2026 VISITING FACULTY LECTURE, July 16, 2026
Shana Moulton A' 04; introduced by Co-Director Ruth Estévez

Ruth Estévez: [Estévez is at the podium, with a slide of an image of the Shana Moulton Lecture Sign made by 2026 participants] Welcome, everyone, for this special occasion. Thank you. Shana. I'm going to be brief. But I want to open my heart a little bit to all of you today, because opening our hearts is what we do at the Skowhegan, right? [Cheers] So for the for many, yes, we try, at least for many of you who are just here for one day, this is a lovely afternoon spent with all of us: the class of 2026, my beloved faculty and staff. But for us, this is a day in the middle of our summer together. Sorry, we're still processing, rehearsing, exploring. We are still far, I think, for reflecting or even understanding what this experience means for us. And we are very happy to share with you a glimpse of a day at the Skowhegan. But please also allow us also to feel a little vulnerable and a little awkward and a little disconcerted. I think the relationships that developed here became very deep after living together for several weeks, and it is always a celebration, but it's also an effort to open to others.

So this year, many participants asked me at the beginning, I think now we are getting into that, but what is this a school about no? And sometimes with suspicion, sometimes with genuine curiosity–what is the structure of Skowhegan and how does Skowhegan works? And really, it's always very difficult for me to answer those questions. Many of the things that happen here might not have a clear resolution. They might appear and disappear and, and they might return years from now, somewhere along your careers and your practices and your lives.

I think when we get here, we kind of reset, or we try, at least, to understand these gray-green surroundings, and the morning fog, and on on the northern skies of Maine, and these clouds that belong to scenes that belong to different weather systems, I mean, all at the same time.

And there are tons of new people. We do have we meet and sometimes we are open to that, and sometimes you are not. So it's always hard. So my question is, how can we organize or can we organize or give form to something that is unpredictable? Well, I think we can, but please don't ask me to explain [laughter] with what is the right answer to that. I will probably just look at you with this blank face. Or I will start talking. What I do very often, as you know [mimes words falling out of her mouth], very nervously, which is what I do, what I do when I don't know when, when I have to give the precise answer. And I think many of you might, may know also, now that this is the eightieth anniversary of the school, and having this history behind is extraordinary, but it's also complex, and it's also a heavy weight, at least for me. And I think for a lot of people here.

So I think many people apply to Skowhegan every, every year because they feel they need to be here, because they want to become part of this legacy of incredible artists who have passed

through this school over the decades. But the Skowhegan is not always for everyone at the same moment, and it requires a lot of adjustment. And it's soft and it's sharp and it might be transformational. Or it might be critical. And, I remember my first year I, talk about this Skowhegan as Alice in *Alice in Wonderland*, you know, falling into an infinite tunnel, or Dorothy standing at the window completely overwhelmed by the tornado or Bruce Nauman trying to catch objects with his hands and missing many of them.

Or this year, with João Onofre's video sculpture of a vulture desperately running through a studio and trying to fly while knocking everything over. And thinking about the school, many other visual situations come to my mind, like Pope.L many years ago immersed in this hole, unable to move, Edu Navarro offering psychology sessions to understand what I think is impossible to understand or Betye Saar playing with shadows that you cannot really see, and so on and so on. And so on. And here again, I find myself trying to build a genealogy of people, trying to explain something that cannot communicate what really happens here. But we definitely want to enjoy it. We want you to accompany us this day and, and we want to, you to smile and feel, even for a moment. What is this idea of the unknown at this Skowhegan.

So this year I want to give also a special hug and thank you to my dear faculty. Thank you for your I don't know where you are, but you are, for your process and for your wise advices. And Sahar for being so kind all the time. And also your wide experimental–oh my god! [getting emotional]--approach. And Edu, for thinking, outside the box, eating the box, kicking the box. And, Teresa, for your cheerful guidance always, and your patience, and your peace. Naomi for being so fucking radical while always maintainin–[cheering] but always very serene. And you know, like [makes hand gesture], you know. And I also want to thank the Skowhegan team. I'm not going to name all of them, but you are my favorite team. And you just get it. And you sustain the school. You really do. And you understand what is about, what is actually not that easy.

And I also want to thank you, of course, all our friends and supporters for helping us make this school happen every year because it is great. What can I say? It is truly great to be here. And I also want to thank my colleagues in New York City, especially my co-director Katie Sonnenborn, who calms me down when I become too emotional about the mission and purpose of this school, especially when I worry that people will not understand it. [switches slide] And, and yeah, and we are grateful that all you're here today at that, but allowed us to be a little bit vulnerable and perhaps a little quiet as we prepare to return to our daily routines, even if we only invented these routines just a few weeks ago. So thank you all for, for this.

And now I want to, sorry, I want to, ahh!, I want to invite a very special two guests who will be introducing our visiting faculty, one and only artist, Shana Moulton, who, like many of you, was also a participant, some years ago. And since they will be the ones in charge of this non-proper presentation or this presentation, I don't know, I just want to say that I am extremely happy to

have you here, Shana, really. A huge fan, I'm a huge fan of your work and, and of course I cannot, I cannot wait to, to hear your, your talk.

I'm going to read very, ver–because we need to be formal–I am going to read like, m, a brief bio provided by the artist who is…here I go…

an INFJ, introverted, intuitive feeling, judging Myers-Briggs. Cynthia lives in a world of hidden meanings and is more interested in what is possible than what is actual. She prefers having a vivid imagination over having a strong hold on reality. And her supernormal intuition can take the form of visions or uncanny communications with certain individuals at a distance. Her artist-dominant-introvert-abstract-feeler-spark-aspects allows her to have a rich inner life that often turns the real world into a prison of foolishness and embarrassment.

The abstract random [WORD UNCLEAR] sight of Cynthia is not inhibited, inhibited by logic, and gives her a colorful, flighty, media oriented perspective on things. Finally, as a type four artist [WORD UNCLEAR], she enjoys proving issues like femininity and pop culture with open-ended playfulness, fantasizing and exploring the potential of nonlinguistic communication.

So that's it [cheering and applause].

[Eduardo Navarro approaches the podium to cheering and applause. He sets two figures down, Tony Salami and _____ and adjusts the microphone to face them. He leaves the podium. A pre-recorded voiceover plays.]

Eduardo Navarro: [as Tony Salami] Everybody. Rock your body. Everybody, rock your body right. Tony Salami's back, alright?

Oh my God, we're back again. Art sculptures. Everybody sing. [WORDS UNCLEAR] how to do a fresco and get a lot of muffins in the muffin room. Am I original? Ye-ah. Am I the only one? Ye-ah. Am I se–[BLEEPED OUT]. Ye-ah. I am everything you need. You better rock your body now. Everybody. Ye-ah. Tony Salami. Ye-ah. Everybody: buy my artwork now!

Welcome, everybody. My name is Tony Salami. I was a participant back in 1983. And yes, I am a salami. Like to give a big welcome to all the trustees and governors to this special event and also introduce a dear, dear friend of mine who did Skowhegan in the year 2030. Yes, she comes from the future and her name is Maria Potassium.

Please give a big welcome to Maria Potassium.

Estévez: [as Maria Potassium] Thank you, Tony. Thank you. Hi. You have always been so sure of yourself. I see you have all the specific answers. And I have to confess that you are a professional improviser, Tony, but, you know. Yes. Actually, I did Skowhegan long after you. But in 2035, by then, there was no longer the possibility. I don't even remember what the possibility was, but I just remembered everyone talking about it. The possibility as if everyone knew what it mean except me.

I can remember being anxious and excited. I thought that meant I was doing it right, that I could do whatever. Well, not whatever. Something in between whatever. Could you tell me what Skowhegan was for you, Tony?

Navarro: I was sweating a lot of really thick, really thick oil all the time.

Estévez: Well, for me, I could simply be the Crazy Californian. You know, I tried to fit in by sticking out. People seem comfortable not knowing. They call it openness. I call it panic. There's nothing magical about being somewhere in-between. I will work in the studio for an hour. Then I wanted to watch television for ten, but the Wi-Fi was always overloaded, so instead I wandered into other people's studios and keep asking them what Skowhegan actually was… a school, a performance, a social experiment, and an advertisement? No one answered the same way. Maybe that was the answer. By the time I realized there wasn't one, it seems it was too late, and I got nervous and I wanted to make things, you know, and I need a large photo-images to see before I can do anything. Otherwise I just stewed in an empty pot!

Navarro: I know how you feel, but you know your skin is wonderful.

Estévez: Well, yeah, but the faculty kept telling me not to be so focused. Less ha ha! More soul searching. I don't know if the work changed. Maybe it changed. Maybe neither of us did, Tony. I have zero distance from myself, creativity and anxiety are romance, you know, and they split the rent.

Navarro: I know how you feel. Did you get any drugs?--

Estévez: [cutting Navarro off] Yeah. I'm really. I don't really like promoting myself, but yes, advertising has always fascinated me. My mother said that when I was little, I'd leave the room while everyone watched television. Then I come back only for the commercials. I loved advertisements, not because I believed them, because they promised, you know, and they promised you could improve your life, became healthier, happier, another person, or finally become yourself. That's such a beautiful promise. And you know, Skowhegan made a promises too, Tony. Do you know that? Do you know that, Tony?

Navarro: Yes, I remember lots of promises.

Estévez: Well, but the best part of that summer was spending time in the library watching recordings of Shana Moulton's lecture from 2006 to talk about the banality and enormity of everyday life, about the spiritual magic, medical technology, popular culture, kitchy paint, halloween, healing, and advertisement not only the commercials on television but the advertisements we make for ourselves. The performance of became and the performance of wellness, the performance of being an artist. And I kept thinking maybe that's what they was doing too, advertising a future version of myself waiting for her to arrive. But no, Tony.

Navarro: I understand the banality of being a banana.

Estévez: Well, maybe that's why I was so anxious. I couldn't tell whether I was making work or waiting to become the person who made it.

Navarro: Hmm and also dealing with the stereotype of, like, people stepping on you and sleeping, no? That must have been hard.

Estévez: But it's never been very good, and giving up control, Tony. And you know that. Even dreaming makes me nervous. People talk about surrender, letting go, transformation, improvisation and Skowhegan. They all seem to require believing that something will happen before you know what it is. That's the possibility, isn't it? Not becoming someone else, not just staying with, not knowing long enough for something to happen! [sighs]

Navarro: Trust your gut–crust.

Estévez: Well, that sounds beautiful, Tony, whatever. It also sounds completely, completely terrifying.

Shana Moulton: [applause and cheering at Shana approaches the podium] Wow. Thank you, thank you. Tony and Maria, thank you so much. It's, it's wonderful to be here, everyone. I can't believe I'm standing here. This is, uh, kind of a dream come true. [switches back to first slide] And I want to. I want to just, shout out to the, brilliant announcement tent clock-eye sculpture that Maliayamungu and Mattia made, I believe [cheering]. So, thank you, it's amazing, I love it.

And Ruth and all of the staff here [switches slide] for making this possible for me to be here. It's like, you know, like I said, a dream. And since I was here in 2004 up in that corner, I have literally been dreaming about coming back, um, and I–there's nowhere else I would rather be on the eve of my 50th birthday, so thank you [cheering and applause].

And it's–thank you–to experience the generosity of spirit and the community that you all have cultivated this summer has been very special. And I feel really privileged to share that with you in this place. It's been incredible to meet this cohort. And, I'm really grateful for all of the studio visits I got to do this week, and I was repeatedly struck by the sense that I was in the presence of total stars during these visits. No joke. I haven't seen art or artist this alive in a long time, and I've been trying to remember a quote that I heard during a visiting artist lecture when I was here '04, and so Chris helped me find the audio files from the lectures. And it was from, um, it was a talk by the late and great artist and historian David Driskell [cheering] and he said…He said, "you will never be the same once you were here. You will always want to come back unless you are deranged" [laughter].

And you know, my, my enthusiasm is not just because it's trustees day. I always talk about Skowhegan in my artist talks and at school, in my teaching, because it was so crucial for me. But thank God that this place exists. And thank you all for making it happen.

And I just wanted to share a few memories from my days. You may recognize the fellow in the very back who now has much shorter hair. Shawn [cheering]. And that's me with Vera, I think. Tommy, did you take these pictures? Maybe. Maybe not. [switches slide] Um, hanging out at the–this one you did–hanging out at the front office. Marie is here, too. [switches slide] And I, you know, smoking the whole time… And, you know, that was such a nice way to get to know people [switches slide]. So I'll return to these memories later, but it's wonderful to see that the same sign is here.

[switches slide] So, um, I, you know, I make videos that I perform in and performances that, where I interact with video, and installation that encompasses both. I'm going to start with the earliest work, since that's the only way I really know how to talk about my practice. Almost all of the work features my alter ego that I started working with in graduate school called Cynthia, whose bio you heard earlier read by Ruth. And Cynthia initially developed [switches slide] this is her [switches slide] from this series of, um, dresses embedded with medical devices that I started making in graduate school.

And, um, my, my grad school advisors–at first, they're meant to just be sculpture or photographs–and my advisors kept telling me that they needed to be activated. So I started to wonder what kind of person would need to wear one of these dresses, particularly the hemorrhoid pillow dress [laughter]. And, that's where Cynthia started.

So this is *Whispering Pines 1* from 2002. And in this first video, I don't know…Yes, in this first video, I put on a wig and came up with this one dimensional caricature of the physical or psychological pain signified by the hemorrhoid pillow. Here, she's debating, with an internal entity about what to buy at the grocery store to soothe her pain. And while making this, I realized

that the hemorrhoid pillow could be a portal to Cynthia's inner world. And this is what motivated me to learn Adobe After Effects, so that I could cut through one layer of video [switches slide] to reveal a deeper level beneath the surface [laughter]. [switches slide]And I ended up naming the series of videos, because I decided there would be more, after the mobile home park I grew up in: Whispering Pines, which is between Fresno and Yosemite, California.

And it was also an ode to Twin Peaks, which, um, has a lot of parallels with Oakhurst, and of course [switches slide], also an ode to *Santa Barbara*, which was my first love, the soap opera. And it is where I ended up.

[switches slide] This is *Whispering Pines 2*, where I introduced Cynthia's domestic setting and decor as extensions of her personality. Her home accents are existing as other entities in her outer and inner world, like toys or sentient beings or like Walter Benjamin's idea of the "furnished man." Her psyche is constituted by the objects that surround her.

[switches slide] And I brought this idea of the furnished man, or Cynthia as the furnished man, here to Skowhegan. This is *Whispering Pines 3.* [switches slide] And I you know, I, it took me at least seven weeks during my summer here in 2004 to start making work. Because I was busy getting to know everyone. And I think this is the only time [switches slide] that Cynthia got to let her hair down with the other people [switches slide] and find some freedom from alienation. And, um, I also spent–that's Cynthia, right there–I spent a lot of solo time [switches through two slides]. Um, this is, I think this is Daniel Boshkov's daughter and his daughter's rat that I was reading a love fortune to here.

[audience member shouts something] Oh it is! Yes, it's Waneeta's daughter. Right. Sorry. Waneeta's daughter that had the rat.

[switches slide] But I also spent a lot of solo time in my studio. This is Upper Barn Two where Sachaa is currently residing [cheering]. I and I shared this with, my buddy Tommy, who is Upper Barn One. But, you know, back then, we almost all had to share a room. There were not very many single rooms, so this was the only place where I had any, uh, solitude.

[switches slide] But by the seventh week, I had so much love and admiration for the other artists here, I was inspired to make something to share with everyone. So I got very busy and still playing hard–there isn't, there's nowhere else I know where it is possible to play this hard and to work this hard at the same time. And you know the support and the meals? [cheering] Yes! Nowhere. You know, I've never, you know, 50/50 balance of work and play. Didn't have to cook. Didn't, you know, everything was taken care of other than the work and play. And addition, in addition to that, all of the willing collaborators and helpers one is surrounded by here.

[switches slide] So I finished *Whispering Pines 3* and shared it with my cohort. And, in it, Cynthia is writing in her diary about missing her cat and not being able to understand the wooden sign she just found in a thrift store here, here in Skowhegan. [switches slide] And then she's transported to this landscape through the portal in her neck brace, and is trying to catch the dollar store diamond lights from her home. [switches quickly through two slides] Which then lead her to this tree [switches slide] where the sign is. [switches slide] And once she sees the sign in the context of the tree, she understands the meaning of the sign, which is towels [laughter]. And [switches slide] by vocalizing this word, she, she's sent back home and with a big cough, she brings up her cat through the portal in her neck brace.

[switches slide] So, even though all of these videos are narrative, they grew out of my response or inspiration from earlier performance-based video practices and artists. Working alone in the studio like, um, Martha Rosler [switches slide] and Joan Jonas, [switches slide] Bruce Nauman, Howardena Pindell. And the approach [switches slide] to persona was influenced by figures like Mike Smith, who I rediscovered here at Skowhegan through the library, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Eleanor Antin, [switches slide] and Pee-Wee Herman, with a little Buster Keaton.

And it felt like a very natural progression to go from playing with the video camera as a teen-teenager, to the spirit of video art [switches slide] in the Portapak days. [switches slide] And particularly with this sentiment in this quote by Hermine Freed. And I'm not going to read this entire thing, but if you're if you work with video, you should take a photo or find this quote, it really, it does a great job of summarizing that spirit.

And, and, even though this was all rooted heavily in the history or brief history of video art, I was equally influenced by a lot of the experimental filmmakers [switches slide] like Kenneth Anger [switches slide] and Maya Deren. And particularly this idea, where she writes, “the film is concerned with the interior experiences of an individual. It does not record an event which could be witnessed by other persons. Rather, it reproduces the way in which the subconscious of an individual will develop, interpret, and elaborate an apparently simple and casual incident into a critical emotional experience.” And here she's talking about *Meshes of the Afternoon* from 1943. [switches slide] And I was also responding to artists that built sets for their video performances, like Tony Oursler, um, [switches slide] or the team behind Pee-Wee's Playhouse.

[switches slide] And, you know, so I started to attempt to build my own sets. This is in Amsterdam when I, uh, started out at a two year residency called De Ateliers, and with almost no money, I made this set out of foam core and paint and discarded furniture. And this is *Whispering Pines 7* from 2007. And I'll show the whole video.

It's about 4.5 minutes. [video plays from 00:27:49 to 00:32:16] [cheering and applause]

[switches slide] That, that audio is from Mia Farrow as the voice of the unicorn in *The Last Unicorn*. [cheering] Yes. And it's, it's when the unicorn gets her wish and turns into a woman. And I remember as a kid, it, it resonated with me because I would wonder if I was a woman yet and I'd stare in the mirror and I'd, I'd pull my clothes like this. And say am I a woman yet? [pulls clothes tight to her body] Nope! And it never, it never seemed to really happen, you know. But, Still waiting. Probably missed that. So Cynthia eventually became an outlet for more autobiographical material. Like this one, or the past one. This one is called *Whispering Pines 8* from, from 2007. And it was related to my late mother learning that the artificial sweetener aspartame or NutraSweet in drinks like Crystal light or Diet Pepsi causes night terrors, and then discovering the alchemical potential in home decor and flower arranging. So this, this, quick excerpt [switches slide]. Oh, and this, this painting in her home is Mondrian's painting called *Evolution.* During his theosophical phase. And this was, you know, kind of site specific to living in, Amsterdam.

[switches slide] So this, this begins once Cynthia has gulped down a giant glass of crystal light. [video plays from 00:34:00 to 00:35:11]

[switches slide] And then the video finishes with me, going into the corner, kind of being rejected by the other ravers, and then vomiting myself back into [switches slide] my, my living room in a sort of loop.

[switches slide] So later on the video started to have different titles. But I consider all of, all of the videos as part of *Whispering Pines,* as the same body of work. This one is called the *Galactic Pot Healer*, and the narrative was inspired by Philip K. Dick's eponymous science fiction novel. [switches slide] Here, Cynthia seeks a healer [switches slide] to repair her favorite pot [switches slide]. And although it can't piece together [switches slide] the original,[switches slide] it–um, this is the healer healing pots–it can't piece together her [switches slide] her pot, but it offers her a massage [switches slide] and then it regenerates [switches through six slides quickly while speaking] the pot from her back.

And, this was one of my first opportunities to build a multichannel installation around a narrative video. [switches slide] And so here, the, you see the galactic pot healer healing pots. And then as they're healed, they go up the staircase. And as I got more opportunities [switches slide], and budgets to work with, video and installation, I found new ways to situate these videos in expanded, um, scenarios. [switches slide] But also allow some of these installation videos [switches slide] to become less narrative [switches slide] Here are the eyes from the, the introduction tent [switches slide].

[switches slide] And, I also drew a lot of, footage for my performances from these videos and installations. This is from the Galactic Pot Healer, and the performances almost always include interaction with a video projection. [switches slide] This was initially just a way to simplify the set or to make it portable and changeable by digitizing it and then scaling it to my body based on the venue and the size of the projection. [switches slide] But I realized that this was also a way to combine the three dimensional space of my body and, and the slow time of performance with the two dimensional space time of video and montage.

And this idea was initially sparked by other artists combining video or film and live performance, like, Robert Whitman [switches slide] and Ulrike Rosenbach; [switches slide] Joan Jonas, of course, [switches slide] and Miranda July. I got to see this Swan Tool performance in person in 2002, and seeing the ways that she sync to her body with the projection was a huge revelation. [switches slide] But before that, I had experimented with some projection performance. This is from my undergrad years in the 90s, and here I'm removing the fishing lure worms that my dad would hide around the house for me to find, for my childhood Visible Woman anatomical doll. And then I projected a close up video of that over the performance.

And I've been thinking a lot about this performance. [switches slide] I reenacted a version of this much later. This is maybe 2012. And here are the same doll's organs projected on my body. And as they are being removed, I'm singing along with the Sphinx: “now that I'm a woman, everything is strange.”

And, um, next month, I have to get a hysterectomy. And I've been thinking about this performance in particular. With the organ removal, “hystero-” means uterus and hysterectomy were originally a cure for hysteria. And with my ovary removal, I'm going to go into instant menopause, which, based on my perimenopause journey, should be quite hysterical [laughter]. And hys-hysteria was supposedly caused by the womb wandering around the body. And I can imagine some future work about the wandering of my wormy organs once freed from the confines of my body. So I, you know, I see it all as potential fodder for new work.

[switches through three slides] And here I am, dancing with logos from various women's health organizations and pharmaceutical companies. [switches through two slides]Here I am reenacting the final scene, or the scene in *Carrie* where she's covered in pig's blood at the prom, um, but in this case, it's Pepto-Bismol.

[switches through two slides] And then in this case, I'm projecting coordinated imagery into the large projection with a mini projector. [switches slide forward and then back] Here, I'm using it as a tool to see inside my body. [switches slide] And here I'm revealing my third eye with the mini projector. [switches slide] And then finding the, the last piece of the puzzle.

[switches slide] So I have another clip that starts out with the video that was projected during the performance and then transitions to the performance documentation. And it's not the best documentation, but it's my favorite audience because it was during a drunk midnight crowd at a Nuit Blanche. And this clip includes a few other performances [video plays from 00:41:09 from 00:45:58]

[switches slide] So the performance with the mini projector was, the audio was from a TED Talk by the neuroscientist Jill Bolte Taylor, who had a massive stroke–some of you may remember this story–she had a massive stroke and lost the ability to access her entire left hemisphere from her brain, and she lived, but had to completely relearn how to talk and eat and be a neuroscientist. But during her stroke, and that left hemisphere disconnect, she experienced nirvana. The right side of her brain being unfiltered from the left, showed her how she is energy being connected to the energy around her.

[switches slide] And my, my spirituality is vicarious through stories like that or [switches slide] near-death experiences or descriptions of profound drug trips like Terence McKenna's encounter with self transforming machine elves on DMT [switches slide] or other transcendent experiences described on websites like Erowid [switches slide].

[switches slide] And this book, *Journeys into the Bright World,* describes, or is written by a woman who experienced enlightenment on intravenous ketamine in the 70s. And during one of her trips, it was revealed to her that every angle is an angel. And so I based a video [switches slide] on that and titled it that, with Cynthia achieving spiritual bliss by ingesting special K cereal [switches slide].

[switches slide] And another piece called *Restless Leg Saga* was inspired by the Swiss artist [and] healer Emma Kunz, who was mainly known for these graph-based drawings that she made and thought of as, more as healing tools rather than art. But she also discovered this product called AION A, and while I was in Switzerland in their pharmacies, at least back in 2016, you could still buy this, this, this, treatment.

[switches slide] And I wanted to connect her visuals and AION A to the modern pharmaceutical logos I'd been collecting. And so I based a set of fabric sculpture costumes on some of the logos to make a kind of dancing chorus [switches slide] that Cynthia encounters during a restless leg syndrome induced nightmare [switches slide].

[switches slide] So this is *Whispering Pines 10*, and, uh, was it up until, a couple of years ago, my most ambitious project, and was a collaboration with performer, singer, composer, curator Nick Hallett and originally was an evening length performance. [switches slide] The narrative is loosely based around Cynthia wanting to emulate the environmental activist Julia Butterfly Hill,

who sat in this old growth tree, Luna, for over two years before coming down, in order to save it from being logged. And she achieved that. She saved the tree and she saved, you know, a certain amount of area around that tree. And this is, you know, and I think, I think she came down in 1998, when I was an undergrad. And as a student, I saw her doing that as one of the most amazing combinations of activism and art. And I saw this as kind of like a durational performance in the tradition of Tehching Hsieh or Linda Montano and their yearlong performances. And, and it was kind of the thing I imagined myself doing as a student.

[switches slide] But, uh, in this performance, I never really achieved that. And so the, the narrative here is about, you know, both mine and Cynthia's attempt to make a difference. So we developed the piece at The Kitchen in New York, and it had three channels of video. And originally it was truly interactive with motion sensing cameras.

[switches slide] Here is a two minute clip from that original performance [video plays from 00:50:30 to 00:52:27]

[switches slide] So, we, got a Creative Capital grant to turn that into an internet opera. So, we created a website and released, uh, basically video versions of this narrative on Whispering pines10.com. It's still up. And then to, to access the final chapter, the final video, you had to, um, discover or guess the password based on clues in the piece. [switches slide] And so that's still there. [switches slide] And then I mounted a few installation, six channel installation versions of this, [switches slide] and then the butterfly eyes made another appearance a lot more recently at, ART on the MART in Chicago [switches slide].

[switches slide] So this, um, has defined my work in life quite a bit for the past, for the past few years. Some of you may be familiar with this. I got a hip replacement about a year ago, but I was pretty limited and, and still not 100%. [switches slide] And right around the same time, I was asked to design a performance and installation for the new Kravis studio at MoMA. [switches slide] So I came up with the idea of turning my physical therapy and midlife challenges into a spiritual progression, [switches slide] and called the installation and performance *Metaphysical Therapy.*

[switches slide] So this was, 8 or 9 channel projection and included a structure [switches slide] based on the sisyphean-penguin race toy I had as a kid. [switches through two slides] And the narrative involved a set of menstrual cups that then became, the Seven of Cups from tarot. And then, you know, Cynthia's challenge was to find the perfect spot for her new vase. And then there was a ceiling fan oracle, voiced by Joan LaBarbera. And once, once, Cynthia placed the vase in the correct spot. The, this Oracle vase guided her or transported her to the ladder of the Hermetic Stone and guided Cynthia through seven physical therapy steps that change her body into the associated metaphor, like butterfly for the butterfly movement, clamshells, and so on.

And with each movement, she achieved a new step on this ladder until she went to full coagulation, which was the integration of the physical and spiritual, solidifying ultimate enlightenment. [switches slide] And this is the performance version. Nick Hallett made music for both the video installation, and then we collaborated on the performance. [switches slide] This included a few new moments, like all of Cynthia's belongings falling onto her in a big pile. [switches through two slides] And this this performance included five musician performers, including Nick, two other vocalists, and these percussionist doctors that bow a vibraphone during the performance. And then at the end, bow a stretcher with my body in the same way, tuning both my body and the universe.

[switches through two slides] Here I am designing or creating the piece on, on set, and the whole set was designed around [switches slide] achieving this moment where Cynthia could become one with the ceiling fan Oracle. [switches slide] So I move this rolling vase and turn it around in front of the main projection, which causes an eclipse. And this was, this, this performance was happening around the most recent eclipse, maybe two years ago, where New York was almost within the path of totality. And then I climbed the steps while the vocalists sing the the classic physical therapy rule for stairs:"up with the good, down with the bad."

[switches slide] That's the cast, crew, curators. [switches slide] And I'm just going to finish tonight by scrolling through some of that performance. I'll start playing some of it. This is the moment where I, I, the eclipse happens with the vase.

[video plays from 00:57:02 to 01:00:11 with Moulton pausing and speaking over the video until the end of her lecture]

[while scrolling through the video] So it's late. I'm just going to scroll through some of this so you get a sense… there's the eclipse…

And then the the tuning at the end.

Okay, I'm going to turn this down. And I just wanted to leave with one more story about my time here. When, when I was here, I turned 28, and, the visiting artist that I had a studio visit with on my birthday was Jeff Koons [laughter], and which was pretty memorable. My friend Zach gave him a donut to bring to my studio. And it was also his son's birthday. And his lecture was pretty memorable. For one piece of advice that has stuck with me, and I, I originally thought that he had said the most important thing is to keep the fear away. But I, you know, asked Chris to find the recording of the lecture, and it turns out what he said was kind of even better.

He said, “if you just listen to your intuition and follow that, it's really the only thing you can do and focus. And there's never any need for anxiety. The enemy is anxiety. It's all about getting rid of the anxiety. And I think it's really all about love.”

Thanks. [cheering and applause]

So it's very late, but if anyone has questions I'd be happy to talk. Or we could talk after, but I can take questions now.

Audience Member: I'm wondering, if you could describe any healing effects Cynthia felt from the metaphysical therapy performance?

Moulton: Well, honestly, it was, it was so much it was a lot of hard work. And when I was not ready to do that much work, but I, I think more Shana than Cynthia was deeply healed by being back in New York, where I lived there for, for eight years, and actually the only reason I had never planned to move to New York. But then once I went to Skowhegan and, you know, all, all of the people that hadn't moved to Skowhegan or not all of us, but a lot of us then moved to New York to be together. So, after the residency in Amsterdam, I joined all my Skowhegan pals in New York. And so just to say that I think the most therapeutic thing about this process was being, you know, with all of my dearest friends in New York. And of course, you know, making work is always therapeutic, but I can't yeah, I don't know. I mean, I think reaching for, I think the connect, connecting with a lot of people that had gone through similar injuries was also therapeutic. So and that's usually where it is therapeutic for both Cynthia and I is where, you know, there's some kind of kindred, you know, understanding. Thanks.

Audience Member: Hi. Thank you so much for this talk. I'm curious about a pre, a pre Cynthia practice. Like how you.. how'd you meet Cynthia?

Moulton: Yeah. So I, you know, like I said, Cynthia kind of started in grad school with these dresses. And before that, I was, you know, trying to do performance. And it was all, you know, I mean, very much inspired by, um, Fluxus and, um, I'm blanking on everyone's name, but, I had it was very serious, and I had my serious performance face, you know, and I could–I didn't really have a way to channel what I was interested in. You know, I felt very much like, you know, there was, there was a kind of attitude that I was meant to have in performance art. So it wasn't until I saw these other artists working with humor or working with things that they drew from in their childhood, where I felt like I had permission to do the same.

And then media, television, you know, that I could work with television, not only as something to critique, but just as fodder or material. So I think that's, that was like a big revelation. One of the members of a collective called Paper Rad started, joined my grad program. And so seeing

their work, they were working with Gumby and making cartoons and animations. That was a big revelation for me. So you know, it was really a sort of process of getting, feeling like I had permission to explore this and to, you know, work with humor. But yeah, before that I would say, yeah, serious and just lost. I mean, there wasn't much of a pre-Cynthia practice, and I just barely got into grad school. So, you know, I'm just here. I feel like I'm here just by, you know, luck and, you know, dumb accidents, but, yeah. Thank you.

Audience Member: Hi. Thank you so much. I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about, like, how Cynthia has shaped you as, like, a person. How like how like, it's like this, like reciprocal kind of, maybe relationship that exists, like within performance. And if you could talk about that a little bit.

Moulton: Well, Cynthia is where I get to put on a lot of makeup. And, you know, I mean, she, you know, with…particularly in the beginning, she was sort of more haha, funny. And, and then, you know, as she became more autobiographical, it was…I felt like this, she gave me this channel to work with difficult things, you know. And so even though there's humor, there are also a lot of sad or, you know, serious things behind the work for me. And, you know, it might not be obvious. It's often personal. But she, you know, kind of became a springboard for me to deal with that. And then also because, I mean, it's in a way it seems kind of limiting to always work with this one alter ego, but it actually was very freeing for me to have these parameters that act like a springboard. And then I could tackle anything I'm interested in at the time because Cynthia is really just me with a wig, and you know, just, just a little bit of distance. She doesn't really have biographical details other than sort of being me, you know? But she's not…she's not the me that has the relationships and the social…she's the me that is in the bathroom, looking at the mirror and worrying about aging, or like, staring at the wall and wanting to go through a portal into a better world. So, yeah, it's…yeah, I mean, it's, she's been like, everything for me. And so it's hard to imagine letting her go. And I said, well, maybe it'll be interesting to see her age. And, you know, it's definitely happening now. And it's… the aging part is not as fun as I thought, but I hope it's interesting. So, you know, I, I don't I still yeah. I can't imagine doing this without her now. Thank you.

Well I don't know about you all, but it's late and I'm so grateful for–thank you so much. Thank you.

END OF RECORDING