

My very deep thanks to TBA for this invitation to speak and to Paula Caspao for coordinating a longer visit with her platform on Expanded Practices, one that has allowed me to engage with the expanding practices of several other artist/researcher/teacher/curators throughout the week. My time with them has influenced how I decided to spend my time with you today, and hence, I have shifted my title somewhat to focus -- not only the concept of Public Servants-- but also on related ideas about performance, infrastructure, and participation. While I will not pretend that I am ready to analyze their work, our workshop on expanded practices compels me and implicates me as I find my way here in Lisbon, a tourist/researcher/teacher/curator and guest thanks to your collective hospitality. So as I speak, know that I'm thinking of work like Joana Braga's "Scores to Walk," which created site-specific, multi-sensory tours of the neighborhood that surrounds this theater, exposing the politics of its gentrifying, urban infrastructure. I'm thinking of the more explicit theatrical structures of Daniel Gamito Marques's works, which also exposed the politics of a changing Lisbon context, including a play that offered tourists like me a rented Lisbonite to help us navigate the city more efficiently. In addition to thinking about the politics of public space, we Expanded Practitioners found ourselves thinking about the politics of time and labor, of our time, of how we spend our time, about what it means to be productive or unproductive, and on whose terms. Such questions seem to animate the work of someone like Silvia Pinto Coehlo who titles her work unpretentiously as a series of Caprices—and who proposes to explore apparent unproductivity in a School of Procrastination. Those concerns seemed to animate the thoughts of everyone in the room at some point, as all of us reflected on the effort it took to be present together, of how they squeezed quality time together

in the midst of their day jobs, their adjunct jobs, amid working doing too many jobs as artists/curators/teachers/researchers/programmers/parents/telemarketers/and other types of service. As further background, I am also interested in what it means to be here, in this newly re-opened theater in Lisbon. Of what it means to be hosted by a theater that just hosted David Marques's "Misterio da Cultura," a piece advertised as a "mystery performance...[that is also] about culture, art, and their models of production, representation, and support," a piece that placed its theatrical infrastructure of lights and scaffolds into the center of the room, turning the supports of cultural production inside out in the process. And of course, what it means to be hosted by a theater that is tonight hosting Gob Squad's "Super Night Shot," a piece whose super success is evidenced by how long its participatory infrastructure has stayed alive in the professional circuit of globalized experimental performance, traveling from destination city to destination city, remaking destination into a serially, site-specific thrill for witting and unwitting public participants. We will see how they do it again, and again, tonight. I am of course once again implicated in the politics of Lisbon's space, its changing models of precariously immaterial labor, and its growing status as a globalized destination city. As a further aside, I am of course a tourist here from San Francisco for the first time during the week of a Web summit that remakes Lisbon as a global destination, and where I find myself surrounded by suited and hooded entrepreneurs who are also here from San Francisco, chatting over their cell phones, plugging into Four Squares, swiping on Eater Apps, and calling on Uber apps –the online platforms that we all use to navigate our offline experience of a new city more efficiently. I am implicated by the fact that I feel right at home.

Alright, having set the scene of our immediate context, let me widen further to set the scene of my preoccupations outside of Lisbon as well. I offer these thoughts as someone with largely two major areas of research—one focuses on the nature of performance and its inter-arts conversation across performing arts, visual arts, and other media forms. That pursuit has coincided with a second abiding socio-political interest, the connection between aesthetic form and political reform, between the arts and social change, and now what the visual artworld began to call social practice. Such a tendency can be placed within long and venerable genealogy that aligns art and performance with political action---whether in the ancient theatron that offered citizens a ‘place for viewing’ or in a modern political theatron where Hannah Arendt’s interlocutors elevate the political possibilities of performing artists and their actions. Of course, in a more recent context, some of those performative or participatory turns are about ‘being social’ in a more mundane sense, about enabling or enforcing participation with the artwork, or about using participation and performance to activate the social scene of the artworld. [SLIDE] I might also note here that this is where the inter-arts conversation often becomes tangled in its own politics, its own institutional politics about which artistic forms find themselves where, about what it means that performance is finding its way, forcing its way, or being forced on the way as a variety of art and cultural organizations seek ‘performative’ engagement. For some in the artworld, performance is in the process of insidious take-over. The inter-arts domain thus turns out to be political in different terms, largely because the so-called turn to performance (or what Quim in our workshop called the Performance Boom within visual arts), is seen to be, not only politically resistant

but actually symptomatic of a late capitalist shift in the coordination of immaterial service labor. More on that tangle as I go.

Indeed, to help me with this tangle, let me think with another one—and get some performing arts into the room. This tangle sits inside the work of choreographer and performative artist Faye Driscoll’s *Thank You for Coming: Attendance*, a piece that arguably thematizes 21<sup>st</sup> century debate around participatory service. The piece begins on a raised platform around which all audience members assemble, sitting with shoes off, cross-legged on the floor. Five bodies, propelled and propelling, suspend and suspending, compose a precious structure, a sentient collective form. If you are an audience member like me, you think you feel vicarious connection to those connected to each other, and you think you feel that discomfort as bodies grow weary or bored of the obligation to hold up the limbs of another. As limbs release and torsos fall, dancers catch a different head or different limb, propping and being propped by new extensions, releasing in boredom or excitement to new arrangements.

A piece like *Thank you for Coming* might be productively placed within the network of genealogies I glossed above. Driscoll is one of a cluster of experimental choreographers who enjoys an inter-arts career, presented and touring amongst notable performing sites (The Kitchen, Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Walker) as well as international performance festivals (at Festival d’Automne, Onassis Center) as well as within ‘visual art’ world curation—at The New Museum, the Museum of Arts and Design Biennial. By thematizing “Attendance” and the hospitable exchange amongst participants – “thank you for coming”—Driscoll arguably rides a social turn as well, where the act of showing up as a participatory infrastructure is itself the object of investigation. Driscoll’s

career and her transit amongst different types of venues coincided with an accelerating interest in theater, dance, and performance amongst visual art spaces, part of the inter-art acceleration that has been preoccupying me and many others for the last decade.

Just a tiny bit more scene-setting about that decade. I often take the year 2011/2012 as an exemplary, pivot moment in these transcontextual experiments, one that included performance festivals like American Realness and Crossing the Line that considered the relationship between the gallery and the theater. So too, in Performa, a Roselee Goldberg decided to focus that year's performance art biennial on the category of "theatre" in order to grapple with the expansion of performing arts curation, even if, as she said at the time, she 'hates theater'.<sup>1</sup> The Under the Radar festival followed by hosting a conversation on the relation between the "black box" and the "white cube." In the spring of 2012, Jay Sanders and Elisabeth Sussman offered a Whitney Biennial that was lauded in part for the performances curated inside it, including Wu Tsang's *Green Room*, Michael Clark's *Who's Zoo*, Richard Maxwell's installed rehearsals, and Sarah Michelson's *Devotion Study #1—The American Dancer*. The latter made history for being the first choreographic work to win the Whitney's Bucksbaum Prize.<sup>2</sup> By fall of 2012, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York was commissioning and acquiring all varieties of performances—from the maybe parodic, maybe activist, maybe earnest "events" of the art group Grand Openings to the siting of works conceived and commissioned by choreographers like Ralph Lemon, Steve Paxton, Faustin Linyekula, Dean Moss, Jérôme Bel, and more.<sup>3</sup> 2011 was also the year that Tim Griffin left his position as editor of a premiere contemporary art journal Artforum to take over for a premiere experimental performance space The Kitchen,

activating both its gallery spaces and its theater to stage a conversation across art forms. Meanwhile, non-New York-based activity had been approaching those inter-art stakes from different angles. The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis reconceived what it means to collect Merce Cunningham's costumes, debating along the way whether their conservation required the preservation or the eradication of the sweat marks and make-up stains of the dancers who wore them.<sup>4</sup> In France, Boris Charmatz and others started la Musee de la Danse, putting choreography on a plinth. In the United Kingdom, the Tate Modern opened a section of the museum called The Tanks in 2012—committing "permanent" space to the presentation and exhibition of "temporary" art forms—by re-siting choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's *Fase* on its concrete floor.

Having started this kind of inter-arts investigation around that exemplary year in 2011/2012, however, the stakes of these turns, misrecognitions, and alignments have changed, sometimes subduing, sometimes coming into striking focus. In order to track and spark student interest and audience engagement around these episodes of disjunction, I began another, "translational" or publicly-engaged research initiative entitled *In Terms of Performance* with the Pew Center for Art & Heritage, an organization invested in public literacies across the arts. In this co-edited online site, Paula Marincola and I commission short reflections on keywords in contemporary art and performance, asking differently positioned artists, curators, and critics to mediate on terms like 'composition,' 'live,' 'duration,' or 'character' that might have quite different resonances in different artistic domains. The site launched at Tate Modern with an array of public programming. More recently, in Spring of 2018, it was exhibited at the Brooklyn Academy of Music who used the site as an audience engagement

tool and educational exhibit. Many of the above artists—and their curators—are represented in the site, and several helped us activate it. Sharon Hayes, a site-specific visual artist who uses performance, as exhibited at major Museums and biennials, indeed, and is a winner of the Golden Lion award at the Venice Biennial—quipped that this would probably be the only time she would ever be presented at a storied palace like the Brooklyn Academy of Music; performance art is, after all, less often curated in the space of the performing arts.

If I say that the stakes of these inter-art turns, misrecognitions, and alignments have changed, or seem to have changed, it is coincident with changing institutional questions as global political shifts unfold. As we discussed in our workshop, this was also a year when a variety of politicized performances and assemblies unfolded, under the banner of Occupy, unfolding further into the embodied and digital protest forms of Tahir Square, Arab Spring as well as further protests on the nature of precarious labor in a neoliberalizing world. [slide] What, we now find ourselves asking, does the performance boom and the participatory turn in experimental performance have to do with this political debate about Public-ness and about the changing nature of labor. This is where the latent politics of inter-arts experiment becomes patent, even if there starts to be a routinized quality to this so-called global debate. Let me pick up one of the routines. One argument with which I am routinely confronted: the post-Fordist critique of participatory performatives. This critique places performance and the participatory turn within a wider discourse on the changing nature of work, a shift that arguably underwrites art world experiment and experience. Bojana Cvevic and Ana Vujanovic offered as example of how the thought rides in an interview with Jaspur Puar, Judith Butler, Isabella Lorry and others on the subject of

precarious labor. Here they cite Post Operaist thinkers who theorize a turn from material production of commodities to immaterial labor of services which values “cultural-informational content — standards, norms, tastes, and (most important strategically) public opinion — by means of cooperation and communication as the basic work activities... Art thereby gains a new political position, and performance has a special role to play there.... workers are no longer obliged merely to get the job done, but also to be virtuoso performers: eloquent, open, and communicative.” But, and here’s the tangle, while this thesis “is mostly taken as promising for the politicality of the contemporary Art Word,” they and many others argue that such optimism is misunderstood and misplaced; they would say —and others say-- that performance should be talked about less as a political practice and more “as a model of production.” Thus, the ‘performative’ turn in contemporary art and public art practice is read as a symptom of a wider turn to service in late capitalism, offering “encounter” and sociality as desirable product. From such a vantage point, social practice work, performance art, and participatory art, now even the performing arts are unwittingly providing an economic service, enabling an immaterial turn that now seems fully in consort with the experiential turn in late capitalism. Moreover, that turn is buttressed, or rather un-buttressed, by the increasingly intermittent conditions of artistic and performing arts labor; artists have learned to embrace the ‘freedom’ and ‘creativity’ of a lifestyle that strings together residencies, laboratories, and temporary working situations, the “festivalization” and “proliferation of small-scale projects, ”leading only to economic self-precarization.” If we take seriously this tangled scene, what are artists invested in these practices and dependent upon their professional networks to do? Well, first of all, we might notice that the



inter-art 'debates' I glossed above might be best framed, not only for their politics but for their underlying economics, that the classic Arendtian division between politics and labor are getting differently defined in such moments. The apparent political significance or political insignificance of a performance gesture can be thus reframed, made differently legible, when we notice that gesture's embedding in a changing context of labor and economics, the changing workplace of performance. Along the way, performance workers might have to rethink service labor, and what it means to display their skills. Or, as Cvejic and Vujanovic conclude with no small degree of oratorical intensity: "The question would be how to act upon the material conditions, to no longer compose or negotiate with them, but to reclaim art as a public good in political and economic terms, which requires reconfiguring relations between the state, the public sphere and the sphere of the private capital. To do this, critical thought from within performance practice itself will not suffice, but in fact, performance practitioners will need to politically reeducate themselves as citizens in the public sphere."

What would such a public re-education within the workplace of performance be? What does an enactment on material conditions look like? Let's start with the virtuosic skills they reference. How clearly do we see the connection between the virtuosic skill of the performing arts and the workerist virtuosities—eloquence, openness, communicativeness-- touted and critiqued amongst 21<sup>st</sup> century social critics? The exploration of that question means confronting a conceptual tangle around what these performers and their networks think virtuosity might be, even if the term has enjoyed no small degree of discursive attention lately. Indeed, it's no coincidence that the contradictions and associations attached to Virtuosity ended up on our ITOP site. Let me

reductively start with two. On the one hand, we might invoke an inherited, traditional, or lay conception of virtuosity as exceptional skill or physical technique. This is the association heralded in art histories, musical histories, theatrical, dance, and circus histories where the practiced practitioner awes and inspires with feats that are out of reach of the audience members who encounter them. Of course, this association of exceptional virtuosity is also the one roundly critiqued by generations of late-20<sup>th</sup> century artists who rejected the feats of their artistic forebears, saying No again and again to their Spectacles. Next to that first association, however, we find the term ‘virtuosity’ animating early 21<sup>st</sup> century social theory. Workerist” networks of philosophical reflection used the concept of Virtuosity to galvanize their political analyses of labor and mobilization in a post-Fordist global sphere tracking a transition from Fordist production of objects to the post-Fordist performance of service, as well as what might be called its counter-service or counter-staging in new models of political mobilization.

Let’s foray just a bit into the thoughts of one of those mobilizers, Paolo Virno’s accounts of the psychically and politically a turn toward emotional and affective labor. Virno had specific reasons for thinking anew about virtuosity. In a late-20<sup>th</sup>-century context of service labor, he continued to find food for thought in “the special capabilities of the performance artist,” elaborating that, first, “theirs is an activity which finds its own fulfillment (that is, its own purpose) in itself [...] and [second] [...] is an activity which requires the presence of others” (Virno 2004:52). It was the first quality that so intrigued and perplexed Marx when he tried to define labor for which the “product is not separable from the act of producing” (1977:1048)—laborer and product were entwined. And it was the second quality —the need for others-- that underpinned Hannah Arendt’s

equation between the performer and the political actor; said Arendt, “acting men need the presence of others before whom they can appear; both need a publicly organized space for their ‘work’” ([1954] 1977:154). Interestingly, however, both of the qualities emphasized by Virno – the entwinement of production and product *and* the need for others, an audience -- are different from the primary qualities emphasized in a traditional or lay definition of virtuosity — one that would link virtuosity to “excellence,” “mastery,” and to individual “exceptionalism.” Virno certainly refers to the “skilled dancer,” to “memorable” piano performances, and to orators and priests who are “fascinating” and “never boring,” but the specific skills and techniques of these immaterial makers are under-emphasized in order to craft a different principle of philosophical connection. For Virno, the contemporary virtuosic laborer is most interesting because, first, she is non-object-producing, that is, she is one whose product is not separable from her body and whose laboring effects are felt immaterially as a service more than materially as an object. And, second, she is interestingly virtuosic because she is part of an outwardly-directed mode of social action and exchange, when were people share space with each other, and stand in for each other. Not only did Virno end up sidelining the traditional notion of exceptional skill; intriguingly, he even allowed for its reversal: “Each of us is, and has always been, a virtuoso, a performing artist, at times mediocre and awkward, but, in any event, a virtuoso” (2004:55). Virtuosity here is thus decidedly not unique but generalized, not exceptional but awkward. Virtuosity is now within reach of all of us. Indeed, in Virno’s frame, you can deliver a mediocre performance and still be a virtuoso.

What then do we make of situations where a resuscitation of virtuosity in

Virno's sense coincides with a critique of virtuosity in the lay sense? Often these discourses talk past each other, but they sometimes talk with each other, in productive tangles. Let's return to that sentient structure in Faye Driscoll's *Thank You for Coming*, the work of a choreographer that now travels from occupied proscenium stage to occupy the galleries spaces of museums and biennials as well. The transit across this inter-art scene is one where modes of reading, perceiving, and servicing partake of different virtuosic legacies. In the scene of this work, the tangle of bodies will eventually settle collectively onto the ground, wrapping torsos and limbs into a group ameba-like form that shuttles across the platform, contact improv meets Meat Joy meets Brechtian aesthetics. Eventually, they will rise in highly stylized gestures and facial expressions, communing with each other in jittery, syncopated movements while joyously calling out the names of those of us attending. Paula, Ana, Silvia, and Daniel, and each and every audience member who made the decision to assemble together that night are called, underscoring the parameters of attendance and those who elected to "be with others." Eventually, performers will come down from the platform and ask us to rise. They take apart the platform and ask us to help them, re-arranging us and the stage space into new infrastructures of observer and observed, turning theatrical models of support inside out, and now asking actors and audiences members to become shared participants who occupy the same horizontal plane. We are asked to re-assemble the material conditions of the choreographic structure. They will ask us to grasp ropes suspended from the ceiling and dare us to amble and swing with them—awkwardly—into new forms and shapes together—making virtuosity in reach. This performance certainly requires traditionally virtuosic performance skills—the bodily core of contact improvisation, the

gravitational defiance of ballet—and it requires conceptual or cognitively virtuosic skills that step back to assess the significance of the action before us, while never letting us forget that they are offering us a service. The piece asks us to attend to the entwinement of artist and art in bodily service, as well as to the entwinement of audience and art in necessary co-presence. For me, it is a piece that re-thinks rather than rejects virtuosic spectacle, allowing its cognitive and productive dispersal amongst bodies who increasingly avow their need for each other. Eventually, we will depart, and as we make our way out, we will, for the first time, receive our programs from the dancers who greet and say goodbye at the exit. Offering us our welcome in reverse, the programs remind us that the title is Thank You for Coming. In a conceptually rich performance of service, the dancers' gesture enacts hospitality while making us question and re-choreograph our patterns of participation, allowing us to thank these virtuosic dancers for being so good at what they do, even as they assure us that their virtuosity is shared in the mundanity and investment of our attendance, that their virtuosity is matched by our own.

Now, moving from those years in 2011 and 2012 to the perspective of 2019, a piece like this seems to thematize and take a degree of control over the workplace of performance, its forms, its material conditions, its bodies, and its way of being with others. That said, we have to also acknowledge that its appearance is contingent upon the intermittent, temporary, festival structure of serial project work—Faye Driscoll's career is – like that of Gob Squad and others who might be presented here at TBA---an assembly of some of the most distinguished venues for 'project work' a performing artist can string together. Such a piece might be at risk of only "enacting 'critical thought' from within

performance practice, only -re-composing and re-negotiating rather than, as Cvejic and Vujanovic would have it, reclaiming art as a public good.”

With that inconvenient thought in mind, we might turn to another example to understand the 21<sup>st</sup> century tangles of that public reclaiming and its embedded global politics. Let’s set this work next to the recent furor at a different performing arts palace, --the Volksbuhne, the German palace of performing arts in the former East Berlin—where the furor over the arts as a public good received an urgent exorcism. At one point in 2017, the German ministries of culture’s decision to appoint, Chris Dercon, the director of the Tate Modern as the new director of the Volksbuhne seemed another exemplary opportunity to advance and complicate aesthetic experimentation across the visual arts and the performing arts. My scene-setting examples above with the Whitney, MOMA, Tate, and more seemed to get a new spin. Dercon said he was ready to animate Berlin with a modernized program, one that began by transporting a range of Tate Modern performance experimenters—including Boris Charmatz of Musee de La Danse and Anna Terese de Keeersmaeker in a Fous de dance at Tempelhof airport as well as relation artist Tino Sehgal creating Beckett performances, along with others. As interesting as this transit and transplantation might have seemed to some of us, it was roundly rejected---often before viewing—by a host of others. Indeed, the ensuing debate, protest, occupy-like takeover, and eventual resignation of Chris Dercon as the Volksbuhne head typified—in high dramatic form-- the struggles, projections, misrecognitions, and insidious politics of inter-art performance experimentation; those moves were taken to new heights around the purported Tate Modernization of the Volksbuhne. Take the 2017 well-circulated Open Letter of Volksbuhne staff as an example. Its writers accused Dercon of re-presenting

“dance, musical theatre, media art—already core elements of the Volksbühne—as ‘novelty’”—as forms erroneously discovered by the then outgoing Tate Modern Director. In response to Dercon’s desire to move across disciplines beyond what he called the ‘spoken word’ form of the theater, practitioners were alarmed by his desire for an alternative ‘polyglot stage language.’ His infamous assertion that Hito Steyerel and Wolfgang Tillmans were the only good artists in Berlin stung. In these and other exchanges, we saw a tussle around vocabulary (how strange to hear theater called “spoken word”?), around artistic literacy, and a confrontation of inherited artistic genealogies. It also exposed a much wider concern about the workplace of performance in a globalizing environment. Dercon’s program was critiqued by staffers as one that welcomed in an empty internationalism perceived as “a historical leveling and destruction of our identity, [ushering] a global consensus culture with unified patterns of presentation and scale.” The outsourcing of the season to “project work” and “residencies” with Charmatz, de Keersmaeker, Sehgal and other international artists was seen to undermine repertory model of resident theater. Once again, undergirding this concern about aesthetic differences or political differences is a primary concern about economics, about jobs. New polyglot stage languages required a different kind of expertise from an artistic and technical staff trained in producing the “spoken word” form of repertory theater. The Open Letter put it bluntly: “We fear that with these plans there will be no need for our expertise and capacities. We fear job cuts, even liquidation of entire subsections.” In other words, these salaried theater artists feared (rightly) what Axel Haunschild calls the boundaryless career of the itinerant, 21<sup>st</sup> century creative laborer, thereby staging what Cvejic and

Vujanovic might have read as one last ditch refusal to concede to artistic precarization.

This drama is one way of imagining political re-education for artists as citizens in the public sphere, albeit a fitful, opportunistic, incomplete, and internally contradictory one. It exemplified concerns about the performance workplace, about the re-skilling or de-skilling of the performing arts, about the potentials and perils of an artworld embrace of performance, and – in a Brexit context—the potentials and perils of a neoliberal Londoner (never mind that he’s Belgian) taking over an historic, (East) German institution in the EU. It seems important to step back, however, to situate these patterns of projection. The crisis is not fundamentally about how the visual art world is taking over the theatrical world. Indeed, over the last several years, many of us have heard just as many accusations that theater was taking over the visual art world. Perpetuating a modernist art habit, many critics from Michael Fried to Hal Foster have lamented the invasion of performers, choreographers, and time-based artists whose work de-skills and distracts attention from the contemplation of visual art. If the artworld’s ambivalence toward theater is something of a modernist trope, we now find ourselves in a reversal, navigating the theater world’s ambivalence toward artworld. But each accuses the other in similar terms. And it is certainly there that we find the real symptoms of historical crisis. Each accuses the other of ushering a commercialized event culture. Each accuses each other of neoliberal takeover. Critics in both camps are concerned about the effects of globalization, whether the empty internationalism of art biennial or the empty aesthetics of a performance festival. Rather than decide which art form is more political, which more neoliberal, the inter-art debate reveals a much broader anxiety about the



future of work, one in which all cultural employees have a stake. Indeed, it is striking to see how much the performing art works initially presented by Dercon anticipated the imagery of the protests against it. The virtuosic powers of the artist as political actor become, through a change in optic and context, a protest against the economic conditions that house it. Dercon resigned in less than a year at the urging of German cultural ministers, public sector employees who did not want to have to sustain this kind of public re-education.

The Volksbuhne scene is one way of imagining – and facing the obstacles to – the political re-education of the artist, especially at a historical moment where the effort to embrace art as a public good seems increasingly remote. Before concluding, I'll offer one more quite different example; an example back from the U.S. if also an incomplete, fitful, and dependent still upon the vagaries of intermittent project work for the serial, performing artist. But let me first get the space of the Public Servant, the public sector of public re-education, into the room, through another mundane political performance, in which I once again am implicated.

They, I mean we, meet every two months in the large assembly room inside the offices of the Berkeley Unified School District. They, I mean we, start to trickle in to find a seat amongst the rows of folding chairs placed on linoleum floors under fluorescent lights while in front of us they—though it could be we—take their seats in front of the tables placed on the portable stage set up for the evening. They don't look at us, even though we look at them, as they arrange their papers and microphones and as the clerk calls the meeting to order. And the meeting is off and running, or off and stumbling, as minutes are shared, as motions to approve are seconded, as the group, on and off the portable stage,

recalls the finer parts of Robert's rules of Order. "Point of order," someone might call from the sidelines, "excuse me, you can't call point of order now," says someone else. And we putter along, managed by the city council 'agenda' and its underwhelming plot plodding along, punctuated by occasional thumps of a gavel when a motion is carried. As if something happened, as if the motion carried us, as if the motion has changed us in some way, a decision made that has changed our ways of operating in the world.

I'm there—we are there—for the big event which is a vote to install a 1% tax on private development to support the arts in the city of Berkeley. When the agenda tells us that it's time to deliberate, I, and others not on the portable stage, line up as we planned to do in front of a microphone. I share my three to share a prepared statement about the importance of the arts to the vitality of the city. I attempt to make eye contact with those on the portable stage. Two stare at their paperwork, and I try to will them to look up as I speak. I feel like I'm doing a scene study in acting class. I have my objective, and they are my obstacle.

I recall this scene as an exhibit in the mundane process of the public sector—if not exactly the public sphere-- in part because I was prompted to recall this kind of scene upon encountering Aaron Landsman and Mallory Catlett's *City Council Meeting* series; and now I recall their project, every time I return to the scene of my own city council meetings (I just stepped down after completing two terms as a Cultural Commissioner for the City of Berkeley). In this project—whose script has been enacted in cities such as New York, Tempe, Houston, and San Francisco— the *City Council Meeting* team re-enacts transcripts from actual city council meetings in each region, creating a team of participants to decide on the arc of the evening and welcoming a wider audience to become participants of

varying sorts in the process. I am interested in this project, not necessarily because (as you'll see) it is the most exciting performance one could imagine, but to ask about the possibilities of joining the actions of the performing artist with the actions of political process. What happens when the critical consciousness of performed re-enactment is brought to these mundane and repetitive unfurling operations of public life, of public sector life?

To briefly describe, City Council's performance re-enactments are divided into three parts. Participants first enter an ante room, where there is an orientation video that mimics the orientation training in citizenship that one encounters before jury duty or other civic processes; typically, one hears instructions about how you will show you ID, where you will line up, how to prepare etc. Instead of those instructions, in City Council Meeting, you get a bit of introduction into some theories of democracy from Plato to Aristotle, informed a bit by Rancière. [Play Video] The second section of the performance is a reading of transcripts from actual city government meetings in one's own community. The final section is created locally with artists and collaborating community members; it unfurls differently every time, creating a responsive structure in which to reflect on what was just heard. *City Council Meetings* are performance spaces where spectators become participants in situations that re-enact and sometimes re-interpret the behaviors of city governance, its rituals of entry, its pedagogical orientations, its rules, Robert's rules, etc.

When viewers arrive at orientation, they are given a choice of what type of participant they want to be. One can be a counselor and read the meeting; they can be a speaker and say a piece of testimony ("I have a claim"); one can be a supporter with modest speaking roles; or one can be a bystander, which means

that one can just watch as a mode of participation. Once the meeting starts, a local group of artists (the staffers) push the performance along. Staffers act as a kind of run crew throughout the performance and also keep performers on book as they go. Here's a sample rehearsal.

#### SHOW VIDEO

So if we recall the 'special affinity' between the performing arts and the world of the political as elaborated from classical to modern political theory, what to make of this conjunction? What is the role, of virtuosic role-play – in the amateur sense – in this process, especially when those on one side of the portable stage assume a position on the other? Who gets to take this place? Who gets to inherit whose seat? The performance is far from smooth; indeed it is strikingly mediocre as it stutters along. But it is simultaneously a vehicle for sensitization and re-contextualization as the performed re-enactment foregrounds the daily rituals and repetitions and Roberts rules of local political action. Another way to frame the event is as a site where a working world meets a political world, where the labor of the performing arts re-script the actions of a political sphere, re-stitching the services of artistic labor to those of the public servant. These are public sector and civic processes that sustain our lives, that keep our parks going, that manage debris, that distribute resources to high schools. Civic processes have their protocols of attendance—orientation, oaths of office, delegations of authority to one amongst the group—and arguably the re-enactment of City Council Meetings make those protocols available for viewing. As such, it defamiliarizes the structures of 'being with others'; by asking citizens to imagine ourselves in that structure, participants arguably become re-educated about the existence of that structure, how it impinges on them, how it might, or might differently.

This project came about because Aaron, one of the collaborating artists, was asked by a friend to attend—or, as he said, was “dragged” to—a city hall meeting with friends of friends. A council member had said that tonight was going to be great because they were going to talk about a zoning issue that was going to be “really hot.” In the midst of the mundanity, the fumbblings, the passing of the papers, Landsman became aware of the theatricality of the civic attendance, as selected citizens debated the finer points of debris collection. As he says, “It seemed as if every city and almost every meeting, there is some apparently innocuous issue that gives way to more fundamental rifts, which start to come forward and energize a community to think about how it wants to be regulated.” *City Council Meeting* re-enactments try to re-dynamize a local public sector, and in the process, re-position artists as citizens in its unfolding; yes, the skills of the performing artist offer a service, but they function as ‘staffers’ in a re-enactment that is itself political re-education, albeit modest and eccentric, to all participants.

Re-enactment thus offers re-education via role-play within a city council’s participatory infrastructure. The piece is really, Landsman says, is not about the content; instead, “the issues we use in our transcripts are often chosen in order to make sure that people think about the form”—the form and, as he also says the “structures of participation,” so that people become differently attentive to those forms. Participants might find themselves reconnecting affectively, and oddly, with Robert’s Rules, or other protocols for deliberation and decision-making. Civic meetings, collective bargaining, public deliberation, collective agreements—all of those public processes have their protocols, repeated again and again over time. They become so familiar that stop noticing their formal character. In swapping roles, however, and re-enacting, there is a strange enlivening. Indeed, as

uninteresting as this performance might seem to watch, it is apparently incredibly interesting to be in it. Said one participant: "I found the experience of being mayor for one-hour empowering. We can feel so defeated by the world around us, thinking we are powerless to change our environment. Taking a careful serious look at how the guts of a city work is a good thing to do. These are the very politics that matter most to our lives." That's one testimonial, but I think of it next to, what Aaron [Landsman] says about city council meetings and inherited theories of political governance. Re-performing allowed an enlivened relation to a civic culture of participation, in part by reminding us that anyone could play anyone else's role. It recalls the virtuosic structure of "being with others," of "attendance," and offers an opportunity to attend differently to each other. Political and artistic virtuosity generalized for the amateur. One could say that this Expanded Practice is also an accessible, gentler way of getting a public education.

Finally, whether in choreography, transnational theater, site specific tours, or public art, whether in classic social theory, modern, or post-Fordist, we find symptomatic episodes of a redefined workplace for performance. If the critiques of participation, of public outreach, of artistic experiment, of expanded practices, and of community engagement often question the political limits of the form, perhaps some were aiming at the wrong target, or at least missed one of them, by not foregrounding that they are symptomatic investigations of the changing nature of our work. As researcher/teacher/artist/curators/telemarketing /parents/ service providers tack amongst formal experiments, as artists play activists play politicians, as touring academics like me tack between peer reviewed research articles and translational research platforms and my own Uber app, as all of us try to figure out our place in an 'event culture,' how are these tackings and tanglings

not also attempts to examine the effects of our labor? To, redefine, confront, and gauge the quality of that labor—in a cultural sector, in the political sector, in a school of higher education, in a school of procrastination. Rather than worry which one of us is being theatricalized, or Tate Modernized, or rendered academic, or rendered amateur, we might take a step back to track the twists and turns of our own projections. These patterns of cross-sector projection bespeak anxieties and potentialities as inherited virtuosities undergo redefinition. I've decided that neither the redefinition, nor the critique of redefinition, belong to one sector, that the problem and possibility of participation is shared. Whether or not our workplaces have emancipatory potential is a question with different answers each day. It's now part of my routine.

- 1 Statement from conversations with the author. For a more detailed account of Goldberg's distinction between theatre and visual art performance, RoseLee Goldberg, ed., *Performa 11: Staging Ideas*, Performa Publications, 2013.
- 2 Among others, see: Roberta Smith, "A Survey of a Different Color: 2012 Whitney Biennial", in: *New York Times*, March 1, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/02/arts/design/2012-whitney-biennial.html>; Andrew Russeth, "Whitney's 2012 Bucksbaum Prize Goes to Sarah Michelson", in: *The Observer*, April 19, 2012, <http://observer.com/2012/04/whitneys-2012-bucksbaum-award-goes-to-sarah-michelson/>; and Brian Schaefer, "Sarah Michelson and the Infiltration of Dance", in: *Out Magazine*, January 30, 2014, <https://www.out.com/entertainment/theater-dance/2014/01/30/sarah-michelson-whitney-museum>.
- 3 See MoMA Press Release, "The Museum of Modern Art Commission Six International Choreographers to Present Dance Performances at the Museum in a Series Co-organized with Ralph Lemon", [https://www.moma.org/documents/moma\\_press-release\\_389341.pdf](https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_389341.pdf).
- 4 See Abigail Sebaly, "Cold Storage and New Brightness: The Cunningham Acquisition Moves in at the Walker", in: *Walker Art Online Magazine*, July 29, 2011, <https://walkerart.org/magazine/cold-storage-and-new-brightness-the-cunningham-acquisition-moves-in-at-the-walker>.