Occupy Citizenry: Participatory Performance in New York City: 2009-2015

Kenn Dixon Watt
City University of New York, Graduate Center

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Occupyng Citizenry:  
Participatory Performances in New York City, 2009–2013

by

Kenn Watt

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York 2016.
This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Professor Jean Graham-Jones

Date____________________

Chair of Examining Committee

Professor Jean Graham-Jones

Date____________________

Executive Officer

Professor Marvin Carlson

Professor David Savran

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

Occupyng Citizenry: Participatory Performances in New York City, 2009-2013
Advisor: Prof. Jean Graham-Jones

Kenn Watt

This dissertation examines participatory aesthetics and their realization in various examples of contemporary performance. I examine a range of performance modalities, and discuss examples from military, civic, and environmentally themed work by the following New York City–based artists: International WOW Company, Aaron Landsman, and Natalie Jeremijenko and the Environmental Health Clinic. The performances took place throughout 2009–13 and involved my immersive research as both audience member and as a member of the team documenting each performance. The study examines the implicit performance “contracts” established between artists and audiences, current theories of participation (Claire Bishop, Jacques Rancière, Shannon Jackson, and Bruno Latour) and proposes that such performances operate via a consciously adopted form of performative failure to fully represent the utopian worlds insinuated by the performance contracts. Such failure to represent draws on the recent theoretical writings of Nicholas Ridout, Sara Jane Bailes, Baz Kershaw, and others. Through such performative failure, it is argued, the existence of networks of social association is revealed—leading to the emancipatory promise of the performance worlds and to avenues of progressive resistance to military ideologies, civic lack of democratic participation, and ecological crisis—all characteristic of contemporary life in the United States.
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Introduction

On stage and online, New Yorkers who follow contemporary performance art have shot an Iraqi, occupied Wall Street, deployed in Humvees, applied for citizenship of utopian Lush Valley, and become “impatients” at NYU’s E-clinics, where the diagnoses and prescriptions treat the ills of the environment. They have co-created performances as citizen-scientists, soldiers, and celebrants of a participatory social order finding expression in what has been called by some an “American Spring,” the 2012 election-year surge of activity by the founding New York hub of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) protest movement in 2011–12. The participatory turn in art and politics that predated, but seemed to culminate for many with, Occupy’s headlines in those years marked a hopeful, freighted moment in New York City performance. The confluence of recent, fascinated demand for participatory aesthetics coinciding with powerful global social and political movements forged a channel leading directly to Occupy’s brief but resonant hold on the imaginings of progressives throughout the world.

This dissertation focuses on the work of a small group of New York–based artists and activists and is narrow by practical design. A larger, more complete study would necessarily recognize the critical ancestry of participatory aesthetics within such hemispheric movements as Argentina’s horizontalidad, in which nonhierarchical decision making met “social protagonism,” in Marina Sitrin’s term.¹ In a recent collection of observations about the first period of OWS activity, Sitrin situates the occupation of Zuccotti Park firmly within a tradition that includes earlier movements in Buenos Aires,

Seattle (Direct Action Network’s 1999 protest against the World Trade Organization), Chiapas (the highly performance-oriented activities of the Zapatista movement), and the many revolutionary movements throughout the Arab world, where the moniker “Occupy” was appropriated in an act of homage and, perhaps, forced association.\textsuperscript{2} Even Europe, rocked by austerity economics in the face of massive international debt restructuring, underwent convulsive political reshuffling in 2012. The Italian _operaismo_ movement’s use of the term “multitude” and the idea of the transformation of labor popularized by Paolo Virno prefigure Occupy’s celebrations of creative labor, consensus-based methods, and cellular political organization characteristic of the earlier movement’s repudiation of work’s centrality in political life.\textsuperscript{3} Clearly, no investigation of the origins of the present moment’s interest in aesthetic and political participation can ignore historical lessons from the turbulent international scene.

The participatory performance practices this dissertation offers as symptomatic indicators of recent “horizontal” trends form a study of lived experience as performance. They constitute an opportunity to deploy a mixed-methods immersive study of a rapidly changing area of politics, performance, and scholarship. This confluence marks and enacts a defining contradiction of social and political forces in a United States dominated by a seemingly unchallengeable neoliberal economic order. For artists attempting to make sense of this thoroughly polarized political order, it means confronting corporatized electoral politics (witness the US Supreme Court’s 2010 _Citizens United vs. the Federal Election Commission_ decision), class divisions defined by preposterously disparate


income levels, and mountainous debt burden for students and middle-class homeowners in a nation whose military has been fighting two wars simultaneously (and contemplating a third) in order to secure the future of such a system. It also means coming to terms with emergent, new, and not-so-new forms of collective social action and organization defined by physical and virtual networks that offer access to instantaneous communication, coalition building, and response.

The military, environmental, and civic-themed performances presented here, from 2012–13, are collectively authored and deeply committed sociopolitical engagements. They are invitations to engage in shared labor organized around tensions between a ruling economic order and an emergent sense of political renewal. Occupy Wall Street, participatory performance, the ongoing uprisings in the Arab world, online gaming and interventions based on games, and the theory of convergence culture and shared labor in general are creating real changes that have shifted the meaning and value of the participatory. The artists creating these local performances, each of which I engaged in personally, are transcending local (even New York local) notoriety and becoming nationally and internationally known. Their work involves participants within immersive environments, combining live and mediated strategies that render academic disagreements over the “live” versus the “mediated” as too narrowly focused, if not yet entirely settled. Analyzing the lived labor of participation on Occupy’s streets, and in the performance settings and mediascapes of recent New York performance, this dissertation presents the strategic work of emancipation, simultaneously failing and succeeding in a search for a democratic mode of performing citizenship.
Among the artists whose work is analyzed in this dissertation, there is substantial variance in approach to the question of performance’s political efficacy. All of them, however, offer spectators implicit contracts for direct social engagement via participation, contracts that are revealing of the promise and limitations of performance that engages, models, and simulates the social. Activating the real via various strategies—town hall style group writing, audience interactions (ranging from tame public questions to ecstatic physical commitment), mediated online assassinations, and personal “lifestyle experiments” in environmental co-habitation with other species—these artists risk failure by approaching the porous boundaries of the represented and the real. This “partial performative failure,” as I will call it, is critically productive, however, and points towards the liberatory gesture that the artists seek. The contracts are varied in nature: “Train and deploy with a real military unit,” “Shoot an Iraqi,” “Apply for citizenship in a new community,” “Be an amateur scientist,” “Be a member of a city council.” Yet each promises engagement with experience beyond the narrow performance frame.

These theatrical experiments with failure share some key similarities that point to the current historical circumstances of the avant-garde. Critically, all are presentations of small companies and presenters operating on the economic margins of the theatrical landscape. They depend on nonprofit subsidies from government and foundations and are far from being able to survive on earned income. In addition, the marketing and even the content of the performances are uniquely connected to online communications, which serves to blur the boundaries between their artistic nature and the social structures that support the work. Thus the work in question retains the autonomy that, in the sense Peter
Bürger uses the term, traditionally marks the process by which artistic creation is transferred into social praxis characteristic of the avant-garde, while gesturing toward a political efficacy that transcends “mere” theatre. These small companies and artistic partnerships clearly aim for political relevance and the empowerment of their audiences. Some, like International WOW Company, approach it obliquely, offering audiences a choice of political affinities and positions while denying consensus. Others, like Natalie Jeremijenko’s environmental actions, follow the participatory mandate to embody direct resistance (or model alternatives), drawing inspiration from the politicized art of the 1960s and 1970s. All of the models bear the contemporary feature of existing as and through digital archives and online networks, which allow both preservation of the work and modification of the reception of the activities themselves. Those artists most directly concerned with community building—Aaron Landsman and his collaborators Jim Findlay and Mallory Catlett—are the most direct adherents of a new mode of “disclosing the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it,” a new distribution of the sensible, in Jacques Rancière’s

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4 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 49. The autonomy of art is characteristic of the bourgeois stage of cultural historical development in which art portrays self-understanding and is produced and received as an individual act. Participatory art collectivizes both processes, making a critical reflection of the labor process possible.


terminology.⁷ Rancière’s important work on the notion of *dissensus*—the idea that the prevailing political order does not represent consensual democracy—is a touchstone of my investigation. For Rancière and several other theorists of the political,⁸ the lack of presumptive consensus is the basis of emergent forms of social collectivity. Within the shared creative labor of these projects, the cocreation and sudden appearance in performance of a new social bond constitutes, I argue, the very essence of the work.

All of the performances identify what art historian Miwon Kwon refers to as “temporary invented communities,”⁹ a term that recognizes the provisional, unstable, and fleeting nature of the public collectivities assembled by the authors of the work. The artists discussed share, furthermore, a conceptual basis in collective performance grounded in shared labor, the actual work of dialogue and collaboration. This grounding in labor marks the shared space of artistic work as both unique and exemplary, as Kwon writes, “predicated on an idealistic assumption that artistic labor is itself a special form of unalienated labor, or at least provisionally outside of capitalism’s forces.”¹⁰ This idealistic take on artistic labor underscores the productivity of such forms of fleeting community that succeed in depicting the promise of an as-yet-unrealized community, even while failing, within the limitations of the performance, in becoming communities themselves. These forms of accidental, temporary community—a fictional city council

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⁷ Kristin Marting and her collaborators as well as Melanie Joseph of The Foundry Theatre are other New York artists working directly with the creation of social collectives in performance at this time.
⁸ See also the introduction to Miranda Joseph’s *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002),vii–xxxvi, for her discussion of the ways that the very notion of a consensual community forces a false leveling of necessary diversity of opinion even in a progressive, LGBT arts community in San Francisco.
¹⁰ Ibid., 97.
meeting, a referendum on values, a faux-immigration exam, a clinic for the environment—promise a terrain of the possible, where subversion and resistance can be carried out among strangers. By promising and then failing to quite deliver the thing promised, a space is opened to reveal the potential unity of purpose as the basis on which a “collective artistic praxis, as opposed to ‘community-based art’ might be theorized.”

In her important recent work on failure as a performance strategy, Sara Jane Bailes makes a compelling case for the productive potential of performance that, through failure deployed as a strategy, consciously denies conventional expectations. She addresses the tenuous relation between performance as social practice and political efficacy via performance that does not succeed as promised. Proposing failure as a strategy deliberately adopted by such groups as Forced Entertainment and Elevator Repair Service, Bailes notes that “representation proposes a double failure. First, each representative act underscores the failure of the present that instigates the initial impulse toward artistic activity…but failure then repeats (its doubling), for the art object produced inevitably fails to be the thing it wishes to communicate.”

Bailes works through her idea of failure in relation to J. L. Austin’s oft-cited notion of the “infelicitous” performative via speech act theory in *How to Do Things with Words*. Essentially, the infelicitious performative is a communication “misfire” in the intention, reception, or context of the communicative act. The misfire recognizes the correct procedure, while acknowledging a fatal problem in its execution. This is

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11 Ibid., 154.
applicable in performance where a community is represented, because the misexecution resonates beyond the context of the performance and can show us possibilities that, while unrealized in performance, are nevertheless present as potential future outcomes.

Bailes’s investigation, although incorporative and encompassing, is primarily limited to the kind of diminished expectations characterized by a flat or neutral performance style, the staging of mistakes and errors, and the direct materialization of self-conscious awareness that all theatrical representation is somehow ersatz. I would like to extend her useful analysis to include: 1) the work of artists who open the performance to outside participants; and 2) an examination of the ideological justifications undergirding a collective approach to performance labor. In other words, failure here will refer to the (partial) incompleteness of the implied contract set between performer and spectator about the temporary community of the performance. The failure to realize community in the older, more nostalgic sense of like-minded ideology opens the possibility of envisioning a new idea of a convergence culture, a network of differently oriented subjects connected in a creative framework of autopoetic cocreation.14 This overarching contextual failure, more than the failure of individual performance elements as described by Bailes, is the formulation that connects the performativity of contemporary political movements and participatory performances that, through unrealized utopian form, deliver to spectators a transformational context of hope.

In this conceptualization, failure is a necessary attribute of the creative act and the figure of the artist. It is not the evaluative outcome of a judgment of a performance, but a

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means of revealing expression even while foreclosing it. Examples of this failure might include the practical impossibility of having a “real” war experience at *Surrender*, a performance that advertised the presence of a combat veteran in the cast and required audience members to wear military uniforms and carry lifelike M-16 assault rifles. Other examples of failure might result from the awkwardness of what Nicholas Ridout calls the “affective discomfort” of the intimacy of the shared labor of performance\(^\text{15}\) that results from pretending to create a utopian democracy with performers one has paid, as in the work of Aaron Landsman, HERE’s Kristin Marting, and The Foundry Theatre’s Melanie Joseph. In these cases, failure is generative, not a disappointment but a conductive device pointing outside of the performance itself to the world at large. The expectations of community that are established and then shown to be unrealizable within a theatre reveal the existence of a hoped-for community that otherwise would have remained hidden if not for the workings of performative failure.

Contested notions of community form the basis for this study, which frames participatory engagement as a search for an emancipatory form of performance based on changing conceptions of contemporary social networks. The key operative goal of such work is the appearance of a shared sense of the network itself, rather than a specific ideology or politics. In an age of ubiquitous digital communication, instantaneous news access, real-time reporting of political movements, and a decisive shift from the idea of the virtual toward an emphasis on spectatorial *entanglement*, in Chris Salter’s term,\(^\text{16}\) these projects re-think the participatory experiments of previous generations. They


represent a vital, urban manifestation of the tradition of challenging form and institutional authority that marks the avant-garde. Recognizing that such work retains (and extends) the avant-garde emphasis on the autonomy of the artwork, I seek to examine the artistic strategies through which spectators become entangled in performance networks in which ideology and community are unfixed terms. This fluidity denies participants a firm political orientation while maintaining a focus on politics as an essential act of co-creation.

In claiming the importance of this work for the current moment, the paradigm of the network may be substituted for that of the community, signaling a shift in the ways group identity and political efficacy reveal themselves. Whereas community might entail a preexisting commonality of identification, a network may be thought of as revealing itself in the operation of connectivity itself. As Marina Sitrin writes, presciently, about OWS:

> It might not appear very organized or clear, but beneath the layers and layers of people, and the waves and waves of voices on the people’s mic, is a web of networked organization. We organize in decentralized but connected working groups. Our working groups range in focus from the most concrete, such as food, medical and legal, to things such as art, education, women’s needs, and safer spaces. It is in these working groups that the day-to-day work of Occupy Wall Street takes place.

Or, in the words of a recent article about the movement in the *New Yorker*, “in the end, the point of Occupy Wall Street is not its platform so much as its form: people sit down

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17 Or, as Miranda Joseph reminds us, a “vision of political community based on difference rather than identity, unity or communion” in the work of such theorists as Judith Butler, Iris Marion Young, and Chantal Mouffe is a more persuasive sense of the term. This is in accordance with the direction of my use of the term “network.” Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community*, xxvii.

and hash things out instead of passing their complaints on to Washington.” This appearance of new forms of networking, as French sociologist and theorist of science studies Bruno Latour (as well as Alan Read’s reading of his work) argues, reveals a new, expanded form of the social and how it works in performance, one that incorporates both humans and things in a manner that, in Read’s words, demonstrates “the recalcitrance of the human condition to be made manifest in the form of community.” In other words, representation of communities in performance cannot follow preordained categories based on exclusion, but must be re-imagined through expanded, redefined modes of collective and community, as in the questions Read quotes Latour as asking: “Where should the collective assemble? How can we compose the collective? How can we make others speak and act?” For sociologist Latour as for performance theorist Read, these questions, relevant to OWS and participatory performance equally, are not just political questions, but poetic and rhetorical and, I would argue, dramaturgical as they are revealed in “failure” performance. Latour’s actor-network theory describes multiple arrangements of individuals, animals, machines, and things that involve many levels and forms of agency, ascribing agency as much to things as to humans. I believe that Latour’s work is critically important here for the way he makes clear that the “social” is not an explanatory concept (like “community”) but is rather the aggregate of many types of associations, each of which is performative and generative of its own reality. A new form of the social recognizes that individuals and groups comprise “a tracing of

21 Read, Theatre, Intimacy and Engagement, 187.
22 Ibid., 191.
associations” that cocreate one another as assemblages of technology, politics, performance, and bodies. The definition of the community is the outcome of the establishment of the network, not the origin. This idea will be made manifest most clearly in the current research of Natalie Jeremijenko, whose Environmental Health Clinic, OOZ (ZOO spelled backwards) and How Stuff is Made projects, lifestyle experiments, and archival websites clearly include the agential perspectives of nonhuman animals, trees, and even inanimate matter. The meaning of participation is exponentially expanded along with these redefined patterns of the collective and the community in ways that will reflect back on less inclusive projects that I will examine.

Thus, this study examines work that reveals the performative creation of social networks themselves as their paradigmatic expression rather than as a prescriptive basis for a means of liberation or to an explicitly political end. The network is the end expression in and of itself. Many critics of OWS have decried (and probably exaggerated) its unprogrammatic, nonteleological political orientation, but, for the activists involved and for other observers, the fluidity expressed in direct democratic expression is result enough, not a means to another end, at least at the initial stages of the movement. If we were to attach a meaning, it is that for this moment the positioning of the participant to interpret and engage in the expression of the network form is itself the emancipatory goal that these works attempt to express. Those interpretations may remain widely disparate. For example, a recent National Public Radio podcast about OWS included references to

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23 Versions of these were presented at the Noguchi Museum in Long Island City, as part of the installation “Civic Action: A Vision for Long Island City,” which closed April 4, 2012.

federal and state budget cuts, growing income inequality, the loss of a social contract, the mortgage crisis, corporate bailouts, a loss of faith in corporations, the lack of accountability, and an increasingly globalized financial market all as the true significance of OWS. The only reliably consistent metric for the movement was that, in the words of radio host Brian Lehrer, “consensus has limits,” a sentiment which underscores the provisional and unstable quality of the young movement and its lack of a fixed ideology. It is this precise alliance of a network and an open interpretive center that define the new participatory performance model the following research examples explore in the realm of live performance.

**Research Subjects**

Relatively little has been published in recent years about participatory performance with the exception of work devoted to what is generally termed “applied drama” or “theatre for social change.” Most of this work is derived from the pioneering research done by Augusto Boal and his disciples and focuses on nontheatrical settings such as social communities, labor and educational organizations, and the associations generated through the work of nonprofit organizations. While applied theatre is a vital field, and one that is pushing roots widely into educational institutions and research journals, this study focuses on work that maintains a primary commitment to performance as an art form branching into social action. In this sense, I hope to explore the unsettled formal boundaries between art and social action, leaving aside applied drama’s ostensive commitment to engaging groups who do not primarily self-identify as

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audiences for theatre and visual art forms. There is ample research energy being channeled into the latter, while relatively little to the former.

The participatory engagements that I propose to examine are grouped into three categories symptomatic of the historical moment and the ways in which avant-garde performance has addressed current political reality: military-themed engagements (assaultive participation), community-building engagements (deliberative participation), and environmental engagements (nature and participation).

In 2008, at the about-to-close Ohio Theatre in New York City, the International WOW Company’s production of Surrender had audience members don military fatigues, carry mock weapons, and submit to vigorous basic training and a cacophonous simulated deployment into a hostile war zone. The performance took place against a background of heightened awareness of the possibilities of experiential war gaming for civilians. In the spring of 2011, the US Army itself closed the Army Experience Center (AEC), an interactive recruitment and infotainment complex at the Franklin Mills Mall in Philadelphia after a storm of protest and local outrage. In 2009, Iraqi-American artist Wafaa Bilaal devised Shoot an Iraqi, an online participation game in which players could shoot actual paintballs at high velocity at the artist, an Iraqi whose family had been killed by US forces. Bilaal resided in a sealed room in a Chicago gallery and posed as a target for thirty days, a performance that now is accessible on YouTube. In another

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26 Shoot an Iraqi: Art, Life and Resistance under the Gun, by Wafaa Bilaal and Kari Lydersen (San Francisco: City Lights, 2008), documents Wafaa Bilaal’s installation at the FlatFile Gallery of Chicago in 2007. Originally meant to be called Shoot an Iraqi, the installation, which involved Bilaal inhabiting a room in a gallery for twenty-four hours a day over a month while being shot at by an automated paint ball gun connected to networks of actual online shooters, was renamed Domestic Tension by the curators. A future version of this study will include Bilaal’s project.
repurposing of video-based war gaming, Brooklyn-based artist-provocateurs Eva and Franco Mattes, creating netart as 0100101110101101.ORG, showed *Freedom* at a Brooklyn gallery in the 2012 season. *Freedom* engaged online players of the war video game *Counterstrike* in a subversive parody of combat, with the artists posing as peaceful wanderers getting ridiculed and shot within a virtual Iraqi free-fire zone. These assaultive performance examples all required an audience of engaged participants willing to simulate military combat as a condition of involvement and as a necessary supplement to the original artistic authorship of the events.

Throughout the fall and winter of 2011 and continuing development into 2012, there were three productions in various stages of preparation in New York that examined themes of community values, participatory democracy, and civic self-conception. Each was created by downtown theatre artists better known for making performances more traditionally oriented for a passive audience. Aaron Landsman, an artist better known as a member of Elevator Repair Service, created *City Council Meeting* with director Mallory Catlett at HERE Arts Center under a residency arrangement. Since 2009, Landsman has traveled throughout the United States attending actual town council meetings while developing the concept for this production. Landsman’s dramaturgical approach is self-critical about the question of participatory performance, and the project’s website includes a link to Claire Bishop’s important critique of the utopian leanings of 1990s participatory artists in “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,”27 as well as a blog for...

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27 Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics” *October* 110 (Autumn, 2004): 51–79. Bishop’s important contribution has been critiqued as insufficiently rigorous by such respondents as Grant Kester, in *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), and supported, in her own criticism of the liberatory optimism of Bourriaud’s relational
responses to the project’s evolving self-conception. The public blog also features
Bishop’s essay, which represents both City Council Meeting’s justification and self-
provocation.

Other examples of such work included that of Kristin Marting, the founder and
artistic producer at HERE, who created Lush Valley along with dramaturg Maya
Landowne, video artist Tal Yarden, and writer Robert Lyons. The production was
advertised as “an interactive live art event… hatched by a creative artistic team and
shaped nightly by an ever-expanding community of you. Lush Valley invited the audience
to abandon their spectator hats and become key players in shaping an alternative national
ethos…”

Lush Valley’s development took place via a series of themed town hall-style
open rehearsals/meetings featuring a collection of audience responses to questions of
community, citizenship, utopia, and political engagement. Melanie Joseph, artistic
director of The Foundry, developed, with a small group of performers, designers, and
writer Kirk Lynn, How Much is Enough: Our Values in Question. This production had a
two-week developmental run at the Foundry’s space on the lower east side of Manhattan,
in a simple space above a Ukrainian cultural center, followed by productions in Boston
and at St. Anne’s Warehouse in Brooklyn. During the workshops, writer, director, and
“video content producer” J. Yew sat among audience members, who shared an informal
meal and answered questions posed by the performers, thus assisting the artistic team in
refining the version of the script featured in the production’s November 2011 run in

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http://www.here.org/shows/detail/663/.
29 Yew was not credited, or present in the tech booth, for the final production at St.
Anne’s Warehouse in 2012.
Taken collectively, these communitarian performances position spectators as interlocutors in the creation of “temporary communities” and also as subjects comprising split identities, possessing characteristics of both performing subject and relational interpreter of the producer’s artistic and political objectives.

In a third category of participatory performances, environmental activist-artist Natalie Jeremijenko, along with her NYU students, has opened the Environmental Health Lab and Clinic. The Lab is meant to function like any ordinary clinic, with the primary conceptual difference being that the patient here is the environment itself, and prescriptions are written for drop-in users (called “impatients” for their unwillingness to wait for legislative approaches to environmental change) to administer as extensions of the work of the lab. In this sense, the ideological orientation of the lab is outsourced to users who act as surrogates (and extenders) for Jeremijenko and her staff. These stand-ins not only participate in the time of the performance, here defined as the duration of their actual access to the clinic and its workers, but also extend the time of participatory engagement into the future through their actions. The bifurcated temporal signature of the performance may be said to exist in multiple spatial realizations as well, via online blogging and content creation as well as in the classroom and in the field. Jeremijenko’s installation, “Civic Action: A Vision for Long Island City,” at the Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park throughout the summer of 2012 (together with artists Mary Miss, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and George Trakas), forms, along with the Bronx OOZ project, the
most recent installments of a growing, developmental set of civic experiments in participatory ecological remediation.\(^{30}\)

These three categories—assaultive, deliberative, and environmental participation—have been selected for the proximity they deliver between the aesthetic and the social. Each provides a model platform from which to examine the dramaturgy of the collective, the arising of the network, and the workings of performative failure. Taken together, they address a cross-section of the concerns of the OWS movement and constitute an important current contribution to progressive social action in this country.

**Review of the Literature**

The tradition and history of the participatory turn in performance work can be traced to multiple sources, some from theorists of the visual arts and fewer others from performance theory. These sources find a common historical touchstone in the experiments of the avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s, but cover a historical trajectory that differs according to whether the point of origin is: a) the inclusion within early-

\(^{30}\) For reasons of space and clarity, and because they have been widely profiled, I choose not to examine the recent work of Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), an enduring ensemble who, unfortunately, gained unwanted notoriety in 2005 for the circumstances surrounding the death of Hope Kurtz, a cofounder of the group. A subsequent investigation led to the arrest of SUNY Buffalo professor Steve Kurtz, Hope’s husband and CAE cofounder, and his subsequent trial on attempted terrorism charges. CAE has involved audiences for many years in theatrically rendered environments that disseminate information about and stage resistance to corporate and governmental entities. CAE described their recent work as “participatory theatre” and themselves as “tactical media practitioners,” adopting and shifting between the labels “artist,” “activist,” “theorists,” or cultural workers” as needed for their current performative situation. Since 2005, their works—which bridge publishing, activism, education and performance—have focused on the economic relationships between bioengineering, genetics research, and their corporate sponsors and military applications.
twentieth-century visual arts of live performance elements into the experiments of the Dadaists and Futurists, or b) performance history as it traces the dissolution of the boundary separating audience from performers. Among the former, Miwon Kwon and art historian Claire Bishop cite the innovative practices of the 1960s and 1970s among artists interested, in Bishop’s terms, in “practices…that appropriate social forms as a way to bring art closer to everyday life.” Bishop also cites important precursors of socially disruptive forms of participatory art, such as the Paris Dada-Season of 1921, Soviet mass spectacles, and theorist Walter Benjamin’s emphasis on direct viewer involvement (“this apparatus is better, the more consumers it is able to turn into producers—that is the more readers or spectators into collaborators” as well as his interest in the plays of Brecht.

In the latter category, works that examine participation from a performance studies orientation, there has been a relative paucity of work, with some notable recent exceptions. Erika Fischer-Lichte’s *The Transformative Power of Performance* references the early-twentieth-century origin of theatre studies in Germany as the true origin of the “performative turn” of the 1960s and 1970s. Coinciding with the Cambridge Ritualists’ emphasis on performed ritual over written myth in England, German theatre studies privileged the embodied materiality of performance over the traditional literary basis of theatre history. For Fischer-Lichte, this is the historical foundation for the performative turn in the 1960s that included participatory Happenings and the work of the Performance Group and The Living Theatre.

Fischer-Lichte relates the performative turn to J. L. Austin’s work on performative utterances, important here for the manner in which Austin allowed that such

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32 Ibid.,11.
utterances can succeed or fail. It is this manner in which utterances can fail when circulated among participants of a community (also noted by Bailes) that, I propose, is key to understanding the partial failure, as well as the ground of the emancipatory potential, of recent immersive performance. Fischer-Lichte’s work, while not primarily concerned with participatory aesthetics, nevertheless takes up some useful ideas that address the immersive aspects of spectatorship. For the author, work that is ethically and emotionally engaging, such as the early performances of Marina Abramović, evokes physiological, affective, and, in a critical term, autopoetic opportunities for audience cocreation. Discussing The Performance Group’s productions, such as Dionysus in 69 and Commune, Fischer-Lichte notes the material presence of the performer and the performing body in its specific materiality rather than its semiotic potential, and notes the critical “perceptive oscillation” between these states as a key component of audience entanglement.33

In a recent work that focuses primarily on performance reenactments, Rebecca Schneider uses Fred Moten’s term “interinanimation” to refer to the state of being in-between temporal registers, the “now” of performance and the “then” of historical time. This term usefully illustrates another dimension of participation and performance failure, the liminality inherent in performance that attempts to touch the “real.” For audiences deploying to war, enacting citizenship rituals, or investigating civic engagement with animals, to cite some examples, this useful in-betweenness leads to a critical awareness joining participation to witnessing. The autopoetic, affective response to transformative performance that Fischer-Lichte describes runs a parallel course to this temporal

33 Fischer-Lichte, Transformative Power of Performance, 88.
liminality, suggesting that the reception of the performing body in its dual modes and the collision of time frames—the time depicted and the time of representation—are related. Taken together, Fischer-Lichte’s and Schneider’s dual registers, as well as the split nature (symbolic cultural performance/“real” social action) of my chosen examples account for the failure of the “real” to fully materialize, while still emerging sufficiently embodied and represented to point to future possibility. For Schneider, unpacking this liminality in reenactment work (or in participatory performance) is also crucial to countering the still-present antitheatricality of much work on the visual arts.34

Shannon Jackson’s examination of socially engaged art that goes by various names—relational, collective, immaterial—is characterized by a deep awareness of the intermedial nature and, even more importantly, the social interdependence of participatory work. The approach of such work in its anarchic, anti-institutional impulse must be balanced by questions of sustainability and working in coordination with existing social structures. For Jackson, the autonomy of the work is always “a conflicted one, as the art form’s inter-dependence with ensembles, technologies, and audiences has always been hard to disavow.”35 I take from Jackson’s approach an awareness that the nature of all of the critical terms under analysis—participation, collective, network, failure, and the social—will appear differently depending on from which art form we imagine such intermedial works as departing in their hybrid form. An online engagement operating a remote-operated paint ball gun to shoot an Iraqi in a gallery connects the institution of the museum with the notion of live presence differently than a Critical Art Ensemble lecture

demonstration in which artist and audience are present and available to one another in the gallery. Either of these engagements may be said to “fail” in its promised contract and hence manifest the appearance of a new form of the social differently, and both will differ from the US Army’s strategy for recruitment via militainment in a mall in suburban Pennsylvania.

**Relational Aesthetics and Labor**

Contemporary participatory performance raises critical questions about neoliberal globalization, communities and networks, labor, violence, spectacle, and the aesthetic realization of democratic representation. These questions can be framed in terms of shifting concepts of artistic authorship, political efficacy, and the political potential of what Nicolas Bourriaud has termed “relational aesthetics.” For Bourriaud, an art based on interactivity may be thought of as occupying an *interstice*, a term used by Marx to “describe trading communities that escaped the framework of the capitalist economy.”[^36] This is a space that fits into the overall social totality but suggests alternative structures; it is also a fair description of the kind of venues within which the performances I am concerned with occurred. One unifying principle of the performances under investigation is their sponsorship or hosting by marginal, economically tenuous institutions (HERE, The Foundry, the now-relocated Ohio Theatre, university art departments, etc.) that position themselves as risky alternatives to the mainstream within the New York performance marketplace, or as brick-and-mortar gallery/virtual space hybrids. For Bourriaud, these kinds of spaces, if not utopic, at least “encourage an inter-human

intercourse which is different to the ‘zones of communication’ that are forced upon us.”

This study, therefore, addresses strategies of production within specific artistic institutions as well as the nature of the shared labor of performance itself.

In *Living in the End Times*, Slavoj Žižek reminds us of the role that labor plays in capitalist society by describing the “double character” of labor, its concrete and abstract nature. Concretely, human labor produces commodities; abstractly, labor is a socially mediating activity, allowing the acquisition of goods through the reproduction of the social structures that labor itself constitutes. Labor is the origin of value. And yet, there is in fact no distinction between abstract and concrete labor in practice, for “the network of social relations inscribes itself into the category of labor precisely in the form of its opposite, of abstract labor and into its product, a commodity, in the form of its value.”

This is a key concern in participatory performance, namely, the role of abstract labor in constituting a surplus value through the added work of the spectator. The performances under investigation here offer participants a form of contract: the value of contributed labor (i.e., participation in the network itself) is increased by the received value of the performance encounter. In other words, what you take away is of greater value in this alternative economy than what you contribute. Spectators are offered the promise of a contracted exchange: labor for value, the value of being present for the appearance of the network, and the social and intellectual capital conveyed. Performances such as *City Council Meeting* and *Surrender* offer participants inclusion in actor-networks through the performance of democratic self-representation. Such work involves the aesthetic deskilling (of creative techniques) and outsourcing (to participants) of the immaterial

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37 Ibid., 16.
artistic labor involved in participation. Claire Bishop has defined deskilling as “a desire to abandon specialized forms of artistic composition and skill in order to make the boundaries of artistic production more diffuse and democratic.” This equalization of practice, according to John Roberts, signals the entry of art practice into “general social technique.” According to this schema, the artist is more a constructor of the techniques and skills of others than a maker of specialized objects, an idea in accordance with the participatory. The non-specialized coauthorship involved in participatory performance implicates audience members in the ideology of work produced through their commitment of immaterial labor as performance.

Throughout the range of works examined, the spectator’s contribution is an intrinsic element of performance work that is, nevertheless, still attributed to a company or artist. In some cases, the subject position of the spectator is rendered ambiguous, both affirmed as author and taken up and purposed to conform to the artist’s presumed theme. The appearance of a network connecting participants in a production such as *Surrender* or *City Council* is a concrete manifestation of what Marx termed the metamorphosis potential of a commodity. Crucially, however, the performance should be considered a *non-reproducible* commodity, a commodity that mainly escapes the law of value of the marketplace. Nevertheless, it is still a commodity; the unique quality of the non-

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39 The definition is taken from the description of Claire Bishop’s 2012 CUNY Center for the Humanities seminar Deskilling: The Aesthetics of Amateurism. Bishop borrows the term from John Roberts, *The Intangibility of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (London: Verso, 2007). Deskilling refers to the routinization of work; in artistic work which is increasingly immaterial, the work of the artist is identified with its conceptualization and therefore “no longer determined by the artist as sole author,” 227.
40 Ibid., 3.
41 Ibid., 28–30.
42 Ibid., 28.
reproducible performance-as-commodity exists in its potential to transform the alienated labor of the spectator as unalienated labor. This metamorphosis, of alienated labor into non-alienated labor, is a surplus value, value accruing to the participant herself. This appearance of non-alienated labor is realized, I would argue, in the shared network that is the ultimate goal and purpose of participatory performance.

Performances such as those discussed pose critical and urgent questions for participants, offering them “scenes” in both the theatrical and social sense. In these scenes, for example, consent to participate in a recreation of a recent military engagement can be offered (or withheld), collective political action can be participated in (or disrupted), and the tactical politics of direct environmental activism can recruit (or alienate) participants who are also role players in these theatricalized settings, laboring as unscripted, improvising performers. These roles are then doubled, as spectators become spectator-performers, observing as their contributions are rechanneled by the original creators of the performance. This split ontological positioning is further troubled by the artist, who exercises the freedom to contextualize and recontextualize the spectator’s offering, allowing it to congeal into, or stand apart from, the ideology of the performance. This doubling of the role of the participant reinforces performance’s doubled ontology as not real and not-not real in Richard Schechner’s oft-cited formulation. 43 Further, the complicity spectator-participants share as cocreators in the work also has a double

nature—both as improvisation and as an element of a pre-existing, albeit fluid, representational structure—as a social performance of symbolic action.\textsuperscript{44}

The recent wave of immersive art in the age of Occupy Wall Street challenges the nature of the performance event, the ethics and aesthetics of participation, as well as the very idea of the social. It suggests a need to examine the mechanisms by which producers construct the role of the performer-spectator. The creation of shared, consensual participation involves, for the participant, actively embodied questions about enacted identification with the operating ideologies of a given performance and about the decision to allow oneself to be interpellated as a subject, in Althusser’s terminology, at least for the time of the performance.\textsuperscript{45} Collective authorship is utopian by definition and has been since its origins in the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century. As the Marxist art critic John Roberts has succinctly pointed out, this is because “collective authorship represents the displaced social form of non-alienated collective labor.”\textsuperscript{46} The ideal of collective art has been a mainstay of the avant-garde and connects the revolutionary moments of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1960s, the joint aspirations of art as research laboratory and as a practice dissolving the barriers between artistic and larger social practice.


\textsuperscript{45} The notion of being “hailed,” from Althusser’s “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” has been taken up by many theorists of subjectivity and performance, notably Judith Butler in \textit{The Psychic Life of Power} (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 106–110. For Butler, the “call” involves a subjectification that is reduced by the recognition of the authority of the voice which, partially through a construction of guilt, promises identity in return. See also Ann Pelligrini, “(Laughter),” in \textit{Psychoanalysis and Performance}, ed. Patrick Campbell and Adrian Kear (New York: Routledge, 2001), 177–91.

\textsuperscript{46} Roberts, \textit{The Intangibility of Form}, 125.
This dissertation, then, examines the strategies of the artistic producers whose work directly involves and “hails” participants and is invested in the situational networking of spectators. Participatory performance entails the transfer of authority, to a greater or lesser extent, from artist to spectator; nevertheless, a strong focus remains on the artist as author of the situational context. Through my examination of recent assaultive, civic, and environmentally themed performances, I will propose that recent forms of participation offer new strategies to, in Bruno Latour’s term, “reassemble the social.” By locating ourselves in networks made newly visible through the connectivities of online communication, we will find newly democratized artistic practice that dissolves the boundaries of producer and consumer. These networking practices mediatize live performance, which absorbs and reflects the dramaturgical possibilities of nonlinear, multiple-channel, connective, and immersive forms of authorship.

Clearly, the creation of an effective network among live subjects is a challenging artistic goal. It may succeed or fail to achieve a transformational state in a given performance through the “perceptive oscillation,” in Erika Fischer-Lichte’s terminology, between the subjective and objective states of the spectator. Do we see our role as static observer or activated cocreator for the time of the performance, or, as Fischer-Lichte might encourage us, transformationally, projectively, beyond the frame? This potential is the basis of what I argue is the innovative liberatory possibility of this type of work, namely, the strategic and deliberate failure of the temporary community-as-contract between artist and audience, as a device to reveal the hidden origin of a new, more inclusive and politically progressive, sense of network.

Community, Network, and Identity

The three performance groupings I outline above—assaultive, deliberative, and ecological participations—are subject to a common and fundamental shift in the way in which networked communications are envisioned. Each also bears some unique elements specific to its respective field. For example, within the area of military studies, the development of communication, gaming, and simulation technologies underlying the performance by International WOW Company as well as the now-closed Army Experience Center can be traced to the Revolution in Military Affairs, or RMA. Begun during Bill Clinton’s presidency, the RMA represented an enormous expenditure on streamlined and integrated command-and-control structures to align the military with twenty-first-century technological potential. The goal was “full-spectrum dominance” through computerized weaponry (often developed in tandem with entertainment corporations), asymmetrical hegemonic war-making superiority, and, most importantly, the class ideology of the American state, neoliberal economic restructuring, and capitalist accumulation.48 As Roger Stahl and others have written, the RMA has remolded the contemporary citizen-soldier into a recruit for the techno-fetishism and consensual cooptation of the Pentagon-Hollywood alliance, whose techniques and ideology the artists listed above parody and critique (without ever quite escaping).49

49 These themes are explored by Roger Stahl in Militainment, Inc.: War, Media, and Popular Culture (New York: Routledge, 2010). See also James Der Derian, Virtuous War (New York: Routledge, 2009); Nina B. Huntemann and Matthew Thomas Payne, eds.,
As the division of this study into military, civic, and environmentally themed engagements indicates, the idea of networked communities recognizes from the outset the inherently multiple identities of the communities forged and developed in such work. This multiplicity as a defining principle challenges an earlier notion of collectives as, in Benedict Anderson’s term, “a deep, horizontal comradeship.”\(^{50}\) Miwon Kwon, who has written extensively on installation art and its relation to performance, argues against “the common notion of the community as a coherent and unified social formation.”\(^{51}\) Instead, community is determined as a scene of contested identities that artists attempt to define through activating spectators. Addressing performance collectives specifically, this also differs substantively from Baz Kershaw’s formulation of communities as relatively cohesive. In an early work from 1992, Kershaw, concerned primarily with community as a “potential site of ideological opposition,” cites Raymond Williams as describing performance as an “oppositional cultural formation.”\(^{52}\) Communities thus conceived are forms of association that mediate between the individual and the larger society. Kershaw then viewed performance as an ideological transaction with an audience, albeit one in which efficacy is difficult to verify, posing a challenge to the unification of identity within the community of performance. In *Theatre Ecology*, from 2007, Kershaw’s sense of the ideal way of conceiving the performance collective relies on more relational,

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interconnected models of social and ecological networks, which he terms “performance ecologies.”

Somewhere between the idea of community as common ideology and the network lies the “coming community” of Giorgio Agamben. In an early work by that name, Agamben sets out the idea of being as “whatever” being, being in common but not derived from a common property. This notion of “singularity” is neither individual nor universal but is formed of the tension of their opposed forces. Agamben calls singularities that escape the antinomy of the opposites “examples” that have the power to call attention to themselves as real, individual cases that nevertheless cannot stand in for universal traits. The politics of such singularities entails a “community…mediated not by any condition of belonging (being red, being Italian, being Communist) nor by the simple absence of conditions…but by belonging itself….“ This politics, one of indeterminate demands, Agamben recognizes as heralding a new struggle, not for control of the State, but between “the State and the non-State (humanity).” This capacity for struggle and cohesive effort absent decisive goals is an apt description of performance that risks the failure to achieve easy determinate meaning or simple utopian community while revealing a potent structure of participation beneath a surface of ideological disunity.

This performance of “whatever” being recognizes a politics of singularities: individuals working for something together without, perhaps, the knowledge of exactly what that means in terms of the politics of ideological certainty. This state of bearing

55 Ibid., 85.
56 Ibid.
something unknown in common (and risking failure) in order to reveal a deeper association is more easily imaginable as a network of actors than as a bound community, although Agamben’s version comes close.

Network theory implicitly recognizes the difficulty of defining communities of participants. Recent work on networks and networked environments proposes more open, distributed models of social and political agency. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri characterize networked power as a new paradigm of both sovereign power and oppositional democratic action. For Hardt and Negri, changing class structures, the rise of immaterial labor (such as cultural production like performance), and new forms of decision making based on networked structures have radically altered the nature of activism and, by extension, performance with activist aspirations.57 An enormous literature has developed validating and critiquing Hardt and Negri’s reading of the multitude as a postmodern vision of a dispersed force engaged against the outdated sovereignty of nation-states. One trenchant critique, that of Sylvère Lotringer in his introduction to Paolo Virno’s 2004 *A Grammar of the Multitude*, notes that Virno avoids some of the facile mythologization of resistance found in Hardt and Negri. Specifically, he writes, Virno “refrains from turning exile, or the multitude for that matter…into another splendid myth.”58 Echoing the tension of opposites within unity in Agamben’s “whatever” being, Virno, following Spinoza, portrays multitude as a “plurality which persists as such.”59 Like Agamben, the multitude, neither individuals nor a collective,

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citizens nor producers, finds its unity not within the State but within “a mode of being, the prevalent mode of being today…ambivalent…it contains within itself both loss and salvation, acquiescence and conflict, servility and freedom.”

Unlike Agamben, however, Virno connects the political with the production of culture in his concept of the “virtuosic.” For Virno, the virtuoso is not a member of an elite but an ordinary “deskilled” speaker, the virtuosic a “horizontal” property of all human voices. All utterances, all speech acts are “without end product” and virtuosic in that they refer to others within the public sphere. The importance Virno places on speech as instituting the public context draws on the importance of the performative gesture as felicitous (or, failing, infelicitious) utterance. Earlier these speech acts were noted as germane to both Bailes’ concept of performative failure and Fischer-Lichte’s analysis of the transformational theatrical gesture. In Virno’s analysis, we find the multitude as public created in the act of speaking, in and through performance.

Other definitions of the network broaden the concept and describe characteristics of communication within its sphere. Andrea Zapp notes that the “networked narrative environment must be defined as the modus operandi that reflects not only creative but also social processes” characterized by open dialogue and interactivity. However, as theorist Alexander Galloway acknowledges, while human subjects may thrive on networks, the form itself is unstable and disorienting, ripe for contradiction. They are literally impossible to control.

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60 Ibid., 26.
61 Ibid., 55.
In *A New Philosophy of Society*, Manual DeLanda proposes a theory of assemblages derived from Deleuze and Guattari for the notion of society as a totality. Assemblages are characterized by relations of externality among their parts that may be separated and reconnected to other assemblages. This interchangeability also characterizes the fluidity of the position of the individual participant in the performances under discussion. While the digitally networked environment of the work of Eva and Franco Mattes or Wafaa Bilal may be readily apparent, it can be maintained also that live performances such as those of International WOW, the Army Experience Center, Critical Art Ensemble, Melanie Joseph, Kristin Marting, Aaron Landsman, and Natalie Jeremijenko rely on the existence of such networks in an equally pervasive sense. Facebook and Twitter marketing, online blogs, and web archives form intrinsic parts of the lives of all of these performances. Moreover, the post-dramatic dramaturgical structure of the live performances themselves is thoroughly mediated, designed to reflect the self-generating participatory structures earlier referred to as “autopoetic.”

The performances I examine conceive an activated subject to be the basis of political collectivity and consider networked collectives to activate subjects ordinarily separated by differences of culture and identity. This means of overcoming the lack of an easy, identitarian, consensual basis in politics is compatible with Jacques Rancière’s theories of *dissensus*, underlying the innovative potential of art and performance to disrupt forms of domination. Rancière advocates overturning the idea of a consensus

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democracy that typically relegates politics to a managerial class and reduces the political subjectivity of individuals by assuming a fundamental equality for all subjects. Nevertheless, these complex forms of subjectivity and community mean that, for audiences, there may appear roadblocks to full participation within the very structure of the social. The performances I examine here have in common the potential of restoring a voice to those Rancière delegates as having been denied such rights.

The appeal of a directly engaged audience may appear obvious to an experienced, or any, theatre practitioner, critic, or contemporary user of interactive gaming, social networking, or reality television. Both the lure and danger of dissolving of the performer-spectator divide have been the source of controversy throughout the history of performance theory, from Plato’s injunction against mimetic representation to Brecht, Boal, Schechner, and the diverse approaches and philosophies of current practitioners of applied theatre research. In The Emancipated Spectator, Rancière places spectatorship at the very center of the relationship between art and politics, introducing the “paradox of the spectator,” which states essentially that while there can be no theatre without spectators, the passive looking, inaction, and immobility involved render a negative judgment on the entire art form. This has led, alternately, to a desire to abolish theatre or to reform it through making spectators into actors, either scientifically (through the Brechtian model) or energetically (the Artaudian model). Rancière argues that the reformers of the theatre unwittingly reinscribe Plato’s distrust of theatre and his judgment of the theatrical community as not a “true” community by assuming a distance between

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performer and spectator that must be bridged. He calls this a dramaturgy of “guilt and redemption,” a compensating for theatre’s own essence through teaching spectators how to stop being spectators. This compensatory desire by artists to “solve” the problem of various oppositions such as watching/doing, appearance/reality, and, of course, performer/spectator is actually an attempt to solve the problem of an assumed inequality, the “partition of the sensible.” Emancipation, true audience involvement, means assuming equality (of intelligence, capacity, etc.) from the outset and understanding looking as a form of action, and contemplation as involvement.

For my argument about the efficacy of performance failure, Rancière’s key point is that the assumption of an already-activated spectator means that what is transmitted by the artist (or teacher) is not identical to what is received by the spectator (or student). Rather, it is an interpretation mediated by the distance between them and through the additional mediation of the spectacle itself, which is not equivalent to either the intention of the creator nor the interpretation but is rather a third term. This term, which Rancière terms critical for “intellectual emancipation,” can neither be “equal” nor “undistorted.” It is a misreading, an emancipated reading, which we can compare to a reading of a performance context that has “failed” or “misfired” in the Austinian sense. This reading acknowledges the mastery of the author but not the sanctity of the message. It is, I will argue, precisely the situation I refer to in my extension of Bailes’s notion of performance failure regarding the performance contract: offered, unfulfilled, yet providing the seeds for an appearance of the underlying network of associations that yield the potential for transformation. Rancière acknowledges the need for a new sense of community in such a

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66Ibid., 2.
67Ibid., 5.
theatre, drawing a critical connection between spectatorship and what he terms “emancipated learning,” in which the distance between teacher and student need not, indeed should not, be collapsed in a false utopian desire for community. Regarding the theatrical setting, Rancière asks whether it is not “high time to call into question the idea of theatre as a specifically communitarian place. It is supposed to be such a place because, on the stage, real living bodies perform for people who are physically present together in the same place.” Emancipation, in other words, begins by denying theatre’s uniqueness as a community and installing instead the capacity of all to be anonymous, to be the equal of anybody. In a manner equally compelling as a description of those massed together in Zuccotti Park in 2013, Rancière writes: “We don’t need to turn spectators into actors. We do need to acknowledge that every spectator is already an actor in his own story and that every actor is in turn the spectator of the same kind of story.” This is another way of framing deskilling, as a blending together of the active and the passive, the spectator and actor, the individual and the collective. The exemplary performance creates the condition to achieve both opposing states simultaneously and self-consciously.

The collapse of the distinct roles of audience and performer raises the question of how participatory performance practice can be both democratic and identifiable as performance in specific aesthetic terms. The answer, differently realized by each practitioner, begins with the specific workings of contextual performative failure and the oscillation between the subjectivity and instrumental nature of the involved spectator.

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68 Ibid., 6.
69 Ibid.
Nicholas Ridout has described the fraught nature of such theatrical encounters between performer and spectator as an inevitable result of the outsourcing of performance in a service economy. We experience “affective discomfort” at the intimacy of performance the way we do, for example, while getting a haircut. For Ridout, in certain instances of contemporary performance, the process of the production of the work is thematized within the work itself; this, in Ridout’s estimation, may be a desirable outcome. The potential of foregrounding the labor process within the work might be liberating if it cuts through what Ridout calls the “self-disgust in relation to labor” characteristic of a service economy, especially in terms of the “theatrical mediation of economic relations.”\(^70\) For performances such as those of International WOW, Landsman, or Jeremijenko, which I maintain are examples of this kind of theatrically mediated work, the material conditions of the process depend upon, and even demand, the donation of affective labor. This emotionally inflected corporeal work reproduces the social networks that sustain the performance within the performance itself. Within an economy such as ours, more devoted to the production of services than goods, the collapse of the producer-audience divide introduces a malleability into social relations through such donated labor. The question may be raised as to whether such work is an attempt to critique or to remove itself entirely from the market. Ridout posits that this is a misrecognition of the nature of theatrical delegation. “Performance in the service economy discloses the full commodification of human action,” he writes, and exists as the opposite of authentic expression as the “exemplary commodity.”\(^71\) Here again, I

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\(^71\) Ibid.
believe that Ridout is referring to the simple inability of theatre to fulfill the contract for full democratic participation as a basic failure of mimetic representation to be the thing to which it refers; we must follow the workings of performance fully to the stage of revealing the existence of the network. Bailes’ work on failure, discussed earlier, emphasizes this critical future-oriented sense of performance and its ability to represent the unrepresentable, the possibility that things can be different in the future by revealing the mutability of existence through the workings of actual labor.

**Efficacy**

Of the three categories of participatory performance proposed—military, civic, and environmental—the last category, which includes the work of Natalie Jeremijenko, offers the most direct experiments in social efficacy. Her work with the Environmental Health Clinic least resembles the other examples of performance in terms of overtly theatrical spectacle and traditional performer-audience relationships. While Fox’s and Landsman’s productions assume those relationships, if only to disrupt them, Jeremijenko’s strategy is to encourage strictly self-authored work within a shared collective artistic identity. There is an emphasis in this work on hands-on, do-it-yourself approaches that transfer agency and power from the hands of experts to the “deskilled” hands of the self taught, in a manner difficult to conceive of when transferred to the authority structures depicted in *Surrender* or *City Council Meeting*.

Jeremijenko, who teaches Environmental Art and Activism at NYU, has had her work referred to as bioart, which she calls “an umbrella term for a diverse group of practitioners largely united by the fact that they have dubious credentials and no business
in biotech.” Jeremijenko, along with the artists of Critical Art Ensemble, has long been an advocate of “biotechnology hobbyism” as a way of democratizing scientific knowledge. For these artists, citizen participation refutes governmental and corporate monopoly over technological capability and reinforces Latour’s point that the networks of society, science, and technology are simultaneously “real, like nature, narrated, like discourse, and collective, like society.” In his study of the idea of the modern, Latour urges an understanding of the networks we form as one in which our “roles, actions and abilities are distributed.” The false separation of science and politics must be collapsed if we are to comprehend our relationship to animals, objects, and the true meaning of the human. Latour describes this false divide between the realm of the sciences and that of the political as the very definition of the modern, in which individuals delegate power to representational bodies (the laboratory and the social contract). For Latour, we confuse Nature and Society and the manner in which we have a hand in constructing and representing them both. The result is that they remain separate entities and we fail to understand our full relations to both. There is a “complete separation between the natural world (constructed, nevertheless, by man) and the social world (sustained, nevertheless, by things).” His proposal, taken up directly by Jeremijenko and her student collaborators, is that we learn to construct a Parliament of Things, an inclusive representation of humans and nonhumans in which all have a voice of participation. Latour’s description of this parliament reads a bit like a manifesto of performance from

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74 Ibid., 15.
75 Ibid., 31.
one of the working groups of Occupy Wall Street: “Let one of the representatives talk
about the ozone hole, another represent the Monsanto chemical industry, a third the
workers in the same chemical industry, another the voters of New Hampshire, a fifth the
meteorology of the polar regions; let still another speak in the name of the State.” The
emphasis is on an efficacy borne of inclusivity and performativity.

For Steve Kurtz and his collaborators in Critical Art Ensemble, the main principle
for exploring performative efficacy is through tactics. From an interview, Kurtz writes:

The five principles of tactical media are: specificity (deriving content and
choosing media based on the specific needs of a given audience within their
everyday life context); nomadicality (a willingness to address any situation
and to move to any site); amateurism (a willingness to try anything, or
negatively put, to resist specialization); deterritorialization (an occupation of
space that is predicated upon its surrender, or anti-monumentalism); and
counterinduction (a recognition that all knowledge systems have limits and
internal contradictions, and that all knowledge systems can have explanatory
power in the right context, and that contradiction in general is productive). Our
practice is about process only—the process of resistance. We have no final cause
in mind, no utopias, and no solid social categories. CAE interacts with the
becomings of lived time in an effort to expand difference.

The parallels with other self-organizing political doctrines can be found in the specific
variability of themes and political circumstances represented and the mobility and
willingness to alter the tactics and strategies of the movement in a search for resonant
forms of efficacy. This strategic openness to alterations in form characterizes the search
for the revelation of the network itself as the ground for a future politics.

If efficacy refers to the sociopolitical utility or strategic reach of a performance or
participatory event, then we can distinguish among the various artists’ strategies
according to how directly they create the appearance of the network, which, as described

76 Ibid., 164.
12/09/12.
earlier, is the manifest basis for change. The environmental bio-hobbyists create a specific, direct network of productive actions that form enduring alterations in their community. For International WOW, Landsman, and Jeremijenko, the participatory actions they authorize are symbolic cultural performances that instill audiences with a shared sense of Rancière’s emancipated equality as a template for further work.

Alan Read, in *Theatre, Intimacy and Engagement*, refers to theatrical attempts to create actual efficacy as misguided, indulging in nostalgia for an agency assumed to be lost. He writes:

> It is only by separating theatre from the political that their potential relations in a practice of politics can be realized. The error has precisely been to leave these two terms bonded in a fantasy of expectation and hope while patronizing them both with the commiseration of a failure.  

Read’s announcement of failure here diagnoses the problem correctly, but it doesn’t work failure through to its productive endpoint. He then proposes a reworking of the manner in which we conceive the representational mechanisms of performance to enable the appearance of a new reassembly of the social, based partly on a close reading of Latour and partly on Rancière’s principle of radical equality, an attribute common to both artistic production and political action in the aesthetic realm of expression. The final connection, to which Read alludes but does not state explicitly, and which this study seeks to demonstrate, is that the path to equality and social reassembly leads directly through the dramaturgy of performance failure. In other words, it is through the deployment, fracturing, and dissolution of the utopian context of performance, followed

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by the appearance of the actor-network connecting individuals (humans, animals, machines), that the equality of participants is revealed. For both Rancière and Read, the idea of efficacy in performance (mobilizing political action, supporting causes, etc.) collapses the separation between the aesthetic and the political, and the spectator and performer, which need not in fact exist.

Still, we must not lose sight of the difficulty of describing exactly where the appearance of the network leaves us as political subjects. This problem has been investigated by Claire Bishop regarding installation art and applies here equally. Presumed political efficacy under participation has its basis in a hopeful account, such as Bourriaud’s, of the full identification of the role of the participant and that of the artist as completely formed social beings. This leads to somewhat exaggerated claims about how relational art produces new social entities, rather than reflecting them. As Bishop notes,

The interactivity of relational art is therefore superior to optical contemplation of an object, which is assumed to be passive and disengaged, because the work of art is a “social form” capable of producing positive human relationships. As a consequence, the work is automatically political in implication and emancipatory in effect.  

Clearly, it remains critical to examine closely the tension in each of these works between the appearance of the network and how the work resists the closure Read warns about, the too-easy political reconciliation of antagonistic forces in a false resolution. In the forms of participatory performance that I am examining, this boundary is one that is blurred by design, without wholly disappearing, and thus represents an incomplete or partial dissolution of the theatrical divide. It is this very hybridity that represents the unique distribution of the sensible within these varied works. Throughout the diverse range of

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80 Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” 62.
performances—the faux combat in *Surrender*, the audience-as-surrogate local executive trope of *City Council Meeting*, or in Jeremijenko’s NYU environmental clinic—one finds the positioning of the audience as hopeful co-authorial presence. The shared responsibility of co-authoring performance reveals efficacy without programmatic simplicity, retaining an imaginative surplus that remains a tension, differently across each instance.

This tension, that of the limitations of art and all symbolic cultural actions, raises many other issues about the role of performance in developing new ethical and social arrangements. The differences separating performance from education and social work represent one set of issues, while the artistic challenge of offering imaginative templates for social change constitute another. Yet a third set of issues derives from acknowledging the identitarian differences separating participants while holding on to the possibility of collective labor. Social actions, not being fully conscious, are a tangle of agencies and intentions that reveal themselves in the doing. Latour writes, “An actor in the hyphenated expression actor-network is not the source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming towards it.”

81 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 46. In terms of performance, then, we should look to the appearance of new forms and new rhetorics of actual relations that appear in the collaborative authorship and delegated labor of participation.

**Methodology**

The methodology for this research is by necessity variable according to the differing subject-object relations across widely differing performance circumstances. The
relative passivity of spectatorship involved in attending a performance of *City Council Meeting* bore little resemblance to a self-directed “lifestyle project” of the variety that Natalie Jeremijenko urges on her students and fellow researchers. Further, the field notes and observations through which I documented my presence at live performance events might not correlate with video documentations of the same event, viewed months or even years afterward. And the sum of all these observations, supplemented by press notices and interviews with the artists and buttressed by critical analysis, differed still from my observations on and participation in Occupy Wall Street activities, marches, occupations, town hall meetings, and general assemblies.

The overall research philosophy for such a project necessarily involves a subjective folding into and constant reframing of my own immersed perception of external events. In such an endeavor, I have tried to put to use the kind of dynamic relation between force and material, subjective impression and objective placement, of my actions among others actions, all relating to, affecting, and being affected mutually.

For many of the productions, the research was relatively straightforward: documentation of attendance and field notes, supplemented where possible by interviews of the primary generating artists responsible for the work as well as videotapings of performances. From 2009-11, I participated in International WOW Company’s *Surrender* and twice visited the now-closed Army Experience Center in Philadelphia. I attended and occasionally performed roles in rehearsals and workshop performances of *City Council Meeting*. I also attended numerous performances of *How Much is Enough: Our Values in Question*, which opened at St. Anne’s Warehouse in Brooklyn in October 2011, as well as the conference that the Foundry Theatre presented in April 2012 that enlarged upon
many of the themes running through the earlier work.\textsuperscript{82} Similarly, I attended rehearsals and performances of Kristin Marting’s \textit{Lush Valley}, and the company shared extensive archival resources pertaining to the two-year development process of the work. Josh Fox, artistic director of International WOW Company, initially offered to make available the complete collection of performance video documentation from the run of the production of \textit{Surrender}, but these were ultimately unavailable.

I participated directly in Natalie Jeremijenko’s Environmental Health Clinic as a guest at the NYU Steinhardt School Department of Art and Art Professions, and Professor Jeremijenko offered her assistance with research in concert with her students in the Environmental Arts Activism courses. I attended and guest-taught classes at NYU as an invited researcher with Jeremijenko, attended her installations, and had numerous conversations with her, her gallerists, and her collaborators. I also interviewed, before her premature death at age 37, Beatriz da Costa. Da Costa, formerly of Critical Art Ensemble, directed her own tactical media groups, and finally was a resident artist at the NYU lab. This all-too-short connection was made immeasurably more meaningful in retrospective understanding of the little time da Costa was able to spend with all of her many students, colleagues, and admirers.

Research was also done through the available archives of Jeremijenko’s work at university and museum libraries, at Postmasters Gallery in Chelsea, and in online art collections. I have also, through curator Salette Gresset, had introductions to Wafaa Bilaal and to other curators actively working in political participatory installation work in

\textsuperscript{82} The conference was called “This is How We Do It: A Festival of Dialogues About Another World Under Construction.” It ran April 20–22, 2012, at the Cooper Union in New York City and was produced by Melanie Joseph and the staff of the Foundry Theatre. Conference dialogues are archived on the theatre blog site Howlround.org.
New York City, including Gregory Sholette, whose important work is included in the bibliography.

Aaron Landsman’s *Town Council Meeting* opened in New York at HERE Arts Center in April 2013, but developmental performances have continued to occur in various venues throughout the country and internationally since that date.

My research also included investigating specific areas that relate to the three categories of participatory performance examined. These are recent changes in military technology, current work on participatory democracy, economic analyses of the recent world economic recession, and environmental science and hobbyism. Significant materials exist on the topic of the US military’s turn to virtual command-and-control systems and the increased circulation of digital imagery at the intersection of gaming and military training. In the area of environmental performance, in addition to a growing literature devoted to recent practitioners and activists, my research required grounding in the alliance of eco-activism and participation, as well as strategies for creating public awareness and visual representation of specialized, sometimes arcane scientific data and processes.

The self-involvement of participatory research requires a further methodological frame that considers assumptions that cannot and should not be discounted in such a study. Action Research provides such a platform for involved research work. In Action Research methodology, the shifting positionality of the participant/observer relationship is recognized in a self-critical awareness of the subjectivity of one’s reception and the dynamic effects one’s presence and involvement have on the social and artistic processes studied.
Action Research, originally developed in the 1930s in the United States and widely used by theatre-for-social change and theatre-in-education field workers, foregrounds the preexisting values and relational awareness of the researcher. In my own case, a background as a theatre professional (actor, director, producer) and someone passionately invested in matters of participatory economic and political decision making in this country factors significantly into my research. When I participate in a rehearsal for City Council, I do so as a fellow practitioner among peers, while concurrently offering my perspective with my research subjects from a position of extensive experience in the field of performance. I am a fellow traveler in the “downtown” performance scene, as an administrator with several nonprofit theatre organizations (including HERE), as an avid consumer of performance and visual art, and as a director of performances. My work has been recognized by such organizations as Theatre Communications Group, the National Endowment for the Arts, the California Arts Council, and other state bodies and local foundations whose imprimatur traditionally serves as an indicator of professional merit.

The methodology of Action Research is open ended and developmental, like much of the work being discussed in this dissertation. The project clearly will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining archival study, Action Research, field notes, interviews, and study in military history, philosophy, contemporary relational aesthetics, and citizen science. The resulting pool of information was filtered through my own sense of development as an artistic partner to the artists studied and through my own political awakening as a small part of Occupy Wall Street’s activities in one city, during one politically charged year in the United States.
Throughout the dissertation, my concern has been with the strategies used by artists to unify spectators at the level of ideology and agency, and how these depart from traditional notions of community building. The implicit “contracts” proposed by artists to render participants complicit within the actual scripted performances resemble temporary communities, after Miwon Kwan’s useful term. These communities are both self-selecting and exclusionary and may, as Miranda Joseph and others have demonstrated, promise more than they deliver in terms of purity and authenticity. These communities operate in response to requests to outsource the labor of creation as a defining element of the contract. The terms of the contract include the prior marketing of the artist’s reputation and the experiential nature of the current work through social media, blogs, and traditional media. I explore the dramaturgical strategies offered by these mediated works as overtures to participants to perform under the authority as delegates of the artists themselves. I show how the operations of identity formation among participants unfold from within network structures, following protocols that identify subjects as ambivalent, both accepting and resisting the power of the artists to frame the work as a network that defines the performance event. Finally, I offer a theory of performance failure and the subsequent appearance of new ideas of the social as a means of interpreting the work, using the writings of Bruno Latour, Jacques Rancière, and Sara Jane Bailes as primary theoretical armatures.

In chapter two, I critically relate the experiential dramaturgy and participatory strategies of one key recent example of immersive combat-themed performance, *Surrender*, directed by Josh Fox. Historically and operationally, the production is connected to the virtualization of the modern army as part of the Revolution in Military
Affairs and the transition from an era of the virtual that defined the first Gulf War to the embeddedness characteristic of the second. The military’s abandonment of a policy of persuasion in order to achieve citizen consensus for a strategy of collaboration provides a framework for an examination of audience participation. The delegated performance of combat in Surrender represents the thorough entanglement of war gaming and American capitalist global military influence. The role of the player/performer is characteristic of this entanglement, as we move from an era of virtuality to one of embeddedness.

Chapter three examines City Council Meeting, which represents a long labor of immersion in distinct communities by the artists and a direct engagement with local institutions, funders, and constituencies. This chapter examines the marketing, strategies for inclusion, and participatory models of an important recent civic-themed performance. Recent theories of democratic citizenship, and the dissensus and antagonism within contemporary polarized political discourse, form the context of these performances. While the specific strategies of inclusion challenge both aesthetic judgment and may fail to produce fulfilled contracts of inclusion, the productions critique virtual digital relationships and the consumerist economy of experience. They gesture toward a collapse of the distance separating artist and delegated performer, which succeeded in provoking new immersive experiences of the social bond of performance.

Chapter four examines the environmental networks comprising the practice of Natalie Jeremijenko. I frame the performance of science-based hobby/activism as the least traditionally theatrical of the typologies and the place where performance meets lifestyle politics most directly. A critical component of this work has involved engaging audiences through devised means of making complex knowledge accessible through
public information design. For Jeremijenko, structures of participation involve taking audiences into public spaces—museums, ecosystems, and Manhattan streets—as well as into privileged forms of discourse generally reserved for specialists. The hopeful scenario of efficacy through direct action, education and training, and participation fails productively as a critique of institutional power and as a refusal of the distinction between performer and audience subject.

This progression from overt theatricality to artistic activism in recording observations about several years’ worth of performance allows a reflection, in my conclusion, about how this work has contributed to an enlivened political discourse as well as opened the possibilities and terrain of performance in a converging culture. As the editors of the varied and inclusive theatre blog *Howlround* make clear, all are invited to curate, publish, and use the creative channels offered. We have only to pick up the tools.
Chapter Two – Assaultive Participation; Negotiating Identity: The International WOW Company’s *Surrender*

**Going to War**

I entered the room, rifle barrel first, just as I’d been taught. With the breath of my squad mate in my left ear, I used the viewfinder to scan the small, dark room, trying to focus my hearing amidst the din of screaming voices and the rattling cacophony of explosions in the distance. Dressed in fatigues and regulation boots, with a full-scale, weighted M16 replica rifle in my arms at the ready, I felt myself pushed ahead by our instructor sergeant. I knew that, as designated squad leader, I would have to be responsible for the lives of the others in my unit. My footing felt unstable and my boots too tight, and the sweat ran down my chest and arms, pooling in my navel and on my wristband.

Someone switched a flashlight on and played the light across the floor, where it revealed a mound of what looked like khaki blankets and tarpaulins. Suddenly, the bundle began to move, and what had seemed like a lifeless mass of material became a small group of frantic women and children in headscarves clutching one another and screaming at us. I reacted with shock and spun around to see where I was and who was behind me, but it was too late. I hadn’t seen a young man hidden behind the others wielding a pistol, and, using his family as a human shield, he pointed the gun directly at me and squeezed the trigger.

The noise and flaring arc lights seemed to get stronger, and I couldn’t hear a thing anyone was saying. I noticed that my squad mates seemed to be wandering aimlessly
around, looking in all directions as though unsure what exactly was taking place and where the exits were. I remember thinking, “This is what it must be like.”

Suddenly, my sergeant came up and put his hand on my shoulder. “You’re dead,” he said. “You just got shot. Follow those nurses to heaven.” I turned to my left, and, sure enough, two women in their early twenties, smiling in military nursing fatigues, extended their hands to me and led me through a secret passage, out of the maze of alleys and tunnels installed in the Ohio Theatre, through the lobby and downstairs into a makeshift field hospital. Intense, bright fluorescent light made the white uniform of a head nurse glow jarringly as she said to me, “Welcome to heaven. Would you like a piece of gum or a hard candy?” Taking a stick of peppermint gum, I welcomed the taste of something other than the sweat that the past two and a half hours had left in my mouth. I lay down on a small army cot, next to another casualty of the evening’s raid, and awaited further instructions.

Thus ended my direct participation in *Surrender*, the International WOW Company theatre production, cowritten and directed by company founder and artistic director Josh Fox and featuring former gunnery sergeant, blogger, and war memoirist Jason Christopher Hartley. Hartley appeared in both runs of the production, in 2008 and 2009, at two downtown New York City locations, where first Clemente Soto Vélez and then the old Ohio Theatre space, in New York’s fashionable SoHo district, were transformed into convincingly simulated army training and deployment installations.

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83 I witnessed and participated in *Surrender* at the Ohio Theatre at its now-closed space at 66 Wooster Street in the fall of 2009. In 2008, the production had a run at Clemente Soto Vélez Cultural and Educational Center on the Lower East Side.

84 The Ohio Theatre, a key venue supporting the independent New York theatre and performance community, was shuttered in August 2010. The venue was established by
In this chapter, I analyze Surrender’s unique status among the many war-themed performances in the years following the 9/11 attacks on the US homeland and the second Gulf War. While staged, filmed, and multimedia productions featuring military narratives and characters became relatively common after the two Gulf Wars, few productions, if any, so completely modeled the fulfillment of consumerist desire for embodied involvement and committed, experiential immersion as Surrender. The emphasis on direct involvement and vicarious military role-play positioned Surrender as an exemplary cultural incarnation of what some have called military neoliberalism. The production’s emphasis combines two concepts underlying both Iraq wars and much of the US foreign
policy of the past sixty years: radical market privatization and global markets kept open, by force if needed, by US and European military powers. Such militarized enforcement of the new global order protects a system of international investing, the free circulation of capital, restrictions on labor power, and economic stratification. I will return to these concepts in my description of Surrender’s tacit reliance on a system of consumer/citizen engagement and marketing supported by recent US military history and current recruitment strategies and methodologies.

I begin this chapter by describing the performance experience of Surrender as a consumer-turned-recruit, one among many who paid for the experience of surrendering. Voluntarily relinquishing the physical and emotional autonomy typical of the theatre experience, I joined a crowd of others willing to submit to an assaultive spectatorial experience. From the outset of the production, and throughout, Surrender felt familiar, an outcome that positioned the theatrical event as symptomatic of a larger set of trends, more readily visible in broadcast, cinematic, and online media, engaging spectators in immersive roles as consumers of military narratives, games, and journalism. In making sense of this familiarity, I have relied on the way in which social theorist Judith Butler and media theorist Mark Hansen define a sense of “enframing” through which we receive and process images—in Butler’s case specifically military narratives and images—and process them cognitively and ideologically. As I will illustrate, taken together, their ideas of framing work in a coordinated manner in Surrender, as a crucial bridge between the producers and viewers.

In my analysis of the experience of coperforming Surrender, I describe a form of “performance failure” in a dramaturgy that first implicates and then releases the spectator
from full immersion in the performance. As described in the introduction, this failure is partial, and it is ultimately a productive, useful strategy when viewed as a tactical placement of the participant within an open-ended vantage from which to assess one’s own interpretation of the production’s ambiguous politics. I refer to the idea of “productive failure” as a way to interpret the impossible contract of engaging spectators in war. *Surrender* offered a diminishing return; the expenditure of labor in the performance led, inevitably, to a growing sense of the unrepresentability of war. This progressive loss of the promised real became both a marker of the military’s own marketing dissimulations and a gap within the performance through which audiences could measure the distance between their own ideology and the slippery ideological positions that emerged in performance. The failure to deliver on the contract radically opened the participants’ perspectives on war and complicity.

Finally, I situate *Surrender* historically as a theatrical response to US military policy and the Revolution in Military Affairs—an overarching commitment to unassailable post–Cold War global superiority. Within the role-playing of soldiers and their enemies are echoes of a cultural saturation: the marketing of vicarious consumer military entertainment and indoctrination through games, film, journalism, fashion, and advertising. This ideological conditioning of the US citizenry on the part of the military-industrial-entertainment sectors forms the forbidding backdrop to the participatory experience of *Surrender*, one which the production both encourages and challenges in an ambivalent provocation that lays bare the critical priorities of current US global policies. *Surrender* operated on audiences’ desire for participation through activation of key elements of political and military discourse that marked the second Bush presidency.
Offering less a critique of the military than an opportunity to model militaristic behaviors, the production’s marketing capitalized on the recent growth of video war gaming and the many ways in which journalism is imbricated in fostering civilian assent to US military goals. By placing spectators’ bodies on the line and physically “enframing” the crisis of war and trauma within this representation of recent US military adventurism, International WOW Company’s theatrical trap ensnared audience members within a coercive situation, pressuring our acquiescence to (or refusal of) a signature act of citizenship: military service. While “only a performance,” the pressure to perform was signaled early and often by the large, highly disciplined, regimented cast. It is telling that, according to producer Robert Alexander, during the two extended runs of the production, few if any audience members refused the call to go along with the performance and its demands.  

No one disrupted the play of war. Admittedly, it is difficult to imagine how anyone could have dropped out short of radically disrupting the integrity of the performance space, stripping off their costume—a real infantry uniform—and stopping the action to request their clothing be returned—not an action to be undertaken lightly in such a faux militarized atmosphere. That so many audience members did willingly submit to performing in accordance with actions contradictory to the expected political sensibilities of a young, culturally savvy, SoHo audience is testament both to the unusual power of the production’s design and to the potent role of media, gaming, and the ubiquitous lure of participatory culture in the current state of relations between the US military and civilians.  

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86 Personal communication, November 15, 2012.
87 This may be taken as a truism for corporate marketing efforts generally. See Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every
As a means of enlisting subjects in an immersive simulacrum of real military actions, the strategic enframing of participants posed an ethical challenge commensurate with the notable physical involvement that we audiences paid for with our ticket purchase. Among the most striking aspects of the experience were numerous moments in which it appeared the production could not continue without our collective assent—to be controlled, to perform as scripted—and this performed permission granted the company ever wider latitude to create often horrific scenarios. The portrayal of military action in heroic, funny, or inspiring modes, even under the rubric of challenging military life and ideology, is a gambit familiar to anyone who has watched a war film. Surrender, by contrast, extended the alluring action of combat into a more profound level of consciousness via tactical orders without a strategic plan. Our ticket purchased a field of immaterial labor that was compromised by incomplete information; no one could know how far we would be asked to go. This edgy uncertainty comprised a unique poetics of immersion, what Jacques Rancière has referred to as a contemporary partage du sensible (typically translated in to English as the “distribution of the sensible”), a faculty of thought that yields a new poetics, in this case, of performed military affect.  

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Rancière writes, “I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitation that define the respective parts and positions within it,” Jacques Rancière, The Politics of Aesthetics, 12. He continues, “aesthetic practices as I understand them, that is forms of visibility that disclose artistic practices, the place they occupy, what they ‘do’ or ‘make’ from the standpoint of what is common to the community” (13). This mixture of a poetics and a politics, which leads to a new form of artistic expression that defines both a community and a rupture in previous forms, characterizes the distribution of the sensible.
portrayal of our own internal reckoning, a warring personal field of impulses and
decisions, ethical assent leading physical responsiveness, and vice versa, was the real
performance we purchased. The journey was relentlessly redirected back at our own
participation in a theatrical ensnarement requiring we calculate the cost of our
involvement and what it represented to the others present. Rancière’s injunction to seek
out a new poetics assumes a foundational equality between artist and viewer, the quality
of participation defined within the struggle for a new poetics of expression marking a
fundamental relationship between the political and the aesthetic. It is through reference to
these challenging dramaturgical ideas that I assess the strategies behind what remained,
in the end, a politically ambiguous yet ethically provocative experience in *Surrender.*

**The Company and Production**

The International WOW Company, founded in 1996 in New York, Indonesia, and
Thailand, has created original theatre works in downtown New York venues, following
an early period in Chiang Mai and Bangkok. Over the past decade in New York, the
company has generated substantial popular success, in terms of institutional and
foundation support, and positive, frequently glowing critical approval as well as
consistent itinerant space relationships with mid-size presenters like the Ohio Theatre. In
addition, Fox and the company, whose website lists many associates around a core
structure governed primarily by Fox as artistic director, have also undertaken substantial
film and video projects. In fact, the recent acclaim awarded the documentary *Gasland* led
to both a sequel and a shift in focus for the company.\textsuperscript{89} The film’s release coincided with, and possibly helped precipitate, an offshoot of the Occupy movement known as Occupy Pipeline. That quickly formed organization became a visible, highly performative second-generation iteration of the Occupy Wall Street movement. OWS’s popular street theatrics, such as marching in costume, have been put to use by Occupy Pipeline, creating what one might term enforced participatory encounters among strangers.\textsuperscript{90}

Simultaneously, Fox himself has gained notoriety and significant political capital as an effective spokesperson for the movement and as a performer in his own films. The combined capital, along with celebrity media events with Yoko Ono, Sean Lennon, and others carried on live broadcast, raise some interesting questions about the relationship between International WOW’s aesthetics and politics that, I will suggest, can be read retroactively through the acclaim awarded the production of \textit{Surrender}.

\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Gasland} was nominated for an Academy Award in the documentary feature category in 2012. Since that time, the company has taken a hiatus from live performance, mainly to allow Fox to pursue environmental activism. Indeed, the company website, which archives production photographs, texts, news and biographical information (of Fox alone) seems not to have been substantially updated through my three years of perusal since the film was nominated. Links to the \textit{Surrender} homepage and its Drama Desk Award nomination are broken as of October 20, 2013, and their domain names are for sale. Others appear never to have been completed. Any of this might be the case for an overextended company achieving success in a new medium. Yet, the company critically known as an adventurous downtown performance company, having produced some two dozen stage and film works with a rotating, extended family of over 100 participating artists, seems to have become dormant as a theatre company. Meanwhile, while Fox has been a key member and spokesperson for Occupy Pipeline in New York City, the organization has lobbied Governor Andrew Cuomo to block any legislation authorizing upstate New York to enlist private companies to practice hydrofracking, which \textit{Gasland} depicts as highly dangerous to groundwater quality in surrounding areas. The film’s most widely disseminated image, a kitchen water tap in Fox’s native Pennsylvania being lit on fire due to the methane content apparently in the water due to hydrofracking leakage, has been a true viral meme of the post-Occupy-initiated era.

\textsuperscript{90} On the theatricality of Occupy Wall Street, see Rebecca Schneider, “It Seems as If…I Am Dead: Zombie Capitalism and Theatrical Labor,” \textit{TDR} 56, no. 4 (2012): 150–62.
It is noteworthy that, despite counting a large cast of primarily youthful performers in their 20s and 30s as a company production hallmark, Fox’s name alone dominates news about the organization. Deriving an aesthetic drawn from diverse, older avant-garde companies with similarly singular artistic focus and led by an artistic figure chiefly responsible for most, if not all, of the project direction, International WOW seems to be wherever Fox is at the moment.\textsuperscript{91} The company’s commitment to themes such as critique of US military imperialism and domestic political culture certainly marks the work as politically engaged theatre. Their trademark style, which includes collaged texts, expressionistic movement-centered performance, and heightened theatricality, places the work as postdramatic in Hans-Thies Lehmann’s definition. This is primarily made clear in terms of narrative structure and the conventions of Aristotelian/Epic drama (which Lehmann views as a historical continuum, not a break).\textsuperscript{92} Along with many such gestures that hearken back to earlier avant-garde traditions, the company’s political interests are generally progressive and concerned with the heightened narratives of working-class men and women struggling with dark, social antagonisms and with labor itself. This opens the possibility of sharing labor within the performance as an easy and accessible strategy, and opens the production to a labor-based analysis.

\textsuperscript{91} A list of such companies and directors might be drawn out at length, but relevant examples which have influenced Fox’s work include The Wooster Group, SITI Company, The Performance Group, The Living Theatre, Richard Foreman’s Ontological-Hysteric Theatre, and the work of such auteurs as Robert Woodruff and Robert Wilson as well as older avant-garde pioneers like Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook.

For example, to reference Shannon Jackson on performance and the aesthetics of precarity,⁹³ the question of participatory performance’s political complicity, its risk of cooptation as mere spectacle, and its politically resistant characteristics often seem to work simultaneously in a way true of all immaterial labor. The proof, for Jackson, is in the use to which “virtuosity,” in the many senses of the word, and which she borrows from Paolo Virno’s Workerist philosophy, is put. The latent ability of anyone to mobilize the “cognitive faculties” suggests a leveling of the idea of virtuosity to make it available freely and distributed widely, and not just in the memorable work of the skilled artist.

This equalization of the value of all labor is, again according to Jackson, a tricky concept for the theatre, which has always relied on some degree of special training and ability. The confusion surrounding, say, the donning of fatigues and rifle to experience and simultaneously critique militarism—a confusion of affect, skill, intention and performance—renders the political goals of such a work as ultimately indecipherable.

Furthermore, participatory performance work that announces itself as social remedy or as compensation for lack of political mobilization in the larger culture can frequently operate, as Claire Bishop has written, in ideological lockstep with neoliberal,

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consumerist, and statist ends.\textsuperscript{94} With a potent mixture of the cast’s performance intensity as well as the highly seductive hypermasculinist lure of the show’s war play, the question of \textit{Surrender}’s ideological affinities remains complex. It appears even more so when considering questions of the audience’s donated immaterial labor and the ends to which that labor is positioned. In the spectator’s complex role as both boot camp trainee and witness, a performing example of the now common notion of the “flexible” neoliberal workforce, we are physically and ideologically challenged throughout the three-and-a-half-hour duration of the performance to submit to authority in ways familiar to both soldiers and actors. But do we do so as resistant subjects or as complicit ones? And can we be certain of the intent of the framers of the performance? Is that even an important question? These concerns are at the heart of the framing of \textit{Surrender} as an example of performance failure, as described in the introductory chapter. Based on my interpretation and extension of Sara Jane Bailes’s use of the term, I refer to performances that fail, but fail to fail completely, and by a positive turn on the nature of both performance and failure, turn to productive political account. I present \textit{Surrender} as an example of performance failure not through an assessment of its (generally high) level of critical or commercial success, but through focusing on its deployment of a provocative strategy of audience immersion and a jarringly sudden return from such a strategic move to more

\textsuperscript{94} This ambivalence about the instrumentalization of participatory art is one of Bishop’s primary theses in \textit{Artificial Hell: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship} (London: Verso, 2012). See “The Social Turn,” in particular p. 5, for her citing of the New Labor governments in the UK in the 1990s. These governments sought to use culture as socially ameliorative work that left untouched the underlying structural problems of income inequality and social access inherited from the Reagan-Thatcher era. As Bishop notes, the economic situation for artists in the United States differs primarily in its lack of national government funding. Thus the role of the arts as a quasi-official social policy implement is lessened as public policy, but opened up as commercial opportunity.
conventional forms of storytelling. While not providing precisely the experience marketed by its producers or suggested by its initial Althusserian “hailing” of spectators as soldiers, the rigorous and confrontational approach offered a profound imagining of elements of military service. *Surrender*, to an extent unusual among other New York theatre-of-war productions in recent years, attempted a fully participatory engagement of its audiences, inviting them to take part in grueling emotional commitment in the co-enactment of simulated military training and deployment. While stopping well short of the terror and grim reality of real military action, *Surrender* proposed how a temporary artistic community could turn political dissensus into a form of highly suggestive, embodied connectivity in spite of, or perhaps due to, the production’s failure to fail on any but its own distinct terms.

This strategy of wraparound connectivity is clear from the first minutes of the pre-performance. We first encountered the cast of *Surrender* as we assembled on the sidewalks of Wooster Street in front of the Ohio Theatre. At around 7:15 p.m., several actors dressed in military fatigues and holding clipboards came out of the theatre foyer and checked our reservations, counted the audience, assigned waiting-list reservations, and corralled nervous patrons into a properly instrumentalized mindset for the audience’s actual entrance. This more-officious-than-usual ticketing experience allowed the initial entrance to the space to function as an indoctrination; it also acknowledged the implicit contract between performers and audience promised by the promotional materials for *Surrender*. The company press release subtitled the production “A Simulated War Deployment Experience.”

*International WOW Company press release, October 8, 2008.*
event which simulates the training, deployment to Iraq and the return of a group of soldiers, experienced and enacted by the audience of the show each night."\textsuperscript{96} This interpellation, in the Althusserian sense, of spectators as already drafted and functioning members of a military depicted by the performers themselves in the liminal moments from street to foyer, enabled the rough terms of the spectatorial dual function to be revealed.\textsuperscript{97} We would be both witnesses to a simulation and participants in an enlargement of that simulation.

The staging of simulations as performance has become a widely deployed trope in many varieties of contemporary performance. Associated closely with The Wooster Group’s productions since the 2005–06 Poor Theatre, theatrical simulacra or simulations (such as modern-day Civil War reenactments or Marina Abramović’s 2005 \textit{Seven Easy Pieces}) have been theorized by Rebecca Schneider as occurring in a doubled temporal signature, the here and now, and the there and then.\textsuperscript{98} Such instances of historical investigation as restaging a skirmish or reviving another artist’s performance foreground issues of fidelity to originals. By contrast, the approach to simulation used by International WOW originated in a desire to challenge audiences to voluntarily place themselves at the behest of the company, which was itself modeling behaviors not from an original model, but from shared cultural representations of the military. This began on the sidewalk before the actual performance commenced.

The action then flowed smoothly, as spectators were separated by gender, interrogated as to their shirt and shoe size, then issued uniforms and boots along with a

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{98} Rebecca Schneider, \textit{Performing Remains}, 2011.
\end{flushright}
plastic bag for personal clothing and belongings. The bags were then removed and deposited elsewhere, while the men and women separately put on desert fatigues in a space enclosed by tall tarpaulins outfitted with simple benches, harsh overhead lighting, and the intrusive presence of performers shouting orders and questions while keeping watchful guard on the proceedings. After approximately twenty minutes, the space and our personal possessions were cleared, and Jason Hartley took over the basic training drills constituting the first section of the performance. This sequence began with our being called to formation in the central area of the large Ohio stage to begin calisthenics, rifle training, and other drilling that comprised the ninety-minute basic training regimen. Assisted by the performers enacting junior officers, Hartley commanded deference from the crowd of trainees, few of whom appeared to have had prior experience with such drilling. Weapon handling, safety and cleaning, walking in formation to engage an enemy, and the correct way to stand at attention, salute, and respond to commands were all covered in detail. After forming two lines facing each other to practice marching with weapons drawn, room markers—short pieces of wood—were dropped on the floor to designate enemy houses to be used for further drills on entering and taking control of spaces. Cast members functioned as demonstration partners, guards, and physical and visual focal points aiding in the immersiveness of the scene. Infractions, such as dropping a weapon, earned punishments of sets of pushups done with the M16 balanced on upraised knuckles, a routine humiliation that was repeated several times during the evening I attended.

A key opportunity realized by Fox and International WOW within Surrender’s marketing and performance strategies that announced the piece as a realistic war
experience was the casting of Hartley as the drillmaster. Hartley’s presence lent much of the verisimilitude to *Surrender*, and his role was central to the dramaturgy of the production; he was our drill instructor as well as a fictionalized version of himself as a returning war veteran. Hartley, a former soldier, was also the author of a blog and a book, both titled *Just Another Soldier*, which were the inspiration for the production. As a kind of onstage dramaturg, Hartley’s presence in the cast and controversial writing history (his blog was at one time banned by the US military) represented a significant gesture guaranteeing the credibility of the production. By casting Hartley as the drill sergeant in charge of the first section of the production, Fox and company asserted that, insofar as the audience interacted with him in the “basic training,” they were getting a genuine taste of infantry life. In fact, this section of the performance was, for many reasons (many of them obvious), the most successful at conveying the porous boundary between fictive and real. Dehumanizing exercises, forced humiliations, and the subservient role playing of the army “grunt” trainee seemed a realistic reflection of the hypermasculinist spirit of war making, or at least the preparations for war.

*Surrender* was, however, not a simple adaptation of Hartley’s memoir. The sections of the book chosen for theatrical adaptation fulfilled the most discomfiting aspects of military life designed to challenge the typical citizen’s confrontation with the soldier’s mindset, such as a raid on an Iraqi civilian family home. In Hartley’s book, this scene is prefaced by another, on the subject of “stack” training (or “room clearing”) in the section “In the Kill House Under a Dead Moon.” This training excerpt, dated November 13, 2003 (from early in Hartley’s tour of duty), describes the formation of infantry

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teams of four soldiers undertaken in order to enter and clear an unknown enemy room. It was included as a training action in the first section of *Surrender*, almost exactly as described by Hartley. We learned how to force open a door and sweep into the room in a formation designed to “dominate” the space by moving in close procession along the walls while inspecting the perimeter for enemy combatants. It was done repeatedly at high speed and was one of the most uncomfortable moments of the production for many audience members. I was designated as a team leader and instructed to give orders to the team that was “on stack.” My comportment and physical disposition were, therefore, supposed to model the team’s effort as well as indicate the timing and direction of my team’s flow into the room. When our first two attempts failed, in part due to my unfamiliarity with the exercise (which in turn was partly driven by my split focus as participant and critic of the production’s ideology as I was attempting to come to grips with it *in situ*), I was yelled at in very close quarters by an actor playing an assistant to the drillmaster. The discomfort rendered the situation very difficult to ignore as simply a moment of performance, and it was thereby difficult to avoid having a troubled response to the perceived threat of embarrassment, or threat of worse treatment. This was clearly one moment when the ideology of being a split subject was most readily apparent in its irresolvable tension. The training finished, the segment ended with the sound of alarms, a fast striking of the room markers, and our squad leaders dividing us into units for deployment.

The second phase of *Surrender*, the deployment, was announced by the sound of alarm sirens, taped yelling, and onstage calls to arms. This section, called simply “WAR,” was described by the company prior to production in the following way: “The
audience…is sent into a room-to-room combat simulation…a house where suspected insurgents are hiding, a Humvee on its way to a raid, a barracks complete with bunks and a PlayStation console, and a military prison, among others.” The press release also makes explicit the random distribution of outcomes from the play of battle about to take place: “Each audience member carries a casualty card in their pocket containing their fate, some are ‘killed’ in simulated IED explosions, some suffer traumatic brain injury, some are paralyzed, most survive without being ‘wounded.’”

If basic training was designed to build a bonded community with elements of trust and mutual reliance, the section dedicated to deployment would test the delegated participant/co-author’s commitment to the production’s representational goals. Moved through a maze of small rooms, walled in burlap to create a dense, dizzying network of possible routes, the players were led in teams of four, with one or more cast members guiding the action and calling out shots and “kills.” Again coinciding with game behavior, as individual shooters we could kill or be killed in close quarters of perhaps fifty or sixty square feet. Our “targets” to be engaged were other cast members in various Iraqi-like dress, in configurations meant to represent family groupings. It was not clear whether or how one could know when one was hit, or whether a “target” was “acquired” through our actions or reflexes. “Kills” were called out by company members, and those killed were removed from the scene and transported out of the installation through what had been the box office/reception area, continuing down a flight of stairs into “heaven,” a kind of white medivac tent lit brightly and staffed by nurse-angels who handed the

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101 Ibid. I was not issued a casualty card during the performance I attended.
unfortunates small, wrapped candies and escorted them to beds, where they awaited the remainder of the scene, in contemplation.

Unlike the demanding physicality required in the first section, “WAR” was characterized by a tense, confined physical comportment necessary to follow the training maneuvers and take in the heightened sound score that dominated the act. We worked in close quarters and devised spaces representing historically real and recent battle zones in Iraq and Afghanistan. There was a heady excitement throughout, a rapidly paced tension to remain aware and responsive that seemed to bypass reflection on what was being portrayed. It felt tactical, with the advance indications of potential outcomes reminiscent of first-person shooter-style games. The challenge came from trying to enact a role while being subjected to the combination of “realistically” aggressive interpersonal relationships that faithfully “cited” familiar military behavior and imagery, along with a sound score which was the acoustic equivalent of white noise. Thus, situational and affectual sensations took precedence over the sheer bodily labor of basic training. The sound served to heighten the tension of the encounters. Initially, one struggled simply to hear what was being demanded; then one was required to respond appropriately, making sudden decisions to fire or not, to escape or remain, all while carrying a weapon in uniform, and remaining in character. This enjoinment to respect the narrative boundaries of the performance became paramount; once engaged, it overrode the impulse to retain critical distance regarding *Surrender*. Most members of the audience did exactly what was expected of them, with more or less vigor. There was no way to assess to what extent

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102 Director Fox is also credited with the sound design for the production.
they did so willingly, and what motivated them to remain faithful to the event of the performance.

This section was the portion of the performance most closely associated with the production’s afterlife in memory and was the most frequently cited in press and in a collection of archived audience response interviews. One participant recalls her unease at being asked to take part in guarding a fictitious enemy combatant, another woman: “I began to cry. . . . You had to point the gun at her . . . and that was extremely disturbing, the chaos that was happening and people yelling at you. . . . I found this to be the most powerful anti-war experience ever.”103 The loss of her partner with whom she had attended to a fictitious death, followed by what was asked of her as a participant, literally overwhelmed her. 104

The integrity of the theatricality was assisted enormously by the coordinated actions of the cast, the speed of the unfolding events, and, in this section, the soundtrack which, in its affectual density, produced what theorist Steve Goodman has recently called a “sonic warfare” effect. “WAR” was noteworthy for the initiation of the audience into the production’s signature use of heightened sound. Goodman’s term refers to the documented use—by various military organizations throughout history—of highly

103 Kenn Watt, in discussion with Jessica Del Vecchio, October 21, 2013. Interestingly, Del Vecchio also emphasized that the presence in her squad of Alisa Solomon, theatre critic and Columbia professor, was almost as unnerving as the production, raising questions echoed in my argument about the twinned penalties for failing at the performance and failing within the context of the character one is asked to perform. Both failures are instructive and, allied together, form a potent affectual structure of fear of shame and desire to perform as expected, in the context of the production.

104 Unfortunately, video of the many performances made by the director and the company have, as of this writing, been lost, and thus were not available to me despite numerous requests, so there are limited opportunities to test my own memories. Yet Del Vecchio’s experiences are congruent with other participants’ memories, which were provided by co-producer Robert Alexander, some of which are quoted below.
amplified sonic events as weapons systems, as well as to the aesthetic, first noted by the Italian Futurists, of the “art of noise” that derives from such threshold explorations of pain and its effect on human consciousness.\textsuperscript{105} The layered soundtrack of sirens, machine gunning, white noise, and explosions facilitated the chaos within which it became more and more difficult to signal one’s discomfort with the proceedings, or to register one’s progressive resistance to fighting. It was, in fact, difficult to hear anything at all—even voices yelling at close range.

Goodman cites many examples of sonic warfare throughout history, from the biblical walls of Jericho to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms raid on the Waco Branch Davidians compound in 1993. He reminds us that the enemy in war is also an audience, one who sees, hears, and participates. This principle is a key component of Revolution in Military Affairs thinking, discussed later in this chapter, and is written into the Army’s program manuals about full-spectrum dominance outlined in their Joint Vision 2020. The sonic onslaught of the second section of *Surrender* was also, then, an actual deployment of a tool of warfare, and a potent means to reframe our senses, our affectual bodies, and our rational minds.

This scene, with its delegation of the labor of performed killing to the spectators, represented one level of performance failure *Surrender* confronted while attempting to manufacture a faithful experience of the military real. Unlike the symmetry between the physical commitment demanded of participants in Act I, which closely represented its actual original, the deployment could not possibly faithfully deliver its referent, Del Vecchio’s responses and my own notwithstanding. The stakes and consequences

remained fictive, and adamantly so, despite or perhaps even due to the lengths to which the company substituted sensorial and sonic overload for the psychological burden of war’s reality.

The sense of failure inhered, partially, in the knowledge that such “outsourcing” of the roles of virtual Iraqis mirrored the real-life use of actors in military training; actors are frequently used to train real soldiers preparing for foreign combat. A role-playing trope meant to convey an experience of real war conveyed, instead, merely a training simulacrum, part game, part enforced labor. In a similar vein, Fox and company used actual military uniforms in Surrender, a costume choice that performance scholar Sara Brady has described in some contexts as signifying authority. She writes that “the person in it inhabits the validity necessary to manipulate, contort, torture, the mind-body of another,” referencing not solely warfare but war’s simulation in the context of training.

As mentioned earlier, the overheated depiction of an “actual” assault illustrates only that such an assault can never really be represented. Again, the limitations of the form provided a lacking representation, of representation’s overburdened insufficiency. These overtaxed substitutions—simulation for real, training for combat—become images that cannot contain the full psychic and denotative burden with which they are charged, and thus illustrate the dramaturgy of guilt—that neo-platonic, anti-theatricalist holdover Rancière describes in The Emancipated Spectator. Essentially, they reference, in

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107 Sara Brady, Performance, Politics and the War on Terror (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 50.
Rancière’s thinking, the mistaken notion that there is an inherent performer/spectator divide that must be bridged, an initial and always already occurring separation between those teaching (performers) about military performance and those (patrons) who are learning to enact it. The scene is, perhaps, the very model from which Rancière wants to emancipate the spectator—the supposition that there is something to learn at the hands of the “expert,” rather than a general equality between artist and spectator from the beginning, sharing equally and simultaneously the work of learning.

The hybrid nature of the experience of playing at battle in *Surrender* renders a split subjectivity in the participant. We are invited to cocreate the event, taking on the agency of virtualizing war from the solidier’s vantage point, experiencing close drilling, exposure to simulated danger, and the disorienting cacophony of the production environment. At the same time, we are returned ultimately to the normative role of detached viewer being asked to make valuative judgments about the performer’s execution and other typical critical-aesthetic considerations. This movement of return is enacted dramaturgically in the final part of the performance, the most conventionally theatrical segment. Having already co-performed *Surrender* for over two hours, the audience is treated to a scene called “Kuwait Party,” a raucous rock-and-roll mixer which functioned as both an intermission and a transitional element, with a loose, “club” environment and free beer distributed by the cast. The audience seated on risers, the proscenium divide was restored. Female cast members portrayed flight attendants, offering erotically charged readings of banal descriptions of items available for purchase from the duty free catalog during the flight home. The odd specificity of the offerings (“The M Shaped Edge Baking Pan—a perfect gift for the wife or husband”; “For those
cat lovers seeking to bring kitty a welcome home gift we have the Continuously Freshening Water Fountain”^108) underscores the chasm between the war and the consumerism driving the markets that serve as the hidden bounty of the conflict.

Several audience members were asked to come forward to read short proclamations of welcome and, thanks to the troops, which served as eulogies in a mock military funeral. Seven scripted scenes played out, loosely related to the trauma of return: a funeral; a rehabilitation session in a Walter Reed-like hospital for veterans; scenes of work in a meat packing plant; and an uncomfortable family dinner, bleeding and blending into one another. Throughout the section, images of death and terror were juxtaposed with the realistic scenes, many of them referencing the infamous Abu Ghraib photographs that came to light in the latter stages of the war, during the trials of soldiers charged with mistreatment of the prisoners held there.\textsuperscript{109} One audience member was called to the stage to portray a returning soldier; once there, he engaged in a lengthy dialogue with a female cast member who performed the role of his disaffected girlfriend. They bickered about their loss of intimacy and her discontent since his return; he read text as it was projected overhead while she played the scene realistically, directly at him. While they spoke across a bed, the bloodied and injured Abu Ghraib soldiers entered their space and settled around them on the bed and on the floor in an attempt to capture the juxtaposition of present and past that is typical of the PTSD-suffering veteran. The act became a lavishly surreal montage of images that commented indirectly on the traumatic state of the survival of war, along with the violent nightmares of survivors. Deploying the

logic of a dreamscape, several of the cast members donned outsized animal heads and bodies. The haunting scenes depicted cruel isolation, sexual torture and *faux* fornication.

Act III attempted to continue the participation theme, but the performance was really “over”—at least our portion was, despite the call for a few individuals to read and the one unlucky male who got stuck onstage being prompted to enact the taut scene with his girlfriend. It was humorous to watch him respond when his “girlfriend” said, “But you don’t sound like you love me. It sounds like you are just saying the words.” However, the humor had sealed us off from the piece we formerly inhabited; we were now tucked well behind a fourth wall as much as any magician’s audience while watching a volunteer have his pocket watch vanish and reappear. In reading the text a few years after experiencing the piece, I find I can’t remember hearing most of the lines of dialogue, including a scene consisting of twenty-seven sexual jokes (How could I have forgotten “Masturbate is used to catch large fish”?). Act III portrays a homecoming, but also a release from our contract as spectator-participants.

The final scene was a lengthy, quintessentially “American” scene of domestic life featuring Hartley himself as the returning veteran. The banal discomfort of the homecoming with its quiet surfaces and studied avoidance of conflict provides an ironic counterpoint to the preceding images. Lines were assigned somewhat randomly to various cast members who portrayed Hartley’s extended family, while he sat wordlessly listening as an outsider and we sensed his distance from them. (“Jason here was in Iraq. He was a real soldier/Yep yep/Harold is just obsessed about the war. He’s really into it. He reads everything he can find./He’s got a dartboard up on the wall with all those crazy

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110 Ibid., 17.
liberals like Michael Ignatieff and all those guys who thought it was a good idea/Crazy—
I can say that right? I can say it was a bad idea, right? You’re liberal isn’t that right?
You’re against the war, aren’t you?”) The scene of Hartley’s discomfort served to
reference the kind of liberal acquiescence to the war ideology discussed earlier in the
chapter, as well as positioning the production itself as ambiguous about Iraq and the
military in general.

The effect of this more conventional viewing was to allow us time and
opportunity to reflect on our own participation in all that had come before. The scene felt
intended to deliver a statement about war’s psychic after-affects commensurate with the
embodied immersion of the earlier sections, but this was difficult to achieve through the
handful of audience members who performed as surrogates for most of us. What was
meant to convey disorientation or horror instead became a series of over-theatricalized
gestures laboring to find the proper communicative channel among performer, spectator,
and image. The easy psycho-physical access to the audience engaged in the earlier
physical actions began to feel foreclosed by the scenic shift and the relatively passive
listening and viewing that replaced immersion. Clearly, we were meant to draw
connections between our participation in training and faux deployment and these figures
from Act III, but the connections failed to cohere because the center of gravity of the
production had shifted from underneath us. Once central to the experience of Surrender,
we the enactors no longer inhabited such a place of importance, and the expectation and
sense of adventure were dulled. There was one exception: I argue that the use of Hartley
himself in the returning-soldier role served to further emphasize the reality-effects that
appeared throughout the production. We were induced to read into and through this final
scene that what we had witnessed and participated in was truthful documentary theatre, and that we had vicariously participated in (and so must take responsibility for) the ideological cocreation.

Despite the interest generated by Hartley’s fictional reincorporation into the narrative as a version of himself, Act III reveals the final level of failure in the performance. The return to conventional audience configuration and a form of scripted, set narrative reveals, again, the limitation of representation, this time in the depiction of trauma and its aftermath. Here, in the crises depicted, we cannot help but slip back into the kind of audience the earlier sections seemed to be most in reaction to, silently processing our perceptions without physical engagement. In fact, one wonders if the final act was crucial even for the producers. A sample of the audience responses they archived for marketing purposes is revealing:

“For me, participating in Surrender was a brief foray into the unimaginable.”

“My heart was pounding, especially in the Humvee. My hands were shaking from holding my rifle but I felt like I couldn’t put it down because it was so real, and if I took my eyes off my target, something would happen.”

“My best friend is a Sergeant in the USMC currently serving in Iraq. This entire act was very emotional but gave me hope. Thank you.”

“Awesome. Fucking awesome. I didn’t want Act II to end. [In Act III], I began to understand what people in the military go through.”

“I thought the training was pretty g-damn realistic. I have a friend going to West Point and I finally have a tiny fraction of an idea of what he is going through. I’ve never been so g-damn sweaty at a performance in my life. Thank you. I was alternately terrified, excited, appalled, turned on, etc. Brilliant.”

All quotes taken from pers. comm. with Robert Walker, company member and co-producer of Surrender, 12/11/12.
All of the responses, save one, address the war-gaming elements of the production. The performative failure here is a kind of disappointment in representation itself; barred from experiencing the full psychic effects of the private traumas depicted in the final act, we are instead returned to sedentary watching, attempting to make sense, however we can, of our release from our commitment to performance labor, divided subjectivity, and the three hours we have spent working with (and for) Josh Fox and company. This, finally, amounts to the recognition of our labor itself and what it represents for us in our co-authorship under the split subjectivity of our resistance or acquiescence (or both) from our position within the narrative. In other words, our participation in a new distribution of the sensible, a new way of ordering reality, is the reward for our freely given labor. As cocreators of this new poetics of embodiment, participation, and affect, we inhabit the very elements of war-as-play that determine how ideology is transmitted through mediated culture. Denied the escapism of conventional proscenium narratives, we are nevertheless granted a certain kind of agency: the knowledge of our complicity in the affective excitement of war gaming. Entering with consent and realizing (through the failure of representation) that we can never enter the reality of war as outsiders, we peel away the smoke screen of the kind of citizen-spectator role Roger Stahl had critiqued as an invitation “to consume war.”¹¹² Had Act III not paradoxically failed to allow us to consume its traumatic imagery, we might not have escaped with this agency still intact.

**Surrender, Remediation and Framing**

In order to trace the connection between director Josh Fox’s image making and the politics surrounding U.S. military involvement, I turn to some recent media theorists who have surveyed the landscape of war marketing, journalism, and video gaming. *Surrender* uses a game-like dramaturgical approach to immersion, one that would be familiar to any user of the many popular video game platforms that utilize military themes, roles, and settings. Comparable theatrical deployments of structures derived from recent gaming platforms are few, and even fewer are thematically related to the military. Matthew Causey, in his important study *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture*, describes a history of recent performance, tracing the progression of how live performance has responded to the technological developments from the time period separated by the two U.S.-Iraqi wars. Between 1991 and 2003, he notes, the technologies of war and war media evolved from one of simulation to one of embeddedness.113

Marking the passage from imagery, such as the simulations of aerial bombing campaigns that marked the first Gulf War, to the embedded reporting from the second conflict, Causey claims the crisis of the disappearance of an oppositional subjectivity that has evolved into a manifestation of the subject split and neutered, a subject position not unlike that experienced within *Surrender*. Yet Causey cites no military performances; his argument is limited to dramaturgy derived from technological apparatuses that are military in origin.

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113 Matthew Causey, *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3. “The effect of simulation was that the real remained hidden and coded, but available. Embeddedness, making its appearance in the recent American invasion of Iraq (Gulf War II), altered simulation’s masking of the real with a dataflow that could inhabit the real itself and alter its essence.”
A comparison with another production will illustrate the difference. The UK ensemble Blast Theory’s noted 2006 immersive military performance, *Desert Rain*, incorporated multiple taped and projected landscapes and virtual personal encounters that traced how we experience military ideology as screened events, particularly via television screens.\(^{114}\) Fox and company attempted to restore the agency of the material body, choosing not to use a mediated spectator interface (screens, simulated environments projected on falling water, etc.) to achieve immediacy and simulated place making. *Surrender*’s first two sections privileged embodied experience, live presence as a progression through frames of war that depict the soldierly cycle of indoctrination, training, battle deployment, and finally homecoming and reintegration with community and family.

I propose that the staging of *Surrender* was an experiment of reconceived, repurposed, remediared video game aesthetics and dramaturgy as a live participatory event; the strategies and tropes made familiar through war media were here put to use in the service of a unique live event.\(^{115}\) Despite the highly regimented focus of Fox’s performers, it was ultimately less surprising that *Surrender*’s simulations of war (and of war’s simulations) were unable to represent war’s reality than it was how thoroughly the sheer affectual pull of the production’s dramaturgy literally and figuratively moved audiences. Like anonymous warriors in ancient and modern war games, we ticket-paying soldiers were pushed, commanded, berated, punished, and exhausted for a three-and-a-


half-hour durational performance. Audience comfort, political leanings, and even ability to rationally process the event were given little concern. Uncompromisingly, the company asked more of its audience than one might have thought conceivable in a theatre. Whether through artistic design or due to the limits of representation itself, the blurred line between war’s simulacrum and the unrepresentable nature of war itself (or, alternatively, the representability only of war’s simulacra) might be said to have become the overriding theme of the production. Fox and company’s consistent use of implicating frames of experience continually gestured toward the reality of war, yet produced actual affects familiar to audiences through the many echoes of military marketing tools and devices. The mystique of “real war experience” remained intact, the imaginary barriers to true indoctrination reserved only for those who have actually served, as Hartley’s presence reminded us.

Borrowing liberally from first-person shooter-style military video games such as the US Army’s own recruiting tool, the wildly successful America’s Army and the popular Call of Duty series,116 Surrender is a work of remediation in the sense that authors Richard Grusin and Jay David Bolter first used the term to describe the reuse and repurposing of older media within new.117 The authors’ well-known claim is that this is

117 Remediation: Understanding New Media (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999). “The practices of contemporary media constitute a lens through which we can view the history of remediation. What we wish to highlight from the past is what resonates with the twin preoccupations of contemporary media: the transparent presentation of the real and the enjoyment of the opacity of media themselves” (21). The authors practice a Foucauldian
the standard modality by which new media appear to supplant older media with respect to their fidelity to nature and representations of the perceptible world. The older media repurposed are, in this case, the many varieties of first-person shooter games available on various platforms currently on the market but also the historically various earlier war games that such video games themselves remediate. These stretch back, of course, to the classical era, and are as disparate as board games like chess and Stratego and the sophisticated equipment simulators featured in the US Army’s own Virtual Army Experience and Army Experience Center, where patrons can try out full-scale Humvees and Black Hawk helicopters.118 Surrender, in this sense, offers a version of Richard Schechner’s notion of “restored behavior”119 multiplied many times to reflect an age-old inheritance, the endless fascination of the civilian for the soldier, those excluded from (or who opt out of) fighting versus those who do fight, frequently manifested in gaming.120

In Remediation, Grusin and Bolter posit a historical genealogy of remediation in which viewers of various media experience oscillations between the twin poles of immediacy and hypermediacy, or transparency and opacity, in terms of reception. This binary experience of the medium as frame and meaning runs parallel in Surrender with the experience of Erika Fischer-Lichte’s formulation of “perceptive oscillation” in performance. The effect, using her terminology, is of a perception focused now on the presence of the body qua body, now on the representation that the body yields in the genealogy of the term and the forms of media that inform one another; each age has its relation with what realism is and hence, how immediacy is represented.

118 The Army Experience Center is described in detail in Brady’s Performance, Politics and the War on Terror.
120 Ed Halter’s aptly titled From Sun Tzu to Xbox (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2006) offers a popular history of military gaming from 3,000 B.C. to the late 1990s.
context of the performance event.\textsuperscript{121} Historically, as Grusin and Bolter claim, new forms of media attempt to supersede their predecessors in the search for increasingly immersive reality, through which, ideally, the medium itself might “disappear” in the service of providing a convincing, thoroughly engaging environment. Examples of this range from point-of-view “reality” television to historical set recreations in film production, virtual reality, early and later-generation websites featuring graphics, animation, and video, and the early days of photography and its struggle with the medium of painting. Yet such an outcome depends, the authors maintain, on the conscious quotation of earlier media, leading to a reinforcement of the awareness of the medium itself, or “hypermediacy.” The result is a network of associations of mediated self-referencing that accompany changing conceptions of just what the real consists of and how it is received. Neither full immediacy nor hypermediacy are reducible to a pure essence without elements of the other being involved. Translated to the split subjectivity actualized within Surrender’s delegated labor of battle, we can view the requirement to wear a uniform as a form of immediacy, while hypermediacy might consist variously of the evolving ideological associations of the production’s enactments, such as US military supremacy, the quest for control of the Middle East oil supply and regional control, and “Halliburton, Bechtel, the arms industry, banking and financial services, and myriad private firms that would be invited in to rebuild the ravaged nation.”\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{121} Fischer-Lichte, \textit{The Transformative Power of Performance}, 2008, 88. Indeed, Fischer-Lichte offers a more useful framework than remediation for the perceptual challenge of experiencing the performers in \textit{Surrender} as both role-players and co-authors. I limit the use of remediation as a descriptor of how the production animates aspects of video game reward structures and team building.

What made *Surrender* unique in its use of remediation was the reversal of the historical process. Whereas contemporary digital games have made ubiquitous use of previously understood narrative elements borrowed from theatre and film, here live performance borrowed back elements of staging, dramaturgy, and the sense of the live original that had been put to use by video gaming in its own borrowings. In this reappropriation, a live immersive performance like *Surrender* acquires a matrix of pop-cultural referentiality cued to gaming along the way. In theatrical terms, Grusin and Bolters’ immediacy and hypermediacy parallel the manner in which *Surrender* presented spectator-participants with both immersive and alienating theatrical devices. At times, audience members were seamlessly folded in with the production as though there were no “show” to witness, such as in the opening sequences during which uniforms were distributed for audiences to don, street clothing was collected, and we were introduced to Jason Hartley in his role as master drill sergeant. Like Fischer-Lichte’s non-referential bodies, we occupied the same theatrical space as the performers.  

At other moments, we were arrayed proscenium-style before scenes that played more conventionally, with minimal interaction with the performers beyond that of the traditional passive audience role. Here, in Fischer-Lichte’s terms, the representational potential of the performers became paramount once again. Of more nuanced interest were the frequent opportunities for slippage (and confusion) between these poles, and that potential for confusion about how we identify the proceedings and our role(s) in them. These moments, which coincided with scenic transitions and efforts to “raise the stakes” of the performance,


were the chaotic, disturbing moments which Del Vecchio recalled in her interview and memories.

As the spectators confronted the real-time reality they were preparing to both enact and interpret, there was considerable tension, not simply the perceptual “oscillation” described by Fischer-Lichte. It may be more accurate to say that the production’s power hinged on the exploration of the boundary between war and its media representations. The subject matter of *Surrender* is, in large part, the theme of remediation itself, both as a strategy of audience engagement and, more importantly, as the source of the production’s realization of its ultimate goal: pointing toward an emergent social formation appearing as an imagined community and the underlying, potential networks operating therein in a nascent state. Ironically, this appearance was predicated on a kind of theatrical trap whereby a downtown Manhattan audience was induced to vigorously portray characters whose stereotypically aggressive warrior behaviors clashed jarringly with what one presumed was the audience’s hip urbanity and liberal politics. By moving us so forcefully and rapidly through training exercises and simulated deployment, the production actually forced us to act in the supercharged present time of performance. As a closely regimented group charged with goals difficult to grasp and attain, the audience could be assumed to be aware of the recent past that the performance referenced, yet was compelled to restage such memories with scant time to consider the full (future) imaginary import of our collective actions on the artists’ behalf.

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124 It should be noted that I have not undertaken a qualitative study of the audience demographics of the production; this assumption is based on audience observation from the performance I attended, several conversations with other attendees, and general knowledge of the patronage of downtown New York performance theatre. As indicated earlier, the loss of the company’s archive of video recordings made during the run of the show is a significant loss to the research.
The fictional situation is analogous to that of a young recruit who is promised adventure and instead delivered to trauma-inducing situations that are unanticipated and overwhelming. By the time we realize what we have enacted, we have become complicit in a theatricalization of aggression and killing in the name of patriotic endeavor and team unity. The effect is, in many respects, shattering.

In Walter Benjamin’s well-known theorization of the auratic quality of the original, the modern represents a loss of status for the art object, replaced by proliferation and mass access. In *Surrender*, the directionality of this process is inverted, as older and newer dramaturgical techniques are blended. *Surrender* remediates not only Hartley’s aforementioned book and blog, *Just Another Soldier*, but also the perspective of military-themed first-person shooter games as we journey through the piece, following one of several outcomes for our “characters.” The sense of engagement in battle, made familiar to audiences through the wide commercial distribution of war films, games, and other media, is quoted in the performance, allowing a large image repertoire to be (potentially) available for audiences. In a sense, the repetition of narrative, situation, framework, and engagement replaces representation at the center of the production’s economy of images. Notably, Philip Auslander has examined at length the use and re-use of live and mediated images in performance, noting that the live and mediated do not share the same ontology. Rather, Auslander claims, they are differently constituted by their role in the economy of the culture. “The live is actually an effect of mediatization,”¹²⁵ Auslander writes. So it would seem in *Surrender*, where the very sense of the production’s advertised experience rests on media culture: the popularity of military video games, films, and television

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shows, recent embedded war journalism practice, the widespread commercial use of military simulation gaming, and the projected image of the military itself. The sum of this military mediatization is a profound entanglement of our citizenry with military propaganda.\textsuperscript{126}

Strategies of remediation, and their resulting failure to immerse us fully, critically affected the charged and highly ambiguous ideological stance that confronts audiences in \textit{Surrender}. Media theorists like Stahl, Virilio, Jean Baudrillard, and Friedrich Kittler have long debated the relationship between warfare and the cinematic, the technological parallels and commercial relationships that have contributed to the dense interrelationships among Hollywood, the US Army, and international media corporations like Sony, Dreamworks, and others.\textsuperscript{127} Kittler, in particular, has elaborated the close developmental parallels between the history of film and other media and the creation of automatic weapons. Stahl and the various authors in the collection \textit{Joystick Soldiers} make a case for the importance of the US Army’s joint imperative with Hollywood to engage the public at something more powerful than mere propaganda and suasion. Together, the industries have aimed directly at the public desire to experience vicariously, through all media, going to war. Marketing affect in the form of the physical and emotional sensations associated with warfare, an enormous joint industry, has determined the US citizen to be the subject and consumer of military feelings and sensibilities.

\textsuperscript{126} On these themes, see Stahl, \textit{Militainment, Inc.}, and Huntemann and Payne, eds., \textit{Joystick Soldiers}.
Noted war journalist and Occupy Wall Street supporter Chris Hedges has written at length about the popular desire for simulations of experiences of warfare, military news coverage by embedded journalists, and politically coopted news culture and ideology. Hedges has referred to that relation in the current era as an enforced “permanent state of war,” one in which many of the traditional critical and oppositional roles taken up by the liberal class of journalists and critics have been stripped of their power in recent years: “Permanent war is the most effective mechanism used by the power elite to stifle reform and muzzle dissent. A state of war demands greater secrecy, constant vigilance and suspicion. It generates distrust and fear, especially in culture and art, often reducing it to silence or nationalist cant.”

Hedges cites numerous examples of liberal journalists, religious leaders, artists, scholars, and pundits who fail to challenge the ethical bases of US wars from Vietnam to Afghanistan, and in the process cede their traditional oppositional role. The reasons for this journalistic avoidance of the responsibility of protesting the inherent immorality of warfare, while complicated across numerous examples, remains, for Hedges, allied primarily to liberal refusal to publicly imagine war in its distinct horror and gruesome reality. The instances in which certain iconoclasts have tried and have been met with public scorn and professional censure have served to reinforce the imperative to support US war efforts. Since World War I and the introduction of mass media, it has proven easier and more rewarding for journalists and others to remain near the centers of

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129 Ibid., 35–40.
130 Ibid. See the descriptions of the responses to statements by Michael Moore, Dennis Kucinich, Noam Chomsky, Julian Assange, et al., 34–43.
institutional and political power as allies of the war machine, a position which, in general, has mirrored and guided the support of the US electorate.\textsuperscript{131}

Hedges suggests this “dismantling” of the liberal class was made possible throughout the twentieth century by the sophisticated and widespread use of industrial production, the rational administration of governmental institutions, and the use of mass propaganda made possible by developing news media. Even the administration of Woodrow Wilson, which did so much to foster the new League of Nations, also enacted the passage of the Espionage and Sedition Acts in 1917, which helped silence dissident critics of US involvement in foreign wars.\textsuperscript{132} The seduction of journalists, intellectuals, artists, and other critics of war through mass propaganda early in the twentieth century forms, according to Hedges’ genealogy, the template for the subsequent sale of US involvement in foreign wars, particularly the wars in Iraq under both Bush administrations.\textsuperscript{133} As media critic Stahl has claimed, the civic experience of warfare changed significantly during George H. W. Bush’s 1991 Desert Storm conflict. Stahl notes a late-twentieth-century trend away from the spectacularization of warfare, which was formerly used to

control public opinion by distancing, distracting, and disengaging the citizen from the realities of war. Subsequent decades, however, introduced a new set of discourses and practices that invaded the home front experience of war in the United States. The intensification of the relationship between the Pentagon and the entertainment industries brought about the crystallization of platforms that invite one to project oneself into the action … opportunities … for the citizen to

\textsuperscript{132} Hedges, \textit{Death of the Liberal Class}, 65.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 74. So, too, Hedges notes corporate complicity, such as ExxonMobil’s financing of “grassroots” organization to fight the science of climate change in support of the politics of a war fought for easy access to oil for US consumption.
play the new “interactive war”… from military recruiting to journalism to consumerist practices.\footnote{Stahl, \textit{Militainment, Inc.}, 3.}

This complicity and co-optation, an acceptance of the rationale for and of the moral stature of war, along with new opportunities for civilians to take part in simulations of the action of battle through increasingly sophisticated means, developed dramatically in the two wars’ intervening years. The multibillion-dollar industry created by the mutual cooperation of the Pentagon and Hollywood (and later of online industries) was descriptively noted by media theorist James Der Derian. Der Derian coined the phrase “military-industrial-media-entertainment network” in 1995 to describe the conjunction of these newly engaged civilian practices with the new networked information technologies and the philosophy of total (or “asymmetric”) command superiority that controls it, which together have come to be known as the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA).\footnote{Der Derian, \textit{Virtuous War}, xxx.}

For Der Derian, as for Causey, this collusion of the defense and entertainment industries created the marketing and delivery of war as an ethically purified, morally justified commodity: “virtuous” war.

\textit{Surrender} was a critical performance experiment for the age of permanent militarization, because it activates the ambiguous line that separates oppositional and complicit positions toward war that are symptomatic of culture in the current experiential economy. By uniting affective, physically shared performance to the marketing of a unique, simulated deployment performance-game, the production placed unique demands on participants to commit bodily to a heightened immersion of \textit{faux} war-making rituals. Through this means, the affective and the political were joined at a material, elemental
level of experience. By enacting a culture of fear made manifest via gaming applications and, implicitly, the panorama of military images commonly available in the mediascape, *Surrender* replicated the military’s age-old recruiting scheme to glorify and engage, before laying bare the facts of the terms of the contract. As Hartley said to us while we were on the floor doing push-ups, “I don’t know how many of you read the FAQs. Your recruiter told you there would be no strenuous physical exercise. Guess what? Your recruiter lied!” Hartley taunted us with the stereotypical idea of a military that deceives to achieve recruiting goals, while simultaneously daring us to face up to the challenge of the moment. The production reminded us that the idea of citizenship, what the concept means and how it is lived, is a highly contested notion, particularly as it touches on military values.

The extreme militarization of current US-international relations requires the reproduction of military culture in the popular sphere. This reproduction, in film, advertising, and particularly participatory online gaming, appears as rationally administered ideology, along the lines made famous by Adorno and Horkheimer as a part of the culture industry. As Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard note, US imperial power, supported by unchallenged military superiority, has reflected the maintenance of free, worldwide markets essential to the continued advantages of neoliberal hegemony. They write, “In historical reality, the country has always been a warrior culture propelled by the same interests as previous empires: resources, markets, cheap labor, national

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chauvinism, geopolitical advantage.” Boggs and Pollard are far from alone in recognizing the essential relationship between neoliberal global economic realities and the requirement for a powerful military to protect US interests. Samir Amin traces this country’s militarization to the need to control international markets and resources in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the “bipolar” system that kept US interests in check throughout the Cold War era. 

Throughout the wars promulgated in the Balkans, the Middle East, and in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US has pursued, according to Amin, an imperialist agenda that required the creation and dissemination in the public sphere of a reinforcing moral agenda. The outlines of this method for achieving control are clear:

… first, choose an enemy in the coveted geostrategic area; next, exploit the enemy’s often odious behavior (the kind happily tolerated in others) … then suddenly “declare war” on that enemy through massive aerial bombardment from a safe height (“nil casualties warfare” for the United States); and finally, establish a lasting American presence in the region, on the grounds that the enemy is still there.

The goal of achieving public consensus for these geopolitical pursuits requires the establishment of a persuasive public moral narrative; typically, the American public has shown itself willing to respond to foreign war with patriotic fervor and support. In this sense, patriotism is a performance.

Other, more recent critics like Stahl have noted that the intensification of the relationship between Hollywood and the Pentagon has reshaped the average citizen’s

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140 Amin, *Obsolescent Capitalism*, 82.
relationship to war and war making. Since 1991 and the first Iraqi war, Desert Storm, the dissemination of war imagery has been evident in every media format from news broadcasts to ever more realistic simulation games and to the use of consultants and trainers circulating among movie studios, army facilities and university research institutes. Stahl notes that the new interactive features of contemporary war making in this country have collectively changed “the construction of the citizen-subject.”

The concept of Western citizenship has historically included an ideal subject position expected of the citizen of the state. Among the rights and obligations, some form of military commitment has generally been required of male citizens. A lifetime of rigorous military training and fierce discipline and obedience was demanded of those privileged elite who were elevated to full citizens in ancient Sparta were. Even democratic Athens expected a commitment to defend the state through military service of its citizenry, despite setting itself against Sparta in terms of values and ideals. Roman citizenship, too, was founded on a basis of military commitment and taxes. Most European feudal towns insured their autonomy through the recruitment of private armies; Machiavelli included the willingness to defend the city among the necessary attributes of the ideal citizen. More recently, as part of the Enlightenment, establishment of a militia is, of course, enshrined within the US Bill of Rights.

Shifts in the nature of citizenship, and the concurrent alteration in citizens’ relationship with the military, derive from recent changes in military strategy that encompass everything from battlefield tactics to recruiting. That such a performance as

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141 Ibid., 4.
142 For this background on the role of military service in changing conceptions of citizenship, I am indebted to Derek Heater, A Brief History of Citizenship (New York: NYU Press, 2004).
Surrender can so artfully represent this new reality forces us to look beyond the background culture of war media to the late-twentieth-century transformations in the military itself. Surrender, as an instance of war performance, could not have been conceived before the recent thoroughgoing shift in technology, doctrine, and philosophy known as the Revolution in Military Affairs, or RMA. The RMA has been variously defined by military strategists and scholars. For those describing the complex perspectives that determined (and were determined by) US responses to the end of the Cold War, the revolution involved the breakup of the Soviet Union, the new challenges and opportunities presented by information networks and precision munitions, the virtualization of the battlefield through computers and satellite imagery, and the changing methods of waging war.

Strategy for Chaos author Colin Gray locates the origin of the RMA in the demise of the Soviet Union as a global superpower and Soviet attempts to counter perceived US advantages through their own strategic moves in the 1980s. He notes that Andrew Marshall, the head of the Office of Net Assessment in the Pentagon, was the first to suggest “that a fundamental change was occurring in how wars would be fought in the future.”143 Gray takes a broadly sociological approach to the RMA, aligning it with historical progenitors from military revolutions in earlier centuries and noting that technological changes are meaningless without corresponding strategic and personnel alterations. His use of terms like nonlinearity, chaos, and strategic effectiveness grounds his project in a postmodern vein, stressing the networking, geographic, and ethical complexity of the military’s new approach to the C4ISR ideal: “command, control,

Gray locates the high-water mark for the evolving RMA in the US air campaign against Iraqi defenses in January–February 1991, the beginning of the war that Baudrillard famously declared did not take place due to the newly virtual quality of the video images most Americans saw of precision-guided munitions, animated battlefields, and a press corps embedded with the troops. This was the moment during which what Der Derian terms the military-industrial-entertainment complex projected itself onto a remade US citizen-subject, newly enmeshed, as Stahl claims we became, as a result. Still, Gray notes that the four basic questions about the RMA—why and how these changes happened, what evidence exists for them historically, and what difference they will make in the future of warfare and society—are all open to speculative answers.

International security historian Elinor Sloan adduces a range of other possible definitions of the RMA: a “paradigm shift” in the nature of conflict, which renders “obsolete or irrelevant the core competencies of a dominant player”; and “a major change in the nature of warfare brought about by the innovative application of technologies which, combined with dramatic changes in military doctrine and operational and organizational concepts,” changes the nature of war. Sloan emphasizes the look and feel of information superiority, noting that the ideal of a digitized battlefield and unmanned aircraft (like today’s prevalent drones) reduces the fog of war. “Information Dominance” is the ultimate objective of increased technological control, and Sloan claims that these changes suggest an evolutionary process rather than a sudden

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144 Ibid., 272.
145 Baudrillard, The Gulf War Did Not Take Place, 3.
transformation. The Army’s *Joint Vision 2010* and *Joint Vision 2020* documents (actually from 1996 and 2000) develop the technological and conceptual aspects necessary (to achieve “full spectrum dominance”).

One of the keys to achieving this goal, and of interest for our analysis of *Surrender*, was the development of what the Navy calls “network-centric warfare.”

Network-centric here means the privileging of simultaneous communication among many platforms and participants over communication between individuals. The visual imagery and material feel associated with this form of communication is mirrored in the touch screens, control devices, and interactive features of first-person shooter games like the *Call of Duty* series and *America’s Army* and is, as I have claimed, remediated in *Surrender* as a live version of videogame participation. In the introductory chapter, I outlined the ways in which the performative failure of productions like *Surrender* reveal the outlines of a politically resistant network among participants. Through our relation of *dissensus*, through participation in a new distribution of the sensible, we begin to recognize ourselves within a new form of the social. This is a productive strategy for the theatre. The networking emphasis of the RMA approach to information technology and control is key to the strategic changes the military has undergone in recent years. Likewise, these concepts extend to the entertainment products of the military-industrial-entertainment complex, the use of which serve to immerse the general public in pro-military ideological acquiescence. In particular, the user interfaces of video applications,

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147 Ibid., 34–35.
148 For a supporting analysis of the physical, material, and cultural crossovers from war gaming, with a focus on the barrel of the gun as a cultural signifier, see Scott Lukas, “Behind the Barrel: Reading the Videogame Gun,” in *Joystick Soldiers*, ed. Huntemann and Payne, 75–90.
whether games or training simulators, share most features as a result of the collaboration among Hollywood, gaming producers, and military developers. These features share a virtual, interactive information network in everything from the way users log in to game sites, to the ability to mobilize mass numbers of users. It is this philosophy, the deep immersion of the newly created citizen-subject, that we see engaging and activating spectators in *Surrender*.

The army was eager to make increased use of information technology in the 1990s, a time in which the armed services were falling short of recruitment goals. Colonel Casey Wardynski was responsible for addressing these problems. Among his solutions was the development of the *America’s Army* video game, the traveling Virtual Army Experience, and most recently, the aforementioned Army Experience Center, an information recruitment center in the Franklin Mills Mall in Philadelphia.¹⁴⁹ Wardynski notes that the army was attempting to take marketing advantage of the same technological trends that were aspects of the RMA. In order to insert the army’s brand into pop culture, Wardynski noted, they needed an innovation: “…to deal with the cognitive biases, heuristics and other information problems likely to afflict Army recruiting, we needed to substitute virtual for vicarious experiences with a focus on what it’s like in basic training, home station and deployment.”¹⁵⁰ *America’s Army* is not the first video game to feature the army, but it was able to capitalize on the fact that 60 percent of the games commercially available are military themed.¹⁵¹ The game focuses on Army values like loyalty and teamwork, according to Wardynski, and, along with the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 180.
¹⁵¹ Ibid., 80.
full-scale Humvee and Black Hawk helicopter simulators that were available at the Army Experience Center, it represents a sophisticated repurposing of the research and development undertaken at university and commercial partners over the past twenty years. *Surrender’s* interesting take on this technological landscape was to rid the performance of computer screens and digitized battlefields, instead focusing audiences on the raw, corporeal elements that the games gloss over. Spectators for *Surrender* were actually doing calisthenics and running rather than guiding an avatar via a joystick. While the virtual blood and gore were missing, the experience of breaking into a room of the “enemy” was very much present, experiential, and live. The context demanded decision making and responsiveness that tested the same instincts developed in actual basic training.

James Kievit and Steven Metz, researchers at the Strategic Studies Institute, tie the RMA to an American ethos of progress that sheds light on how readily the promise of the new approach to war was eagerly embraced by politicians keen to increase US influence abroad while limiting exposure to fallout from US battlefield casualties. This deliberate positioning of war as antiseptic, like a digital screen, instead of lethal and messy is designed to appeal to the kind of consumer experience offered by the Army Experience Center and first-person shooter games. It also ties American military prowess to a larger neoliberal project. They write:

*The American ethos holds that progress—defined, in part, as efficiency augmented by technology—is inevitable and irrepressible. Technology is respected, almost deified. There are sound historical reasons for this. During its formative period, the nation suffered from chronic shortages of skilled labor, thus forcing reliance on laborsaving technology. Eli Whitney, Robert Fulton, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford and thousands of other entrepreneurs and inventors harnessed*
technology in the name of efficiency. Reflecting this legacy, the U.S. military has often evinced an unreflective trust in the ultimate benefit of technology.\textsuperscript{152}

This connection of the RMA obsession with technology to the mythic American ethos of progress and innovation is characteristic of the deep ties between US military superiority and global neoliberal development. As many have noted, military prowess functions today as the final arbiter of challenges to the hegemony of free market economic policies. An RMA that allows for the asymmetrical superiority of the US military further ensures neoliberal domination. If that RMA involves forms of technology uniting military and consumer applications that, as Stahl notes, encourage civilian engagement as opposed to resistance, then the same acquiescence might also apply to the neoliberal vision. Accepting free, unregulated markets and American dominance as naturalized states would seem to be the ultimate goal of such experiments in advanced war technology and organization. Certainly, many commentators have found this to be the case in the global economy today.\textsuperscript{153}

For the most part, military strategists and historians unsurprisingly focus on answering the kinds of tactical and economic questions raised by Colin Gray and cited above, rather than pursuing the more political/aesthetic line of questioning I am engaging here, which is to assert that the kind of intensified, physicalized split subjectivity encouraged by the dramaturgy of \textit{Surrender} could not have existed without the RMA. The alterations outlined here in the way warfare looks and feels on video screens and the ideological effects of this change have radically shifted the visual field of war and how we respond to it as news consumers, as avid participants of games, and as audiences. In

\textsuperscript{152} James Kievit and Steven Metz, \textit{Strategy and the Revolution in Military Affairs: From Theory to Policy} (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1995), 340.

\textsuperscript{153} See, for example, Amin, \textit{Obsolescent Capitalism}, chapter 7.
order to connect the RMA with the kind of background shift in mediated images of war that functions as the (remediated) backdrop for *Surrender*, I now turn to recent work of Judith Butler and Mark Hansen, two theorists from different fields who both make use of the concept of “framing” to describe our physically embodied affective responses to war and media. Both theorists draw strong connections between affect and the visual field, and how together they determine our apprehension and bodily response to images of war and the politics they convey. *Surrender*’s remediating strategies include “enactive” aspects of new media art that Hansen, in particular, deploys to implicate the body as the primary ground of determining our response to the screen.

For Judith Butler, images of war’s discursive and visual fields, or “frames,” are essential to the understanding of war. In fact they are intrinsic to waging war itself. The technologies of both war making and representing, and their effect on the senses, are thus critical to our understanding of war and, in particular, how we are, in her words, “conscripted” by war’s wagers:

> We have to understand how the senses are part of any recruitment effort. Specifically there is a question of the epistemological position to which we are recruited when we watch or listen to war reports … the frame does not simply exhibit reality, but actively participates in a strategy of containment.154

The bodily effects associated with our senses when we are presented with images are indissociable from our perceptions and responses. These responses are controlled versions of what we anticipate as reality, particularly regarding the precariousness of life in a regime of violence, Butler’s primary concern.

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How, she asks, can we maintain an ethical and intelligible focus on the value of all human life when confronted by imagery that has already selected out some lives for valuing and others for devaluation? *Surrender’s* frames of war—training, deployment, and reintegration—function as critical tests of our ability to respond to military imagery. While failing to replicate war in its likeness, it nevertheless situates us imaginatively, affectively, and sensuously in frames of war’s chaos that we may experience in its full intensity, interpelling us within ideologies and politics of aggression and the US military philosophy of “full-spectrum dominance.” In this scenario, we are practicing a fully embodied form of efficacious speech of the variety Butler and Gayatri Spivak describe in *Who Sings the Nations State?* while glossing Hannah Arendt’s description of freedom as a practice. We are acting in unison with others, but “de-individualized, that is … taking place in concert but which does not presuppose a collective subject.”

These ideologies might well come into conflict with those with which most patrons identify prior to entering the enframed war scenes of the production’s training and deployment sections, and they are not softened or taken up for critique within the performance. Butler emphasizes, in the strongest terms, the identification of frames of war with war itself: “our visual apprehension of war is an occasion in which we implicitly consent or dissent to war or where our ambivalent relation is formulated.”

This identification goes to the heart of *Surrender’s* power to insinuate its positioning of the spectator at a deeply felt level.

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156 Ibid., xvii.
That which is excluded from or devalued in the frame is violated even before physical violence is done to it. This framing of the visual field lends importance to our bodily reactions in a simulated war deployment. While *Surrender* did not pose the question of the precariousness of life, or enemy life specifically, through its staging of the thrilling, aggressive actions of training and engaging in assault, it appealed directly to the senses, posing the questions Butler raises about consent and dissent. It demanded that we consent (or not) to being conscripted in a portrayal of war, in a staging of a performance. The time of performance, while not the same as the depiction, was the present, affective time of decision making for the participants, who were, at the same time, aware that the kind of battles engaged in had already transpired. They were doing things the likes of which had already been done, with known outcomes of the dead and injured and the American side faring better, losing fewer lives, and ultimately maintaining the victor’s role. They replayed, in the present, events from the past, living them as though for the first time, as all performance does. By registering this split time frame, participants succeeded in processing something real taken directly from war, while “failing” to accede fully to war’s lethality.

From the first moments of the production, spectators were placed in a position to respond, through assent and compliance, to prompts from cast members playing military personnel. This was true even before we entered the space of performance, on the sidewalk, as we lined up for tickets. Throughout the next three and a half hours, we were moved forcibly and aggressively from place to place, with punishments and humiliations for failures and lethargy, following orders and responding to shouted commands.
This forced perspective is no surprise to anyone who has played any one of the dozens of first-person shooter-style video games, particularly *America’s Army*, the world’s most popular.\(^{157}\) *Surrender* made ubiquitous use of the first-person perspective; although grouped into teams, each “soldier” proved herself by following orders, carrying out actions, and working in unison. This emphasis on the solo journey through the performance occurred in two primary modes. In the first mode, the first-person narrative structure closely followed the prompts, rewards, and punishments of military video games. (This was altered in the final “homecoming” section, when the first-person vantage point shifted over to the real-life character of Jason Hartley, reverting to traditional passive viewing seated on risers.) In this sense, not only were the games remediated, but so was news coverage and other stored imagery of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. *Surrender* was an opportunity to renegotiate battles audiences read about and saw covered in television news reports. In this sense, the fact that few audiences chose to replay the invasions differently, or otherwise disrupt the production, raises questions about affect, conscription, and engagement that linger long after the performance.\(^{158}\)

In Hansen’s *New Philosophy for New Media*, the use of the frame is put forward as the means through which the body is modified through interactions with digital technology. Like Butler, Hansen is concerned with screens, specifically the multiple

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\(^{157}\) Over 9 million copies of the game have been downloaded; http://www.armytimes.com/article/20130829/ OFFDUTY02/308290054, accessed May 21, 2013.

\(^{158}\) This sense of replaying the past can be distinguished from games that anticipate future wars through developmental technology or imagined enemies. This “proleptic” mode is discussed by Josh Smicker in “Future Combat, Combating Futures: Temporalities of War Video Games and the Performance of Proleptic Histories,” in *Joystick Soldiers*, ed. Huntemann and Payne, 106–21.
versions of screens that comprise the digital arts, be they television, film, computer, or personal devices that share content across platforms. All can be used, for example, to watch military-themed cinema or journalism, or as a staging ground for personal gaming. Taken together, the collapse of distinctions between these various media represents a progressive de-differentiation of all media that, Hansen notes, runs through twentieth-century art criticism from Benjamin to Kittler to Deleuze.\(^\text{159}\) The result is an equivalence among all imagery, regardless of its medium or source.

Hansen’s vision is of the image transformed, and his approach is derived from Bergsonian phenomenology, specifically citing the affective body as the ground of meaning. This ground is itself related to the work of cognitive neuroscientists, like Francisco Varela, who describe a reconfiguration of the sensual world that is precognitive and, in this sense, deeply dependent on a fully embodied cognitive processing.\(^\text{160}\) While much could be written about Hansen’s use of Bergson’s description of the affective image and how it places the realm of perception firmly in the body prior to the image itself being grasped by the viewer, my concern is with Hansen’s sense of framing and how it supports Butler’s use of the term as the format through which we are interpellated and incorporated into an ideology when viewing war imagery as a category.

Hansen, a media theorist, derived a theory of what is “new” in new media art. One of the legacies of Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” is the transformation of media from the auratic to something shared on a

\(^{159}\) Hansen discusses this briefly in the introduction and again in chapter 7. *New Philosophy for New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

mass scale. This shift led to a later theorization of the collapse of any distinction between media formats such that they don’t exist as such any longer—they are all one flow of images. Hansen attaches his embodied, affective grounding of perception as a way to reclaim the primacy of the physical from the virtuality of the digital screen.

The remediation of the digital in *Surrender*, via the dramaturgy of war simulations, is grounded by the kind of embodied affect that Hansen derives, which supports the ideological framing described by Judith Butler. Hansen writes:

> When the body acts to enframe digital information—or, as I put it, to forge the digital image—what it frames is in effect itself: its own affectively experienced sensation of coming into contact with the digital. In this way the act of enframing information can be said to give body to the digital data—to transform something that is unframed, disembodied, and formless to concrete embodied information intrinsically imbued with human meaning.

Bearing in mind that Hansen’s “framing” itself derives from a phenomenology of images in space, what is new is the application to virtual images. Though his subsequent examples are drawn primarily from the video art world and are installation based, the kind of bodily viewing he describes can, like games and televised media, be remediated in *Surrender*. The performance takes place within the realm of the digital, although it does not use media explicitly. In fact, much of the production played like a return, or restoration, of the elemental physicality of war: the instruction in killing techniques, the sense of being herded from location to location, and the deliberate instilling of fear and the stakes of failure that work in concert to ensure that there is little time or opportunity

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162 Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media*, 22. Hansen calls this the “framing function” of the body.
163 Ibid., 13.
to question the proceedings, or to deliberate about their meaning. How, in this context, does Hansen’s claim that Benjamin’s legacy is in service of a redemption of embodied experience—embodiment in the Varelian sense as neural—relate to an actual, live embodied experience in the theatre such as the exploration of extreme physical commitment in Surrender? How does the performance’s structure of indoctrination, submission, and engagement reflect Benjamin’s sense of art’s “new” ability to reach a mass audience and affect hitherto unimaginable political realities?

Fox and company use specific strategies to engage spectator subjectivity in Surrender. The framing of Surrender is mediatized: 1) through the narrative form of the first-person perspective, via a reward/punishment-based durational journey guided by cast members; 2) through coercive pressure, replicating the training/deployment modes typical of military video games such as America’s Army and the Call of Duty series, to respond to commands, behave as committed soldier-trainees and perform in alignment with the stated strategic goals; and 3) through references in the production to recent war scenes known through their convergence with war media such as the infamous photographs from Abu Ghraib prison, and video and print journalism about the psychic struggles of returning veterans, as well as the (ambiguously) pro-Army tone of Jason Hartley’s memoir.

Taken together, these strategies pose an equivalence between the act of performing and the performer-spectator’s assent to what is being represented. This presumed consent, sharply conditioned through military orders, is a real departure from the notion of dissensus developed in the introduction. Within this temporary imagined community, only consensus is allowed. This represents a fraught artistic strategy for the
company and for the spectator-participants. The first two-thirds of *Surrender* plays as the production was marketed—as a simulation of military action—without depiction of resistance. To have included dissenting voices would have mitigated the purported verisimilitude of the engagement with training and deployment. Thus, to achieve its stated immersive purposefulness, all audience members must take part. The “productive failure” of *Surrender* inheres in the production’s thorough commitment to the immersive fiction of military activity. While this commitment might be viewed negatively as overreaching, it may also be interpreted as a conscious strategy to embody the ultimate untranslatability of war, the impossibility of the desire to know war’s reality, except by living it. The productiveness of the failure is the measure of theatre’s limitations.

To conclude, it was an ambitious and unusual contractual complicity that the company offered in this experiment at the Ohio Theatre. The company’s website provides a concise definition of the manner in which *Surrender* was to be received as an affectual participatory event, calling it “a simulated war deployment experience.”

Alongside accompanying images of audience members in full fatigue uniforms holding mock assault rifles, captions inform prospective ticket buyers what to expect: “When you arrive at the theatre we issue you a standard military uniform”; “Act 1: You train in basic combat techniques with Jason Christopher Hartley: a crash course in rifle handling, clearing a room and engaging the enemy. Act 2: You are deployed: you enter a multi-room installation to put your military training to the test.”

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165 Ibid. Although audiences were highly encouraged to take an active role, this was alleviated by the selling of two levels of tickets: $15 to be a participant, and a limited number of $20 seats for those wishing to stay in bleachers and watch the action. I do not recall seeing anyone in the bleachers on the night I attended.
the experience is not for the faint of heart, the bottom of the webpage informed participants that they would be asked to sign a “hold-harmless” clause, indemnifying the producers from legal responsibility. Further, there were two levels of ticket prices available; patrons could opt to be mere observers, choosing not to actively deploy, but merely to watch the action from above. This deliberate advertising campaign appealed to patrons motivated by the possibility of role playing actively through the implicit agreement to a performative contract, and the entering of a liminal space of identification that blurred the lines of performer, audience, and creative agent.

The critical difficulty of simultaneously embodying both observer and participant roles is where the experience of Surrender remained most provocative. The complex positional blurring became more pronounced as our labor became more assaultive and sensorially overwhelming. The aggressive complicity (being yelled at, submerged into a group, expectations of obeisance to commands and working as a collective entity, performing combat maneuvers, and “taking it” like a soldier) pushed aside the space for reflection typical of the theatrical audience experience. The effect was one of trying (unsuccessfully) to catch up to one’s senses and the simulated war overstimulation in order to evaluate the geopolitics that are being represented in this performance of warfare, and to formulate a responsive judgment about whether to continue to assent to the performed action required. This was the true trauma for the audience, rather than what was depicted narratively.

It was in this doubled space where performance becomes confused with ideological assent that Surrender most closely paralleled the subjectivity of contemporary citizenship during a time of conflict. Recent US military conflicts have been deeply
polarizing in terms of domestic consensus-building and have also been characterized as “virtual” or “clean”\textsuperscript{166} wars that blur image and information. The inability of the average person to distinguish mediated surfaces that are both the space of war gaming and the user interface of a weapon render unintelligible the nature of such “asymmetrical” warfare, to use Paul Virilio’s term. Asymmetrical warfare of the kind depicted in games and in \textit{Surrender} is a “transpolitical” style of warfare, in which politics as such disappear into a realm of pure speed and reactivity through varied forms of simulation. Der Derian’s coinage of the military-industrial-entertainment complex suggests within its terms the military’s reliance on advanced forms of battlefield simulation and training that link the need for weapons training systems with the powerful economic forces behind the development and manufacture of gaming systems. In \textit{Surrender}, participants functioned as part of a network within a closed system of controlling actions. The performance itself borrowed and repurposed the notion of agency contained within the video gaming interface. This prescribes a set of actions that are carefully monitored by the cast and the production dramaturgy.

Functioning as a network has interesting possibilities for performance. Alexander Galloway, in \textit{The Exploit: A Theory of Networks}, describes a recent, American exceptionalism that operates according to a new political logic of networks. Networks are “the dominant form describing the nature of control today as well as resistance to it.”\textsuperscript{167} He describes the juncture between the idea of sovereignty, state authority, and the network form itself as containing a living contradiction; control and resistance adopt the same form. This operates in \textit{Surrender} inside the network of the performance; within the

\textsuperscript{166} Virilio, \textit{Pure War}, 15.  
\textsuperscript{167} Galloway and Thacker, \textit{The Exploit}, 1–4.
network of spectator performance options—play along with the program of state sovereignty and control or resist, or perform and simultaneously read against the grain of our own performance. This contradictory space becomes an experience of the deepest political struggle, Galloway writes that, because “networks are not liberating; they exercise novel forms of control that operate at a level that is anonymous and non-human, which is to say material.”

Sovereignty is performed throughout Surrender; it is distributed through the participants, each of whom becomes one “node” of the network, accountable to each other. We are presented with a live experience that is modeled after a simulated virtuality derived from Der Derian’s military-industrial-entertainment complex. We provide, through our acquiescence to the event, the missing component, but our participation elides the desired meaning-making opportunity. It moves past us too quickly, providing an experience likened to deployment, but no space for reflection, until the moment is finished and we are audiences once more. This calls to mind the cautionary note struck by critic Hal Foster regarding the notion of substituting the collective for other kinds of goals in participatory art; it may be utopian, says Foster, to think that “simply getting together is enough.” This is so, particularly when the critical importance of evaluating our commitment in foreign conflicts has so much riding on clear-headed thinking that a performance in which we are pushed to go faster may simulate the speed of information circulation, but not the real relation between sovereignty and networks at the political heart of the issue.

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168 Ibid., 5.
Sara Brady, in her recent book, uses the term “percepticide” after Diana Taylor to describe the U.S. public’s willful blindness to the embodied reality of anti-war protests since 9/11. In league with Chris Hedges’s critique of an embedded media rendered complicit in this war blindness and ineffectuality, Brady also quotes Bill Moyers on US antiwar protests in 2007 and their utter lack of representation in the media, which prevented them from joining the “archive” of lasting documentation and public record. This archive, like Derrida’s, is the repository and stronghold of public images and official ideology; it is the place where memory is affected and where affect reaches objective form. It is also a useful place from which to consider the embodied affect of Surrender. Does the performance enter the archive as protest or complicit spectacle? Can it do both? Does it do either? These are the questions one is left with finally.

The fact that the Act III “homecoming” section recedes in memory three years after experiencing Surrender may or may not be an indication of a belated authorial gesture to address the problems arising from a disproportionate focus on action over activism in Surrender. Or, conversely, it may be attributable to a strategy that determined the best way to reach a liberal audience is through a sheer confrontation with the reality of war, within theatrical limitations. Unexpectedly, it is in the final scripted section, when the production drops its simulacral fiction and obeys more traditional theatrical dramaturgy, where uncomfortable seams are revealed. Those seams, troubled jointures of affect and embodiment, relate directly to the sense of performative failure: performances

171 Ibid.
that fail, but fail to fail completely, and by failing productively result in unexpected engagements, unanticipated affects, and, in this instance, spectators’ split “antagonistic” subjectivity as participant observers. As Nicholas Ridout has written cogently, theatre’s failure is not an imperfection, but rather is a part of the very constituent elements making up the form. His theorization of the “face-to-face” encounter in performance, and the expectations that are entailed therein, critically, arrive in a kind of disappointed deflation, as the unavoidable underlying relations of capital are recognized. Ridout goes so far as to ascribe a certain shame or embarrassment to such a misexecution. He writes, “[I]t is as though the construction of bourgeois subjectivity in the age of the service economy takes place by means of the calibration of a certain self-disgust in relation to labour, and related and acute discomforts around the theatrical mediation of economic relations.”

Here, though, with higher ticket prices for the gallery meant to dissuade those unwilling to suit up and join in, and with a street-to-stage commitment to remaining in character, *Surrender* labored—and demanded our labor as boot camp delegates—for an auratic sense of the “truth” about war, even while acknowledging the impossibility of delivering such an experiential product.

In the conscious decision to dedicate such varying dramaturgical approaches to the problem of how to both immerse spectators in distributed, dissensual structures (that nevertheless remain highly controlled and authorial) and then to return them to a recognizable and set narrative via passive watching, *Surrender* raised tantalizing questions of productive failure. As I referred to the notion in the introduction, Sara Jane Bailes’s poetics of failure, involving deliberately amateur gestures and sub-virtuosic

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performance styles can be extended, in such a case as *Surrender*, to cover the implied contract between producer/performers and audiences. Fox and company’s deliberative playing with foreclosed expectations and the shortcomings built into the framework of the production concept rendered the contract to perform itself open ended and grounded in the ambiguity of the call to arms overlaid with a call to ideological assent. Like Jessica Del Vecchio, some found the call an antiwar call; one might say that it reveled in what it critiqued. Through generating disgust at the discomforting labor of participation and excitement at the thrill of engagement, *dissensus* among bodies performing together, but not in unison, was strikingly achieved.

One final quote from Bailes reveals the deeply artistic nature of what I am calling productive failure:

> If one discovers sense in [Beckett’s] words … then failure can be understood not simply as the evaluative judgment of an outcome—its “disappointment”—but rather as a constituent feature of the existential condition that makes expression possible even as it forecloses it. In other words, failure is intrinsically bound up with artistic production, and by extension, the figure of the artist.\(^{174}\)

By examining *Surrender*’s peculiar strategies of expression that simultaneously created and foreclosed meaning, I have shown that the split subjectivity of audience/performer defines the entirety of the production’s existential condition, the implied contract itself between co-authors onstage. The offering of an opportunity to go to war became a deeper one of examining the lure of affect in creating complicity and dangerous ideological assent.

The next chapter will take up the question of performative failure as it is directly related to a type of civic art performance that takes as its goal the establishment of newly imagined forms of citizenship alongside the kinds of new ideas about politically expressive poetics through which to express them that I have referenced to this point. There will be opportunity to return to some of the issues that informed my reading of *Surrender*, including the most influential recent writing on aesthetic participation by Claire Bishop and Shannon Jackson. In addition, we will find that Ridout’s analysis of the face-to-face encounter and its attendant embarrassment, seen as a kind of unmaking of the mystification of capitalist relations in performance, will also factor in to the variegated workings of performance failure and the establishment of new networks.
Chapter Three: *City Council Meeting* – Civic Participation by the Multitude

**Staying Within the Lines**

As I took part in early rehearsals for *City Council Meeting* in the spring of 2012, it became clear that participants were going to have their work cut out for them. Sitting at a dais, filling in for a missing actor playing a council member, I juggled a script on the table before me, while another actor sitting directly behind me frequently leaned forward to tell me what the scene was about and how to read my lines. It was a dynamic form of rehearsal that found us plunging ahead without knowing quite what we were doing. Moments before we were to speak, the instructions would come from the assistant behind us, and the goal was to interpret the message (“You don’t like her. She opposed your last initiative.”), then incorporate that correctly in the delivery. This was director Mallory Catlett’s way of guiding the show while allowing the performers some autonomy.

Flash forward several months. Midway through the Long Island City High school premiere of *City Council Meeting*, the performance seemed to be going off the rails. Twenty minutes into the performance, the designated city councilors were following the text, but they seemed to be destroying the production through off-key acting choices. I had followed the production to Tempe, at the Mitchell Center on the Arizona State campus, and to Houston, marking the progress of the scenario, having just been asked by Tom Sellar, the editor of *Theater* magazine, to document my response to the audience for Aaron Landsman’s new work of participatory democratic theatre. Focused on the communication between the onstage volunteers portraying the council members, I was becoming distracted by the frequent whispered suggestions the volunteers gave the performers as they sat directly behind them. These “working group” members, part of the
production staff, worked like kabuki set dressers or Wooster Group imitators, guiding and shaping the performers’ cues and line readings. But the volunteer playing the Mayor seemed to be lost in his own world, making bizarre line choices, taking unconscionable pauses, and generating idiosyncratic and awful decisions for his portrayal. It became difficult to watch.

I sneaked a glance at the director and writer cringing in the back of the auditorium. They seemed pained at what was transpiring onstage but could not, or would not, interrupt the action. To have done so would have been to assert control over a process that was designed to allow audiences to see the seams of the performance in a Brechtian style but to carry on and not correct performance choices that might differ from performance to performance. I both empathized with them and marveled at their self-control. They really were going to let the first act proceed exactly as it was going, unraveling almost completely and confusing the audience members who were watching nothing make sense onstage. It seemed a high price to pay for participation.

Many pertinent questions came to mind: Who was this performance for: those participating only or the passive audience as well? If the play didn’t cohere aesthetically, would anyone get the true experience of it? Could there even be said to exist a true experience of a work made anew by fresh audiences in each venue? Finally, the act ended, and the audience took a break. Surprisingly, the writer and director seemed pleased. The performance, in their eyes, had “survived” the botched performances and still conveyed something of what it was like to attend a city council meeting in a palpable transmission of both the important work and the occasional boredom of such assemblies. Ultimately, the performance quality didn’t matter; all that did matter was that a group of
amateurs had struggled through a difficult text and authored an experience of civic unity and participatory democracy. It was enough.\footnote{175}

In the previous chapter, I touched on the question of state citizenship and military service. The idea was traced through several moments of history, noting that the long tradition of such obligations can be imagined as a powerful background context for the present-day appeal of military gaming and simulations. Exercising the roles of citizenship and the function of theatre in defining that citizenship is germane to this chapter’s instance of participatory performance as well. As theatre historian David Wiles has demonstrated in a recent book on the subject, theatre and citizenship have been mutually defining and reinforcing partners since Athens, and similar questions resonate throughout history about the theatre’s role in creating subject-citizens.\footnote{176} The specific issue of whether theatrical practice appeals more to audiences as individuals or as a collective is a related concern, both historically determined and bound up with questions about the intentions of authors and producers. As several recent civic performance experiments have shown in New York City, the issue of citizenship as it is reflected, critiqued, and defined by theatre is one that remains current, perhaps more so now than at any time

\footnote{175} \textit{City Council Meeting} premiered at HERE Arts Center in February, 2012 before being performed in Houston on November 1–3, 2012, where it was cosponsored by the Mitchell Center for the Arts and Diverseworks. It then played in Tempe, AZ on February 16, 2013 at Arizona State University’s Gammage Center before returning to New York in 2013 to play at three select locations: Chelsea High School on May 9–11; La Guardia High School on May 16–17; and Museo del Barrio on May 22. Future tour dates are planned in San Francisco and abroad.  
since the radical theatre experiments of the 1960s and 1970s. This chapter focuses on one particular project that both achieved a paradoxical blueprint for participation and represented an ambitious ongoing creation of temporary imagined communities. I will describe the productions that I witnessed, and contextualize the production’s deployment of a partial inclusiveness that nevertheless retained artistic control in the hands of the primary creators while obscuring the line dividing performance from overt political organizing. Utilizing the theoretical armature of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri and others, I show that the production fashions an inviting partial performative failure in order to lead participants back into a world that awaits their full political participation.

City Council Meeting is a project initiated by Aaron Landsman, a writer and performer closely associated with the theatre company Elevator Repair Service. In 2008, he began a course of research into deliberative processes at the local civic level, visiting various American cities and attending council meetings. While investigating the grassroots-level politics of urban communities, Landsman began to envisage the possibility of presenting to an audience the conflicts and personalities he had witnessed firsthand. He was impressed by the surprisingly theatrical qualities of the meetings themselves and the (often inadvertently) humorous nature of these poorly attended but

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177 A partial list of relevant performances would include Lush Valley, produced by HERE and directed by Kristen Marting; How Much is Enough?, produced by The Foundry Theatre and directed by Melanie Joseph; as well as the visual artist Jeremy Deller’s It Is What It Is, featured at the New Museum for Contemporary Art. This traveling exhibition event engaged museumgoers in conversations about the Iraq War for over one month as part of a national tour to several American cities. Patrons were invited to sit within a furniture arrangement placed on a gallery floor, which also contained the hulking wreckage of a US Humvee destroyed in Fallujah and purchased by Deller, as a backdrop for conversations with journalists, professors, and politicians from both countries. See Jeremy Deller and Nato Thompson, It Is What It Is: Conversations About Iraq (New York: Creative Time Books, 2012).
frequently contentious meetings. Landsman began to conceive the idea of investigating
governance by turning a version of the proceedings into a performance.178

Landsman was joined, during the early development and fundraising stages, by
Mallory Catlett, an experienced freelance director and dramaturg working with many
New York City downtown theatre companies. Jim Findlay, another experienced artist
whose roots are in the alternative theatre scene in New York and a designer known for
innovative work with video and scenic technology, became the third and final member of
the central core of the production team. Initially, the idea of creating an immersive
performance was not a priority or a goal of their investigation. The choice to involve
audiences in the enactment of council meetings developed slowly during early rehearsal
meetings, according to Landsman.179 The initial fascination of such an approach was
derived from the inherent interest of seeing nonprofessionals, in terms of both their civic
and artistic backgrounds, perform aspects of the leadership of the city of which they
formed a part.

The resulting production used various immersive strategies, including most
prominently connections with local civic associations, amateur performers, and a text
divided into two very distinct parts. The first act, which was effectively “set” during
rehearsals in the manner of traditional theatrical performance in which the script is the
dominant and primary artistic gesture, portrayed a council meeting. The meeting’s text
was composed of edited segments of council meetings Landsman witnessed and collected
into a representative sampling of the proceedings. Frequently, video clips from meetings
he attended played on the large monitors, controlled by Findlay, sometimes overlapping

178 Interview with the author, Brooklyn, May 15, 2013.
179 Ibid.
neatly with the live action to striking effect. The edited first act eliminated much of the procedural specifics of council meetings, emphasizing the issue-related exchanges between councilors and audience members culled from various cities. The second part of the “text” was a unique performance score, locally conceived and developed, and distinctly tailored to each locale where City Council Meeting was performed. These performance-based second acts represented a different, more homespun and participatory mode of presentation. The resulting hybrid script, in a manner similar to the experience of Surrender, offered audiences an experience of varying levels of involvement, placing the idea of democratic participation in a range of frames that could be engaged both directly and from behind the fourth wall. Through this varying focal length, City Council Meeting struggled with issues of artistic autonomy and quality control that all participatory performances are heir to, as critic Claire Bishop has made clear.180 In particular, Bishop traces the historical rise and fall of artists’ preoccupation with participatory and immersive strategies as following closely the changeable fortunes of collectivist visions of society in general. Specifically, the aesthetic tension between equality of experience and artistic quality forms one of three lingering, omnipresent concerns with participatory performance, the others being the tension “between collective and individual authorship

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180 See, for example, Bishop’s essay “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” October 110 (Fall 2004): 51–79; and the introduction to Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship (Verso: London, 2012), where she writes that such work exploits the “tensions between quality and equality, singular and collective authorship, and the ongoing struggle to find artistic equivalents for political positions” (3). Further, she explains that one of the motivations for the book is her “profound ambivalence about the instrumentalization of participatory art as it has developed... in tandem with the dismantling of the welfare state” (5). Ideally, for Bishop, we need a new critical vocabulary to discuss participatory art and performance, one that retains associations of quality judgments outside of the overt sociological impulses behind such efforts beyond the false polarities of “active” versus “passive” spectatorship.
and the ongoing struggle to find artistic equivalents for political positions.” Bishop suggests, ultimately, that “artistic models of democracy have only a tenuous relationship to actual forms of democracy.” She writes, however, with limited knowledge of actual theatrical practice. In her response to Bishop’s skeptical articulations of participatory theory, Shannon Jackson takes issue with many of the theoretical assumptions driving Bishop’s arguments, ultimately concluding that “an instrumentalizing pull in ‘theatre for social change’ can compromise the more complex social antagonisms that exist within the theatrical aesthetic.” Jackson takes a more optimistic view than Bishop of the role of performance in modeling language and behavior that is politically defined, seeking to avoid choosing “between polarizing critical and artistic allegiances.” Rather than becoming critically boxed in by these binaries that Bishop espouses, Jackson seems to want to investigate critical positions that interrogate, as City Council Meeting does, the complex spectatorial position of interdependence with the art work, challenging autonomy and heteronomy, immersion and distance, or, to use Laclau and Mouffe’s notion, the limits of singular, fully given subjectivity. These issues are common to all the performances in this study as they are raised by Bishop and partially answered by Jackson. Jackson, for example, acknowledges Bishop’s warnings about state-sponsored art being instrumentalized by government funding to become mere palliatives for pressing social concerns, but notes that, with the relatively small amounts being spent on the arts in the United States, this problem is consequently minor in comparison to

181 Clair Bishop, Artificial Hells, 3.
182 Ibid., 5.
184 Ibid., 60.
European models. Further, she questions Bishop’s oppositional categorizations of artistic autonomy and social utility, asking, “By what logic are artistic autonomy and social intervention made ‘contradictory’ in the first place?”

The experience of the production can be framed initially through a brief examination of marketing strategies used to develop interest in the work. The marketing flyers, program, and the official production website and blog for Aaron Landsman’s City Council Meeting describe the event as “performed participatory democracy.” This promotional tagline carries within it both an accurate description of the nature of the event—it is a performance of democratic civic action of which one is invited to be a part—and, in addition, a hint about the politico-aesthetic orientation of the implied contract on offer therein. Because the democracy on display is being performed here, now, by us, the line seems to imply, then it follows that democracy can be performed. If it can be performed, it might follow that it can be imagined as a performance that can be realized jointly, in a shared setting, as a scene of participation, carried into the future. Furthermore, if democracy can be imagined and performed, in a theatrical setting among strangers, then we might extend this exercise of the imagination to declare democracy itself as something performative, a thing that we can imagine ourselves doing as an act of the imagination, together.

Democracy then becomes both the final result of the performance—the thing represented in performance—as well as the means of representing, the modus operandi of the performance mechanics and the nature of the association between participants. The

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185 Ibid., 49.
186 City Council Meeting website, accessed November 11, 2013, www.citycouncilmeeting.org; see also production flyer.
self-identity of the end and the means, the act and the creation, lends the performance of *City Council Meeting* an autopoetic quality. Autopoiesis is constitutive of many types of performance that proceed in a self-generative, self-replicating manner. Erika Fischer-Lichte writes of performance autopoesis as the spectator’s subjective experience of shuttling back and forth between awareness of the performance as fictional representation and immediate embodied materiality. Not only the performance, but each individual element—sets, props, words and sounds, images and bodies—contributes to this looping.\(^{187}\) The net result is a negation of the idea of the artist as an autonomous creative force in favor of agency granted to the spectators. As Marvin Carlson summarizes in his introduction to Fischer-Lichte’s *The Transformative Power of Performance*, “the ongoing interactions of performers and audiences . . . tie the living process of the theatrical event back to the fundamental processes of life itself demonstrating not only how performance operates within human society but why it is important, indeed essential.”\(^{188}\)

Within the self-consciousness of the dramaturgical structure of *City Council Meeting* resided numerous opportunities to make deliberate choices about how and whether to align one’s own actions with the presumed intent of the original authors of the work, re-aligning and reformulating one’s own assent as various issues and opportunities for cocreation occurred. The production thus proceeded according to a subtle “nesting” effect, as micromoments of performance, each involving a tacit invitation to agreement and joint action, gradually evolved into an ensemble of agreed-upon activities, the sum total of which comprised the evening’s unfolding.

\(^{188}\) Marvin Carlson, introduction to Ibid., 7–8.
City Council Meeting’s marketing taglines situate this fascinating experiment as something more than a mere theatre production. The call to participate in a moment of performed democracy came, over the course of my several viewings in various US cities, to resonate deeply for me in a time of increasingly energized debate about the possibility and promise of newly upscaled public involvement in the political processes that constitutes civic life in the United States. Not by chance, the production coincided with the theatrical season of 2011–12, when a significant number of established downtown theatre artists in New York and elsewhere were responding to the political ruptures of global democracy movements and crises by turning their attention to staging scenes of political group formation and cultural conversation and otherwise representing ordinary citizens responding to extraordinary political events.\textsuperscript{189} The invitation to imagine ourselves as an audience and undertake a task like a city council meeting (the prosaic version, with all its dullness), such that it could become the performance City Council Meeting, was as much of a journey for the audiences I witnessed as suiting up in uniform.

\textsuperscript{189} For example, the Foundry Theatre produced, in addition to How Much is Enough?, a follow-up conference called This is How We Do It at Cooper Union in New York, which featured artists, activists, and practitioners of various alternative community organizing structures. The conference, held in April 2012 following the closing of How Much is Enough? in November 2011, moved closer to the form of critical dialogue and community creation that, it appeared, Joseph was attempting to foster. The production was composed entirely of questions posed to the audience by three performers. This open engagement, built on a narrative structure that moved vaguely through the stages of a human lifetime, was notable both for the freedom granted audiences and for its modest, unassuming theatricality. The conference addressed topicality directly, through panels of invited guests, large invited audiences from the company’s extensive outreach history, a broadcast on the new Howlround blog television channel, and on the company’s website where the sessions are archived. See http://thefoundrytheatre.org/forums.html, accessed December 11, 2013. Howlround itself is a notable addition to participatory experimentation in contemporary performance and publishes email updates, live play readings, and performance and topical pieces on a multitude of aspects of contemporary theatre. See www.howlround.com.
for *Surrender* had been. This call to assume the mantle of civic participation had the effect of functioning as a kind of truth claim. Invited to bring civic deliberation to life among audiences for whom the acts (and the “acting out” as role players) of local governance were unknown, we submitted to the artists’ claim that it could, in fact, be realized. By doing it, we realized that we could do it, and, in the process, the taking on of the roles meant that the roles could, now and later, be taken up by us as genuine involvement. Through tentative acts of political surrogacy, one set of fictive councilors replacing others, we raised the specter of possible future such impersonations.\(^{190}\)

*City Council Meeting* raised an important question concerning the nature and depth of community as a concept that includes the artist’s role within it while developing a work of performance theatre within a particular geographical and social milieu. This challenging issue is one that has been among the most difficult problems for any artists based in communities, seeking to make work that is reflective of that community. The very question of how to define a community, and how it becomes redefined in the process of artistic investigation, has been widely written about and remained uppermost in Landsman, Findlay, and Catlett’s approaches during discussions and rehearsals.\(^{191}\) The

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\(^{191}\) Personal Interviews with the artists in Brooklyn, May 15 and November 19, 2013. See, among several works devoted to the intertwined topics of art, performance, and community organizing across groups not sharing simple unified identities, Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts: Community Based Performance in the United States* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Miwon Kwan, *One Place After Another* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004); and especially Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). For online
nature of the relationships expressed among the various contingents—creators, artists, groups, and sponsors—throughout the piece’s making, and what those relations might represent to the audience during the performance, how they might even affect their desire to perform and participate, was a complex question frequently asked during the long development period. Miranda Joseph, in her important study of community arts, Against the Romance of Community, takes a decidedly anti-communitarian, anti-essentialist view of such self-selecting groups, claiming they are never as simply constituted as they might wish to be seen. She notes that the assumption of fixed and stable identities among collectivities can frequently become “conservative, disciplining and exclusionary.”

Even liberal public spheres can remain marked by hierarchies and the particular interests of dominant groups. The difficulty of offering a voice to the excluded or marginalized was a present and vital issue for City Council Meeting, as reflected in my opening description of how performances varied qualitatively from city to city and audience to audience. Other issues concerned the nature of community performance itself, driving questions of style, veracity, and generosity among the various stakeholders. For Landsman and Catlett, this desire to cultivate and honor local differences sometimes ran counter to their wish to present a scripted, fluid yet fixed performance, and it resulted in a performance over which they would have had little artistic control. As became clear, once the invitation was made, there would be little centralized authority over the actual performative behavior of the audience, even with a scripted first act. This struggle—between presenting an artistic product and exploring decentralized artistic decision-


192 Joseph, Against the Romance of Community, xviii.
making—became one of the hallmarks of the entire process. In a sense, this welcome but unwieldy conflictual engagement replicated the thematic core of the production, which relied on both dispersed community commitments and strong centralized leadership, albeit intermittently, in order to frame a work that strove to “become” that which it was “about.”

The resulting work was a nuanced example of delegated performance: a “tabletop” form of theatre resembling other postmodern lecture-demonstration forms, notable for its affectless performance style. This neutralized, almost ironic performance mode in its many variants has long been a recognizable feature of postmodern performance first described thirty years ago by Michael Kirby as “non-matrixed performance.” This type of work is closely associated with The Wooster Group and the many companies who have been inspired by their work.\textsuperscript{193} It is also among the key performance tropes Sara Jane Bailes cites as earmarks of a kind of performance failure—a willed shortcoming in the onstage proceedings—that groups such as Goat Island (US), Forced Entertainment (UK), and Elevator Repair Service (US) frequently deploy as an anti-empathic acting strategy.\textsuperscript{194}

In \textit{City Council Meeting}, however, the flat acting was not a conscious aesthetic choice but rather a function of the outsourcing of performance labor to actual novices.

\textsuperscript{193} See Michael Kirby, \textit{A Formalist Theatre} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 10. Kirby refers to performance that is “non-semiotic” and not subsumed into narrative as non-matrixed performance; Elevator Repair Service (ERS) is among the companies once affectionately referred to as “Wooster babies” for their aesthetic derivation from The Wooster Group. These connections extend beyond dramaturgical and design choices to personnel; ERS artistic director John Collins was the Group’s sound designer for many years.

\textsuperscript{194} Goat Island disbanded in 2011, after more than twenty years of collaborative devising and performance. See Bailes, \textit{Performance Theatre and the Performance of Failure}.
This is an important difference from the deliberately amateurish acting noted by Bailes in the work of the companies, such as Elevator Repair Service, she describes. For Landsman, the lure of asking people to perform a democratically run civic meeting was his belief that “you can learn about the form of politics by enacting it.” Yet this form of participation should not be confused with well-established forms of theatre for education, theatre for community development, and in particular, the various political strategies developed by Augusto Boal and disseminated by the many teachers he trained and whose work throughout the world made him among the best-known practitioners and theorists of theatre for social change. Landsman is, in fact, careful to single out Boal’s work in social organizing through performance as the focus of what City Council Meeting is trying not to be and is in fact responding to in an oppositional strategy. He claims, “We wanted people not to have the catharsis of speaking truth to power, or to feel unburdened by having the feeling of being drained of energy—like Boal devotees,” who for Landsman are suspicious forms of political organizing, as “they drain political energy.”

Landsman, Catlett, and Findlay’s counter-Boalian strategy led to the decision to disallow participants to introduce personal stories and unscripted responses, along with the ever-present threat of the aesthetic hijacking of the performance. This was a difficult and not uncontroversial decision, particularly among New York City high school teenage

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195 Interview with the author, June 15, 2012.
197 Interview with the author, June 15, 2012.
performers and audiences. But the decision resonated effectively in the hybrid
dramaturgy of structurally fixed but affectively open structures and in the fluidity of the
authorial control, which audiences respected. Thus the production raised, but did not
resolve, the procedural, formal, and detailed elements of the performance score as
authored elements of the production. These choices, rather than other more theatrical,
satisfying elements of the process of democracy, such as dramatic narratives and interest
group clashes, led to other kinds of artistic decisions that affected the production. Among
the most important of these was the quality of the acting solicited by the company from
spectators as they undertook to portray city council members and their audiences. The
emphasis was intended to be placed on the transposition of roles rather than the
verisimilitude of the performances. Landsman explains, “If someone really tried to act,
we realized that it would derail the piece, because the piece is not supposed to be about
‘acting like a good mayor’; It’s like—what is it like to watch someone read someone
else’s words but from a different power position on stage.” These acting notes, created
by the core artistic team and communicated directly to their working groups, situated
*City Council Meeting* squarely within the recent tradition of affectless avant-garde
performance and continued Landsman’s own investigation into the role of the quotidian,
the commonplace, and the everyday in theatre. The script of his earlier *Open House*
(2008), meant to be performed by a pair of actors in an apartment passing as their own for
very small audiences, contains a note on performance style serving as a reminder to

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198 Ibid.
199 “Working groups” were permanent artistic teams that Landsman and Catlett selected
in each host city to be an anchor of each city’s process of creation. They also became the
onstage prompters for the audience members who volunteered to portray council
members.
prospective producers that clearly articulates this approach and how to generate it in
rehearsal. It might just as easily have appeared in the text of *City Council Meeting*, at
least the first act:

*Open House* accumulates dramatic tension through short quotidian scenes and a
purposefully offhand performance style. The piece moves fluidly between
theatricality to an intimate interaction with the audience. Moments may be either
significant or insignificant, but are certain to build in resonance over time.
At several points, Rick and Jane step out of their scenes to tell the story directly to
the audience. It's a way to make viewers understand that they are re-
telling their
relationship, rather than pretending to live it in the moment, for reasons that
become clear toward the end of the whole play. Small moments that seem
incidental are actually crucial turning points upon reflection or repetition. The
point is to create an almost overheard dynamic that lets us access characters’ lives
in a way that leaves room for us to imagine ourselves in those lives.200

As noted, the text was drawn from two sets of sources—council meeting
transcripts collected by Landsman and the collectively assembled fruits of the labor of
working groups in each host city. The meeting minutes assembled into *City Council
Meeting’s* Act I became, over the course of three years’ development, settled into a
performance text that remained consistent in each city—Houston, Tempe, and New
York—through early 2013. The text includes instructions for working with the audience
as well as notes for the key participants of the panel whose job was to shepherd and
advise audience members portraying councilors. Like “visible” classical Japanese stage
assistants interpreted loosely through Wooster Group–inspired manipulations, the panel
staff rehearsed the production prior to the performances, unlike members of each night’s
audience. They functioned as director Catlett’s surrogates on stage, ensuring some
consistency in the narrative if not the actual performances, which, predictably, varied
widely. Frequently, in fact, the local working groups employed by *City Council Meeting

appeared to be performing in the style Bailes describes, while the audience volunteers remained amateurish, resulting in a dissonant note or two. But this was not a directed performance in any conventional sense; it was, rather, a representation of a call for participation in a civic experiment. Thus, the disparity in performance style was subsumed within the overarching frame of the production as both delegated and deskillled. This was, in effect, the point of the work: to create a network of individuals connected by geographical location that had been heretofore disconnected, or connected only marginally, from the mechanisms of power that made up the political life of their city. The event would be composed of their decisions to take a turn at leading, lobbying, responding to, or watching one another perform legislative roles. In other words, they rehearsed the experience of governing their local community.

City Council Meeting’s trio of primary artists enjoyed a favorably long gestation period in the several cities where it was developed. This long, relatively well-funded creative lead time was the result of unusually strong and well-cultivated institutional partnerships negotiated by Landsman. Beginning in 2009, Landsman toured destination cities with the dual intention of witnessing the workings of local politics while seeking out potential arts organizations and neighborhood civic stakeholders interested in sharing the financial and administrative burdens with New York producing partner HERE Arts Center and himself. HERE had provided City Council Meeting with the initial three-year

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201 On the important question of deskilling in both industrial labor and artistic labor, and their relationship in late capital, see John Roberts, The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade (New York: Verso, 2007). Roberts develops a labor theory of culture, noting that the seeming deskilling in participatory and other forms of avant-garde art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has allowed a rise in the legitimacy of the strategic positioning of such work as representative of a progressive political agenda, a conclusion which Claire Bishop cites and questions in Artificial Hells.
residency for its development stages as part of its important HERE Artist’s Residency Program (HARP) from 2010 to 2012.\(^2\) The pairing with HERE in 2010 was fortuitous in several important respects. HARP residencies are designed to attract increased institutional funding for productions that are curated in a highly selective manner and reflect the HERE “brand”: postdramatic works that rely on imaginative use of video, progressive politics, and intensely collaborative dramaturgy. Further, HERE’s longtime leader, artistic director Kristin Marting, was herself working on *Lush Valley*, a long-term collaboration with a strong focus on defining aspects of citizenship in an investigative, process-based fashion. The HARP residency lent *City Council Meeting* a stable institutional development platform and consolidated the producing company’s status as a supporter of cutting edge interdisciplinary work marked by social engagement. It also elevated HERE’s aspiration to national importance and parity with other hosting and producing organizations such as the Walker Arts Center (Minneapolis, MN), the Wexworth Center (Columbus, OH), On the Boards (Seattle, WA), and other university-based and/or mid-sized presenting organizations.

\(^2\) HERE has organized some kind of residency for artists working in intermedial forms since its founding as a conjunction of two earlier NYC producing entities: the Home for Contemporary Arts and the Tiny Mythic Theatre. HERE’s founder, Kristin Marting, currently serves as Producing Artistic Director, having recently engaged Kim Whitener, another downtown producer whose wide experience includes having worked with the Wooster Group as Managing Director and with the Builder’s Association as a board member. Together, Marting and Whitener curate the annual HERE Artist-in-Residence Program (HARP) competition. HARP residencies generally last three years and involve a team of applying artists often, but not always, led by a director/writer team. HARP is funded by HERE’s diverse network of institutional and government supporters, and is unusual as a model of project development. It includes fundraising assistance, rehearsal space, access to a large supply of video production materials, and, frequently, a run at HERE’s SoHo theatre spaces or, as in the case of *City Council Meeting*, at a high school across the street.
In order to draw a self-selecting group of audiences interested in a long-term investigation into the creation of a participatory civic artistic project, Landsman and Catlett made early overtures to local partners that would be representative of contrasting voices on a city council. Establishing deep roots in various locales and credibility with the populace from which the artistic teams and audiences would be drawn was critical, and from the earliest stages of development Landsman and his team pursued collaborators. As they discovered, the relative success of each presentation came to be defined more coherently by the nature of these relationships and how they affected performances than by reviews, audience size, income generated, or other typical benchmarks of theatrical success.

With their local producing partners in Houston, *City Council Meeting* performed in three very different locales: a working courthouse; a small, recently refurbished black box space near downtown (co-produced with DiverseWorks); and a historically African-American recreation hall above a restaurant near the famous Project Row Houses, another Houston partner. Each locale represented a unique development process that the lead artists—writer Landsman and director Catlett—formed individually in the years leading up to the earliest public showings at the HERE Culturemart festival in January, 2011, and in Boston in 2012 before finally reopening in Houston in the fall of 2012. For the primary collaborators, the long lead-up to production time, involving numerous conversations, planning meetings, residencies, and workshops, had been critical to their idea of a successful outcome for *City Council Meeting*. As both described their ideal reception for such a participatory civic experiment, the sheer fact of getting various parties to agree to work in unison on a representative example of deliberative democracy
in action was as crucial as, or even more critical than, an evening’s pleasurable
entertainment. This aspect of City Council Meeting’s reception and horizon of artist
expectations raises, naturally enough, several salient issues regarding the performance
ethics, politics, participatory intent, and framing of the production.

My own participation in the production led me first to Houston. The opening
was at the Palm Center, where the second floor courtroom was the setting for the first
performance of City Council Meeting. The Mitchell Center at University of Houston had
engaged Landsman as an artist-in-residence, offering the production both the imprimatur
of a major university arts affiliation as well as reach into the greater Houston community.
The production team was able to make use of this institutional leverage by forming
subsequent partnerships with a local multicultural theatre group, DiverseWorks, and with
the well-known artistic land reclamation and development effort, Project Row Houses, a
Houston landmark and an important nonprofit organization with whom executive director
Karen Ferber and the Mitchell Center cosponsored the week-long run of performances.
Project Row Houses, in Houston’s Northern Third Ward, is a community of small
dwellings that were on the verge of being destroyed when the newly formed project
began buying a few of the properties, supporting artist residencies, then creating
programs to support single mothers, then buying more houses, and finally building a
nonprofit organization. In the words of Creative Time chief curator Nato Thompson, who
asks why a nonprofit could not be thought of as a social art work like any other
production, “Many artists and art collectives use a broad range of bureaucratic and

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203 I was able to travel to Houston and Arizona courtesy of the American Research Travel
Grant funded by the Graduate Center, CUNY Theatre Program. My host in Houston was
the University of Houston Mitchell Center for the Arts Executive Director, Karen Ferber,
who generously provided housing and transportation.
administrative skills that typically lie in the domain of larger institutions, such as marketing, fundraising, grant writing, real estate development, investing in startups, city planning and educational programming. It would be difficult to conceive of the project’s eventual reach and depth without the key initial approval of the Mitchell Center and the connection with the Project Row Houses. This points to the inestimable importance of skilled managerial and administrative experience and expertise in the realization of such a project. It was evident throughout the life of the development of City Council Meeting that the artists would directly engage the tenuous intersection between performance aesthetics and the ethical basis of their contract with audiences, supporting both through a commitment to long-term presence in the host communities and the priority given to the goal of leaving behind some lasting echo of the work undertaken. These traces and documentation took varied forms, some extremely surprising.

In contextualizing the cultural setting for this production, utilizing the theory of networks and participation upon which the audience contract for City Council Meeting

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204 Nato Thompson, Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991–2011 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 27. Thompson has been at the forefront of Creative Time’s support of participatory installation and has curated widely, including the notorious show, “The Interventionists,” at MassMoca in 2006. That show included Free Range Grain, the infamous work by Critical Art Ensemble which was confiscated—along with research materials for two other performance installations—by the Joint Terrorism Task Force, the US government agency which raided the house of CAE member Steve Kurtz, arresting him on trumped-up charges following the mysterious death of his wife, Hope, also a CAE founder and editor of their many book projects. See Critical Art Ensemble: Disturbances (London: Four Corners Books, 2012), 14.

205 This point is made exhaustively in Claire Bishop’s Artificial Hells, and is itself the subject of a recent John Baldessari piece reviewed by Theron Schmidt “Troublesome Professionals: On the Speculative Reality of Theatrical Labour.” Performance Research 18 (2013: 15-26.
rests, I confront again the question of performative failure which the production uses in developing its audience as a deliberative body. This concept of “failure,” the quotation marks indicating not an insufficiency but rather a deliberate strategy of indicating possibilities beyond the limitations of the performance itself, is a complex one for the group of artists who created the production. Specifically, the dramaturgical choice to involve participants, but not to allow them to use their own words and responses to the issues raised, set *City Council Meeting* distinctly apart from other contemporary productions in the off-off-Broadway scene in New York that also treated issues of citizenship and local political deliberation. This important gesture, including schema of representation within the production and not merely acts of self-representation, allowed a fictional reality to be maintained, at least throughout the first, generally more participatory, act. Fictional portrayal of council members, meeting audiences, etc., combined with the opportunity for ideological difference, debate, and decisions to be made, rendered the contract and its impossibility of fulfillment to be highly generative for audiences.

After witnessing the production and its reception in several distinct locales, I came to understand that *City Council Meeting* enacts imagined potential subjectivities among audiences inhabiting a temporary participatory community. Taking direction from members of the local working group, the creative team’s local partners, each of whom was assigned one or more volunteers, the council meeting played something like a rehearsal from the third week of a rehearsal process, with familiarity but without memorization. The performances featured overly broad, reductive acting choices, improvisations that led nowhere, and many dropped lines. The rough edges of the
reenactment allowed a touch of the everyday to be joined with a sense of future possibility as an embodied aspiration, much like the political performatives described by Judith Butler, Gayatri Spivak, and Athena Athanasiou in their recent work. Butler and Athanasiou use the term “the political promise of the performative” to describe such recent historical social actions as the singing of the US national anthem in Spanish by Southern Californian documented and undocumented immigrants or the staged marches of Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires. For these key authors, such performatives resist the violent dispossession of memories, rights, and even the ownership of one’s body by the instrumentalizing forces of neoliberal capital markets and the police and military regimes that support them. Such performatives, by representing potent counter-histories and claims to spaces and politics, deploy the bodies that enact such resistant practices, to provide an important model for other theatrical actions that seek to embody specific ideological politics of resistance. City Council Meeting, too, enacted a form of resistance, a radical assumption of horizontal, democratic participation in actual legislation, instead of the mere witnessing of such actions.

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207 Butler and Atahansiou, *Dispossession*, 140.

In Houston, the production weekend opened on a busy Thursday, with a performance at the University of Houston’s Mitchell Center. The courthouse was crowded by early voters for the coming November election, and the parking lot, corridors, and foyer were full of Houston citizens heading to the polls. Most seemed surprised that a theatre performance was happening on the premises. There was no evidence of promotional signage or the typical trappings of community theatre: crowd, creature comforts, or hospitality, like preshow food or drinks and other concessions to audience ease. The only indications of the performance were scattered hand-drawn pages directing audiences to the courtroom at the end of the building. The architectural configuration and flows of foot traffic were convoluted: the end of the work day for city workers, arrival and check-in for City Council Meeting attendees, and lines for voting merged, overlapped, assembled, and disassembled variously, mitigating any sense of pre-performance anticipation. It was a canny, although perhaps unwitting, setting for the merger of the performance of politics and the performance of political theatre.

The long, mahogany, pew-like benches filled quickly at the City Hall with an enthusiastically buzzing arts crowd, predominantly white, apparently middle and upper middle class, and dressed for an opening night. In comparison with the audiences that I would join later in the weekend at DiverseWorks’ theatre space in downtown Houston and at Project Row Houses, this first night’s audience was notable for the ease with which they anticipated the start of this experimental, site-specific theatre performance.

Most, with the exception of the elderly judge in whose actual courtroom we were sitting, appeared both enthusiastic and fairly aware of what was about to happen. It was an “insider” crowd. Many appeared to know one or more of the artists, and several told me they had come from out of state to see the performance as official representatives of the funders, producers, and civic entities with whom *City Council Meeting* was partnered. The subsequent audiences downtown and at Project Row Houses more directly represented the neighborhoods and communities that took part in the creation of their own local versions of *City Council Meeting*. There were more families, and more persons of color, and there was a palpably different investment in the event, more revealing in its reflection of local interests with less emphasis on the production solely as entertainment.

While a few friends of the artists and members of the Mitchell Center milled about in expectation of their own participation, Catlett and Landsman studied the patterns from the corners of the foyer as though wondering how and when the local volunteers would direct the ticketholders to coalesce into an organized, interactive assemblage. It was clear that, even at this preshow stage, the artists were making a concerted attempt to discover a balance between guiding the audience and allowing them to find their own way through the experience. This watchful hesitation on the part of the two main artists (the third, designer Jim Findlay, was inside the courtroom setting up the live video capture) became a regular part of each night’s performance—a kind of controlled experiment in *laissez faire* crowd augury. Even the decision of how to begin *City Council Meeting* appeared less dependent on the designated start time than on the arrival of a tacit signal that a certain quality of focus had arrived, distributed among the spectators, indicating the right moment for the commencement of the performance. (I came to
understand this was another essential aspect of the dramaturgy, and the delay was repeated in other, subsequent performances elsewhere.) On this particular evening, November 1, 2012, there had been a procedural difficulty; the video mixing board used for transitioning between prerecorded and live video had gone missing and was presumed to be stolen. The issue was resolved when a real, local bailiff, who appeared in the performance, informed the team that it had been removed and stored in a utility closet; it was safely delivered to the stage.

It was noteworthy that the audiences associated with each of the three Houston co-producers maintained distinct and slightly different investments in City Council Meeting, and this differentiation is reflected in how the production has been archived on their respective websites. For the Mitchell Center, the production page emphasized Landsman and company’s residency at the University of Houston and the Mitchell Center’s innovative programming for such artistic support.\(^{210}\) By contrast, sites for DiverseWorks and City Council Meeting ask the question that they interpreted the production was asking of the community: “This is the city we make together by performing it. Who are you in it? Who represents you? City Council Meeting is a participatory theater event about empathy, democracy and power. . . . City Council Meeting reveals the city we make each night by performing it.”\(^{211}\) For Catlett and Landsman, each and all of these different promotional spins captured a necessary aspect of the production’s lifespan and nature. Their attentiveness to audience dynamics,


engaged but deployed lightly, became a hallmark of all the future performances I attended over the coming months. As though trying to decipher for themselves their proper relation to a participating audience while in the role of nominal authors of the performance, Landsman and Catlett seemed to find themselves shuttling between various levels of direct and indirect manipulation of and responsiveness to the unfolding events swirling around them each evening. Often, as they huddled whispering in a corner, they appeared to have less control over the event than anyone else in the room. Having made possible the event through their work with institutions—funders, presenters, community organizations, schools, churches—they remained acutely aware of their responsibility as artists to deliver a certain kind of experience. Yet as artists wishing to submerge their authorial function into the choices made by a larger grouping of individuals, and through a determined need to allow the event to unfold in response to different locales and audiences, they had to delegate much of the control typical of the author-director team to that particular performance’s attending amateurs and subjects. City Council Meeting’s unique form of “productive failure” stems, in part, from the striking juxtaposition of the artists’ skillful finesse with using the network of partnering institutions, funders, sponsors, and venues on the one hand and their courageous relinquishing of control over the time and “feel” of the performance and the volunteer performers themselves. The first circumstance, the deskilled labor of project management, is a key element of delegated or outsourced performance and has been analyzed widely, by Miwon Kwon, Claire Bishop, Shannon Jackson, Rebecca Schneider, and Theron Schmidt, among others.  

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management of individuals such as that undertaken by Landsman and Catlett embodies a form of labor that directly addresses changing modes of production and consumption under neoliberal capitalism. But the second element, the lightly held control implicit in a performance script like Landsman’s, as well as in Catlett’s realization, suggests a deeper exploration of the nature of “performed participatory democracy,” as City Council Meeting’s promotional materials named it, as well as the larger themes of delegated performance, authorship, participatory aesthetics, and civic engagement.

The performance began with an audience orientation video. In early workshops, it had become clear that some audience orientation was necessary to bridge the level of unfamiliarity most people brought to the experimental structure of the participation sought by Landsman. The video presents James Hannaham, a young African American man welcoming the audience and beginning a lecture with a Platonic parable from the Laws, in which the philosopher delineates the qualities of natural or assumed superiority necessary for the good ruler. In addition to the expected qualities deemed suitable for rule—age, wisdom, property ownership, and the like—Plato adduces the remarkable “quality of no qualities” represented by the drawing of lots. It is this groundless, random designation of authority without natural cause that underlies the concept of democracy, a

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*Performance Research* 18, no. 2 (2013): 15–26. Schmidt describes John Baldessari’s *11 Rooms* installation at the 2022 International Festival, which was composed entirely of documents mounted on the gallery walls, all of which related to an unrealized project in which Baldessari was planning to display a human corpse. Schmidt notes that in this piece, “the project manager—flexible, task-based, always working—exemplifies the post-Fordist or neoliberal worker. This image of the mobile, precarious worker is a hallmark of contemporary capitalism, and the networked society.” On the flexible worker and networks and neoliberal capitalism see Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Networked Society* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 1–3.
political system that, in the narrator’s words, “only a god could save.” This sense of leaderless rule is reiterated in relation to the performance itself, and the video acknowledges publicly that there will be mistakes, hesitations, and some disorder that the presence of the working group assistants will only partially ameliorate. The video continues with an explanation of the ways in which audience members can choose among several levels of participatory roles: city councilor, testimony presenter, supporter, or bystander. Over panned shots of renderings of council meetings, a female narrator (Maggie Hoffman, of the downtown New York ensemble Radiohole) describes the function of each role in a bemusedly enthusiastic, gently ironic tone.

Hoffman’s rendering of the instructions serves several purposes, the most evident one being a simple clarification of the avenues for participation available, following Hannaham’s philosophical entrée to the concept. Yet something more ambiguous and critical is at work in her reading of imagined questions and answers from onlookers. She describes the quotidian functions of “supporters” within the performance: “respond to simple instructions—stand up, applaud, answer your phone, or get up and leave the room for awhile, the kind of activities that take place at any local government meeting.” The representational frame is referenced, reminding viewers that there is a generalized code of behavior that they are invited to both observe and recognize as typical of civic proceedings. This behavioral interpellation serves several overlapping purposes. It shapes a performance undertaken by nonprofessionals through citation of familiar, recognizable behaviors. It also playfully mocks the seriousness of the proceedings, allowing humor into the performance where it is deemed appropriate by volunteers, creating a shared

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213 Aaron Landsman, *City Council Meeting*, unpublished manuscript, 1.
214 Ibid.
blueprint for performance style. Notably, this evolving style is based on whatever
references were shared by audience members; it is not a product of rehearsal, or a
director/performer relationship. This is critical to the realization of the contracted score,
what Richard Schechner refers to as “ritual by contract,”\(^{215}\) and is encouraging for those
dubious about joining a performance. Finally, the orientation enables perceptive
spectators to witness *City Council Meeting* as both “not real and not-not real,” to retrieve
Schechner’s formulation once again, and as “twice-behaved behavior.”\(^{216}\) The shared
immersion in the ethos of the performance, through watching the video together, becomes
a way of investing the moment with dignity while simultaneously inaugurating a
commentary on the absurdity of the ritual manners through which we create our city as
citizens together. The perceptual oscillation, to use Erika Fischer-Lichte’s term,\(^{217}\) shifts
the referentiality between commentary and laughter and it constitutes a real-time iteration
of the very activity itself in the here and now.

The crux of the engagement strategy is saved for the end of the orientation
voiceover. Audiences are encouraged to maintain conversations throughout the
performance via the social media platform Twitter using hashtag #citycouncilmtg, and
several people at this performance took out their phones at this stage in order to do just
that. Then Hoffman’s text, after acknowledging that everyone in the audience is equally
unsure of how to proceed, declares pointedly,

> Some people get to *City Council Meeting* and go, “Wait a minute, I
> thought I’d get to speak my mind. I thought I’d be engaging in dialogue.”

\(^{215}\) “Rehearsals function to build a score, and this score is a ‘ritual by contract’: fixed
behavior that everyone participating agrees to do.” Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre

\(^{216}\) Ibid.

She provides the answer to the hypothetical query, “Well, you do get to engage in dialogue, but it’s a dialogue that has already happened, among other people, somewhere else. You’re just filling their shoes for a little while. Why? Because we think it’s more interesting for you to put your mouth around other people’s words than to speak your own minds. You might feel like “Hey didn’t you just say that I was in charge?” The fact is you are in charge. You’re deciding at every minute how to participate. That’s a kind of power, isn’t it?218

What is this power referred to here? Is it the power to participate, to answer the call of the contract to cocreate? It seems that this power is being granted at the cost of denying individual voice to the participants, but the stakes of this loss are surprising. The loss is one that allows a focus on the material, embodied form of politics without the distraction of discussion of the ends of actual political involvement and the myriad complexities of actual issues. In a sense, those ends are provided for us, with an attentive ear for the creator’s choice audience. The range of issues—via video clips from meetings in Bismarck, ND, Houston, TX, and Oakland, CA—are all framed such that they would engage the attention of the politically aware, progressive, or even moderately leftist viewer. For a community whose political commitment has, for the majority, been limited in the past decade to forms of online, disembodied, or digitally networked participation only, this form of performance represents a restoration of the key aspect of organizing lost in the digital realm: sheer physical presence and the symbolic stage gestures characteristic of deliberative legislation. The network is thus joined to the public space and the realms of the actual and material.

Hoffman’s gently taunting introduction achieves a reinforcement of the idea that performance, not politics, is the ontological ground of the proceedings, in addition to a bit of theatrical sleight-of-hand: “this work which we just said is being made by you was

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218 Aaron Landsman, *City Council Meeting*, 1.
really made by us, initially.” It is mimesis, the representation of roles, rather than the actual shared distribution of power being offered as the terms of the contract. The interpretation and physical circumstances and relationships, i.e., those aspects that make it performative in the first place (and mediatized) remain open to individual choice.\footnote{The video score features closed-circuit image capture of many of the performers, including their opening speeches as well as extensive archival video footage of most of the council meetings Landsman attended and which are being excerpted. We also witness thematic interpolations: text fragments, sound effects, humorous and wry, providing a fictitious, destabilizing audience perspective. This perspective could be characterized as an extension of the affectless acting style that summons a downtown hipness, an ironic distanciation from the earnestness of the political deliberation going on. This use of video “signals” are perhaps a remainder from the project’s early conceptualization as an ordinary theatrical presentation with a passive audience, and not the resulting participatory investigation genuinely interested in staging dissensus and local concerns.}

Thus, City Council Meeting addresses one of Claire Bishop’s main challenges to participatory political work, addressing “tensions between quality and equality, singular and collective authorship, and the ongoing struggle to find artistic equivalents for political positions.”\footnote{Bishop, Artificial Hells, 3.} Options for participation were various and were distributed during a brief hiatus following the video. Councilors ran the meeting and received direction. Speakers represented specific viewpoints on local issues and were given text to present at the meeting. Supporters were given no text but rather simple instructions. These instructions consisted of actions such as to rise in solidarity when the speaker of their interest group rose to address the dais, or to perform actions such as answering a cell phone at a certain time while saying, “I’m in a meeting. Hang on.” (This action was followed by a conspicuous rising and moving to the back of the room to continue the presumably imaginary conversation.) Thus, incidental interruptions and disorder were built into the performance throughout the first act. The final group, bystanders, were only
allowed to watch. Working group members assisted the audience in assuming their chosen roles, escorted the council members to the dais, and guided the bystanders and supporters to their seats to resume the performance.

The orientation video\textsuperscript{221} served as a kind of aesthetic apologia for elements of the production that moved along parallel tracks of improvisational freedom, while not allowing the proceedings to spin out of control. The expectation of strict verisimilitude, or actual immediacy, was mitigated, and the originating creators asserted the primacy of the textual score. This would not be, for example, the long-form improvisation or open-ended issue-based dialogue like the “constructed situation” installations of Tino Seghal or Jeremy Deller.\textsuperscript{222} The text has been shaped and rendered as a creative gesture, and the interpretation has been suggested by reference to viewer associations with preexisting codes of public comportment (“get up and leave the room for awhile”). Yet, a performance remains to be negotiated with no one in charge of its precise contours, interpretation of dramatic tensions, or its ultimate thematic emphasis.

The video finished, bystanders are asked to leave the room, and instructions, printed on notepaper, are given to those choosing to portray council members or those presenting testimonials. Here, the intervention of members of the local workshop team,

\textsuperscript{221} In the Tempe production, the orientation video was performed by two actual council members, Onnie Shekersian and Corey Woods, and in Houston, council member Steve Costello was both a performer, as himself, and a performed role in the proceedings. \textsuperscript{222} The term is from Guy Debord’s 1957 manifesto, “Report on the Construction of Situations,” available in \textit{Situationist International Anthology}, ed. Ken Knabb (New York: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2007), 25–46. Deller’s \textit{It Is What It Is} was a month-long public conversation among journalists, Iraq war veterans, and nonprofit leaders and patrons at the Museum of Contemporary Art on Bowery Street in SoHo. Seghal’s work has been seen widely in New York galleries and museums.
chosen by Catlett and rehearsed for several periods of a few weeks at a time for up to two years prior to the performance, becomes critical. Another key strategy arrived at by the creative team to investigate the control/freedom balance within *City Council Meeting* was the deployment of working group members to take responsibility for live, onstage coaching of the councilors, in addition to their functions as support staff for the production generally. The live coaching, performed in the context of the meeting itself, developed into a means of controlling the performance through their roles as live intermediaries between the creative team and those completely unfamiliar with the terms of the performance. The results varied across audiences, but it can be claimed that some form of normative, if not definitive, performance was achieved consistently in a manner attributable to their role and labor as delegated authors or authors’ representatives.

The production video design, spare and unobtrusive, played a key role in integrating live participants with the score of the piece. Designer Findlay combined video clips from actual city council meetings with selected close-ups of live participants from the audience and occasional ironic, playful textual comments directed at the audience observing other audience members enact roles. Little of the video could be said to contribute ideological positions or even provide the kind of “masks” or personae that might contribute a perspective on the nature of the theatrical representation being undertaken. In this sense, the video was unlike the kind of design used by the Wooster Group, Builder’s Association, Radiohole, or that of their many imitators. It was not deconstructive in the sense discussed by Greg Giesekam in *Staging the Screen*, in which underlying meanings are proposed and enacted by the collision of the screen and

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the stage. Rather, the use of video in *City Council Meeting* functioned as a kind of meta-commentary on one of the production’s themes, namely, the double outsourcing of labor involved in audience participation, and the democratic participation of citizens as local legislators. It also, by depicting “actual” council meetings, and foregrounding their dramaturgical elements, provided a kind of standard against which to measure the performances being enacted in the present by the audience and volunteers.

We can distinguish two kinds of immaterial labor referenced in the video design whose messages communicated the tonal variations of the performance’s reception, providing clues to the way in which the social network was revealed during the performance. The labor can be distinguished between the professionalism of the paid staffers and the unpaid volunteers, who paid a nominal fee to see the performance. As mentioned above, audiences were invited to role-play without the benefit of a typical rehearsal process, which for a theatrical production might have lasted from three weeks to many months. Without the benefit of a director’s explicit instruction, or the rehearsal context for collaborative discovery, spectator-performers were left to their own design, revealing their own choices about how a councilor or representative might behave in a given circumstance. Through a Brechtian sense of defamiliarization, audiences watched themselves and one another try on the mantle of different tasks, sometimes privileging the narrative, sometimes the momentary pleasure of the role. There was neither consistency within characterization nor within scene, except on rare occasion. The working group members, who whispered adjustments to volunteers and managed the stage, maintained the tonal appropriateness of performers’ professionalism. Thus, the

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224 Ticket prices never exceeded ten dollars in any venue.
immaterial labor of the professional was distinguished from that of the amateur, with the amateur—unpaid, deskilled—revealing the promise of what City Council Meeting offered, namely, the very performative possibility of amateurs transforming themselves into political participants, even if “only” in performance. To reference Fischer-Lichte’s “oscillation” again, the hybrid focus on the body’s referential potential and simultaneous embodiment of meaning here took on remarkable and dramatic possibilities. The range of behaviors chosen in this “cold-reading” context, predictably, varied widely from night to night, and from individual to individual within a given evening, often creating a cacophony of uncoordinated performance styles—a kind of director’s nightmare in a typical performance. Here, however, the effect of such variations, while distracting by ordinary aesthetic valuations, proved a highly revealing method of communicating distinct attitudes toward the process of imagining oneself proactively into a political role. For bystanders, strikingly effective moments—when, for example, participants rose to the challenges of performing Mayor Warford of Bismarck addressing youth participants of a summer Urban Leadership Council, or the role of activist youth Taliq Pryor complaining to the mayor about the state of the city’s east side schools struggling under fiscal cuts (a previous exchange had congratulated staffers for balancing the city’s budget)—alternated with others in which the rigors of a convincing performance went unrealized. Nevertheless, what was offered to all was the witnessing of transformations, of volunteers becoming political players, central to the issues germane to city governance, and the quality of life in the neighborhoods shared by all.

With those who wished to remain less involved outside the performance space, the production experienced a brief hiatus, allowing for a hands-on, face-to-face
orientation of the councilors and interest group members to receive their text for speaking which had been prepared for them. A general sense of the show’s order of events was thus offered to selected participants out of the earshot of those who had volunteered to remain bystanders. Thus, while all entered unprepared, those with speaking roles and featured supporting functions were pulled into definitive, if rather hurried, insider roles complicit with the primary artists. One result of this, as noted by some audience members and working group members, was that only those who took on speaking roles within the work, a small percentage of the audience, had the full experience of what *City Council Meeting*’s co-creators intended.

Councilors were seated at a front dais table equipped with microphones and flanked by large video monitors, which often showed the feed from cameras pointed at the speaker’s lectern. Members of the working group took seats behind the councilors while others prepared the space and circulated through the room for audience interaction such as passing out paper and pencils and fragments of paper with instructions printed on them. From this vantage, they acted as advisors to the performers, whispering instructions and even motivations for lines from upcoming scenes.

The trajectory of the scripted first act moved from idealized statements of principles about the relationship between local governance and the citizens it serves, through to a variety of crises and civic dilemmas. The councilors introduced themselves to the now-settled audience via an oddly ritualized format of performing alongside prerecorded statements shown on the monitors. These had been recorded during the hiatus and were simulcast while they took turns performing head nods, smiles, hand waves and other personalized tropes of public officialdom to their own amusement and to
that of many in the audience. The sequence gently undermined the hazy line
distinguishing the performance simulacrum and the artists’ use of transcripts from the
recent past by referencing the peculiarity of the transition from ordinary citizen to
citizen’s representative. The formal informality of the tics and gestures that signaled
“politics” became detached from their owners and distributed among the performers,
creating a repertoire of images that defined the entry into a period of public discourse. In
a manner akin to what Rebecca Schneider discusses in a variety of performance contexts,
from Civil War reenactments to The Wooster Group’s recent performance simulacra, City
Council Meeting reused the past—the very recent past—to materially interact with the
present via embodied inhabitation. Schneider notes that, while performers cite the past as
theatre’s primary currency, they also, through their own additions and subtractions, make
the present past a matter of citation, by calling attention to the act of citation in
performance itself. In City Council Meeting the performers, depersonalized by the shared
gestural patterns, signified the exchangeability, the democratic sharing, at the center of
the presentation of roles. In the larger sense, and throughout the performance, this
network of sharing the fictitious space of a meeting with actual, named characters
speaking actual previously spoken words, and in some cases with actual, present
personages being impersonated, the fluidity of entering the political realm was made
manifest.225 The production’s key feature of staging the relationships and institutions
cultivated by the artists provided a mirror of the kind of democratic interchangeability of
voices and identities that was one stated goal of the work itself. In addition to a generous
opening out to future audiences, it enacted what it proposed.

225 See Schneider, Performing Remains, chapter 2.
The first act’s initial section, titled “Bismarck” after the North Dakota city in which it took place, concerned the retirement of a council member and her replacement with the honorary exchanges evidencing the familiarity of local politics within the transmission of authority. This was followed by a section detailing the odd minutiae of council proceedings, the *longeurs* of city planning and budgeting, frankly referencing the boredom of much of the proceedings via gently mocking text on the video screens. The represented boredom merged with the act as written, the performers hardly being able to escape it completely, by design of the author. Another moment of puzzled, almost embarrassed bonding with the audience was the result, again referencing the world of the real and the world of the frame of the meeting. The monitors showed a request for all those seated to move to the back of the room, leaving only a self-selected three performers to represent the actual audience in attendance at the Bismarck City Council Meeting. Landsman implicitly compared the size of his own audience in attendance at this performance to that of the meeting he attended. The moment was not lost on us; the simulacrum of civic involvement generating more interest than the meeting it referenced perhaps suggested a strategy for advancing performance as a kind of proposal for increased deliberation, for enlarging the issues shown, and for signifying the potential of such a performative scheme. This was followed by a roll call of the assembled councilors. Again, the video provided an undermining commentary:

> Be ready to be bored. Be ready to watch a kind of irrelevant antsy unfolding around you that wonders if it’s even worth it. The room breathes and thinks of itself as it goes. The meeting itself wonders. Are you even here? Or are you just represented?²²⁶

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²²⁶ Landsman, *City Council Meeting*, 18.
The screen city name changed to San Antonio as roll was called several more times on items of local import but left unexplained in the performance. The audience became witness to little more than procedural gesture, the flashing of cards, calling of names, and quickly spoken references to statute names and code numbers. The strategy thus far had been to highlight the banality of governance and the numbing details of budgets and parliamentary ritual. Yet the ritual was not an ingathering of like-minded cohorts; rather, it was off-putting, and reinforced a shared sense of discomfort and ennui. This was paralleled by the narrative of the actual performance of the roles, and the current performers’ own level of discomfort on display there. The production followed a seeming strategy of proffering the kind of antitheatrical disassembly of the meeting structure itself, made porous and fragile by the amateurism of the performers undertaking its representation. Still, the work of the staffers, shadowing the action and working the seated crowd, reminded the viewer that the authors were in charge, and that this performance was working according to their plan. As one former staffer claimed, this was the aspect of the performance that generated the most unease among audiences and critics. The performance was, in this sense, weighted for the benefit of those who participated directly, sometimes at the expense of those “merely” watching the theatrical presentation. Like one of Brecht’s learning plays, the question could be asked whether one had to perform City Council Meeting to “get” City Council Meeting.

The rest of the act similarly worked through illustrations of local political work along with the ironically destabilizing video score, paired with the inherent interest of the

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227 Personal communication with the author; speaker wishes to remain anonymous.
production being finessed by staffers with each night’s variety of volunteers. The San Antonio section featured the testimony of a group of African-American youth (often read by persons of other ages and races) from the city’s impoverished east side in favor of a summer educational program the council had sponsored. This moment of encouraging progressive policy was interrupted by a choral arrangement of councilors, and the voiceover of one, again undermining this illusion of clear-eyed, responsible authority:

I frickin’ love my job, dude. We don’t have to say anything because we rule, you know. The most surprising thing I found out is how easy it is, you just act like the guy in charge and they treat you that way. We put up a couple tables, put a few of us on one side and the rest of us on the other and boom! Power.\(^{228}\)

In a video transition in meeting locale, to Houston, and announced on the stage monitors presented a local woman, Vivian Harris, speaking against municipal fee-exemption for churches and, more generally, tax exemptions for underperforming or ineffective non-profit organizations. Prodded by staffers, councilors bickered over the investigation into the economics of such a policy. Another local, pastor Steve Riggle, rose to defend the position of churches and tax exemption, and he was followed by a councilor whose speech summarizes the entire liberal tradition of deliberative democratic political thought, as passed from Rousseau to Locke, Hobbes, and Habermas:

Why thank you, Mayor. Um, pastor, thanks for, uh, coming down, and for your supporters as well. You know some previous speakers have said things that, uh, reasonable minds, uh, can differ. But we know at the end of the day, when it’s all said and done we don’t differ when it comes to one aim, one destiny, okay? I think we can connect on that.\(^{229}\)

\(^{228}\) Landsman, City Council Meeting, 30.
\(^{229}\) Ibid., 37–38.
While portraying deliberative legislating as a national ritual in many dispersed communities, *City Council Meeting* also revealed the relationships of influence and control underlying politics. While neither ideological nor propagandistic, the volunteers playing the roles and actions that determine access to power and the influence of money discover, in the enacting of the text, some of the covert manipulations and problems of ruling with the variable skills and expertise of fellow council members.

The ideal of full democracy and participation is shown to be highly contingent on numerous social factors that inhibit, and can prevent, the realization of that process. The production took on a variable, highly veiled relation to what was at first appearance a fairly straightforward exercise in expanding civic awareness and engagement through the medium of performance. This complication—the shuttled rhythm of the depiction of meeting scenes and frequent recourse to undermining of that representation via the video subtexts—creates a more ambiguous stance about participatory democracy. It is difficult not to read this as a formal stance of ambivalence about the pursuit of power, or at least the way it was read by Landsman’s civic wanderings. Yet this very ambivalence may prove to be the thing that makes the experience “stick” to audiences, as it anticipated and acknowledged one’s own ambivalence about why more of us do not attend city council meetings. When the many characters’ hesitations, ideological bickering, and malfeasances are read across the surprised faces of volunteers (they learned what was about to transpire from staffers), the moment is presented: to “play well” the character or to “comment on” or otherwise distance the character, and so endorse or critique the
represented actions of cynical, power-crazed councilors from Texas.\textsuperscript{230} This track formed the supplemental representation of the act. In addition to the fictional meeting, and the actual cocreation of the event, the authors signaled an invitation to the ideological overtaking of the performance by volunteers, which became a frequent occurrence. Consistently from performance to performance, performers translated the moment of discovery, typically an actor’s cherished tool, into a pseudo-Brechtian form of alienated acting, transmitting to onlookers their real-time performed commentary. In this sense, the performance was superbly participatory and rendered much more layered and nuanced the invitation to explore democracy.

The Tempe section followed, with testimonies about planted ficus trees decorating the downtown. A character called “Audience Participation” was referenced onscreen, along with the text: “Are we working together? Are we capable of it? Is that why this structure is here? Or is that what the structure prevents?”\textsuperscript{231} As though to acknowledge (and fulfill) the momentary self-consciousness of this plaintively artistic self-questioning, cards and pencils were passed around with the instruction: “Please write a resolution. Something you want in the public record. Something you think no one here

\textsuperscript{230} Jim Findlay, personal communication, January 7, 2013. According to Findlay, the decision was made early in rehearsals to withhold the entire scripts from volunteers, allowing staff members to communicate situational givens and points of characterization to them partly because early audiences would look ahead in the text in order to prepare for their scenes, like an auditioning actor. This resulted in well-realized performances in some cases, loosening the production’s tenuous balance between order and suggestively performative disorder and amateurism. This balance was necessary to maintain what Findlay describes as an equipoise between artifice and immersion, a shared fiction that a city council meeting could be created and a simultaneous critique of that very simplicity, another, more complicated iteration of the oscillating frame and ground described in the last chapter as an aspect of remediation.

\textsuperscript{231} Landsman, \textit{City Council Meeting}, 46.
will agree with.”232 For the most part, audiences did so. In the Tempe performance, the only one in an actual theatre space, rows of actual trees were brought onstage in act two with audiences asked to roam among them. The scene played more as installation than as theatre.233 Audience members, seated on scattered benches, filled out cards using pencils handed out by staffers, answering the directive. A few video monitors showed images of a local woman, a struggling individual who had been hired to be a part of the working group. She quietly read short statements about her life in response to the earlier section’s questions about urban renewal, public access to the common space of downtown parks, and economic disparity.

The final sections, Oakland and Portland, described a darker vision of American cities. Testimony ranged from the violence that marked the Oakland police department’s response to the local Occupy branch’s occupation, to the lunar, cosmic ravings of one Bobby Valentine, also of Oakland. In a memorable scene, Pete Colt appeared before an incensed Portland council and poured out a bag of used condoms, syringes, and alcohol cans found along a school zone. The act was a journey from boosterism to urban blight, by way of procedural boredom. As narrative, little was surprising; most of the exchanges felt familiar. Local surprises were saved for the customized act two sequences, such as when teams of youth from the Project Row Houses in Houston began circling the stage and audience, gradually running faster and faster, becoming a whirl of young energy as though to direct the politics of the moment to their coming future. Or, in New York City, the raucous exchanges, on video and via live megaphones, of students and parents.

232 Ibid., 47.
233 This was at the Gammage Center at Arizona State University, where I saw the performance in February, 2013.
shouting down a broadcast of a measure to cut school funding. It was in these sequences, more than in the formal first act, when the local audiences, from bystanders to councilors, seemed to resonate together with lively intensity, underscoring the promise of the gestures at the heart of City Council Meeting. Here, one hopes that, in the tradition of notable, early work by Cornerstone Theatre Company, which followed local projects in communities by founding a lasting theatrical home, something tangible will be left behind that touches both politics and performance in the communities. Much remains to be seen.

The range, variety, and interconnectedness of issues did not describe a coherent world or a position; they could be placeholders for an infinite number of parallel scenes that could be culled from any urban center’s meeting transcripts. The important questions raised by City Council Meeting clearly were not the issues themselves but rather the larger matter of whether the experiment at hand, a flawed depiction of flawed democratic processes, could at the very least augment participation in such processes and whether, in this case, such participation had occurred. This exposure of emergent, possible networks of political awareness and exchange, over and above the revelation of other themes, which I have claimed is a critical hallmark of successful participatory engagements, is worth bearing in mind as we finally examine how to assess the production’s performative failure, its networking potential, and the various criteria for deciphering the efficacy of participatory social art performance raised by recent scholarship.

**Networks and Participatory Performatives**
Many networks operating concurrently comprised the dense web of associations supporting the production of *City Council Meeting*, and time was as much a factor in this regard as it was for script development and rehearsals. The artists needed to develop relationships in multiple locations over three years, and to adopt strategies to make the relationships sustainable throughout intermittent sessions and frequent absences for other projects. This might have proven insurmountable without the level of support the project earned, and from which institutions it was given. Landsman, more than most other artists who self-produce, has developed a mastery of the kinds of fundraising and institutional partnerships that convey the imprimatur of quality and artistic importance to audiences and other funders. The original budget of $225,000, large by mid-size theatre standards, was met through several large gifts that Landsman was able to obtain. A significant achievement for a small organization, they received $12,500 from the National Performance Network, $105,000 from the New York Foundation for the Arts ($50,000 for development and $55,000 for touring), and a Rockefeller Multi-Arts Production award, as well as the HERE support and a $75,000 bequest from the Gammage Center at Arizona State University in Tempe. This success must at least be partially attributed to Landsman’s ability to sell the project to funders as innovative and timely, and it allowed all participants to earn a reasonable wage for their services.

One aspect of the project that spoke to the present moment in a manner that appeared to pique audience interest as well as institutional underwriting was a knowing and savvy use of the growth potential of networks. Networks were the subject of *City Council Meeting*, Catlett had several projects in the works, and Findlay was developing original work independently and with The Collapsible Giraffe, a company that shared a space in Williamsburg with Radiohole until its closure in 2012.

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234 Landsman continued to tour with Elevator Repair Service during the development of *City Council Meeting*, Catlett had several projects in the works, and Findlay was developing original work independently and with The Collapsible Giraffe, a company that shared a space in Williamsburg with Radiohole until its closure in 2012.
Council Meeting just as surely as they were the means of creating it. Just as Surrender replicated in theatrical form the kind of investment in the control and surveillance power of video networks characteristic of the Revolution in Military Affairs, City Council Meeting promised to develop a hands-on discussion about democracy at the civic level using the latest technologies of civic engagement. Three years of cultivating groups largely through social media allowed the simultaneous rehearsal of staffers among seven partners in three different cities. Dialogue across political borders was both the theme of the production and its chief mode of creative labor. A memorable image of this strategy of public border crossings was one iteration of the production’s various, localized acts, this one at the Project Row Houses: a discussion between Steve Costello, an actual Houston councilor who is white, and a six-year-old African American girl, who sat across from each another behind microphones at a conference table and read from a meeting transcript. While Costello’s seasoned voice counterpointed the child’s tones, a larger group of youth assembled behind them and began to walk circles around the audience. This was followed by the introduction of loud pop music under their dialogue and finally by the girl’s ecstatic running of circles around the councilor’s seat, which became a slowly accelerating and increasing crowd of all the youth, energetically claiming the space. What could not be communicated textually between two generations separated by race, gender, and status could still become a moment of shared communal participation through the actions of children, known to many in the audience. This scene could have been read as either communal summation of the networking potential of the work, or as a facile summary of its goals, or perhaps as both. Nevertheless, as performance, the moment worked on a visceral level for the audience, as at least a marker
of the attempt to bridge divides long known to the Project Row Houses community in Houston. Whether and how to judge this moment by the criteria of sheer performance, or as social politics, or, as in my own judgment, a provocative hybrid of two partially realized visions, are questions that resonate long after the performance’s end.

This network-driven project can be viewed against the dynamic recent history of global political movements of resistance, which have been characterized as a radically new paradigm for organizing social change and responding to oppressive state power. The functioning and importance of networks—journalistic, social, digital, artistic, and at their common fundamental level, political—continue to elicit widely differing opinion. Among the most articulate of those supportive voices—those who can be considered academic fellow travelers of the movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Spain, Argentina, and the United States—is media and systems theorist Manuel Castells. For Castells, for whom the Internet provides unprecedented access to real-time information, the groundswell of pro-democracy movements in opposition to long-entrenched unpopular leadership and policies has made use of powerful tools to unseat power. Societies are conflictive by nature, and information sharing is key to the “fundamental battle . . . for the construction of meaning in the minds of people.”

Local workgroups, such as those surrounding the arts administrators of the University of Houston’s Mitchell Center, the activists involved with Project Row Houses, DiverseWorks, (which was opening a new space and thus re-introducing itself to Houston audiences), and the Gammage Center, found a unique way to publicize the show and develop a coterie of production assistants and onstage performance guides, as well as other needs as they arose. In an age of

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convergence, blogging, and social media, *City Council Meeting* made use of a wide range of engagement and outreach strategies.

*City Council Meeting* might initially be thought of as a variant of the type of performative discussed by Spivak and Butler, a counterdemonstration of a political reality that presumes a new distribution of power. *City Council Meeting* shunned both editorializing on the shortcomings of existing administrations and prescribing specific methods of expanding access to power. Neither radical, nor necessarily even progressive in content, *City Council Meeting* nevertheless embodied an alternative democracy, one in which roles and responsibilities are flexible, mobile, and circulating. The taking on of such public roles, executing administrative tasks within a context of play, was a deeply moving, almost giddy expression of the kind of virtuosity that Paolo Virno locates at the center of immaterial labor’s challenge to escape being collapsed into an instrumentalized cultural product.

For Virno, immaterial labor that does not result in the creation of a commodity or other tangible end product reveals the virtuosic, the pleasure of labor’s performance in and for itself. Noting that Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, distinguishes labor (*poesis*) from political activity (*praxis*), Virno retains part of the distinction, claiming, along with Marx, that “virtuosic labor…is a form of wage labor which is not, at the same time, productive labor.”\(^{236}\) For Virno the virtuosic form revolves around language and speech. But language is considered a pleasurable end in and of itself, and does not need an end in order to have value. Verbal performances, like Austin’s speech acts, *accomplish* in the doing. Within the instrumentalized culture industry, in Virno’s analysis, capitalism

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has managed to turn speech technologies like cinema, radio, and television into “factories of the soul” that “mechanize and parcelize even its spiritual production.”\textsuperscript{237} In post-Fordism, flexible laborers are turned into mere conveyors of information, yet through their virtuosity, the immaterial laborer’s speech has intrinsic, creative power. So, it seemed, did the enactment of city councils on the various sets where \textit{City Council Meeting} was performed: courthouse, community center, public schools, and even a theatre.

Director Catlett emphasized the raw qualities of each performance venue with minimal scenic intervention, with the exception of a dais and speakers’ tables and chairs. Thus, Findlay’s video provided what visual appeal the production had as a viewing experience, in addition to the architectural specificity of each venue.\textsuperscript{238} Specifically timed dissolves blended footage of the original meetings with television news-like coverage of the surrogate performances on monitors placed in front of the dais. As Findlay himself pointed out, the appearance of broadcast quality footage was important to the realism of the décor, and this was accomplished for relatively low cost through the use of “prosumer” quality switching devices that he applied to the processing of the video signal.\textsuperscript{239} The payoff of this work was evident early in the performance when, following the pre-meeting hiatus, he was able to record the volunteers’ images quickly to generate images of them giving short speeches, which played behind their actual onstage appearances as introductions. This key moment definitively encapsulated the tri-partite

\textsuperscript{237} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{238} In fact, these venues varied widely, from a neutral auditorium in Houston’s Project Row Houses area, to various school auditoria, and Arizona State University’s ornate, well-appointed Gammage Center.
\textsuperscript{239} “Prosumer” refers to digital video tools and equipment that carries a nonprofessional price point while bearing elements that were recently reserved for full professional gear.
scoring of image and identity mentioned above. Volunteers appeared as themselves, uneasy in their new roles, performing with some difficulty repetitive, humorously elliptical thoughts. For the audience, this gateway moment, just prior to the real beginning, underscored the provisional nature of the assumption of new roles. The shared gestures—smiles, head nods, formalized ritual public behavior—cemented the oscillating conversation as performance between concurrent modes labeled: “participant,” “observer,” and “co-author.” As Joe Kelleher writes about Nicholas Ridout’s theory of such unintentional, affective, discomfiting moments, for both performer and audience:

> When these affective elements, these feelings of shame, embarrassment, and so on which normally we regard as non-essential to our understanding of a show—come to our attention, it is usually because something has gone wrong with the management of the theatrical spectacle. When this happens, our attention slips a gear and we find ourselves drawn not so much by what the theatre has to say to us as to its extraneous bits and pieces…At such moments…“we are simply watching the cogs of the machinery…and maybe reflecting too on the machinery of work and play and economic dependence.”

These moments of failure are, of course, as previously explained, the very moments that open the performance to the appearance of new connections, new networks, and new possibilities for envisaging the crossover from spectator to co-author.

The second act of the performance score came directly out of long-term collaboration between local members of the arts community surrounding the local partners as well as select members of the greater community engaged by those arts locals. Thus, each local community—three in Houston and New York, and one at the Arizona State University Gammage Center in Tempe—created a unique second act that showcased local issues of governance and a unique artistic response developed through

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repeated workshop visits held by Catlett, Landsman, and Findlay. The essential structure of the work thus mirrored the partnership that the project was meant to represent and to inspire, showcasing respectful dialogue among the partners, incorporating locals both inside and outside the development process.

Much has been written about our newly networked society in the digital age, and which forms the context for a performance deploying civic involvement as a kind of game. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s trio of books—*Empire, Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*—position them among the key authors whose work has been taken up to understand and critique the characteristics of postmodern global economies, their post-Fordist worker “flexibility,” the hyper speed and availability of social communication platforms, and the changed structure of labor relations within a newly globalized context. Hardt and Negri’s approach to contemporary power relations, characterized as “decentered and deterritorializing,” envisions a new form of postnational sovereignty that replaces the rise and dominance of nation-states in classical modernity. Hardt and Negri’s admittedly utopian assessment of networked power interprets the American Revolution as a transformational moment in world power, which they describe as a moment of “immanence” in which the “productive synergies of the multitude” triumph (in the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution as well as the course of US history) over the older models of European “transcendence” and nationalist power. This hopeful tendency toward “expansive” power (as opposed to national imperialist “expansionism”) leads them to imagine the devolution of organizing political energies

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242 Ibid., 164–65.
downward and outward, toward liberatory democratic possibilities at the level of domestic markets and internationally, superseding both colonial imperialism and class struggle. In a sense, *City Council Meeting*’s creators utilize a partially ironic version of this vision as the production’s organizing conceit while sanguinely identifying, in the playing of the script, the difficulties of such noble goals.

Clearly, this abstracted idea of human progress runs up against actual history, and, in *Empire*, Hardt and Negri acknowledge both the dominance of US hegemony among world affairs and the current (2000) state of sustained oppressions within the United States and abroad. Their answer involves a descent “into biopolitical virtuality” and the creation of a new collective subjectivity “where social, economic and political production and reproduction coincide.” This biopolitical subject position, within the areas of power that control and produce social life at the level of our very bodies, is modeled after Foucault’s thought in his later works on sexuality and posthumously published lectures. For Hardt and Negri, the area of struggle opened within the biopolitical is both spiritual in essence and multidimensional, or rhizomatic in the sense borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari. This sense of collective action whose *telos* closes their analysis in *Empire* is further developed in *Multitude*. In this second volume, the authors elaborate their postmodern notion of labor in terms that reflect on the kind of delegated labor I examine in participatory performance as having transitioned to the immaterial from the industrial, from Fordist to Post-Fordist structures of organization. Immaterial labor produces linguistic codes as well as other forms of communication and affects states of being and

the ground of emotional response. This kind of labor is characterized by “flexible, mobile and precarious labor relations.”\footnote{245} These traits of the labor market and the nature of work, the authors claim, were at one time the promise of a new creative freedom under capitalism, but have become, following their \textit{excursus} on Marx, labor, and value, endemic of a newly blurred relationship between labor and all of social life. Hardt and Negri write,

\begin{quote}
Capital has always been oriented toward the production, reproduction and control of social life. Marx is gesturing toward this fact, for instance, when he says that although capital can be defined, as is commonplace, as an accumulation of social wealth in the form of commodities or money, most fundamentally capital is, ever more clearly and directly today, the production of social life… \footnote{246}
\end{quote}

Attempting to update Marxist thought to include a useful contemporary paradigm for the relation of immaterial labor and collective democratic action, they refer to the relationship between communication, cooperation, and the creation of inclusive social wealth as the \textit{common}.\footnote{247}

Having already described the network as both the primary structure of social reality as well as the form for resistance to the status quo, the authors turn their attention to potential forms for establishing a new political subjectivity.\footnote{248} Among the key tactics

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\item \footnote{246} Ibid., 146.
\item \footnote{247} Ibid., 147.
\item \footnote{248} Ibid., 142. “Today…we see networks everywhere we look—military organizations, social movements, business formations, migration patterns, communications systems, physiological structures, linguistic relations, neural transmitters, and even personal relationships. It is not that networks were not around before or that the structure of the brain has changed. It is that network has become a common form that tends to define our ways of understanding the world and acting in it. Most important from our perspective, networks are the form of organization or the cooperative and communicative
emerged performatives and strategies of performance—of gender, race, and sexual orientation as enacted physical and social codes of behavior that made and were made by the subject. Again here, we might think of the example of the singing of the national anthem in Spanish. Hardt and Negri cite Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz, Jon McKenzie, and Paolo Virno’s theories of the virtuosity of linguistic performance in order to assign value to performance’s ability to convey the affect they find to be fundamental to the organization of and motivation for collective action.\textsuperscript{249} Performativity is key to the realization of the multitude, “created in collaborative social interactions.”\textsuperscript{250} Their key examples of democratic action—the Italian group White Overall’s street theatrics and their intersections with Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatistas of Chiapas, the World Trade Organization activists in Seattle in 1990, and the Greenpeace flotilla—all deployed real-world enactments of alternatives to some realities of neoliberal governing structures in the form of political street (and sea) theatre. The authors’ call for a second People’s Assembly to supplement the United Nations General Assembly, based on global proportional representation, was echoed in their later Declaration, a work supporting the assemblies that made up the original governing structure of many global movements, including those in Tunisia, Spain, Argentina, and in the global Occupy movement.\textsuperscript{251} City Council Meeting, as both primer on local legislation and parodic performance of such relationships dictated by the immaterial paradigm of production. The tendency of this common form to emerge and exert its hegemony is what defines this period.”\textsuperscript{249} Virno, \textit{A Grammar of the Multitude}, 52–55. Virno’s virtuosity is defined as “special capabilities of a performing artist” but by extension can refer to any action that is contingent on having witnesses and does not produce an extrinsic product, like social and political actions of the kind that Marx, Aristotle, and others discussed and which Virno holds up as important defining acts of political subjectivity. See “On Virtuosity: From Aristotle to Glenn Gould” in the second lecture of \textit{A Grammar of the Multitude}.\textsuperscript{250} Ibid., 222.\textsuperscript{251} Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, \textit{Declaration} (London: Argo-Narvis, 2012).
legislative activity in the guise of participatory performance, serves as a powerful test case of such a newly imagined political aesthetics. Not by distribution of actual power, but as both an invitation to imagine such distribution, and as a critique of power’s masks, the production serves a valuable purpose. By “failing” to transport us to new power relations in actuality, City Council Meeting enacts what Ridout has termed the “ontological queasiness” of performance work that uneasily shifts the subjectivity of the audience into the area of the performance’s primary concern. Such work, for Ridout, is important for the way it turns the anti-theatricality of much modern performance against itself, exposing what is disturbing about theatrical absorption in the first place, namely the self-consciousness of our viewing roles. In such performance, “the objects turn themselves into you, and you into them, and instead of a plenitude in oneness experienced in the moment of absorption, comes a constant to and fro, an unbecoming becoming, in which the action takes place in a kind of in-between, neither onstage nor off.” Such self-consciousness on the part of active participants would seem to form the necessary egress to an awareness of the kind of new networking associations that Hardt, Negri, and Latour propose.

In Multitude, Hardt and Negri ultimately direct the notion of rule emanating from the commons toward a form of democracy newly considered as a rule of the many, not the one, whether the one is defined as the autocrat, monarch, or even the people thought of as a single, homogenous entity. The many, thought of as an assemblage of singularities, by contrast, preserve the autonomy of conflicting ideologies and viewpoints.

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253 Ibid., 9.
as an ideal form of democracy derived from the philosophy of Spinoza, rather than from Plato (or more recently, Carl Schmitt), substituting the power of the collective agents of labor, production, and governance for the supreme power of the sovereign.\textsuperscript{254} Marshalling all varieties of networks and analogies from brain functions to language development to software design, Hardt and Negri call for the realization of a new society based on acceptance of the common, which perpetuates itself in acts of realization:

Production based on cooperation and communication makes perfectly clear how the common is both presupposition and result: there can be no cooperation with an existing commonality, and the result of cooperative production is the creation of a new commonality: similarly, communication can not take place without a common basis, and the result of communication is a new common expression.\textsuperscript{255}

It is through acceptance of singularities and differences, within a common basis for decision making and rule, and through love as an expressed living ideal, that this revolution from traditional sovereignty is realized. It is through enactment that this acceptance is made material. This moment is propitious, they conclude, because “the constituent power of the multitude has matured to such an extent that it is becoming able, through its networks of communication and cooperation…to sustain an alternative democracy on its own.”\textsuperscript{256} What better way to test this maturity of the multitude in common than an enactment of local governance? It was this precise variety of civic test that \textit{City Council Meeting} materialized. As local test cases of dissensual politics, via the

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\begin{itemize}
\item Hardt and Negri, \textit{Multitude}, 349–50.
\item Ibid., 357.
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creation of assemblages, the performances enacted specific versions of the very kinds of networks Hardt, Negri, Latour, and others have been calling into being.

Among *City Council Meeting’s* various local iterations, this very sense of examination was never made clearer than through its New York partnerships with the Department of Education. In Manhattan, at the Chelsea Technical High School on Dominick Street (across the street from HERE, where the production had had its initial residency), the performance took place in the school’s auditorium. It was a typical US variety, a former basketball court pressed into service for any one of a number of public presentations with a raised stage and folding chairs. The start of the second act commenced teens from the school making statements about local education policy disputes while passing out blue examination-style books in shrink-wrapped plastic to audience members. The blue books were unwrapped throughout the act, which consisted of a brief appearance by a dynamic member of the New York City Council and a video of interviews with angry parents and students related to a dispute over standardized testing, a point of contention among parents, the Department of Education, and members of the Bloomberg administration. The blue books revealed a list of performance dates and the following: 1) a multiple-choice quiz on DOE policies; 2) sections of Rancière’s *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* disguised as a reading comprehension quiz; 3) passages from the NYC Council Committee on Education Oversight about testing standards, a hot-button issue in NYC education; and 4) a list of student activities and internal responses provided by students in response to the question of what they do during standardized tests in order to maintain composure.
The selection of blue book readings was developed in the New York working group, a collaboration of the primary artists and volunteers recruited during the HERE residency. Similar groups were formed in Houston and Tempe, as well as in other cities where the production will tour.\textsuperscript{257} Since former Mayor Bloomberg’s highly contentious hiring of ally Kathy Black, who lasted less than three months as public school Chancellor, the DOE has engaged in a highly politicized debate over the city’s generally poor showings on standardized tests compared to statewide results. The issue of such test scores involves many economic and pedagogical ideas, including the paradox at the heart of \textit{The Ignorant Schoolmaster}, Rancière’s philosophical book about the nineteenth-century French teacher, Joseph Jacotot—namely, that there are possibilities for exchange among a teacher and students despite the lack of a shared language. Rancière uses Jacotot’s experience with Flemish schoolchildren to develop a theory of education focused on learning that departs from the standardized role of the teacher as dispenser of knowledge to those lacking it. Rather, he advocates for a shared focus on learning based on what is already known to both parties, a two-way transmission of lessons of mutual discovery inspired by pedagogical cues and a radical acceptance of the idea that all are capable of both learning and instruction.

This idea, a horizontally oriented, democratizing ideal, points directly to Rancière’s influence in recent years on artists and theorists, including Landsman and Catlett, who are invested in exploring participatory models. The second act, more of a presentation than the first act, involved little direct interaction with audiences but nevertheless used the notebooks as a tactile prop within a chaotic, almost carnivalesque

\textsuperscript{257} As of November 2013, these include Belgrade, Serbia, San Francisco/Oakland, and Boston.
parody of an institutionalized examination. Loud pop music poured from tinny overhead speakers, while the video played at equivalent volume over the competing student statements from onstage. This section of the performance lasted about a half hour, during which audiences toyed with, unwrapped, read, folded, discarded, wrote in, shared, and in most cases, kept these props when they left the auditorium, ensuring at least the possibility that they would be read and thought about post-performance. It was a rare opportunity for artists reaching beyond the confines of the performance to deliver a statement about the nature of their own influences on important issues such as democracy and learning. The offer was made. Yet, like the Project Row Houses ending, the ultimate landing image of the performance was one of chaos, of questions raised and unanswered, and of the intangibility of roles. The contract shifted from one of invitation to participate, create, and perform to one much more searching and loaded, one that questioned the democratic structures and the ways in which participation was granted on that stage. These questions, while clearly beyond the scope of the performance to address, were revealed in some of their profound complexity.

**Failure and Mimesis**

Claire Bishop, more than any other critic in the field of visual and performance studies on participation, has turned a skeptical eye on work bearing too overt an orientation toward curing social ills and addressing distressed communities. In her earlier essays, and refined and distilled in *Artificial Hells*, she has called ardently for a nuanced assessment of both the artistic strategies as well as the politics of participatory performance, defined broadly, from the ethics of collaboration to the work’s ideological
stance. For Bishop, the notion of civic improvement through sponsored art, and art that too closely reflects the interests of official groups, is almost by definition artistically suspect. Shannon Jackson, in her *Social Works: Participatory Art, Supporting Politics*, while also recognizing this difficulty, sounds a more optimistic note about the relation between the autonomous artwork and the heteronymous communities that social art reflects. Bishop and Jackson might well agree that Landsman’s work successfully negotiates the tricky territory, mentioned earlier, between aesthetic autonomy and civic engagement, without superficial boosterism or cooptation by sponsoring funders or politics. In order to situate *City Council Meeting* within its context as a simulacrum of civic deliberation and participatory democracy in performance, we must distinguish a critique that elevates the presumed goal of the performance—to increase political participation at the civic level—with what, on closer examination, the production actually achieves: the opening up to and revelation of new forms and appearances of the network. In addition, we must assess the work as performance.

As Alan Read has described at length in *Theatre, Intimacy and Engagement*, the relationship between theatre and politics is honored most fully by separating them, and realizing that they are different entities with distinct grammars. As Joe Kelleher notes in his recent work on theatre and politics, Read’s interest in the fidelity of the mimetic image is not only its adherence to reality, but also and more importantly to the justice and appropriateness of the image’s communication of the real to and with us as viewers. Read’s frank goal in his book is to reassess theatre as a “human laboratory” and one that, as such, is marked by shortcoming and failure in a constitutive manner, much as Bailes

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258 Read, *Theatre, Intimacy and Engagement*.
has asserted in her work. One of theatre’s shortcomings, for Read, has been the fallacy of theatre being somehow “about” or “for” politics in the minds of many practitioners and audiences. For Read, theatre’s connection with the political is best revealed through a separation, a notion with which, it would seem, Bishop would heartily agree. The presumption to politics, or really to political efficacy, should not, for any of these critics, short circuit a deeper search for what theatre reveals about the social in a way that can inform political discourse. Thus, Read relies on the work of sociologist Bruno Latour, who, in such works as *The Politics of Nature*, *We Have Never Been Modern*, and *Reassembling the Social*, calls for an expanded perception of the interconnections of social agency in a way that includes the human, the animal, and the material.260 This call for a reframing of our sense of the terrain of the political, and for the ways in which that augmented, more inclusive scope might be represented through theatrical performance, is Read’s ultimate goal. Along the way, he implores us as audiences, critics, and cultural workers to resist old, ineffective ideas about addressing the political efficacy of theatre through liberal hopes, or falsely quantitative measurements of viewer responses and changed behaviors. In this regard, his appeal resonates with Bishop’s critique of New Labor social policy in the United Kingdom and its well-funded attempts to assess the accountability of such arts spending through non-artistic economic and social value systems.261


261 Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 13–18. Shannon Jackson notes that the system in the United States is inherently different owing to the relative lack of national funding for the arts, yet much of the argument about the dulling effects of collaboration within the neoliberal
Paolo Virno’s *A Grammar of the Multitude* lays out basic principles for a post-Fordist critique of capitalist production, developed via categories of human action from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* read through Hannah Arendt’s late work. These categories reveal a hybridization of labor (*poesis*) with political action (*praxis*). Simply put, ordinary labor in a flexible, unequal, and oppressive economy has come to resemble the worst aspects of political work, and vice versa, leaving both work and politics in unappealing and alienated circumstances, a crisis that *City Council Meeting* addresses. What Marx and others referred to as “non-productive” labor, i.e., that which does not produce a residual object outside of the performance of labor itself, is shown by Virno to be a quality of both kinds of activity, and hence characterized by virtuosity, the need for witnesses, and a publicly shared context. This reliance on the communicative qualities of labor is a major tenet of the post-Fordist era, notes Virno, anticipated though it was in the thought of Marx and other critics of the culture industry amid the rise of the immaterial within the current service economy. Through a focus on communicative abilities and skills, the work’s resulting dependency on others in order to have meaning signals, for Virno, the spread of culture industry mechanisms of soft control throughout all aspects of political and economic life. The present dangers, he notes, are those of willing cooperation in the perpetuation of the same old relations of production for workers newly “empowered” to use their creative capacities. For Virno, the means of resistance is simple: escape from the system of worker control.

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Clearly, this mode of analysis is neither simple nor evident in relation to cultural production. In *City Council Meeting*, we experience directly what Read refers to as our own “nostalgia for agency” within our simple response to the work’s seeming preoccupation with increasing participation, as though it were simplistically beckoning us to break open a closed system. This is only partially the case, as a critique based on Virno clearly entails; we do not change the system simply by entering it, nor is it feasible to plan one’s exit.\(^{263}\) As I have shown, within *City Council Meeting*, many self-critical moments and other strategies of revelation that are critical of the council meetings, and our easy identification with them, deny a facile response. This was borne out in conversations with some local participants in the work: the typical response to questions about efficacy was hesitation in assigning *City Council Meeting* responsibility for any changes in political outlook, even while having had some personal impact on the staffers themselves.\(^{264}\) If the work succeeds, as I believe it does in performance, it is by calling


\(^{264}\) I include here, at full length, one response from Houston staffer Maria Kristina Jadik, who, pursuant to her comments, denied that the production had any knowable effect for nonparticipating viewers. She wrote, “My participation in the *City Council Meeting* production augmented my idea of participation in the political process in unexpected ways. (Frankly, I didn't know what to expect and was initially way out of my comfort zone.) Assata Richards (one of my co-participants whom I had never met before, nor knew anything about her background or experience) was, I discovered, employed by the City of Houston and knowledgeable about the ins and outs of everyday City government. She shared personal anecdotes and advice related to her city gov't experience to alter small details of our production to enhance its authenticity. I thought that was very helpful and informative. I also learned that she had been one of the young, single mothers from the neighborhood assisted by the Project Row House community; (PRH has been associated with the Eldorado Ballroom, the latter being one of the performance venues of our *City Council Meeting* production.) I observed Assata enthusiastically help develop young teens (participants in the Project Row Houses after school program) as she encouraged them to aspire to big roles in government by proxy participation in our *City Council Meeting* Project. That was inspiring and heartwarming to watch. I also became acquainted with Maurice Duhon (one of my co-participants who I had never met before
attention to the weaknesses and failures of its own machinery as a metaphor for the weaknesses and failures of the machinery it represents. It is only on these terms that it can be assessed and critiqued, and it is on these terms that the performance succeeds. City Council Meeting, then, is the perfect imperfect vehicle to reveal the perfect imperfection of democracy as it is practiced in the early twenty-first century United States.

The productive failure which City Council Meeting enacted in performance measures the distance traveled by participants from initiation to embodiment of their fictional roles, a route that highlights the artificiality of performed immaterial labor. Recent critical engagement with the fragile nature and purposeful artifice of participatory performance positions this lack of truthfulness as an advantage. In a recent essay in the UK journal, Performance Research, performance theorist Theron Schmidt takes up the allure of failing in live performance as part of a broader discussion on labor and value. Schmidt examines the variety of forms of immaterial work that usually remain hidden in performance contexts. Citing both Bishop and Jackson, Schmidt points to theatre’s own artificiality as integral to the purposive failure that reveals the contingencies of form and but who I learned was a former rapper, a Realtor and a Candidate for Congress in Sheila Jackson Lee's District.) During breaks from production of City Council Meeting, Maurice and I had conversations about the neighborhood around Project Row House and the visible improvements that I had witnessed take place over the years since its inception. He shared his unique perspectives and helped me understand the need to support the candidacy of local residents for political positions in the district. He was convinced that their motivation to meet local wants needed to be empowered for the best interests of the neighborhood. As a result, I was moved to contribute to Assata's election campaign and remain appreciative of Maurice's willingness to share his honest, personal perspectives. I also met Autumn Knight and learned about her fascinating artistic background and groundbreaking approaches to bringing diverse groups together. I wish I had been able to attend some of the performances she presented subsequently. Unfortunately, I had many schedule conflicts that impeded it. There’s more, but I'll stop there.” E-mail to the author, January 2, 2014.
content in the works he examines. As regards labor, Schmidt notes the fascination of the artifice of ordinary labor when it appears onstage in a manner indistinguishable from labor removed from the theatrical frame. It may allow us to use the theatre as “a place where we can give up our desire for the real because it will never deliver it: what remains instead is pure speculation, emptied of the promise of a return.” This is the revelation of the interchangeability of forms of labor: labor power and commodity-form, exchange value and use value, become merged into one idea when the finished work takes as its theme the creation of the work itself. *City Council Meeting* foregrounds its own labor process in a manner that, while not fully revelatory of all the work involved in the association of networks that enabled its creation, nevertheless gestures toward a kind of work that desires to be non-alienated, as a genuine reflection of the intentions and desires of those involved. Yet, as Schmidt acknowledges, the problem of the commodity-form of theatre remains; even while critiquing the system of representations of human labor and action, the object that is the performance does not, cannot, entirely resist being swept back up in the machinery of commodification. *City Council Meeting* remains, in this sense, a part of the subscription seasons of various venues, reliant on the largesse of civic institutions and educational groups. The production relied upon a great deal of outsourced, unattributed, non-waged labor, as well as the generosity of various funders who undoubtedly anticipated some social return on their investment in the form of cachet as “innovators” and increased access to the arts for their various constituencies. The production’s marketing call to join democracy as an ideal (if a compromised one) to a sense of present possibility that signals future action is served as a flattened dish—the

invitation to the labor of legislation is not real, productive labor. There is no end product
in the sense Marx considered the result of productive labor, except for the revelation that
the work of standing in as councilor is no more or less real than the labor of which it is a
theatrical representation. This in itself is “representative” of other meetings and
gatherings, doubly so because it is performed by delegates—outsourced labor—just as
the audience is in the theatre. The fragile boundaries between amateur and professional,
insider and outsider, productive and unproductive, artist and audience are all operating
under a spirit of erasure, pointing to the radical equalization of roles of which Rancière
has been the most eloquent recent exponent. When amateurs step into the roles of
political workers, their labor, according to Virno’s analysis, is evidence of the “score”
through which we perform the “general intellect” that is shared by all, much like that of
Mssr. Jacotot’s students in The Ignorant Schoolmaster.266 The network has been revealed,
and it is the network of social association that, feasibly, can allow even the most passive
spectators into the world of political action. In fact, Landsman, when queried about what
he would like audiences to take away from the performance, replied that he would like
audiences to see democracy as a performance, a goal with which Bishop might take issue,
but in the analysis taken from Virno, along with the sense of possibility inherent in the
artifice and shortcoming as described by Schmidt, makes surprising sense as a leveraging
of future work.267

In the next chapter, I will describe participatory performance that takes the
expanded sense of the network described above to a deeper and more inclusive
destination, put to purposive use by artists. In particular, I will examine NYU professor

266 Virno, A Grammar of the Multitude, 64.
267 Interview with the author, November 12, 2013.
Natalie Jeremijenko’s use of immersive environmental, virtual, and biopolitical modes of investigation. The stakes of performative failure will become correspondingly higher and the definitions of performance to be applied significantly broader.
Chapter 4. *UP_2_U*: participatory lifestyle experiments with Natalie Jeremijenko’s Environmental Health Clinic

**Up a Tree: Experiencing *UP_2_U***

In a shady grove in the middle of the *Civic Action* installation at Socrates Sculpture Park in the summer of 2012, an imposing, incongruous structure rose through the treetops on massive iron pilings.\(^{268}\) What at first appeared to be construction scaffolding was in fact a solidly engineered tree house, with metal stairs climbing twelve feet to a reinforced plywood platform supporting a laminated table and four office chairs bolted to its deck. With a direct, if hazy, view of Manhattan across the East River, Natalie Jeremijenko’s TREEXOFFICE was open for business occupancy, according to an accompanying plaque, and remained in use during the park’s long summer open hours. Its railings were painted caution yellow, decorative wood lattice faced the park, and its open-air exposure grandly surrounded the venerable oak tree that formed its central pillar and canopy. The entirety of the 250-square-foot deck was shaded by leaves, and the massive trunk and one thick branch could support one lucky recliner.

Occupying the space for more than a few minutes, as I did, inspired several identifiable effects. Initially unsure how to move, or what to do, gradually I became less and less hindered by the uneasy situation of being aloft amid the inquiring eyes of children and their guardians below, and the milieu began to feel congenial. Then, my awareness shifted from the jointure of this engineered structure to the trunk itself; the tree and platform appeared to support one another, the steel girders arcing around the trunk,

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\(^{268}\) *Civic Action* was a jointly produced project with the Noguchi Museum, which is nearby Socrates Sculpture Park in Long Island City, New York.
with just enough room for the tree’s future growth, were the platform to remain in place for another 50 or 100 years. There was ample space to hold perhaps a dozen people without crowding or footing dangers for the unwary. Eventually, my reason for being there, note-taking and photography, supplanted the oddity of the elevation and surroundings, and the joyful utility of the space asserted itself. It became easy to imagine myself working there, anticipating a commute to the TREEXOFFICE as my daily destination.

Soon, the thought of working anywhere other than a platform in the treetops of Queens began to appear self-denying and shortsighted, at least on that balmy July afternoon. TREEXOFFICE became a very feasible way of experimenting with healthier, more environmentally sustainable and conscious work/lifestyle choices—the ultimate social goal of Jeremijenko’s work. Experiencing a conscious diversion from the quotidian, situated in a kind of private performance for impromptu audiences below, being poised on a theatrical space designed to respond to real life circumstances, all combined to function for me as a kind of “invisible theatre.” Yet, unlike Augusto Boal’s interventions in civic politics designed to test alternative responses to power and subjectivity, TREEXOFFICE was a site of direct enactment of an alternative form of living, a kind of witnessing of immersion into nature. Our presence there represented a proposition for a healthier future, a philosophy of sustainability in embodied form conceived at the fundamental level of where and how we work. A reconceptualization of the tree as an office situates the laboring self within a newly imagined material topography, one that fosters reciprocity. As part of Jeremijenko’s contribution to the Civic Action project, the tree was conceived to be its own owner and landlord, modeled
after a historical contract from the early twentieth century in which a Georgian landowner created a deed of trust for a favorite tree in order to sustain the tree’s presence and health in perpetuity. In an act of pointedly playful ventriloquism, Jeremijenko made the tree “speak” via wry messages, inviting us to recognize the tree’s status as our equal in agency—able to enter into contracts, to determine its own use of resources, to be in dialogue with human partners. Fancifully, this assignation of personhood was activated through fictive “tweets” that the tree’s WiFi-enabled base transmitted to users’ cellphones: “Trees’ earning power has fallen in the recent recession. We need a bailout for trees whose mortgages are under water./This office to let: will build to suit – 220 sq. ft. office space, natural air-conditioned, easy access. /If you worked here, you’d be at work now!” It almost seemed possible to imagine speech acts on the part of trees, enacting recognition of their basic rights expressed as part of a social ecosystem.

In this chapter, I introduce the idiosyncratic, hybrid work of artist, engineer, activist, and designer Natalie Jeremijenko into a study on participatory performance. Doing so reflects a different approach to the concept of productive performative failure. Indeed, the decision to refer to her work’s contractual offerings to audiences as performance is a deliberate provocation, and one the artist herself has disavowed. In taking issue with Jeremijenko’s non-identification of her own work as performance, bred from her wish to imagine her lifestyle experiments as inspiring, lasting alterations in one’s ethical and material relations, I respect her viewpoint yet simultaneously propose a broadening of the definition of performativity characterized by such experiments. Here,

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270 Natalie Jeremijenko, unpublished manuscript.
environmental design, performance, ethical relations, and community (networked) engagement all grow many tentacles, which blend and blur their actions and outcomes. In the process, the very notion of community is reworked, expanded to include the non-human and even the non-living, grounding our perception and being in a network of mutually-responsive autonomous elements. It is via this expansive vision of reciprocity that Jeremijenko’s work comes closest, of the various works surveyed here, to realizing a fully participatory environment.

Her contribution, titled _UP_2_U, to the group show _Civic Action_ at the Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park in Long Island City, which I describe based on my attendance and participation, offered opportunities to experiment performatively with alternative lifestyle adaptations to our indissoluble bonds with other species and our earthly environs. I begin by describing my own experience of the installation. I then position Jeremijenko’s _UP_2_U as performance in relation to recent theories of theatricality and the performative by Jon McKenzie and Josette Féral, as well as Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou. After describing the performativity of her work, I explore the network as a descriptor. I find the term “network” more useful than the overused “community” for the kinds of associations created by Jeremijenko’s participatory performance structures. In the case of the work on display at the Noguchi Museum and at Socrates in 2012, framing such associations as networks is particularly apt for the technological components nested within the environments and their distribution of communication channels, as well as for the configuration of the matrix of contacts created by the installation itself. Networks of all varieties are a paradigmatic concept for understanding and responding to a globalized world, and for developing resistance to a
foreshortened neoliberal future existence as is on display in Jeremijenko’s work. Through this lens, one of confronting a dire alternative, I situate the utopian aspects of Jeremijenko’s work and the version of performative failure evidenced through its rich humor, all within the decidedly serious forms of remediation she proposes for environmental distress.

I also return in this chapter to themes of theatre’s revitalized representation of the social, described in the introduction, with reference to performance theorist Alan Read and his reading of the actor-network theory of sociologist Bruno Latour. I carry forward the idea of reading some instances of participatory performance as democratic innovations and more inclusive schemes for representing the social, environmental, military, and political networks surrounding us. I will return, later in the chapter, to Latour, networks, and this unique approach to activist environmental response. In its display of robust, augmented networks, I propose that Jeremijenko’s work actualizes the common utopian imaginings of much participatory performance.

Jeremijenko, raised and educated in Australia, received a PhD in Information Environments from the School of Computer Science at the University of Queensland. Currently an Associate Professor in Visual Art at New York University, she directs the Environmental Health Clinic there, which is an umbrella for her many projects.\textsuperscript{271} Her work has been featured in exhibitions at the Noguchi Museum, MoMA, the Whitney Biennial 1997 and 2006, the Cooper Hewitt Design Triennial in 2006–7, and in the exhibition EXPOSED at Tate Modern. Jeremijenko was named by \textit{MIT Technology Review} as one of the Top 100 Young Innovators in 1999 and by \textit{Fast Company} as one of

\textsuperscript{271} Jeremijenko is also listed as Affiliate Faculty in Computer Engineering at NYU.
the most influential women in technology in 2011.\textsuperscript{272} In describing her own work, she writes, “I have cultivated and sustained a longstanding reputation for utilizing information design and systems thinking to produce positive socio-environmental change.”\textsuperscript{273} After an early career as a rock promoter, Jeremijenko was a founding member of an activist art collective called the Bureau of Inverse Technology, which experimented with aerial surveillance technology and with the public dissemination of biotechnology information and home experimentation kits. Her work crosses and mingles boundaries of activist art, computer and information systems design, biotechnology, gastronomy, environmental science, and participatory public spectacle. Jeremijenko formally runs the Environmental Health Clinic, (also referred to as XClinic), at NYU, out of her offices. The clinic has a location on the fourth floor of the Barney Building, the home of the Department of Art and Art Professions. The clinic seems to operate on a somewhat virtual basis, conceptually coherent but, for financial and staffing reasons, actually practicing irregularly. A well-represented lecturer with a sizeable online archive of lecture appearances (at universities, conferences, TED events, and venues such as Eyebeam and Postmaster’s Gallery in New York City), Jeremijenko often appears in public events dressed in her clinic uniform, with its trademark red X, often paired with white go-go boots and a cowboy hat. She frequently employs the trope of asserting, while also undermining, her authority as researcher, professor, and scientist through her choices.


\textsuperscript{273} Natalie Jeremijenko, unpublished manuscript.
of self-presentation. While the clinic itself has no set hours, she advertises widely the concept that it is open for “impatient,” those unwilling to wait for political or legislative change to address environmental remediation, to enter and make their complaints. In turn, they will be seen by a representative of the clinic and receive a prescription for self-directed solutions, at personal scale, that can address the issue. Indeed, in an interview from the rooftop of the Postmaster’s Gallery, her frequent space for exhibition in Chelsea, Jeremijenko spoke of burying copies of her PhD dissertation in the ground soil that was providing habitat for birds, and has long been an advocate for “citizen-science,” which stresses the availability of sophisticated research and testing capabilities for non-specialists. 274 Civic Action, a public design challenge in which she was one of four artists invited to participate, took place in 2011–12, in Long Island City.

TREEXOFFICE was only the most recent of Jeremijenko’s experiments with trees. She has frequently used trees for experimentation, continuing a strategy of place making and creating augmented spatial identities via public, participatory actions. Her OneTree(s), begun in the Bay Area in 1998, planned the implantation of 100 pairs of genetically identical trees in various urban locales worldwide, and followed them for genetic differences in their growth and appearance. The trees’ differences could then be traced to local environmental conditions including toxins potentially harmful to humans.

274 In this sense, she is an ally and fellow traveler of such citizen-scientists and performance-centered tactical media artists as Critical Art Ensemble, the late Beatriz da Costa, and the scientist-activists operating in startup venues such as Genspace in downtown Brooklyn, where students can sample their own DNA and research its composition. For more on citizen science, see Da Costa and Kavita Philip, eds. Tactical Biopolitics: Art, Activism, and Technoscience (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010); the free online publications of Critical Art Ensemble available at www.cae.org; and the recent study of CAE by Brian Holmes, Critical Art Ensemble Disturbances (New York: Four Corners Books, 2012).
This tracking of the trees can be viewed as an extension of efficacious cultural “performance” in the sense that Jon McKenzie describes in *Perform or Else!*, demonstrating the effects of environmental boons and damages from local pollutants, groundwater and sunlight variations, and myriad other factors. McKenzie describes the growth of interest in the performance paradigm (and its institutional counterpart, Performance Studies) as predicated upon a “gathering…of a field of study, a field of objects…a gathering of subjects, a community of practitioners and researchers” to constitute a debatable, contestable, diverse group of activities and areas of study.\(^{275}\) His challenging re-envisioning of the definitions of performance comprise cultural activities like theatre and ritual, organizational efficacy as a management concept, as well as technological performance, which can include measurements of technological design as well as as-yet-undefined crossings and hybridizations of all of these categories. Jeremijenko’s work with tree plantings, by underscoring our relationship with the environment, seems particularly faithful to the import of McKenzie’s idea of newly developing fields relying on the multivalences of meaning within an expanded definition of what it means to be a subject of performance.

A local, small-scale experiment like the tree office clearly has larger resonances within the popular imagination regarding social/ecological design and our cohabitation within the natural environment. The odd intimacy of being partially hidden from view while seated at a desk, able to touch leaves and branches, was a strangely beautiful experience. It was apparent, watching others climb the steps to TREEXOFFICE, that they were having similar experiences to my own. The tree office surprised and stirred

expectations and memories, perhaps, of climbing in youth, or of other more conventional modes of coexisting with trees. Here, we were asked to reassess our normative associations of discrete conceptual elements: work, nature, urban design, and our relationship with our surroundings, in seemingly contradictory fashion. Climbing a tree to work? An open-plan office, in view of passersby underneath us? Imagining a day-to-day utilization of this space confronted me with many obvious questions about the feasibility of such an arrangement. It also provoked interrogation of the baseline status of our relationship with and consideration of urban nature in general: locating us as correspondents with the tree’s domain in a kind of performative embrace. Clearly, the tree was providing a service, as trees have always done, furnishing raw material for building, or bearing fruit, or providing shade. But in this instance, the tree was also a setting, an environment within which we performed activities that typically took place elsewhere, indoors, in artificial light, in enclosures designed for those purposes.

Intuitively, I began to perform tasks that the TREEXOFFICE offered—opening my laptop while stretching out across the desk with feet propped on the trunk, taking off extraneous layers of clothing to enjoy the exposure, creating odd arrangements among my body, the tree, and the others present, defying conventional spatial arrangements. I began to behave as one who actually has a tree office space. I began to perform.

But was this an occasion of performance, or merely a possible design for experimental living? In this prototypical office in a light industrial section of Long Island City, boundaries began to blur between binary affects: between an instinctual performance within a setting that invited it, and simple appreciation of a crafted object; between immersion and looking and being and doing; and between art and engineering
(to name just a few of those divisions). Michael Fried’s infamous antitheatrical screed from *Art and Objecthood* came to mind, as in his critique of minimalist art that forces the viewer to interpret actively, reciprocally, *theatrically*, so the tree *cum* office seemed to want to engage us physically, psychically, perhaps even spiritually, and not remain merely something to behold.276 For Fried, this dialogic quality of certain forms of art betrays a conceptual shortcoming, an impairment of the work’s nature, and a qualitative falling-off into the medium of suspect, debased theatre and its native dialogism.

Relatively unknown to theatre and performance scholars, Jeremijenko’s practice of environmental art activism features numerous examples of such hybrid, uncategorizable work. Typically, she offers situational placements that summon behavioral responses that, while of limited duration, raise tantalizing questions about the potential of sustained choices and their effects. These lifestyle options frame her design choices and our responses as politically fraught decisions. In turn, the resulting designs further modify suggested behaviors. In many instances, they either reverse, or otherwise problematize, inherited social norms and hierarchies among species, raising associated questions that bear on consumerism, conservation, and ecological sustainability. One of her most famous works, the 1996 Suicide Box,277 used motion sensors installed on San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge to measure and record passersby leaping from the popular suicide location to the waters below. She then plotted the frequency of the jumps

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276 In Michael Fried’s well-known 1967 essay, he critiques the perceptual effects of certain minimalist artworks for the way they engage the viewer, as he says, theatrically, i.e., in a kind of supposed dialogue that impairs the sense of the object’s medium specificity. See Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 148–72.

277 This installation was created under the auspices of Jeremijenko’s former collaborative group, the Bureau of Inverse Technology.
against fluctuations in the Dow Jones index to create a mapping of the relation (or rather, the surprising lack of one) between the performance of the economy and voluntary morbidity. In recent years, her “Cross-Species Adventure Club” dinners, presented sporadically, have combined “molecular gastronomy,” unusual pairings of biodiverse species-as-food, along with menu choices encouraging sustainable farming and production methods. These are presented in conjunction with partner specialists working in the field of bioengineered foods. Each dinner is both a festive celebration of biodiverse cuisine and a lecture-demonstration participatory performance about responsible shepherding of the food supply with tips on how to substitute do-it-yourself approaches to mass-marketed forms of gastronomy.

In the TREEXOFFICE, the quality of the invitation to connect with the object, to interrogate its possibilities, became a welcome sense of expanded potential and a reframing of possible worlds. For Jeremijenko, these possible worlds allow for the possibility of repositioning the tree within the economic landscape, thus creating a reconfiguration of the relations of capital exchange. Neither a commodity, nor raw nature becoming mere accumulation of capital investment, the tree asserts its own self-domain, albeit framed as such by the artist. It is thus a good introduction to the affectual pull and ingenuity of Jeremijenko’s multidisciplinary work, which addresses aesthetic, environmental, political, and civic issues with startling juxtapositions of urban design, political activism, and the design of systems for emplacing participant-users within relationships of proximity to other living organisms. This is achieved in such a way that

Interestingly, the Suicide Box experiment challenged the theory of the so-called misery index, which proposed an inverse relationship between the Dow Jones average and the rate of suicides. There was no recorded correlation.
we are challenged to question the fundamental structures and assumptions of agency and responsibility as they are distributed between and among living entities. This strategy serves to further the park’s historic designation as a site reclaimed by residents from what was formerly wasted urban space. Jeremijenko writes:

Under the new property ownership regime of UP_2_U trees can of course exploit their property for their own uses. . . . Further, the current technological opportunity transforms trees’ capacities to self-monitor and report, tweet, and account for their uses by people and other organisms. Trees themselves account for the variety of uses and services they provide, and they themselves monetize these services, exploit their own assets, and capitalize on their capital. Using simple, inexpensive sensors, the trees assume their own voices and capacity to exert corporate personhoods within this new structure of ownership.

The imaginary dialogue inspired by TREEXOFFICE broadened and deepened as I explored the other elements of UP_2_U. Surrounding the tree was the breathtaking moth cinema, which projected the pollinating dances of moths at dusk on a giant movie screen, backlit while they hovered above flower gardens planted with species designed to attract them. Rows of white sacks hung on the massive tubular steel frame of the projection screen emblazoned with her NYU-based Environmental Health Clinic’s trademark red X. These “Ag-bags,” inexpensive, lightweight, hand-sewn Tyvek bags suitable for supporting plant growth, are designed to turn “nonproductive” urban structures into vertical farms. Filled with enriched soil, the bags are easily sewn together and arrayed in suitable urban locations, a process which was demonstrated during a Saturday workshop I

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279 Socrates Sculpture Park was created by sculptor Mark di Suvero who, in 1986, established his own studio there, which was later expanded into a full, shared design studio and exhibition space. Community members assisted in turning what had been an illegal dump site into a walled garden and neighborhood park.

280 Jeremijenko’s contribution to the Civic Action project was called UP_2_U and comprised several dispersed, networked elements on the grounds of the park.

attended. Bearing green plants and edible flowers, the Ag-bags turned the structure into an eye-catching display of elevated agriculture and productive space, while eliminating the costs and pollutants associated with trucking organic produce from farms to markets.

Nearby, marked on the ground by a 30-foot X, a stretch of degraded grassy territory was being regenerated by biochar, which had been mixed with the long-despoiled soil of the sculpture park. Throughout the summer, the grassy spot bloomed a bright green, marking a location of remediation and carbon sequestration designed to inspire further such creative land use and forms of upcycled waste disposal.282 Near the entrance to the park lay the Salamander Superhighway, an underground tunnel connecting the creatures’ breeding and feeding areas through a reinforced plastic tube, protecting them from the dangers of automobile tires.283 Combined, they formed a landscape to wander in while considering ways of coexisting with nature in an urban setting, one that long functioned as a site of careless disposal of detritus, marked by crime and neglect and long feared by the community. Jeremijenko’s proposed landscape incorporated diverse species and strategies into a conversational field of caretaking, agency, diversity, and health—one’s own, and that of the ecology surrounding all of us. By mixing current capabilities and utopian, future-oriented proposals, all scaled to actual needs and uses, UP_2_U was a challenge and an invitation.

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282 Biochar is produced by the carbonization of various agricultural waste products. It is noted for its long stability in soil, positive soil enrichment capabilities, and its ability to sequester, or trap, excess atmospheric carbon that would otherwise degrade to greenhouse gas. It is thus an inexpensive and extremely productive tool for both sustainable agriculture and carbon emission control. See http://www.biochar-international.org/biochar/faqs, accessed February 11, 2014.

283 Jeremijenko has referred to the loss of amphibian habitat as the greatest extinction threat since the age of the dinosaurs. They are a keystone organism, particularly in the Northeastern United States. See the demonstration video at: https://vimeo.com/49552724; last accessed 4/5/14.
Other aspects of the site were easier to enter into fully. The Saturday ag-bag creation workshops were convivial gatherings of locals and followers of the artist’s work, and had tangible rewarding results for the participants. Still, more consideration is needed to decipher one’s own role in the landscape. As participants in the work, we might, as I did, simply fill a bag with soil or mount the tree structure, enjoying its solidity, fullness, and free exposure to the elements and lack of constriction typical of conventional offices. Yet, this was clearly a mere partial apprehension of the work, overlooking the full conceptual apparatus being deployed. The office represents, after all, not merely a radical approach to environmental ownership and control, but is actually conceived as a system of reparation, comparable to the infamous “40 acres and a mule” system from the Reconstruction Era.284 Further, Jeremijenko assigns the tree not merely property management rights and responsibilities, but actual personhood “through the 14th amendment, which is now assumed to grant personhood to corporations.”285 Clearly, we are on slippery interpretive terrain when undertaking an assessment of the politics, poetics, and situational placement of viewers (and trees) here. The name of the installation is, after all, \textit{UP}_2U; complicity is assumed from the outset, as are opportunities, like those I experienced, to perform new urban/environmental relationships. Moreover, many salient and crucial questions arise as to what modality of expression is preeminent in this work. Is an outdoor office naked artistic provocation, radical utopian public design offering, or activist performance setting, and, if any combination of these, in what percentages and to what ends? How do we view (and perform) this work, and according to what disciplinary standards can it be assessed? Are

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285 Ibid.
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we meant to visualize Long Island City converted to tree offices, full of commuters connected by zip line to their travel hubs, another Clinic activity, which has been showcased at recent international festivals? Should we be asking pragmatic questions of the design, such as where to work during inclement weather, or how to secure property, or should we go directly to underlying foundational concerns? Is the office meant to point us back to energy-efficient construction, such as that featured in the US Green Building Council’s LEED certification process, and if so, why this fanciful detour? Ultimately, we are thrown back on ourselves, and our own personal abilities to engage into the kind of performative relationships with technology and design that McKenzie anticipated and which, in Jeremijenko’s work, come to fruition.

**Jeremijenko’s Work as Performance**

Interpreting *UP_2_U* as performance, or at least as an environment for performance, is further supported by reference to other notable recent theories of theatricality and the performative. Josette Féral, revisiting an earlier article on the distinction between the performative and the theatrical, assigns the theatrical to a set of recognitions on the part of the spectator. Three “cleavages” announce theatricality: separation from ordinary environments, opposition of the fictional to the real such that the two resonate together (much like Fischer-Lichte’s “perceptual oscillation” discussed

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286 LEED, the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a certification program operated by the US Green Building Council that recognizes sustainable practices and usage of materials in the construction trades. It is widely recognized throughout the United States; information on the program can be found at http://www.usgbc.org/leed#overview.
in Chapter 1) and, finally, one within the spectator herself, distinguishing behavior from other forms of symbolic play. For Féral, these concepts bring performativity and theatricality into close proximity, a revision of her earlier position that had privileged (only) the immediacy and informality of performance. In this earlier perspective on the performative, Féral recognized numerous binary distinctions that separated the theatrical, with its historical codes and inherited literary dimension, from the openness of reference and form characteristic of the performative. Marvin Carlson, in the same issue of the journal Substance in which Féral’s later essay appears, writes of the cross-pollination of theatre and performance studies and the social sciences, while noting the general debasement of “theatricality” in comparison with “performativity” as a critical term. Still, he notes, we can recuperate a positive sense of the theatrical, one applicable to all of the arts of performance, “a heightened, intensified variation on life, not so much a mirror as an exploration and celebration of possibility,” by appreciating the virtuosity and nonreferential aspects of theatrical form. In this sense, one might well refer to Jeremijenko’s settings as theatrically virtuosic. In Jeremijenko’s TREEXOFFICE, each of these distinctions, complementing but never erasing the other, were very much present. They thus contributed to a heightened awareness of every action, however private and small, being projected into an alternative reality in which such a workspace might be conceivable and practical. How would one act? How might we behave, pose, and think when freed of constraining but also protective walls?

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Jeremijenko’s environmental designs stretch the category of the performative, in comparison with my other chapters’ more conventionally theatrical examples, by considering environmental art activism as an art form comprised of public lifestyle experiments and as opportunities to perform acts that can be, and are meant to be, cited and re-performed by others. Activism is joined to personal habit in public displays of reworked ecological networks of coexistence. These experimental modes of living and, in particular, the radical envisioning of coexistence across species boundaries, involve volitional, ethical acts that can be repeated and which, shared with others and in their deliberate re-citation and reiteration, become forms of self-transformation meant to last.²⁸⁹ A “lifestyle experiment,” such as creating an urban farm composed of Ag-bags, or working in a tree canopy office, provokes imaginings of permanent, remediating forms of response to ecological crises associated with late capitalist urban life. These experiments serve as exemplary practices through a combination of critique (of policies, institutions, government and corporate practices) and remediation; alternative action is always presented as achievable on a local, personal scale. In this sense, lifestyle experiments are an even more individuated, dedicated form of political performative, a concept framed by Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou²⁹⁰ and referred to in the previous chapter. The

²⁸⁹ In a sense, this approach to lifestyle experiments echoes Richard Schechner’s “restored behavior,” which also involves citation and repetition. The primary distinction, and where Jeremijenko bases her opposition to the term “performance” to describe her work, is that the citation here is meant to be shared among an ever-growing community of activists, many of whom might never presume to know that their actions originated in an aesthetic context. See Richard Schechner, Between Theatre and Anthropology (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 35–36.
²⁹⁰ Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, Dispossession: The Performatively in the Political (New York: Polity, 2013). Butler writes, of resisting authority and power, “It is my understanding that to answer these questions requires insistence on the politics of
examples offered by Butler and Athanasiou perform, critique, and protest, calling for legislative change, relaxation of state strictures, or some other such appeal to the agency of others. Jeremijenko’s experiments, by contrast, instantiate arrangements of new relations between humans and our biological home. They are direct enactments of wished-for conditions, propositions that assert an alternative reality rather than lobbying for or requesting such futures. They are invitations to affirm performatively new configurations of networks among humans, nonhumans, and the material world.

Through Butler’s work on the citationality and reiterative aspects of the performative, it is possible to derive a theoretical channel through which to situate Jeremijenko’s politicized lifestyle adaptations as performance. In particular, Butler’s emphases on the power of citation as a response to constraining social norms, as a strategy used to shape the materiality of bodies, and as an introduction of new identity configurations are all richly suggestive themes that describe the forward-looking aspects of Jeremijenko’s work. The net effect of such individual encounters with the environment and our networked agency within it constitutes, I suggest, a dynamic form of environmental citizenship. Such forms of citizenship, offered as models for others, position our most ordinary actions as replicable forms of activism and agential self-instantiation, with beneficial effects for the performer and for the environment in totality.

Jeremijenko’s 2012 arrangement of installed elements, collectively called _UP_2_U_, offered a playful assessment of the critical dangers of dwelling near a transforming industrial park. Her structures represented a hopeful and cleverly designed

performativity, norms, names, signs, practices and regulatory fictions that can be invoked, cited anew and challenged at once” (99).
imagining of alterable aspects of urban ecology. They situated the participant within a dialogical relation to these diverse sculptural elements, inspiring thoughtful engagement. 

*UP_2_U* represented a networked urban landscape, structured around participation “creating a new (organism-centric) urbanism of BiodiverCITY, ComplexCITY, and SynchroniCITY.” Personal health, improved air and water quality, soil remediation, and increased use of urban farming and inhabitation with other species were clearly delineated as shared goals. “The City’s own backyard becomes populated with exhilarating devices, marvelous couplings, delicious new foods, and spectacles that are designed to create shared public memories of very possible futures.” These public engagements are not meant to be comprehensive approaches to sustainable ecology but rather suggested starting points. As the artist noted in a video documentary on the exhibit, *UP_2_U* redesigns systems for energy, food, mobility, manufacturing and distribution to improve environmental health as a common good and motivation for change in Long Island City.”

Jeremijenko’s work is typically characterized by spectacular elements, and, for most of her career, it has featured theatricalized settings. A documentary video, shot on location at the Noguchi Museum, presented the artist walking through the exhibit,

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291 The impetus for the joint project between The Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park was a change in zoning regulations by the Queens Community Board 1 allowing taller buildings to be built amidst a general push for development of the surrounding area. The plans stalled during the prolonged economic downturn beginning in 2008 and continuing through the project period. The artists involved in the project committed to proposing integrated solutions to area land use and made formal proposals to the advisors, community board members and developers. The outcomes remain works in process as of this writing. See Jenny Dixon, introduction to Jeremijenko, *Civic Action*, 7–8.


293 Ibid.

294 Unreleased documentary, video acquired April 21, 2012.
greeting gallery visitors in a “costume” that simultaneously pointed to and undermined her scientific bona fides: a white lab smock emblazoned with Xs. This typically ambivalent gesture toward institutional authority was, for the most part, belied by her alternately dry and playful manner. She switched easily between modes of delivery as the situation required, from abstruse technical details to quirky investment in the physical life of the many material “props” on display. This had the effect of engaging museumgoers, as when she demonstrated a hula hoop that had been perforated with holes for dispersing the seeds contained inside, or when she spoke to one of her “feral pets,” modified robotic toys designed to record video while spinning wildly out of control via remote control.

Jeremijenko’s October, 2009 TED talk featured her characteristic admixture of silly-serious provocations, all framed under the rubric of NYU’s Environmental Health Clinic where “impatient” come to receive prescriptions for environmental, not personal, medical complaints. Notably, one sequence of the video screen behind the artist included a plastic, water-filled rolling tank with a long handle, intended for “taking a tadpole for a walk.” While the image was humorous for the TED audience, Jeremijenko explained that tadpoles and humans share certain hormones that have been implicated in certain cancers, as well as in the falling age of puberty in girls, due to their environmental chemical release. The rolling tadpole-walking tank was meant to inspire questions from observers that would inspire further inquiry about the future health of the

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295 I was a member of the video production team from May 16 to 20, 2012.
296 TED talks are a popular, searchable archive of relatively brief public addresses sponsored by TED, which stands for Technology, Entertainment, Design. TED is a program of the Sapling Foundation, started in 1996 by Chris Anderson, a magazine executive. See www.ted.com, accessed February 14, 2014.
tadpole, the reasons for the experiment, and finally the nature of the connection between the environment and human health concerns. The critical element, however, was framed from the perspective of the tadpole, with the artist as facilitator. The focus remained on the health of the tadpole, its associated reflection of the human condition a subsidiary concern. The unexpected inversion, privileging an animal normally “used” for testing as the featured organism in the investigation, destabilizes the normative hierarchy made familiar through scientific inquiry. Here, the researcher does not put the animal to use. The animal exists, thrives or does not, and the human observes and draws conclusions. The difference, while subtle, can be conveyed performatively, as palpably “reimagining our relation with natural systems.”

A subsequent segment of the TED talk described another Clinic program, an ongoing, conceptual approach to reimagining our cohabitation with a nonhuman species called OOZ. OOZ, an inversion of ZOO, is without display cages in which our shared urban existence is rethought, borne of the loss of natural habitat forcing their increased wanderings into cities. It also refers, naturally, to the primordial ooze we share with all living beings’ origin. While largely conceptual, OOZ is occasionally instantiated in material terms. One version from the TED talk, presented at the 2006 Whitney Biennial, included outdoor stations where birds alighted, triggering sound files of statements broadcast statements to museumgoers: “Here’s what you do, go inside and get us one of those health bars, the ones you call bird food and scatter it about—there’s a good person.” Here, agency is assigned again to the animal, with the human responding to and supporting patterns of coexistence. Pointedly, Jeremijenko went on to tell her TED

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298 Ibid.
299 Ibid.
audience that her team had tested various sound files to see which generated the most
generous provisions of food donation from patrons. The answer to that experiment was
the birds’ statement that, due to genetic mutations, avian flu was becoming human
influenza, but could be slowed by fostering healthy bird populations. “Therefore, share
your lunch.”300 Agency is thus returned to the human, with a performative lesson in the
serious stakes involved in coexistence in proximity. The lesson, elegantly framed via her
avian ventriloquism, is that restoring reciprocity benefits both species. This connection is
made visible by thinking of the reciprocity as the workings of a network, comprising
multiple species, an environment, and a food supply, with ongoing movement and
connectivity among the diverse, autonomous nodes of which it is comprised.

The installation I witnessed at Socrates was preceded by a group show at the
nearby Noguchi Museum, which featured plans, drawings, and renderings of the artists’
work to be realized subsequently outdoors. Jeremijenko’s installation space at the
Noguchi Museum provided sketches of the type of networked concept pieces on view at
the sculpture garden—three rooms full of tables and walls crammed with drawings,
photographs, video monitors, architectural prototypes, and interactive elements—and did
not immediately appear to be a performance space itself. Rather, it was a series of
designs, renderings, artifacts, and mini-ecosystems that documented various lifestyle
experiments, some of which would be realized at Socrates. Some were, no doubt, meant
to be interpreted whimsically, like a pair of women’s strapless high heels shelved in a
brilliantly lit vitrine. Each heel had been altered to include a sturdy industrial spring—a
spring in your step. While an amusing sight gag, the shoe was difficult to integrate with

300 Ibid.
the more unified elements that suggested a holistic vision for a new biosocial relation between urban humans and their food and energy systems and how they all interact with animal species.

Jeremijenko’s “prescriptions,” the actual practice of the lifestyle experiments, could be seen to take any of several forms, as the elements of the Noguchi Museum made clear. For example, the artist team had hung several hula hoops filled with seed and perforations along the edge, offering the combined health benefits of exercise and the environmental effects of reseeding or restoring foliage. Or, one might use the Clinic’s plans for a 5’×5’ solar awning to create micro-scaled energy self-reliance, enough to power several laptops, at least. The work broadly combined technology, engineering, systems design, sculpture, and the potential for individual and group performance spectacle. Another recent offering was the “No-Park,” a reclaimed parking space in front of a fire hydrant in SoHo, which was turned into a mini-garden, “liberating” the space and revitalizing one small stretch of neighborhood.

Arrayed along one wall were three salamanders in tanks containing various mixtures of local groundwater and sampled chemicals from local runoff spillage, a critical problem for the Gowanus Canal area. Each salamander tank was backed by a photograph of a local legislator (whose name they had “adopted”) responsible for upcoming votes on the proposed community board plans for Long Island City. Elsewhere, small-scale projects, such as home grow lights powered by the excess energy released by an ordinary ethernet cable, sat side by side with designs whose ambition and undoubtedly significant costs made them appear unlikely for realization. One of these was a proposal for an extension of elevator shafts in tall buildings several floors above
the roof, with clear shaft windows to provide greenhouse-like growing space for urban gardens as well as stunning views of the surrounding area. Throughout, there was concern that Long Island City, as New York City’s power plant and lone remaining industrial community, bore disproportionate risks, from everything from potential terrorist attacks due to its energy capacities, to the health consequences of its loss of shoreline access, and the pollution from trucking and energy generation. Rather than argue against current development plans for the area, which feature high building growth, the curators and artists behind *Civic Action*, and in particular Jeremijenko’s designs, argued for immediate activism as art as performance, with the singular goal of transformation.

At Noguchi, flight was a prevalent theme running through Jeremijenko’s organized response to remediating the industrial grid and congestion of urban life in Long Island City. On one of the exhibit tables, the artist had arranged a series of small wing prototypes, suitable for experimenting with wind patterns that, she explained, could be tested while in a moving automobile, using the car as a wind tunnel. Placards for this “Imaginary Airforce” described the bird species whose anatomy was the inspiration for each model: turkey vulture, seagull, etc. Nearby, on a spring-weighted pillar, rested a full-size model, which patrons tried out by lying across the seven-foot span, pivoting and balancing as the wing shifted with movements in their bodily weight. Jeremijenko answered questions about how to adjust and control the wing’s aerodynamics and recounted stories about the debut of the device at a festival in Toronto several years
Several users seemed enchanted by the mere fantasy of flying, which was augmented for them by a small wind machine directed toward the pillared wings.

The encounter clearly delighted the visitors, who formed a relaxed group around her, encouraging each other to try “flying” while cautiously playing with the model wings. She explained that, in answer to one query about the use of paper for the models, if engineers could design wings out of wood or paper they would, because of the superior strength-to-weight ratio of the material. Perhaps surprisingly, no one challenged the improbability of Long Island City investing in zip line transportation infrastructure, preferring the elaborate design elegance of her solutions and research to the more difficult issues of urban design involved, including the costs and integration with existing transportation choices.

The complexities of realizing travel via zip line using human-powered wings highlights the practical challenges and limitations of the sort of design systems Jeremijenko invents. Photographs and video from a 2011 event in Toronto evidence a combination of participatory spectacle and amateur “flight school,” complete with rock-and-roll-styled laser light show, to demonstrate the possibility of emissionless, airborne transport with an emphasis on sporting adventure. The event webpage of architect Usman Haque, Jeremijenko’s collaborator in Toronto, asks of urban airborne travel (and the avian vantage point enabled via zip lines): “If you were to reimagine the city, how would you commute? /If you could redesign transport, would you prioritize wonder & pleasure?

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301 The event, Flightpath Toronto, took place on October 1, 2011, and was commissioned by the City of Toronto and co-conceived with architect Usman Haque. Spectators were invited to don flight apparel and helmets and negotiate full-sized wings along special zip lines constructed for the event. See http://www.haque.co.uk/flightpath.php, accessed 9/20/14.
/Would you choose a fast, low-cost & emissionless means of transportation? /What flight path would you take to work, to school, to visit your friends?"302 But, like the provocations surrounding the tree office at Socrates Park, the questions may support more imaginative creative play than pragmatic speculation regarding urban transport. Throughout the daunting array of ideas and experiments, questions arise concerning the feasibility of the system being realized, as well as the detachability of some projects from one another and from the whole. Can a TreeXOffice operate without zip lines? Are the benefits of locally grown produce negated by the diesel burned to power the trucks to transport the produce to market? If one possessed the resources to construct either a Moth Cinema or a Salamander Superhighway, which would provide greater net benefit? The uneasy equipoise between provocation and proposal, between engineering and art, are constants in the work of the XClinic. For her part, Jeremijenko seems less concerned with justifying the projects in real-world funding and political scenarios than in continuing to generate ideas and models for action. This has been read as impracticality, the deployment of humor and offhandedness sometimes detracting from the scientific verifiability and engineering acumen with which the designs are developed. The New York Times reviewer of Up_2_U wrote of Jeremijenko, that she “has become, for better or worse, the model of the eccentric artist-scientist in the contemporary art world.”303 Nevertheless, these inconsistencies raise the critical issue of partial performance failure, which I am pursuing in this chapter, as well as the productive side of such shortcomings and how they inspire further investigation.

At the Noguchi, surrounded by tables full of plans, Soon after demonstrating the zip line wing apparatus, Jeremijenko exchanged her inventor’s demeanor and authority for a more playful modus and began manipulating (and talking to) her collection of “petbots,” off-the-shelf toy animals that had been re-engineered (by Jeremijenko and her students and assistants) with robotic parts. One, a white puppy, she fronted with a digital video camera and then manipulated with a remote controller. It proceeded to capture images of the gallery, spectators, other petbots, and the artist herself. Petbots could also, she explained, be outfitted with electronic sensors to sniff out pollutants in the environment and transmit them to data-gathering devices. She deployed the petbot here as a recording device, the spinning camera/rabbit head capturing a dizzying record of the installation. Jeremijenko was thinking ahead, capturing images to use for her website, archival documentation of the galleries, and as promotional footage for the opening at Socrates, which was approaching soon. Her performance as curator was self-captured for future use, but in a distinct and telling key: the surreal, mesmerizing quality of the resulting video showed a blur of color before finally settling on some fragment of the room, and spinning off again before landing on another, and so on. The perspective, Jeremijenko explained, was a forced mixing of two nonhuman points of view, one animal, and the other robotic. The filming, itself a part of her performance as host and interlocutor, incorporated live, unsuspecting volunteers as subjects. It also moved into a different frame of reference, substituting absurd humor for the dry engineering physics of the wing room. It was yet another tool being used to tease open the possibility of representing a post-human perspective. Still, this perspective was, in a sense, in referencing posthumanism, I regard the term as Ian Bogost does, as “neither
referenced more than fully represented; the point of view remained Jeremijenko’s. The petbots were machinic, and certainly represented animals, but that didn’t necessarily mean that the perspective on the world captured by their nose cameras was in actuality a mash up of the animal and the machine. Rather, the product of the petbot video referred back to Jeremijenko’s performance as a mashup of art and engineering. The artist’s performance here, present but elusive, drew attention to herself, in costume, but also to her role as orchestrator of experience and guide to the interpretation of the event. The video became another version of the event, a real-time documentation, but one that introduced another new perspective and simultaneously asked whether such a nonhuman perspective can be attained— captured and presented— by a human with an ingeniously engineered toy, without the actual participation of some other nonhuman animal. Yet to witness another presence sharing the space, the petbots themselves, whose unique version of reality could be fictionally represented and archived, was illuminating entertainment. Posed as a realization of a newly networked, truly posthuman perspective—animal-machine hybridity—the petbots came up short. Reimagined as a demonstration, a pointing to a needed perspective, they were enchanting.

extend(ing) humanity into a symbiotic, visionary future nor reject(ing) our place in the world via antihuman nihilism…a posthumanist ontology is one in which ‘humans are no longer monarchs of being, but are instead among beings, entangled in beings, and implicated in other beings.’” Bogost quotes philosopher Levi Bryant, whose idea of “onticology,” a flat ontology levelling all objects in the world including humans, goes even beyond sociologist Bruno Latour’s idea of de-privileging the human perspective within systems in his own actor-network theory. Bogost sees the posthuman not as a cybernetic utopia of human augmentation but as involving a deeper sense of reflecting on the material status and agency of the non-human. See Ian Bogost, Alien Phenomenology, or, What It’s Like to Be a Thing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012). Also Bruno Latour, Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Levi Bryant, The Democracy of Objects (Ann Arbor: MPublishing, University of Michigan Library, 2011).
As noted earlier, Jeremijenko’s work moves freely between the practical and the fanciful, from deceptive simplicity (Ag-bags) to composite networks integrating communication, observation, and information that couple nature and society, and humans and nonhumans. The Daniel Langlois Foundation, recognizing her work with robotic geese designed to teach humans how to communicate with geese through controlled, distributed motion, noted that the interactivity of OOZ projects combined:

1) an architecture of reciprocity, i.e. any action you can direct at an animal, it can direct at you, and 2) an information architecture of collective observation and interpretation. OOZ addresses learning that reveals interconnections among complex natural systems and the ongoing political effect of changing someone's ideas about their role in the local environment.305

Said interface was achieved, for example, through the design of a custom chair which sensed the operator’s movements and transmitted them to the robotic goose which moved accordingly. A microphone and video camera allowed audiovisual communication and reciprocity. A database collected the verbal responses of the biological geese, which were assigned interpretive values by all users; anyone could edit and comment on anyone else’s online postings. In this, the network arrived at collective interpretations of goose responses and actions prompted by the robotic goose.306 Notably, the experiment’s web archive is designed and written to resemble the language and structure of scientific methodology, yet the conclusions and data gathering have a certain lack of strict scientific rigor and are designed to encourage non-expert participation. Whether by

305 The Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science, and Technology is named for filmmaker and computer animation technologist Daniel Langlois and was founded in 1997. The robotic geese project was designed and implemented in the Netherlands in 2006. See http://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/page.php?NumPage=1830; see also http://www.nyu.edu/projects/xdesign/ooz/; both accessed March 1, 2014.

306 The robotic goose was named Leda, referencing a classical instance of cross-species interaction. See http://www.nyu.edu/projects/xdesign/ooz/, accessed March 1, 2014.
design, inclination, or simple concession to her lack of interest in pursuing traditional forms of research, Jeremijenko typically pursues a strategy of promiscuously moving among several forms of discourse in her project design. The designs appear slippery at times, as though opportunistically putting to use whichever framing will offer what is needed to publicize the experience, whether the discourse of research, social participation, visual art and design, or simply experiential novelty.

Still, the consistent commitment to enframing an expanded network of species in uneasy coexistence is a hallmark of Jeremijenko’s design systems, no matter how fanciful or improbable. The designs at the Noguchi, more than mere sketches for the later realization outdoors at Socrates, formed a retrospective of Jeremijenko’s preoccupations with establishing alternative forms of place. As landscapes and tools for performances of living, her proposals modeled modes of travel, work, and coexistence in newly connected environments. If not full realizations, indeed, even if unrealizable by reason of excessive cost or overwhelming engineering challenges, her designs capture the full potential of imaginative place-making. They feature a radical democracy of species and a palpable sense of individual becoming. Jeremijenko offers a fluid aesthetic, situating spectator-participants within environmental remediation, in which the role to be played is that of newly aware, right-sized steward.

The tension between utopist imagining and pragmatism that adheres to a design like the flight wings or TREEXOFFICE pulls the spectator in and repels our involvement simultaneously. These projects activate both critical and playful faculties while making the designs appear “unique” and difficult to imagine duplicating in reality. The same sense of wonder at feeling one’s weight release into a full-size prototype bird’s wing
seems to mitigate the, presumably desired, sense that one could depart the museum and begin commuting via zip line in our city. Yet even this seeming failure to achieve plausibility recalls the source of the power of Jeremijenko’s designs; there is a productive vision of an imagined future that is deeply theatrical and compelling as participatory performance. The failure to immediately manifest nearly global scale change is hardly unanticipated, and leaves open vast areas of individual agency and creativity. It is productive failure.

**Performance Ecology Literature and UP_2_U**

The performative failure of the work, as Nicholas Ridout suggests about more traditional theatrical models, resides near the heart of the performance experience of XClinic’s philosophy and approach to system design. In *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems*, Ridout claims the problem of theatrical failure—to convince, to transport, to faithfully mirror reality, to transcend leisure capitalism, to offer us a clearly defined role—is somehow intrinsic and central to the experience of theatre itself. Theatrical failure, in its Performance Studies context as a practice seeking to rid theatre of its artifice and to model behavior that is closer to the real, claims Ridout, fares no better than theatre does in failing to escape its economic and social context, and should dispense with its inherited antitheatrical bias. Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems.*

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307 Even performance, in its Performance Studies context as a practice seeking to rid theatre of its artifice and to model behavior that is closer to the real, claims Ridout, fares no better than theatre does in failing to escape its economic and social context, and should dispense with its inherited antitheatrical bias. Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems.*
altogether.»308 The theatrical failure is most present at precisely the point wherein we struggle with our own role in the proceedings. This working of theatrical failure is similarly necessary and intrinsic to Jeremijenko’s work in that the imaginative scenes she creates move us in large part because they do not, they cannot, fully succeed as representations. Their own shortcomings as mirrors of reality indicate the necessity of the worldview they concretize. They are meant to indicate forms of a new network and inspire creative solutions toward its achievement. They are meant to locate us in the oscillation between absorption and dialogue, activating us and providing models for actions that are environmentally remedial.

Recent literature on performance and ecology supports thinking of Jeremijenko’s work as a form of environmental place making, and as sketches of newly imagined networks of interspecies cohabitation. The philosophical orientation of her work is aligned closely with work addressing themes of place as a form of ecological and theatrical practice. The realization and reception of UP_2_U reflect in unique and productive ways on expansive notions of public space, interspecies cohabitation, citizenship, and networked communities such as those creatively articulated in theory and practice by Una Chauduri and Baz Kershaw.309 Kershaw inscribes various forms of theatrical failure within an evolving paradigm of performance responsive to an age of

308 Ibid., 9.
ecological crisis.\textsuperscript{310} For Kershaw, theatre ecology suggests the interrelationship of all organic and nonorganic inhabitants of ecosystems. Inspired, in particular, by Bonnie Marranca’s 1996 \textit{Ecologies of Theatre}, Kershaw develops his ecological views as an integration of diverse sources and traditions as well as an ethical invitation to approach performance with an idea of sustainability and endurance.\textsuperscript{311}

Newly evolving “performance ecologies” reflect a needed commons, shared by humans and animals, that performance is uniquely suited to investigate, within an avowedly performative society.\textsuperscript{312} In Kershaw’s definition, theatre ecology involves a basic reading of society as “addicted” to performance: “Every dimension of human exchange and experience is suffused by performance and gains a theatrical quality. All human life is theatricalized and dramatized including, crucially, its interactions with other species and the environment.”\textsuperscript{313} Ecologies of theatre inhabit overlapping domains, dissolving borders between culture and nature, and comprising performance’s mediation of the material world. These may include images of global warnings and crises within economic and geographic landscapes that both scale (up) and shape performance, all contextualized within a search for a “commons” for all species. This is not unlike the shared environment Jeremijenko seeks to portray, embody, and instantiate in her

\textsuperscript{310} Kershaw, \textit{Theatre Ecology}, 7. Certain eco-theatre experiments are described as “pathological reactions to the degradations that humans wreak on Earth.” Kershaw’s ecologies of theatre, echoing Marranca’s work which he cites as an influence, imagines similarly concentric overlapping ecologies comprising the world of performance and performance’s mediation of the world, including images of global warnings, economic and geographic landscapes that scale and shape performance, and the search for a “commons” for all species.


\textsuperscript{312} Kershaw, \textit{Theatre Ecology}. See especially chapter one, “On theatre and performance ecology”.

\textsuperscript{313} Ibid., 12.
installations and the XClinic-sponsored personal lifestyle experiments. In particular, the Socrates installation was designed to support inter-species awareness and health via altered human behavior, set in a global context. Thus, Kershaw’s distinction between performance ecology and performance ecologies, distinguishing “how performance is an integral part of global ecology” and how performances “operate ecologically as ecosystems,” neatly captures both the ethos and the purpose of Jeremijenko’s body of participatory work.

In the collection Land/Scape/Theater, co-edited with Elinor Fuchs, Una Chauduri contributes a largely metaphorical treatment of landscape as performance to Marranca’s earlier, similarly inclined offering. In their introduction, the editors note that the word “landscape” denotes a movable boundary between the allied concepts of the natural and the human, sharing with theatre (and with Kershaw) an intrinsically contested and debated set of definitions. In her own essay in the collection, Chauduri notes that the European tradition of landscape painting since the Renaissance evolved in the cultural imaginary from a depiction of “truthful” observation of a welcoming nature to an ideological positioning of the isolated observer in a fixed perspective, passively separated from the depicted surroundings. This detached, albeit reassuring, placement of the viewer is challenged by the new kinds of “landscape theatre” that the book describes, and

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314 Lifestyle experiments vary widely and can include growing flowers and vegetables in her patented “Ag-bags,” like those created by visitors at Socrates Park in Long Island City, or researching how ordinary items are manufactured and reporting on this topic. The findings can be uploaded to an ever-expanding website called How Stuff is Made (HSIM). See http://www.nyu.edu/projects/xdesign/.
315 Kershaw, 14.
317 Ibid., 21–27.
which find an ultimate realization in Jeremijenko’s *UP_2_U*, both rendering landscape as actively, pervasively inhabited and explorable.

Of course, *UP_2_U* has a more complex relationship with performance than as mere landscape, or as a platform for its creator’s aforementioned self-presentation and overtly performative public appearances. The ethical component of the work demands that attention be paid, centrally, to our ongoing relation to the environment and other species, calling for a more situated, self-reflexive subjective response than the mainstream environmentalists’ “reduce, reuse, recycle.” Jeremijenko’s work can, nevertheless, also be read through the lens of current trends focusing on models for sustainability and greening practices within the theatre. Unlike, for example, such arts/environmental organizations as Broadway Green Alliance in New York, or Julie’s Bicycle in London, the XClinic does not publish scientific studies or advocate simply for better practices of reusing material waste.\(^{318}\) Advocacy, journalism, legislation, and data reporting are left to those better positioned to be effective in those areas. The set of practices organized under the umbrella of the XClinic are themselves a powerful expression of a new hybrid medium, environmental arts activism.

This more inclusive quality of performance experience represented by *UP_2_U* resembles a shift in emphasis from the varied dramaturgical plays and experiments loosely grouped under the labels “eco theatre” or, in Theresa May’s term,

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\(^{318}\) The Broadway Green Alliance, through partnerships with the Natural Resources Defense Council and within the industry, serves as a resource for improved practices regarding recycling and upcycling on Broadway and, prospectively, in regional and university theatre departments. BGA’s UK counterpart, Julie’s Bicycle, originated in rock music touring, and partners with the UK Arts Council and with university research centers to advocate and demonstrate improved practices throughout England, Scotland, Wales, and North Ireland.
“ecodramaturgy.” Wendy Arons and May, in their 2012, co-edited *Readings in Performance and Ecology*, express concern that “despite the fact that ecological degradation will likely precipitate enormous social and political upheaval in the next century, and, with it, unpredictable and unimaginable effects on human communities and cultures,” environmental issues are still underrepresented in Western theatre and performance scholarship. Referring to the diverse contributions to their collection, May’s coinage announces a form of theatre and performance work that places ecological concerns and community, another contested term, centrally among its preoccupations. Ecodramaturgy also includes investigation of the hidden or overlooked anthropocentric assumptions involving the environment in classic texts, as well as the unsustainability of many current theatrical production practices.

Terms such as “ecodrama” or “ecodramaturgy” refer, generally, to theatrical forms that retain environmental challenge as a subject existing apart from imagined protagonists. Even such an innovative director as the New York-based Karen Malpede, writing in the theatre blog *Howlround*, deals primarily in fictional characters. Calling

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320 Ibid.
321 Ibid., 4.
322 This topic alone could exceed the bounds of one dissertation, and it is being addressed with innovation by some recent designers, such as New York’s Donyale Werle, who has made a specialization of using recycled set materials in such productions on Broadway as *Peter and the Starcatcher* and *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*. Ian Garrett, of the Center for Sustainable Practice in the Arts, also a contributor to the Arons/May volume, has made CSPA a valuable organization by connecting advances in environmentally friendly technical theatre practices with recent visual and performance work exploring new forms of representing ecological concerns.
323 *Howlround* itself is an interesting instantiation of participatory theatrical trends, functioning as a distributed platform, lightly curated by a team, and allowing a wide variety of forms of participation. See www.howlround.org.
her own projects at Theatre for the New City in Manhattan, as well as the work of some other artists, “climate art,” she writes:

Climate art can show how characters come into a newly enlivened relationship with nature and how they help one another by inventing new strategies to sustain life. We’ve got to be as fearless in our climate art as the Greeks were in their tragedies, and dare to imagine the worst of all possible outcomes, but we need to discover ways to lift each other up and out before the final, fatal moment. We must create characters that recognize our common fate before it is too late and who act forcefully to turn grief to creative effort and to laughter.\(^\text{324}\)

Even as far-sighted and progressive as this position is, it resists the kind of direct enactment and inclusive subject positioning of a design like \textit{UP \_2 \_U} and points to Jeremijenko’s own resistance to referring to her work as performance.

Una Chauduri, in her most recent work on ecology and theatre, advocates for a form of investigative performance, which she calls “Research Theatre.”\(^\text{325}\) This process-based, open-ended form of theatrical research, is, in Chauduri’s opinion, particularly suited to questions (such as the role of environmental consumers and citizens within global capitalism), on which public opinion and media consensus differ widely. As such, it comes closer than eco-drama to realizing the activated spectatorship advocated by Jeremijenko’s lifestyle experiments. Also, in contrast to documentary theatre’s search for


\(^{325}\) Una Chauduri and Shonni Enelow, \textit{Research Theatre}. 
the truest among varying subject positions, Research Theatre “tries to multiply the questions, meanings, interpretations, and possibilities evoked by a given discourse.”

Like Jeremijenko, who has called her own work at its basis an investigation into the “crisis” of human agency and its representation for the ordinary citizen (and an encouragement to become citizen-scientists), Chauduri sees her work with artists and students as addressing problems of discourse and agency. She writes, ”Climate change has advanced to this dangerous verge in part because we haven’t known how to think and feel about it.” In particular, within the arts and humanities, she notes, the disciplinary habits involved in addressing global issues such as climate change, war, or civic agency deny us an easy apprehension of the role of time scales and our own capacity to organize and enact change, the same issue with which Jeremijenko struggles in her own practice. Both practitioners seek, in their research-based arts practice, to crystallize and reveal new opportunities for agency and productivity in the face of impending crisis. They further agree that this platform for change rests on a radically altered set of representational tools, which, in distinct ways, immerse spectators within a participatory form of comprehension and engagement while conditioning us to respond to unfamiliar geologic time rather than human time registers. This expanded concept of our role in terms of planetary scale and disciplinary inventiveness, common to the work and thought of

326 Ibid., chapter 1.
327 See Jeremijenko’s interview with Jennifer McGregor, “Platforms for Participation: A Conversation with Natalie Jeremijenko,” in The New Earthwork: Art, Action, Agency, ed. Twylene Moyer and Glenn Harper (Hamilton, NJ: ISC Press, 2011), 302: “I think that the climate crisis has produced, or revealed, what I call the ‘crisis of agency.’ There is a dissatisfaction with small steps, like driving the speed limit, changing light bulbs – formulas that no one really thinks are going to save the world. But what to do? That’s the kind of representational challenge that this space address. The clinic offers a different structure for participation and a very specific engagement.”
328 Chauduri and Enelow, Research Theatre, chapter 1. Italics in original.
Kershaw, Chauduri, and Jeremijenko, suggests a similarly enlarged sense of individual agency to include our inheritance and our legacy.

Jeremijenko’s approach, the creation of “lifestyle experiments” in which participants role play solutions, interventions, and responses to locally specific issues, is a different order of aesthetic event entirely. Unlike ecodramaturgical strategies, lifestyle experiments move us along the continuum from a human-centered to a more radically de-centered conception of interspecies relation within networks. Rescaling our place in the landscape, it fosters a new awareness of ecological citizenship as a derivation, an augmentation, and an intensification of traditional citizenly forms of existence.

**Environmental Citizenship**

In the previous chapters, the dramaturgical strategies for devising tacit contracts with audiences for their creative participation were traced across two distinct fields of engagement: military role playing in a simulated battle deployment and a civic exercise in local city council legislation. Both areas of endeavor bore relationships with long-held notions of the activities defining citizenship throughout many periods of history and in multiple settings. In directing inquiry to the area of environmental performance, addressing issues of science, engineering, politics and participation, this chapter’s trajectory takes on a number of different emphases and new ambiguities. Environmental participation, comprised of actions touching on stewardship, consumerism, and concern for our shared existence is, by its very nature, political in orientation and reflects, it can be argued, positions even more fundamental to human life than war or legislative scenarios. Indeed, environmental remediation is intimately connected to both legislation
and war, in myriad ways familiar to witnesses of the oil well fires of Kuwait and Iraq during the Gulf Wars, and followers of media stories about climate change denial and its corporate sponsorship, almost on a daily basis in the United States.

In a recent study of the relationship between evolving notions of citizenship and the theatre, David Wiles portrays the historical congruence between state subjectivity and public performance with close attention paid to the importance of “acts” that define the citizen. The role of the citizen is performative by design and is constituted by how we gather and associate in specific locales; this differs materially from the concept of nationality, which is a combined function of birthplace, and, for expatriates and some travelers, adoption of new national identities. For much of history, being a citizen has involved attending public performances of some kind. Wiles describes an expansive history of civic participation, including Greek and Roman festival life, the pageantry of Rousseau’s Geneva, the festivals of the French Revolution, and other examples through to modernity. Asserting that the very idea of the citizen “unhooks the state from the nation,” Wiles nevertheless affirms that ethics and feeling cannot be separated from the terms of one’s membership within the community, a relevant condition within the theatre. If citizenship “addresses the problems of cohabitation,” then the art form that models, represents, and has a hand in creating the condition of citizenry needs to account for the dual nature of our presence there as individuals and as a collective. Wiles traces the history of theatre (and associated antitheatrical prejudices)—theatre’s various architectural settings, forms of spectatorship, status of actors, and changing dramatic

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330 Ibid.
forms—bound with the dynamic tension between appeals to our rational autonomy and our collective affect as we experience our social ties represented before us. He concludes that it is undecidable, ultimately, whether theatrical reception is determined primarily by our individual responses or our collective sense of ourselves as communal audience.\textsuperscript{331} By starting from either premise—that of the autonomous, classically liberal individual, or that of the member of the \textit{polis}, which Aristotle claimed as a foundational sensibility in the theatre audience prior to the sense of ourselves as individual—we must address, Wiles claims, the relative lack of emphasis given in theatre studies to the aspect of subjectivity that is derived communally.\textsuperscript{332} This is the book’s primary intention, and numerous examples attest to the importance of shared theatrical response for defining a body politic.

In recent years, as prospects for a sustainable environmental future become more threatened and the scientific evidence mounts that climate change is inevitable and has already progressed beyond our ability to control its effects, a new form of citizenship has been conceptualized, one that responds directly to a shared sense of commitment and responsibility to planetary unity. Andrew Dobson and Derek Bell’s recent \textit{Environmental Citizenship} offers numerous versions of actions stemming from concern for both local and global territories as dawning constituent elements of the citizen.\textsuperscript{333} Adopting an ethics-based approach to the twin concerns of altering people’s behavior and attitudes,

\textsuperscript{331} Wiles acknowledges a wide range of theories of spectatorship, including the recent turn toward cognitive theory, experiments involving “mirror neurons,” etc., yet his interest remains primarily focused on the lack of importance given to communitarian theories of reception, although they date back at least to Aristotle’s sense of \textit{synaesthesia}, or co-perception.

\textsuperscript{332} Wiles, \textit{Theatre and Citizenship}, 11.

\textsuperscript{333} Andrew Dobson and Derek Bell, eds., \textit{Environmental Citizenship} (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007).
Dobson and Bell introduce the concept of individual practices as an alternative to the state-sponsored, market-based incentives that have been, until recently, the primary tools for encouraging public actions that harm the environment. Holding to the idea that environmental citizenship is an inflection of historical ideas of citizenship, they and the other authors in their essay collection seek a balance of liberal, rights-based and republican notions of what constitutes a citizen, stressing virtue and responsibility.

“Eco-feminist” Sherilyn MacGregor’s contribution to the collection raises provocative questions that relate to Jeremijenko’s work, its promise and, perhaps, its shortcomings. MacGregor’s thesis is that most prevalent forms of environmental activism, including newly defined forms of citizenship, fail to address gender and other structural inequalities in their view of the autonomous, rational citizen. Nevertheless, she finds the search for a newly inclusive citizenship as a “promising strategy for challenging gender inequality while imagining a form of political solidarity among women that does not forever tie them to an essential capacity or innate sense of responsibility to care for others.” This strategy seeks to critique and displace a more dangerous neoliberal definition of citizenship based on individual economic rights and self-interest in a globalized marketplace, allied with unsustainable material accumulation amidst unfettered competition. MacGregor’s primary concern is in the veiled and hidden assumptions about gender and the organization of “socially necessary work” that “most green political theorists” make about the ideal subject that we must actualize in order to

334 For example, they address the Irish government’s levy on plastic bags for shoppers who request them in supermarkets, begun in 2002.
335 Dobson and Bell, 5.
participate democratically in collective, sustainable, environmentally sound practices.\textsuperscript{337} As she correctly maintains, any reform of citizenship calling for more participation relies on the assumed freedom of time and responsibility for individuals to become involved; if women are charged with the majority of the work of the domestic sphere, as is still the case in most parts of the world, they will be disadvantaged in undertaking new and time-intensive forms of action. This is a theoretical blindness of most theorists, claims MacGregor, who derive their models from classical Athens and its democratic politics, limited by law and custom that excluded women, slaves and foreigners.\textsuperscript{338}

Jeremijenko’s work takes an expansive view of citizenship, one which is neither gendered nor enmeshed in capitalist accumulation. Focused on shared space, self-reliance, and the autonomy of individual participants, lifestyle experiments and the modes of living they foster emphasize the maximum possible self-initiated and self-sustaining systemic energy production and conservation. Her vision assumes the three R’s (reduce, reuse, recycle) as a starting point, but seeks to go far beyond such practices to enhance living in interconnected worlds of information and data. Her use of environmental sensors—tracking devices that provide environmental health-related feedback about the interrelationships within systems (such as the robotic geese or TREEXOFFICE)—is designed to both enframe space and to activate participation in designing future systems. As she says, “‘Structures of Participation’ is the term I use to understand the network structure of accountability, the network structure of participation,

\textsuperscript{337} Ibid., 105.  
\textsuperscript{338} Ibid., 108.
the network structure of sense-making.”

For the artist, the citizen is not simply a data consumer, but a data producer, interpreter, and user. By virtue of the complexity of the data, the urgency of the issues involved, and according to the logic of the commons, problems and solutions that can be pursued by wide networks must be pursued by such dispersed networks.

These problems of networking and association admittedly require some introduction and articulation; standing before the TREEXOFFICE, one would not immediately grasp that, as the artist claims, “Your tenancy generated rent—proceeds could be used by and for the interests of the landlord tree as the tree determined, for example: augmenting spoil with biochar, companion plantings, and other actions taken at the tree’s discretion.”

Leaving aside for the moment how one is to ascertain and interpret the tree’s directives, Jeremijenko is clearly pursuing an artistic approach to representing both agency and subjectivity that requires some decoding and thought, one that depends equally on willingness to engage the world as a partner in citizen science and activism and the knowledge to do so. For the newly initiated, one finds oneself relying on the status of the image and the explanatory text taken together in order to unlock the full import of the experience and its resonance for her and her team of co-workers. The kind of equivalency espoused by Paolo Virno in his notion of the “general intellect,” a radical leveling of assumed functions and capabilities among persons, is at the center of the kind of intellectual and moral activation such experiments demand of us.

We are assumed to be equal partners and responsible for choices that will, presumably,

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340 Ibid., 21.
341 Jeremijenko, Civic Action, 44.
represent and support the collective. The nagging question is how to choose and equip ourselves to decide and act.

**Networks of Participation and Performative Failure**

Jeremijenko’s installations and participatory experiments rely upon intricate network designs, often through online projects with geographically dispersed participants. Through a radical imagining of multispecies cohabitation, complex, distributed associations of human, nonhuman, and material entities are represented in theory and, partially, in practice. This incomplete realization of utopian future worlds, provocatively incomplete but tantalizingly figured forth, is what I call Jeremijenko’s performative failure. Again, to restate part of my thesis, this sense of incomplete realization should not be viewed pejoratively, but rather as a call to further action and as a version of “risky aesthetics.”

Here, unlike the risks of participation characteristic of International WOW Company’s *Surrender*, or Aaron Landsman’s *City Council Meeting*, risk would seem to inhere in the danger, for the artist as well as for us, of leaving Jeremijenko’s fields of action unconvinced or unmoved by their environmental imperatives or their urban design. This risk, however, is boldly mitigated by the accessible qualities of her experiments and the sense that all of us are capable of making a difference.

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342 “Risky Aesthetics” was the title of a recent call for papers for a forthcoming volume to be edited by Alice O’Grady, which promises to explore “performance in which participants engage with work where the outcome is not fully known and where there is some degree of surrender, or relinquishing of control…designed to produce a sense of critical vulnerability in the participant to achieve affect, transformation or attitudinal shift.”
The work of Jeremijenko’s Experimental Design Clinic has frequently been considered as a form of urban design and as experimental architectural investigation. A work from 2009, *Amphibious Architecture*, placed floating light displays above submerged oxygen sensors in the East and Bronx Rivers. The sensors detected measures of water quality while ultrasonic fish finders noted the presence of fish in the area. As described in The Architectural League of New York’s published study *Sentient City*, the experiment detailed the simultaneous functioning of several unique networks. These unusual networks realized the ambitious goal of connecting living and nonliving elements and were comprised of the fish themselves, data gathered from the river’s condition, the technology used to acquire and transmit the information, and dispersed teams of human researchers and nonspecialist observers. The project design, notably, replaced the kind of fixed structures typically thought of as architecture, with conceptual “envelopes” designed to be porous conductors of flows of energy, information and living beings. As the project description noted, these envelopes—water-borne sensors and computer networks—created small ecosystems that could themselves be networked to exchange data, inform the public of environmental conditions locally, and, most crucially, engage and solve problems rather than merely report them.

*Civic Action* imagined large, impossibly complex systems in action while envisioning representing such abstracted utopian space to nonspecialists. In this sense, the work resembled the artistic activism of well-known “citizen-scientist” practitioners such as Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) and their one-time collaborator, artist-scientist

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344 Ibid., 50–51.
Beatriz da Costa. Jeremijenko, like da Costa and CAE, was one of the important early practitioners of “net art,” artistic practice designed for realization via the internet, and her work is frequently experienced via another mode of networking, websites that document the cumulative work of online, distributed associations of otherwise disconnected individuals.

In Long Island City, the exhibitions at the Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park were designed “to produce a project about community, real estate development, and the built and natural environment.” Each of the four artists—George Trakas, Mary Miss, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Jeremijenko—were asked to address the changing industrial landscape of Long Island City in Queens, and to do so by forming their own network of collaborators. As with the earlier Amphibious Architecture, the importance and uniqueness of the work resided in combining attractive, sustainable worlds in which humans might imagine ourselves in right-sized perspective among other living beings and material infrastructures as something other than consumers or exploiters. This was made manifest through networks that possess the capability to “scale up” toward profound environmental consequences, joining philosophical concerns about ontology to ethical choices supporting these human/nonhuman networks, sustaining lives coextensive with our own. Such a reimagined ontology asks us to seriously consider the possibilities of placing objects, or at least the relations between objects and objects and

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345 Jenny Dixon and John Hatfield, foreword to Jeremijenko, Civic Action, 2.
346 I participated in the website development aspect of the second part of the work, at Socrates Sculpture Park, writing and editing project descriptions, in addition to viewing the work. I also shot and co-edited video documenting Jeremijenko’s presentation of her portion of the Noguchi installation.
ourselves at the center of our experience of existence, displacing the primacy generally accorded the individual (at least in the Western metaphysical tradition).\textsuperscript{347}

The fruitful intersection of research, performance, and advocacy explored by such work is revealed in an interview from 2008, for The Architectural League of New York, between Jeremijenko and design theorist Benjamin Bratton. It explores the relation between the performance of institutional and scientific authority, and the development of networks of environmental citizenship in her work:

NJ: Take lead levels or elemental carbon diesel pollution in the air, for instance. You can pump kids up with asthma medication or you can try to improve the air quality in their school, parks and neighborhoods. These are very different regimes.
BB: And to do those things is the agency of a clinic?
NJ: The useful thing about the clinic and the clinic script is its familiarity and how you can get people to participate.
BB: Can you expand on the clinic as a “script”?  
NJ: The reason it is a useful script in terms of political organization is these one on one indelible meetings. In what other institutional context do you have this kind of direct engagement?\textsuperscript{348}

Acknowledging here, at least, the theatricalization of the clinical setting and the performativity of the identities being modeled within it, Jeremijenko traces the outline of the projective future of the work. It is a kind of seeding, to work the metaphor more deeply, positioning role playing as a form of ethical appeal to the newly imagined citizen—

\textsuperscript{347} Among recent developments in revisionist philosophical approaches to the Western idealist versions of ontology, are Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network-Theory, which emphasizes the dynamic relation among living/non-living assemblages and the more radically materialist object-oriented ontology of speculative realists like Professor of Digital Media Ian Bogost. See Latour, \textit{Reassembling the Social} and Bogost, \textit{Alien Phenomenology}. Bogost: “To be a speculative realist, one must abandon the belief that human access sits at the center of being, organizing and regulating it like an ontological watchmaker. In both a figurative and a literal sense, speculative realism is an event rather than a philosophical position: it names a moment when the epistemological tide ebbed, revealing the iridescent shells of realism they had so long occluded” (Kindle locations 146–9).

scientist, fostering a do-it-yourself approach to sophisticated data mining and community empowerment. It is also, like the Civic Action work, projective in the sense that it virtually acknowledges the built-in limitations of scope and reach involved. It is a hoped-for solution, a utopian future in which all might participate in bringing their environmental “ills” to a clinic for activist problem solving. It might spread to other locations and settings. But it is difficult to imagine, and difficult to believe, that the artist(s) imagine this as the lone institutional solution necessary to remediate the environment. It remains materially, though helpfully, short of named goals.

Her interviewer, in imagining the eventuality of many such clinics, acknowledges her strategic focus and indirectly points out the of the nature of the productive failure inherent in such work: such immeasurable scope would stand little chance of becoming universally applicable even if funding, political obstacles, behavioral habits—in short, all the elements of environmental citizenship—were to fall her way. And yet, the networked potential exists, and is augmented by the visionary quality of the performance contract. Jeremijenko acknowledges that the citational potency of the work is a key attribute, and more important than almost any other aspect; the work breeds imitation through play and role-modeling.

She is sanguine, also, about the revolutionary potential of amassing more data, given our limited focus and vast inequalities in power and authority of those who generate the data. The majority of environmental readings taken and publicized regarding air and water quality, for example, are generated by governmental agencies or their corporate scientific research partners whose interests closely align with state needs to control the flow of information. This is not the case with individual, autonomous
research. The clinical ideal acts as catalyst and aggregator of data, strategy, and informational dissemination, without the veil of partiality and editorial slant from most publicly available sources. In this way, the “citizens’” data can become knowledge, strategy, and even policy.

Jeremijenko also acknowledges the important role of affect, direct bodily experience, in the composition of participatory engagement. Disputing that what she does is political in the legislative or advocacy senses of the word, she nevertheless says that, “it is critical to appeal to the sense-making of the everyman. We are trying to translate these techno-scientific, industrial and political resource allocation issues to be self-evident to the everyman, such that they could act as if they were self-evident.” Her admission that there is a challenge not only in acquiring and interpreting data from local environments, but additionally in contesting the claims made by authoritative agencies with other political desires, makes explicit that the political ends sought here are not consensual. In fact, they resemble and instantiate the kind of contested, essentially antagonistic political readings of parties, class politics, and the composition of communities familiar to readers of Laclau and Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, as well as Rancière’s work on political *dissensus*. These readings acknowledge that the totality of interests among groups is rarely aligned and is instead subject to a wide variety of associations, interests, identities, and desires, each of which pulls subjects into unique, ever-changing dynamics of connections. Any network that decenters the human and acknowledges the agency of animals and objects is bound to

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349 Ibid., 31.
radically multiply this already complex matrix beyond comprehension. Yet Jeremijenko’s work is precisely the kind of investigation and practical offering that sociologist Bruno Latour advocates, and that Baz Kershaw and Una Chauduri would have us undertake, inside and outside the theatre, as a matter of aesthetic necessity and environmental urgency.

In framing the ongoing public lifestyle experiments of Jeremijenko and the Clinic as performance, it is clear that the recognition is meant to position such performances as a means of travel beyond performance to explore the conditions of performance itself. Immersed in an emerging world of connection between humans and nonhuman, we opportunistically accept the challenge, as Kershaw, Chauduri, and Read have advised us, to dispense with “ecological theatre” in order to explore the more substantial relations and reflections potentially revealed within new performance forms. For Read, performance scholars writing about the human–animal connection would do well to look back to a much earlier scholar, Richard Southern, whose *The Seven Ages of Theatre* invests in a vision of animal nature as it first infuses live performance with his description of “The Bavarian Wild Man.”

It is this vital connection, where the mysterious power of the animal melds with the very human conception of emotions, that can inspire us as practitioners and researchers. The connection has been read by Joseph Roach in his history of the actor’s art as involving physical transformation, the very heart of mimesis. Ultimately, the difference between the human and the animal, Read provocatively suggests, is that the human animal is capable of forms of failure, of doing

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things less well than they are able. “Nature and those things once consigned to it are now in the process of being drawn towards the collective for consideration as to the extent to which they are matters of fact, to be appreciated, or matters of concern to be acted upon…as endeavors, tasks to be realized, repeatedly to be performed and acted upon anew.” This falling short, of indicating that there is more to do, to learn, to produce, and to alter, is at the heart of Jeremijenko’s performative designs and lifestyle experiments too.

Performance failure, the productive sense of pointing to a goal beyond what is evidenced in performance’s own duration, is, perhaps in Jeremijenko’s work, more fully revealed and attained than in any of the other examples I examine. Sitting in a tree office, taking salamanders for urban walks, or seeing the eerie ghost lights of East River fish blink on, the scope of the work resonates with the very possibility of life’s sustenance and healthful futurity itself. The humorous, often quixotic tropes point to this inherent recognition of both the enormity of the crisis and the immense task ahead, of conceiving the networks that connect us within shared space and agency with so many other entities. Associating animals, sensors, trees, human labor, and connectivity with performed spectacle and old-fashioned theatrical hype and marketing, the artist summons us to explore a rupture with the quotidian, a new distribution of the sensible that will prioritize sustainable choices.

Whether or not this vision is attainable is impossible to determine, but even a cursory examination of contemporary political resistance to accepting the reality of climate change, or climate catastrophe, leaves one less than hopeful. What is clear is that

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the networks unveiled through the work of the Environmental Health Clinic’s associated artists, led by Jeremijenko, are falling short in the best manner possible—boldly, bravely, and with provocative vision—in confronting ecological ills about which even progressive environmentalists remain largely unaware. In this task of educating and activating the public, Jeremijenko is well served by her institutional placement within a major research university, in a city that supports many artists. Yet her vision, in order to manifest real, lasting remediation, would need to be multiplied—and financed—many times over. Financial constraints deter the scope of Jeremijenko’s work as they do most artists. Grants are never generous or frequent enough; institutional support is contingent on changing priorities and administrations. For now, the work remains in the nebulous existence characterized by various forms of productive failure.

Performance failure compels us to see further than we might had the incompletely realized performance not existed. It beckons and leads us far beyond our current constraints of political will, quotidian habits, and narrowness of vision. In the case of Natalie Jeremijenko’s work, these constraints touch on the most pressing issues of our era: the disappearance of habitats, the rising of the oceans, and the many illnesses, extinctions, climate shocks, and as-yet-unknown effects of our addiction to fossil fuels. Her work attempts to represent a state of nature that is actually nature-culture, the hybrid actions of geological and human forces that are interpreted as separate, as long as humankind is unshaken in our perceived centrality. What can be emphasized is that, in contracting with us to immerse us in a form of performance failure, Jeremijenko’s experiments allow us to inhabit an alternative world, incompletely drawn, but indicative of the possibilities of new energy directed toward ecological remediation and health.
*Surrender, City Council Meeting, and Civic Action* share the goal of the potential revitalization of social forms through increased democratic participation. *Civic Action,* despite the limitations of its frequently virtual status due to its ambitious number of projects and ongoing funding shortage, comes close to realizing the goals set by most participatory theatre and performance: to introduce models for individual and collective involvement in an ongoing structure of agency demonstrated by the performances themselves. By engaging in lifestyle experiments, subjects explore the performance remains of *Civic Action’s* existence as live performance and, perhaps, retain the projective nature of its strategic dramaturgy into the future.
CONCLUSION

My operating thesis in the foregoing survey of recent participatory performances—that partial performative failure is a strategic and compelling element in the work of connecting audiences—resonates with many recent statements about the important role of failure in art. For example, Lisa Le Feuvre’s edited volume *Failure*, in the Documents of Contemporary Art series, cites numerous curatorial statements offering failure as an operating principle across four distinct modes of addressing practice. She includes “dissatisfaction and rejection, idealism and doubt, error and incompetence, and experiment and progress” as her chosen categories of valuing forms of failure as a tactic representative of modernist practices of many stripes.\(^{354}\) According to curator Russell Ferguson, introducing the practice of experimental, participatory artist Francis Alÿs, “failure,” the idea of falling short of a finished work, allows Alÿs to maintain the ideal of a still-forming rehearsal aesthetic throughout his social works. He writes, “If a work is still in rehearsal then it can always be changed. The moment of completion is always potentially delayed. For Alÿs, then, the final work is always in some sense projected into the future, a future that is always advancing ahead of the work.”\(^{355}\) This indication of a future cohesion and completeness is, clearly, also the strategy of the artists in this study, their work deriving its utility from a directedness of our attention toward a future fulfillment of ideals stated as partial, incomplete, or conditional in the performed present. This performed present is codified through an implicit exchange of immaterial labors,

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\(^{354}\) Lisa Le Feuvre, ed. *Failure* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 12.

informally contractually, though subject to surprises and ideological promiscuity. We rarely quite know what we are agreeing to when we join the performance, and we frequently determine the nature of that agreement ourselves, albeit with significant, and sometimes veiled, input from the artists who accrue artistic capital by virtue of having invited us in to the collaborative table.

The idea of the utility of performance, that theatre might be valued as a practice of shared empathy, awakening us to social and political possibilities beyond the confines of the performance, is at the heart of the participatory impulse. All of the artists whose work I saw, and with whom I met to discuss their practice, wanted to effect some positive alteration in their audience. Each of them wanted, in some deeply personal sense, to create more politically astute, activated, and engaged citizen-subjects among their audiences. Each proposed a performance context in which audiences would directly experience a version of emancipation from political passivity. These liberating gestures of subjective inclusion were designed to unfold via scenarios the artists created as narrative indoctrinations into critical aspects of contemporary neoliberal existence in the United States in the twenty-first century. The overwhelming social compulsion to experience militarization, or to address the loss of civic engagement and community, or, alternately, the inability to conceive of interspecies cohabitation in spaces of environmental remediation: all reference sets of issues revealing dire assessments of our sense of agency in the face of crisis. The “crisis of agency” is posited and revealed as equally momentous in the battlefields of *Surrender*, the civic auditoria of *City Council Meeting*, and in Natalie Jeremijenko’s public landscapes and stated philosophy of participation.
The works and artists surveyed in this study share a commitment to activating spectators politically by engaging them in immersive situations. They share an orientation that favors the actively engaged spectator over the idea of passive viewing. These theatrical/social formations offer opportunities for collective involvement in mimetic actions that reference crucial political realities. Yet, the political sensibility and the artistic value of the contract between artist and audience remain ambiguous and elusive, if provocative and, for the most part, theatrically entertaining.

Claire Bishop’s argument that, far too often, ethical and social concerns trump aesthetic criteria when evaluating participatory work is compelling. She outlines important aspects of a critique analyzing how participatory performance mediates and sublimes political ends through the labor of audiences, which are, generally, provided on an unpaid volunteer basis. She acknowledges the participatory “turn” in visual and performance art is an avowedly theatrical one, emphasizing live relationships and shared spaces. Secondly, she claims the performances are frequently more powerful and effective as conceptual ideas than as realized works, seemingly originating with purposive political or ameliorative social ends and tested as experiments with the public.

For the most part, however, these works do serve to call attention to the proliferation of contemporary networked modes of capitalist communication, production, distribution and consumption and to suggest interventions. The immaterial labor of spectators is put to use by artists wishing to shape the way performance is circulated and consumed, and to make active engagement a critical part of their consumption. Still, Bishop insists, these works should be judged on aesthetic grounds, not simply as ethical gestures. It is necessary, for Bishop, to focus on “the mediating object, concept, image or
story...the necessary link between the artist and a secondary audience.”356 This cautionary resistance to participatory performance contrasts productively with the work of Shannon Jackson, for whom Bishop’s objections smack of a visual studies methodology only lately come to the theatrical ideal and to performances that have featured participatory elements since classical eras, if not earlier.357 It is this focus on the work itself, not simply its overt goals that, as I have proposed, is contingent on the productive deployment on the artists’ part, of partial performative failure. Each in its own way, Surrender, City Council Meeting and Up_2_U exhibit shortcomings of realization that point towards deferred, potential further fulfillment through conscious awareness of their own limitations.

We can see this partial failure at work in various stratagems related to the implicit (or even explicit) contract that characterizes the relationship of volunteering spectators within the performances. In Surrender, the frank acknowledgement of the impossibility of representing war was matched to a poetics of embodied deployment, a tantalizing and brutal immersion in an endurance test of the body and spirit. Referencing the violent rituals of heroism and sacrifice typical of first-person shooter-style video games, Surrender approached the reality of war through a deeply committed, frighteningly confrontational performance audio score. In asking and receiving such a commitment from spectator volunteers, director Fox and company positioned us as partly responsible

356 Bishop, Artificial Hells, 9.
357 Jackson, Social Works, 54–5. She dismisses Bishop’s tendency to find reasons to support works that she likes, and to prioritize objects over durational processes, the unintelligible over the intelligibly political, and also reminds, as does David Wiles, that citizenly forms of theatrical assembly long predate visual art discussions about participation. See Wiles, Theatre and Citizenship: The History of a Practice, (Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2014).
for carrying out an enactment of our own brutalization and ideological instrumentalization. At the same time, the performance, in an awkward transition away from direct participation, finally dismissed us with an insider’s wink and acknowledgment that this deeply theatrical double-role playing had substituted for the advertised immersion in war’s reality.

In City Council Meeting, participation was always already mediated by the production’s complex dramaturgy. Participants were informed from the outset that they were not fully participating, at least not through their own political concerns and words. Rather, they would be re-enacting previously witnessed, edited, and condensed versions of city council meetings, which Aaron Landsman and company had selected for their illustrative value. This resulted in both a hyper-local theatre of the real and a simultaneous reminder that the real work of the performance was deferred to a future engagement outside of the performance space.

Natalie Jeremijenko’s UP_2_U, in Long Island City and elsewhere, promises actual participation, actualized for a utopian environmental remediation and networking. The most provocative of the case studies, the approaches to environmental stewardship characteristic of Jeremijenko’s urban spaces, are tantalizingly possible, precisely as presented. In a sense, it is their performative presentation that most militates against their wider adoption. As performances, the lifestyle experiments are personal, and not necessarily public except through wider networking. As activism, they are sometimes silly, often cheeky ventriloquisms through which Jeremijenko delivers the “other side” of animal behavioral response to human ears, about human environmental depredations and their potential for reverse. The failure resides primarily in the impossibility of realizing
the utopia in the time of public performance. Ultimately, the experiments rely on the future behavior of environmental citizens. The artist and her collaborators provide beautiful networks through which to display, promote, solicit, and envision futures, via the creative use of such networks, virtual and material. Networks are the solution and the art form.

As Maiike Bleeker has written, failure inheres in theatre’s dependence on seeing. There is a necessary failure in seeing representations live as representations.\textsuperscript{358} Networks, however, while able to be represented visibly, bear greater meaning as processes. They are most fully represented as projections of a participatory future of engagements and connections.

Networks, conceived of as descriptions and mappings of connectivity, are among the principal paradigms of our existence. More than a metaphor, networks describe the structure of myriad entities across numerous fields: scientific, social, communications-related, biological, and economic. In neoliberal capitalism, as theorists of networks like Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello have demonstrated, the artistic critique of capitalism—that addressing alienation, oppression and the loss of a sense of the beautiful—was partially addressed from within capitalism in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{359} Creativity was emphasized and work was made more flexible and hence harder to dissociate from private life and time, keying workers into a longer day and commitment to participate in capitalist circulation. This occurred at a time when increased globalization made capital cycles a 24-hour


\textsuperscript{359} Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, \textit{The New Spirit of Capitalism} (London: Verso, 2005).
phenomenon. Thus artistic energies that were once marshaled against authoritarian control were now safely made a part of it.

As one critic of neoliberal capital, Jodi Dean, has maintained, democracy itself has become a kind of fantasy performance at the center of neoliberalism.\textsuperscript{360} The shift in forms of communication and the proliferation of modes of capital in the recent era has oriented us to fetishize participation, particular technological participation. Her psychological view is that this has, all too frequently, served to allow our mere participation—on blogs, email chains, and in consumer experience generally—to substitute for more substantive and lasting forms of political commitment. Bishop agrees with this, mainly because of the frequency with which cultural consumption is sponsored or programmed by liberal government ideologies. For participatory performances such as those under consideration here, this is an important lesson in awareness and aesthetics. These fantasies of networked participation can never rely solely on a progressive politics, rather, we must be on our guard that forms of participation are not mere co-optations of resistant impulses, desires, and energies.

This political ambiguity marks the performances under examination here.

Beginning with \textit{Surrender}, we noted a tension between the thrill of suiting up and performing military actions, and a sense that the critique lay directly underneath such activity, if we choose to see it there, shorn of our own thrill at involvement. Yet this very

\textsuperscript{360} See in particular Dean, \textit{Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies}, 2010, especially 31 and 65. Dean and Bishop share a common distrust of “mere” participation as inherent good, suggesting that the reality is much more diffuse and uncertain. For Dean, networks themselves “capture and reformat” political energies. But she also acknowledges that online participation “feels good,” allowing mobile identities and hybrid subjectivities, along the lines suggested in 1985 by Laclau and Mouffe in \textit{Hegemony and Socialist Strategy}. 
involvement represents a narrative of patriotism, vicarious desires, and the institutional confluence of the military-industrial-entertainment complex, which portrays American military exceptionalism as unique and infallible. Critical awareness must be deployed, that is to say, in the face of powerful cultural values and messages. We must always remember to look to the ways that each of our examples exposes the networks that are its hidden theme, as well as the necessary components of the performance’s dramaturgical structures.

Boltanski and Chiapello’s analysis of 1990s capitalism demonstrated how corporate management responded “artistic” critiques—critical of capital as forming inauthentic people in need of liberation—and succeeding in radically weakening organized resistance strategies. Yet the critique, they note, resurfaces fully within the new, networked capitalism, which offers the illusion of democracy and justice base on access to supposedly free and open channels of communication. This carryover points, the authors claim, to a lingering anomie and dissociation from actual political participation on the part of the new classes of twenty-first-century laborers. This would seem to be the essential social mechanism behind much of Claire Bishop’s distrust of engaged politics, theatrically conceived.

Our critical awareness must be deployed carefully, for example in Surrender’s beckoning our sense of patriotism, mitigating such powerful cultural values and messages. We must look to the ways that each of our examples exposes the networks that are its hidden theme, as well as the necessary components of the performance’s dramaturgical structures. The French sociologist of science and technology, Bruno

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Latour, has developed an Actor-Network-Theory through which the network is represented not by a mapping consisting of nodes and connections, but in a detailed, objective description of the connections at work. The connections between actants, which here can be human beings, animals, objects, institutions, ideas, anything in short which can be seen to be unfolding, in transition, in flux of becoming. His injunction to “deploy” ever more actants is useful for what it suggests about participatory performance in action. It is difficult work to engage audiences, while showing them the network unfolding around them, and at the same time, to entertain, and point towards a way of making the unfolding network more just and equitable. Latour writes, “To deploy simply means that through the report concluding the enquiry, the number of actors might be increased; the range of agencies making the actors act might be expanded.”

Latour advocates for a view of the realm of the social as a series of assemblages, ever in motion, and only coalescing into a “society” after the laborious work of tracing associations between elements. This is not unlike the work of the artists surveyed here. They are all tracing associations, providing blueprints for new social connections, charged with political intent and import.

Networks replace the older convention of speaking of “community” in my discussion of the performances in this study. As Miranda Joseph has made clear in her work, community is a received idea that has frequently been romanticized and used as a suturing device to gloss over many crucial identitarian differences. This use of “community” operates then instrumentally for the sake of offering a shorthand cohesiveness to group politics and even group resistance. Joseph acknowledges, in fact,

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the “conservative, disciplining, and exclusionary effectivity of the invocation of community,” a theme that, for her, underscores the frequent identity-building effect not of membership within, but of exclusion from, even exclusion within communities.\footnote{Joseph, Against the Romance of Community, xviii.}
Joseph’s primary point is that the imbrication of non-profit, idealistic and community-based work within capitalist economies functions as a supplement to capital, without which capital cannot function as such. Communities, in all their local specificity, are not the antithesis of capitalism, which has somehow superseded its idealist origins in true community, but rather they complete the work of capital by opposing it and providing it new niche markets to conquer and incorporate.\footnote{Ibid.}

“Community,” much as Joseph implies, loses much of its borrowed interpretive valences in approaching, for example, the work of Jeremijenko’s Environmental Health Clinic work. Whereas City Council Meeting’s non-aligned audiences can be thought of as embodying dissensus politics, in the Ranciérian idea of maintaining levels of alterity within political assemblies, Civic Action (Up_2_U) requires a new and untested form of community to be introduced. This is a radically inclusive community in which agency is distributed and within which we are trained to search for representations of the social that are as-yet uncreated; it challenges the ability of any mimetic art to show us that which has not yet arrived. Representations can only suggest and sketch future potentials.

In order to fully reckon with the vision and promise of Jeremijenko’s work in environmental art activism and design, I turn again to Latour, one of Jeremijenko’s mentors. Latour notes that in his interpretation of the network, each actor is a mediator, responsible for tracing connections and for movement within the system which, in fact,
defines the network system. “Each of the points…may become a bifurcation, an event, or
the origin of a new translation. As soon as the actors are treated not as intermediaries but
as mediators, they render the movement of the social visible….Thus…the social may
become again a circulating entity that is no longer composed of the stale assemblage of
what passed earlier as being part of society.” As noted earlier, performance theorist
Alan Read has been among the most eloquent of those using Latour’s work to connect
current trends in performance theatre to the paradigm of the dissensual network. Making
creative use of Latour’s “object-oriented” sociology as well as his actor-network theory
as a launching point, Read has called for a radically new sensitivity on the part of
practitioners and audiences to be directed toward a global awareness of the
interrelatedness of the natural environment and all living species. Both writers emphasize
that agency is assignable to animals and inanimate objects, broadening the distribution of
meaningful social actions, and hence the terrain and scope of the art of performance.
Performance can thus, according to Read, be critically evaluated by reference to the
litmus test of how well it represents or embodies this condition of interrelatedness, both
environmentally and politically. Toward the end of Theater, Intimacy and Engagement,
Read offers a provocative contrast between animals and humans, in which the human
condition is composed of a certain ability to fail, to do things less well than they are able
to. “Animals are unable, because perfect, to do failure: ‘Man is made in such a way that
when he accomplishes an act that is difficult to carry out, he has the ability to do one that

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365 Latour, Reassembling the Social, 128.
is less difficult.\textsuperscript{366} But of course, the corollary is also true: not necessarily will he choose the less difficult. The representation indicates failure as a pointer toward non-failure.

The paradigm of the network which forms the conceptual, philosophical, and architectural foundation for the work Read calls for is itself a concept of such overwhelming importance and scope that it merits some final comment here. Not a new idea, the revitalization and elaboration of network theory and structure has been well documented in recent literature. Media and information technology authorities Eugene Thacker and Alexander Galloway have written widely on the topic. Their “political theory of networks,” particularly as it exists as a conduit for American sovereignty and exceptionalism on the global stage, conveys a paradigmatic sense of broad scope and, like other important theories of networks, covers a wide variety of activities.\textsuperscript{367} They write, of the variability and importance of the network paradigm in the current era, that networks reach:

The decline of Fordist economies in the West, and the rise of postindustrial information and service economies, the transnational and immigrant quality of labor forces, the global outsourcing of production in high tech fields, the dissemination of cultural products worldwide, the growing importance of networked machines in the military and law enforcement, the use of highly coded informatic systems in commodity logistics, or the deployment of complex pharmacological systems for health therapies and management of populations.\textsuperscript{368}

This list could be expanded further according to two major, post-Fordist sociological investigations of how networks define and materialize our social, political, and economic identities. Sociologists Manuel Castells and the team of Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello,

\textsuperscript{366} Read, \textit{Theatre, Intimacy, and Engagement}, 262.
\textsuperscript{367} Galloway and Thacker, \textit{The Exploit}, 2007, 3.
\textsuperscript{368} Ibid., 4.
while differing in emphasis, share one key commonality in their work—namely, the recognition that the creative aspects of the technology revolutions of the 1960s and ‘70s redirected the liberatory energies of the era’s political radicalism toward forms of labor-based self-expression and forms of flexibility in the workplace that left unchanged the essential structure of the politics of economic inequality. Changes in workplace design and inclusion of workers’ concerns furthered progressive goals of reducing forms of alienation and, paradoxically, foreclosed on part of the progressive promise of real, lasting democratic change. The ubiquity of the network as a guiding concept used to describe the nature and function of most human activity, allied with the new speed of information transfer produced forms of messaging and connectivity that, presumably, fosters mobilization and change. Yet, for these observers, the outcomes have, as mentioned above, been a greater consolidation of capital accumulation and power for those who already possessed both, actually increasing inequality. This trend since the relative equalization among classes of the 1970s has led to more powerful calls for social, economic and political amelioration as evidenced by the many radical, transformational movements of the past several years throughout the world. It is in addressing these trends that the performances described in this study make such a valuable contribution.

Networks have become the paradigmatic model for how we think about abstract complexities such as the social world, technology, management, and even thinking itself. From the behavior of individual entities at all scales to the structure and function of organizations from corporations to the global economy, as well as the interconnectedness of subatomic matter, virtually every sphere of existence can now be perceived, described,

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and theorized as, and through, networks. Castells, one of the major theorists of network analysis, attributes the development of networks to the post–World War II industrial boom, the collapse of Soviet statism and changes within global systems of capitalism. All of the hallmarks of the explosive, post-1970s transition to neoliberalism—unequal accumulation, the destabilization of the laboring classes, infinitely rapid globalization and financialization of commerce, a new corporate flexibility (favoring producers over labor), and state enforcement of this economic regime—are derived from invigorated and robust networks. For Castells, as well as Boltanski and Chiapello, this newly designed way of thinking of labor, social policy, flexibility, and social networks breeds precariousness and risk, which they see as a hallmark of neoliberalism and postindustrialism.

The idea of the network has undergone numerous changes over time, but it continuously references a system defined by nearly infinite connectivity between individual elements and by constant flows, exchanges, and associations. These connections confer identity upon subjects that define themselves by attributes and becomings that are open to alteration and change, a lack of fixity and unitary identity. Unlike the nostalgia for solidarity and unity that marks community, the history of associations with the network is frequently grounded in the secretive and the underground, as Boltanski and Chiapello make clear. The term’s rediscovery, by contrast, still instills controversial and conflicting readings, as is clear looking at contemporary theorists of internet culture writing for a more general audience. Boltanski and Chiapello diagnose a future “projective city” in which projects and temporary

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connections gain ascendance over property and position, characteristic of an older bourgeoisie. They note, further, that the current “connexionist” city still values ownership, but over our bodies and the time during which they are devoted to laboring, with a corresponding reduction in the dividing line between work and private time. This was accomplished during the transition to the post-Fordist economy, with little opposition, according to the authors, because of the aforementioned cooptation of labor’s resistant energies in the late 1960s through the flexibility and autonomy bestowed on the contemporary laborer as a strategy by the ownership class, as a means of leaving the essential structure of economic divisions intact.

For networking author and theorist Clay Shirky, networks are instrumental tools for rapidly organizing social pressure groups and getting data to circulate that can have radical consequences for those who are tuned in to the circuits. Shirky’s books are rife with examples of groups and individuals who, through the aggregated power of internet connectivity, leverage large groups of people not connected either geographically or even ideologically, to coordinate efforts for targeted goals. This would seem to be congenial territory for the work of the XClinic and its many projects, and it may turn out to be an important, though by no means sufficient, measure of their success. The internet, seen as an integrative component of a participatory performance for social change, is not proven yet as an effective tool. Jeremijenko herself is not naïve about the Internet, and she assigns some very critical debunkers of what Evgeny Mozorov calls “cyber-utopianism” among the current generation of social media activists. A writer whose work Jeremijenko

372 Ibid., 153.
373 Ibid.
374 Ibid., part II, chapter 3.
assigns to students in her Environmental Art and Activism classes at NYU, Mozorov warns that the surveillance potential by states, whose sovereignty still controls access to and privacy of information networks, goes far beyond the liberatory potential of networks today. Warning of both “cyber-utopianism” and “internet-centrism” among progressive social media activists, he concludes that “it is impossible to place the Internet at the heart of the enterprise of democracy promotion without risking the success of the very enterprise.”

Mozorov uses the example of the Iranian Green revolution in 2009, and the West’s embrace of the hype around the role of Twitter, as a prime example. When the Iranian government followed with its own online initiatives, using the same Twitter broadcasts to target dissidents, it became clear that social media’s powerful networking tools could be appropriated by any agents for liberation or repression.

By approaching networks of participation as flexible and powerful, if unstable, tools for activism and performance, new avenues of liberatory, progressive political expression are made possible and are embodied in real time. Much further study remains to be done on the complex connections of labor, participation, and the artistic energies unleashed when audiences cocreate. These examples are merely a tiny selection from a newly invigorated tradition of audience engagement, with a history that stretches back to the beginnings of performance. The prospects for further work on this topic should engage the energies of today’s scholars within an immersive

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methodology, marked by personal investment and the search for an aesthetic language with which to articulate such experience politically.
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