



On Occasion

A Monthly Think Tank on
Public Performance in Chicago
www.outofsitechicago.org

OutofSiteChicago presents *On Occasion*, a think tank to explore ideas around public performance art. Hosted at Chicago Cultural Center, *On Occasion* will consider the diverse forms of public performance and why it is a vital part of our city. Each think tank gathering will be organized around a guest speaker who will present unique perspectives on public performance from different parts of the world. Invited speakers include Meghan Moe Beitiks, Robin Deacon and Joanna Matusuk. After each speaker we will break off into workshop sessions to discuss the ideas and thoughts generated in the lecture. Our hope is to generate lively debate.

Month 1 Artist Presentation

Tracks and Tangles
by Meghan Moe Beitiks

Saturday, November 22, 2014 ▪ 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm ▪ Meghan Moe Beitiks

Saturday, January 24, 2014 ▪ 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm ▪ Robin Deacon

Saturday, February 21, 2014 ▪ 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm ▪ (Speaker TBA)

Saturday, March 21, 2014 ▪ 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm ▪ Joanna Matusuk

Saturday, April 25, 2014 ▪ 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm ▪ (Speaker TBA)

All events will be held in the First Floor Garland Room, Chicago Cultural Center. This event is free and open to the public.



Artist Presentation

Tracks and Tangles

by Meghan Moe Beitiks

Meghan looks for ways to explore and measure human impact on landscape and utilizes the findings to prompt site-specific work. At one time the expansion of the train system in the United States was regarded as a feat of human achievement – in recent decades the network has greatly reduced and come into disrepair. At one time, the introduction of non-native plants into a region was seen as a fantastic cultural act, a way of creating home away from home – now many of these plants have become invasive species, insinuating themselves into unlikely places. There is hope for the renewal of a rail use in this country in nascent high-speed rail projects, and many once-maligned plants have come to be appreciated for other reasons – the highly invasive English ivy, for instance, does an excellent job of filtering air. Beitiks *Out of Site* performance negotiate the co-existence of the el train network with volunteer or weed plants in Wicker Park area through a series of performative actions – creating an unexpected connection between the two entities specific to the site.



Sara Legg, today's facilitator, is a visual anthropologist and inter-disciplinary researcher currently living and working in Chicago, Illinois. Her primary research interests include experimental ethnography with an emphasis on film and performance as alternative research methods in the humanities. She completed her BA in anthropology and art history from the University of Maryland and MA in visual anthropology from Goldsmiths, University of London, UK.

On Occasion



Month

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Saturday, November 22, 2014
Chicago Cultural Center
In the 4th floor Conference Room
12 - 4 pm

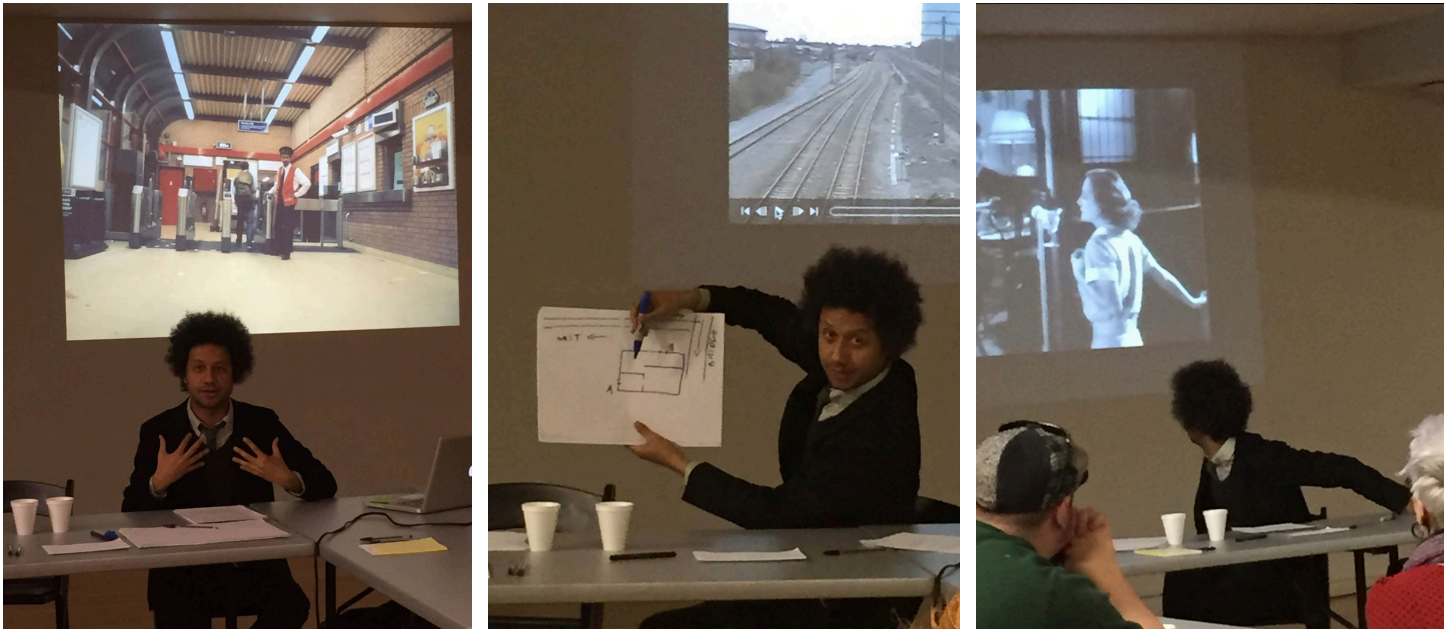
A Monthly Think Tank on
Public Performance in Chicago

Presented by *Out of Site Chicago*



Meghan Moe Beitiks works with associations and disassociations of culture / nature / structure. She analyzes perceptions of ecology through the lenses of site, history, emotions, and her own body in order to produce work that interrogates relationships with the non-human. The work emerges as video, performance, installation, writing or photography depending on what arises from her process of research and improvisation. She has presented work in California, Chicago, Brooklyn, Wales, London, Latvia and Russia. She was a Fulbright Student Fellow in Theater to Latvia and was recently declared the School of the Art Institute of Chicago's recipient for the Edes Foundation Prize for Emerging Artists.

On Occasion 2015 Collaboration: Robin Deacon & Sara Zalek



Out of Site organized a monthly public performance think tank at Chicago Cultural Center from November 2014 – May 2015 entitled On Occasion. The premise was to invite one performance theoretician/practitioner to collaborate with a local performance practitioner. One person gave a lecture and the second person created a workshop inspired by the lecture. On January 25, 2015 Robin Deacon and Sara Zalek collaborated.

After Robin Deacon's lecture and Sara Zalek's workshop for On Occasion I have been thinking about how we form our transnational identities. Deacon presented a lecture written in chapters that presented a series of journey's that all ended at the disjuncture of being lost. Being lost is something I can personally associate with being born in America of Scottish parents – going back to Scotland at the age of two long enough to acquire the Scottish accent and then growing up on Dartmoor, England – a rural part of England. Since the age of five I have been a foreigner in every place I have lived. In Robin's lecture yesterday this disjuncture of identity of being in one place but never quite understanding it or feeling comfortable became a running theme. In the lecture I was also interested in a repeated phrase: "The past is a place where I'm spending a lot more of my time." Deacon Sat Jan 24, 2015 On Occasion lecture.

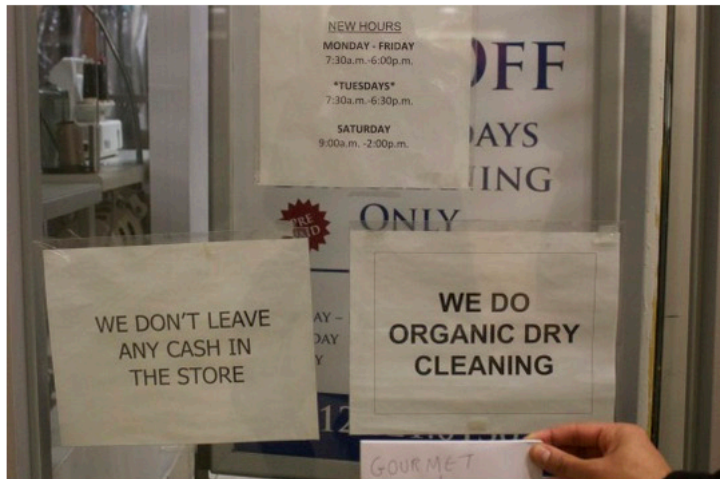
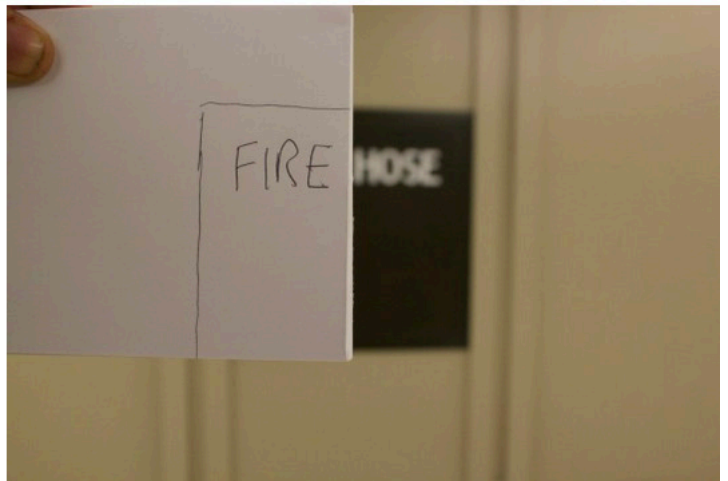
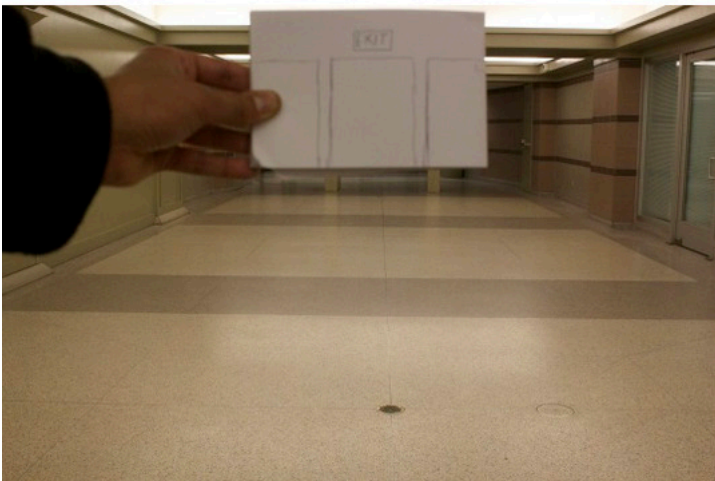
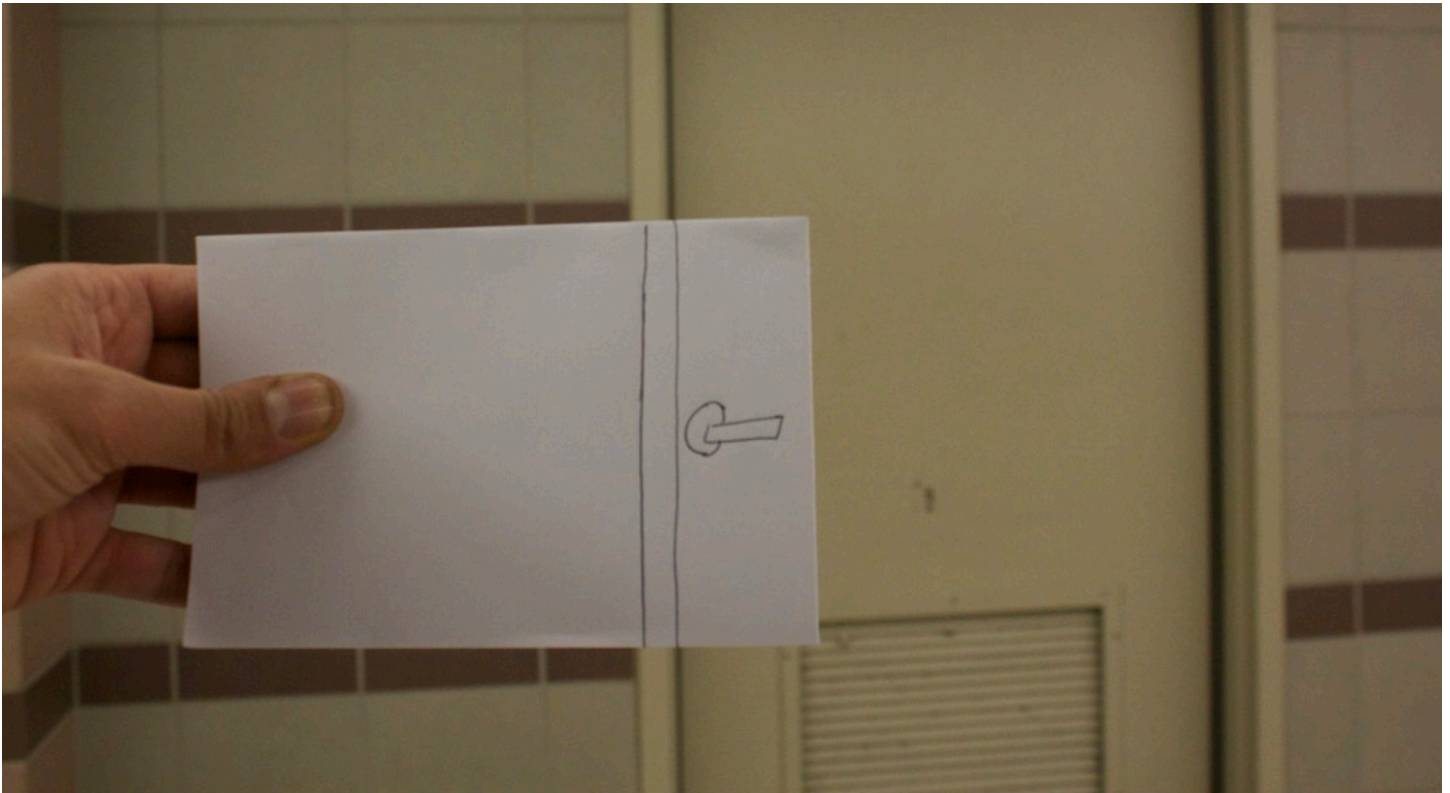
His discussion of public transport in Chicago and how it is built to punish people. Giving examples of letting people know when the next train is due seems to be a strain for Chicago CTA. How does the city perform for us? Thinking about our transport system as a public performance. Looking at the past – our history of cities in England and America, he reminisced about how the seats on English trains had a head rest that arched out of the top of the seat. I can still feel the sensation of the headrest today with its peculiar prickly velvet texture. The concept that it was built for our comfort. Then we compare that to our CTA system and I'm desperately trying to find elements of comfort. The International Situationists talk about creating a New Babylon in every city and how we need to create joy, pleasure and creativity and I am asking myself where is the fun and pleasure for people on Chicago CTA?



In the workshop Sara sent us off on different journey. One group went to the pedway, one group went on the brown line and other group was sent to the Metra. In sharing our experiences the Metra group made a comparison of the subway to the metra and how the times of the trains are always available. They discussed the comfort and cleanliness of the metra station in comparison to the ragged interiors of our EL Stations. Even after the recent renovation of Damen L Station I'm considering what im-

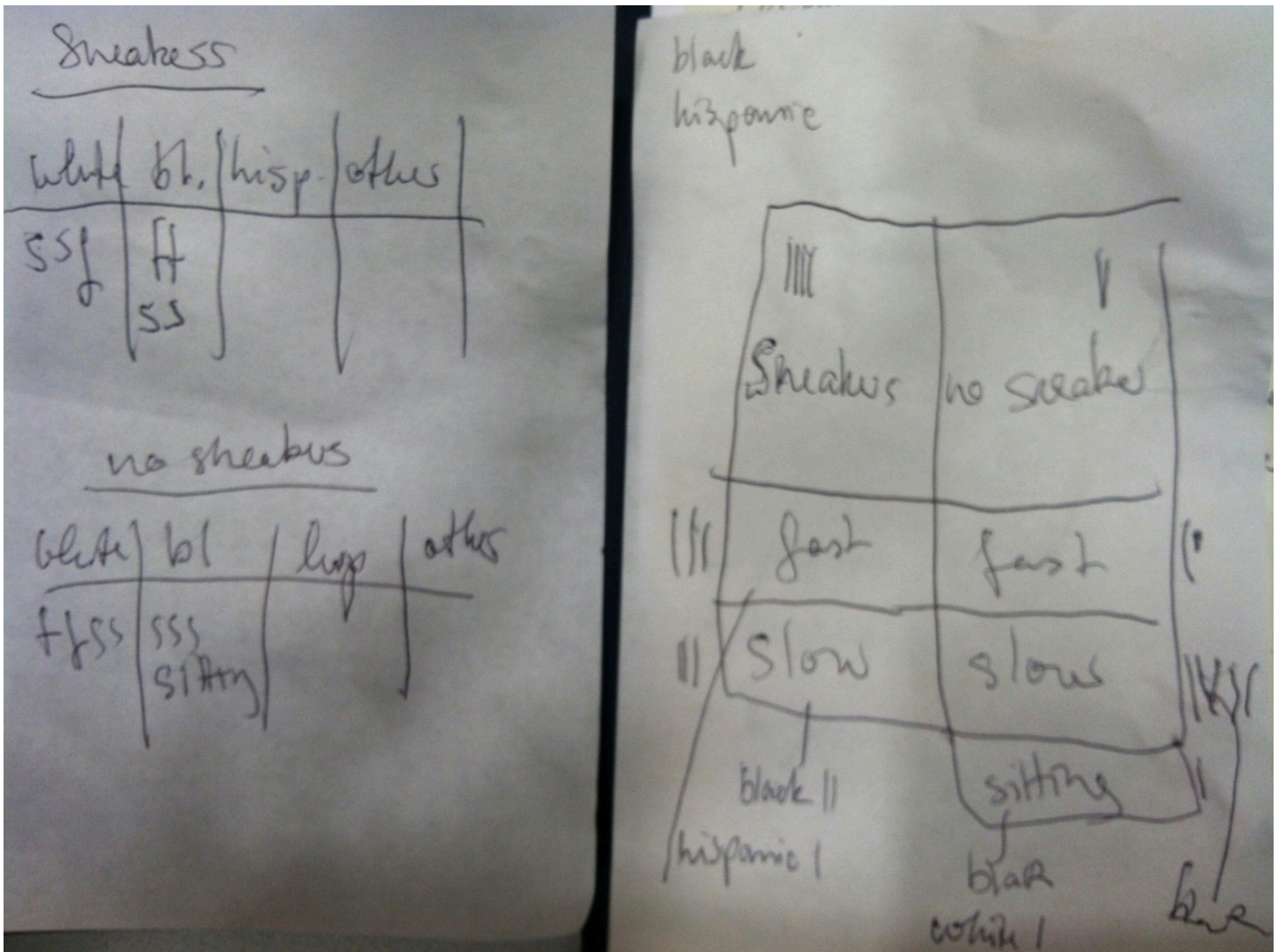


provement was really made? I observed that they replaced most of the metal fencing but you can see parts that weren't completed due to the design. They replaced the wood on the platform but thinking about accessibility or ways to aesthetically improve station stop was an opportunity missed. How is this performance evaluated and how are the public involved in this conversation? Even experts in-



volved in the conversation? I sit on the local Arts Committee and at no point have we been consulted after funding a rotational art project at the Damen L Station for the past two years managed by Johalla Gallery. Even Johalla were not consulted on how to make this station more artful, pleasurable or comfortable! Integrating ease into the process of even how ideas are exchanged, the flow of creative thinking and how we form and shape our city for the comfortability of its citizens seems a paradox when observing the 'L'. The idea of looking at the past, looking at our history to think how we can think about performance of trains, movement accesibility are all important questions to be asking.

Corbusier created the idea of making cities that were machines and functioned as good circulatory systems. This was innovative for the time a hundred years ago but is still something to consider as population sizes have quadrupled. How do we think about comfortability and how cities can provide pleasure so people can enjoy living are fundamental questions. Robin Deacon's lecture often take small and seemingly simple details yet they speak poetically to the larger issues. Sara Zalek's workshop took aspects of looking and individuals went on their own journeys in groups to think about new ways of looking.



For more images from the workshop and event please visit the On Occasion Blog:
<https://onoccasion.tumblr.com/>

On Occasion 2015 Collaboration: Melissa Potter and HiTypo



Above is a photo from Melissa Potter's lecture 'On Gender' for On Occasion – A Public Performance Think Tank at Chicago Cultural Center organized by Out of Site Chicago. Saturday February 21, 2015 12noon to 3.30pm

Below are some of my reflections on Melissa Potter's Lecture

"We are at a totally new cultural moment with gender. It fires me up like probably nothing else does. In terms of what is being discussed in public it is probably one of the major debates today." by Melissa Potter

I invited Melissa to talk about her Gender Assignment project and explore ideas of how gender is a daily public performance. The lecture and workshop revealed many questions both personally and politically. I knew for instance what my results would be on the BEM test but I was perhaps less aware of what Melissa was advocating for in terms of the gender assignment project. But for me the fascinating thing about the test is that it reveals the masculinity, femininity and androgyny that exists in us all. We are all amalgams of all these characteristics and to me that is the most important revelation and once we all come to terms with the diversity of gender definitions as human beings the impact of this on-going social study could be profound.



In the slide above is an example of over fifty gender pronouns being used today.

Some wonderful highlights for me were the shared discovery that when we are in Europe we feel more feminine and when we are in the States we feel more masculine. I think this is worth further research as to why this is the case. When Melissa asked the room 'How many of you have considered changing sex?' Only two people said no out of eight. And when discussing gender pronouns there are now fifty definitions used across the world as opposed to the two being used just a year ago. This is progress!

Her lecture mapped out a past of gender bending and she shared her own research of exploring people being born female and then appropriating masculine roles in society in different cultures. In our one room of people in the workshop it was fascinating the diversity of experiences and relationship to gender that existed. One person was a twin, another from China, me from Scotland, another was from a rural farming community in America and our relationship to our socialized gender experiences growing up were all completely different.

How do we think of gender in a country where the one child, one family has been enforced? Where if a family had a girl they were drowned because boys are more successful and can bring in more wealth especially in impoverished communities. How do we think about gender in relationship to class and especially when we are thinking about communities who are struggling to survive, where food is a scarce resource? We can't just think about gender in western terms and it can become highly problematic when we start to evaluate eastern relationships to gender through a western lens. How do we start to reframe the conversation and build a broader understanding?

In a recent trip to New York I acquired Judy Chicago's detailed research of women throughout the past dating from ancient times to modern. So I've been thinking about my own relationship to this culturally as Scottish. Celtic society was considered a matriarchal society in ancient times and all the women in my family have been very strong figures. If I think about my grandmothers, both were the breadwinners for their respective families. However my knowledge of my own family history sadly ends there on the matriarchal line. Just in my own lifetime Scotland suffered a lot of brutal policy making from the British government that impacted on the quality of life in Scotland. However, this oppression dates back to the 16th Century when England banned the native language, Gaelic from being spoken. I wonder to what extent this oppression has manifested itself in my own family history and how the gender relations were effected through the battles of the centuries?

The lecture has raised lots of questions for me in terms of 'Gender Neutrality' and if this is something that we should be fighting for and why? Why can't we embrace and have a culture that embraces the multiplicity of what it means to be human in all our various forms as opposed to negating or erasing specific gender identities in order to be accepted? It is a fundamental problem that women are objectified in society but does this mean we have to erase ourselves to be seen as equal? A colleague said to me recently "sometimes I need to do a personal privilege check in with myself". Shouldn't we be living in a society where we demand men do a 'privilege check in'. It's been fascinating for me to see women around me have appropriated masculine identities to become powerful leaders in the world. I am proud to be a woman in the world and in fact love it, but there are times when I get frustrated especially when the gender pay gap is so real for many of us. Right now in my own household I earn in a year what my partner earns in a month. These disparities are endemic and that is when we start to talk about class in relation to gender and the enforced impoverishment of female households.

This comes down to policy making and again something that Melissa brought up on Saturday and I spoke of at Columbia College on Tuesday: affirmative action. From the Government to companies to institutions we need to be taking affirmative action, not just token gestures of adding one black person or one woman to the board of executives but lets make policies were we are 50/50 on gender and diversity in all our institutions. Then we might start to see effective and caring decision making for the work force that creates a more stabilized economy. And when you obliterate poverty, you minimize crime and the impact on society could be huge!



In the workshop by HiTypo everybody had a unique approach to all the tasks set for the day. We were asked to choose three high number words from our BEM test and three low numbered words and free-associate with those words. Then we were asked to choose two of those words and write a paragraph. I love doing these workshops because they are so generative and inspire me to come home and write much more. The fascinating thing for me was when Melissa spoke of how she feels masculine in America and Feminine in Serbia. I found this so fascinating and really related to it.

Some days are so special – one just has to go home and read more and think more. This happened today after a wonderful lecture by Melissa Potter. Big thanks for bringing all your wisdom.

Portrait photo by Sabina Ott

To see more photos check out the [onoccasion blog](#)





PRESENTED BY
Out of Site Chicago
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A Lecture by Joanna Matuszak

Performance Art in Public Spaces

03/21/15

12 to 3pm
 Chicago Cultural Center
 First Floor Garland Room

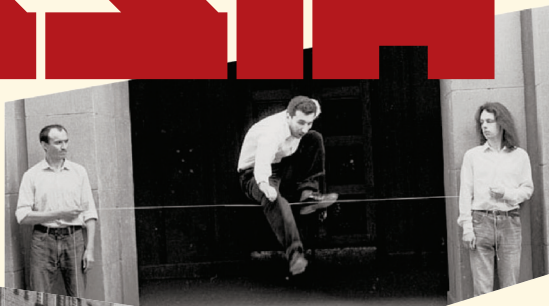
**SOVIET +
 POST-
 SOVIET
 RUSSIA**

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The Nest Group (Gennadii Donskoi, Mikhail Roshal, Victor Skersis), *Art to the Masses*, Summer 1978. Performance. At the crossroads of Dmitrii Ulyanov and Vavilov Streets, Moscow. Photographer Valentin Serov. Courtesy of Victor Skersis.



Aleksandr Brener, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, June 15, 1994. In front of Vakhtangov Theater, Arbat Street, Moscow. Photographer Igor Stomakhin. Courtesy Igor Stomakhin.

On Occasion 2015 Collaboration: Joanna Matuszak & Adam Rose

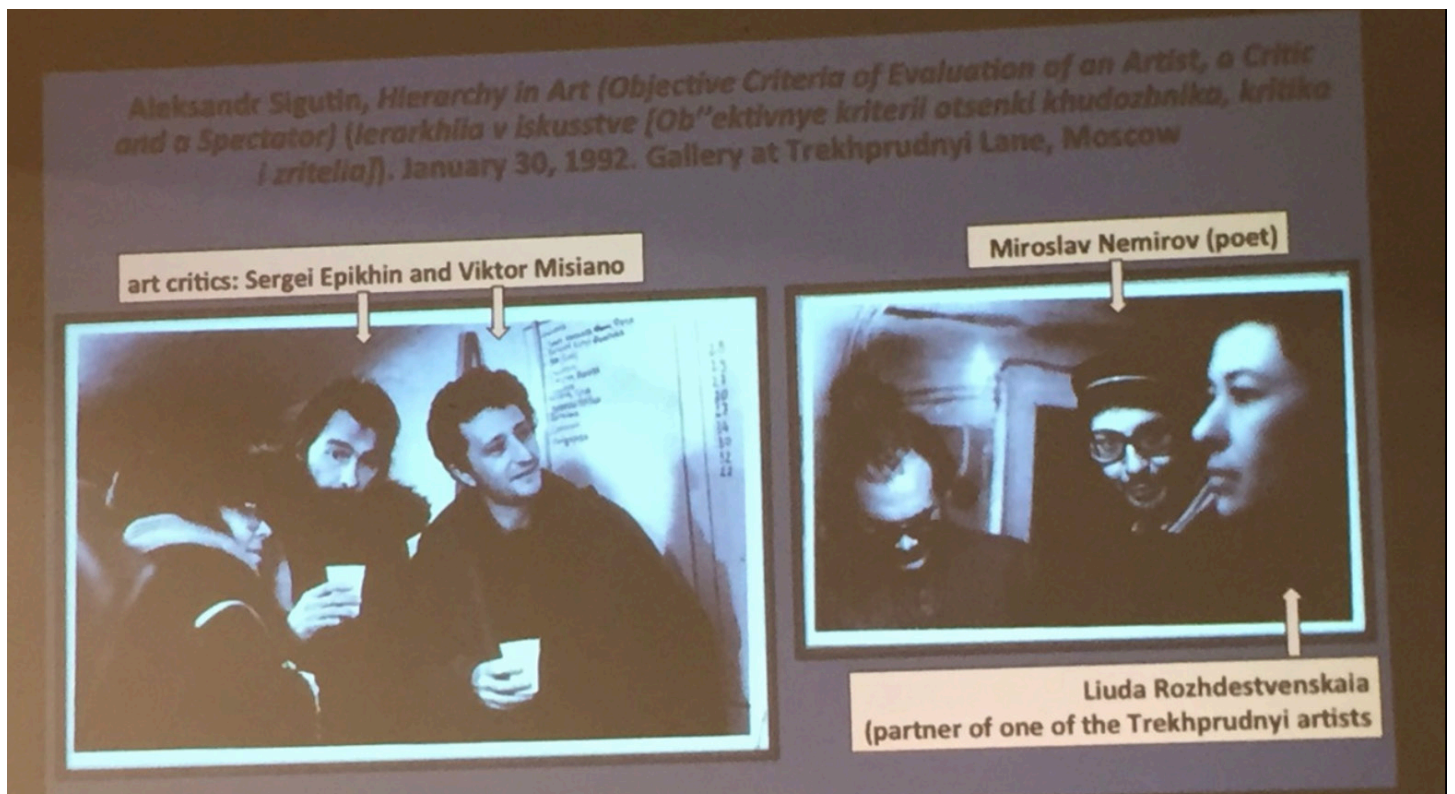
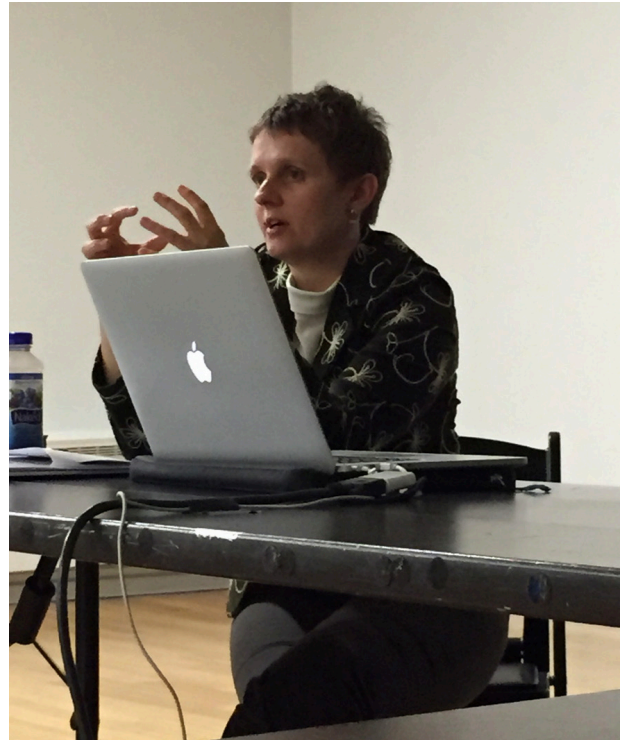


Joanna Matuszak's Lecture on March 21, 2015

We in the west always have our presumptions about the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet living. When I first invited Joanna to speak I was thinking about the shape of On Occasion being this space where we could learn and think about different genres of public performance from multiple cultural perspectives. My plan was that On Occasion would present a diversity of cultural perspectives and performance genres. Our first debate came at the stage of writing the press release and different interpretations of Soviet, Post-Soviet and the term Russia. Having been born into the Cold War and being highly aware of Gorbachev's election and the changes that followed – I wasn't so aware of the new terminology or shall we say the academically correct terminology when referencing what we call now the Russian Federation. Also since the invitation of Joanna to speak was sent the tension between the USA and the now president, Putin has risen and I am personally fearful that we are digressing back into a cold war climate. And in creating a space for greater cultural understanding maybe a good place to start for both sides as maybe there are no sides and just lots of creative people trying to make art and be free in their own lives. Sometimes when we start to see our similarities we can have greater respect and that is an aspect that Adam Rose drew attention to in the workshop.

Matuszak's lecture started with a brief history of the USSR working from the October Revolution in 1917 and the collapse of Russia to the different artistic climates under the various Soviet Communist leaders. Starting with *The Nest* performance in 1974, this piece was very participatory – the public was invited to sit in a nest and created this moment of closeness. There were no instructions and it seemed apparent in all the pieces between 1970's and 1992 were group collaborations. There was one group that travelled around the train system visiting 42 stations. They documented each station – how many guards were on duty, the conversations they had with the guards and there was a leaflet sent out to friends stating where they could meet at specific locations during this performance.

Matuszak showed a transcript from one of the conversations that documented a dialogue with a train station guard about taking photographs. The guard said they weren't allowed and they said but tourists are allowed and his response was but they are not from here, 'But we are at home why can't we take photos' and the response was 'You are not allowed'. That one transcript reveals a lot in terms of how the people were policed and how critical government control over the population and let's not forget these forms of censorship happen here in America too. It comes down to fear and governmental fear of artist's as they are the people in society who they cannot control but what happens when you do let people become free and let artists express themselves freely? You create a more educated society, that is less prone to violence because educated people are more articulate and will use words rather use violence. When people are oppressed they are angry and we can see that revealed in the work of the artists who from the nineties up until now seem very angry, in Post-Soviet Performance Art.



There is a sharp contrast between the work prior to 1992 that was made in collective groups and the audience was friends or people who were part of the group compared to the 1990's to date that spans a range of individuals, mostly male creating action-based works. Artists like Alexandr Brenner and Pavlenski who in 2013 nailed his scrotum to the Red Square in a piece entitled 'Fixation'. This piece was performed a year after Putin's re-election. Putin had been in power from 2000 to 2008 after Yeltsin's resignation on December 31, 1999. Putin served his term and as prime minister in the years following 2008 and worked with his friend to change the rules so he could stand for re-election in 2012. Is this performance making a statement about Putin's 'fixation' with 'Power'? The artist has been hospitalized in a psychiatric ward since and in Pavlenski's most recent performance decided to chop off his ear. These simple, yet powerful one gesture acts are emblematic of a person who is desperate, who is so restricted he mirrors the oppression in society. One of the questions at the end was is there any difference between a person running naked onto a football field and these gestures by Pavlenski? And a discussion grew out of this about how these actions are spectacles played out in the western media as they are invisible in the country of origin. Another example would be Pussy Riot who are again working as a collective growing out of the Soviet Union tradition yet their audience is the a western public – presented through the western media. I would say much like Pavlenski's work these performance are staged as a political gesture. And there is a long tradition of public performance being used as a method of raising political awareness. If we think about Emily Davison, the Suffragette who threw herself in front of King George V's horse on June 4, 1913 at the Derby Race sustaining injuries that killed her four days later or the women who chained themselves to the fences outside the Houses of Parliament in 1918 to demand the freedom to vote. Or to 1969 when women in the UK and America burned their bras outside Miss World competitions sparking the feminist movement of the 1970's. These often simple gestures come out of this need to campaign and draw attention to political oppression.



In the workshop led by Adam Rose we were invited to think of a gesture, one action and then choose if we

wanted to do a collective gesture or an individual. All the performance artists decided to do solo gestures and the people who don't usually perform decided to do a collective gesture. The collective group became a group of ten people and they decided to walk in two lines through the Cultural Center. They walked blending in normally before they started jumping, this simple gesture made people stop and look. After climbing the stairs they waved to each other and then they came down the stairs dusting the banisters as they came down. Me and Brianna headed into Randolph Square I went up to people who were sat on their own and shook their hands and said 'Welcome', I came up to the entrance of the Cultural Center and there was a group entering just at that moment and I stood at the doorway and welcomed everyone who came into the building. We then walked in the other way and switched roles. Brianna sat down opposite an older white man and took off her headscarf and massaged her hair – this action lasted about 10 minutes and was very powerful. He of course tried not to look but he was being performed to in this intimate one to one space. We then left the space to meet up with the collective group. Sara and Ji went outside the Cultural Center – they were both wearing puffy jackets one was blue and one was yellow. Sara had decided to fall and Ji had decided to write on people's bodies as his gesture. Having decided to do individual gestures they decided to collaborate. Everytime Sara fell, Ji wrote a Chinese character on her hand – the character meant positive. Sara had first decided she was going to fall 50 times, then after 50 Ji persuaded her to do 75 and then after she reached 75 he encouraged her to do 100. After one hundred she stopped. In our conversation after our public actions we had an enlightening conversation about audience in relation to all the gestures. Brianna and I produced the only pieces that directly engaged the public and this took risk on our parts to be brave to enter into the public's meta-space. The collective group didn't interact with the public or notice them and Sara and Ji's performance became these two simple gestures performed with a fourth wall that remained in tact. The fourth wall becomes a safety net in a way when performing in public and sometimes it is the scariest thing to cross in the invisible divide between you and a stranger.



The question I posed in the first paragraph thinking about our similarities and what is interesting to me is the abstraction of these single performative gestures by Brenner or Pavlenski are similar to action painting in American Abstractionism. Adam introduced the idea of the abstract gesture and what happens as this gesture becomes repeated, as in the case of Sara and Ji's? It becomes all the more abstract, like a 'Beckettian' moment. In discussing it with Sara after the gesture of falling was a direct response to the Matuszak's lecture. And in turn this abstract gesture although is live repetition, becomes a reflection of death in the living. Let me elaborate – living under an oppressive regime becomes a living death, a death of the living and when artists are oppressed then society becomes stuck in mental decay. And perhaps this is when artists take desperate measures and I would argue Pavlenski nailing his scrotum or cutting off his ear is an example of desperation in living under an oppressive regime.

For more images from the workshop and lecture please visit the On Occasion Blog

Tags: #adamrose, #joannamatuszak, #onoccasion, #performanceworkshops, #publicperformance, #thinktank

