Walker Art Center
Carolyn Lazard Opening-Day Talk with Curator Pavel Pyś,
February 12th, 2022.

- Well, welcome, my name is Pavel Pyś. I'm a curator in the Visual Arts Department at the Walker Art Center. For those listening in I'm a white male with blonde hair. I'm wearing a face mask and a cardigan, a soft cardigan. And I'm speaking to you seated in the cinema here at the Walker in Minneapolis, Minnesota, located on the traditional, ancestral and contemporary homelands of the Dakota people. This site, which was once an expansive marshland holds meaning for the Dakota, the Ojibwe and other indigenous people who still live here today. So before I speak further, I will pass over to Carolyn Lazard to introduce themselves.

- Hi, I'm Carolyn, gonna introduce myself. I'm a light-skinned Black person I'm wearing cornrows that feel like train tracks. And my sweater is very fuzzy and I'm wearing like Black kind of crispy, but soft pants.

- So for today's talk, we will be in conversation for about 40 to 45 minutes. We will take questions. Please feel free to draw up them into the Q&A function. Today's talk includes ASL interpretation, and you can turn on captions by pressing the closed-captioning button. If you're using audio description, please call the number posted in the chat to be connected to our audio description feed. And if you have any issues at all, with any of the access, please feel free to contact either Sarah or Mackenzie who are on today's webinar. So this is an unusual conversation, because usually we would have an opening-day talk and typically people will have seen the show. It's a little different today. We have many more people listening in who have not experienced the exhibition. So I think maybe we could start by talking about how this show came about and specifically how you responded to the invitation to make a show at the Walker. And then maybe you could describe a little bit what the show is like.

- Yeah, sure. So I think when I started working on this project, I started from a really different direction. I wasn't really thinking about making something responsive to this institution and this site, but increasingly I find it really challenging to not make work that is in some way responsive to the site that the work is being displayed in or held in. So yeah, I kind of pivoted, I started thinking a bit about the Walker's history and I started to really focus on the Walker's relationship to dance and performance, it's kind of like one of the large institutions in the US that really championed this work early on, before many other institutions decided to kind of fund and support and show dance and performance works. So yeah, in some ways I wanted to think a little bit more about that real relationship and some of the big dancers and performers who have been supported by the Walker over the years, some like archives and works are here, thinking about Merce Cunningham and Trisha Brown and Yvonne Rainer and so forth.

- So I remember there was a moment when we started working together, there was a particular idea and then there was a hard turn, which was exciting. And then the show came about really you thinking, I mean the show is not in reference to any particular person or thread of history, but really thinking about that whole heritage in a way and responding to it. So the exhibition, which is called “Long Take” is very immersive and there are individual works within the show, but it really is an environment to be experienced. So maybe we could
talk a little bit about each of the elements in the gallery space. So you've transformed the gallery completely by covering it in a work called “Surround Sound.”

- Yeah, so yeah, that's sort of the literal, I mean, it's like the foundation of the entire exhibition, it's a work called “Surround Sound.” It's made of Marley floor, which are vinyl mats that are traditionally used in dance rehearsal spaces and stages and so forth. You're normally not supposed to, or allowed to walk on them in those places when wearing shoes. So this is a little bit different, because it's sort of meant to be walked on and get scuffed up by people who come into the galleries and yeah, that's one of the works.

- And there's immediately also the way that it lit, With three lights, there is this kind of suggestion as if you were either in a rehearsal space or on a stage.

- Or on a stage, yeah, it's kind of, the whole room kind of feels like you're on a stage. I mean, I can do a more like direct description of the room, but maybe yeah, maybe I'll describe the other kind of discreet artworks in the space, even though it really is a kind of a immersive piece. So apart from “Surround Sound,” there are these pieces called “Institutional Seat” and there's three of them, kind of four, but you would have to find the fourth one. And so it's “Institutional Seat One through Three” and I had asked the Walker to give me the Walker’s standard gallery benches, the ones that you might find in the middle of an exhibition, or with two dimensional works or sculpture or often you see them in immersive kind of gallery environments in front of moving image works.

- And every other gallery right now has those, yeah.

- Has them. Yeah, so I appropriated these works, you could say, or these standard seats and then I have them modified for comfort. So they have like put plywood backs and plywood risers that tilt the chairs slightly back, like thinking about furniture, like thinking about seating design basically and what's actually comfortable and they've been upholstered as well and they're much more comfortable for sitting and watching durational work basically, 'cause oftentimes in institutions there isn't really comfortable seating for that. It's also, this is a good time, I'm probably gonna shout out a lot of people, but this is a really good time to shout out Shannon Finnegan, who’s an amazing artist who also works a lot on access and institutional seating.

- And then already many colleagues have said that they don't want to go back to the-

- The old seats.

- The old bench, yeah, but then there is within the center of the space, there is a three-channel moving image work. Which is called “Leans, Reverses.”

- Yes, it's called “Leans, Reverses” and you can kind of think about it in two ways. Like I’ve been really conceptualizing it less as a moving image work, than as like a sound work with captions. But you could also just think of it as like a three-channel video in some ways, but on each channel, what you see and maybe one thing to say is everything that you see in the channels is exactly what you hear. So the first channel basically is a score that I wrote that is recited and spoken, so you can hear it and it's also written as a caption on a black background and then the next script, this is complicated to explain. Deceptively simple, yet very complicated work. The next channel is the captions of a dancer’s movement. And then
the third channel is a audio description of a dancer’s performance. So maybe to explain it, it would be helpful to explain how I kind of constructed the work in some ways.

- [Pavel] Sure.

- Which kind of brings in some of my collaborators. I wrote a score-

- Maybe it's worth also saying that for each of those three tracks, the sound is all put together into one. Yes, so everything is heard

- At the same time.

- At the same time and it’s very much in very sculptural in that you take up very much the volume of the gallery by placing sound in a very sculptural way.

- Yeah and also in terms of the sound design, the sound of the dancer’s movement and breath is like being carried and moved around the room in a kind of circular motion basically. But yeah, so I wrote this score and the score was kind of influenced by a lot of different things, it was a hodgepodge of things. It was me looking at Merce Cunningham performances and then writing my own AD and then adapting them. I was looking at a lot of the language that like Steve Paxton used in terms of like generating contact prompts basically, like really specific language around just space, time, duration, tempo, volume, like these really specific words that are repeated often in prompts for movement. And then, yeah, so I wrote the score, I recorded it. Then with my collaborator, Jerron Herman, I gave him a recording of the score, which he listened to and responded to in real time with the reading of the score. And while he was dancing and improvising in response to the score, he was miked with lavalier mics all over his body, which picked up the sound of his movement and his breathing. And then after that, I worked with Joselia Hughes on developing an audio description of that performance. So the whole piece is kind of different levels of translation based on looking at dance and also hearing dance basically.

- Mm hmm, and collaborators are very important to you. And what I was really struck by when we were working on the show and installing, is that every day you had several phone calls with your friends, with artists. And you were workshopping the install of the show live with them. And so maybe you could talk a little bit about the importance of friendship and collaborators.

- Sure, I think there’s also even, maybe we’ll talk about this more later, but there’s like a kind of historical precedent. We’ll talk about dance film and dance films sort of influence on this, but there’s so many incredible historic collaborations between dancers and filmmakers and painters and sculptures and very much in that spirit and beyond that spirit, I wanted this project to be very collaborative, but also most of my work is very collaborative and I make work from, through, in and with extended disability arts community, and lots of other artists who are like deeply important to me and whose work has impacted this work. And we’re sort of in a kind of collective-like dispersive practice of trying to answer similar or adjacent questions. So yeah, I have to call my friends to help me figure out how to make art. And yeah, that feels very important. I also think just like, as an artist, I personally find it hard to be so like individuated, at the end of the day, it's like there's my name and there's the title of the work. And it really doesn't hold the complexity of how things get made, which is like inherently dependent and collaborative. And so, yeah, I feel like I definitely lean pretty hard
on my community when producing. I feel weird using the word community, I just wanna say friends, I lean on my friends.

- And that will really continue, because the show is co-commissioned with ICA Philadelphia and Nottingham Contemporary and it will be on view through to, I think, 2024. And so with each presentation, for example, “Institutional Seat” will be different in each location. You will take existing furniture from those museums. But I imagine those iterative conversations will really continue, because you’ll be faced with totally different spaces.

- Yeah, absolutely. I think I will have to reconfigure the layout of the show, in response to each site that’s just like necessary, especially working with sound, which is like, it’s like when you’re working with sound sculpturally, it can’t just like exist. It has to have a kind of dynamic relationship to the architecture, so that will definitely change, yeah.

- Yeah, so one thing that you’ve talked a lot about is how your work, but specifically also “Long Take” really touches upon the relationship between Blackness and disability and I wonder if you could kind of talk a little bit more about that.

- Yeah, I think I’ve been thinking a lot about the relationship between accessibility and opacity and we traditionally think of access as this, I’ve talked about this a lot, but we traditionally think about access as this thing that’s about transparency, about like translation as this kind of like transparent process, a kind of one to one, but through the people who actually work in access and are thinking about art and accessibility, it’s like very clear that it’s a lot more complex of a process in that it’s kind of opaque and it has this relationship to opacity as well. And so I think there is a relationship there in the sense that access becomes, for me or the way I use it, becomes a really interesting tool of fugitivity as a Black artist inside of arts institutions in some way, like it is a way for us to like make contact with others inside of spaces that we might feel as I wouldn’t go so far as to say hostile, but maybe like inhospitable, not necessarily always accommodating and yeah, so that’s kind of what, yeah, that’s the relationship I’m sort of interested in is like the relationship between Blackness and opacity and then opacity and access. And then also just like thinking a lot about access practices as like improvisational and thinking about that relationship to Black improvisation in sound and in dance and in life and how do we think about access as this thing that is very in real time responsive to the present and current conditions and how disabled people, Black and disabled people, are using whatever is it, like whatever tools are available to navigate in and through institutions and conditions that are inhospitable basically. So it’s like kind of about this like creative practice of like adaptation, modification, which extends to translation, description, et cetera.

- Right, this idea of this notion of fugitivity is also so important to the work in the sense that when I referred to it as a moving image work, that is in some ways unfair, because as you were saying, it’s as valid as sound work as it is in moving image work.

- Yeah.

- So there’s something about the work resisting to be confined to a particular medium. And that’s where I think these questions of where is the work located and what role does translation play. But I wonder if maybe we could also kind of go back to some of those past histories that you were looking at, because I remember, and certainly with some of the work that you were making in the last year and a half, you’ve been thinking a lot about the sixties
and seventies, for example, the work “Red” that was on view recently in Greater New York is very much pointing to the history of structural film and flicker films. So I wonder if you could talk a little bit about how cinema has also played a role in making this exhibition.

- Mm hmm, mm hmm, yeah, I’m gonna get to, I think I wanna start with performance and then I’ll like get to cinema or something. I’ve been thinking a lot about like the relationship between like dance and the gaze. And so like two works are coming to mind right now, thinking a lot about how we think of dance as something that has like observed something to be seen. And I know when Yvonne Rainer’s instructions for “Trio A” are basically that the performer has to like constantly avert their gaze and like not make eye contact with the audience. And then like a kind of opposite example of that would be like “Performer/Audience/Mirror,” Dan Graham’s work where it’s basically about maintaining constant contact, between the performer and the spectator, but it’s always, and that work also has a really interesting relationship to description, even though it’s not about access, extensively, but just like it’s so much about looking and seeing, and being in a body and observing another body, which made me feel like thinking about access the way that I do, it’s like, that’s so strange because dance is something that can be experienced in a wide variety of ways. And there might be another way to like, not simulate live performance, but just present dance in a way that is not so, as we say oculocentric, or is not so visual or overly reliant on visuality in a certain way. So that, I mean, in some ways, if I could condense the whole work into like one thing, I would just say, I just wanted to make a dance film without an image.

- Right and when we started talking, I would go to colleagues and say, “We’re co-commissioning a moving image work that we’ll never see.”

- Right, exactly, yeah.

- But I think this is also something that we’ve talked about a little bit this and what this show gets at, which is a refusal to obey by the standard way of experiencing in a gallery space that the visual is not the primary or default way of experiencing it. It reminds me of, we were talking a little bit about who was getting at that. And in some ways the show reminds me of people like Sturtevant, who were exactly kind of questioning this. So where does the work reside?

- Reside, yeah. I mean I think access is an interesting way to think through that, because access makes artworks necessarily iterative. So through the lens of access, an artwork could be a sound, an image, it could be a text, it could be like a tactile sensation. It it could literally just travel through multiple sensorial modes basically. But like based on the premise of accessibility, that thing would still be the thing, if that makes sense. So there’s something, oh, I don’t wanna go this deep, but there’s something about like the ontology of art that I think is like really like challenged by accessibility as a framework that I’m interested in, which is just kind of like, yeah, at this point the work is kind of against medium specificity, basically. It’s just like, sure, it could be this, it could be that, like it doesn’t have to, a film doesn’t have to look, doesn’t have to literally look at all. So that’s, yeah, that’s something I’m super, yeah, that’s what the work’s about.

- And I wonder if we could, I mean, we have a show coming up at the Walker with Paul Chan and he’s also an artist that I know you’ve been in dialogue with and inspired by and for Paul, he has this kind of continued resistance towards the norms of the moving image and
particularly the screen. And so I also wonder, in this, also this time of just being completely restricted to often just being at home and constantly looking at the screen, there’s also something related there to the kind of last two years that we’ve been living through.

- Yeah, absolutely. I think also I’ve just been really like moved by the way performers have adapted to this moment and like rethought live-ness in performance when we literally can’t be in physical space together. And yeah, I mean, yeah, I think it’s like the work in some ways, even though it’s not like explicitly, I think a lot of artists are like making work in response to COVID, but are like struggling to find the language to frame it because we can’t, ‘cause we’re still in it.

- In it, yeah.

- But, yeah, in some ways this work is about how can we find, like is there a way, are there these strange ways to build the kinds of connections, the kinds of modes of relation that we might have in live performance in a different way? Like what does it mean to sense sonically and viscerally, like the feeling and the sound of a dancer’s physical exertion or what does it mean to be in a gallery that is also a stage to hear descriptions of, to hear descriptions of a performance that have happened, but because of the way that audio description works, it also functions as like an imperative or as a direction or as a score itself. And so thinking about you at how the work kind of continues in the way that it like invites the spectator to participate, which actually takes us back to the title of the work, “Long Take,” which is sort of about this really basic thing in filmmaking, which is around duration and not cutting and I was sort of thinking about that idea, in the context of art, which is like what does it mean for an artwork to kind of continue beyond its immediate presence in the gallery or something, or how does a performance then generate another performance or a text then generate movement or something like that and how these things just kind of, yeah, basically what are the parameters of the work? Where does it end?

- Which is also how you were approaching the score. It was such a kept building on and on, on the writing that you were doing.

- Yeah, mm hmm, yeah, exactly.

- So kind of resisting fixity and trying to keep reshaping, remaking.

- Yeah.

- I wonder if maybe we could share a little bit about the layers of access to the show and yesterday we had a walkthrough with Dan from BLIND Inc. who’s generating an audio description of the experience of the show. So I think it’d be interesting to share a little bit what that conversation looked like.

- Sure, yeah, yeah, I think obviously a lot of people can’t come to museums and for lots of reasons, mostly around access and especially in the pandemic around being high risk and yeah, there are things that are inaccessible about coming here, so we wanted to find way to extend the work online. And part of that is basically a written transcript of the exhibition that includes the texts from the captions and the audio description and the score, but then also is like a description of the space. And it was kind of an amazing conversation with this person, Dan from BLIND Inc. because he’s so just like acutely focused and has so much
experience with like the kind of language that gets used to describe exhibition spaces, even
the way he talked about how one might like explain the sound as something that like starts
in the center and then ripples outwards or yeah, just like really tuned into like describing
different sensorial experiences. So yeah, I’m feeling good about just like having that as a
possibility for people who can’t be here or who want to access the work in a different way.
And I would argue that like that text transcript is as much the work as coming in and sitting
in the seat and being in the space.

- So I feel like we should qualify what you were saying in terms of “Institutional Seat, Number
Four,” because in the gallery there are three. But this show has kind of moved beyond the
gallery a little bit and when we were working together on finalizing the placement, you made
the call that four seats were too many and so one has gone out into a public space in our
building. Do you want it to be a surprise or do you want to share a little bit like how we-
- Maybe, I won’t say where it is, I’ll just say it’s a kind of weird interstitial space where things
happen at the museum that aren’t looking at art.

- And it doesn’t have a label.

- And it doesn’t have a label, yeah, so yeah, it’s just there. I feel like I’ve gotten into this
practice and also kind of shout out to Park McArthur, because I think she does this a lot
too, but it’s really nice to leave things behind in institutions. I don’t have anything super
intellectual to say about this, except that I just really enjoy hiding things in institutions and
seeing how long they last basically.

- And we should also mention that there’s another work on view, which is not technically part
of “Long Take,” but it’s a work that came into the collection about a year or so ago and it’s
called “A Conspiracy,” which it’s been interesting watching people experience it, because
some people notice it and some people do not. And it will be the same, I think, with the
bench, with the “Institutional Seat Number Four.” So I wonder if maybe you could talk a little
bit about “A Conspiracy” and how it looks and feels here.

- Sure, yeah. Well, I also just wanna like shout out Peter Hannah, who’s like a preparator
here, who does amazing work and just made the most beautiful install of that piece I’ve ever
seen. Yeah, it’s basically installed in this corridor between the kind of central visitors desk
and the garage that one would walk from the garage to the visitors desk, if you parked your
car. So yeah, it’s also in this hallway and I don’t know how many there are?


- Okay, there’s 48 Dohm noise machines installed in the ceiling in a grid and yeah, they
basically emit like white noise and I mean, I can talk about the work, okay. Yeah, they
basically emit white noise, it’s a kind of an electro-mechanical thing, which is really
important for me, like a lot of white noise machines now use like a digital file, whereas this is
literally just a fan inside of a metal box and that’s what produces the sound and people use
these in a lot of different ways, like to go to sleep or to help concentrate or they’ll put them
in a baby’s nursery to sort of mask other noises and help kind of calm things down. I know
them primarily from going to therapy, ‘cause they’re often used in therapists’ offices as a
kind of way to, they use sound sculpturally actually, which is that like the noise machine sits
outside of the door and it produces this kind of like wall of white noise-
- Since it's been installed, I've started noticing it everywhere.

- Oh you see them everywhere.

- The noise machines.

- Yeah, so I just got hyper-fixated on that, I was like thinking about the audio describer and I was like, oh, I could describe myself, I'm doing this weird gesture with my hand right now. So yeah, yeah, it's used sculpturally in this way to create like privacy so that if you're having these intimate conversations in a therapist's office, people walking through the hallway, won't be able to hear what's happening, so I've sort of installed them in this way and what it allows is for people to move through the space and have conversation with each other, without it being necessarily heard by others, which I really love, it's kind of like a, I don't know, like an anti-surveillance device or something and like thinking about, yeah, the misuse and misappropriation of wellness and health tools.

- I think the marketing copy of the company issued for that product is something like provides a tranquil sanctuary or something ridiculous.

- Right, yeah. But yeah, I think the work in some ways is about also kind of having a fugitive relationship to institutions, which is like, what does it mean to be here and to be hidden in some way or unheard or finding these like pockets of community or collectivity or conspiracy inside of what feel like totalizing systems.

- The private and the public have the two come together.

- Exactly and having that kind of conflate. And I think that also comes a lot from some earlier thinking in my work that really just has to do with like chronic illness and like yeah, the kind of strange occupation that chronic illness, I mean times have changed, things are a little different, so maybe need to rethink this, but like yeah, thinking about how chronic illness is often seen and understood as a kind of private moment and how we've like classically conceived of politics, particularly in an Arendt-ian mode or something as having to appear in the public sphere, which I think that then proposes challenges from chronic illness, like thinking about disability and thinking about how we might conceive of politics as something that is not about appearing on the public sphere, like how can we reframe politics, not around this distinction between public and private.

- And I want to ask you a little bit about this issue, particularly in relation to the work that you've been making and how the work has been talked about because even in the time that we've worked together, some of the language around the work that you make has changed. And so I'm thinking "A Conspiracy," which is, I think from 2017?

- '17, yeah.

- And then I'm thinking of work that maybe our local audiences might know, which has been on view here previously "In Sickness and Study," which is a work that consists of Plexiglass objects under which are images, they appear as if they seem to be iPhone screens and on these images, we see you holding the book that you happen to be reading at the time, but also receiving a blood transfusion. And so in the works where we have a kind of maybe
more heightened reference to chronic illness, but that has, I think, really shifted in recent work. So can you talk about a little bit about that change?

- Yeah, I mean, your off script.

- We don’t have to talk about it.

- No, no, it’s a really good question, I think over time I have really just, it does also relate to fugitivity actually, we’re just gonna keep talking about that, which is just that I’m really trying to, I’m thinking here with Jordan Lord’s work, ‘cause I think Jordan references capture a lot, but really thinking about ways of kind of evading capture basically. And some of the ways to do that are to like not, or to kind of shy away from or move against certain how do I say this? Just like intelligibility or like legibility in certain kinds of ways, how might we be able to like communicate some of these things, not through representation, but really through form or aesthetics or-

- [Pavel] Experience.

- Experience, or just vibe or feel, there’s like all of these different ways of understanding something and also I think it just has to do with the fact that I’m not, my understanding of chronic illness and disability is so collective that I feel like my personal experience, while it’s deeply important to me, obviously it’s my life. It’s also like, it’s such a collective one, that, and of course I love work that is deeply personal and so how many works like that have changed my life. And also in my personal interests, I’m really more interested in how the body is interpolated by institutions and forces and systems and et cetera. And I don’t know if we can necessarily have those conversations or there are other ways to think about that without imaging the body in a certain way, if that makes sense.

- I think you’re describing the problem of over determining the lens through which a work and the person who made that work right is read.

- Yeah, sure.

- And so how to resist that, is it really valid.

- And that’s obviously like raced/classed gendered, in a lot of different ways in terms of like whose work gets read a certain way, whose work doesn’t, so it’s complex, but I think it’s something that I’ve definitely very self-consciously navigated as an artist.

- We’re coming towards the 40 minute mark, I wanna make sure that we have time for questions.

- Cool.

- I really hope that anyone listening can come and see the exhibition, it’s on view for quite some time. It’s a really powerful show. I’m going to field some of the questions here. So there is a question here from Elizabeth Flinch, which I’m going to read out for you. I was able to spend time in the space today.

- Oh, cool.
- Which is amazing to have had that opportunity before hearing you speak. As a performer with a brain jury, I was moved to take off my coat and boots and follow the verbal cues as instructions for movement in the lit area. The spinning cues made it difficult for me, but the piece urged me to keep going in a beautiful way, I kept wondering if I was going to get in trouble with the gallery attendants. My question is do you intend for people to move in the space like this? How do you see that as part of the work, if it happens, allowed or not?

- That's a great question. I don't get to make the decisions, I don't work here. So I don't know, but I mean this work is about this complex relationship between instruction and description and it actually really conflates the two, I really think it's highly interpretive. I don't know if I can say much more, because I really don't like over-determining people's experiences of my work. It's like, if that was your experience of it, then that's what it was and that's what it is and remains to be. But yeah, I think in some ways the work is about conflating, kind of like these other works, I referenced, conflating, complicating and trying to understand the relationship between performer and spectator and by, and that gets very seriously ambiguated in the space because you're like sitting on a bench in the middle of a stage, basically.

- Thanks, McKenzie, feel free to use the Q&A button for any questions. I think for me also, it was interesting to hear some initial responses to the show yesterday, which was, we talked about this, but some teenagers who were intimidated by the experience of being in the space. So, and then earlier today I saw children running around, so I think it's, you're inviting that there's so much room.

- Yeah, yeah, absolutely, I think it is an invitation. I just, yeah, I don't wanna be prescriptive about what that movement is, but it is like an invitation to yeah, to respond to it as you see fit, whether it is description that you are listening to, to get a sense of like this event, this performance that happened, or whether that description then is actually, like I said, a kind of imperative and instruction for you and for your movement.

- We'll wait for a few more questions if they come in. But I also was curious, one thing that maybe you didn't talk about, which is that actually the format of the captions in “Leans, Reverses” is very similar to subtitles on a TV, as if you were watching TV and also, I mean, televisions and just commercial television has featured in your work quite a bit with “Extended Stay,” which is a hospital arm that would be attached to a hospital bed with a TV on it. There's also, I can't remember the title, but the flaming log.

- Yeah, I think that work is, you mean, oh, the physical work or the video.

- No, the video.

- Oh yeah, I think that work is called “Untitled.”

- “Untitled”?

- “,” yeah.

- But I wonder if maybe you could talk about just what TV means in terms of your work.
Yeah, totally and even more specifically in relationship to this project, as an artist, I have also been an art worker. I had a day job at EAI, Electronic Arts Intermix, shout out to them and when I was working there, we had just taken on this huge sort of conservation restoration, archival project of Merce Cunningham’s dance films, basically, collaborations with Charles Atlas, et cetera. And I really became interested in this genre and part of my interest in it also is related to like older ideas of access from the sixties and seventies that came through the transition to like video from film and how like video made art-making, or just any kind of documentation, so much more accessible, at least like financially and so, that was the idea about all these like dance film collaborations and was basically like, oh, let’s make dance on camera and we can put it on television. And then everybody will get to see dance, like this idea that like TV was this like amazing democratic-like forum this place where we could really like explode art and make it so expansive and accessible. And in some ways I was sort of interested in that and then being like, okay, well that is access and also here are some considerations that weren’t made and I want to think through them around access, right. So yeah, TV is really important to me, I sometimes feel kind of stunned around this kind of question, because I’m just like, I just love television, like pretty uncritically and I’m interested in it’s history and it, yeah, it’s a big part of my work, particularly around that moment and thinking about the relationship between magnetic tape, video and television and this like really specific art historical moment that was really transformative in terms of moving image work.

- We have a question from Michael Hanson. Would you recommend any other artists or authors related to the topic of institutional accessibility?

- Sure, yeah, absolutely. I don’t wanna be reductive about anybody’s practices, but I can name a few artists who I think speak to this kind of thing. So Park McArthur, Constantina Zavitsanos, Cameron Rowland, Shannon Finnegan, who I had mentioned, Brothers Sick, which is a collaborative project, Jerron, who’s my performer, Jerron Herman, Joselia Hughes, Alice Shepherd, I mean, honestly, I could literally just go on, go on and on. But there’s like a lot of artists who are really, Jordan Lord, there’s a lot of artists who are like really deeply invested in questions of access and radical access and how that is, and will continue to be like really, I don’t know, transformative.

- And there’s “Accessibility in the Arts.”

- Oh mine?

- Yeah.

- Oh yeah.

- Which is a relevant-

- Sure, yeah, I wrote an access guide for small scale arts nonprofits or organizations called “Accessibility in the Arts.” It’s available online it’s promiseandpractice.net, I believe.

- A few questions, so from Simi Linton,

- Oh! Hi Simi.
“You used term disability arts earlier, wonder if you could talk about the role of access in this domain, genre, field, or however you refer to it.”

In disability arts? Hmm, yeah. I mean, I don’t wanna say, I don’t wanna say that, disability arts is always gonna have a relationship to access, but I don’t even wanna over determine what that even means. Right, like there’s just a lot of different people making a lot of different kind of work. Can you repeat the question?

[Pavel] Sure.

Thanks.

“You used term disability arts earlier, wonder if you could talk about the role of access in this domain, genre, field, or however you refer to it?”

Sure, yeah, I just think that there are a lot of, I mean, this community is like expansive and exists in different pods and pockets, all over the world. And I think people are thinking about access in different ways, in different places, but I think disability arts as a framework is basically really about cross disability solidarity actually, which is something that I think outside of communities of disabled people doesn’t really get talked about, but it’s about people whose like points of access might sometimes like contraindicate each other, finding ways of like being together and making work. So, yeah, I guess that’s what I would say about that is it’s just kind of about finding ways to be together.

Mm hmm.

Yeah. A question from Kunal Patra, you mentioned the Dohm white noise machines in regards to surveillance. Do these machines in your work symbolize as a sort of way to fight state surveillance? If you don’t mind, could you also speak a little bit about your hourglass works?

Oh, cool. Yeah. I mean, I said the surveillance thing in passing, but I, yeah, I think what I’m interested in is like how we can like retool and repurpose objects towards like other more radical means than they were like intended for basically. And so I guess when I say anti-surveillance, I just mean, yeah, that there’s a kind of innate power in not silencing, but in being able to hide underneath white noise, basically. And that might be useful politically in some ways to not be heard or to be able to have conspiratorial conversations in public. And, yeah, so that’s that. And then in terms of the hourglass piece, I have a piece called “Free Radicals” and it’s basically an hourglass and it’s filled with like limestone and granite dust from a stone quarry that I grew up next to in exurban Philadelphia. And I think with that work I was at the time just thinking a lot about, it’s also a remediated Superfund site and there are across this country kind of, I mean, I hate to say like, anyway, yeah, anyway, across this country, there’s a really high incidence of Superfund sites adjacent to Black neighborhoods, basically. And I kind of wanted to make a work just like using that material and thinking about its kind of like ephemeral presence throughout my life and kind of the strange ways that we’re able to map physical change in response to the environment.

Mm hmm, we have a question from Hana Noorali and Lynton Talbot.

Oh, hi.
- When talking about fugitivity and the idea of evading capture, I'm wondering to what extent you think this is possible inside the museum? Fred Moten talks about complicity a lot, that, “One can’t necessarily rise above it, but forge a different type of radical complicity.” Does this resonate at all with your works particularly “A Conspiracy” installed in the Walker’s permanent displays?

- Yeah, that’s a great question. I mean, I think you kind of answered it, something I think a lot about is this particular phrase that Fred Moten says about being, “In and not of institutions.” And it’s like a very subtle distinction and yeah, I think that’s like how I try to kind of operate, it’s yeah, these systems, institutions, et cetera, can feel totalizing yet there are these, I don’t know, pockets of grace and radicality available, like everywhere in life.

- From Martin Germann, what is for you the relation between institutional access and the notion of vibe as you were describing it?

- Vibe, also shout out Constantina Zavitsanos, I don’t know if people think about their work this way, but for me, their work is very much about vibe, like vibe and vibration, these thresholds of sensory experience that are beyond, yeah, beyond hearing, they’re about feeling in some way. And I think, yeah, vibe for me is I guess when I think about vibe, it brings me back to this question of collectivity and what is the point of access, which is we’re circling back to the beginning of the conversation, which is like, access is not about increased transparency to an object, to a thing, to a text, accessibility is about collectivity. It’s about like producing a thing that can be experienced with others. And so I think that’s what I mean when I say vibe, where it’s like this is the thing that has to be prioritized over transparency in some ways, a lot of times when disabled people try to come together, it’s like really challenging, because of these conflicting kind of access needs. But at the end of the day, it’s like, I’m gonna give a really practical example, which is, you could try to organize a meeting for disabled organizers or artists or something. And the hours, the meeting’s like two hours and by the time all of the access is set up, there’s like 15 minutes left for the actual meeting, but it doesn’t really matter, because the whole point is just like, oh cool, we got together, like that in and of itself is like such a radical and amazing necessary part of life and such an incredibly, such an incredibly important practice. It’s like, fuck the meeting, this is the point of access. So yeah and in that way it’s like structural, right? It’s kind of like about moving around the thing and what are the protocols and tools that make a thing possible.

- Right, we have just a couple more. Question from Drew Maude-Griffin, can you speak more about this movement towards intelligibility as a way of evading capture and how this interacts with access? How do you evade capture, but still remain accessible to an audience who may not be within the arts field, or frequent spaces like the Walker? I am so appreciative of your wisdom and this word fugitivity, which deeply encompasses many aspects of being disabled.

- Mm, yeah, I think you’re talking about the accessibility of the work in some ways, or that I think that’s what that question is about. And I’m gonna, I think, talk about another work to kind of respond to it, like this piece that you had mentioned before “Extended Stay,” which has a hospital television monitor on this articulating arm mount that comes out from the wall. And it’s basically playing cable television for 24 hours and it’s been programmed to change the channel every minute and 30 seconds, so it’s like a self-surfing television and it
presents itself in some ways as like a kind of classic ready-made, but also could be thought of as a kinetic artwork, because of the television functions as like movement in some ways. And there are lots of ways to talk about it, but honestly, the people who I felt had the most profound or who understood the work best when they approached it were people who were like, oh, I know this object, I have like an intimate relationship with this object. Right, so it can be framed art historically, or it's just like, if you've been in a chemo infusion suite, if you've spent any kind of time in that location, you will recognize the object and you will understand its association, you'll understand how much different of a media experience that is than like what we classically think of as an experience of media in a museum. And the difference between a hospital and a museum as institutions and so I guess what I'm trying to say is, I think that what needs to be recognized is recognized by the people who need to recognize it.

- And one last question again from Elizabeth Flinch, you've mentioned Merce Cunningham a few times, and I'm wondering if there are any other dancers who excite you or may have influenced this work?

- Hmm, that's a good question. Yeah, well, Jerron obviously, somebody who I really wanna cite is Kayla Hamilton, who's a dancer working today who we had many conversations as I worked on this project. She has a dance performance called “Nearly Sighted” that's really amazing, that's also sort of about performance and creatively engaging audio description. Alice Shepherd is also a Black disabled dancer doing really incredible work that I'm deeply influenced by. And then maybe more historically somebody I thought a lot about was Blondell Cummings who had various associations with that earlier generation of dancers, had been in one of Yvonne Rainer’s films, but had made this kind of amazing dance work that took what we saw as kind of I don't know, white modernist, in modern dance interests in pedestrian gestures and sort of really transformed it because the work was so much about domestic labor and domestic work and care work and caring and trying to mimic and repeat those gestures over and over again and see what they produced, so I've been thinking a lot about her work actually, so those were some of the people I'd mention.

- Well, thank you so much, Carolyn, for sharing with us, some of the stories around this exhibition, but your work more generally, thank you to everyone who have tuned in and asked questions and been here today.

- Yeah, thank you, Pavel and thank you everyone for coming and to the access workers and to this talk show that's been set up and yeah, thank you.