

Event Transcript

July 21, 2020 – *Performance-in-Place: 4 Bodies 1 Screen* by Maria Hupfield

Sara Reisman:

So good evening. I think we're going to get started. Thank you all for joining us tonight for Maria Hupfield's newly developed work titled, *4 Bodies 1 Screen*, for which she has invited three artists, TJ Dedeaux-Norris, Ayana Evans, and Esther Neff, to join for collaborative engagement and performance art. Working from an agreed upon score in four parts, they will introduce a combination of improvised individual and group led movement that considers the full body in relation to the screen. Characteristic of her live interdisciplinary performances, Hupfield has crafted an atmosphere for an active exchange of ideas across cultures, disciplines and borders. Her practice has invested in collaboration as a means for sustaining trust and support introduced and developed during her time spent with the Brooklyn Performance Art community between 2010 and 2019.

Quick introduction, my name is Sara Reisman. I'm the Executive & Artistic Director of the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation, which many of you know is focused on art and social justice, grant making, exhibitions, and public programs like tonight's performance and conversation.

When we open the floor to questions later in the discussion, we ask that you submit questions using the chat function, and one of us will respond to those verbally asking you to pose your question to the artists. I do want to point out that in the chat section you can find information about ASL interpretation as well as captioning. So I'll continue.

We're gathered virtually in many locations at once, Toronto, Chicago, Iowa city, and St. Louis, including Manhattan, Brooklyn, and other places. As this event is organized by the Rubin Foundation I've chosen to address the specific site where our offices are located, where I'm sitting right now, near Union Square and what the local indigenous peoples call Manahatta, thereby acknowledging the Lenape community past and present, as well as future generations. The Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation and The 8th Floor acknowledge that we are the beneficiary of historical exclusions and erasures of many Native American people, including those on whose land the foundation is located.

This acknowledgement demonstrates the commitment to beginning the process of working to dismantle the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism, a commitment that I think many of us agree has become all the more poignant in this time of reconciliation that has resulted in transformative activist engagement across what is currently referred to as the United States of America. Thank you.

Please also note that this performance includes live ASL interpretation and captioning as I mentioned. If you look to Lydia for ASL interpretation, I think you can see her on screen, and you can also look at the bottom of your Zoom screen to activate closed captioning. You can just select that CC button and then you'll have live captioning. Instructions for ASL and closed captioning can be found in the chat section of the screen.

Before introducing the four artists I'd like to mention that *4 Bodies 1 Screen*, is the fourth performance in our current series Performance-in-Place, which was a curatorial response organized by the team at the Rubin Foundation on the 8th Floor: George Bolster, William Furio, Anjali Nanda Diamond and myself. We were responding to the current social distancing guidelines that we're living within. Past and upcoming artists in this series include Alice Sheppard, Eileen Myles, Nicolás Dumit Estevéz Raful, Aliza Shvarts, LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs and Baseera Khan. These events are typically staged online on Tuesday evenings, every three or four weeks, and then are made available through social media channels for those who are not able to attend live. So you can look online to find more of those past performances that we've done.

With that I'd like to introduce the artists featured in *4 Bodies 1 Screen*. TJ Dedeaux-Norris is based in and presenting from Iowa city. Ayana Evans is based in New York City and presenting from Chicago. Maria Hupfield is based and presenting from Toronto. Esther Neff is based in and presenting from St. Louis. For full bios for TJ, Ayana, Maria and Esther, please refer to the chat section where there's a URL link to the event webpage. Thank you very much. I guess we can't see each other but I want to welcome the performers and the performance will begin.

(Performance)

Sara Reisman:

Hi. Thank you all, that was fantastic. I want to say that the tension was actually part of what made this so incredible. So I just want to maybe ask a question and then we'll see if there are questions from the audience. But what I was really struck by watching all four of you is this strange connection between intimacy and isolation. And if you take the two words, we could say the intimacy of isolation. I think many of us have been isolated for many months now. Right? Time is an elastic band, so here we are. But also then there's isolation in intimacy. Right? So I just thought maybe you could talk a little bit about one or the other term, or both, and how they relate to your practice right now, if anybody wants to take that up, or how you do that collectively, because you've been collaborating.

Ayana Evans:

Who want to go first?

Maria Hupfield:

I can go first. Thank you, Sara. Thank you so much. I just want to verbally out loud say thank you to the Rubin Foundation, to put in place the invitation for me to create a new work, and to my collaborators, Esther, Ayana and, oh, you're off, TJ. I'm back. It was really great to be invited. In terms of isolation, this opportunity came up at a really good time for me, because I wasn't making work at all and not wanting to make work and not thinking about it, and feeling so preoccupied with so many other things. But there was enough advance notice. I thought maybe this is something I can work towards. And then the more I thought about it, there's so much happening, I just felt like this is something I didn't feel prepared to do. I didn't want to do it alone, I wanted to... It really got me going and thinking and looking online and seeing who's

performing. And I saw Ayana, and Esther's during her thing with the Forum. So all this stuff was coming up and I just thought this was a great way to take on this huge challenge of how do you create work that's about your bodies and other people, and being in the space when you can't do any of that stuff. So yeah, that's what led me to kind of think about this and propose as an experiment and to the generosity of everyone here for coming on board around this issue or this concern with performance and taking it on.

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

I think what I noted in our rehearsal, I just didn't realize how excited I would be by being on Zoom with four performers, three other fellow performers, and just how excited I got about what that meant. As much as we're Zooming in these moments there's parts of us I'm sure where we're all aware of our bodies in the frame and we're looking and listening and listening and looking, but to be just on with performers is such a great opportunity to use them in a way that I think I daydream about when I'm supposed to be in serious meetings. So this is pretty cool.

Ayana Evans:

I guess for me, like right now I'm in my family home, like this is my childhood home. I mean, this is my brother's room, so. But ... Oh, no.

Maria Hupfield:

Oh, no. She'll be back.

Sara Reisman:

Yeah.

Esther Neff:

Okay. Well, while Ayana's gone we should note that this is her birthday week.

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

Her birthday week, that's right.

Sara Reisman:

So should we take questions or is there more to discuss amongst us?

Maria Hupfield:

Yeah, I think there's a lot that we can talk about each other. You're back. Did you want to say anything else Ayana, about your practice? Oh, you might be muted.

Ayana Evans:

Yeah. One.

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

I like that piano wherever that's playing at. There's two questions in the chat.

Sara Reisman:

Yeah, some questions. Let's see. Joey Orr, can you tell us something about the collaborative planning involved? How did you plan this? How did you develop the collaboration?

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

There you go.

Maria Hupfield:

All right. Do we want to answer the question about how we collaborated, how we developed it?

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

Whatever you want to do.

Maria Hupfield:

Yeah. I mean, there's so many questions here, I'm just scrolling through the chat right now and seeing tons of stuff.

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

Yeah.

Maria Hupfield:

Yeah, one of the things we saw around this idea of collaborating/not collaborating, the idea of having Q&As after a performance. There's so much that you're processing that it's a lot to kind of answer all the questions. So we probably, we're not going to get through all of these; we have about 10 minutes. But I can just share that Esther, Ayana, and I have collaborated before in Brooklyn, and TJ I've known your work. When I connected with Ayana, and I was saying, "Well, who else should we invite?" Right away we mentioned TJ and so you're kind of the wild card of our group. But just I think our performance artists are so rich, with all the material vocabulary, movement vocabulary, that there's so much to draw from. Right? So having a really great practice, I think helps. Ayana, how's your volume? Esther do you want to talk a little bit about collaborating?

Esther Neff:

Well, what I can say Maria, I think this is a fantastic idea. I was so excited to be invited and involved, and I had so much fun working with you all. Yeah, I think in regards to the intimacy question, it's really fulfilling to hear how other people are thinking right now and just to have that window into the practices of people that I love and respect. So thank you, Maria, for making this happen. It's really fun.

Maria Hupfield:

Yeah. I totally feel the same way. Yeah, I think with Zoom... When I was thinking about everything that's involved, if this wasn't COVID and if we didn't have Zoom, what would go into conceiving of a performance project like this, like the setup, the tech, synchronizing, having a

live performance, and then recording it, there's actually so much involved when we were thinking about breaking down a performance for Zoom. Yeah.

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

I found that the rehearsal didn't do justice to what actually happened, which is really interesting for me. It was just a different level of engagement where we were really feeding off it. We were really, in real time, responding to one another. I'd see one of you make a shape. And I know we talked about all of that, but until we're really in it, I'm realizing that as much as we went over the score, as much as we did all of that, it was really the action. The actual action is where I feel like I connected the most comfortably and humbly and knowingly. So that felt really good. We did a lot of things that we didn't necessarily talk about either, but it was also really powerful how some of these gestures really came together. You were going to say that too, Ayana?

Ayana Evans:

I was going to say you had a toothbrush and I had put a toothbrush right next to me. When I saw yours, I was like, "It's on." I had put the toothpaste on, after my shower earlier. I just was like, "If I feel like it, I got this toothbrush. Maybe." But I was like, "Oh wow, that looks planned. That's cute."

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

Both of us were like, before we got on were like, "I need to take a shower, to prepare." I opted out for the shower. I was like, "I can't right now." So then it just felt like the right moment to seal the performance with the shower that I needed to take, and brush my teeth. So I know it sounds so silly, but like...

Ayana Evans:

Because I wanted to brush mine a second time, because I had done a quick job and I was like, "Man, I need that second go round." I'll start with the tech issues y'all. That's actually my fault, I think. Now with the phone, I tried to join and I couldn't hear, I don't know what was going on with that. But totally, I thought I had plugged in the laptop, but all I did was unplug the air conditioner and plug the wrong thing in, so it just all went to hell.

Maria Hupfield:

Yeah. Unfortunately that's the reality of being tech dependent, right? That will always come up. That's just so the way it is. I feel like anytime I've tried, like Ayana when we did social health performance club, whenever we would say we're doing rehearsal, we would never really rehearse. It wasn't like that, right? We'd kind of get together and connect, see the space. So I feel like this was a common way, yeah, to kind of save all the energy, like the real kind of meat of it for the performance. Which might be a bit different if you'd come that performance through theater, perhaps where I know there's a lot of rehearsing. I've done performances like that as well when you collaborate, but ...

Ayana Evans:

Well, okay, I should confess, I don't really believe in rehearsal, I always go. If it's like this, like it's structured, I go, but like TJ what you were saying, like it was better as the thing, for me, it's always better as the thing.

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

Yeah.

Ayana Evans:

I can't rehearse it. If you give it all in rehearsal, it's a bad performance. So I just go back and be lazy, like, "Okay, let's check the lighting. Wherever."

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

Yeah. No, I think that, that's interesting. There are some performances that I've had to retire because doing now feels like it's lost all of its-

Ayana Evans:

There's no surprise.

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

Yeah, there's nothing there. So it feels like a stage rehearsal, which means then it's like stale. So I liked that nervous feeling that you get and sort of the anxiety and curiosity of what somebody else is going to do next. I'm equally watching all three of you trying to synthesize something that... Yeah, all these connections were happening. When I was peeling the mask and not knowing what was going to be happening, in the juxtaposition of this gesture that I had obviously committed to, right? There was no other way to get it off, or like the actual duration. I got really lucky that it came off in one sheet. That is so rare to get the mask off in one nice-

Ayana Evans:

Real talk.

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

So I'm really impressed with my ability to, in real time, get that mask to peel off in a way that was also ecstatically pleasing for me.

Ayana Evans:

Yeah.

Maria Hupfield:

One of the things I feel whenever you're performing solo, you know what you're going to do because you know yourself. You don't have to communicate to anyone else. But when you're collaborating with many other people, they have to know what is going on as well. So there's that. I feel a sense of trust and responsibility within those collaborations as well. So it does help to have that kind of ongoing familiarity, so we can kind of catch each other. That's something I feel like comes directly from working in Brooklyn, where performance artists were always

performing and always finding that way. So, Ayana and Esther, I think that it's been a huge influence for sure on my work and thinking about it. And not necessarily from a, that people kind of, yeah, the sense of community. I'm seeing there's a lot of questions here. I see something about black face, something about what are we going to do after to take care of ourselves.

I'm aware that we're kind of coming really tight up to the top of the hour, which is sort of the end. I'm just wondering if there's anything that any of you wanted to share. I guess we can kind of look over these questions and we can reconnect and talk about those together and think about it. But yeah, if there's... Okay, Sara. Sara's saying we can go a little bit later. So I don't know if there's any kind of comments that... Having done this, I mean, I've never done this before, I'm kind of hoping that maybe we'll see more performances like this happening and then... I look forward to watching the video as well, because it's also tough to be in the role I felt watching. Yeah.

Esther Neff:

Yeah, it's hard to assess right now when all the little moments are just kind of still firing inside your brain, like, "Oh, when they did this and then she did that."

Ayana Evans:

Yeah.

Esther Neff:

Yeah, I think these more larger analytic questions are really hard for me to think about it in this moment.

Ayana Evans:

Okay. I don't think they're hard but I think that I have started to be trying to accept that a lot of times I get asked to do a talk right after performance, so now I can give answers, I won't remember what I said.

Maria Hupfield:

Do you ever feel like that's just part of the performance though? You build the Q&A-

Ayana Evans:

Yeah. There've been times where I'm like, I'll do a whole lot of rigorous, like drinking bath water, roll down the street, and then, I don't know, run a little bit, hit somebody and then sit in a chair and be like, "All right, let's take questions." But usually it's just a regular tired day and I'm just like, "All right." You can see it in my eyes if you started looking at me. If you've seen my videos enough, there's a tale. There's a moment where I look like this.

Maria Hupfield:

You don't get the crazy eye.

Ayana Evans:

No, I don't get the crazy eye I get the sleepy eye. People might think I'm trying to look sexy, but I'm not. I'm like ...

Sara Reisman:

What I liked, I mean, watching this, this is our first time doing this without the audience being visible. I mean, we've been testing out different options and Maria was the first artist we invited who said, "I want to do it this way." So part of what's interesting for me is to see the grid. To see these moments of congruence between what each of you were doing and also the kind of contrast between your spaces and the way you're interacting with your spaces. But it's like taking Zoom to a photogenic level, because I don't know about you but when we first started using Zoom for meetings at the beginning of the pandemic, it's interesting to see people's homes and then you get kind of bored. But this is a different thing because just to see this grid that's all art. It's all your performance, genders and movement. What you're wearing is sort of using as props or wearing as costumes is very interesting to see together.

So, I think you've taken this further as a form, using Zoom as a collaborative platform. I think it's very, very interesting. It's just a comment, but it was fun to watch for that reason. And then the tension of not knowing, really not understanding or being certain what form this will take. How does it conclude? Because it felt to me very iterative as you were going, although there was some rehearsal, but Ayana doesn't believe in rehearsal.

Maria Hupfield:

Just a score, a structure...

Ayana Evans:

I believe in a score. I'll admit, I believe in a score. I almost always have a score. Even if I'm solo, I do believe in a score. But the real rehearsal, no, but I try to play nice. I do always try to be like, "Yes, I'll do rehearsal."

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

I just read something really amazing. Someone said, "Ah, I didn't have a grid, I just saw one person at a time." So, ha, that-

Ayana Evans:

That's interesting. Who said that? I wonder if they liked it that way.

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

Lorraine, it says. But I think that that's really amazing, right? Like depending on what device you're looking at it on or how you have your Zoom setting setup, even with as many parameters as were controlled and all the things that we talked about, about how we're corresponding, someone had an experience that we had no control over. Right?

Ayana Evans:

Hi Lorraine.

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

That's kind of cool. I wonder what that looks like. To see one person at a time and how that's designated by how much sound is in the room, however the mic picked that up. That's part of it.

Maria Hupfield:

... a little bit about that too, the way that we'll be in different, depending on people's screens, we'll be in different order.

Ayana Evans:

Yeah.

Maria Hupfield:

I didn't even think about the speaker view, that if you're watching from a different speaker view. But also, Lorraine, if you're interested in seeing the grid, the video documentation will be available. I think that's also different, thinking of a live performance, but then also there's this after live. So we're also performing for the camera and in the moment, and yeah, there's a lot of kind of process in that.

Esther Neff:

I liked the way that things we talked about, but didn't explicitly decide to do.

Ayana Evans:

Yeah.

Esther Neff:

As if the actions that were involved were broader than what we had decided on for the score. I think that just speaks to sort of like your power as performers, that all of the things that are in different parts of your mind and body are still going to be present when you're in that performance mode. I really enjoyed seeing that, well, as best I could, but I felt it too.

Ayana Evans:

Yeah. There were moments where I looked at you guys, where I kind of was like, "If I do something interesting, I can kind of post." Almost like I wanted to enjoy it, to be in it, but also enjoy it. Because you guys were doing some interesting stuff. I know maybe it was like cheesy, like sweat, ourselves, but I enjoyed watching what I could watch. I really liked seeing the difference. I don't know, my grid is different from everyone else's grid, like what you see, but it really worked beautifully in some moments. So I really loved that.

Maria Hupfield:

Do you find that in a live performance, Ayana, because in a live performance you have to do that too, right? If you're collaborating, you have to watch what people are doing. They're always spontaneous and thinking of things. You're like, "Oh, what's going on back there?" But you've got to stay to the audience. Was there a big difference for you?

Ayana Evans:

I think I see a lot less. In a lot of performance, I don't see anything.

Maria Hupfield:

Right.

Ayana Evans:

I have no memory of what other people were doing pretty much. Even if I had a moment where I laid on the floor, I don't take it to look at people. I don't know what that's about though. I don't know. It's just different for me.

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

Yeah, I'm excited to watch it. There are things that I know I missed and there were ... Yeah. I think we'll all be surprised to see-

Ayana Evans:

Yeah, I think so too.

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

...what's there. Yeah.

Maria Hupfield:

Well, I think that ... I don't know if anyone has any last ... Esther or TJ or Ayana, if there's anything you want to share. I think people are slowly signing off.

Ayana Evans:

I just want to say thank you. You guys were great to work with. It was easy, it was simple. That's something that I needed. Just a nice, a good experience with the online performance in a group. Because I don't think that always is so nice. It's not guaranteed. Put it that way. Not guaranteed. I enjoyed this. This was really great. So thank you.

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

Thank you. Thank you, Maria.

Sara Reisman:

Thank you all.

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

Thank you, Esther. Thank you, Sara. Thank you, Will. Thank you, Ayana.

Ayana Evans:

Will, our unsung heroes.

TJ Dedeaux-Norris:

Thank you audience. Yeah, thank you, Lydia.