REFUSING TO BE DISPOSED

by

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Smash borders. Smash boundaries. Smash limits.

Smashing, Smashing it,

Smash.

REFUSING TO BE DISPOSED

Refusing to be Disposed

Refusing to be disposed explores oppression of the female body in a nationalist America. Focusing on my experience as a white woman in this modern, highly polarized political climate, I reject the idea of disposability in a country emboldened by sexism and hate. I use my body as a site of protest and manifestation of the messiness of the feminist fight for gender equality today.

Through a multidisciplinary installation with live performance, *Refusing to be disposed* presents a female body as a force of power—claiming space, demanding to be seen, and desecrating the American flag in an effort to symbolically dismantle Trump's patriarchal umbrella and the metaphorical (and literal) borders he represents. In creating this work during the Trump presidency, I use Trump as a metaphor for oppressive forces: Trump is Capitalism. Trump is Patriarchy. Trump is White Supremacy. Trump is Exclusionary. Trump is Misogyny, Racism, Xenophobia, Ableism, and so much more. I also acknowledge that "Trump's America" has elevated these qualities since its inception.

As a woman activist and performer, I am interested in reclaiming the body from the male gaze and the conditioned gaze within myself. I utilize the American flag as a multipurpose symbol of oppression in response to the resurgence of overtly sexist political leadership. This work is an urgent expression of the female fight against sexism as a conditioned societal structure in a world where my right to personal autonomy and

full control over my body can be compromised by (rich, white) men. With health care policies that restrict choices for my body and a president who has been praised by supporters for his disregard of women's dignity, I find myself navigating a country that reinforces gender and racial oppression. This work creates an active environment of agency by inviting the unsuspecting audience to witness acts of defiant expression and political resistance.

DEFINING TRUMP'S AMERICA

Trump's America is a country led by an unabashed misogynist, an America where "grab 'em by the pussy" became a political tagline. Donald Trump's dehumanizing behavior targeting women, minorities, and the disabled became glorified in his campaign slogan "Make America Great Again"; a terrifying rally that "invoke[d] a return to a never-never land of white male supremacy where coal was an awesome fuel, blue-collar manufacturing jobs were what they had been in 1956, women belonged in the home, and the needs of white men were paramount."[1] The 2016 election itself witnessed many battles—man versus woman, Democrat versus Republican, experience versus inexperience, and inclusion versus exclusion. Hillary Clinton's electoral college loss brought forth many questions about America's underlying gender bias. Her campaign was intentionally run on identity politics, and America was not ready for a woman with power; Clinton's womanhood, alongside many other factors including Russian interference, was both her strongest and weakest attribute.

One of the more bewildering results of the 2016 presidential election was the fact that 52 percent of white women voted for Trump instead of the first ever major woman candidate for president. I see much of it as subconscious cultural conditioning: "a white man who is rich, powerful, and aggressive must be better than a woman who doesn't know her place." In contrast, ninety-four percent of black women voted for Hillary Clinton. In addition to gender, this campaign brought up issues of class and race, illuminating various forms of oppression within Capitalist America, including middle to lower class white males who were inspired by Trump's apparent success and completion

[1] Ed. Kate Harding and Samhita Mukhopadhyay, *Nasty Women: Feminism, Resistance, and Revolution in Trump's America* (New York, 2017), 128.

of the "American dream." Despite his many business failings, outrageously offensive behavior, and glaringly obvious political inexperience, Trump was still more "qualified" in many eyes compared to a woman. His behavior could be shrugged off. *He's just a man, after all*. Though numerous factors contributed to the final results, in the end, a woman's flaws were unforgivable, and a man's incorrigible behavior could be ignored.

Abusive Behavior as Control

Trump's most troubling characteristic is his erratic and disturbing behavior, which, in many ways, mirrors that of an abuser. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence defines domestic violence:

> "Domestic violence is the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, and emotional abuse. The frequency and severity of domestic violence can vary dramatically; however, the one constant component of domestic violence is one partner's consistent efforts to maintain power and control over the other."[2]

In his past treatment of women, rage against the press, alleged sexual assault, and constant belittling of others—including a reporter with disabilities—Trump exhibited many of these traits and he continues to behave in this manner to maintain power over those in his orbit (and beyond). With his constant Twitter antics, including derogatory slurs maligning those who disagree with him or who accuse him of any wrongdoing, Trump is the ultimate bully who uses force as a means of control. Vice President Mike Pence is equally as frightening for those who support LGBTQ and abortion rights.

[2] National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, "Signs of Abuse," Accessed Apr. 28, 2018. https://ncadv.org/signs-of-abuse.

Pence's political record includes "signing eight anti-abortion bills in his four years as governor of Indiana, and going after Planned Parenthood the way Trump went after hapless beauty queens."[3] Together this team campaigned on hate disguised as hope, unearthing a white supremacist movement that had long been condemned by past presidents.[4] The white-centered American socio-political system was founded on racial inequality: "the direction of power between whites and people of color is historic, traditional, normalized, and deeply embedded in the fabric of U.S. society."[5] Within this system, women of color suffer the deepest oppression, fighting a multiplicity of battles. The election of Trump reinforced a system of abuse, and revealed a hoax of equality, freedom, and respect for *all*.

The Rise of Incels

In the online world, the terrifying development of incels brings forth a new wave of masculine supremacy. An extremist group of predominantly white men called incels, shorthand for involuntary celibates, have "constructed a violent political ideology around the injustice of young, beautiful women refusing to have sex with them."[6] They see themselves as ugly and unworthy and yet blame women for society's conditioning of beauty standards (to which they too hold women). This assumption of gender hierarchy and "diabolical misogyny" breeds a rage that stems from insecurity and power hunger. Their extreme views mask an internal contradiction by which incels "direct hatred at

[3] Ed. Kate Harding and Samhita Mukhopadhyay, *Nasty Women,* 125.
[4] Glenn Thrush and Maggie Haberman, "Trump Gives White Supremacists an Unequivocal Boost," *The New York Times,* Aug.15, 2017. Accessed May 15, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/us/politics/trump-charlottesville- white-nationalists.html.
[5] Robin DiAngelo, "White Fragility," *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, vol. 3, (2011), 56.
[6] Jia Tolentino, "The Rage of the Incels," *The New Yorker,* May 15, 2018. Accessed June 25, 2018. https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-rage-of-the-incels.

things they think they desire."[7] For example, their obsession with female beauty contradicts their professed view on makeup "as a form of fraud."[8] For incels, the goal is not actually to have sex, or as they describe it, "dominion over female bodies"; rather, the goal is to achieve "absolute male supremacy."[9] These extreme views come from a deeper social conditioning that relates to masculine versus feminine behavior stereotypes. Scholar of masculinity Michael Schwalbe argues that "masculinity and maleness are, fundamentally, about domination and maintaining power."[10] While incels are a warped example of specific male hierarchical views, this perpetuation of male superiority contributes to the normalization of hate, violence, and inequality.

The Power of the Phallus

Trump's America demonstrates a conditioned perception of the phallus as power, or *phallocentrism*, a term coined originally by Freudian psychoanalyst Ernest Jones and used during the second wave of feminism. Within *phallocentrism*, the penis acts as the central element of social hierarchy. When faced with the suggestion that his penis was small because of his hand size, Trump raged in defense, terrified that his manhood could be lessened in the public eye. How then does one define the phallus outside of the physical organ? In the metaphorical sense, the phallus can be "rendered transferable and expropriable through its very idealization as a privileged trope of masculine morphology; it can only be approximated, not possessed."[11] Within the social constructs of the

[7] Tolentino, "Rage of Incels."
[8] Tolentino, "Rage of Incels."
[9] Tolentino, "Rage of Incels."
[10] Ross Haenfler, "How a masculine culture that favors sexual conquests gave us today's 'incels,'" *Philly Voice*, Accessed June 25, 2018. http://www.phillyvoice.com/masculine-culture-sexual-conquests-incels/
[11] Athena Athanasiou and Judith Butler, "The Political Promise of the Performance," *Dispossession: the performative in the political,* (Malden: Polity Press, 2013), 50.

masculine-feminine binary, the phallus can be referenced without one actually seeing it, labeling these differences through gender norms and emotional expectations. Society blankly categorizes these terms in two ways:

> "A **masculine** society has traits that are categorized as male, such as strength, dominance, assertiveness, and egotism. **Feminine** society is traditionally thought of as having conventional traits, such as being supportive, caring, and relationship oriented." [12]

Within these behaviors, women are "permitted and even required to show emotion more openly" while men "are required to present a facade of coolness, lack of excitement, even boredom, to express emotion."[13] Through these constructs, women openly expressing emotion may be chastised as crazy or unreliable. These assumptions about gender characteristics reinforce gender stereotypes.[14] In fact, that women who assert themselves are perceived as crazy or unstable further demonstrates the inequality of phallic expectations.

In an America where women are treated as objects, I am curious if the reversal of these characteristics through movement in some way creates the perception of restructured power, or simply continues the cycle of inequality and stereotyped assumptions. bell hooks reflects: "there was a time when I liked to dress up as a man and go out into the world… to symbolically cross from the world of powerlessness to the world of privilege."[15] I aim to channel the essence of this power through my movement—leading certain movement phrases with this feeling of privilege within my own woman

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[12] Study.com, "Masculine vs. Feminine Cultures: Distinctions and Communication Styles," Accessed April 25, 2018. https://study.com/academy/lesson/masculine-vs-feminine-cultures-distinctions-communication-styles.html.
[13]Alison M. Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in feminist epistemology," *Inquiry*, 32:2, (1989), 164.
[14] Gill Perry and Paul Wood. *Themes in Contemporary Art*. Art of the 20th Century (Yale University Press; Bk. 4. New Haven: Yale University Press in Association with the Open University, 2004), 243.
[15] Andrea Juno and V. Vale, *Angry Women. (*San Francisco: RE/Search Publications, 1991), 81.

body. I examine where my identity stands within this work. In an effort to deconstruct society's expectations, must I put myself in a place where I can feel this white male power or simply re-establish my own identity? How can a woman embody the phallus? Is that notion alone reinforcing inequality and exclusion?

Figure 3: Ashley McQueen

I believe that the qualities society associates with the phallus are qualities that lie outside the masculine identity.

I refuse to be confined to a behavior binary.

WOMAN BODY AS PROTEST

My body serves as a form of protest within the work. I aim to incite resistance through movement that pushes against conventional expectations. I demand to be witnessed. I am in control of the environment.

Multiplicity of the Woman Experience: Intersectionality

My woman body has its own history and is reflective of my past experiences as a white woman growing up working class in southern Alabama. My use of the term "woman" refers to "any and every individual existent woman, past, present, or future, without the intermediary of the imagined universal."[16] Identity politics are defined as "a series of repetitive acts and socially mandated behaviors that an individual is forced to perform continually in order to take on and maintain a particular identity."[17] By acknowledging the identity politics of my being, I will performatively redefine certain social expectations. Judith Butler's words on political protest inspire my creative process:

We are STILL here
We have not yet been disposed of[18]

As I develop my sense of self performatively within the work, I question how I can speak for women who experience deeper oppressions than I experience. Intersectionality in feminism "refers to multiple oppressions experienced by nonwhite and poor women in particular, but more generally to all women because differences in

[16] Naomi Zack, *Inclusive Feminism: A Third Wave Theory of Women's Commonality*, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), Accessed April 30, 2018, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 26.
[17] Cherise Smith, *Enacting others: politics of identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith. (*Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
[18] Athanasiou and Butler, *Dispossession,* 196.

sexuality, age, and physical ableness are also sites of oppression."[19] My experience as a white female from a low income family growing up in the South impacts my perceptions of class, race, and gender roles. While I faced hardship because of my gender and financial status, my whiteness brought me privilege unknown to those experiencing other types of oppressions.

In defining the multiplicity of her identity, performance artist Adrian Piper was able to navigate beyond binary labels. Piper "reconceptualized her practice as a result of contemplating the 'nature' of her 'position as an artist, a woman, and a black.'"[20] The greatest challenge of intersectionality in feminism is the lack of a single, cohesive mission: whether or not these "differences combined erase all commonality among women."[21] Theorist and author Naomi Zack argues "intersectionality is not inclusive insofar as members of specific intersections of race and class can create only their own feminisms."[22] While the concept of multiple feminisms certainly poses additional difficulties in unifying the movement, the common issues that affect those who organize in resistance are more powerful than their intersectional differences. Audre Lorde reflects: "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own. I am not free as long as one person of Color remains chained. Nor is any of you."[23] All women share a commonality within protest: an awareness of various privileges, oppressions, and backgrounds. I also agree with the Women and the Politics of Place (WPP) perspective that the "body not as a static entity locked into

[19] Zack, *Inclusive Feminism, 7.*
[20] Cherise Smith, *Enacting others: politics of identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 40.
[21] Zack, *Inclusive Feminism*, 2.
[22] Zack, *Inclusive Feminism*, 2.
[23] Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger," *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 1-2. (Feminist Press at City University of New York, 1997), 285.

culturally defined biological rhythms" but operates as "a fluid site of power and political contestation."[24] Womanhood cannot be defined through a universal lens, but with a common thread of humanity that underlies our diversity.

Overcoming the Conditioned Idea of Disposability

From my perspective growing up in Alabama, I have seen women emote an inherent, culturally-conditioned feeling of disposability in the eyes of men. I witnessed moments of fear and insecurity paired with an urgency to remain relevant within society's unattainable standards. As women age, it is argued that we get closer to our "sell-by date"[25] when we are no longer deemed attractive to men. In researching performative force, Judith Butler discusses dispossession versus disposability, defining disposability as the "dehumanization of women as long as bodies are found discarded, remain uncounted, deemed disposable."[26] By treating women as disposable objects, one enables sexual violence by emotionally detaching from the action. Disposability grows from the objectification and dehumanization of a living body, and men can psychologically relieve themselves of guilt associated with acts of sexual or verbal abuse by treating women like an object or something less-than. These behaviors come from a conditioned hierarchy in which "men take a proprietary view of female sexuality and reproductive capacity."[27] In other words, men "exhibit a tendency to think of women as sexual and reproductive 'property' that they can own and exchange."[28]

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[24] Wendy Harcourt and Arturo Escobar, *Women and the Politics of Place,* (Kumarian Press, Inc., 2005).
[25] Perry and Wood, *Themes,* 243.
[26] Athanasiou and Butler, *Dispossession*, 147.
[27] Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, "Till Death Us Do Part," *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior.* Ed. Rose Weitz. (New York: Oxford UP, 1998), 209.
[28] Daly and Wilson, "Till Death," 209.

My own experiences as a woman have been shaped by my Southern roots, growing up in a culture that praised women for being clean, quiet, and out of the way. Reflecting on my youth, I remember questioning the need for feminism and not understanding its importance. *Women are fine, right? Men are just supposed to be in charge, that's how things go.* Despite my liberal upbringing—spending weekends at one of the few openly gay-friendly churches in the state of Alabama and getting into arguments at the lunch table about abortion rights—I was blinded by conditioned expectations of my future. Unlike the other girls in my grade, I barely escaped cotillion class on Sundays (dance rehearsals got in the way). There was still this "ideal" woman—a woman who goes to college to get her "MRS degree" and comes home with a ring—that I unknowingly desired. It took many years of separation from Alabama and exposure to other environments to recognize this cultural conditioning for what it was. Reflecting on emotions as social constructs, Alison Jaggar argues that "within a white-supremacist, and male-dominated society, the predominant values will tend to be those that serve the interests of rich white men."[29] In this sense, women are conditioned to reject feminism from the beginning, "develop[ing] an emotional constitution that is quite inappropriate for feminism."[30]

In college I found myself surrounded by men characteristically resembling Trump. I watched my then-boyfriend's friends treat women like trash, yet I still desired their approval. I found myself an empty shell of a woman, fighting to be seen as desirable and worthy of equal treatment. I found the only tool I had was my body and my sexuality. I could use this tool to be heard, even for a small moment. I could use this tool to be in

[29] Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge," 165.
[30] Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge," 165.

control, even if only until they were finished with me. I knew better, but it was the only option that ever seemed effective.

That's just what women did.

Over time, confidence and self-love rebuilt me into a woman who finally recognized her worth and rejected the toxicity of this social conditioning.

Excerpt from "Aunt Mandy" by Karen Finley

They never talk about a woman who can't
be a mother, it doesn't matter what else a woman
accomplishes for
A WOMAN MUST ALWAYS BE A MOTHER
A WOMAN MUST ALWAYS BE A MOTHER
A WOMAN MUST ALWAYS BE A MOTHER
'Cause a woman isn't nothing if she isn't a mother
A woman must always be loved but never treated
Like her own body is her own[31]

[31] Karen Finley, *Shock Treatment*, (San Francisco: City Lights; Monroe, OR: Distributor, Subterranean Co., 1990), 112.

Politics of Appearance and Objectification

Within America's patriarchy, hyper-sexualization and objectification of women exists in the hierarchy of gender norms. While introducing the politics of appearance, Rose Weitz argues how attractiveness serves as a power source—an idea that is still very much true today.[32] Within this attractiveness, a woman's breasts are a form of sexual power, exemplifying fetishism and "an object that stands in for the phallus"—the ultimate object of sexual desire.[33] Attractiveness as power is dangerous because it reinforces the concept of disposability as women age. Thus, a woman loses power as she ages, merely because the male gaze no longer deems her attractive. My movement research explores the interplay of the politics of appearance: how a semi-naked woman wearing only the flag can wield sexual power and make a statement on sexual exploitation.

In observing the objectification of women, Bartky describes the woman body as "object and prey" in the eyes of patriarchal power, arguing that she "lives her body as seen by another"—embodying an "anonymous patriarchal Other."[34] The male gaze asserts itself onto the female body, and through conditioning a woman lives her life with a perpetual male gaze within her subconscious.[35] A further argument claims "women's attractiveness is defined as attractiveness-to-men; women's eroticism is defined as either

[32] Rose Weitz,"The Politics of Appearance" *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, & Behavior*, ed. Rose Weitz. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 123.
[33] Iris Marion Young, "Breasted Experience: The Look and the Feeling," *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, & Behavior,* ed. Rose Weitz. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 125.
[34] Sandra Lee Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, & Behavior*, ed. Rose Weitz. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 34.
[35] Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," 34.

nonexistent, pathological, or peripheral when it is not directed to phallic goals."[36] A woman cannot escape the oppressive male gaze because she has internalized this gaze, which emerges in the constant desire to behave in a way accepted by the outside male gaze. These desires dictate and reshape women's behavior and enforce male power by avoiding disruption. To navigate the system, women must obey the rules of the system. In my movement research, I play with redirecting the male gaze back at the audience, observing their observation of my body in the space. I observe the observer. (But which comes first?)

Women and Space

I explore a woman's right to hold space, and the bravery in doing so without guilt or fear. Where I was raised, women around me, regardless of class, race, or ethnicity, were expected to stay quiet and out of the way. Behaving in this way demonstrated proper manners. Disturbingly, I was reminded of this dynamic while I watched Trump looming behind and interrupting Hillary Clinton eighteen times throughout the second presidential debate. He was "in her space" and "appeared to be outraged that she was in [the election]."[37] His behavior was representative of how many Americans felt about Clinton and how many Americans still feel about women in general. Women in power cannot shed their womanhood and the expectations associated with their gender. A woman who speaks with passion is "aggressive." A woman who speaks loudly is "shrill."

[36] Kathryn Pauly Morgan, "Women and the Knife: Cosmetic Surgery and the Colonization of Women's Bodies," *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, & Behavior*, ed. Rose Weitz. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 151.
[37] Ed. Kate Harding and Samhita Mukhopadhyay, *Nasty Women,* 124.

In fact, for many women, the feeling of not wanting to be in the way or not wanting to "take up space" comes from lifelong subconscious conditioning. Examining women's relationship with space, Bartky references Iris Young (1980) to comment on spatial limitations women self-impose through their conditioned psyche: "a space seems to surround women in imagination that they are hesitant to move beyond."[38] This idea of a psychological space restriction that acts as "an enclosure in which she feels herself positioned and by which she is confined,"[39] leads to further analysis of body language of women. Weitz describes a "tension and constriction" that suggests fear and reaffirms a woman's subordinate status.[40] She also compares a woman crossing her legs to a subconscious "guard[ing] genitals," an interesting thought considering the comparable man spread that has become characteristic of men who feel the need to claim their space.

Figure 4: New York Post reports about the MTA New York City Transit campaign against "manspreading"[41]

Furthermore, society demands women look young and skinny, a "tyranny of slenderness"[42] suggesting women should be small and out of the way, take up less space, and be powerless and weaker than the men. Bartky argues women aim to achieve "the

[38] Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," 29.
[39] Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," 29-30.
[40] Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," 35.
[41] Rebecca Harshbarger, Frank Rosario, and Dana Sauchelli. "Subway 'manspreading' ads debut to shame bro riders." *New York Post.* Jan. 14, 2015. Accessed May 1, 2018. https://nypost.com/2015/01/14/subway-manspreading-ads-shame-bro-riders/.
[42] Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," 35.

body of early adolescence,"[43] a frightening regression of power as women go through puberty and mature into capable and independent adults within society. The expectation that women should "take up as little space as possible"[44] refers to not only the physical body but also to a woman's presence in the workplace. Threatened by successful women in the workplace, men seek to reclaim their place of power through manipulation, policies, and actions directing women to how they "should behave." Sexual harassment is deeply tied to these psychological tactics; men assert power through sexual aggression.

In Trump's America, the woman has been reduced to an object, merely a thing to be patted, grabbed, kissed, shoved, or ignored. Trump's past behavior speaks for itself, with nineteen women coming forward with sexual assault claims and adult film star Stormy Daniels revealing his careless affair with her. Despite an overwhelmingly critical media response, Trump's actions toward women did not impact the election. His history of sexual assault and objectification of women was ignored by over 62 million voters. How then does one overcome these conditioned social constructs and reshape the expectations of behavior?

[43] Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," 35.
[44] Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," 35.

Figure 5: Ashley McQueen

Within this project, I aim to bring the depth of my conditioned sense of disposability to the surface. How does my movement hold space with this intention? How do I refuse disposability?

CREATIVE PROCESS

For Which It Stands

My first taste of political dance came during a choreographic buffet called *On 1 Condition* in New York City. My friend Will Taylor asked six choreographers, including myself, to create anything they wanted, on the condition that they incorporated a plunger. I was riding the subway one evening and the thought of Trump's voice layered with classical music floated into my brain. The work, entitled "Plunge the Swamp," became my satirical masterpiece. Using a little plunger for "little hands," I embodied Trump's narcissism through exaggerated and forceful movement and pedestrian body language. For my Intermedia Arts class at Hollins, I created a projection installation that multiplied my image on screen and put my character inside the Oval Office and outside the White House with plunger in hand—plunging the floor, using it as a penis, and creating various other metaphors. This solo traveled to Santa Barbara, Kalamazoo, Brooklyn, and Roanoke; I performed the work over ten times to varying responses. These experiences allowed me to realize the power of my art. I could reclaim control—even for five minutes—of Trump's vulgarity. I could make people laugh and unite through the absurdity of our president. I could provoke political discussions right there in the theater.

I wanted more. I developed an evening-length work that satirized the Trump administration and surrounding political climate, from the Nasty Woman movement to the rise of "alternative facts." I sandwiched each satirical section with a more abstracted, resistance-focused piece. It was in these pieces I began to develop movement inspired by my thesis research. The movement phrases evolved from quotations that stood out to me in the readings of Judith Butler and Sara Ahmed.

Figures 6 - 7: Smashworks Dance in "Reclamation of the Flag," Photos by Stephen Delas Heras

The Waves of Feminism as Structure

I chose to use the waves of feminism as a loose historical and structural outline. The first section (the audience's entrance) represents my initial impressions of the first wave of feminism, the era of the Suffragettes—the upper-class white women's fight for the right to vote, which overshadowed the nonwhite women's fight against both gender and racial equality. Author Naomi Zack references bell hooks' discussion on how "only white women were acknowledged as participants by its female white leaders, and nonwhite women, particularly black women, were explicitly denied voice and presence."[45] Through projection installation I use quick cuts and audio splicing of Schoolhouse Rock's *Suffering Till Suffrage* video, footage of suffragettes marching, red and blue paint splatters, and protester's signs from the second wave as a foreshadow.

Figure 8: Screenshot of video projection

I stand still, hunched over with minimal movement—history moves around me; a mainstream children's video spliced with only the white-centric aspects of the first wave feminist movement of the suffragettes is contrasted by paint splatters that could be

[45] Zack, *Beyond Intersectionality*, 4.

doubled as blood shed of the silenced. To me, this introductory section parallels my own past adolescent ignorance of what feminism was; I use an environment of predictability spliced between "marketable utopia" and underlying rupture. The introduction fades into varying shades of blue projection, leading into the "striptease," or the stripping of the flags. Each flag represents a layer of conditioned patriarchy—oppression, objectification, inequality. Each flag is an acknowledgment that, while I am in control of my actions, I am still controlled by the capitalist, nationalist umbrella. Once all flags are off, I am left with only the flag leash making contact with my neck.

Figure 9: Ashley McQueen in rehearsal, the stripping of the flags

The second wave of feminism, from the 1960's to the 1980's, consisted of fighting for gender equality and reproductive rights, as well as he emergence of radical and multiracial feminism. Despite many white feminist recordings, the second wave was still very segregated in its protesting. Evolving from the Civil Rights Movement, the 1960's and 1970's era was also a time of resistance against the government in response to the Vietnam War and flag desecration. In reaction to the incarceration of Stephen Radich, a New York gallery owner who presented flag desecrating art, the People's Flag Show

was born, and brought numerous artists of multiple disciplines together in a performative protest. Yvonne Rainer created "Trio A with Flags," a nude version of her well-known "Trio A" set with six dancers wearing American flags around their necks. The image of flag bibs paired with naked bodies sparks images of messiness, childishness, and exposure. Within my work, I reimagine this idea by sewing four flags together and tying one end around my neck, which created an elongated flag leash representing oppression, objectification, and women as property (of men and of the system). I toy with my own "radical" experience, exploring femininity as spectacle, "masculine" movement interpretation, and power dynamics of sexual exploitation.

Figure 10: Ashley McQueen in rehearsal, exploring femininity as spectacle

The third wave of feminism (argued to be between 1990's-2010) is embodied in the final section of the work using red, white, and blue paint complemented by a bold series of quick video cuts. I see this section representing the various resistance movements that intersect one another (more so now than ever before). The audience witnesses a chaotic scene of movement, video, sound, and paint. Change happens before

their eyes; a clean space becomes messy, blue and red become purple, and the dancer is finally free to move without the constriction of a distorted American symbol. This work represents the fourth wave (existing from 2012 to present) by living inside of it. The performer and audience are part of a Fourth Wave movement by actively participating in an event of resistance. My goal is to "radically repoliticize [my] belonging" by "enacting alternative modes and sites of belonging."[46] By creating space for an audience to witness my political expression "without hierarchy," I am manifesting a "collective 'thereness'" that "assert[s] its presence as a plural and obdurate bodily life."[47] The experience that the audience and I share becomes its own political statement.

Figures 11 - 12: Screenshots from video projection

[46] Athanasiou and Butler, *Dispossession*, 159.
[47] Athanasiou and Butler, *Dispossession*, 196.

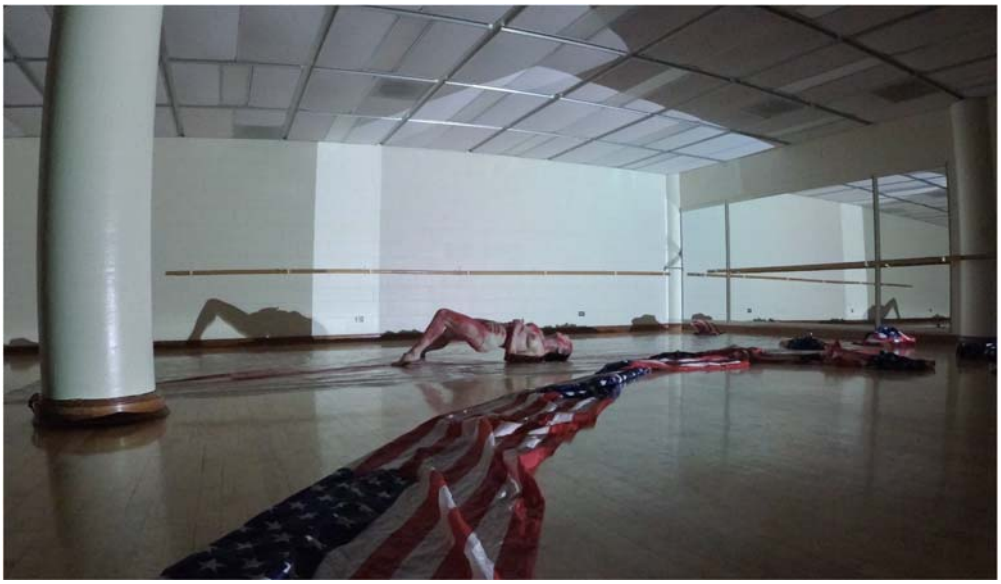


Figure 13: Ashley McQueen in rehearsal

Naked* versus *Nude

My choreographic choice to explore a partially naked body comes from a desire for vulnerability and controlled exposure. Karen Finley describes the use of the nude body: "to express a certain sense of freedom and abandonment, where I'm not going to be violated."[48] Performance artist Valie Export reflects: "I knew that if I did it naked, I would really change how the (mostly male) audience would look at me. There would be no pornographic or erotic/sexual desire involved—so there would be no *contradiction*."[49] Expressionist painter Eric Fischl argues that even in an art practice, men looking at women is "'a genetically engineered reflex for very particular reasons'"; and "to try to make it somehow an 'unnatural aspect of being a man' doesn't make much sense."[50] While this is just one man's opinion, I agree with his argument in some respects while also recognizing the power and ownership of nakedness in a performative setting. For my work, the audience will be coming into my own realm; I have control of my own

[48] Juno and Vale, *Angry Women*, 49.
[49] Juno and Vale, *Angry Women*, 187.
[50] Michael Slenske, "Who's Afraid of the Female Nude?" *New York Magazine*, 48.

nakedness. I am choosing to use the term *naked*, because despite my efforts, I don't believe the female body will ever be truly free, particularly from the male gaze.

During my performance, I want the audience to see skin and the body's form, and I want to feel the freedom of exposure, yet I am choosing to cover my intimate parts in an effort to maintain control of what the audience sees. I don't want to cover myself without intentionality. In my movement research, I questioned whether or not I would perform fully topless. While I feel no shame in exposing my breasts, I questioned whether that choice will be too distracting to the audience. I also question how my choice will be perceived—will the lack of complete nudity be read as inauthentic or give off a sense of shame? In the end, I have the choice to expose myself or not, and I believe my right to protect my body from the male gaze should be respected. Throughout the process, I played with different options: nude briefs with text written on them reading "refusing to be disposed"; white sports bra and underwear; or nude sports bra and underwear. I am choosing to wear only nude briefs, a statement of both control and exposure.

Figure 14: Ashley McQueen in rehearsal

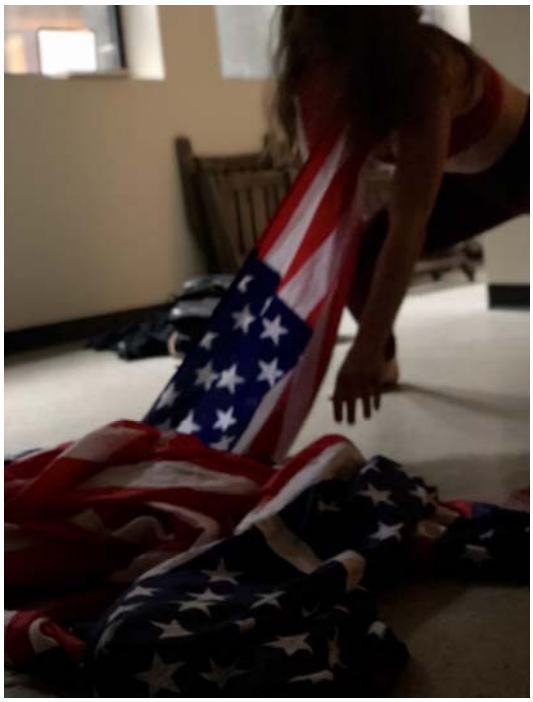
The American Flag: Deconstructed or Desecrated?

I am interested in the deconstruction of the flag and, therefore, deconstruction of all that it allegedly represents. The flag's purpose has evolved throughout history, shrouded with controversy and reappropriated by many groups to fit their political agendas. The flag is seen as "holding the memory of chaos" while also being "a timeless symbol, familiar and classic, a symbol of hope and promise against a background of despair."[51] However, the flag cannot be detached from its symbolism. The values of a country are compressed into a piece of fabric even when that country's leaders embrace a form of perverse nationalism. Dismantling this symbol with my woman body metaphorically dismantles the conditioned patriarchy on which our country was founded. *Does this flag truly represent me (woman) and my America? Does nationalism overshadow my rights as a woman?*

Through the use of seven American flags tied around my waist and a 20 foot flag leash around my neck, I manipulate this symbol to showcase America's underlying oppressions and socially conditioned expectations of women. I transition to the final section by using flags to spread red, white, and blue paint throughout the space. The clean lines of the flag become blurred, because this America is messy and nonlinear. I considered abstracting these symbols, but I enjoyed the symbolic rebelliousness of sewing flags together and seeing real flags hit the floor. Flag desecration in action; flag desecration as performance. Through projection, I use a sideways image of the flag to invoke the impression of both prison bars and a circus tent (an ode to the current White House's abnormal and reckless tactics of making policy via Twitter). My multiplicity of

[51] Woden Teachout, *Capture the flag: a political history of American patriotism.* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 219.

flag use allows me to "performatively expos[e] and repossess the norms of visibility and audibility through which the nation constitutes itself."[52]



Figures 15 - 16: Ashley McQueen in rehearsal

[52] Athanasiou and Butler, *Dispossession*, 141.

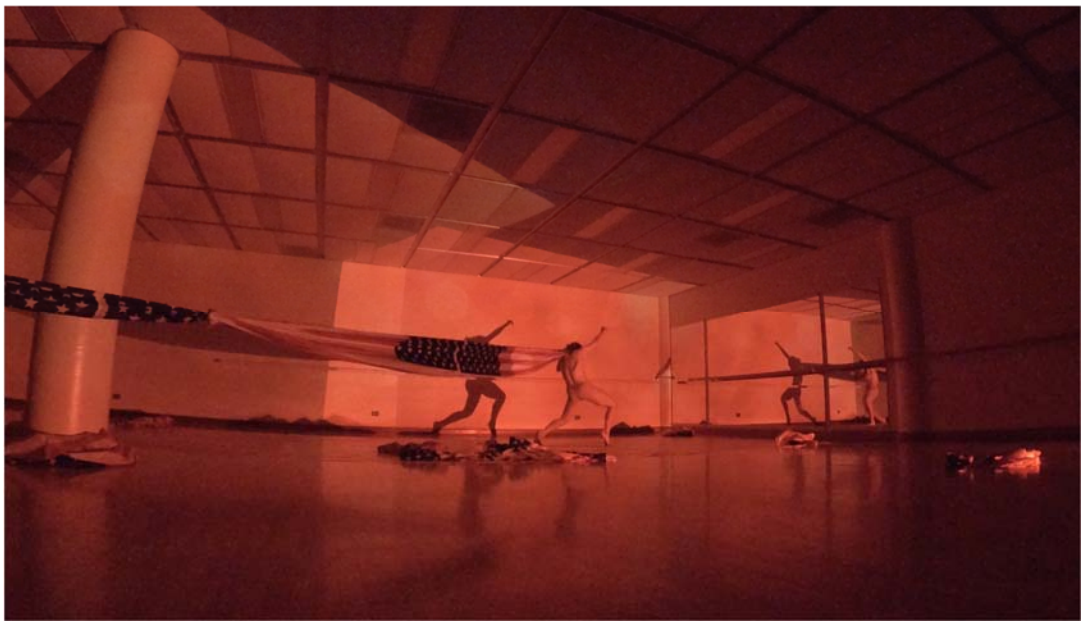


Figure 17: Ashley McQueen in rehearsal

Placing an event or image outside of its familiar context or frame can be, in itself, an act of intervention.[53]

–Diana Taylor

[53] Taylor, *Performance*, 17.

Paint as Metaphor

The paint as prop holds its own symbolic power as a deconstruction of the physical flag. I am using children's craft paint that fully conceals my own skin color once it touches me. My skin color is lost in the colors of the nation, symbolizing the inescapable power of nationalism over individual human rights and patriarchy over women's rights. Overall, my individual body is subsumed by the larger whole: America represented by its colors. For many, the country is more important than the individual; society's expectations are more important than the woman. The flag-colored paint symbolizes systemic oppression, and through the performer's interaction with blobs of fresh paint, traditional views of patriotism are distorted. The messiness of the space during and after the performance represents the messiness of America and the hypocrisy of its values.

I chose paint because of its commercial-like vibrancy, permanence on my skin, and unnatural, manufactured consistency and smell. Each interaction with each color makes a different statement. The red paint is first, symbolizing the multiplicity of blood and alluding to menstruation, abortion, and sexual violence. The white paint, representing a woman's supposed pre-wedding "purity," becomes mixed with the red until finally the blue, which projects stability and confidence, is added, culminating in a mix of colors blending together throughout the space, on the flag costume, and on the body. As the paint spreads, the white tarp transforms into a dirty, slippery surface, representing the instability of resistance and the uncertainty that comes along with standing up to patriarchy. By wearing the mixed paint on my body, I become a source of political power, disrupting the values associated with red, white, and blue. Through repetitive

gestures that spread the paint around the space and onto my skin, I redefine the meanings associated with each color individually by invoking images of sexual violence, cleansing, and messiness. I performatively redefine my role as a woman in America and reconstruct my relationship to the flag through the symbolism of flag-colored paint.

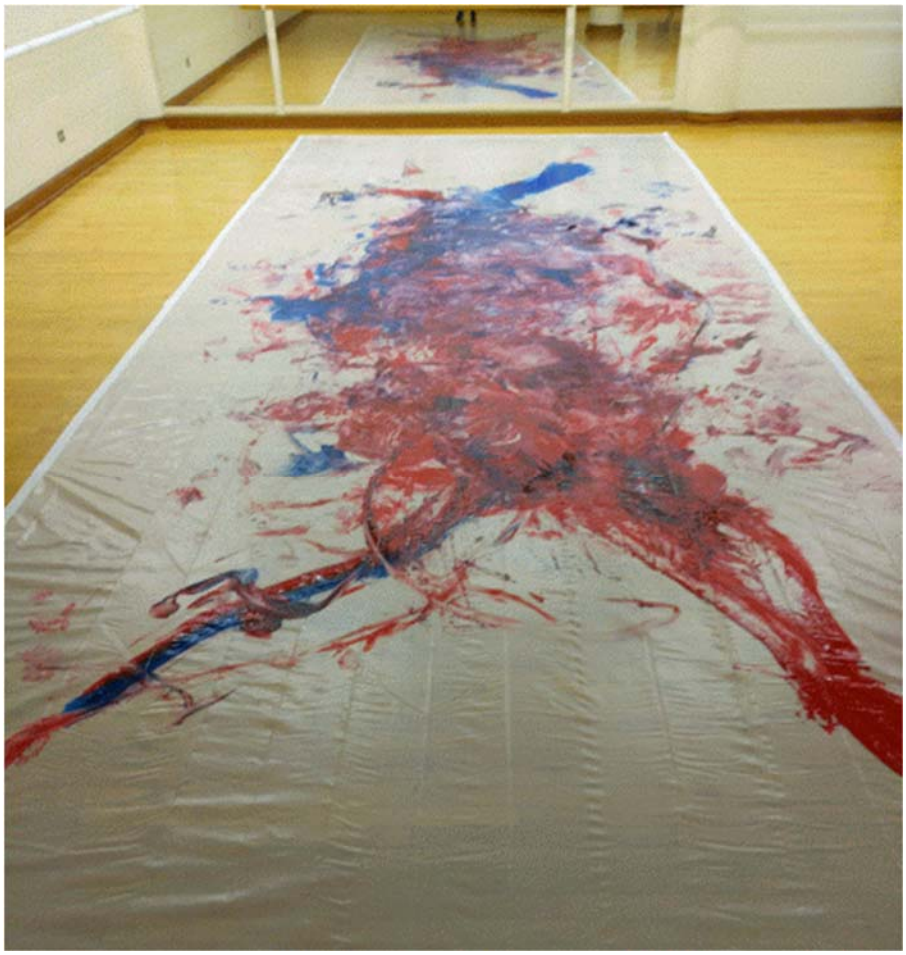


Figure 18: Post-performance space

I found myself inspired by the creative processes of Carolee Schneemann and her construction of original environments through installation. In her work "Up To And Including Her Limits," she reflects on how her "entire body becomes the agency of visual traces, vestige of the body's energy in motion."[54] Within this work, Schneemann installs

[54] Carolee Schneemann.com, Accessed June 10, 2018. http://www.caroleeschneemann.com.

herself in a tree surgeon's harness from a rope in which she can control the height; her use of crayons in transforming the space paired with her physical attachment to the environment integrates her body with the artwork. I enjoy Schneemann's use of non-proscenium style environments and the lack of stark beginnings and endings. The work lives with or without the audience. In an interview about her piece "Action for Camera," she discusses how she "merged her own body with the environment of her painting/constructions," making the fusion of her body and the work itself "a further dimension of the construction… [she is] both image maker and image."[55] I appreciate how she takes ownership of her body in this exposed, carefully-crafted environment: "the body may remain erotic, sexual, desired, desiring, but it is as well votive: marked, written over in a text of stroke and gesture discovered by my creative female will."[56] Within my own multidisciplinary expression, I give myself permission to explore these themes of femininity and desire, all while reclaiming ownership of my womanhood.

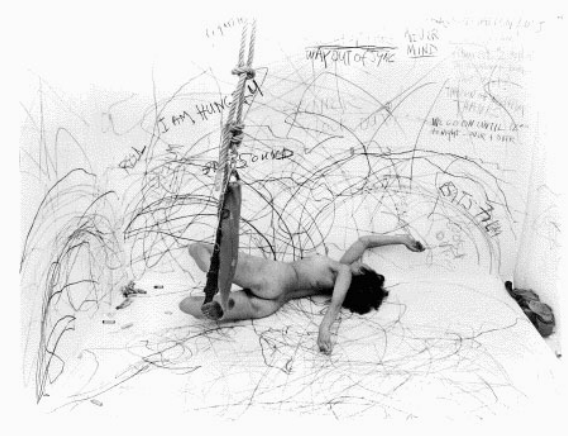


Figure 19: Carolee Schneemann in "Up To And Including Her Limits"[57]

[55] *Caroleeschneemann.com*.
[56] *Caroleeschneemann.com*.
[57] *Caroleeschneemann.com*.

Figures 20 - 22: Post-rehearsal cleanup

Movement Research

In developing movement material, I created improvisational scores inspired by Ahmed's "Living A Feminist Life," as well as *felt* movement derived from my own experiences of oppression and constriction. As much as I attempted to set choreography, I found that in order to move from a place of rage I needed the freedom of an improvisational score. As my creative concepts developed, my choreographic use of flags began to shift. I began to see the work structured after the three main Waves of Feminism, while paralleling my own personal narrative of empowerment and resistance. The work begins with the audience entering to see me standing in the space wearing what appears to be a full skirt made of American flags. With seven flags tied around my waist, I appear pregnant with a full stomach covered by the skirt.

My movement research begins with an improvisational score that involves me taking off each flag one by one, either through abstracted gestures or simple pulls with my hands. With each flag, I envision a layer of oppression leaving my body. I am symbolically taking off the weight of the patriarchy: my shame, doubt, constriction, tension, and judgement. The final layer is an elongated flag bib (an ode to Yvonne Rainer's "Trio A with Flags") that eventually fully unravels to present the audience with a never-ending flag leash around my neck, representing the inability to escape the patriarchal umbrella of capitalist America. Within the unraveling, I have moments where I get stuck in it. I played with this constriction and tension. I had to find different ways to navigate this flag system. I had to recondition my movement practice within the improvisation. These internal impulses reflect in the culmination of my escape from the

flag dress, only to discover the leash still binds me. I play with simulating sex as the flag falls between my legs. Am I fucking a man or fucking the system? Or both?

As I played with the metaphorical meaning of the flags and my place within them, I created a prompt that places all the flags on top of me as I lay on the floor and attempt to uncover myself; the movement frantically accelerates, and I find myself suffocating in the colors. This moment expresses my own questions of protest: does the government really hear us? Is a protest march an effective resistance tool or a waste of time and energy? The flags appear to carry a weight on top of me. The weight of an unwanted man, a raping. I embody the exhaustion of the feminist fight.

I explore various ways to use the flag leash, including covering my face while moving and giving an audience member the other end to experience choking. I represent femininity as spectacle. I represent the complicity of women in this environment of manufactured consent. I am utilizing my physicality, facial expressions, and repetition to develop movement experiences that bring out the essence of control. I am exploring movement that abruptly shifts dynamics, presenting my woman body as one that is malleable and responsive to my environment.

I am curious how my relationship with the audience can impact my message. By incorporating subtle gestures, pedestrian moments, eye contact, and distance, I aim to connect with each person in the space at some point during the work. I create an environment where a woman has control of her space and defies the expectations of white American patriarchy through movement. In an interview, Carolee Schneemann describes how her work revolves around "cutting through the idealized (mostly male) mythology of

the ‘abstracted self’ or the ‘invented self.’”[58] This inspires me to continue to break from the constructed perceptions I have of my own performative self, pushing this work into a dimension that has yet to be experienced.

Figure 23: First rehearsal with full paint

[58] Juno and Vale, *Angry Women*, 69.

Performance Environment: Installation

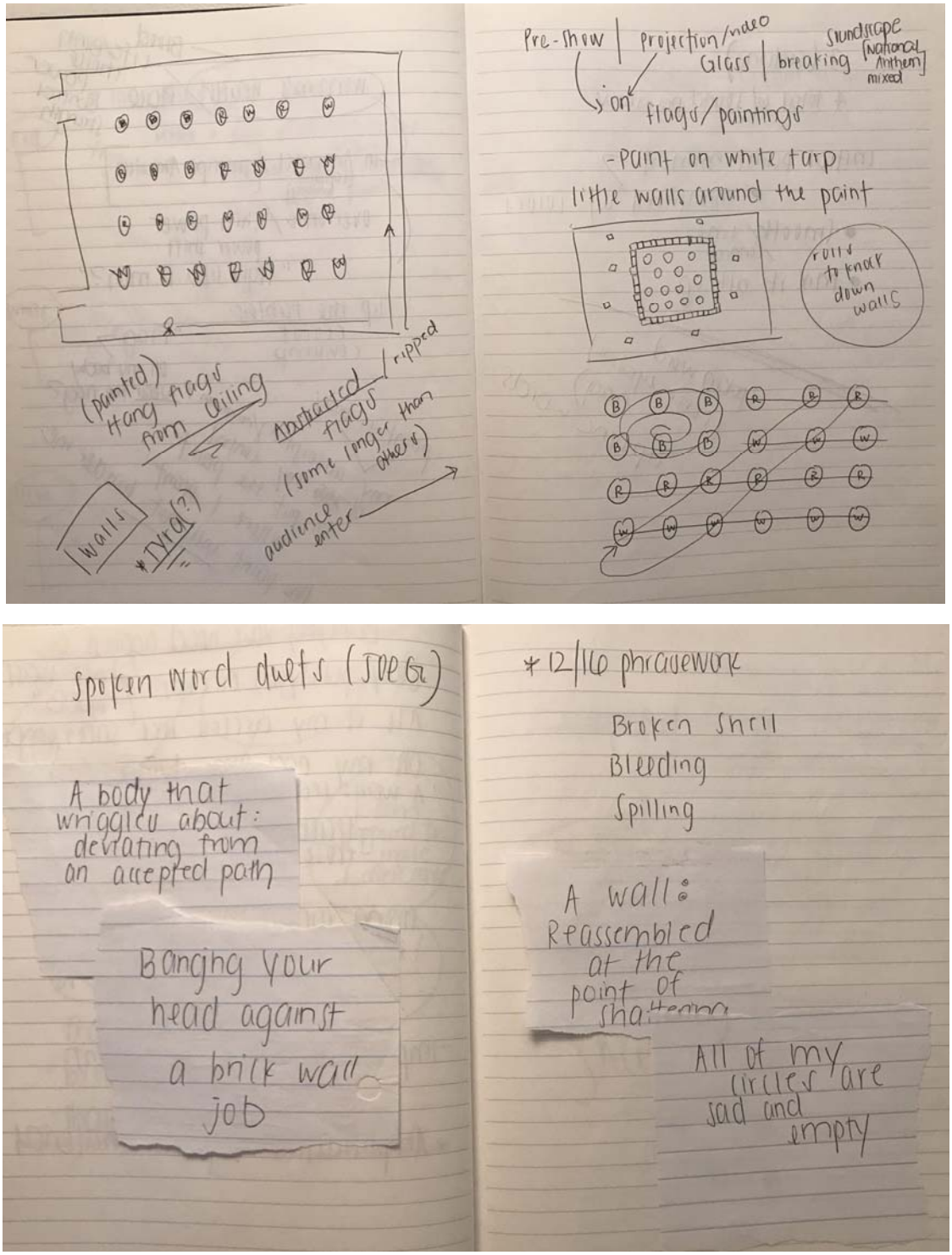
I initially envisioned the performance space in a museum setting with a visual art installation, yet as my research developed I found that the environment I created could be simpler. *The human body alone is intimate enough.* The audience is led through the Dana Science Building in a procession, following the sound of the music of John Philip Sousa through a maze of hanging flags.

Figure 24: Post-procession, pre-performance

As they enter the room, they are met with an audio and projection installation, a mix of distorted clips from the SchoolHouse Rock "Suffering Till Suffrage" song with various ambient sounds and virtual paint splatters layering the images. The projection invokes the same feeling of anxiety that I feel as a low-income woman artist in Trump's America: a chaotic, ungrounded slice of false hope mixed with an unnervingly dark adolescence. The floor is taped with a canvas of clear plastic as flags lay around the space. Once the audience settles, the projection fades into a calmer and simpler pattern of light, mainly tones of blue that simulate visions of cleansing.

The work progresses through various mood and color shifts. I make my way into the paint, ultimately mixing and spreading the paint all over the white tarp and my own body. I demand to be seen and to hold my own space. The projection fades into quick cuts between a sideways American flag (resembling prison bars) and white. I begin to clean up the remaining flags by laying them down around the space. The transformation of both the dancer's body and performance space represents political resistance and a shift in power and control. A woman's body as protest serves as an artistic statement, dismantling the false freedom of the flag. The audience is signaled to leave the space by the opening of a door; the projection continues and I begin to lay the remaining paint-splattered flags out around the space, folding some of them similarly to that of the military procedure. There is no official ending of the work. I remain in motion, as the work we have to do as women is never finished.

Figure 25: Post-tech rehearsal with flags hanging



Figures 26 - 27: Journal entry, movement prompts

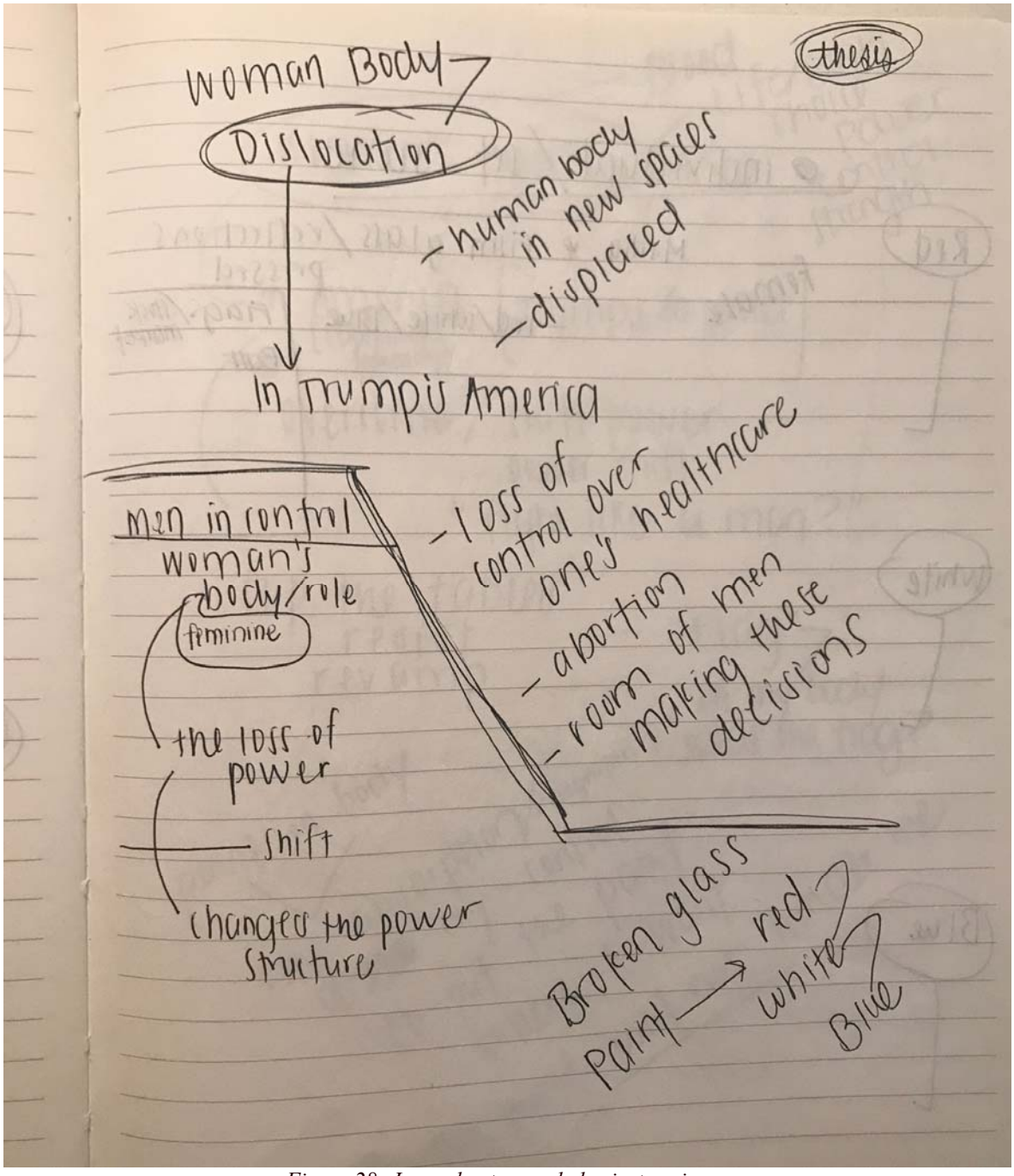


Figure 28: Journal entry, early brainstorming

Poem given to me by my mentor, K.J. Holmes

Keeping Things Whole

In a field
I am the absence
Of field.
This is
Always the case
Wherever I am
I am what is missing.

When I walk
I part the air
And always
The air moves in
To fill the spaces
Where my body's been.

We all have reasons
For moving.
I move
To keep things whole.

–Mark Strand

This is my flag

THIS is my flag,
Splattered, smeared, distorted
Men-driven world, money-driven country
because America is messy

THIS is my flag,
Stripping down each layer
False freedoms ring, whose freedom rings?
At the expense of all the country

THIS is my flag,
Burning, blazing, blistered
Capitalism at its finest,
Does my period disgust you?

THIS is my flag,
Reclaim, re-seize, reconquer
I dare you to arrest me
‘Cause in the end we’re already jailed

–Ashley McQueen

POST-PERFORMANCE REFLECTION

I am always amazed at how quickly a process can slip away. After almost a full year of research, rage, and obsession, I completed the performance element of this thesis project. What started as "dance" structure turned into a highly emotional and unpredictable improvisational score. Each rehearsal was a completely different "product" in many ways. The moment an audience came into the space, I found myself overcoming any fear or anxiety almost instantly. *I had a job to do. I had a story to tell.* In preparation, I would listen to Karen Finley speak on YouTube and read excerpts from her book *Shock Treatment* before leaving my room. I needed silence in the performance space, projection on and ready, costume and makeup done. I would stand with my hand on the large white pole and find a deep, dark place I normally repress. I dug up ex-boyfriends who had cheated. I thought of the men at the subway station who make nasty remarks. I thought of sexual violence against women. I thought of Trump's "grab 'em by the pussy" comment.

I placed a portable speaker in the hallway outside the studio that played the music of John Philip Sousa as the audience came downstairs and wound through the maze-like basement of the Dance Science building. I had five painted flags hanging across the pathway, forcing the audience to either step aside or brush up against them. I could hear the music and the sound of the audience getting closer. The dress rehearsal was the first time I found myself crying before I even began to move. I felt the audience enter and the energy shifted immediately. I had to tell this story, and it was painful. I found that I was only able to go to this deep emotionally with others in the space. When I tried rehearsing otherwise it felt contrived. In the actual performance, there was miscommunication from the beginning. The production team did not direct people avoid sitting in front of the

projection light, so there were two bodies directly in front of my image. As people entered, I found myself drawn to them. I felt like I needed to acknowledge the audience. I reacted and frantically waved my arms at them to back up and walked quickly at the line of people sitting. They backed out of the way, and I made my way up the line repeating this gesture until I found myself back in the space. I actually felt the direct interaction from the beginning made the leash moment later in the piece more impactful, so I went with it. I could feel people's eyes. My performance felt extremely rage-driven. I did not cry. I do not think I will cry again unless it's an intimate group of people. The large crowd fueled my aggression and my desire to make a strong statement. I could not sense the audience reaction at all during the piece.

As the work progressed, I found myself making similar choices to dress rehearsal, yet I had an anxiety-driven surge that pushed my physical limits. I felt an adrenalin high so strong I could have done anything in that space. I felt no pain. I felt anger. By this point in the process, my exposed breasts did not make me nervous; half-nakedness was both my costume and my vulnerability. When it came time to select an audience member to hold the leash, I chose Tara (my planted cohort who was informed of the process). With the unexpected audience entrance difficulties, I wanted to ensure that at least the flag leash would go well; I knew Tara wouldn't drop it. During dress rehearsal, I gave the leash to one of the interns who did not know what to expect. I pulled so hard that she came out of her seat a couple times. I enjoyed involving the audience, and if I expand this work I would give the flag to multiple people or even order them to pass it down the row.

In responding to the red paint, I felt the blood of sexual violence; I felt other women's pain. I felt my IUD being ripped out by the gynecologist who treated me like an

animal. I felt the pain of unwanted sex. As I spread the blue paint into the space, I tried to clean up the red with the blue flag as though it were a rag. Another moment of "women's work." I rubbed the blue on my face as though it were water and I was washing my face. I wanted to wash it all away, but the mixture only looked dirtier.

At the end of the work, I began laying out and then folding the paint-covered flags. The interns opened the door as they were told to do, but the audience didn't move. My cohort began to exit in an effort to encourage the rest of the audience to get up (as they knew my cue) but many people still stayed. There was an awkward moment of clapping—some wanted to clap, others sensed this wasn't a "clap at the end" piece—and an uncertainty of when to leave. *Will she stop dancing? Is there a bow? Do we go?* I stayed in the work. The audience could do whatever they wanted, as my work was with the paint. The projection ended up running out before the whole group exited. I continued folding flags and then rubbing paint on myself. I wish this piece could have lasted longer. As painful as it is to dive into performance, I love being in the world outside of myself. I become another being. I am inspired by Karen Finley's reflection on the stress of performing: "I could get attention a lot of other ways. Easier ways. It's so painful. I don't want to perform. Every time, I say, 'Why am I doing this, why didn't I become a veterinarian, why didn't I go the easy way out?' . . . I feel that I have to do it because I don't see many other people who are capable of doing it. I feel that it's my responsibility."[59] Before the audience entered the space, I repeated to myself: *It's my responsibility.*

[59] The Internet Movie Database, https://m.imdb.com/name/nm0278052/quotes.

It's my responsibility.

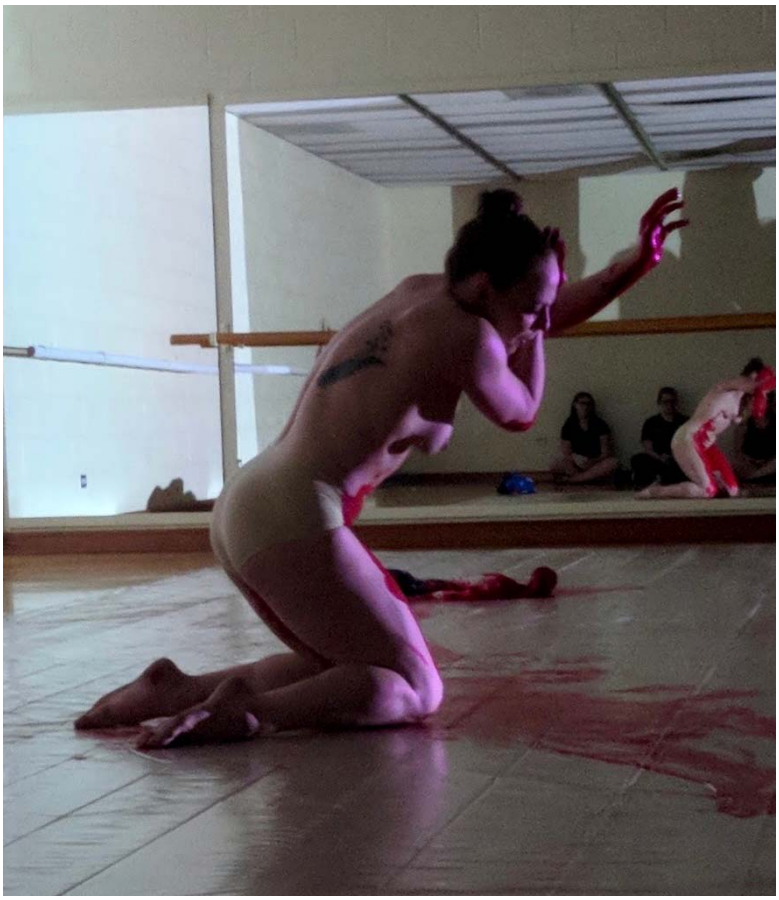


Figure 29: In performance, Photo by Erica L. Gionfriddo

"My art is my body.

The place of my desire—repressed, then liberated—becomes the body in all its most intimate manifestations, taken violently to the surface and subjected to collective verification. And of course, it is the inspection in front of everyone that makes it intolerable."

– Francisco Copello[60]

[60] Francisco Copello, *Fotografia de performance: Analisis autobiografico de mis performances* (Santiago de Chile: Ocho libros editores, no date).

"I want more than a biological opportunity.
I want more than a biological opportunity.
Listen to me…"[61]

Figure 30: Post-performance

[61] Finley, *Shock Treatment*, 110.

ARCHIVE

Refusing to be Disposed

Choreography: Ashley McQueen
Performance: Ashley McQueen
Costuming: Ashley McQueen
Installation design: Ashley McQueen
Projection Editing: Ashley McQueen

Music/Sound:
Hatch the Plan by Andy Stott
Violence by Andy Stott
Reunion Rumors by Captive Portal
Footprints in Solid Rock by PLOY
Excerpts of "Suffering Suffragettes" from SchoolHouse Rock
Endless Fragments of Time by Deep Watch
Showy Malaria Hatpin by a Tape Full of Mistakes

Youtube Videos:

a. "SchoolHouse Rock America Rock Suffering Till Suffrage"
Posted by Essra Mohawk on May 1, 2015
Broadcast date: February 21, 1976

b. "A Bite Sized Guide to Third Wave | All About Women 2018"
Posted by SOH Ideas on March 1, 2018

c. "Video of Black Lives Matter Protest and Police Shooting in Dallas"
Posted by the Dallas Morning News on July 8, 2016

d. "Free Slow Motion Footage: Red Paint Splatter"
Posted by Epic Slow Mo on January 4, 2013

e. “Slow motion red and blue on white”
Posted by JD Anderson on February 24, 2016

f. “Free Slow Motion Footage: Red and White Paint Splatter”
Posted by The Epic Slow Mo on May 14, 2013

g. “The Slow Mo Guys crashing paint filled balloons in 4K”
Posted by ODN on April 14, 2016

h. “Ink Drip in Water Stock Footage RED”
Posted by TheToobStock on November 28, 2011

i. “Slow Motion red and white paint”
Posted by DEco HOUZZ on June 5, 2017

j. “Clip of the Week - The Suffragettes”
Posted by Bridgeman on October 24, 2014

k. “The 1960’s Feminist Movement”
Posted by Karianne Fisher on April 11, 2016

l. “Glimpses of the ‘Revolution’ - The Women’s March January 21, 2017”
Posted by Diva Communications on February 20, 2017

m. “Day without Latinos: Thousands protest Wisconsin Immigration bill”
Posted by RT America on February 19, 2016

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AMERICAN FLAG IN PERFORMANCE: SHIFTING CONTEXT, SHIFTING PURPOSE

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American Flag in Performance: Shifting Context, Shifting Purpose

The American flag has long been a conventional symbol of American identity, representing freedom and liberty as well as "selfless sacrifice, solidarity, and devotion to one's country,"[1] with different subtleties depending on demographics and political climate. In times of crisis and in times of triumph, the American flag remains a recognizable symbol of both patriotism and nationalism. While Americans have different relationships with the flag and its meaning in their lives, the flag cannot be detached from its American identity. The flag remains a symbol of America, but how America is defined remains subjective. Choreographers choosing to use the American flag in performance make a bold statement by reappropriating a patriotic symbol into an artistic tool of multiple meanings. For example, in a premiere work for my company Smashworks Dance Collective, I chose to utilize the American flag as costuming for the final section of *For Which It Stands* (2018), an evening length political performance that explores today's polarizing atmosphere of off-the-rail soliloquies, SNL-bait one-liners, and Twitterized policy-making. Consisting of nine episodic dances that seamlessly blend humor and reality, this work uses themes ripped from the headlines to satirize the Trump Administration while inviting audiences to confront the contradictions of modern political discourse, tear down the walls that divide America, and reject the normalization of nonsense. Entitled *Reclamation of the Flag*, the final section utilized American flags as costumes, complemented by a soundscore mixed with an excerpt from a speech by

[1] Markus Kemmelmeier and David G. Winter, "Sowing Patriotism, But Reaping Nationalism? Consequences of Exposure to the American Flag," Political Psychology, vol. 29, no. 6, 2008, 861.

former president Barack Obama about hope. After forty minutes of satire and extracted audio of President Trump, this closing statement reclaims the idea of America from its vulgar president, with flags representing the embodiment of a hopeful future. I question how this work and my choice to incorporate the American flag will be received in ten years, when these now-relevant episodes become historical reflections. This paper examines how the context of the political climate shapes audience interpretation and reaction to choreography that uses the American flag, whether in resistance or nationalistic pride. A resistance work may still remain a resistance work, yet as America changes, the work evolves.

Two choreographic works that exemplify this shifting framework are Yvonne Rainer's "Trio A with Flags" and George Balanchine's "Stars and Stripes." Rainer, a postmodern choreographer best known for her work with the Judson Church Theater in New York City, utilized six American flags as bibs for naked performers in "Trio A with Flags." This piece was presented at the People's Flag Show in response to the incarceration of Stephen Radich for his gallery of flag-desecrating art in protest of the Vietnam War. In contrast, George Balanchine's "Stars and Stripes" is a work arguably dripping in patriotism, from upbeat music and costuming to the large American flag raised at the climax of the piece. Although both works were choreographed with a particular motive for the use of the flag, interpretations change over time as the works are re-performed, with present day viewers imposing present day perceptions of their American experience on the flag and its role in the work.

The American Flag as Symbol

To place flag use in the context of performative art, it is important to understand the origins of the flag and its place in society—its birth out of the "need to provide an identifier for the country and a symbol around which people could rally."[2] Originally established by the Congressional Congress of 1777 to "identify American ships at sea as well as designate national buildings," the flag's importance "was not fully recognized until the Civil War when it became a way to specify units and armies, as well as serve as a rallying tool for the country."[3] This purpose evolved and expanded with the country's growth, eventually becoming a tool for capitalist manipulation. "According to *Browne's Trademarks*, a post-Civil War advertising magazine, using the national flag would 'catch the eye' of potential new consumers, arousing 'feelings of patriotism' which would then win the purchase of the products displaying it."[4] Patriotic organizations sprang up, including the Flag Protection Movement, whose goal was to protect the American flag from "misuse and remind the public the flag had 'many glories, virtues, and benefits'"; and seeing the American flag as 'the handsomest flag in the universe.'"[5] These views of the flag evolved with different groups of Americans in various environments, yet a common thread remains in the power of a small fabric symbol when viewed with such a

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[2] Jeffrey Kyle Long. "'Red, White, and Blue, We Spit On You.' The Case of Texas Vs. Johnson, the Issue of Free Speech and the Cult of the American Flag." Master's thesis, University of Texas at Arlington, 2005, UMI Microform (1427650), 6.

[3] Long, "Red, White, and Blue," 6.

[4] Robert Justin Goldstein. *Saving "Old Glory": The History of American Flag Desecration Controversy.* Boulder: Westview Press Inc., 1995, 8-9.

[5] Long, "Red, White, and Blue," 9.

high importance. This importance grew into a cult-like reverence. The cult of the flag was "primarily based on fear of change and protecting the flag would guard the country against upsetting the social order and threatening American leadership"[6]; a fear that would remain within the social constructs of America until present day and drive debates about treatment of the flag, including desecration, both in and out of the artistic world.

It is important to note that flag desecration was illegal until 1989. In the landmark case *Texas v. Johnson*, the Supreme Court ruled that burning the U.S. flag was protected speech under the First Amendment, and that the Texas law prohibiting desecration was unconstitutional.[7] Following this decision, flag usage in resistance art is legal, though often controversial. The U.S. Flag Code, the flag-handling guide created for cohesion within military branches, has evolved to be the public's implied protocol for respectful treatment of the flag as it defines the many ways desecration can occur. With such social constructs defining the flag's importance, artists naturally found ways to defy the status quo through controversial resistance art.

One installation work that changed the way resistance art was viewed from a legal standpoint was Dread Scott's "What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag?"—an "installation for audience participation" that was displayed at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1989. Scott's installation included images of flag desecration framed on the walls and required audience members to step on an American flag on the floor to write their response to the installation on a podium. This caused an uproar among

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[6] Long, "Red, White, and Blue," 11.

[7] Long, "Red, White, and Blue," 11.

many veterans, politicians, and citizens, and the Art Institute of Chicago lost government funding as a result. Some veterans "would try to rescue the flag by confiscating it from the exhibit," while others would fold the flag and leave it on the podium next to the ledger book.[8] This happened so many times that the work took a life of its own, with the "degree of audience participation surpass[ing] even Scott's expectations (personal communication, 1990)."[9] Outrage was not the only response that Scott's installation invoked. In fact, the varied responses recorded at the installation exemplify the different Americas seen by different people and the impact these differences have on artistic interpretation. Angry, violent comments incited by the work showed that, for some, the flag itself held more importance than the artist's humanity; for example: *As a veteran defending the flag I personally would never defend your stupid ass! You should be shot! - U.S. Navy Seal Team."*[10] For others, however, the work was perceived as an act of bravery, resistance, and power: "*There are many questions you have raised. For that I thank you. It does hurt me to see the flag on the ground being stepped on. Yet now after days have passed, I have realized that this is the ultimate form of patriotism. Our country is so strong in believing what it stands for that we would allow you to do this. You have made me really think about my own patriotism, which has grown stronger*." The varying responses showcase the diversity in opinions regarding this debate, including the

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[8] Michael Welch, John Sassi, and Allyson McDonough. "Advances in Critical Cultural Criminology: An Analysis of Reactions to Avant-Garde Flag Art." *Critical Criminology*, vol. 11, 2002, 9.

[9] Welch, "Critical Cultural Criminology," 11.

[10] Dread Scott, "What is the proper way to display a U.S. flag?" accessed November 12, 2017, http://www.dreadscott.net/works/what-is-the-proper-way-to-display-a-us-flag/

extremism that is born from nationalism, and how symbols that hold such power can act as blinders in the face of discomfort.

Almost thirty years later, the same controversy surrounding flag desecration remains. Despite the clear legality of expressive flag-use for nearly three decades, in 2017 President Trump proclaimed he would throw Americans in jail for flag-burning and demanded professional football players stand during the National Anthem to show their respect. Demonstrating ignorance for American principles of free speech, Trump nonetheless sparked dialogue through these tweets and brought the issue of flag desecration back into the mainstream media. Trump's preoccupation with protecting these symbols of America when combined with his failure to promote policy, embodies a certain naive nationalistic delusion that places the value of symbols over the value of people. Those who share a similar viewpoint associating the flag with this version of American identity will perceive the flag onstage as more powerful and more important than the dancers. The flag's presence onstage, outside of its purely ritualistic duty, cannot be detached from political statement. Additionally, this demonstrates the political power of the flag and body together in protest, and how in a concert-dance setting "the physical body on stage (especially when wearing or on top of a U.S. flag) is one of the ways that these large political ideas, such as dissent against war or questioning patriotism, can be embodied."[11]

Yvonne Rainer's "Trio A With Flags": Political Resistance in Performance

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[11] Jessica Dellecave. "The Againness of Vietnam in Contemporary United States Antiwar Choreography." PhD diss., University of California, Riverside, 2015, ProQuest (3731833), 129.

Yvonne Rainer was a prominent New York choreographer in the 1960's postmodern dance era. Best known for her work with the Judson Dance Theater, Rainer's experimental choreography challenged the status quo of dance performance. Like many of the postmodern-era choreographies, her original "Trio A" (1955) was a "rebellion against the certain privileging of certain kinds of movement over others—mainly the privileging of trained dance movement over quotidien movement."[12] Notable movement characteristics include the dancers' eye focus never presenting outward to the audience, and "the entire movement sequence was/is performed without emphasis, accentuation, or transition."[13] This made the work accessible outside of the traditional concert-dance realm and was a statement of defiance to the rest of the dance world through basic and humanistic movement.

A decade later, the Vietnam antiwar movement sparked poignant responses from artists of all disciplines, and flag burning in particular brought forth a wave of conversation about flag desecration. Although she once declared her dances to be non-political, Rainer's two works "WAR" and "Trio A with Flags" were inspired by the events that transpired during the Vietnam War. Rainer first created "WAR" (1970), an hour long structured improvisation that functioned using rules and props, including an American flag, which she described as a "huge sprawling non-competitive game-like piece for 31 people who had rehearsed with me for a month and a half."[14] "Trio A with Flags" was

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[12] Dellecave, "Againness of Vietnam," 90.

[13] Dellecave, "Againness of Vietnam," 90.

[14] Yvonne Rainer. *Work 1961-73*. Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1974, 161.

created for the Judson Flag Show, a concert organized by Yvonne Rainer, David Gordon, Barbara Lloyd, Lincoln Scott, Nancy Green, and Steve Paxton on November 9, 1970. The Judson Flag Show, hosted in response to the incarceration of gallery owner Stephen Radich for his presentation of Mark Morrel's work consisting of large flag desecrating art installations, featured numerous New York artists protesting the arrest. Demonstrating the power of artists coming together to make a strong political statement, the performance featured "hundreds of flag artworks that cover the walls of Judson Memorial Church; the post-show discussion about nationalism, patriotism, and the symbol of the flag; the antiquated 1970s fashions of the participants; the confidence and the determination of the performers; the thin technically proficient bodies of the female dancers."[15]

Yvonne Rainer presented "Trio A with Flags," a variated version of her iconic "Trio A." She employed twice the number of dancers and repeated the dance twice, with nude dancers wearing American flags as bibs. Rainer remarked how for this performance she "felt a need for a statement with stronger political overtones," and "to combine the flag and nudity seemed a double-barreled attack on repression and censorship."[16] The flag touching the dancers' naked bodies breaks down the metaphorical barrier between government power and American citizen, highlighting the human body's strength in contrast to the frailty of the fabric symbol; the physical body literally and figuratively carries the flag. Further, the flag bibs present an impression of sloppiness, needing a bib to catch spilt food.

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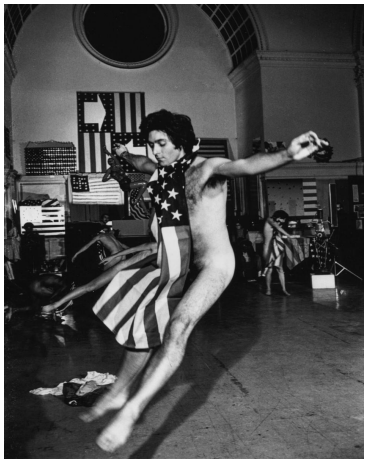
[15] Dellecave, "Againness of Vietnam," 89.

[16] Rainer, *Work*, 172.



David Gordon in "Trio A with Flags" (1970). Judson Memorial Church. The New Yorker, *Photograph by Peter Moore.*[17]

This image can have multiple meanings, but in this political context I see it representing the political and humanitarian mess in which America was embroiled during the Vietnam War. The flag, dangerously close to the body's most vulnerable parts, also disrupts conservative expectations of the U.S. Flag Code, adding to the shock value of the costumes. The moments during the performance when the flag touches or almost touches the floor can incite waves of anxiety—highlighting a conditioned cultural response to flag misuse or abuse. In any context this image is powerful, yet its impact is also influenced by the audience's living perspective of the flag's relationship to their perception of America. Additionally, "Rainer's interpretations of the function of the U.S. flag demonstrate how flag art can serve as a complex multivalent symbol -- at once a representation of nationalism, a metonym for repression caused by war, and an aid to challenge artistic censorship."[18] When describing the aesthetics of "Trio A," Ryan Platt reflects on the movement qualities that characterize the work:

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[17] Peter Moore, "Trio A with Flags," Digital Image, 1970. From: "Stephen Petronio Revives Yvonne Rainer's 'Trio A with Flags,'" *The New Yorker*, Mar. 17, 2017. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/03/27/stephen-petronio-revives-yvonne-rainers-trio-a-with-flags

[18] Dellecave, "Againness of Vietnam," 121.

> The choreography wavers, wobbles, and shakes, always unstable. Even when simply standing, a faint trembling undermines its equilibrium. In one telling gesture, Rainer inconspicuously unsettles a simple forward bend by holding one foot just above the ground. The choreography also employs preposterous physical feats that exaggerate her awkward imbalance. In one such movement, Rainer dumps herself into a handstand, legs flailing above her; in another, she unexpectedly bears her head down, clasps her hands behind her and blunders thunderously forward, heavily hopping on each foot.[19]

Adding an American flag, symbolically majestic and powerful, to the unflattering movement qualities of the choreography, enhancing instability and uncertainty, made a strong statement of power and political leadership.

Re-performance of "Trio A with Flags": Evolving Interpretations

Since the original performance, "Trio A with Flags" has been re-performed many times. Past historical landmarks have brought forth differing responses to this work. The September 11th, 2001 terrorist attack on the United States was a devastating moment in American history, and Americans united as a country in mourning; with the flag "temporarily becom[ing] a symbol of remembrance for those lost in the terrorist attacks."[20] Critic Burt, when reflecting on a performance of "Trio A with Flags," described Rainer's choreography as "subversive and was cognizant that his reading was greatly influenced by the overwhelming post 9-11 display of flags in New York City at

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[19] Ryan Platt, "The Ambulatory Aesthetics of Yvonne Rainer's 'Trio A.'" *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2014, 41.

[20] Dellecave, "Againness of Vietnam," 91.

that time."[21] I question how his reactions would have differed even a week before this historic event, and if others viewing the work post-9/11 had similar sympathies.

Most recently, Stephen Petronio's company presented "Trio A with Flags" in their evening length *Bloodlines* at the Joyce Theater, New York City (2017). In an interview with *The New Yorker*, Petronio admits that he decided to incorporate the flag piece months before the controversial election of Donald Trump, "to celebrate what he was sure would be Hillary Clinton's election as President. 'Then,' he said, 'the world changed.'" Petronio went forward with the decision, believing it to be "a nice act of defiance" in the wake of upset, similar to Rainer's inspiration for the work in the first place.[22] Petronio's re-performance of this work is the prime example of how evolving political context can change the meaning of political works. When reviewing for *The New York Times*, Alistair Macauley refers to the nude dancers with flags as an "arresting gimmick," and comments on the ever-changing "aura of nakedness" as the flags move[23]; exemplifying the power of these two bold artistic choices in unity.

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[21] Dellecave, "Againness of Vietnam," 91.

[22] Joan Acocella, "Naked Flag Dance." *The New Yorker,* vol. 93, New York: 2017, 10.

[23] Alastair Macauley, "Hail the Stars and Stripes, and Radical Moves." *The New York Times*. Mar. 30, 2017, C2.

"Trio A with Flags," Stephen Petronio Company. The New York Times*, photograph by Andrea Mohin.*[24]

When I attended this revival of "Trio A with Flags" shortly after Trump was elected president, I viewed it with completely different eyes. The flag bibs against naked flesh brought forth feelings of vulnerability, the messiness of our president's explosive words, and the bodies he feels he has the power to touch without consent. The flag as a bib represented the child-like behavior of our president and the incoherence of his leadership. Nude bodies touching and displaying the flag referenced a reclamation of power by those underserved by his presidency. If the president has the right to "grab [women] by the pussy," artists have the right to expressively use the American flag in any context. I had not seen the work in full before this performance, and my perception was shaped by my personal experiences and political ideology. Performed in a theatre with many in the audience who were not alive during the Vietnam War era, "Trio A with Flags" became detached from its original political environment and was instead transformed into a piece reflective of the time in which it is performed. As American society evolves and as the political climate shifts, choreography that uses the flag

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[24] Andrea Mohin, Digital Image, 2017, Available from: "Review: Hail the Stars and Stripes, and the Radical Moves," *New York Times,* Mar. 29, 2017, C2.

maintains its integrity of resistance while also being shaped by the passage of time. While original intent will never be lost with the continuation of dance archive, "these choreographies keep ideas from the Vietnam Era anti war protests alive yet changing in the multiple political contexts."[25] "Trio A with Flags," in both its original premiere and in its modern renditions, is a prime example of ever-evolving political resistance art through its stark use of the flag.

Balanchine's "Stars and Stripes": Nationalism, Patriotism, and Chauvinism

In contrast, George Balanchine's "Stars and Stripes" presents a conflict-free, nationalistic use of the flag. Born in St. Petersburg in 1904, Balanchine trained and performed in Russia before meeting Lincoln Kirstein and relocating to the United States to establish New York City Ballet and School of American Ballet in 1933. Six years later he became a U.S. citizen. In 1958 he choreographed "Stars and Stripes," a patriotic ballet consisting of five American-themed campaigns set to different musical themes by John Phillip Sousa. Described in *The New York Times* by Dunning as "the world of baton twirlers, of pretty girls tooting trumpets and stalking through the blessedly lost American art of acrobatic toe-dancing," the story behind Stars and Stripes is simply "the United States."[26] With costumes resembling exaggerated military uniforms and tutus of stars and stripes, exuberant music combined with classical ballet steps invoke patriotic images tinged with patriarchal influence, an amplified and glorified replication of what was

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[25] Dellecave, "Againness of Vietnam," 128.

[26] Jennifer Dunning, "Dancing to Sounds Of Sousa: Hut, 2, 3, 4." *The New York Times*, June 24, 1988, C25.

perhaps Balanchine's own American dream. The final campaign ends with a large American flag raised behind the stage as dancers exuberantly perform their final steps.

Created during the Cold War era, "Stars and Stripes" (1958) makes a clear nationalistic statement through movement, music, costuming and set. With the music providing a scaffolding to the work, "much of the ballet's success comes from Hershy Kay's brilliant arrangement of Sousa's music"—"a complete ballet score that leads naturally into its climax: the unveiling of an abstract American flag (by David Hays) that sums up Balanchine's own abstraction of the American vernacular."[27] The oversized flag's unexpected entrance overwhelms the stage and emphasizes America's superiority and power complex. Presenting the flag so much larger than the dancers shows the flag—symbolically understood perhaps as America the nation or American government—as the more important entity. It supports the theme that "America," the idea, reigns above "an American"—the individual or "style" of the population. In turn, the audience is robbed of the identity of the individual dancers to the nationalistic scene. Balanchine's reasoning for creating the work, "I just liked the music," leads us to believe that it was only intended to display a pure love for America, but it is impossible to ignore the flag's statement at the work's climax. The flag serves as America the idea, or the brand: it is large, powerful, and cannot be ignored.

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[27] Anna Kisselgoff, "DANCE REVIEW; Balanchine, Sousa and Stiefel," *The New York Times*, 1995.

Ballet West in Balanchine's "Stars and Stripes," Photographed by Ryan Galbraith.[28]

"Stars and Stripes" Re-performance: Mixed Political Responses

Balanchine's simplistic explanation was met with controversy, with some audiences, initially "insulted by a ballet originally 'conceived as a musical joke,'" accusing Balanchine of "concoct[ing] the whole thing as a parody of patriotism,"[29] and describing the work as a "simple minded, xenophobic celebration of Balanchine's adopted country."[30] Many critics have also reacted with negative reviews. *The New York Times* dance critic John Martin called it "a colossal piece of cynicism," and "begged 'Please, Mr. Balanchine, leave 'Stars and Stripes' at home' (*New York Times*, Feb. 2, 1958)."[31] Critic Lillian Moore "worried how other cultures would react to the piece, called 'a discomforting touch of chauvinism' by some of her peers."[32] For a U.S. State Department funded tour to the Soviet Union in 1962, New York City Ballet travelled to

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[28] Ryan Galbraith, "Stars and Stripes." Digital image. *Ballet West*. Accessed November 15, 2017. https://balletwest.org/rentals/stars-stripes

[29] Lincoln Kirstein, *The New York City Ballet*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973, 152.

[30] Maureen Needham. *I See America Dancing: Selected Readings, 1685-2000*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002, 179.

[31] Needham, "I See America," 179.

[32] Needham, "I See America Dancing," 179.

showcase "clearly branded American works."[33] Ironically, *Stars and Stripes* was not chosen, and was only considered only if "its most prominent design element, a stage-filling U.S. flag, was eliminated."[34] The United Nations' secretary general Dag Hammarskjold "was so offended by its 'shameless exhibition of chauvinist sentiment' and 'the blatant effrontery of [its] imperialist gesture' that was said to have requested it be omitted from the tour repertoire."[35] As unpleasant as it may seem, the irony is that many of these unflattering qualities have always been part of the American self-image, which includes "a sense of political, economic, technological, and military superiority."[36] The fear of other countries' reactions to this work's re-performance is evident, as it is perceived as either a bold statement of an American supremacy or a satirical, patriotic joke of the "American dream." The multiplicity in the mixed reviews mirrors the multiplicity in the debate of American flag use and the definition of "proper" patriotism.

In an interview with Andrew Veyette, a New York City Ballet dancer in preparation for his leading role of "El Capitan" (2016), he discusses Balanchine's motives for creating the work, as well as the character he embodies: "an exaggeration of maybe the way the rest of the world sees Americans; overly confident, showy." Veyette explains the work is "full of impressive, expansive dancing; full of showy, technical

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[33] Clare Croft, "Ballet Nations: The New York City Ballet's 1962 US State Department-Sponsored Tour of the Soviet Union." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 61, no. 3, Oct. 2009, 427.

[34] Croft, "Ballet Nations," 427.

[35] Kirstein, *New York City Ballet*, 152.

[36] Kemmelmeier and Winter, "Sowing Patriotism," 862.

steps."[37] I find it interesting that even so many years later, the American self-image is still unchanged. "Stars and Stripes," with its over-the-top choreography, music, costuming, and American flag, remains an example of an America that demands to be acknowledged.

The re-performance of this work brings new interpretations as political context shifts. Cold War America contrasts starkly with an America full of Donald Trump's tweets, and therefore the flag incites different emotions and experiences from its citizens. For example, in 1979, militant Islamic students broke into the United States Embassy in Tehran and took 52 Americans hostage. In response, President Carter imposed economic sanctions on Iran, and after a failed mission to release them, lost the election to Ronald Reagan a year after the anniversary of the hostage-taking. In 1981, 444 days after their capture, the hostages were released. In response to this event, New York City Ballet dancer Jacques d'Amboise announced a surprise encore as a tribute to American hostages returned to the U.S. from Iran during a performance, *The New York Times* reported. They performed "Stars and Stripes," and the American flag rose before the ballet began (normally it rises at the conclusion of the piece) while the audience clapped rhythmically in celebration.[38] This gives an example of the American flag as a patriotic symbol directly uniting performance and political reality. During this particular performance and moment in time, "Stars and Stripes" and the American flag became a celebration of the freedom of American hostages, and an experience of unity, patriotism, and joy for human life.

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[37] *New York City Ballet,* "NYC Ballet's Andrew Veyette on STARS AND STRIPES," YouTube video, Posted Sept. 20, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxWCQBORb4s

[38] "Balanchine's 'Stars and Stripes' Hails Ex-Hostages," *The New York Times*, Jan 26, 1981, C29.

When watching “Stars and Stripes” in today’s political reality, I confront an unwelcome reminder of the conservative and oppressive political agenda of the current administration. The American flag image sparks memories of past debates of flag desecration and Trump’s threats to incarcerate flag burners; I am reminded that this American flag for many does not equal freedom, it equals oppression. I am also reminded how the American reputation for being the “biggest and best” is amplified with our current administration.

American Flag Use: Fear and Artistic Choice

The choice to utilize the flag on stage makes a strong statement that can be interpreted in a variety of ways. An artist’s desire to respond to the political world can lead to “fiercely relevant, unforgettable works of art to diverse dance audiences throughout the country.”[39] I have personally experienced negative reactions to performative flag use in New York City. While living and creating in this volatile political climate, I began a choreographic process that incorporated the American flag in costuming. For preliminary promotional material, my company met in a small white box studio in lower Manhattan to take photos. Our photographer was willing to work with the concept, yet in a post-production email, he requested we not use his name in connection with any of the flag related photos. I was shocked and questioned why the flag’s symbol was still so sacred when its country was run by a president known for misogyny, racism, and ignorance. Even in an evolved society that glorifies free speech—and a city that is unabashedly liberal—the fear of repercussions stemming from flag desecration remains.

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[39] Susan Jo Enrich, "Political dance as means of penetrating the public barrier: reflections on Vietnam," PhD diss., American University, 1985, 32.

As I move forward with the choreographic process, I question the audience's response—will I have similar experiences to those of Balanchine and Rainer, or has the flag been so overused that the uproar will be muted? I wonder how my work will be perceived in the future, after Trump's incoherent leadership has faded into the annals of American history. Time has indeed impacted the perceptions of Balanchine's "Stars and Stripes" and Rainer's "Trio A with Flags." Although each captured the choreographer's concept of America in the time in which they were created; the passage of time has undoubtedly altered how the audience views each of these works, even as the choreography itself remains the same.

In conclusion, political works using the American flag are shaped by the context in which they are performed. As politics evolve, choreographers respond through their work, and, either willingly or unwillingly, accept potential controversy not only in the present but also in the future. The flag's role as a tangible symbol of patriotism remains constant, though patriotism itself remains subjective. The taboo nature of flag desecration will most likely always be present, yet the use of the flag in any context, resistance or patriotism, invokes a culturally conditioned response. In an America where freedom of expression is tolerated, future artists using the flag in dance performance will experience an evolution in perception as their works are re-performed over time.

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