



Dispatch

A Walk, a Question, and Missives from the West Coast Video Dispatch

PATTI FRASER

Simon Fraser University, Canada

FLICK HARRISON

Simon Fraser University, Canada

LYNN FELS

Simon Fraser University, Canada

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGDmgL7ynlY&feature=youtu.be>

The video thought experiment accessible at the url above seeks to navigate a question posed in the call for the *Performing the World Conference* held in New York City in the fall of 2016. The conference invited presenters to respond to the question: *Can We Perform Our Way to Power?* This question was inspired by the growing appreciation for performance as an alternative modality to knowing in human development and social justice issues. The question itself, however, became a point-of-departure for a narrative walk and reflection into the possible understandings of performance as it relates to power and place. The video unpacks this troublesome question in the light of research conducted for *The Art for Social Change Research Project* at Simon Fraser University.¹ Through this research project, which was funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Patti Fraser conducted a series of conversations with socially engaged artists in the west coast of British Columbia.

¹ *Art For Social Change Research Project* is the short title for *Art for social change: An integrated research program in teaching, evaluation and capacity-building*, a five-year SSHRC Partnership Grant involving six universities across Canada: Simon Fraser University, University of British Columbia, University of Toronto, Lethbridge University, University of Calgary, and Concordia University, funded by the Social Sciences and Health Research Council of Canada.

Correspondence Address: Patti Fraser, International Centre of Art for Social Change, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6; Email: pattiafraser@gmail.com

ISSN: 1911-4788



As an artist who shared a long history of practice in this field, Patti wanted to know if there was anything from these artists' past experiences that they could offer future practitioners. Conversations between Patti and individual artists were filmed by videographer Flick Harrison, a mid-career arts activist. They were guided by an initial question that was borne out of a brainstorming session between Patti and Lynn Fels, a scholar in performative inquiry and arts education, which was inspired by our reading of scholar Hannah Arendt (1958): *What needs to be preserved or held as a responsibility as socially engaged art is re-imagined in the future?*

Each artist interviewed brings to her or his community work particular values, perspectives, means of collaborative engagement, and arts execution that recognize the importance of individual and collective voice. What is shared in common among these artists is (a) a deep commitment to social justice; (b) a pedagogical and aesthetic stance that the arts should be accessible to all; (c) the notion that we can identify, address and create art that expresses individual and collective narratives, and makes visible social injustices at individual and collective levels; and (d) an understanding that all citizens have a right to creative expression and meaning making.

All of the artists featured in this video, as well as the researchers, live and work in the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations located in and around Vancouver, British Columbia.

References

Arendt, H. (1958). *The human condition*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Works Cited in Video

- Butler, J. (2014). *Performing the political*. First Supper Symposium, Oslo, Norway.
www.youtube.com/channel/UCoFigRu2Lo03TlcPp7HcN6Q/feed
- Couture, S. (2015). *Xway'χwey' and Stanley Park: Performing history and land* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C.
- Fels, L. (1998). In the wind clothes dance on a line. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 14(1), 27-35.
- Taylor, D. (2003). *The archive and the repertoire: Performing cultural memory in the Americas*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.