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## Perils of Obedience

Perils of Obedience was an interactive dance piece that first took place at the “Fête de la musique 2009” in Paris, France. It is a generative audio and dance re-enactment of the Milgram Experiment.

A person dressed with the accouterments, and speaking in the languages of both experimenter and ringleader stands on the street with a mike in her hand. She entreats passers-by and on-lookers to become participants in the performance. The willing participant is given a control interface made from 1950’s British military surplus. Note that the salvaged components were originally made and used for export to Austria post-WW II, the materials used for the apparatus are a material aspect of re-appropriation of various modes of authority.

In the control interface we see what was once secret and powerful, and used as part of the war machine, now cast aside, and made available as scrap to the general public. Though the technology used to re-appropriate the piece is not available without some dedication to learning how to use it, it has the smack of bricolage in the way that it looks. The apparatus itself has been neutralized, almost rendered nostalgic, by the passage of time.

With this appropriated interface the Participant/Viewer now generates the audio, and the movements of the dancer. The intensity of the music, and the intensity of the dancer’s movements are directly guided by the Participant/Viewer’s turns of the knobs on the control interface. All members of the performance know, because they are told by the Author, that the Dancer is following instructions of her own free will. She can stop at any point. Part of the performance is of course for her to act as if she can’t and for everyone else to consent to that.

The re-enactment transposes the roles in the original Milgram experiment, from Experimenter, Actor and Subject to Author, Dancer, and Viewer/Participant respectively. The goal of the performance being to push the limits of the authority of the spectacle.

This performance is meant to happen in the street, but under special circumstances. The “Fête de la musique” for example, transforms the ordinary

street into a special site for performance, by virtue of being a day where, by mass consensus, the street is declared to be a stage and used as such. The "Fête de la musique" is an institution unaccompanied by edifice. This gives the site a vague spectacular designation and the effect, if not the actual fact of being a temporary autonomous zone, which is very desirable for conducting experiments concerning the power of the spectacle.

The impetus for making this project came from a desire for making jest towards scientific as well as artistic authority. Stanley Milgram used actors in his original experiment, he himself acted out the role of authority figure to coerce a body of data. The Milgram Experiment is beautiful to us because it uses acting, consensus, apparatus to create scientific fact, and uses the scientific apparatus to inspire fear and belief. Likewise we are using acting, consensus and apparatus to create music, dance, performance, dialogue, and even the very space for presenting it.

Another theme of the project comes from the question "At what point does the pantomime of danger become danger itself?" In art, and theater, we are given the option of trying on different social hats without too much risk. Even when a spectator would steer the Dancer into the path of an oncoming vehicle, putting her at risk, or some other such situation, he would often simply return the controller to the Author, disengaging from the situation. When we make a similar commitment, for example to steer troops into battle, a team on a project, etc, we cannot disengage so easily, but there is also a myriad of bureaucratic contraptions in place to distance us from our subjects. Of course when a disaster happens, these contraptions often fall apart.

As with the BP Catastrophe (still raging strong at the time of the writing of this text), bureaucratic contraptions muddy the waters of outside perceptions, and distance humanity from the poetic destruction that it has wrought upon itself. The Perils Of Obedience is an art piece, that tries to embody bureaucratized violence. The theatrical way in which it is dealt with speaks back to the tradition of the Grand Guignol, rather than the spectacles of bureaucratized violence and disaster as the BP Catastrophe.

In Perils Of Obedience, we have collapsed all the actions involved in the fragmentation of building up a power structure into four essential roles, all occupied by human beings. We've slightly transposed our humanity through the performance. Abstracting our bodies from their actions. Playing out the age old tale of authority while leaving our bodies exposed to the street and each other. It requires the cooperation of everyone, the Author, the Dancer, the Audience and the Participant/Viewer, and the Apparatus/Prop, for the story to play out, and have a picture perfect ending.

We used an arduino micro-controller (see [arduino.cc](http://arduino.cc)) to push the dancer in 6 directions in space. This would cause vibration motors to actuate when the knobs on the control board were turned. This would also send signals to our Pure Data (see [puredata.info](http://puredata.info)) patch, written and composed by Damien Frey to affect the audio of the piece.