

Transcript of First Meeting

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Jess 0:00 Sure. There we go. Got it. So hopefully I won't run out of disk space before we're done. So, I mean, do you want to go first? You want me to go first? What do you want to do?

Barbara 0:16 Um, I guess we're still waiting for Jamie. But I think we should get started because we do have to end at a certain point, you [Francisco] have a commitment in like 90 minutes, right?

Francisco 0:26 Yeah, I gotta I gotta be I gotta be at another zoom right up to but I'm happy to cut very close.

Barbara 0:34 Okay. Yeah, so I'm happy to start. And maybe if we can each be conscientious about the time and I don't mind being told that I'm getting close to my limit or whatever. So don't don't be shy about interjecting.

Barbara 0:56 About how about if we start in the order that we sent things to each other? So Jess, you want to start with your... I guess it was a PDF, your text that you circulated?

Jess 1:12 Well, I guess I'd say if you've read it, do you have any questions? Because this seems kind of wasted time for me to just repeat everything I said in that note?

Barbara 1:25 Yeah. I've got a couple questions. Did your ideas about scientific method change over time? Or did you always have that approach to the scientific method? Or do you feel like it's something that's evolved through your practice, through your career and through your development in that field, or...

Jess 1:46 I should probably tell us a little bit more about my background. When I was, when I graduated high school, I was I was going to become a poet. And... but it was 1963, and Sputnik had just gone up, and I was trying to get into colleges, and science sold, and I had good marks in Physics. So I said, Okay, well, let's say I'm going to be a physicist. And when I got to, when I got to college, I spent first term... first year in Physics, and went over

and changed majors to English, which was my intention all along. But during the registration process, I discovered that in fact, I could take... there were certain courses in English I didn't really want to hear about, like Puritan Literature. And, and I realized that I could, because my college was a nice, well, enlightened liberal arts college, I can only take two courses, I couldn't take more than two courses in a major at the same time. And I could take all the English courses that I really wanted, and still do a Physics major. I thought, what the hell, science sells. So I went ahead and finished in Physics. And by the time I was done, I had changed my mind, I didn't want to be a poet anymore, I wanted to be a science fiction writer. And I thought, okay, to get to get real credibility as a science fiction author, I should get a PhD in Physics. That'd be cool. And so I went to Berkeley, and got a PhD in Physics. And in the process, I discovered... I got involved in a new technique, using muons as probes of solids, which I thought was so cool... it was like being a character in one of my own science fiction novels, and I got really into it. And next thing I knew I was in Vancouver at TRIUMF building up the Canadian facility for... to do μ SR. And next thing I knew it was 35 years later, and I was retiring. And I was retiring to become... to get finally back to writing science fiction. And then I heard the story about Margaret Atwood, sitting at a fancy dinner next to a brain surgeon. And he said to her, "When I retire, I'm going to write a novel." And she said to him, "That's amazing... when I retire I'm going to become a brain surgeon." The impact of that story made it absolutely crystal clear to me that I was an idiot, right? You can't become a novelist, you know, after you retire. And also I had 40 years of conditioning to try to get to the point as clearly and quickly as possible, to explain things in the simplest terms I can. No mysteries, right? And so this is not good training for being a novelist. So I've changed my mind, I'm going to be a short story writer. And I still write an occasional really lousy poem. So that's,

that's a little bit of background to that. But I mean, yes, things have changed. You know, I've changed my mind. I have over 400 publications in refereed scientific journals. So I've done that thing. I made a decision early on, like I said, that I didn't want to play the gamble game where I mean, in particle physics, you have, you know, you have these things that are like space programs, right? They're billion dollar accelerators. And, you know, sometimes there's 1000 authors on a paper in particle physics, experimental particle physics. And, you know, I mean, most of those people, they're... they're in charge of programming the temperature controller, right? And there's a couple of people who fight to get the top of that huge pile of people. And if it's, if the experiment is a success, they get a Nobel Prize, right? You got to ask yourself, what the hell did they get the Nobel Prize for?

Jess 6:34 I mean, you know, they have to be good physicists in order to, in order to convince people to listen to them. So you know, I mean, I'm not saying they don't deserve it, it's just that it's their organizational capacity, and their determination to get on top is in the Nobel Prize. And I found that pretty distasteful. Also, you know, you spend 20 years on an experiment like that. And you're gambling that it'll be the one that wins the Nobel Prize. And at least you'll get, you know, famous for having been a participant. And that just sounded really awful to me. I wanted to do experiments where I could say, what the hell is that? And twiddle some things and check it out and find out what it was. Yeah, and come up with a new explanation. That, you know, that's fun. Science should be fun. This whole thing about, you know, Conjecture and Refutation... I'm a true believer in Popperian science, you know, Karl Popper said, you make a Conjecture, and then you test. And the purpose of the test is to Refute the Conjecture, right? Not to prove it, you can't prove it, nothing can ever be proven. All you can do is to think of good, good challenges to theory. No matter how much you like

the theory, that's not relevant. Of course, that's not... that denies the nature of human beings. Human beings aren't like that, right? Human beings want to be right.

Jess 8:15 And just to mention the elephant briefly: I'm an American. I'm also a Canadian, I mean, much more proud of being a Canadian at this point. But I'm still an American, I realized that... I really took to heart the famous saying that Richard Feynman, my idol, was reputed to have said, which is that, "Science is the belief in the ignorance of experts." In that, you know, even back in 1835, de Tocqueville made a comment about Americans, he said, you know, Americans don't don't believe anything except their own judgment. And I, you know, that is... that is really baked in to the American character. And I have to admit, I totally, I totally understand that. And I believe in it. I think it's been, it's been the source of most of the creativity and innovation that the US has produced over the centuries. But the problem is that today, it's categorically impossible for anyone to know everything about even their own narrowest specialization. And so we've... we've entered a new era of human behavior in which if we don't trust each other, and we don't cooperate and we don't take people's word for stuff then we can't survive. And the problem is we don't have a mechanism in place for choosing whose word to believe. And so now, in some sense, this whole upheaval of people believing nonsense, is a good thing. Because it's, it's a move in the direction of trusting each other. But we have no practice at choosing whom to trust, right? You can't trust everything. And there's a lot of people in the US now who're just trusting absolutely whatever they choose; they basically, they make a choice of what to what to trust, based on whether they like it, which is like the worst conceivable choice. So anyway, that's the elephant in my room. I mean, that's, that's a problem in the evolution of humanity, that if we don't overcome it in the next five to 10 years, we're dead. So that's my elephant.

Barbara 11:10 Yeah, I can see how that connects also to traditions and Western thought, including science, you know, the traditions of empiricism and the scientific method itself, and the development of scientific discourse within the whole social kind of realm. And how, you know, that's all... that all needs to be questioned that we need to understand what that kind of knowledge, what... what knowledge is, and where it should be placed? And how it can be... how it can be believed, or should it be believed – is belief the right word? And what... what should guide us? And I don't know, I have a lot of questions about whether there are other models or other ways of doing things or other ways of understanding knowledge, I guess that might be... might be good to think about. Like astronomy, for example, in many cultures, you know, ancient cultures have understood astronomy in different ways for 1000s of years. And how did they do that? And how was that knowledge brought together and shared? And also what did it serve those civilizations? Like, how did it fit with other things that they were doing and things that were important?

Jess 12:42 You know, the story of the fishing tree, don't you?

Barbara 12:45 Yeah. Yeah. Did that come up in our last meeting, or you might have talked about it? I came across this somewhere.

Jess 12:59 Yeah. Francisco Fernando is due. Do you go by Francisco?

Francisco 13:06 Yes, people just call me Francisco. I'm Francisco Fernando in writing because as a young performance artist in Vancouver, back during the Bush years, I started doing performance art. And my father had the same name, same last name, but different middle name from me. So I appended my middle name to my first name. So should my father ever google himself he didn't find pictures of me doing things that no father should see his son doing.

Jess 13:07 It's his own damn fault for giving

his son the same first name.

Francisco 13:08 Well, Latin America is patriarchal and we acknowledge them and we thwart it. The question...

Jess 13:46 I'm the Third!

Francisco 13:51 There you go. Well, my grandfather was also Francisco Augusto. So yeah, yeah, something about men and continuity. The question that emerged for me was, how your relationship, Jess, to observations within your life as a scientist, reshaped or might have influenced your relationship to observation in every day. And I am curious about that, because part of what I'm going to talk about are basic sort of elements that I use to explain the world to myself and one of them through drawing is observation. So I saw a really nice overlap and I was curious about whether you see an inside and an outside in terms of your life as a scientist or, but I'm really interested in how you think through and feel through observations in your life.

Jess 14:39 I'd say that...I feel kind of bad saying this, but it's I don't think it's so much that my experience as a scientist has informed my thinking about, you know, every other aspect of observation in my life. It's I found I finally found a spot in science where I can... where my, my innate attitude towards observation... works. I was really, I was incredibly lucky to have done that, right? I mean, in my generation, like, when I applied for my job at UBC, there were 200 applicants. And I don't know how in the hell I got the job. I mean, it's just everything in my life has just been total good luck. So that's very unusual. I think most people don't, don't find their groove. And so most people have to be modified by the, by their actions. But you know, it's also true that I'm sure I've changed dramatically, in many ways and in my career. Because everything you do, everything that happens to you, or everything happens by you, changes you into a completely different person. I mean, it's like you don't, you

know, you don't wake up the same person two days, any two days in your life? Yeah. So I suppose... it sounds to me like I need to reflect on this more. Because I'm sure that there are things that I could probably pick out that my practice has changed me. Certainly I've become more cynical. In my career, I got paid to flunk people. That was basically my job. I mean, being a professor, that's the main thing that you get paid for, right? I mean, teaching is fun, right? And teaching is a perk. But marking is what you get paid for. That's the job. Date being gatekeeper is what you get paid for. So you get paid for, for saying to somebody, I'm sorry, that's not good enough. That's not a lot of fun. But it's the job. And it allowed me to have fun doing other things I liked. And teaching – teaching was fun. I've overrun my time.

Barbara 17:21 Yeah, I agree. This is my first season not teaching. Shall I jump in and share my screen? Okay. Oh, I think the host has to enable.

Jess 17:43 Oh, there's Jamie. I'm sorry. Jamie was in the waiting room. And I didn't see it. Hi, Jamie. Oh, dear.

Jamie 17:59 Hello, I am here.

Jess 18:01 I'm sorry, I didn't I didn't see you in the waiting room. I didn't... I should have set this thing up to not have a waiting room. Normally I don't. Anyway, my fault – I apologize. Um, so I'm going to...

Barbara 18:17 We're recording this though. So you'll be able to watch the first little bit and just... Jess did a very nice informal presentation based on the material he circulated earlier. Good. And I'm gonna... I'm going to share my screen now and talk a little bit about my way of working.

Jess 18:43 So you get me talking and I forget about everything else.

Barbara 18:49 Okay, so where do I go now? Oh, yeah. Okay, are you seeing my title screen there? Great.

So I just repeated just for the sake of it being on the record, the URL that I sent you around. And it's just a selection of some current and more recent projects. And I'll just say that, as a backstory, that my training is as a visual artist, but I started out in university in the Political Studies program and then defected to Art because I felt that things like new German cinema, for example, helped me understand, you know, the traumas of modern history and modern politics better than academic reading and writing did at that time, so I switched gears and went into a BFA program and then MFA, and I concentrated a lot on sculpture and object making and installation and at one point, my work got so much sort of about installation that I realized I was way more interested in the spaces between things than actually in the things themselves – I was interested in connections and affinities and juxtapositions and things like that. So my work is kind of in a very expanded field right now, but coming from roots in sculpture.

So the first example of a project is from 2014. It was a group residency that took place on a small island called Pictou Island, which is between Nova Scotia and PEI. And there were six of us, six artists, we were accepted into this residency, where we basically walked every day on this island. And we made work as we walked, or we made working as the artwork. And I thought about it beforehand and decided to make an object that would become this thing that would frame my experience there. So I made a yoke out of local birch yellow birch that was from that area. And it's based on sort of traditional yokes that would have been used at that time. And I, I used it to carry everything that week. So I would walk, you know, nine kilometers a day to go to the beach, and everything I needed for that day would be carried by the yoke. And I used it for hauling water, and, you know, my tent, and camping gear, all of that stuff. And I think what I wanted to do with this project was to kind of destabilize myself and put myself in a position where physically and on other levels as well, I had to restabilized myself and become

very aware of where I was in space and how I was moving through it and how I was relating to other people and the road and the sky and so on. Part of it had to do with the setting, the fact that this island is, you know, it's in traditional indigenous territory, it's actually an area that's not been inhabited for long periods by indigenous people, because there's no running surface water, freshwater sources. So it's got this interesting, settled and unsettled history to it.

The next image is from a really big group project that I was involved in as one of four core members in a collaborative group called *Narratives in Space and Time*. And in that group, two of us are artists, one person is an architect, and the other person is kind of cultural policy, communications person. And we'd all kind of taken up walking together, and we'd all gotten the first iPhones with GPS at around the same time. And we were just we go for walks and just goof around making tracks of our walks and things like that. And at one point, we decided to walk as far as we could around the whole Halifax Harbour. And we did three or four walks, and then we ended up in this one area that's kind of not a scenic landmark or anything, it's kind of out of the way. But as the place where you can get closest to where the Halifax Explosion happened. And it just, it really hit us that we were dealing with this landscape that had been traumatized almost 100 years earlier. And there were no visible markers, or no plaques or memorials or anything like that. And there was nothing that sort of indicated this sort of physical trauma, but also psychic trauma that had happened in in the city at that time. So we decided – this was three years beforehand – that we would just walk, what we call the debris field of the explosion, and trying to understand it through walking through these different neighborhoods. And we eventually got to the point where we were doing these big public walks, I think our last one had 200 people. And it was on the centenary of the explosion. And we built in all kinds of other kind of creative components

such as building architectural models of things, burning them, serving food, working with actors and singers and dancers and so on. So they were very interactive and various kind of multi-disciplinary, but also very critical examinations of the contemporary urban landscape in view of this horrible disaster from the past. So that was a completely consuming project for about three or four years and I feel in some ways that I'm still just unpacking that it was a major, major effort.

The third image here is from an ongoing project that I'm doing with my partner, Robert Bean, Bob Bean, who is also one of the collaborators in *Narratives in Space and Time*. And we've been doing these projects that we call *Being-in-the-Breathable*. And the phrase "being in the breathable" comes from writing by the Dutch sociologist, Peter Sloterdijk, who wrote a lot about the First World War and periods since then. But really, obviously, with the First World War and the use of poison gases. And the way that breathing itself became weaponized. That's the first time that you know, your ability to breathe became something that your enemy could control or could kill you with. So we started to examine breathing and atmosphere as this kind of area of geopolitics, but also of embodiment. So we looked at things like the history of tuberculosis research and those kinds of things. Obviously, climate change, and the way atmospheres are weaponized through climate change. And the activities that have led to that. The first *Being-in-the-Breathable* that we did was in this place called Sokolovsko, it's in a part of Poland, very close to the Czech Republic. And it's in a beautiful sort of verdant area. And it's a town where the first tuberculosis treatment center was built, it was the model for Dewas, this beautiful Victorian red brick architecture and you know, very wealthy people who were dying of TB would go there to be treated, and basically to die in these beautiful palm courts and environments. And it's fallen into ruin now, but is being restored as an art and media center. So there was a festival there

of ephemeral art, we were invited to participate. So we researched the history of the tuberculosis sanatorium, and devise what we called an annotated walk, that everyone could participate in. And it was about an hour and a half, kind of roaming around different parts of the site, and kind of acting out or embodying these different things that would cue discoveries about the history of the site, and also what was happening in the world today. So this is 2017. And in this slide here, seeing people enacting the requirements for quarantine. So we figured out how much air, the volume that of air that each tuberculosis patient was supposed to have around them, and also the requirements for quarantine, that went back to the time of the play. And we had people kind of move in the space in a way that described parameters for their, for their, where they were located. And then we set out on our walk. So it's a very prescient piece. We thought about this a lot in the last couple of years, obviously, since COVID.

And this last image is of a work that is ongoing, and it's a piece I started in January. It's called Corona Walker. And it's named after the a young woman named Corona Walker who died and whose headstone is in a cemetery not far from me. And I first noticed it about 30 years ago, and I've used it in as a location in different projects. But I decided to center my work on this for the year, partly because I couldn't go very many places and couldn't be in galleries or things like that. And it was a way of, you know, working with other people working outdoors, working with very small groups at times when the restrictions were really tight, and kind of exploring one area very intensely as a way of kind of understanding what it might have been like to be 18 as she was when she died at that point in history. So the walks are kind of probes into the history and also the geography and the features of this very particular environment. But they address things that I think have greater resonance to things like colonialism and the development of capital at that time and the gendering of education, all of those

things kind of come into it. And so they're their walks. There's been a very small gallery exhibition. And I've been doing a lot of writing I hope to to generate a long, you know, longer more developed piece of writing as a result of that.

Barbara 30:06 And then I just put together a little kind of summary of points. When I thought about how I work... (How am I doing for time? Okay? Okay.) So obviously, especially in the last little while collaboration has been huge for me, interacting with others, and working in public spaces. So my studio is a place where I prepare things that go out as props or as things that get enacted with in these blocks or other actions. And a lot of my work is not in galleries anymore. It's just in, in public space. And I guess, I'm still trying to do what I was doing when I was a Political Studies student and trying to know the world. And especially I think parts of the world or things about the world that are troubling, I'm really drawn to things that are very, very troubling and kind of traumatic, and yeah, the crises, I guess. I really like materials, I like making things. So being able to make things by hand, and to enact things bodily is really important. And for me, walking has become a good way of doing that. I think of walking as being very, in a way it's very formal, it's like step after step. It's very methodical and kind of boring, which I really liked, because then your mind can go elsewhere. And I got into making art using walking just after a point where I'd been doing a lot of work with pattern, and repetition, wallpaper patterns, and things like that, I think it really comes out of that. That affinity for kind of sameness and ongoingness... Yeah, I like this idea of traveling the histories of being unsettled, or, you know, probing things that that seem to be narrated and seem to be told in ways that don't don't quite sit right. I'm... this is a big challenge for me, but I believe in creating a very open process of engagement with other people and not necessarily artists, and to try and be self reflective, like to try not to, you know, appropriate other people's stories and re-

alities to always try and speak from, from my own position, my own experience. And I think more and more, I'm interested in taking risks from, you know, burning things in public, to trespassing, to being completely open to public participation. And so you know, advertising a walking art event, in the recreation part of the paper instead of the art part of the paper, and working with the people who come in, who might have assumptions about what we're what we're doing. And through that, I really start thinking about what I do and whether or not it's art. And I really enjoy the these experiences with people who also don't think about it, about whether it's art or not, they just are interested in being in those spaces or talking about certain things. So obviously, I still read no theory and work with ideas, but also work with physical things, physical properties, movements, so on. And as I said, I'm in a way more interested in the energy and affinities and connections or absence of connections between things. I'm not so concerned with making, you know, precious art objects. I think repetition and redoing things, rewalking walks, basing my work on someone else's work, those kinds of ways of working can be really good models and good ways to start an investigation. I also really believe in parameters. So you know, whether it's the size parameter or time or something's... any kind of device really, to help to describe what it is that I'm going to be involved in is important. And I've realized that I'm often interested in what's missing or what's absent or what doesn't gel or is ambiguous. And a lot of the way that I work now, especially when I'm out and walking in a space is to look for traces like to look for things that give some indication maybe about something that happened, but also a trace of something that could be just a stepping stone to imagining something that is completely different that wasn't part of what happened wasn't part of the story, but could be.

So that's my, that's my presentation. And maybe I'll leave this slide up for now. But... any questions or things that you'd like to talk

about?

Jess 35:28 Lots of things I'd like to talk about. But I think in the interest of... I mean, Francisco has another appointment, right?

Barbara 35:38 Yeah. All right. Good.

Jess 35:46 Can we come back to talk about that? I mean, walking is really a great topic. Lots of questions to ask, I have comments to make about that.

Francisco 35:59 And the one thing I'll note maybe has something to discuss as well as this notion of the expanded field because this conversation we've been having has been bringing me back to ongoing work I've been doing with precisely... with Rosalind Krauss, this culture and the expanded field, and you've made me realize, Barbara, that one of the things... that one of the expansions, she folds out modern sculpture sort of four ways, but one of the expansions she can't yet make in 1978, when she writes this really important art historical text on why sculptors were no longer making discrete objects. It's the audience, the public, the viewer, the wall, you know, so I'm interested in that, because some of the sketches I've been making to work this actually engaged with Kraus and her canonical folding out.

Should I share and, and, you know, out of pure nervousness, I have prepared something somewhat more formal, but I think I'll just relax, do some work and have a conversation.

I was born in Guatemala, and came to Canada as a refugee claimant, when I was 16 years of age, with my mother, my father and my two brothers. And I would say that the, the journey from being somebody who was uprooted from a fairly sort of conventional middle class life in a, in a country that, you know, had been torn by civil war during most of the second half of the of the 20th Century, to being a refugee in a place like Canada, in the 21st century. And the journey from refugee to citizen are probably the strongest undercurrents

that shaped my intuitions in ways that sometimes I'm able to talk about and articulate and sometimes in ways that I'm not necessarily able to talk about and articulate. I know that the thing that I do understand now was that the moment my family was granted refugee status on March 17 2004, the first decision that I made when I came back home, was to go online, and to look for the Langara Fine Arts diploma program, which is a small community, wonderful community college, foundational program in Visual Arts. And so I now understand that the moment I was able to... the moment I knew I would be able to stay in the country, the moment I knew that I wouldn't be deported, without even knowing it, the first decision that I made, was to be an artist.

This is a redacted version of a document called the interim federal health, which is a document that is given to refugee claimants as a means of giving people claiming status of basic health care. And even though I have sort of redacted, I'm really interested in traces as well, for us. So I think we'll have a nice conversation about that, even though I've redacted everything that would sort of give away my identity, the thing I kept in this sort of rectified ready made is an annotation by the immigration officer that says authorized to attend school for one year, which you see just above the redacted signature of my father. So education and the ability and the possibility of access to education is quite important to me, especially since once I graduated from my Master's here in Toronto. I became a teacher and I taught Cultural Theory and Drawing to undergraduate students. While I was still in Vancouver, at the same time, as I was a student, first at Langara College, and then at Emily Carr, I began doing performance art independently, just outside of, you know, that there wasn't really an infrastructure and institutional infrastructure supported performance art within the school. But there's certainly a very, very strong performance art community. And so I began just making, I guess, experiments in engagements between my body, time and space.

This is from a series of works that I that I made around 2008 to 2010, called Context Studies, in which I pressed my body against the architecture for an extended period of time. And then when I disengaged, I would goldleaf the sort of greasy imprint of my body as a way to think... the way to think through trace through presence, but also as a way to try to rework legacies of minimalist art and conceptual art, in ways that felt perhaps more embodied that the kinds of histories that were being passed down to me at school at the time.

This is just a close up of one of those, one of those trace details from that series of, you know, from that series of works, and as a, as a way to talk about the role that observation has in my practice, was pressing up against a wall in my studio one day. And I out of the corner of my eyes, saw a Sharpie, and I was just, I had just enough sort of arm to reach it. And I traced it once. And then I decided to move and I traced it again. And I sort of fell into an almost sort of hypnotic rhythm of doing that thing moves very, very slowly. And by the time I've disengaged, I realized that I had somehow turned this sort of vertical exercise in engaging with the space into this horizontal abstract pattern. And out of that experiment, and out of that observation, a work of mine, that's sort of become this ongoing performance and installation called Spatial Profiling came out. I would say that one of the things that happened, as I, as I became a citizen, and in a way settled in a, in a different way than somebody who's a refugee can settle, I became less and less interested of being at the center in my work, and then became more and more interested in thinking about, especially performance art as a way to create and conceptual structures, ideas, sets of instructions that other people could enter into, and reshape. And I think even as, as time has gone by, that I become less interested in, in a way that the spectacle of the action and much more interested in the trace. And so this is an image from a version of Spatial Profiling at the Hessel Museum of Art that's paired up with Fe-

lix Gonzalez Torres this on titled passport as a way to signal to something about my history, also, as a queer Latin American person, that's, that's important to me that I can't quite articulate that that's quite important to me. How am I doing? How am I doing for time? Okay, does Jamie have any place he has to be? Not till 11. Perfect.

There was... there's a really important transitional work that happened as I came to Toronto, which was the creation of a performance in which I attempted to devise an impossible correspondence between myself and Omar Khadr, who was the Canadian born child soldier who was detained extrajudicially in Guantanamo. And what I can say about that work was that it really led me to a place in performance where I really wanted to turn away from the idea of... to face the idea of the figure, the idea of recognition. And it became a work in which I counted the days that he had been imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay. That, you know, these marks on the wall, in which I wrote to him, in which I read texts that had been given to him in prison. And by the end of it, I was really, I was really at a point where I realized that I had reached a series of limits, and in some ways, I now understand that the only place I could go from thinking about somebody who, rather than coming into a frame of subjective recognition as a citizen, had, in fact, gone so far out of our frame of recognition, but for many years, we could not understand him as a... as a human being within the juridical frameworks. Observing on that performance, now, I think that was what led me to abstraction.

You know, the next sort of large project that I that I took on a couple of years ago was an exhibition called Duet, which was an installation in which I attempted to arrange my work in relationship to the work of Canadian modernist painter Jack Bush, in such a way that the work would sing together, if that makes any sense, you know, so I became interested in some ways, not just looking towards the most abstract end

of of subjective recognition in terms of a fellow Canadian citizen in the case of Cat Khadr, but I wanted to almost as a response, look straight up and think about, you know, about us, as held up as our... about an artist could get in terms of Modernism, and so right... rather than trying to compete with him, rather than trying to submit to him, I attempted to find ways in which our work could you know, be by each other — I tried to think about the ways in which he was thinking about obstruction and the ways in which I was thinking about obstruction, not making paintings, but making smaller digital prints. Not making silk screens, but thinking about a certain kind of expanded field, even within the gallery, you know, creating color fields that would envelop his paintings, even as my own compositions might have been quite small. And through that, that process, trying to think about abstraction in, in what I think of as mine, you know, minor ways minor obstruction, and how that can sort of free up abstraction to not necessarily be caught up in the notion of the medium, but to find different kinds of contexts.

There is a public artwork that was installed at Humber College here in Toronto, a couple of different views of it. And in a project that I did last year, during the pandemic, in Monterey, that was supposed to happen in Montreal. To try to think about this question, this... this thing that Rosalind Krauss couldn't quite imagine, as she was thinking about the expanded field to think about the person on the other side. So taking compositions from a series of works of mine, that is called letters, which are these digital drawings that are eight and a half by 11 inches, and turning them into a book that the gallery would distribute to anybody who would basically want to see the show. Sometimes, you know, much more sort of traditional things, but yeah, so that's my presentation.

Jess 7:42 I think I have to, as a, as a... officially a Philistine, I have to use the most shallow conceivable way of complimenting you:

“I really like your stuff.”

Francisco 7:43 I really appreciate that. I guess I’ll go, right? Yeah. Okay.

Jamie 7:51 So I’ll just briefly go through a couple of projects. And I guess at the beginning talk about, like, I’m here as a scholar in this group, which is a little uncomfortable; I describe myself as having like a mediocre scholarly practice and a mediocre art practice that somehow combined into something that’s more impressive than either, but I did degrees in English — Bachelors, Master’s, PhD — and my Master’s was on Gertrude Stein and Picasso. And so it was leaning into a, like a visual relationship with with literature. Originally, I wanted it to be on just the aesthetics of subtitles, but I couldn’t figure out how to actually write that. And then my PhD was on concrete poetry as an international global literary movement that took advantage of, like, the technology is the time to imagine a supranational communicative structure. And so that I talked about its relationship to conceptual art in that it crosses over kind of literary and art, historical or visual contexts. And then the whole time, I also maintained a visual art practice. That space was conceptual, because I don’t have any skills, and collaborative for a long time. . . since 2006. With the laptop collaborative, Brady Cranfield and the Economist Aesthetic is is something that I want to use at the beginning because it’s, it’s the first. . . I’m going to go through like three stupidities, because I think my method like stupidity as method has defined my approach to scholarly and artistic work for the last, I guess, 13 years. And it was really rooted in. . . I was writing my dissertation at the time. I was looking at the period around the 50s and 60s so high modernism, look, Corbusier gaze towards a new architecture talked about the Engineer’s Aesthetic as the dominant aesthetic of Modernism. So that’s why you had like the veneration of factories and silos, cargo ships like ocean liners, these types of things. And I was. . . it happened in 2008. It was a global financial crisis. And all of

a sudden, people started talking about the economy. And I realized at that point that not only did I not know what “the economy” meant, but the people who were talking about “the economy” didn’t know what “the economy” meant. It was this. . . it was this empty signifier that was proving so powerful, like shattered in austerity created new national relationships, it affected voting structures. It still does. And so I was trying to figure out how to talk about the use of the term “economy” or the rationale of the economy as an aesthetic rooted in technologies of computation and double entry bookkeeping. And there were a couple of. . . I mean, it’s an ongoing project, there have been essays involved, there’ve been visual projects, I’ll just talk about two visual projects.

They’re both collaborations with Grady Cranfield. One was called “Due to Injuries.” And it was based on this anecdote from Don McKenzie, who’s a historian of markets. And it was a it was a an account of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, which is basically where finance as an industry developed in relation to computational technologies in the 1970s, late 1960s 1970s. And so we bronze this, this calculator, Texas instrument, this 82, I think, which was the first calculator to allow for programmable options, derivatives equations. And it was just this handheld transformation that allowed for this explosion of the options derivatives industry, but there was a pit, you know, like there used to be pit traders and people would hold up, like, slips and ask for purchasers, or deals, I guess. And it was, it was in the 1970s, and the pitcher on bleachers, and so the older traders would go higher up the bleachers, so they are more visible. And then the younger traders, like in their early 20s, started using platform heels. So like the technology of disco, like four or five inch heels to gain like an advantage on the bleachers. But so many of them, there’s so much jostling that they, they would often fall and injure themselves. And so there was a memo that went out that said due to injuries, platform heels will no longer be al-

lowed in the in the pit. And so it was one of these, it was rooted in an anecdote that was really kind of poignant, but also talked about how economic shifts in technologies affect bodies, and how we might absorb new technologies into thinking about how bodies respond to those shifts.

And then there was another project we did called “Night Shift.” And this is again. . . from this very quick sentence, I read that titanium dioxide, which is the primary colorant in white paint, is used as an economic indicator of recovery. So speculative economists see if titanium dioxide rises in price, they deduce that more offices are being. . . more white paint is being used to prepare offices for businesses. And so they will say, you know, we’re going to, we’re going to bet that the economy’s in recovery based on the price of white paint. And so Brady and I decided to paint a gallery space, we did it at the gallery, and then we did it at 811 in Toronto a few years later, we would just paint at night, so kind of this invisible labor, painting gallery walls, white over and over and over again, and then figure that out as a sculpture. So think about how paint reduces with the drying process, and then measure how much the gallery has compressed from this like invisible sculpture, right? Because you can’t see it, it’s a minimal compression of the space, but it is material. And it’s kind of like a mimicking of economic behavior. So I guess, and so that’s, that’s the economist aesthetic, which still is at the root of a lot of my investigation.

“Nancy” is another stupidity. It’s a writing project. It’s a weird writing project, half academic memoir, and it’s a weird length. It’s like, it’s too long to be a journal essay. And it’s not long enough to be a short book. But it’s my examination of a relationship that I have with the Vancouver curator poet/scholar named Nancy Shaw, who was part of the CUNY School of Writing, who was a communications scholar and poet or/and a curator. And I had known her name, and I’d read her poems, and I knew peo-

ple that knew her. And at some point, I was in a bookstore. It was run by poets that I saw cooking school writing readings. And I heard somebody referred to this woman as Nancy. And I was like, “Oh, that must be Nancy Shaw, because there can’t be many poets in a small city, named Nancy.” And so I just assumed that this woman was Nancy Shaw. And then Nancy Shaw died kind of too early. I mean, she was 44 when she died of cancer in 2007. And I would keep seeing the woman that I thought was Nancy Shaw around, and in my head, I was like, there’s Nancy Shaw. But I know Nancy Shaw is dead. And that was just something that I didn’t really think about too much. But every time I saw her, I was like, that was Nancy Shaw, or that is Nancy Shaw. And then one day I was introduced to this woman, and her name isn’t Nancy. And she’s not Nancy Shaw. And something happened in my mind where my image of this woman that had been so influential on me, because like I, I read her essays on collaboration, RSM collaboration, I read her essays on the Anything Company, I read her essays on artist run centres in Vancouver, and it shaped my understanding of the city. And all of a sudden, with that handshake, I no longer had an image of a woman that had been super influential on my, on my kind of thinking through of the City of Vancouver. And so I really tried to investigate that relationship. And how it changed in that moment of that handshake. And what it came around to is like this phrase, the anxiety of gratitude, like I don’t know who to be grateful for, in my relationships with texts or with, with artists in Vancouver, or like, I had this earlier kind of crisis, but confusion about the term “elder,” because I was like, I don’t, I didn’t grow up with any “elders.” “Elders” were defined to me as people that were older than me. So there would be like people at 15 and I was 13. And they would say, “Respect your elders.” I’d be like, I don’t respect you, you’re not my elder, like, you’re just older than me. And so I framed or I’ve created a course on elders that dealt with queer elders, indige-

nous elders, and art elders, and brought them in. . . it was an interdisciplinary forms class. So they just. . . there are a series of elders that came in and spoke about their understanding of elders. And I think Nancy, the project, kind of helped me through this, this understanding of, of elders, and how to be kind of grateful for the things that you receive as a student or as a community member.

But there's this other stupidity because I'm on this list to litany of stupidities in this presentation that I talked about in this, this text where it's, I remember looking at a picture of my grandmother, who died a couple of years ago at 93. And I remember looking at a picture of her when she was young, and it was black and white. And I felt this pain of sadness for my grandmother, because she had to grow up in a world that was black and white, right? And it's not that. . . it's not that I thought she just had access to black and white photography. I thought that like, outside of the frame of the photograph, everything was black and white, like she walked down the street, and the trees were in black and white. And it's one of these things that I catch myself doing. And I was like, that's so stupid, but indicative of this relationship to media, and, and how we understand history through these media, like particularly photography, right? That we understand the world through these images and an image based ocular centric society.

And so talk about one more project, Broken Windows Work. And so the the two extra windows were going to be the windows that I break. And this is what's going to take place at 221 A, which was probably a library for a while, but they had a contentious relationship with their landlord, and then eventually moved to a new space on Hamilton Street that I don't think the project really works for. So we decided to not do the project of working on it with somebody else which hasn't been confirmed. But basically the idea was that I was going to break these storefront windows, and gather the sharps and make

new windows, instantly replace the window with another window, make new windows out of the shards and then glue them to the back of the window and the reduction, the slight reduction in the efficient or the the energy waste of turning shards into Windows would serve to strengthen the window and maybe make it less transparent. Right. And in the process, you know, referred to "broken windows" policing methods, but also the storefront window as this modernist device of desire production. And access and, and then I talked to somebody who knows how windows are made. Turns out, you can't just break shards down into into molten glass and make new new windows. And so this was a real like lesson, I think I mean, we're still going to break it, I think we just have to rearrange, put the entire window in a kiln with a replacement window and then melt the other glass onto the back of the window. So it'll be much more jagged, more opaque, slightly, slightly opaque, and will be a different formal vision. . . like it won't, it can't be the vision that I have, because my vision was completely misunderstanding of how windows are made.

And then I think I'll just refer to this one because I like this project. This is a project that I didn't know was a project until somebody pointed it out. So as a kind of performance. "Sir, please," an ongoing performance in which I'm requested by museum attendants to please stand back from artworks. My thanks to my friend Roxanne for pointing it out as a performance. And it's just a list of all the times I've been asked to step back from artworks because I'm getting too close. So there's a Jeff Koons there. I was like, "God, this is shiny," and I was pointing at it with my finger and from across the gallery it was like, "Please, sir, step back. . ." at the Getty Center. It was like a James Ensor piece that that I couldn't figure out if it was a drawing or print. So I got really close. The Richard art Swaggers table there was an alarm that I set off by getting too close. The Art Gallery of Ontario is in a conversation. . . that's my collaborator Brady right there pretending to

touch Gerhard Richter, I think that we weren't allowed to carry our backpacks on one strap, they had to be on two straps. And so that's included a Matthew Barney I got too close to, a PR Week I got too close to and then to Laura was painting so I got too close to in Los Angeles. And so it's just one of these things like recognizing these repetitions, as a project rather than a mere attempt to museum guards.

So I think, I mean, there's things that resonate with, with Barbara's and Francisco's and Jess' project, at least from what I read, just, I didn't hear you talk about it, but I'm pretty sure I know, I know, at least in spirit, what you would have presented off, and this idea of being open and, and flexible, not to use a kind of neoliberal capitalist term, but but let's say just open and, and giving, potentially, to the experiences that we have. And I think like approaching work, optimistically and naively, and valuing the the knowledge that is embodied in other people, is maybe what draws all four of us together in a kind of nice way.

And then I'll say, just in advance of this conversation, that I don't have an idea for what will produce I think we all have a relationship to writing, which is nice. We can write but I'd love Francisco's visual production too, so happy to put the burden on him for anything visual, but this is... I'm really excited to have this group. So I'll just, I'll end there.

Jess 23:43 Wow. Let's see. I'm really pleased to be part of this group.

A comment about walking: last year, or the year before last, I was in group eight. And one of the things we did... I don't know if you've seen the stuff from the previous years, but we we did a blindfolded walk where all of us put on blindfolds and then we went walking in the woods. It was very interesting. And we had a photographer that followed us around, taking pictures of our walk. We also had a movie... I mean, I was kind of sorry that we didn't show the movie during the during the presentation.

It was a lot of fun. But walking is definitely an art form. I'm a runner so I don't like walking that much. But I do love running.

Barbara 24:55 Yeah, I started working with walking as a way of making Art at the same time that I was doing a lot of running. And I, to me, they had a, they shared this ability to put you into a kind of trance zone where you're not thinking too much on a certain level. And so you're thinking a lot more on other levels. And I find that to be a really creative place to be. Yeah, I really enjoyed all of your presentations, and I, I came across some of your work online, Jamie, beforehand. So I've seen the the one about being in the museums and a couple of other pieces that you didn't talk about. And there is a really, there's a very playful quality and kind of like self-deprecating quality in all of your work that I really appreciate. And yeah, the other thing I wanted to say, Francisco, one of the things about the way you work that really stood out is, in a way you come at things from an oblique angle a lot of the time, like you're avoiding the obvious and coming at things from this side view that really kind of opens things up. So I guess this goes back to your point, Jamie, about sort of an openness or open endedness in, in approach. And so I really appreciated that I also just really love your use of color and I guess what are the design sensibility, the visual design sensibility, or where your work is really joyful and beautiful to look at. So yeah.

Francisco 26:47 I think that part of... to sort of connect, I love the idea of of stupidity as a kind of basis. And I think that I began to wonder is what's the relationship between a stupidity and that a grounding mistake? I feel like especially as an artist... as an artist, and I think it's very different for a scientist, but as an artist, I cannot begin without a grounding mistake, you know, and, for me, it comes back to notions around training, you know, and I love I'm fascinated by circumstances where I'm ram with people that have very different training for me. I... one of my stupidities, I would say, is that,

because I trained as a painter, and, and I look at the work world as a painter, even though I work so hard to try to not make a painting, right like that my whole, I could have done my whole talk by saying, I'm a painter who's trying very hard not to paint, but also cook like a painter, right? So a 15 minute recipe, I can spend 45, I can spend 45 minutes because of my stupidity. And yet, there's something about that as a kind of grounding mistake that in a different context can become quite productive.

Jamie 27:59 I like that phrase a lot. Yeah. I was gonna say, Barbara, it was a while ago that I started thinking about walking as a form of dancing. You know, and I know Ron, Yvonne Rainer and Merce Cunningham. Yeah, in a different context, but I like to say to expanding it into, like a relationship to space as this type of dance and sometimes an unconscious dance. But if they're... I don't know what that does necessarily, might bring joy or potential into the movement.

Barabara 28:24 Yeah. Yeah, I think I read and sort of looked a lot at Simone Forti and Yvonne Rayner's work from that sort of John Johnson school period. So this is New York in the late 60s 70s. And also Trisha Brown has a lot of her ideas about movement and especially about architecture, how you don't have to move just on the ground plane, you can walk up walls and things like that, that really made an impression on me. So again, these ideas of sort of destabilizing what are our notions are of very ordinary things like walking?

Jamie 29:06 And I think I mean, I was looking at the links that you sent out and one of the things that struck me was this idea of walking with ghosts so I think it might have been the Corona project. Yeah. And then talking about how it's kind of a ghost of yourself as well as your future self like the... you're walking out walking with the the limbs that you're going to have or the difficulties you're going to have in the future, whatever they like. I tried to think about that a lot, or I did think about

that a lot when I was thinking about Nancy, like how, as through texts, but also through the friendships she had, like she was close friends with my teachers and in the community of poets in Vancouver, how her ideas filtered through their ideas and filtered into me, so I owe her this... gratitude. So in Vancouver with so many buildings being kind of taken down, and put backup. How do I live with the ghosts of the buildings that like I can't, or can't remember.

Barbara 30:05 Yeah. I on someone's suggestion I've been rereading. Sebald and the book Austerlitz in particular. And, you know, just reread some really great passage is about this idea of, kind of like the collapsing of, of temporal... temporalities. And a lot of it, he doesn't talk about walking, but that's how it all happens. He, that's how all of his work happens is about being in these environments. And then all of all of a sudden, he's somewhere else or other people are in the, in the picture. So for me, you know, what he's getting out in his writing is this kind of collapsing of space and time that for me happens with walking, it's like walking, it's this moving point that moves, you know, spatially, but it also probes and connects to memory and to possibility.

Francisco 31:03 It feels like, one could say that movement dimensionalizes this observation? Yeah. Especially thinking back, like, all of those dance and movement based performance artists are quite foundational to me in many ways, even especially some local people like Margaret Dragoo, or... And one of the things that, I think, is also an undercurrent for me, that's exciting to sort of find echoes of is the notion of the score. You know, what you're important as a way to annotate observations I feel like so many of those, Trisha Brown Simone 40 performances I think, I think they are born out of an observation of some kind and an observation and movement you know, whether walking, you know, like down the side of the street or something as complex as trio A.

Barbara 31:57 Yeah, I'm glad you brought

that up. That's a good reminder. And I think that concept or the the potential of score has come back around I see a lot of people using scoring and walking based work but also dance and other other just discipline so I don't know maybe there's a maybe there's something there in the idea of a score that has a connection with hypothesis or something that we could relate to other processes of involvement and investigation outside of art. What do you think, Jess?

Jess 32:45 Well, score means music, right?

Barbara Maybe. . . .

Francisco Taking a cue from sort of music, some performance artists, we tend to work through our actions by sort of writing them down. Not not like there are some lyrical, I think, intuitions to it, but it's basically a way to give yourself an instruction, you know, so it's sort of a script. Yeah, I will prep but not narrative. So I will press myself against the wall and I will trace my profile as I move until my body can't do it anymore. You know, like, if I if I'm able to write it, then I'm able to commit to it as a body type of like making dinner. Maybe not, though, maybe in a kind of wonderfully round-about way like that, like the smashing of the windows that sort of like dimensionalize it from the back

Barbara 33:32 The 45 minute dinner.

Jess 33:34 You know, in the previous install, or the previous episodes of leaning out of windows, right, we had we always have a theme and we had sort of sub themes that as each group would tend to have their their own sort of motto or something like that. I was really taking on the idea of stupidity because, you know, in, in science, you know, it's very important to be stupid sometimes. Not only not only because mistakes can be very very creative regenerative as it were, because you know, if you if you go around thinking you know it all the time, you're going to make bad mistakes instead of a good mistakes.

Barbara 34:24 Yeah.

Jess 34:25 I definitely wanted to work with some some version of observational stupidity or stupid stupid observations or something. Has a nice panache.

Barbara 34:39 Well, you know, that phrase, there's no such thing as a stupid question. Maybe we should put that on its head. And maybe we should support the proposition that there are a lot of stupid questions. Yes. That's a good thing.

Jamie 34:55 Yeah. I mean, I really like Francisco's articulation of, of it as a movement dimensionalizing observation, I thought that was a really wonderful phrase. And I think the way that I think about, like this kind of engagement with physics in particular, is around dark matter. And I'm still confused about what dark matter is, and the way that it has been communicated. Sounds like it's the dumbest thing in the world, like, if not the, I guess, dumbest thing in the universe, because the equations don't work for the mass of the universe. And so you develop this thing that's unknown, which is dark matter. And that's 90% of the mass of the universe. That sounds like your equation doesn't work. And your laws of physics are kind of screwed up. Yeah. And I know that that's my misunderstanding of dark matter. I imagine it's a much more complex and rigorous explanation. But it's this this idea of the quantification of what we don't know. And the fact that it's so much of the universe's

Jess 35:59 I know, I know, it's. . . it's, I know, my expertise as well. But my understanding is that basically, the whole the whole reason we believe there is such a thing as dark matter is that the astronomers couldn't explain the motions of the galaxies. doesn't doesn't make any sense. And so there is. . . there is an alternative, which is to say that the gravity doesn't actually obey the inverse square law exactly. But that. . . that's more disturbing to physicists, than, than the idea of saying, well,

there's this stuff that's out there, that's five times more plentiful than the stuff we know about. I mean, basically it's a choice between absurdities. Another thing is, you know, something absurd is going to be true, right? I mean, we, we were all pretty comfortable with the idea that something that is outrageous and absurd, is probably the case. Yeah, there's been many, many, many. I mean, nothing can be weirder than quantum mechanics. And yet, it seems to be the case. So that's just too bad for common sense. This is the thing that I keep having to harp on, whenever whenever I'm trying to explain people about physics. Because there's many things in physics that people say well, that just completely defies common sense; this is ridiculous. Yes, it is definitely not compatible with common sense. Too bad for common sense! When you think about it, what is common sense? Common sense is the accumulated experience of big slow things like us, right? Yeah. So why would imagine that it has anything to do with little bitty things that are moving very fast...but this really upset some people and people who are upset by it don't get over it doesn't matter how many times you explain it just don't get over it. Things have to do...things have to make sense.

Jamie 38:21 Which there's this...there's a book that I read called the engineers of jihad and it's a sociologist that that did a study of jihad ease educations. And so it was the most radical violent jihadists be were disproportionately engineers and they they theorize that it's this need for cognitive closure right there's need for an understanding of things working and then on the left side of like the the red was the red brigade or Red Army Faction Yeah, the Red Army Faction disproportionately lawyers and literary professors were able to to hold these contradictions in their minds and pursue justice that way as opposed to this kind of fundamentalist kind of life engineering jihadi fascinating in its head it's colored how I deal with engineers from from my own that's really kind of applaud the the ability in people to hold contradictions

in their minds.

Francisco 39:31 There...there's no there's no fascism without engineering. I mean, didn't the wall got Trump elected? The notion of an impossible wall, the notion of a completely stupid wall...

Jamie 39:44 Yeah. Let's make it simple.

...and that's all that was transcribed by <https://otter.ai> - I guess there's a limit. We did continue for another 5 minutes or so.