

2014

Potential Energy and the Three Odalisques

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POTENTIAL ENERGY AND THE THREE ODALISQUES

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Art in Sculpture + Extended Media at Virginia
Commonwealth University.

by
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Richmond, Virginia
May 2014

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ABSTRACT

POTENTIAL ENERGY AND THE THREE ODALISQUES

By Roxanne A. J. Yamins, MFA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art in Sculpture + Extended Media at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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The goal of this paper is to examine some ways in which BEHAVIOR, POTENTIAL ENERGY, and EMPATHY are critical components in my thinking and work. The impetus for my work is an investigation of how these three components can be manifested in visually expressive and powerful states. My masters thesis, *The Three Odalisques*, is an attempt at making a space and world which privileges these components and the potential for art to express these ideas. This paper is divided into two parts. The first section is a formal analysis of the pieces in my work from my MFA thesis show. The second section is a compilation of disparate content that has resonance with my work.

PART 1

BEHAVIOR : RANGE, GESTURE, AND BEHAVIORAL APPARATUS

Of critical concern for me is the issue of seeing behavior. Can one see behavior without having to witness an event? Can an object that has the potential to move convey its power in its static condition? What are the mental machinations that occur in an observer when encountering such a static object? What is the relationship between seeing an object and your expectation about the power and meaning it potentially holds?

Range is the spectrum of how an object operates, in its conduct and content. This addresses its activity from its completely inert static state to its fully functional mode. It also addresses the spectrum of an object's meaning. Range very critically includes the in-between, the transitional, and the liminal states of the object's being between these two ends of stasis and motion. It is asserted that this entire behavioral spectrum can be revealed simultaneously by observing the object - as image or object - at rest. Range is both the passive and active conduct people or things express. A good image or object permits and stimulates the individual's imagination to envision a version of all that is really there.

Examples of Range are seeing a tool or person simultaneously in action and at rest. Range is the way the manner in which a person takes his hand out of his pocket to grasp another's hand. Range is the way people stand and wait for things. Range is revealed in the meaning of shared rituals in everyday life. Imagine sharing a feast of Timpano (an elaborate meat pie) with close family, juxtaposed with the image from Titus Andronicus where a family is eating a meat pie made of their offspring.



A Gesture is a particular instance - a snapshot - in the Range of an object's operation. A Gesture can be a small, personal, and intimate behavior unique to an individual, or it can be a universally recognized indicator. Less purposeful gestures often offer access to the broadest possible set of meanings and reveal underlying core content about the individual who is gesturing. To harness and condense the power of these gestures was the initial motivation for producing behavioral apparati.

Behavioral Apparati are tools for amplifying and exploring the behavior of an object - its Range and the Gestural elements. The presence of these apparati open up the existence of previously unknown and unrecognized particulars of the object's behavior. They present aspects of lawlessness, ambiguity, freedom, and play - allowing for the making of something novel and personal.

POTENTIAL ENERGY

I want to construct opportunities for people to see potential energy. Potential Energy is the storage of a force that when released causes the activity or change in state of an object from one point of its behavioral spectrum to another. But how can you see energy? The concept of energy is necessary to envision all the states in the range of an object's behavior. Seeing energy is equivalent to imagining the object changing.

Energy is neither created nor destroyed, but the manipulation - the containment and the release of energy - is what generates powerful, different, and emergent behaviors. Much like windmills collect wind and store energy, my interest is in creating apparatus that actually and visually express this potential energy. The amount of behavior collected in a given arena is proportional to the potential Range of an object's behavior.

How can inherent human gestures be utilized to collect energy? To collect this force or capital of energy (a holding place of potential) - I have been making mechanisms and scapes that function to combine principles of some basic laws of physics with human gestures. Latent in the events of everyday life is the constant dynamic flow of energy between agencies. Together two or more people can forge energy - more powerful and volatile with the tension of opposing forces - to produce this potential. Energy can be generated by minute contact between two surfaces. Even a hug or handshake produces sufficient pressure to be harnessed. By producing apparatus made for reciprocating conduct - like aiding the process of a handshake - the physical and natural properties of the world interact in unexpected, practically malfunctioned and revealing ways.

EMPATHY, MATERIALS, AND OBJECT CHOICE

As stated above energy allows one to see the possibility of envisioning change in the state of an object. Empathy is the inherent capacity of the observer to experience (to a greater or lesser degree) the experience of the other object. Therefore you can better and more fully appreciate, participate, and share in the meaning of what is going on.

The criteria for materials and objects in *The Three Odalisques* rely upon a great degree of empathetic potential. The materials and behaviors associated with the work have 1) a possibility for mental projection and 2) a pliability and potential for energy exchange (work). Combined, these two criteria allow for one to imagine the energy exchange or potential impact he or she could have with these objects. These components can be further divided into constitution (make-up), color, surface value, and design/ scale.

The constitution or material make up is evaluated in the following way. A component exists on a scale of Potential Energy Exchange (P.E.E.). On the scale of the P.E.E. I think of two opposing states /behaviors, for example, rigidity versus pliability. That which has great P.E.E. rates high in its ability to accept force well. For instance if you think of a hand gesture associated with a rubber band or grease - the potential for exchange is great because impact or exchange of work for the hand is possible.



Most importantly, because these properties are visible, one's ability to project and empathize with his behavior is very accessible. This quality is perhaps most evident in the 25 gallons of machine grease I used in *Apparatus For Reciprocity*, or in the exchange system I designed into the looping conveyor belt for two in *Ass-O-Matic*. Likewise, the green high density petroleum

foam used in *Odalisque for Two*, exists on the far end of the P.E.E. These materials have a massive scape for which P.E.E. can occur because force can be released into squeezing the foam, yielding physical and visual impact. The P.E.E. in *Stand and Odalisque* is also present due to its upholstered inner surface. The concave form allows for the body to be encapsulated within a soft, cushioned, push-able place. Its outer surface - boney and thin in its constitution - acts as a counter to its warm and welcoming inside. The suit suspended inside is composed with bellows and inflatables - objects which are made to receive and store pressure (force).

For *Odalisquing*, the spring form acts as a visual indicator for the bouncing that is possible - an activity that relies on the storage and potential of force. The three activities as prescribed by each piece - horizontal work for two (*Odalisque For Two*), gestural positing/bellowing

(*Stand and Odalisque*), and bouncing (*Odalisquing*) - are pervasive and universal behaviors.

If utilized in unorthodox and incongruous ways, these mundane and shared rituals reveal absurd, humorous and simultaneously serious investigations into components of the human condition. For example, in a work previous to *The Three Odaliskes*, *Apparatus For Reciprocity* (*Machine For Pushing Machine Grease*)



this idea is exemplified. This piece used pure force and mechanics to push and give back to machine grease - a material which exists to push other bodies around by reducing friction. In *Odalisque For Two*, friction and bodies at work allows for two constituent points from which to start. Two bodies poised horizontally and parallel push closer and closer working with the other, and against the force of dense petroleum foam to squeeze and store force. Machines made for reciprocal and partnered conduct provide ample opportunity for energy exchange and for funny or strange parallels between bodies to flourish. This apparatus uses resistance and builds pressure to equalize and mediate the desire for closeness/ human contact and the laws of our universe that get in our way. *Odalisque For Two* functions on the principles of friction and compression. As two people move closer the material and space between people is compressed,



causing an increase in pressure, and a greater speed/ force as experienced by the users upon release. Through shared interface, work, and expended energy a struggle ensues, building trust, and intimacy unique to partnership. Using partnership as a model, it was important to make something where the force required yields a positive energy status (i.e. greater force upon release).

In the *The Three Odalisques* colors and surface values employed are meant to induce an automatic mental

and bodily projection. The neutral fabrics and skin-toned vinyls used in all three pieces are an easy and accessible opportunity for these projections to begin to take hold. Obvious and awkward parallels start to develop as one imagines laying on cushions made of fabric that are fashioned after an idea of human skin (see *Odalisque for Two*), or as one projects sitting and bouncing on a cushion that mirrors an approximate color and feel of a human buttocks (*Odalisquing*).



With this show I was eager to play with objects and structures which engage dialogue of varying levels regarding the body and its potential

force. In *Odalisque for Two*, two identical armatures of steel (mirrored in locale) imply a direct contact and activity with bodies, which receive and support most of the work / force. In *Stand and Odalisque* a steel armature of an abstracted body form supports an item of apparel to be worn by a body. And lastly, in *Odalisquing*, a mannequin is the most direct and least nuanced of the forms that act as a stand in for the body.

Though the mannequin is least sophisticated in its constitution, its cheap and ubiquitous nature is essential to the issue of display. *The Three Odalisques* is a trio in a display room of sorts, and is in direct discussion with the dialectics of art exhibition spaces, consumer display rooms, and conventions / trade shows. The role of the mannequin is especially essential to embodying the issue of display and desire. At any given time, mannequins are both the symbol and form of the ideal body, and are typically outfitted with tools and apparel for the desired activity. The mannequin always represents what *you* can have and do and acts as a palette for you to reflect your possibilities. An entity for which you can project your possibilities is a

seductive form in much the way a mirror functions. The use of mirrored surfacing for the pedestal in *Odalisque For Two* compounds this issue of projection and seduction to make a place for the image - of both object and viewer - to exponentiate. Images of seduction and desire have naturally been a topic for art, culture and consumer exchange for centuries.

The Odalisque is one excellent example of this type of image. Historically the Odalisque is an image of seduction and desire, and like the mannequin and any other canon - was idealized to further this function. *La Grand Odalisque* by Ingres is the quintessential Odalisque figure - alluring in its elongated nature, and beckoning in its blank stare. Like a mannequin, Ingres' Odalisque was noted as having "no bone, no muscle, no life" while Baudelaire described it as being "the product of a deeply sensuous nature". (The Annotated Mona Lisa, pg 70) This figure, a female regaling in a welcoming recline - displays an invitation for sex and evokes the projection for this desire in the viewer. The activity of sex is the ultimate work that two people can do together - an exchange more intimate and powerful in its potential result than most any other activity.

PART 2

The following section notes some contemporary cultural references that influenced the development of this thesis.

TWO MANNEQUINS IN THE 20TH CENTURY



Two narratives that center around the life and story of the mannequin are Alfred Hitchcock's *The After Hours* from *The Twilight Zone* (1960, episode 34), and *Mannequin* (1937) - starring Joan Crawford, Spencer Tracy). Its remake *Mannequin* (1987) stars Kim Cattrall and Andre McCarthy. Both stories focus on the struggle of a mannequin to come to terms with the difference between display and function - the experience of the absence of life in comparison to life and activity.







SONGS FOR BOUNCING

This is chart of a small portion of contemporary songs that use the word “bouncing” or some variation thereof. It is an indication of the universal desire and empathetic nature of that I point to in *Odalisquing*.

Imran Khan- Bounce Billo Akon- Body Bounce Transporter 3- (Bounce) song at the gas Scary Movie 3- Rock Rock Bounce Maleek Berry ft wizkid- New Bounce Step up 2- Final Dance song weWurk- Bounce it Biggity Dostana- Shut up and Bounce Lil Bow Wow- Bounce With me	Tyga - Bouncin’ on my Dick Calvin Harris - Bounce jj project - Bounce Justice vs Dj Funk - Bounce dat ass MSTRKRFT- Bounce Dev- Booty Bounce Juicy J - Bounce it R Kelly - Ignition Koren Dj Doc - Bounce With Me
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STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION

The series Star Trek The Next Generation uses concentrated language which describes fluctuations in energies and bodies as a constant meter of status and environment. Gesture and nature of human conduct is a I think about the world around me and the work I make using a similar lingual framework. The following log points to a small portion of the moments in which my interests regarding *The Three Odalisques* and Star Trek intersect well.

STAR TREK NEXT GENERATION LOG

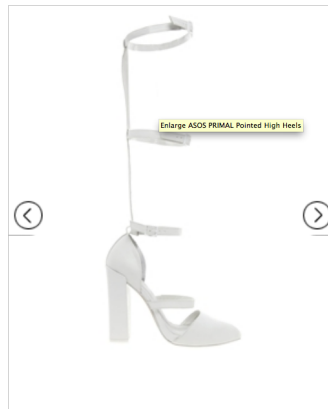
Episode title	Season	episode	minute;second	world/phrase/ content
Where No One Has Gone Before	1	6	23:12	“acceleration and condensations of force”
Where Silence Has Lease	2	2	30:40	“what is this gestural language?”
Loud as a Whisper	2	5	10:00, 14:00	“thats the way I feel exactly” empathy as shown with literal hand to chest contact
The Schizoid Man	2	6	2:00 16:06	“ a fine full dignified beard” “when i stroke the beard thusly do I not appear more intellectual?” “transfer the wealth of my great intellect into this machine”
Unification Part 2 Cause and Effect The Perfect Mate I, Borg The Inner Light	5	8, 18, 21, 23, 25	10:20, 15:12, 17:23, 33:12, 30:40	“energy status exchange”
A Fist Full of Datas	6	8	6:9, 14:40	beards and bangs as manifestations as appendages to gesture with

REAL AND PROPOSED P.E.E. MACHINES

REAL P.E.E. MACHINES
see-saw, typewriter, bell, button, pedal/handle, rocking chair, exercise machines hugging machine (Temple Grandin), organ machine - Wilhelm Reich, inflatables, hydraulics

DAFS prototype fender for US Navy

“Our research and development activities focus on identifying new materials and processes that generate lightweight chemical and biological resistant laminate structures for both passive and active chemical and biological defense.”



ASOS PRIMAL Pointed High Heels
\$84.66

FREE SHIPPING BOTH WAYS »

Heels by ASOS Collection

- Leather-look upper
- Smooth matte finish
- Knee-high design
- Slim pin-buckle straps
- Cutaway sides
- High block heel

ABOUT ASOS COLLECTION

Directional, exciting and diverse, the **ASOS Collection** makes and breaks the fashion rules. Scouring the globe for inspiration, our London based Design Team is inspired by fashion's most covetable trends; providing you with a cutting edge wardrobe season upon season.

White ▾

PROPOSED P.E.E. MACHINES

Shotty Shaper: When I blow my hot air into you this is what it looks like. Use your diaphragm to b(el)low hot into someone, What is the shape of your shotty? Now giving a shotty can be an efficient, sanitary , and overall more fulfilling experience with the shotty shaper. Choose from heart, star, rainbow, abstract, red blue, yellow black white, you can store your shotty as a gift for someone else now

Hugging Machine - - increase collect force, **compressed air and grease vest**

Hugging puts pressure on grease vest which is stored in inflatable units and more potential energy collected

Central Conduct and Core Radiator (aura) - mists and perfumes and radiates a choice of core components to fit your essence as a person

The Practicele Apparatus Line

(practice + practical)

What is to have a practice?

Personal autonomy and labido→ what kind of work are you doing, what is your practice

A line that has the ethos/ sells personal agency

Your practice is your unique code of ethics character and constitution as a person manifested in the things you do and make with yourself and other people.

The fingerprint of your practice are the things and your impressions created by the events/experiences /tones generated of your output. Your practice is revealed in both the involuntary or unconscious gestures and in the deliberate and structured routine of your daily life.

Your Practicele Line are the wearable item allows for the general posing/ gestural positing to become more integrated into your everyday clothing and conduct..

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