

PARTS

OF

SPEECH

PUBLIC FICTION  
WITH TRIPLE CANOPY

JAN 22–JUN 9, 2019

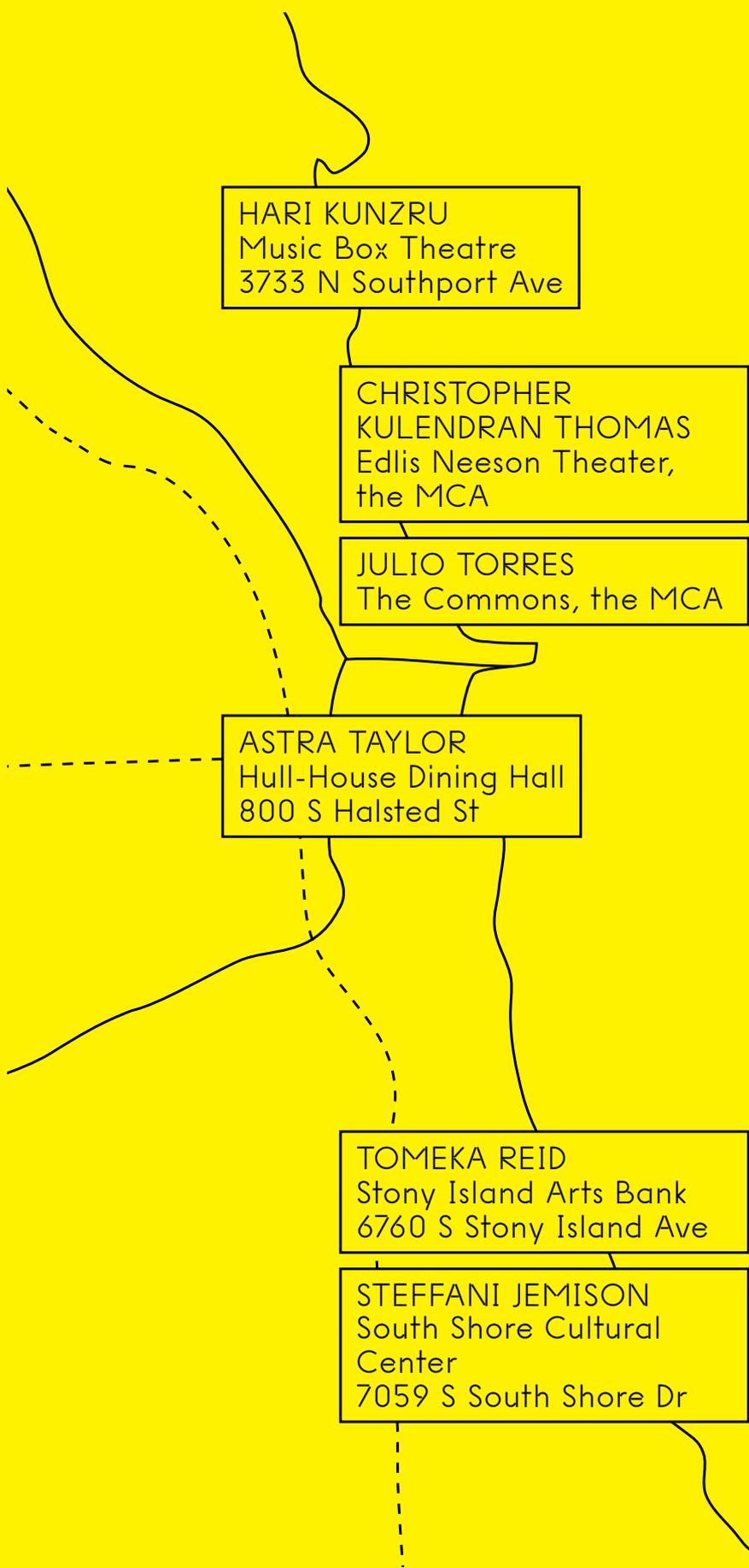
In our contemporary time, what kinds of speeches—and speakers—are likely to win trust, acquire authority, and mobilize audiences? Over the course of four months, Los Angeles-based Public Fiction and New York-based magazine *Triple Canopy* stage a series of experimental lectures and video artworks that address the use of public speech to shape opinion, create intimacy, establish authority, and orchestrate movements.

The project's title, *Parts of Speech*, indicates the way the elements of the exhibition—six speeches and six video artworks—consider the various components of public speech: language, speaker, location, distribution, and audience. Six commissioned artists including filmmakers, comedians, novelists, and musicians experiment with the form of a lecture, resulting in monologues, stump speeches, startup manifestos, stand-up acts, and musical performances that take place at sites designed for assembly. These presentations test the tactics that entice and persuade—or provoke and alienate. Six video artworks similarly showcase elements of public speech, including its distribution through media platforms.

*Parts of Speech* is by Public Fiction (Lauren Mackler) with *Triple Canopy*. *The Commons Artist Project: Public Fiction with Triple Canopy* is organized by January Parkos Arnall, Curator of Public Programs, with Christy LeMaster, Assistant Curator of Public Programs.

## PUBLIC SPEECHES

Public speeches take place at sites of public convening throughout Chicago and are live streamed to the Commons at the MCA.



## ABOUT THE COMMONS

The Commons places artistic and civic exchange at the heart of the museum. Here we encourage formal and informal dialogue as well as interactions among artists, visitors, and communities. The Commons is host to an array of programs, community meetings, and a biannual artist project.

Lead support for the Commons is provided by Rebecca W. Knight and Lester B. Knight, Elizabeth Morse Genius Charitable Trust, and the Thomas Wilson—Jill Garling Foundation.



ASTRA TAYLOR  
Friday, February 15, 2019  
5:30 pm  
Hull-House Dining Hall

Money is a form of speech that enables the voices of some to resonate while suppressing the voices of others. For this event, filmmaker Astra Taylor asks how we can amplify the voices of millions of Americans who are debtors: those shamed for owing money and pressured to toil at low-wage jobs, exploited by creditors, and ignored by politicians. The Debt Collective, an organization founded by Taylor and collaborator Laura Hanna, will facilitate a debtor's assembly. This forum will enable debtors to share their experiences and understand how creditors contribute to (and profit from) inequality. The Debt Collective seeks to turn indebtedness into a source of solidarity. Its digital platform automates the confounding process of contesting debts, aiding in the cancellation of hundreds of millions of dollars of student debt since 2012. Taylor will introduce the assembly by discussing the balance of speaking and paying attention to the speech of others.

TOMEKA REID  
Friday, May 17, 2019  
6 pm  
Stony Island Arts Bank

Many of the most meaningful aspects of music can be indiscernible to listeners. They are, however, apparent to composers and performers, as they trace a lineage between the past and present. These musical elements enable musicians to create new work by quoting, honoring, and remaking history. Tomeka Reid, a cellist and composer, is especially concerned with the reception of jazz and improvised music. She wonders how, without advocacy and education, this music will continue to be heard, and by whom. Will the stories of musicians continue to be recorded, and will the references that infuse and enrich the music be understood? How might speech capture music, and how might music act as speech? Reid will ask how languages and communities of speakers can look backward while moving forward, and who bears the responsibility for assembling and disseminating the history of the music. She will be joined by Taylor Ho Bynum, Mike Reed, and Ugochi Nwaogwugwu.

HARI KUNZRU  
Tuesday, March 12, 2019  
7:30 pm  
Music Box Theatre

Novelist Hari Kunzru's lecture considers truth and distortion in public address. With fascism on the rise in Europe in the mid-1930s, Bertolt Brecht published "Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth," an essay on how readers could be turned into revolutionaries. Brecht asserted that writers must be able to recognize, proclaim, and weaponize the truth, disseminating it to those "in whose hands it will become effective." Kunzru's lecture will respond to Brecht's essay by considering today's greatest difficulties in writing the truth. In 2018, the main obstacle to shaping public opinion in the United States isn't the kind of censorship practiced by the Nazis, but the proliferation of distortions, misinformation, and harassment campaigns. The result is cynicism and the degradation of political and personal agency—for writers as well as readers. Kunzru's lecture will employ two voices competing for attention: one communicating the truth, the other undermining that effort, challenging the very notion of a shared reality.

CHRISTOPHER KULENDRAN THOMAS  
Tuesday, May 21, 2019  
6 pm  
Edlis Neeson Theater, the MCA

Christopher Kulendran Thomas, in collaboration with Annika Kuhlmann, will present the corporate philosophy of New Eelam, a subscription-based housing service to launch this year. New Eelam aims to reshape the global real-estate market by providing subscribers with access to—and collective ownership of—a revolving portfolio of housing in cities around the world. Thomas, an artist and the CEO of New Eelam, has described the company as a vehicle for reimagining citizenship in response to the dislocation of populations that has been accelerated by emerging technologies. But he has never fully articulated the political experiment that is at the core of his company. In his lecture, Thomas will outline the economic paradigm that New Eelam advances, which hinges on the use of technologies to transform how capital is raised, assets are owned, profits are prioritized, and corporations are valued.

STEFFANI JEMISON  
Friday, April 26, 2019  
6 pm  
South Shore Cultural Center

What can gestures and expressions convey that language cannot? Artist Steffani Jemison will reflect on this question in a performance that engages with the rich history of mime and the role of mimicry in addressing audiences. To those unfamiliar, mime might seem to impose severe limits on what can be conveyed; in fact, like many forms of dance, ritual, or theater, the practice seeks to liberate communication from speech, establishing bonds that transcend language. Jemison will focus on mime ministry, which combines physical theater and gospel recordings and, in the past two decades, has become a fixture of African American church congregations. Drawing on the work of Étienne Decroux, who popularized mime in the mid-twentieth century and pitted physical movement against language, Jemison will ask how we can use our bodies to amplify and extend the reach of speech.

JULIO TORRES  
Friday, May 24, 2019  
6 pm  
The Commons, the MCA

Comedian Julio Torres reflects on how comedy acts as a vehicle for criticism, persuasion, and even manipulation. Drawing on his experience as a comic and writer for shows such as *Saturday Night Live*, Torres will consider how stand-up routines and sketches establish expectations, roles, and styles of communication for performers as well as audiences. As trust in traditional figures of authority has dwindled, comedians have a unique opportunity to express unvarnished opinions. And while late-night monologues and YouTube clips might enable comedians to foster public debate, comedians also tell viewers what they want to hear. To succeed in comedy is to create personas and messages that satisfy the desires and confirm the beliefs of audiences. Torres asks how audiences might come to understand themselves to be shaped by comedy by stepping outside themselves as they watch the performer.

VIDEO ARTWORKS IN  
THE COMMONS

Rami George  
(American, b. 1989)

*Untitled (Saturday, October 16, 1993)*,  
2015

HD video (color, sound)  
Courtesy of the artist

In *Untitled (Saturday, October 16, 1993)*, Rami George highlighted a newspaper article about a custody battle involving his father retrieving him and his sister from the Oklahoma-based cult the Samaritan Foundation. George's video addresses the persuasiveness of cult leaders, the proliferation of ideas in print, and the significance of having a profound experience published for all to see.

Rodney McMillian  
(American, b. 1969)

*Untitled (the Great Society) I*, 2006  
Single-channel video (color, sound)  
Courtesy of the artist and Susanne  
Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

In *Untitled (the Great Society) I*, Rodney McMillian reenacted former President Lyndon B. Johnson's 1964 University of Michigan commencement speech. His restaging stresses the influence of a speaker's appearance in framing the content of a speech. McMillian's work emphasizes that history and politics are shaped by performances of authenticity and command of appearances.

Nicole Miller  
(American, b. 1982)

*Untitled*, 2011  
QuickTime animation video (color,  
sound)  
Courtesy of the artist and Koenig  
& Clinton Gallery

Nicole Miller's video shows her toggling between the windows on her desktop, viewing the media clips that animate her work. The assembly of moving images reflects her nonhierarchical approach to research, but also demonstrates the cacophony of public speech available in the digital age. She compiled and super-imposed clips pulled from the web and from films, highlighting the manner in which media is distributed on internet platforms and consumed privately by the public.

Liz Magic Laser  
(American, b. 1981)

*The Thought Leader*, 2015  
Single-channel video (color, sound)  
Courtesy of the artist and Various  
Small Fires, Los Angeles

In *The Thought Leader*, Liz Magic Laser used the TED Talk format as a platform for a monologue adapted from the Russian novel *Notes from the Underground* (1864) by Fyodor Dostoevsky. TED Talks are speeches that typically propose idealistic solutions to issues—but are often criticized for failing to offer tangible steps toward their utopian visions. Dostoevsky's novel, which argues that the individual can never be content with a collective vision of utopia, shares a similar critique of idealism.

David Levine  
(American, b. 1970)

*Some of the People, All of the Time*, 2018  
Video (color, sound)  
Excerpt of performance  
documentation from the Brooklyn  
Museum, May 23, 2018  
Courtesy of the artist

Since 2016, David Levine has fixated on the idea of fake crowds, a topic that has grown in prominence in the context of presidential rallies. *Some of the People, All of the Time* is a documentary of Levine's recent work about the timely issues of paid protesters, Twitter bots, and other deceptive manifestations of the masses. In addition to this video, the museum hired Levine's custom-crowd company GetPeople to regularly populate the museum with visitors tailor-made for specific events.

Videofreex  
(American, formed 1969)

*Fred Hampton: Black Panthers in  
Chicago, 1969*  
Video (black and white, sound)  
Courtesy of Video Data Bank at the  
School of the Art Institute of Chicago

In the late 1960s, the first portable video cameras became available, offering a generation of video artists and citizen journalists the opportunity to shift mainstream perceptions. The Videofreex, a pioneering media collective, conducted a wide range of interviews from 1969 to 1978. This 1969 interview shows Fred Hampton, deputy chairman of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party, just weeks before he was killed.

# Commons Artist Project

MUSEUM OF  
CONTEMPORARY ART  
CHICAGO

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