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“PEMDAS”
People Everywhere Made Decisions About Sums

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Arts

by

Lucas Lee Coffin

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2017

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The thesis of Lucas Lee Coffin is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2017

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my partner, Courtney Patrice Coffin. Thank you for teaching me that good education is something to cherish and strive for. Thanks for teaching everyone you meet how to find light in the darkest situations.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“PEMDAS”
People Everywhere Made Decisions About Sums

by

Lucas Lee Coffin

Master of Fine Arts in Visual Art

University of California, San Diego, 2017

Professor Brian Cross, Chair

Practicing art has been the apparatus to educate myself about the complexities of care, social exclusion, and inequality. I try to provide a lens for my viewers with an oblique angle to view over and beyond utilitarian behavior. Past research and works where I have collaborated with a high school student with cerebral palsy and a specialized academic instructor resurface in relation to a contemporary film by Kazuo Hara. With the collaborative project, the educational apparatus is a tool for inclusion. Mary Anne Doane’s book helps to illustrate how the camera method can be used t

understand modernity. The pressure created by a set of behaviorist/Taylorist curriculum where there is scripted dialog and publicized reading ranking of students according to their academic “levels” of achievements, relates an entirely new unjust meritocratic system. The major distinction from Taylorism, and my collaborative project, is embedded in the “school-to-work,” or “industry embedded education.” The project was designed through an anti-Taylorist lens. In conclusion, my thesis exhibition is an attempt to collapse many different modes of production. PEMDAS serves as a broken empathy machine, a void evoking questions of control. The power behind educational planning and the consequences of arbitrary goals rooted in Taylorism.

Introduction -*PEMDAS*

The acronym *PEMDAS* (People everywhere made decisions about sums, or please excuse my dear aunt sally), derived from the mathematical rules for the order of operations, is the title of my thesis exhibition. The exhibition is an attempt to collapse many different modes of production; be it sound design, moving images, narration, and appropriation into one space that echoes the segregated classroom. I am interested in the physical and metaphysical power relationships between materials, people, communication, and how teaching philosophy intersects the visual art practice.

PEMDAS is an all-inclusive space for viewers to reflect on the shortcomings of an institution within an institution. The materials provided offer an immersive sensory experience bringing awareness to the over programming of students with regiments of utilitarian knowledge that is aimed to propel one through flawed systems based on merit. America is a meritocracy. According to this ideology, so long as a person is willing to work hard, she or he can find success and happiness while overcoming adversities and combating circumstance. This is not necessarily the case for most people, but still majority of the members in our society believe it to be true.

My background substantially impacts the way I understand and produce work. In this exhibition I am channeling a small part of my past who still works construction, programs electronic lottery games at a bingo hall, is a help-desk technician for a network communications company, is an assistant preparator at a sculpture park, and a teaching artist for a nonprofit company that employs inner city youth to design and make public artworks. Most relevant to my current work, includes my time working as a paraprofessional in the public education system with students who have disabilities. I try

not to look at my previous occupations as stepping-stones, or paychecks at the end of the week, but as invaluable sites of learning. In my own reflections I realize, despite coming from a lower socio economic status, I have always had a person to fulfill a support role, to act as my one to one. My Thesis exhibition, *PEMDAS*, is an embodiment in these sites of learning, and simultaneously explores a surplus of examples in one to one relationships. This text is a lens for my viewers to see how the aesthetic choices I make are informed through care ethics and educationalist theory.

Dirty Manila

*This bureaucratic culture fosters the pervasive assumption that when students misbehave or achieve poorly, they must be “fixed” because the problem inheres in the students or their families, not in the social ecology of the school, grade or classroom.
(Jonathan Kozal, 2005)*

The following text is the audio transcription of the narrator’s words in the film

Dirty Manila, which I wrote and produced:

You were just raising sand, and I threw stones. Time to spill the beans.
Its cold to my hand but I cant help myself. Burdens that gets lifted and float away, spectacles and a yellow brick road. Can time fill this void.

I was a hod carrier for a few years, bricks all day mixing mud. Sixteen tons. Hooby doo Habby Da. The grand master mason would always say I only need you guys from the neck down, do me a favor, shut the fuck up and get to work. If you were slow, or lagging, he would spit tobacco in the motor you mixed, he would scream “mud”, if you really pissed him off you could expect a brick thrown at your head. But that’s what hard hats are for right. Are you fucking retarded, this aint your first rodeo.

I wasted a lot of his sand, his water, I made a lot of bad mixes
That job had its moments; I might work it again if I had to, for now this tool works better as a compass.

This is boutique motel in Twenty-Nine palms, box of tissues, two beds, boots, Eric Garner on the TV. U2 supposedly stayed here when recording the Joshua tree. With or without you.

That’s Amboy crater, its 250 ft. high, last erupted about 10,000 years ago. It takes about an hour or so to walk there from the road. Bring water, a camera. If you climb it, stand in the middle and scream as loud as you can, you’ll here a really nice echo. From the brim, you can see the specs that make up the town of Amboy, you can see salt fields reflecting in the sunlight. If you focus you can see here.

I would always bring my guitar when teaching this one class, we would sit in a half circle and sing songs together about the weather, who is absent, who is present, say good morning, start the day.
It was a classroom designed for students who are on the spectrum. I had a lot of one on one time with one of the students, he wasn’t always allowed outside, the staff, and administrative team, and myself, thought that on his

bad days, it would be best to keep him indoors incase he would act out. He didn't get out much.

I sat down in front of him one day on a stool, eye to eye, and tuned my guitar, I smiled and strummed an A minor chord. He punched me right in the face. You know when your eyes fill up with water after you have been hit in the nose. One of the other students asks why are you crying? I said why did you do that. He punched me again.

This student whose words will never be heard and there communication often misunderstood as retaliation. I understand the need to use behavior when words are not enough. The perception of behavior carries so much weight. Be it good, or bad, it is aftermath.

People always say, you must have the patience of a saint. No That takes a special kind of person. No I have heard a lot of people in education and healthcare, law enforcement play those cards, but it's a job. Its a check at the end of the week.

The administration would pay the aides and teachers to attend MANDT training, we would go to these all day seminars, to learn how to properly deescalate a situation, how to be proactive rather than reactive.

You basically practice glorified arm bars and lots of other safety restraints on each other all day. The reality is that in a heated situation all this stuff goes out the window. When you're done your name will look good on a certificate. Certified but not really accountable.

If in the classroom budget, rooms where equipped with different kinds of safety and learning tools, screens that act as barriers are really common. The function of these walls is to channel ones attention for those that need a separate space to work. They are separators to supposedly help control a classroom or to isolate as a way for that student to focus on work. On the contrary it is a type of punishment. Some classrooms contain a black or blue wrestling mat, folded up, tucked away, always ready, easily accessible. This only has one purpose.

I'll never forget doing this exercise in writing, this one student really hated any stylus or pencil that you would put into his hand. He had to be coaxed in to writing using positive reinforcements, somewhere in his education it was discovered he would work for treats, a piece of candy, or a couple of potato chips, bow wow, bow wow.

Do you want some candy, No. Do you want some chips, No. Do you want to play on the iPad No. What do you want?

Well write your name, all you have to do is write your name, like this,

write your name a few times and then you can go outside. Who are you?
Silence.

Tension rises, so many words, so meaningfully meaningless. One caregiver is directing, I'm trying to direct, and another is frantically searching for something in the closet at the back of the room. The noncompliant student is outnumbered. I can feel my heart beating, I want to yell at him, I want everyone in the room to stop, and I'm trying to remain calm. The other caregiver loses her temper first, she slaps her hands on the desk, DO YOUR WORK!

The other aid found what she was looking for, it's a manila folder with stains on it. You angrily flip your desk, stand up, and try to run out of the room, No We block you, so you fall to ground, you try and crawl through our legs, No. Your drug to the mat in the corner of the room, you thrash and bloody your own nose.

Inside the manila folder there are tiny shapes, its some kind of word puzzle, you have to match the shapes to the words. We press your body into the black mat, My hand on your shoulder blade, my other hand wrapped around your fist. Someone is holding your legs still, and another person is on your other side. You will do your work, hand over hand, we match the shapes. We are helping you.

From one void to the next, the wrong information transcends. In this facade of light and endless spectrum of colors there are no subversions, only shadows that cast, and follow.
You were just raising sand, and I threw stones.

The initial content of *Dirty Manila* bears much weight in the exhibition *PEMDAS*.

The functionality, tone, and creation of this piece are foundational in understanding how *PEMDAS* came to be. Therefore, in the exhibition space it is front and center, mimicking a chalkboard or traditional presentation screen. Specifically, this film acts as a multi-faceted film that overloads the viewers' senses through a push pull affect between text, a physical screen object, site specificity, and her or his body. I feel the true poetic strength of the work is not in the range of material or methods used, but in my will to fill the gap between things like site, montage, oblique camerawork, introspective narration, physical

objects, and content. *Dirty Manila* functions as a sculptural object, and as a collection of appropriated objects. This formulaic outline of the single unit within a larger unit of similar objects is how all the correlating works in the *PEMDAS* operate.



Image 1: *Dirty Manila*, October 15 2016 – Installation View

This method serves a metaphorical parallelism between my interest and experience in one to one relationships of care, and how people are categorized and treated in society.

In *Dirty Manila*, the sound of the narrator's voice is designed to mimic the character of the classic Charlie Brown teacher, featuring mundane forms of communication, and educational tropes. Simultaneously it suggests the voice of God, white male authority figures, and on the contrary parallels, the overused aesthetics and portrayal of the witness in a crime documentary. In the latter example, witnesses are usually blacked out and only an outline of their body is visible by the viewer. In *Dirty Manila*, the protagonist only makes two appearances. Similar to a crime documentary, just a shadow of the character is seen. Several octaves down and anonymous, the narrator's voice guides one through the Mojave Desert to Amboy Crater, and finally, an

abandoned school in the same town. The spoken word is an ambiguous reflection on incidents in my past, which are a direct response to the sites on screen. Auditorily, the narration is not always clear. What is said doesn't always make sense. The voice somberly booms in monotone, creating a slow unorthodox pace. The sounds are meant to enter one's body while clarification takes second tier. This choice comes from my own shortage of language and comprehension skills, while also witnessing firsthand the powers, or lack thereof, in pedagogical material.

Though I do not wholesomely agree with all of Noam Chomsky's theories, in the book *On Language*, in the excerpt "On Cognitive Capacity," he eloquently states, "Language is a mirror of the mind in a deep and significant sense. It is a product of human intelligence, created anew in each individual by operations that lie far beyond the reach of will or consciousness" (Chomsky, 1975). Tentatively, the idea of language is a driving force behind *Dirty Manila*. The sight word cards, or appropriated objects that make up the screen, are the backdrop for moving images. These interactions aide in creating a gestalt in the viewer's mind between what is audible, what is legible, and what is visible. These reading cards originate from a themed pedagogical teaching package from the well-known *Fun with Dick and Jane* books from the mid-19th century. This gives the cards more symbiotic baggage for audiences to project into, and gets amplified halfway through viewing the film when one realizes that the dated sight words are collected artifacts from the school in the film. The key in intensifying the gestalt, and evoking thought in the viewer's mind, happens through a projection mapping technique. Certain cards periodically brighten within the film. The words do not always line up with what is being said. On the contrary, the illumination of words often creates more

confusion. This action creates even more tension, and is meant to mimic the experience of students with intellectual differences.

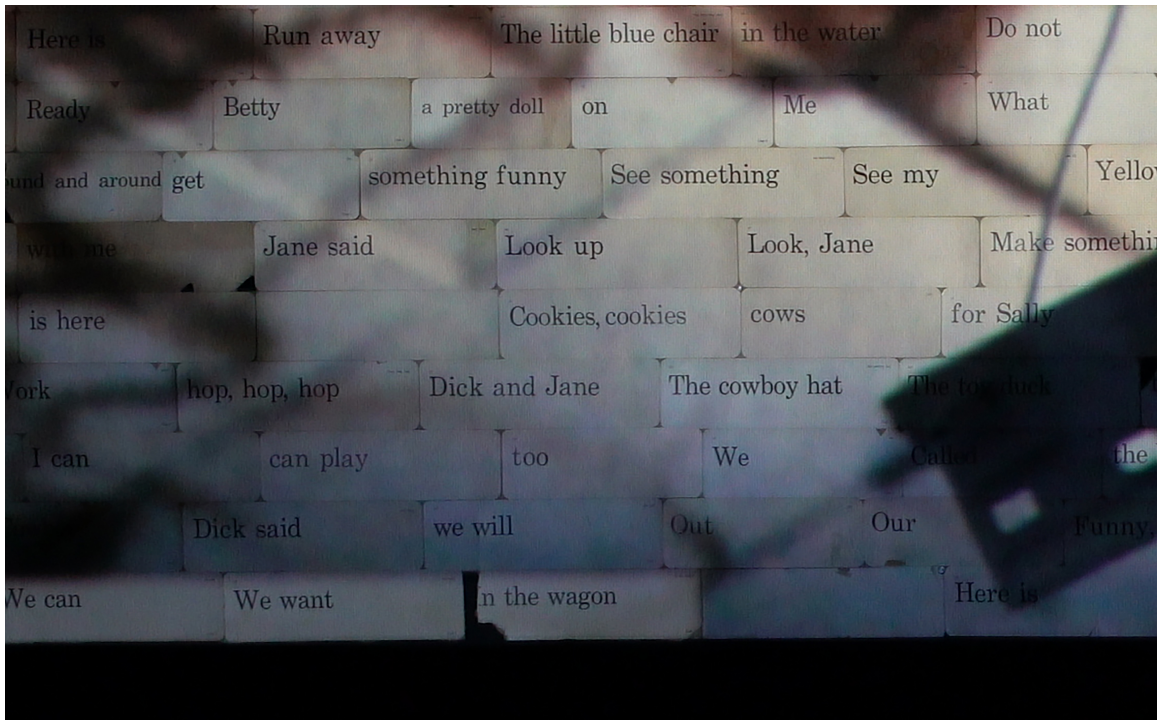


Image 2: *Dirty Manila*, October 15 2016 – Detail

Consequently the viewer becomes the lessoned and the programmed.

Dirty Manila is an intricate machine that allowed me to discover and exercise a new set of tools to visually communicate. This projection mapping technique, in conjunction with traditional film methodology, offers a new process of film that directly corresponds with screens outside of the traditional 16:9 or 4:3 ratios. It is strictly tedious and laborious; for every unit must be mapped in physical space using digital mapping software. These results have opened up new avenues in my editing process. The choices made come not only through a lens or apparatus, like a camera or found footage, but the viewer's body in space must be considered. Like the construction of sculpture and the acknowledged view from all angles, I must consider bodies in dark space and how

something is viewed. The traditional theatre is designed around the single screen. The process of building a screen, for a film and vice versa, is the physical manifestation in the one to one relationship of care I am researching. This consideration of the viewer's body acts as an ethical guide aside the aesthetic experience, and helps align the work as tools of empathy, empowerment, and abstracted pedagogical models. Specifically reaching to individuals who work in education. *Dirty Manila* was my first successful execution of an artwork that engages this many layers.

An Afterschool Program

The new methods of power are not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control, methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus (Foucault, 1978).

Leading up to the artworks in *PEMDAS*, in 2013 I began working in-depth with Courtney Coffin, my partner and pedagogical collaborator. Courtney has her Bachelor and Master's Degree in Special Education, and has served people with moderate to significant disabilities for over a decade. As a case manager of students with disabilities who receive special services, her job is to provide care, and to design/employ an educational program for her students. The program includes a set of goals, which are embedded in each student's IEP (individualized education program). By federal law this legal document must be reviewed and updated annually by the case manager as well as other service providers. IEPs are a form of educational documentation that stay with a student throughout her or his education, K-12. Outside of Courtney's daily, specialized program, we wanted to create an opportunity for her students with moderate to significant disabilities to participate in an inclusive after school program, comprised of students with and without disabilities. Together we designed an extracurricular program for the school.

One of the student participants, Jorge Hernandez, was a 16-year-old who has Cerebral Palsy and communicates via some American Sign Language and gestures. In this collaborative work, we placed a GoPro camera on his assistive walking device to document several days at his high school from different angles. Overall, this act was meant to give autonomy to Jorge through documentation, and a lack of authority to me,

the artist. In this chaotic yet democratic endeavor, Jorge had the opportunity to record his settings and contradict the merits surrounding sports culture. The viewer's experience is on Jorge's time. Additionally, those experiencing the work are segregated from Jorge through his assistive walking device, the same way in which his same aged nondisabled, high school peers are segregated.

As a team we attempted to discredit the contemporary fascination with action cameras, and the fast paced culture for which they are designed. Unfortunately, due to economic hardship, Jorge and his family had to abruptly move for his father to find new employment. Therefore, any continuation of the piece was quickly ended. Part of our objective was to create a multi-faceted video work, where my partner and I would teach Jorge to do basic video editing. This would act as an intro lesson for work she employs in her own curriculum, where she is pursuing video self-modeling (VSM). Meanwhile, this work could potentially function as a cinematic experience, and inspired other students in the program to experiment with filming/video editing software.

Video Self Modeling (VSM) is a research-based practice, and a form of positive behavior supports for students with significant disabilities. As described by Bellini and McConnel (2010) "VSM is one example of strength-based programming that focuses almost exclusively on the child's strengths rather than weaknesses." Students basically imitate themselves performing target behavior(s), after watching a video of themselves correctly executing the behavior (2010). There are two categories of VSM, positive self-review and video feedforward (2010). Greenberg, Buggey, and Bond (2002) explain video feedforward as providing a futuristic view of a person successfully performing behaviors or skills she or he is capable of, but not yet performing. Bellini and McConnell

describe video feedforward as “a category of VSM interventions in which individuals observe themselves successfully demonstrating skills that are slightly above their current capacity to perform” (2010). Buggey (2007) explains video feedforward as the process of editing videos, making it look as though the person recorded is accomplishing a target behavior which, although is beyond her or his present level of functioning, is still attainable and developmentally appropriate.

I have had the privilege and been entrusted to browse through years of digital video footage that my partner, Courtney, has taken for her curriculum. I am motivated by this research-based practice as an educational tool, and how moving images have the potential to achieve some kind of enlightenment through reflexivity. VSM practices helped in shaping intentions behind *Dirty Manila*, where the artwork co-functions as an educational model for its audience. Though that work does not directly use imagery of a specific student, I am interested in the underlying power dynamics that a VSM video potentially offers; especially when used as an appropriated art object. Can the student’s perceived ability be harnessed to create something new, and through a process of inversion, educate the public? By incorporating actual non-fictional bodies into my media experiences, can the results offer a more rounded social critique?

I can think of no other contemporary film work so specific to the goals behind the project we made with Jorge Hernandez other than Kazuo Hara’s 1972 cine-social activist film titled *Goodbye CP*. In this documentary Hara follows men living with Cerebral Palsy in Japan in their attempt to “make their way in a place where conformity is valued and disability is hidden away” (Deines-Jones, 2007). Yokoto Hiroshi, one of the men with CP, aspires to demystify pity and uses his body to debunk the stigmas surrounding

disability. Hara does not aim to humanize his subjects by making them do something an able bodied or non-disabled person would do. The camera apparatus is there to document. There is no filter; there is no pre-stage or script, it is clunky, unorthodox, and over exposed. An empathic tone arrives through his use of disjointed narration and editing. Through a raw Cinéma vérité like approach, Hara allows the men to demonstrate their personas and capabilities naturally. *Goodbye CP* served, and still serves, as a work of advocacy for people living with Cerebral Palsy, and for me, serves as an important philosophic apparatus to help deconstruct meritocracy in a context of disability and pedagogical material.

Through *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency*, written by Ellen K. Feder and Eva Feder Kittay, I begin to connect my histories, teaching philosophies, responsibilities, and adversities of a being a caregiver and artist, trying to do work in a trajectory akin to Kazuo Hara's *Goodbye Cp*. In a chapter on disability and a just care, they discuss the role of the advocate:

Advocates of disability rights have insisted that the independency and productivity that are essential to being considered equal citizens in a liberal society and are no less attainable for the disabled than for the nondisabled. They have argued that their impairments are only disabling in an environment that is hostile to their differences and that has been constructed to exclude them. (2002)

Freder and Kittay emphasize the importance of one's moral powers through John Rawls theory of liberalism. In summarizing some of Kant's theories of justice, Freder and Kittay quote Rawls, "can moral citizenship be granted to those lacking such powers, powers presumed in the citizen who is fully functioning throughout a life," (Freder & Kittay, 2002). For a moment, imagine you are 21 years old. You have had 21 years of life

experience. You cannot communicate with verbal language; you cannot perform activities of daily living others take for granted. Some of the people in your life, and your psychological evaluations, equate you with a 12 month old, rather than a 21 year old. Those who track your progress believe you to have an infant's mindset, temperament, and disposition. Your education is specialized. You work to master the same goals your motor skills would not allow you to achieve in years' prior, such as fitting 4/5 of the appropriate objects through the Fisher-Price shape sorter designed for ages 12-24 months. Don't worry once you can achieve 80% accuracy, you can move on to stacking blocks.

Similar to the character in *Dirty Manila*, where worst practice becomes instructive routine for the educators and para-professionals in the student's life, a student with an IEP can be easily locked into futile tasks for long periods of time. The paradox between time, care, and the educational remedy is a lush place for me to create. Education, no matter what level of ability, becomes a fight for some form of life skills. It is how we strive for quality of life, and how those who care for us strive to teach us. For me, this is a hard and sad place to make work. It is not the student, nor the educators fault. It is rooted in our meritocracy.

I begin to see historical connections to my work through Mary Anne Doane, in her book *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, and The Archive*, she illustrates how the camera as a technological documentation device, can be used to understand the transformation of time and contingencies within the birth of modernity. In relation to tracing movement, the early 1900's were rich with cinematic research that used the new technology as a pedagogical and utilitarian tool. What I see as a branch from Marey and Muybridge's photographic studies on movement, Frederick W. Taylor

focused on particular actions of workers to see if it could lead to better time usage in the workplace. These simple experiments of timing workers with a stopwatch would eventually help design new assembly lines and means of production (Doane, 2002).

“Taylorism,” with the primary elective to “eliminate unproductive time from the system (2002),” has an imbalanced impact on someone like Jorge, who needs more time than his non-disabled peers. Unjustly, time is crucial in public education.

Cells

Guidance given by the teacher to the exercise of the pupil's intelligence is an aid to freedom, not a restriction upon it – John Dewey (Tzuo, 2007).

The other work that I aim to discuss from the exhibition *PEMDAS* is titled *Cells*. Before I discuss any theory or aesthetic decisions behind the making of this work, I would like to expand on some of the pedagogic research that was inspiring the after school art program. To do this I refer to Jonathan Kozol. *Shame of the Nation*, one of Kozol's well-known books, uses my hometown as grounds for much of his research. He writes of the shifts in pedagogy where inner-city schools practice absolute control or "primitive utilitarianism" (2005). Suburban schools have adopted a totalitarian approach to guide their curriculum to meet state standards and pass on high stakes tests. The pressure created by a set of behaviorist/Taylorist curriculum, where there is scripted dialog and publicized reading/ ranking of students according to their academic "levels" of achievements, creates an entirely new unjust meritocratic system.

Following in the footsteps of Frederick W. Taylor, coined the father of "Taylorism," was Frank B. Gillbreth. He used a more complex visual engagement whereas the camera served as a direct method to study efficiency and productivity. In the book I referenced earlier by Mary Anne Doane, she stated, "Gillbreth attached a small electric light to the limb of a worker and used a time exposure to photograph the movement as a continuous line in space (Doane, 2002)." The distinction between Taylorism and the work we have done with Jorge, is the lack of the production line, and he not being a timed worker in a factory. Instead, he is a member of a public school system, which is comparable. This approach is contrary to the intent of Gillbreths

Chronocyclograph. The collaborative experiment with Jorge explores the view of the tool (his assistive walking device), and a unique perspective of time and space through him, then his object.

The workshop consisted of many collaborations and gestures that promoted creative processes and freethinking rather than a strong handed occupation-based curriculum. Kozol describes this phenomenon as “school-to-work” or “industry embedded education.” (2005) This education geared for industry revolves around finding a management job (with the rationale being that a managerial position is the highest accomplishments the students can achieve) and managing money, with their reward system being fake money. “The package of skills they learn, or do not learn is called ‘the product’ of the school.” (2005) In Kozol’s research, he found students themselves are referred to as a “product,” and looked at as an investment. The principals of such schools are often called CEOs and teachers are called “classroom managers.” Keep in mind that positive implications can arise from these types of utilitarian prospectus. For example, in Courtney Coffin’s classroom the students have jobs, or tasks, to help instill life skills. However, Kozol found that students have managerial positions as early as the second grade (i.e. pencil sharpener manger); similarly, students are forced to pick a career as freshmen, and college is not presented as an option.

It is important to note that “School to work” pedagogy influences most avenues of education. As a substitute teacher, and paraprofessional, I came across many instances where a similar totalitarian approach to art making took place. Consequently, Courtney and I designed our program through a lens of anti-Taylorism. The work *Cells*, which I will discuss in detail, embraces this ideology, both metaphysically and physically. Often

times, the traditional arts and/or crafts produced in a special education classroom are a façade of decoration that denotes disability, by showing false capability. Envision tiny cookie cutter Santa clauses; the cotton balls that make up Santa's beard have no glue spills, the glitter is evenly spread, and there are no colored marks outside the lines. These art works are made by the authority figures doing hand over hand work, and sometimes simply finishing projects for the sake of time. This act has a way of segregating the students who made the art from their own ability, expression, and voice. This is the opposite goal of video self-modeling, which creates the potential to propel one to achieve skills. The caregivers who partake in this hand over hand practice probably mean no harm, but unknowingly, or uncaringly, have effect on the student's identity and the perception of students with disabilities in that school. The teacher and paraprofessionals create a false projection and representation for the public sphere within the school.

Giuliani Bruno discusses in her beautiful book *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media*, the physical weathering of surface and theorizes implications as a screen for media through some of artist Tacita Dean's work:

Materiality is not just a question of materials or the province of mediums. It fundamentally means activating material relations and conveying their transformation. This includes refashioning our sense of space and contact with the environment, as well as these works elaborate on use surface conditions, they expose a cultural transformation in surface tension.
(Bruno, 2014)

The work *Cells* is a 36 by 12 foot sculptural screen consisting of over a hundred school desk tablets that came from Orange Glen High School, where the after school program originated. The underside and shape of the desk offers a beautiful place to project onto. Like relationships I have explored in *Dirty Manila*, this surface tension, introduced by

Bruno, is the artistic manner that most parallels one of care. Here, I am using projection mapping techniques designed for dramatization.



Image 3: *Cells (Jorge Detail)*, October 15 2016 – Installation View

The screen object, as a larger unit, becomes a whirlwind of colorful image, appropriated content, and sensorial overload. Comparably in both video works *Cells* and *PEMDAS*, I reinforce power dynamics between student, educators, institutions, and projected needs. I achieve this not only through the appropriated objects I have acquired from institutions, but through the process I have chosen to exploit them. In the work *Cells*, projection mapping allows me to experiment with façade, truth, and isolation. The palimpsest and patinas on the desk surface bond with the projected images.

Cells as a screen or sculptural object appears to float in space, and due to its size, overwhelms the viewer. Its intricate clusters of shapes and groupings make for challenging editorial decisions in how and where images should be projected, mapped, and cropped. To acknowledge and accentuate the façade throughout the film, I occasionally project actual photographs of the desks surface onto single units within the

larger screen object. The boundaries of physical space and shape of the school desk have authority over the image, but this is stripped away when particular images are shown. It is not until the GoPro footage of Jorge Hernandez is seen, that the content within *Cells*



Image 4: *Desk*, May 7 2014

becomes directional. This moment is the axis the work needed to swing from a mundane and surreal school lesson, that is outdated and authoritative, to a work about bodies. It is this hyperbolic VSM video that helps deconstruct the architectures of the traditional classroom, and speak to the unit within a larger unit. Similar to the way language cards create gestalts in the viewer's mind while viewing *Dirty Manila*, a piece of chewed bubble gum, a spit wad, note, or bloody Band-Aid stuck to the bottom of a desk has agency. The conversation between mundane pedagogy and mobility becomes less didactic through overstimulation. In turn, materiality is included in a co-functioning

authorship as a way to amplify subtle forms of student retaliation and institutional critique.

PEMDAS in its entirety is a complex apparatus (aesthetically, sociologically, and institutionally). Drawing deeper connections to how works within the exhibition, like *Dirty Manila* and *Cells*, function for a viewer. I arrive at Vilem Flusser. In this excerpt from *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* he deconstructs the function of an apparatus in a way applicable to my practice:

The camera does what the photographer wants it to do, although the photographer does not know what goes on in the interior of the black box. This is the central characteristic of apparatus. The fonctionnaire dominates the apparatus through controlling its exterior (input and output), and is in turn dominated by the opacity of its interior. In other words, fonctionnaires are people who dominate a game for which they cannot be competent. (Flusser, 2000)

Functionality bears much weight in equation with utility and ability. As a “fonctionnaire” in this game, it is my intent to give new authority through the reaction of material objects, content, and subjects. Nevertheless, a regiment of personal ethics and moral basis guided the making and execution of the work in this exhibition. Due to the nature of projection mapping and site specificity, this work is ephemeral. It will change the next time it is installed and be remade. I believe the tectonics carrying historical, empirical pedagogy and the negative projections onto persons with disabilities needs to be inverted. Models of best practice should be shared to reconstruct the meaning of meritocracy. Ultimately the experience that works like *Cells* and *Dirty Manila* advocate is one of bodily self-awareness, and through nostalgia, denotes the power of pedagogical material and arbitrary objectives rooted in Taylorism.

Let this installation serve as a progressing empathy machine, and a void that questions control. *PEMDAS* is in a place between utopian promises and dystopian realities. Through looking, listening, acceptance, denial, being absent, being present, being anxious, and being patient the faint hope embraced is that the viewer reflects upon her or his own academic quest for life skills.

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