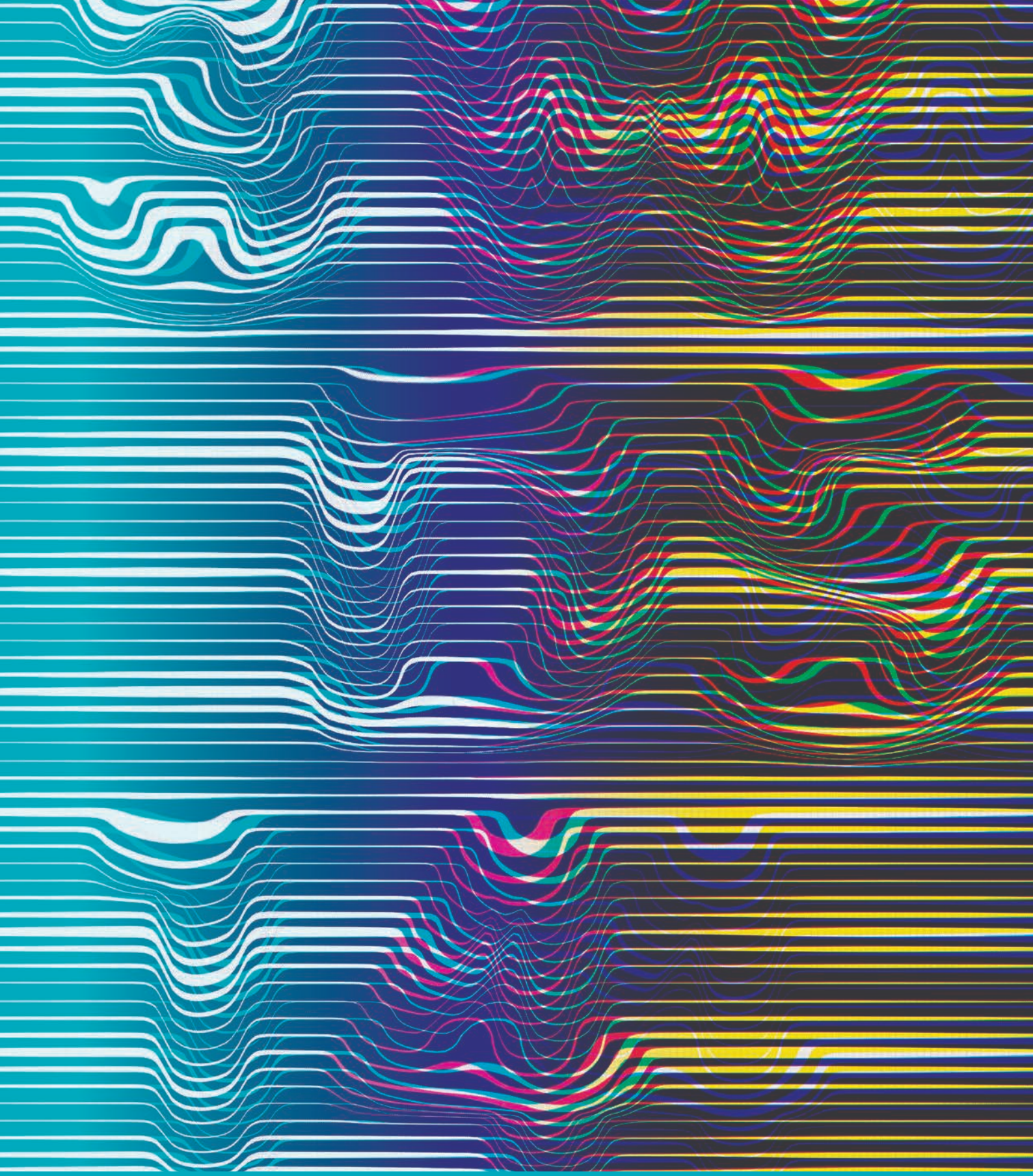


WATER VIEWS: CARING AND DARING

3WDS14 – WATERWHEEL
WORLD WATER DAY
SYMPOSIUM 2014
WAVES, RIPPLES & SPLASHES

WATERWHEEL

8. Performance

PERFORMANCE CONNECTIVITY & RESEARCH—OVERVIEW

by Molly Hankwitz

Bay Requiem, ongoing project by Mary Armentrout, Lauren Elder, Nina Haft and Ian Winters. Direction: Nina Haft.

In this original performance from the project 'Bay Requiem,' Mary Armentrout and Company dance at the Hayward Shoreline Interpretive Center in a mix of loose-knit interpretive styles mingled with site specific details about a place marked for impact by sea-level rise.

In this third session of the 3WD14 Symposium, ocean and saltwater flooding issues were addressed. Eight dancer/choreographers, a director and filmmaker explored the location and "scale" using the Waterwheel Tap space as the "live" stage/frame to create an intricate and layered piece of art. A good mic and a high quality video camera transformed the Tap space into an audio visual zone in which localized sound of wind and the moving dancers evolved over time.

Nina Haft and Ian Winters' commentary and explanation of their collaborative methods and history of site, worked especially well to develop understanding of the work. Audience was intimately connected with a well-planned and shared experience; meeting and chatting with, and listening to dancers discuss their activism, and methods with the issues and the land.

To achieve a really finely tuned performance takes particular planning, rehearsal, and familiarity with what is possible, and on the Waterwheel Symposium Tap, as much as it is an informal venue, available through laptops, performing has particular challenges as a web-based and telepresent medium. 'Bay Requiem' artists should be admired for the range of possibilities they explored; giving a relatively unknown place in California, drama, history, and vitality, while expressing and evoking serious concerns with climate change. Winters' video overlays also lent much to the piece. Evocative and stark, they provided a time-based history to the art, as they were all performed and shot earlier, then brought in semi-transparently over the "live" dance.

Broad use of the huge open landscape as backdrop by Haft had the remarkable effect of effortlessly blowing away the small screen such that fragile human scale ran consistently through the piece. The Shoreline took on an impersonal immensity and this had a profound result. The audience was drawn in to Hayward shoreline's history and development as reserve into a wildlife preserve for jogging and nature walks as the setting for numerous small-scale dance scenarios in which freeway noise, bird life, the Bay; and a power plant became "set."

The deft 360 degree video tour by Winters' gave a proper visual context and Haft discussed her directorial process using basic scripts about "drought" and "flood" with the dancers who then constructed the duets and trios. Ultimately, the entire piece was a mix of movement, environment, voice, video, and site specific detail revealing much about water.

'Bay Requiem' in the context of the Symposium, was "news," "activism," and art, addressing local concerns. Winters' poetic films somehow evoked the domestic work and prior drudgery of the salt industry which once occupied the location. Combinations of dancers performed for nearly two hours, and in each case Haft introduced the themes being responded to and framed for the audience, the artistic intentions. The result was a quite memorable and ambitious work.

BAY REQUIEM: A WORK IN PROGRESS

Nina Haft & Ian Winters
Oakland, CA, USA

Location: Hayward Regional Shoreline nature center and marsh

'Bay Requiem' is part of a long-term site-specific project addressing sea level rise around the San Francisco East Bay shoreline created by collaborators Mary Armentrout, Lauren Elder, Nina Haft and Ian Winters. Filmed, performed and presented in the Hayward Regional Shoreline, the telematic showing of the 'Bay Requiem' work in progress for the Waterwheel Symposium was the first public showing of one strand of ideas.

The performance material shown was choreographed as a series of site-specific improvisations by Nina Haft and her dancers, and Mary Armentrout. The visual and sonic material was structured for a Tap presentation by Ian Winters, and filmed by Winters, Elder and Haft. The work on the Tap consisted of pre-recorded video shots of the site at the time of the "King Tides" (when tides reached one of their highest points in years on San Francisco Bay). This was mixed on the Tap with live video of the site-specific performance, and mapping information / live chat about the site.



Fig.1 Still from the site

For Haft, Bay Requiem started as a conversation about impermanence.

> "Our initial meetings were about king tides – the extreme high and low tides that happen twice a year, and which are often exaggerated by winter weather patterns. For example, the devastation of New York City by Hurricane Sandy revealed the potent alchemy of tides, storm surges and human modifications to the environment. Natural disasters are frequently the result of this kind of multiplier effect."

King tides offer us the opportunity to stand in the now while experiencing the future of sea level rise. Plainly put, king tides flood low-lying areas that someday will be underwater all the time. They help us jump cut across geological time to experience the consequences of our actions, and to perhaps (we hope) make different choices.

As artists, we know each other from our work in the theatre. I am a choreographer whose work is about place. Mary's work offers reveries on presence. As a media artist, Ian is particularly interested in embodiment across real and mediated dimensions. Lauren's work as an environmental and installation artist grapples with climate change in tactile, poetic

forms. We share a sense of grief about what is already lost to climate change. We also share hope for the future. Our work together as artists is to transform future possibilities by asking questions that enable us to fully inhabit the now.

Our first site is the shoreline in Hayward, California where I work and teach. This location is an estuarial reserve on the coastline of the San Francisco Bay. Many of the dancers live, study or work nearby. All of our video was shot in this location, using similar angles of view and framing choices. Our site is one of the largest uninterrupted stretches of coastline in the San Francisco Bay. It also carries historical significance as the outlet for the San Leandro Creek watershed. Here is where native Ohlone people foraged and fished. Later, European settlers built Eden Landing, a lively dockyard and market where large fishing vessels sold their daily catches. Before becoming a nature reserve, this land was a salt farm.

Today, the Hayward shoreline is a park where people jog and walk and bicycle, next to the loud traffic coming on and off the San Mateo Bridge. Hayward residents who live near the shoreline do not live in luxury; this coastal land has evolved into the kind of industrial complex that occupies much of our waterways. On the other side of the reserve is a large power plant with several stacks of billowing smoke. Millions of people pass by this site every year. Few ever truly experience it. When the Hayward shoreline and downtown is underwater, the entire transit and energy infrastructure of the Bay Area will either adapt or die.

Our first creative research at our site was in January 2014 during winter king tides, when we shot video at and beyond the water’s edge. Avoiding the delicate grasslands and mudflats where plants, birds, insects and microbes struggle to survive, we decided to sketch an imaginary journey of “climate refugees,” people displaced by water but anchored by each other in community. These images capture some of the grief and hope we brought initially to our conversations; hence our title ‘Bay Requiem.’

Our presentation consisted of an open rehearsal of improvisational movement scores emerging from our collective questions about water. Our premise was that human bodies are in fact permeable, embedded in the coastal ecosystem. We are subject to the same forces, tidal and weather patterns, natural disasters and daily challenges to our resilience as are animals, vegetables and minerals. Our practice as movement artists is one of profound transcorporeality – of porous, interdependent and mutually organized existence with the larger body of the San Francisco Bay. By talking and moving together, we are re-membering our bodies as weather vanes. We are re-membering our places in the environment. We are re-membering how to be changed by the world around us, instead of only trying to control it.

As artists, we are developing improvisational scores that emerge from our conversations about:

- Predictability vs unpredictability – we don’t know when and how much water will come. This makes it hard to grow food, to feed ourselves and each other.
- Displacement – too much water or not enough of it forces us to migrate, adapt or die.
- Drought versus flood – what it is to have too much or not enough water? How do we hold that experience alone and together?

Each of these questions formed the parameters for our movement at the shoreline. For example, displacement became a task for one dancer to enact upon another, or respond to. Unpredictability was a way to disrupt

pattern, but also to charge a relationship, much the way that natural disasters galvanize our humanity for better and worse. We did not seek to represent these possible futures, but instead to experience them as agents. We believe this practice will cultivate our true power in this unfathomable situation of climate change. We also believe it will invite others to do the same.

Our presentation on the Waterwheel Tap revealed two things: 1) the difficulty of representing a tactile, bodily experience of a vast space in a primarily visual (video) mode; 2) the power of simultaneously being at a specific site in the past (pre-recording), present (live video) and future (sharing questions with a larger community).

We approached the Hayward Shoreline Interpretive Center, who are already finding innovative ways to talk with community members about climate change, and are eager to work with local artists in this endeavor. We are, thus, partnering with the Centre on our immersive performances at the site. We envision community potlucks and conversations, creative educational workshops for youth and adults, and more open rehearsals.

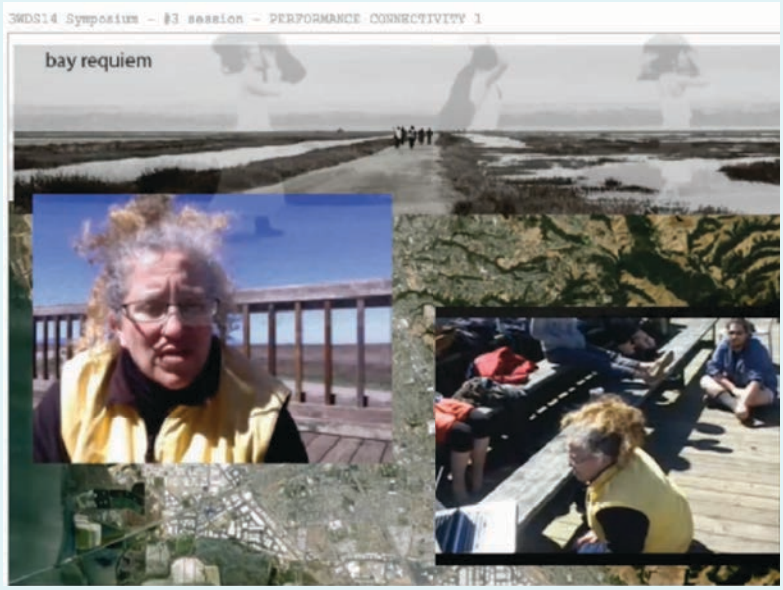


Fig.2 Screen capture from the post-performance chat

BIOGRAPHIES

Nina Haft & Company is an Oakland-based contemporary dance group. Taking a “live cinema” approach to directing, we integrate movement, sound, light and space into evocative works that foster a deep understanding of place.

Ian Winters is an award winning video & media artist working at the intersections of performance, architectural form, and time-based media. In addition to individual work he often collaborates with composers, directors, and choreographers to create both staged and open-ended media environments through performance, visual and acoustic media.

THE TEAM

Dancers: Josie Alvite, Mary Armentrout, Jessi Barber, Rebecca Chun, Melanie Cutchon, Chris Gallegos, Jasmine Yohai.
Direction: Nina Haft
Streaming: Ian Winters
Camera: Ian Winters, Nina Haft, Lauren Elder

LINKS

For more info: nohaft@gmail.com

http://ninahaftandcompany.wordpress.com

http://www.ianwinters.com

Screen recordings of the Tap presentation intro, & performance excerpt
http://water-wheel.net/media_items/view/4861
http://water-wheel.net/media_items/view/4862