

**Legal Name**

Counterpulse

**Project Title**

To host Jodi Lomask at CounterPULSE to imagine and explore new approaches to building demand for dance and theater

**DDCF Grant Number**

2013237

**Project Progress and Successes**

Amidst the media rich environment of tech-centric, urban life, live performance rarely achieves enough market visibility to attract tech creatives. We found that large events with big impacts, like Burning Man, appeal to tech creative audiences. For a local art event at a small venue to be "big impact" it needs to have a life beyond the confines of that singular event.

Beyond the individual collaborations we build with tech creatives, we also wanted to establish institutional partnerships with tech companies that are made up of large numbers of potential tech collaborators and audiences. To that end, we proposed the idea of co-hosting a residency during which artists and tech collaborators would develop new work. While local companies were amenable to the idea, we encountered a number of challenges for in-company residencies that will need to be addressed as we design the residency structure: companies often have strict building security that makes it difficult for non-employees to enter and exit their facilities freely; companies are growing so quickly that office space is at a premium and often unavailable for artists to use; live performance onsite at companies is a great way to engage employees but performance needs to be adapted to the specific site.

**Challenges / Obstacles / Failures Encountered in the Project**

We focused our efforts to build demand among a community we refer to as "tech creatives", consisting of programmers, game developers, designers, and others in the technology-driven creative industries of the Bay Area. Growing demand for the performing arts among tech- creatives presents a series of novel challenges to artists and arts organizations. While many tech creatives have high levels of education and technical skill, they often have little arts education and low artistic literacy. Without an artistic background, they lack a point of entry and engagement into the performing arts.

We chose to develop ways for tech creatives to collaborate with performing artists as an opportunity to learn about performance, a chance to feature their technical skill before an audience, and an invitation to their community to attend performance events. When working with tech creatives as collaborators, difficulties arise when they're too busy with

well-paying, full-time work and not motivated enough to complete their portion of the collaboration in a timely manner. Artistic projects for them are hobbies, unlike the professional artists who are committed full-time to the artistic project. Even as audience participants in live performances, drawing tech creatives away from their round-the-clock jobs and coding projects is a constant challenge.

In developing a residency program that facilitates collaboration between performing artists and tech creatives, we encountered unique, contextual challenges in aligning these professional roles. Identifying appropriate, compatible tech collaborators for a given artist is a core challenge. Developing performance projects with strong tech elements takes additional time; requires further, consistent access to performance and production spaces; and is often more expensive. The technology itself takes time to install, configure, and tune properly for the maximum artistic impact. The performing artists also need time to work with fully developed tech elements. If they don't receive the technology until the last minute then it cannot influence and interact with the creation of choreography.

### **What was learned from these that might be of benefit to others?**

During our Doris Duke Exploration Grant period, we attempted to test as many solutions to the above challenges as possible.

To address accessibility, we built on the discovery that tech creatives are extremely curious about how things work. The technology itself becomes both a draw and reason to attend a show, especially when the population is not confident in their artistic literacy. We developed a series of engagement events of varying formats to gauge interest and participation. We had great success with pre-show talks that focused on who the tech collaborators were and why they were drawn to the collaboration. One-third of total audience for a given night of performance would attend these talks. These low-tech talks did not require the projection or demonstration of the involved technology, as the audience was then exposed to the tech-products of the collaboration in the theater. The live performance filled in the gaps, allowing the audience to piece together how it worked. Participatory creative activities were also popular during these talks as a way to activate the imagination of audience members before seeing art on stage.

Talks and lecture/demonstrations held off-site, separate from performance events, required further, supplemental technology to make them engaging. We incorporated projected digital presentations and brief live demos of performance to illustrate the content of the talk. The technical equipment needed for demos during talks can add a layer of complexity to producing an engagement event that may not be worth the complication.

Hosting talks at partner arts organizations helped cross-pollination between our institutional audiences. Taking art to tech workers at their place of work eliminated the challenge of getting them to the theater, so we found these off-site events helpful for increasing visibility. That said, we were unable to accurately measure whether or not this resulted in increased attendance at performances.

Allowing audience participants to interact with tech elements can also increase audience interest. Going forward we'd like to build in opportunities to "hack" performance technology. This could take place at work-in-progress showings or at separately organized hackathons or "play dates".

We've begun to sculpt a residency model that is responsive to the particular needs of performance and technology collaborations. To establish strong pairings of artists and tech

collaborators, we will continue to build partnerships with organizations that have strong pools of tech creatives in their constituencies. They've expressed an interest in connecting with performing artists who aren't already in their community. Matchmaking must happen at both organizational and individual levels. Organizational partnerships also then open up the possibility for partnered marketing efforts that would increase the scale of participation.

We recommend partnering with tech companies six months to a year in advance of co-hosting a residency in order to establish the needed space access and outreach support. If space is unavailable or inaccessible for the time required of a residency, look for opportunities to have one-off onsite interactions at the company like a brown bag lunch or lecture/demonstration.

Working towards greater visibility, we've begun thinking about how to create more long-term or permanent performance works. There is added appeal to working on something that will touch larger audiences over time. Making work available online through visually compelling platforms is another way we hope to increase visibility and grow demand over time.

**Links to relevant website(s) and/or project publications, reports, etc.**

<https://storify.com/counterpulse/codame-art-tech-playground>

<http://www.ybca.org/synaptic-hours>

<http://thelab.org/schedule/events/743-capacitor-artist-talks.html>

<https://neighborland.com/ideas/sf-show-box-a-multi-purpos>

**If someone wishes to speak with your organization further about your project, would there be a willing contact? Y/N**

If yes, please provide contact name and information for preferred method of contact (email, phone, etc).

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