PAR COURSE A
A Project by Taisha Paggett and Ashley Hunt

Based upon the ongoing research project
on Movement, Thought and Politics
THIS provides documentation of the installation Par Course A, by Taisha Paggett and Ashley Hunt, as it was installed at Sea and Space Explorations in Los Angeles, January 2010.

Par Course A is one realization of Paggett and Hunt’s ongoing research project, which exists under the heading, On Movement, Thought and Politics. Their research looks at the overlaps and gaps between their respective disciplines — including visual art, dance as well as activism.

Beginning with research into these topics during a residency at the BAK Center for Contemporary Art in 2007, the project’s first realization was as an experimental workshop. Here the workshop form combined micro-lectures and “movement-thought exercises” in a way that would activate a series of ideas rather than just point to or represent them.

Par Course A was developed as a way offer this workshop but without the artist-researchers present, using the form of a public Par Course to allow an art viewer to direct themselves through the material, while simultaneously taking up various questions of art-viewership.

Feel free to take off your shoes, jacket and put down your purse.

Feel free to warm-up.

Look for instructions, direct and indirect.

Each station provides instructions and an apparatus for an exercise. Station-markers provide the name, suggest an approximate duration and offer research.

Look for foot prints.

“Etre fort pour utile.” (Be strong to be useful.)

This phrase comes from George Herbert, a French physical educator and creator of the “Par Course” outdoor exercise system.

Be “useful”? (‘Pour utile’?) This might imply an idea of what one’s use “should be” (be useful around the house; be useful to society), which is cultural just as it is political. (Are classes, races, genders not ways of assigning different bodies to different tasks, ascribing them differing uses?) From cultural notions of “what needs to be done” in a given context with particular needs, dependencies and available divisions of labor, usefulness might also be an existential, spiritual and even civic — or secular — way of defining what (or who) a subject should be in life, or what they should exist for. (Be useful to...) (Useful to whom? To what?) Strength and physical training can then be understood as reflecting these values, realizing them in the form of physical capacity.

In short, [training] dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an ‘aptitude,’ a ‘capacity,’ which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. (Michel Foucault)
This first station contains three positions — laying, sitting and standing — each with its own set of instructions. In each the viewer assumes one of these three most basic of human postures while reflecting on them (1) practically (what does the posture allow or do), (2) experientially (what does it feel like), and (3) semiotically (what does it communicate in cultural and political terms).
Decomposition: A form of composition that reveals the structure of a habit (decomposing the habit, breaking it down into its compounded elements).
Psychomotor agitation: A series of unintentional and purposeless motions that stem from mental tension.

INSTRUCTIONS
A. Enter private space.
B. Instructions are located on music stand.
C. Approximate duration: 7 minutes

In this station, a visitor is given a semi-private space in which to select, repeat and reflect upon a gesture they commonly repeat unconsciously, as either a nervous tic or a habit. Using the timer provided, the duration of their repetition allows the participant to defamiliarize this gesture and, as Henri Bergson refers to it, “de-compose” it.
Here, a viewer approaches a section of chainlink fence, where they find themselves before a mirror, so that the fence is between them and their image. The edges of the fence do not show in the mirror, so that the fence seems potentially limitless. While looking at yourself, asked to consider how you strike a posture at a fence, or expect to see how others stand at a fence, there is music stand before you as well with a set of questions for you to consider.

The edges of things, the spaces where power relations meet and contest one another.
A symbol of territory, to keep someone out, to keep someone in, to keep them apart, producing identities to justify their separation and division.

Approximate duration: 3 minutes
At this station, a viewer is asked to lay in a resting pose with their legs up the wall. Following previous actions in which visual perception and an internal perception have been stimulated, here the subject becomes gravity, as blood flow is reversed and the senses rest.
Here a viewer chooses a set of footprints and steps into a hat, each of which hints at a political point of view (from right to left, the hats read: “Tree Hugger”; “I Heart America”; and the far left hat an association with logging. Once finding their position they lean into the middle, finding their reflection by leaning toward the mirror. They are encouraged to change positions.

“The human being is a composite of balancing forces.” — Mabel Todd

“Whether chemical, biological, social or political … any two forces being unequal constitute a body as soon as they enter into a relation.” — Gilles Deleuze

INSTRUCTIONS
A. Step into a hat.
B. Find your reflection.
C. Try another.

Approximate duration: 2 minutes
For this station, a viewer listens to a recorded voice that takes them through a series of thoughts, locating a piece of clothing on their body, and eventually finding the location stated on its tag as its place of manufacture. The participant is then asked to string a piece of yarn on the map before them from where they are (in the gallery) to where the person who sewed their garment was located.
For station seven, a viewer is asked to assume a pose that is commonly known from yoga as “tree pose,” standing in a footprint that directs their gaze alternatively at a text before them, which addresses the capacity of a body to be affected. Simultaneously, their gaze is directed out the one part of the window we haven’t covered, facing a tree growing in the sidewalk. There is a text for the right foot as well as for the left.

**INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Locate footprint on the ground. Balance there on one foot while pressing the opposite foot against the inside of your ankle, your calf or your thigh.
2. Press your palms together, either at your chest or above your head, or spread your arms and fingers wide above you.
3. In the practice of yoga this is called tree pose.
4. Repeat on the opposite side.

*Approximate duration: 2 minutes*
Station 8 features a flat screen video monitor set on its side, picturing a pair of legs moving in place. The legs, which are relatively life-size, alternate rhythmically between walking in place, marching and jogging. A section of exercise mat on the floor before the monitor makes a place for the viewer, who is asked to mirror the action seen on the monitor.

“Empty space does not exist. On the contrary, space is a superabundance of simultaneous movements.” — Rudolf Laban

“...how we use ourselves... learning the language of how brain and viscera use muscle to create a personal skill for managing life in one’s own way with vitality and emotional truth.” — Stanley Kelemen

INSTRUCTIONS
Mirror the action seen on the monitor. Try to stay in time with the movement.

Approximate duration: Stay longer than you might want to.
Here, a viewer is asked, “Is this what Obama said?”, while headphphones play a looping section of speech from Malcom X, stating ideas that hold an ambiguous relationship to one's perception of Barack Obama, where on one hand, Obama is nothing like Malcom X, but on the other, his posing of radical change to the current system and stated willingness to “work with anyone” who wants to change this system has a particular resonance with the very sense of change that Obama was perceived to stand for.

The point of the conceptual is not to “deliver” concepts as things to hold or place on a wall, for the thing one puts on a wall is merely a carrier of a concept, one that might potentially be activated within a viewer. It is not to demonstrate, represent or refer to a concept that is otherwise absent, but to trigger the concept in a mind, body or social field.
This station consists of three mirrors, upon each of which is drawn the outline of parts of a body in a certain gesture. The viewer is asked to “fit themselves into the reflection,” which requires a negotiation of their image and its proximity and scale to the shape offered them, while at the same time they see themselves take the shape of a particular gesture that has its own potentially political significations.

Composition of movement,
Composition of space,
Composition of an image.

INSTRUCTIONS
Fit yourself into the reflection.

Approximate duration: 2 minutes
For this final station, its title offers its instruction, which is to dance to this. While this was located in the patio behind the gallery, where we positioned a DJ for the exhibition’s reception, during the day, when prompted by the instruction, one began listening for the surrounding sounds of the neighborhood for the thing that they would “dance to,” ranging from music from the apartment complex next door, to car stereos fading in and out, to trees rustling in the wind, traffic in the distance, or perhaps to whatever sound the viewer perceived themselves to be making.

“Yo wanna’ talk about postmodernism, you want to talk about deconstruction: Wild-style graffiti on the side of a train; the scratch…” — Harry Allen