

Dee Hibbert-Jones & Nomi Talisman



PSYCHOLOGICAL PROSTHETICS™
HELPING YOU HANDLE YOUR
EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE IN POLITICAL TIMES







Psychological Prosthetics

Dee Hibbert-Jones & Nomi Talisman

with essays by

Terri Cohn &

Rebecca Zorach

Exhibition catalog for Pathogeographies
Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2007



PP Loss, product demonstration, 2005 - 2007 lab coat, resin, electronics

Front cover, Psychological Prosthetics trade show installation, The Lab, San Francisco, CA, 2007

Inside front cover, Psychological Prosthetics intervention, Pilsen, Chicago, IL, 2007

Back cover, Psychological Prosthetics intervention, 2007, Millennium Park Chicago, IL.

Introduction:

In the summer of 2005 Dee Hibbert-Jones and Nomi Talisman headed to Europe with a blue plastic suitcase filled with handmade art objects, fabricated to imitate high-tech commodity fetish products and sleek medical devices. Dressed in lab coats, they wandered the streets and galleries of England, France, Switzerland and Israel, engaging strangers in conversations about their emotional baggage in these difficult times. Each street encounter was webstreamed back to the US as a part of Stretcher.org's site at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco. Viewers were able to respond to the project online, via the blog, and in person. Since that time the project has undergone three website updates and extended into a series of trade show exhibitions and further street interventions. The work has been franchised, developed into training sessions, and new "products" have been added and presented to the public.

In 2007 Feel Tank Chicago invited Psychological Prosthetics to join *Pathogeographies: Or Other People's Baggage*, manifested as a series of street interventions, an on-line site and an exhibition at Gallery 400, Chicago. Hibbert-Jones and Talisman introduced two new objects for this event, the 30 Second Rant Recorder, an electronic hand-made device to activate outrage, and the PP Band Aid device to bandage shame and soothe apathy. They also offered to custom design suitcases to house strangers' emotional baggage, and invited the public to become PP trainees. These new products and services were tested on the streets of Chicago in the spring of 2007. This catalog is a record of the project to date, produced for the Pathogeographies exhibition at Gallery 400, University of Illinois Chicago June 2007.



Psychological Prosthetics intervention, Hyde Park, Chicago, IL, 2007

Marketing is Belief, Consumption is Cure: This Art Means Business

We inhabit social space in the persona of the corporate medical professional. It is a mask, bait we use to enter discussions with strangers. People tell us things; about their suicide attempts, their outrage, apathy and indifference, their political hopelessness. We've signed ourselves up as cultural,

nomadic workers, toiling away, offering objects and services to explore emotional feelings in these difficult times.

Psychological Prosthetics contains a porous fluidity of meaning which the public sometimes chooses to engage, often times rejects, ridicules or takes very seriously.

It is unnerving and rewarding the range of responses we encounter. The meaning of our artwork shifts with each conversation, we find ourselves becoming medicine man, healer, artist, faker, salesman, critic and comic by turns.

Psychological Prosthetics: even the name embodies contradiction. We have trapped the project between the public power of capitalist marketing systems, the authority of the medical profession and the private place of emotion, feelings and desire.

The “discursive field of operation”¹ of the street is where we wander, talking to anyone who is interested. The street is not a customary place to talk about private thoughts and emotions; we are crossing thresholds. We wonder how on earth art can comment upon this mental state in which we currently find ourselves. The rage, impotence, fear, anxiety, hilarity and numbness we experience we see reflected in our conversations. In a culture of emotional dislocation we offer to house stranger’s emotional baggage, knowing that our service is at best an exchange, a clever

abuse of marketing, at worst a psychological prop, “only” an art project. We are not mental health professionals, specialists, or even always serious, yet the work forces seriousness and requires our full commitment.

Many of our best conversations take place with individuals who refuse to be videotaped, photographed or quoted. Which leaves us with questions about the location of the work. With this in mind we have been franchising our role as “specialist” to others, inviting them into the position of power, setting others behind the mask.

We offer a service, with the audience as collaborator/consumer, inviting an odd gift exchange: temporary visibility and relief in exchange for confession. It is an uncomfortable place for us to inhabit, one with slippery morals. Perhaps that is the irony within the project, the humor which skewers corporations and mass marketing also implicates us. I often want to tell people this is an art project, fix their problems or offer advice, but the project will not tolerate my pandering. Collaboration between us and with the public is intense, challenging and at times

barely sustainable. It is also one of the most engaging projects I have undertaken to date and I am grateful to the institutions, individuals and strangers who have allowed me to explore this complex field. Most of all I thank Nomi for her sustained commitment to the project.

Dee Hibbert-Jones
June 2007

1 Miwon Kwon One Place After Another:
Notes on Site Specificity, October 80,
Spring 1997 pp20-30



Psychological Prosthetics intervention, St. Paul's Place, London, England, 2005

Lost in Social Space, or Why This Lady Over There Can Handle Her Emotional Baggage

According to Edward Hall, an anthropologist from Illinois Institute of Technology, there are four distance zones in the US that people use to define the space around themselves: Intimate distance: 0 - 18 inches. Personal distance: 18 inches - 4 feet. Social

distance: 4 - 10 feet. Public distance: beyond 10 feet. A Threat Threshold is an imaginary line that forms the boundary of the intimate distance.

Psychological Prosthetics™ aspires to do impossible things.

Psychological Prosthetics™ guarantees impossible things. ...

No, we don't. We want to explore this uncomfortable space. We want to explore the fine line between public and private, hidden and exposed, what is personal and what belongs in the public domain.

So we dress up in lab coats. It is a front, a uniform where one can lose one's identity, become a member of the Post-Industrial Capitalist Society, a mass-produced persona, working for a corporation, if you will.

Ironically, not only are we not a corporation, we are not even looking to sell our products. How ironic it is that we can hardly even afford this project. If this company existed in the market, we couldn't even afford to employ ourselves. What we really want is to have a conversation. But then, these conversations can be very uncomfortable. The lab coats help us on the outside to create contact zones, but we are left with no shield, buffer, cushion or support. We are not seen as individuals, and

at the same time we are the ones who get exposed.

Is this the Economy of the Conversational? Are we the economy?

The exchange rate rises and falls every time we offer ourselves.

We have been conducting these street surveys and interactions for about two years. We depend on the kindness of strangers. We're not trying to trick or fool the audience. I am not the Lady Over There who can Handle her Emotional Baggage.

Video shoot, May 11, 2007.

Location: Chicago, Millennium Park. Outside, daylight.

Dee approaches three women (Public distance): "Would you like to see our 30 Second Rant Recorder to activate your outrage?" They laugh, "No." Curious, they move closer, (Social distance): "Would you like, then, to try the PP Band Aid to bandage your shame and repair your apathy?" They laugh harder, but still say "No." Two of the women walk away. The

third one moves closer (Personal distance): "Would you like to mail your Emotional Baggage to a political figure?" She laughs, (Intimate distance) and points outside the frame to one of the other two: "You see that lady over there? She can handle my emotional baggage, I trust her."

Nomi Talisman, June 2007



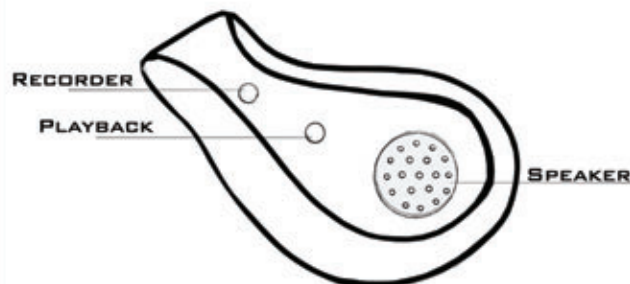
Psychological Prosthetics trade show installation, The Lab, San Francisco, CA, 2007, lab coats, paper, suitcases, DVD, TV, tile, vinyl letters, furniture, plexi boxes

30 second **Rant Recorder™**



ACTIVATES OUTRAGE

WWW.PSYCHOLOGICALPROSTHETICS.COM



HOW TO ACTIVATE PP RANT RECORDER:

1. PRESS RECORDER BUTTON
2. RECORD YOUR COMPLAINTS
3. PLAYBACK YOUR MESSAGE
4. EXPERIENCE YOUR POLITICAL FEELINGS

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS AND OTHER
PSYCHOLOGICAL PROSTHETICS™ PRODUCTS VISIT
OUR WEBSITE AT

WWW.PSYCHOLOGICALPROSTHETICS.COM

The 30 Second Rant Recorder, 2007, postcard, 4X6 inches (front and back view)

Ten Habits of Highly Effective Feelings

one particular industry. PP points to a characteristic of consumer culture in general: the idea that buying an object can cure us -- “fix our feelings.”

It also describes a way of thinking about human relations with objects, current in both academic theory and corporate praxis (and,

memories, relationships and senses of self are all best forged by Brand X. In the tension between object and experience that constitutes so much of the discourse of late twentieth-century art, does the corporate world look to art or does art look to the corporate world? This is part of what’s exciting and disturbing about PP: it’s not just



You know those ads, the ones with the vaguely pleasant, content-free ambiance, the ones that stop short of saying what the drug is for in order to prod you to “ask your doctor about Bloxitol.” On one level, Psychological Prosthetics skews the practices of pharmaceutical companies. But it’s more than a critique of

increasingly, among business writers). Just as art historians and literary critics are becoming interested in people’s subjective investments in objects -- the way they “look back” at us and circulate feeling, are endowed with agency by us, but constitute us in return – along comes business to commodify subjective states, to suggest that experiences, feelings,

art parodying business, it’s art parodying business borrowing from art that sells feelings...

Art has always been about sentiment. And even if business always sold the intangible along with the tangible, in the postindustrial U.S. it seems that the pitch of strategies to market affect has been ratcheted up. You touch a sore spot, though, if you liken art to commodity, the feeling of viewing

art to that of owning the latest product. There's a fine line between art object and metaphor here. In the twentieth century modern art shed content and quarantined itself from the worlds of politics, religion and economics, moving toward an exclusive preoccupation with its own aesthetic problems and concerns. But it could never fully

thoroughly saturate with the fact of being sold things: that is daily life. So a performance intervention in which white-jacketed representatives hand out sales flyers is a great way to sneak a point across: people are obedient when there might be something to buy. It sounds obvious, but the brilliance is subtle. Because then

will agree with this assertion. Someone will say, "but they do" – they work in the fragile but fulsome way that the mystical qualities of art always operate. But this is, in some important way, imprecise: they don't literally make good on their claims. In a disturbing way this mysticism mirrors that of the commodity's



isolate itself from the world: this art was always, in one way or another, bought and sold.

Art's public appeal is uncertain, now, but the corporate idiom is seductive: watching PP operate on the street, you have a sense that daily life for most people is

there's puzzlement, sometimes anger, a question. What is it you're actually selling?

The answer deflects the question: it's consumer research, a prototype in development. The objects aren't really for sale. More importantly (to me) they don't really work. They don't bandage shame, they don't repair apathy. Not everyone

vague affective promises. These, too, are a little bit empty.

This doesn't mean the feelings aren't real. PP markets slogans of exquisitely ambiguous incongruity. The sincerity outpaces their hollowness of the promise. What

would it mean to repair apathy? What times aren't political? The 30-second rant recorder allows you to hear your own rants – but what do you do with them then? The objects might not work, but the project works on those who encounter it -- in the very futility of the objects, the brilliant reticence of the slogans, the awkwardness of interactions, the sheer orneriness of a hand-crafted unique object made to look like a sleek, mass-produced, modernist commodity. The work is in the conversation, the puzzlement or anger or insight generated by an encounter. When we talk about art and feelings, we're usually talking about one

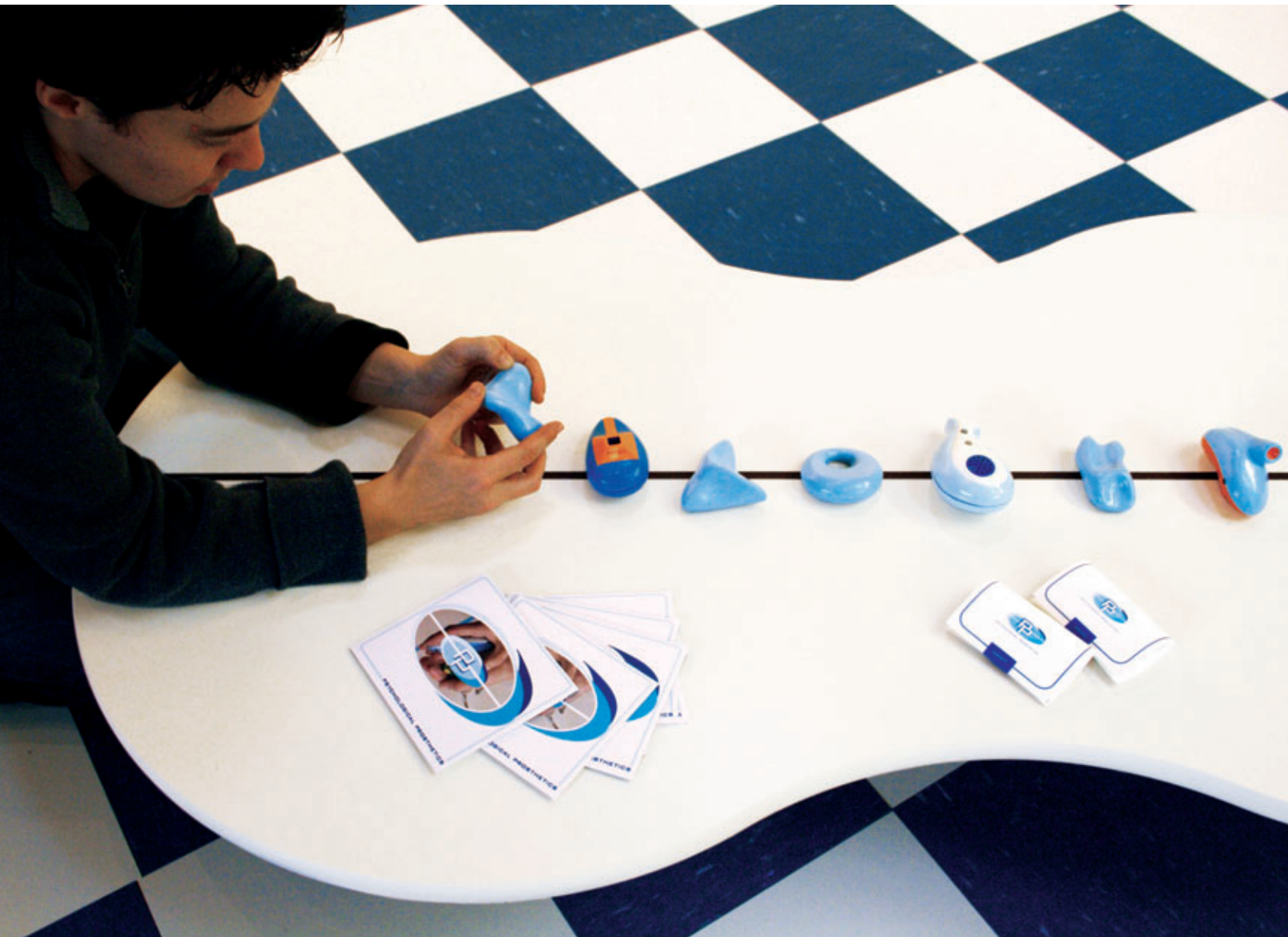
individual's feelings: the artist's self-expression, the viewer's passionate or meditative experience. Here the artists' very medium is collective feeling – not just social sculpture but emotional sculpture – a dangerous and provocative and very vital place to be.

Rebecca Zorach
Associate Professor
Art History
University of Chicago

Right, Psychological Prosthetics consultation, The Lab, San Francisco, CA, 2007
Previous page
Psychological Prosthetics interventions Left-Right,
Lakeview, Chicago IL, 2007, Waterloo Bridge, London, England, 2005, Markt platz,
Basel, Switzerland, 2005 Lakeview, Chicago IL, 2007 Chicago University, IL, 2007







Psychological Prosthetics installation, University of California, Santa Cruz, 2006 resin, electronics, paper, table, tile



Psychological Prosthetics, corporate suitcase, 2007, Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago, suitcase, lab coat, plastic, paper, pen, resin, electronics

Psychological Prosthetics: We'll Help You Handle Your Emotional Baggage

Dee Hibbert-Jones and Nomi Talisman have spent the past three years creating forums for artistic discourse that imitate the language of product design, branding, and advertising with their project Psychological Prosthetics, as means to spoof the marketing industries surrounding mental health. Their

rubber, intended to be physically experienced, and housed in a sleek molded plastic valise-have been redefined as intending to help individuals “handle (their) political feelings in these troubled times.”²

The artists have reinforced the pseudo-mental health nature of



It is the technological order itself, that great mirror in which the growing objectifications of our life appear most clearly, which is sealed against the clutch of pain in a special way.... We, however, stand far too deeply in the process to view this.... This is all the more the case, as the comfort-character of our technology merges ever more unequivocally with its characteristic of instrumental power.

Walter Benjamin, Art in the Age of
Mechanical Reproduction¹

intention is to comment on its corporatization, and to deconstruct the role of the artist and the social function of an artwork. Satirical, serious, ambiguous and multifaceted, Hibbert-Jones and Talisman's line of sculptural “products” was initially intended to soothe such mental health disorders and emotional situations as shyness, anxiety, loss, and shame. More recently, the intention for their hand-sized products-fabricated from smooth, baby blue

these objects by incorporating them into performances, where they variously assume the roles of salespeople, researchers, and medical professionals. To complete their health worker persona/simulacra, Hibbert-Jones and Talisman wear white lab coats, embroidered with the trademarked “PP” logo, distribute product samples-pens, balloons, brochures, capsules containing “PP” insignia-demonstrate their merchandise/

artifacts, and offer personal listening sessions. Essential to this strategy is the grass roots, medicine-man style approach, which they have taken into public spaces in various countries. This has enabled them to connect with populations outside the art world, effectively upstaging hierarchical

Central to these artists' process have been their articulation of the tension between the public and private realms of experience, which elucidates the structural conditions of the relationship between the two and establishes verbal exchange as a central facet of their artistic methodology. By adopting the garb

itself.”²³ Like Fraser, Hibbert-Jones and Talisman acknowledge that they inhabit an alternate persona as means to open dialogue with strangers. This encourages an engaged intimacy and a volatility of meaning that the public accepts, rejects, ridicules, or trusts. The methodology of the work and



and hegemonic institutional and economic models. Hibbert-Jones' and Talisman's strategies for reaching different audiences is contingent on various precedents, including the Situationists and their philosophical enactment of such premises as *détourne* and *dérive*; the legacies of Conceptual art, Institutional Critique, and feminist critique; as well as new genre public art, social sculpture and interventionist practices.

and persona of corporate medical professionals, and enacting those roles in art gallery contexts as well as on the street, Hibbert-Jones and Talisman have effectively confused their identity and role as artists. One of the most significant precedents for their approach is Andrea Fraser, who throughout her career has worked with a shifting artistic guise as a form of dialogic critique, which creates a “series of misrecognitions that... [has] in fact been a structure of Fraser's work

its implicit misrecognition also replicates the conditions of psychoanalytic treatment and transference produced during analysis, which serves as another type of intervention.

In a psychoanalytical context, transference has also been defined as being, at its core, a demand for, or form of, displaced love. This is significant in relationship to

Hibbert-Jones' and Talisman's dialectic methodology, and reinforced by their products- The 30 Second Rant Recorder (activates your outrage) and PP Band Aid (bandages shame and repairs apathy), among others- as the process of psychoanalysis also relies on specific objects and "operates in 'the framework of a specific relationship established with these objects,' allowing 'infantile prototypes' of desire to 're-emerge,' so that they are 'experienced with a strong sensation of immediacy.'"⁴ Freud maintained that such need and longing had the potential to be productive in creating change, but also warned of pacifying these emotions by means of "surrogates." The parallel between the psychological proxy and "the art object's substitution for and objectification of actual social relations"⁵ is a central component of what Hibbert-Jones' and Talisman's project proffers.

On one level, Psychological Prosthetics can be understood as redolent with compassionate intention, expressing the artists' concern with the missing parts of contemporary life and their basic human desire to create artificial substitutes for them. At the

same time, it also reveals a sense of jest that reinforces the work's intrinsic ambiguities. As Freud explained, "the comic is that which makes apparent a human being's dependence on bodily needs and social situations, the mimetic response to which is a discharge of the unutilized surplus of energy left over from the difference between the 'cathectic expenditures' of the observer and the observed..."⁶

From an artistic perspective, the performative means Hibbert-Jones and Talisman have employed, and the action of setting sculpture in motion to give it a "lifelike force,"⁷ pays tribute to Joseph Beuys' concepts of Actions, energy and movement. As Beuys said, "It is a short step from the Actions to a body of works that can be thought of as appeals, or calls, or suggestions to act."⁸ While Hibbert-Jones and Talisman have "trapped the project between the public power of capitalist marketing systems, the authority of the medical profession and the private place of emotion, feelings and desire,"⁹ their gift, like Beuys', is their willingness to provide a public forum and private container for individuals stories and experiences-or emotional baggage-that has the potential to empower

them. Although the deeper issues of social and cultural amputation and dislocation this work addresses is a disturbing commentary on our political time, it also creates a collective space in which to feel, to remember, and to act.

Terri Cohn
Writer, curator and faculty lecturer,
San Francisco Art Institute

1 Walter Benjamin, *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, as quoted in Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered" October 62: 33.

2From Hibbert-Jones' and Talisman's promotional materials for *Psychological Prosthetics*, 2007.

3 George Baker, "Fraser's Form," Andrea Fraser, *Works 1984-2003*, 50.

4 Ibid, 51.

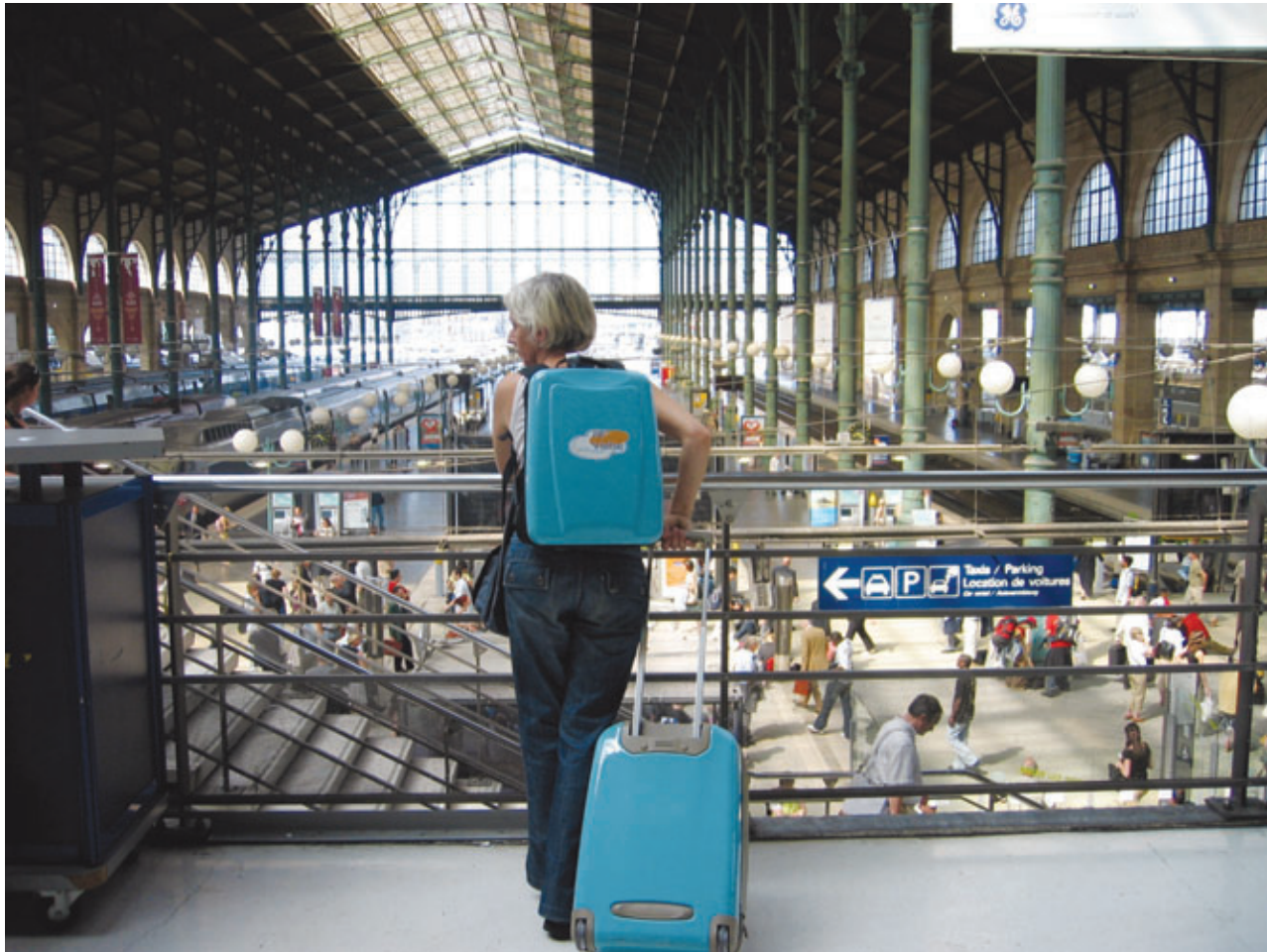
5 Jean Laplace and J-B Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, as quoted in Andrea Fraser, *Works 1984-2003*, 57.

6 Celia Lury, *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory and Identity*, 213.

7 Mark Rosenthal quotes and discusses Beuys' "vibrant idea of sculpture" in "Joseph Beuys: Staging Sculpture," *Joseph Beuys: Actions, Vitines, Environments*. 26.

8 Ibid, 48.

9 From Dee Hibbert-Jones' writings about the *Psychological Prosthetics* project, 2007.



Psychological Prosthetics intervention, Gare Du Nord, Paris, France, 2005

Previous page

Psychological Prosthetics demonstrations Left, Millais Gallery, Southampton, UK, 2005

Training session, images 2-5 The Lab, San Francisco, CA 2007 Right, University of Chicago, IL, 2007





Psychological Prosthetics intervention, Tel Aviv, Israel 2005

Previous page

Top, Left-Right, Millais Gallery, Southampton, UK, 2005, Hyde Park, Chicago, IL, 2007, The Lab, San Francisco, CA 2007

Middle, Hyde Park, Chicago, IL, 2007, Millais Gallery, Southampton, UK, 2005, Pilsen, Chicago, IL, 2007

Bottom, The Loop, Chicago, IL, 2007, Winchester, UK, 2005, University of Chicago, IL, 2007

Psychological Prosthetics

Gallery exhibitions & presentations

2007

- *Pathogeographies, or Other Peoples' Baggage*, Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago, IL
- *Corporate Art Expo 07*, The Lab, San Francisco, CA
- *Yuma Symposium Exhibition*, Yuma Museum, AZ

2005

- *Bay Area Now 4* part of *Stretcher.org* artist's projects, invitation by Terri Cohn, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA
- *PP Valise*, Millais Gallery Southampton Institute, UK
- *(New) Faculty Show*, Sesnon Gallery, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA

Public interventions

2007

- *Psychological Prosthetics*, a week-long series of interventions hosted by Feel Tank Chicago and the University of Chicago, IL

2005

- Berkeley Art Museum Gardens, CA
- Old Town Hall, Winchester, UK
- St. Paul's Place, London, UK
- Waterloo Bridge, London, UK
- Le Marais, Paris, France
- Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France
- Markt Platz, Basel, Switzerland
- Rothschild Blvd. Tel Aviv, Israel

Trainings & lectures

2007

- Contemporary Art Workshop, University of Chicago, IL
- Expo Training, The Lab, San Francisco, CA
- Birbeck School of Public Policy, University of London, UK
- 28th Yuma Symposium, Yuma, AZ

2005

- University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC

Video Screenings

2007

- Academy of Fine Art, Helsinki, Finland
- Mobile Archive, Kunstverein, Humburg, Germany

2006

- Open Archive, The Israeli Center for Digital Art, Holon, Israel



Biographies

Dee Hibbert-Jones works in galleries and public space creating 2 and 3D installations, public works, sculptures, websites and performances investigating notions of community, environments and social systems: exploring our relationship to public and private space. Born in England, she received her Master of Fine Arts from Mills College, Oakland, California; her Master of Arts from York University, England and her Bachelor of Arts from London University, England. Hibbert-Jones has exhibited in Europe, Japan, Israel and the USA. Hibbert-Jones has created public art commissions sponsored by the Golden Gate Parks Conservancy, the National Parks Service, the Goldman Foundation, the Packard Foundation and the City of Santa Cruz. She is an Assistant Professor of Art at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Nomi Talisman works with photography, video, and digital media. Her work explores the relationship between public and private space through an examination of history and collective memory of real and fictional events. She uses serial images and sequences to explore systems and structures of knowledge and power. In her work, Talisman examines the adaptation and interpretation of mass media images and the ways in which these are integrated into everyday life. Talisman's work spans filmic fictions to real life experiences, reflections of the filmic and of public memories, and our fictionalized and mythologized relationship to the real. Born in Israel, she received her Master of Fine Art from Mills College, Oakland. Talisman has exhibited her work in Israel, Europe and the US. She lives in San Francisco, California.



Above, Psychological Prosthetics intervention, 2007, Pilsen, Chicago, IL. Opposite page, Psychological Prosthetics guerilla backpack, 2007 Previous page, Lakeview, 2007, Chicago, IL.

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Parking Ticket With You
Leaving in Your Car



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EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE IN POLITICAL TIMES



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