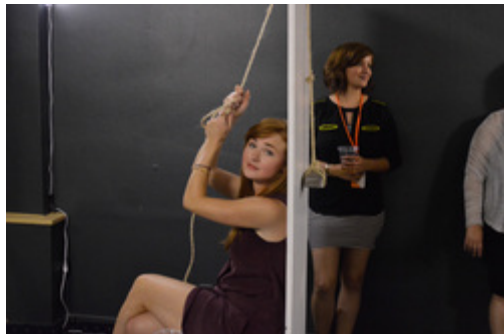


# PERIOD

Published on *PeriOd*  
(<http://www.periOd.com>)

## Halfway through (e)merge – thoughts on performances

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Published: October 5, 2013



US English's "Strike Work" Photo by E. Jane

I don't have headphones. During my morning commute, I'm one of very few on the metro car hearing the sounds of the world. I like to know what's going on around me, and I hate the dissociative feeling of having my ears plugged. When I arrived at [Alex Braden](#)'s performance *Outside and Play*, I was grateful (and wary) that there were some extra devices and headphones available. Alex counted down, and we, the audience and the musician performers, all tried to press play at once on our mp3 players- trying to sync up to an original composition by the artist. The musicians played along, responding to their headphones and isolated from one another, while the audience could move around the space, physically altering our individual experience of the mixing of different instruments by our placement. For the most part, I kept the headphones in- but I kept popping them out for a few seconds to be sure I wasn't missing anything out there, because of course I was. Live sound and recorded sound were intertwined. There was a nice moment when I was standing quite close to the acoustic guitar, but over the cacophony of all the other sounds bouncing around the cement garage, I could hear another guitar much more clearly through my headphones. Especially at the end, when more audience had gathered without headphones, I was struck by the plain difference between the two audiences. Some had, some did not. The ensemble without the recorded piece was impressive enough, but at one point those who had, those who were both plugged in to the track and turned a little bit off to the world all laughed together, a sonic joke in the mp3 we were privileged to. And, the headphones, soft earbuds in my borrowed case, protected my ears, like ear plugs at any loud concert. The headphones both limited what I heard live but also provided additional sound information, like voice sound clips (Rev. Jerry Falwell?) The experience of walking around the live music scattered across a space was irreproducible. The soundtrack in my headphones was not only prerecorded, but given freely to keep and return to indefinitely. So it begs the question- to listen to the live work somewhat compromised through headphones with the track overlaid, or listen to it freely and return to the track later- or skip the performance entirely because the original track is readily available.



Monica Jahan Bose, "Unwrapped"

Several other works are participatory this year. At [Transformer, Strike Work by US English](#) invites artists to hold a lead weight for an hour. A clever and overt reversal of people and object- the lead brick is used in galleries and museums to prop up pedestals, here the artists hold up the work. Paul Shortt walked around the fair carrying a very heavy wooden blow-up of his diploma. He told me, sometimes he holds it up, poses with it, but more often he likes to just lean on it, propping himself up. Literally and figuratively. A team called [Chronoecology Corps](#) has visited the fair from the year 2196 to collect samples and data. In the future, there is no more nature and the last remaining humans live in underground bunkers- not unlike the parking garage of the fair. I tested a technology from their time, a large black helmet with a sound piece built in, a simulation of walking in the forest at night, because there is no nature left in the future. Pointing to another device on the table of their samples and equipment, I asked if we were being recorded. No, that's a nostalgia meter, he told me. Turns out, I was giving off nostalgia after the simulated nature experience. Their time machines are fueled by nostalgia.

I worked with Monica Jahan Bose for her performance *Unwrapped* Thursday night, but it still surprised and moved me. Wrapped in a 216 ft long sari, she danced and struggled to be free of it. Assistants clad in red and pink held up the sari once she detached herself from sections, the fabric became a waving fence around the pool. As she unwound herself, she wound herself back up- two long stretches of spinning out and one stretch back. She was both freeing herself and being exposed. Undressing, but liberating. She began in the comfort of a bed, reading, fat and wrapped completely in the long sari. The sari itself was made of many saris stitched together, that had been printed on and worn by women in Monica's ancestral town in Bangladesh- part of Monica's larger *Her Words* project. Monica is performing again on Sunday at 12:30.

I'm interested in the conflict of duration for performance at art fairs. Is it better to perform at great length such that more people are more likely to see some of the work, or to do

something short and impactful with the aim to draw audience through a clear and rigid schedule. Friday afternoon I turned this question over and over as I watched Sheldon Scott perform nearly the same action over the course of three hours. I believe that it is important to spend a lot of time with a long durational work. Experiencing durational work can be a gift of time. I wondered if it was foolish to spend time and bear witness to the piece that perhaps was meant to be walked by, as one most often does at art fairs- how odd would it be to stare at a painting for several hours at the booth of a commercial art fair? His piece was called *Victory*, an extension of his wall installation, *Level With Me*. Over three hours a few subtle shifts occurred as Sheldon leveled out a plot of dirt, barefoot, and in a suit highly resemblant if not exactly the same as what he wore in his first-ever performance art work at (e)merge last year. Six white pillows were arranged before the dirt for seats, a little comfort in the stuffy and unpleasant parking garage where the work took place. Three black hooded men in white latex gloves tossed handfuls of cotton balls at him, he tried to clear the plot. An hour and a half into his work, a round of watchers left, and I took a seat on one of the pillows. Tired from being on my feet all day, my spine felt a wave of relief. As quickly as comfort set in, I was filled with compassion for Sheldon. Now, sitting down on the ground- my vantage point was level with him as he crawled on his hands and knees laboriously working the ground flat. In the third hour, the same men returned to throw sugar on him, dusting the dirt and he performed a slow and painful voguing movement, hands waving out to the sides and squatting, bouncing, walking. It was like a daydream, a sad and ecstatic memory that came and went, and he returned to his labor, churning the sugar into the dirt



ARLOBI, "Emerge Mix 2013"





ARLOBI, "Emerge Mix 2013"

Armando Lopez-Bircann, ARLOBI, performed a two-hour work Thursday night, listed in the program as *Emerge 2013 Mix*. His piece was also divided into movements, but with a more varied series of *tableau vivante* than Sheldon. Returning to the question of audience, one can assume to have a roaming audience in most art fair contexts, but (e)merge's emphasis on scheduling both simplifies finding work but complicates open-endedness. Armando started interacting with a sculpture like a constellation, posing in an around it. Meanwhile, his performance partner laid on a bed beneath a red plastic cone sculpture- casting a beautiful shadow onto a projection screen behind him. Armando moved to the bed with him, continuously distracted by his phone. The next movement of the piece had Armando sitting precariously on a thin metal sculpture with some kind of mechanical component- he wore a mobile, a chandelier of diamond- shaped silver pieces, his feet balanced on two tall plaster pieces like strapless platform heels. Sitting on the ground before him on a black cloth, his partner stared up at him, undivided attention. The final few moments of the performance had them back in bed embracing.

I felt that ARLOBI's work touched on the way that we, as audience, encounter performance in the context of the art fair. Do we look at it as sculpture- a static object? Is social media and our private technologies affecting our ability or interest in paying any attention? And what good is there, in simply being there? The performance *Emerge 2013 Mix* was done by Armando and his partner, but easy to identify Armando as the primary artist. So, sitting uncomfortably on the thin metal sculpture, was it the care and attention of his partner that helped him through the very subtle if extremely strenuous pose? During stretches of Sheldon's work when no one sat on the pillows, no one watched him perform, I felt a responsibility to be there. Being there is such a significant part of the work. It can't be condensed to a snapshot later.

Armando is performing again on Sunday at 3.

Much more to come. I've left out a lot of work.



Sheldon Scott, "Victory"



Alex Braden, "Outside and Play"





Paul Shortt, "The Legitimate Artist"



Chronoecology



A Chronoecologist gathering samples