

## Systemic Risk

Curated by Jonathan Durham  
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In financial terms, systemic risk refers to a domino effect of cascading failures, leading to the total, irreversible collapse of an entire system or market. This is a popular framework for viewing the current financial crisis (2008 – 2012 and counting...) as it points to collapse on a global scale. The artists in this exhibition work to reorganize specific parameters of a given system in order to point to phenomenological behavior, inequality, misperception, and in some cases complete lack of understanding. Their projects point toward a scientific definition of systemic risk wherein a transition to a much less optimal equilibrium is characterized by multiple self-reinforcing, often irreversible feedback mechanisms. This transition to a less optimal equilibrium is key to the

context of these works, which highlight skewed results, competing agendas, and unfortunate compromises. These artists employ games, social behavior, language, and cultural recognition, revealing that, in the words of one well-publicized OWS protester, "shit is fucked up and bullshit!" That is, not only are our familiar and trusted systems in a process of breaking down, but these systems are universally perceived as discredited machines with suspect origins and multiple points of vulnerability.

The work of Laura Napier tests organized and unified behaviors in public space by introducing direct behavioral experimentations and subtle interventions. Napier makes slight alterations to accepted modes of public interaction – for example how we might



move in a crowd or take a picture on a busy sidewalk. In the performance and subsequent video *project for a street corner (Yankees)* a group of 15 teenage students cross an extra-wide intersection near Yankee Stadium just before a game. Like a migrating red-rover line, the group moves in unison, forming a physical filter for the approaching ticket holders. Unannounced but unified, this action causes sports fans crossing from the opposite direction to weave through the approaching horizontal line like hairs through a comb. This simple gesture is a direct testament to the organizing power of group action. Often staged near highly populated city centers, Napier's work also explores the deliberate ways in which public space is designed to funnel consumers.

Risa Puno's *Good Faith & Fair Dealing* is an interactive sculpture based on the classic wooden game, Labyrinth. In the original game, the player tilts the game board in order to guide a marble through the maze without letting it fall into any of the holes in the playing surface. Puno's version is larger in scale and is complicated by the addition of another player. The game surface is divided in half, with an identical maze and ball dedicated to each player. The players are situated at opposite ends of the board with equal control of the same tilting surface, so they must decide whether to work together to guide both balls to their respective goals, or to play individually as opponents with possibly competing agendas. The notion of a "level playing field" in this game is literally tilted on its axis, revealing the narrow margin for success within a system rife with opportunities to screw your opponent.

Sujin Lee's videos explore the effects of different cultural and linguistic systems on the performative act of language. The video *This is a story for small children. a true-life love story* (2012) re-

veals a series of slippages in meaning that unfold amidst three main elements: written text in English subtitles, spoken text in Korean voice-over, and a series of still images driven by the loosely connected narratives of the former texts. Confusion between the "original" text in relation to the images prompts the question: how much faith can we put in the construct of language to convey the meaning of experience? A similar uncertainty underscores Lee's hand drawn animation *Turtles are Voiceless* (2010) – a pulsating dance of monochromatic patterns emerging from a single turtle shell shared by two feminine "turtle heads." Interlocking arms, heads and elongated necks form a smoothly choreographed physical exchange. Though pleasingly fluid, the figures abruptly shift from black to white, struggling, and failing to form words. This work explores the overcompensations and loss of agency inherent in the decision to learn and communicate in a new language.

Daniel Bejar's *Daniel Bejar/ Destroyer (The Googlegänger)* is a web-based search engine intervention in which Bejar the visual artist re-stages and re-uploads images of Dan Bejar, frontman for indie rock's Destroyer. Sharing not only his name, but a striking physical resemblance to his subject, Bejar culls from Google Image Search, where his recreations commingle with originals. Engaging the highly contested nature of virtual space, the artist's nearly indiscernible recreated images rank with his doppelgänger's among the top search results for their shared search words. The conflation of identity between the two Bejars reveals that even background and personal identity can be optimized, revised, copied and projected globally, questioning any notion of fixed, institutional authority in a culture of the instantaneous and continually adaptable digital archive.