

## Chapter 7

# Moving Mountains: Distributed Leadership and Cyberperformance

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### ABSTRACT

*Moving Mountains is a collaborative venture by eight art educators who explore the notion of distributed leadership to transcend boundaries of proximity, ideation, and artistic production. Their distributed leadership, enacted through both human and non-human performers, involved sharing knowledge and skills to create a cyberperformance and machinima. They completed these projects from conceptualization to artistic production without a designated leader and without hierarchical constraints. In this chapter, the authors view distributed leadership in Moving Mountains collaborations through actor-network theory, crowdsourcing, and transformative potential. Moving Mountains collaborators continue to create video art, written work, curriculum, and virtual world performances, through distributed leadership, in order to challenge oppression and transgress borders.*

## INTRODUCTION: (PER)FORMING DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

Eight art educators performed *Moving Mountains*, a live cyberperformance at *121212 UpStage Festival of Cyberformance*. Through cyberperformance, we examined the challenges and barriers we have each encountered in our respective local, academic, social, and political domains.

Cyberformance is a term combining the words cyber and performance coined by artist Helen Varley Jamieson (2008). She states that “[i]t came out of the need to find a word that avoided the polarisation of virtual and real, and the need for a new term (rather than “online performance or virtual theatre”) for a new genre” (Jamieson, n.d.). In other words, cyberformance focuses on the mixed-reality nature of performance made possible through digital communication networks. It is not a simulation, recording, or reproduction of a physical performance but a new kind of intentional art form that utilizes the characteristics of the Internet and digital media technologies to explore ideas in real time. Cyberformance can employ many different Internet technologies simultaneously and involve various forms of media such as text, video, images, animation, sound, and voice.

Following a successful performance in 2012 of *Moving Mountains* at *121212 UpStage Festival of Cyberformance*, we decided to share the project with different and diverse audiences. An ideal media for this purpose was machinima (digital film recorded in a virtual world). Like many film productions, the machinima production of our performance was very labor intensive. *Moving Mountains* machinima created in 2013 required us to perform the roles of concept developer, actor, scriptwriter, stage manager, set designer, cinematographer, soundtrack composer, and video editor. Using virtual worlds and social media, we realized we have collective strengths that we do not have individually. In order to achieve our larger vision of *Moving Mountains*, metaphorically

speaking, we found that a distributed leadership model works best.

We represent different racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including United States citizens with African and European ancestry; and international residents with Asian ancestry. Our distributed model of leadership is based on the interactions with, between, and amongst each of us as leaders.

In practice, our leadership roles evolve in relationship to the needs of the *Moving Mountains* projects. Our boundaries shift into performing multiple leadership roles such as initiator, opinion and information seeker, opinion and information giver, harmonizer, summarizer, synthesizer, actor, technician, and decision-maker. Leadership roles depend upon the context, the immediate project needs, time availability, and each other’s capabilities. Our leadership model provides the creative space for dialogue and emergent roles that reflect not only the inherent diverse identities within our group but reflect the diversity in knowledge, skills, and abilities each leader brings to our collaborative endeavors.

## COLLABORATION AND DISTRIBUTIVE LEADERSHIP

The process of eight art educators collaborating was quite complex. Part of the challenge of developing our collaborative media projects was coordinating meeting times for eight people from seven different universities and two different time zones. Additionally, we had varying technological and performance experience and expertise. Nevertheless, part of the opportunity was the diversity in our ways of thinking, personal experiences, and backgrounds that informed the structure and content of the efforts. We contributed to conversations both synchronously and asynchronously. Additionally, we conducted much of the preparation for the performance and film at a distance, through email, and computer

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