In our contemporary time, what kinds of speeches—and speakers—are likely to win trust, acquire authority, and mobilize audiences? Over the course of four months, Los Angeles–based Public Fiction and New York–based magazine Triple Canopy stage a series of experimental lectures and video artworks that address the use of public speech to shape opinion, create intimacy, establish authority, and orchestrate movements.

The project’s title, Parts of Speech, indicates the way the elements of the exhibition—six speeches and six video artworks—consider the various components of public speech: language, speaker, location, distribution, and audience. Six commissioned artists including filmmakers, comedians, novelists, and musicians experiment with the form of a lecture, resulting in monologues, stump speeches, startup manifestos, stand-up acts, and musical performances that take place at sites designed for assembly. These presentations test the tactics that entice and persuade—or provoke and alienate. Six video artworks similarly showcase elements of public speech, including its distribution through media platforms.

Parts of Speech is by Public Fiction (Lauren Mackler) with Triple Canopy. The Commons Artist Project: Public Fiction with Triple Canopy is organized by January Parkos Arnall, Curator of Public Programs, with Christy LeMaster, Assistant Curator of Public Programs.
ABOUT THE COMMONS

The Commons places artistic and civic exchange at the heart of the museum. Here we encourage formal and informal dialogue as well as interactions among artists, visitors, and communities. The Commons is host to an array of programs, community meetings, and a biannual artist project. Lead support for the Commons is provided by Rebecca W. Knight and Lester B. Knight, Elizabeth Morse Genius Charitable Trust, and the Thomas Wilson—Jill Garling Foundation.
VIDEO ARTWORKS IN THE COMMONS

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART CHICAGO
220 E CHICAGO AVE CHICAGO, IL 60611

Liz Magic Laser
(American, b. 1981)
The Thought Leader, 2015
Single-channel video (color, sound)
Courtesy of the artist and Various Small Fires, Los Angeles

In The Thought Leader, Liz Magic Laser used the TED Talk format as a platform for a monologue adapted from the Russian novel Notes from the Underground (1864) by Fyodor Dostoevsky. TED Talks are speeches that typically propose idealistic solutions to issues—but are often criticized for failing to offer tangible steps toward their utopian visions. Dostoevsky’s novel, which argues that the individual can never be content with a collective vision of utopia, shares a similar critique of idealism.

David Levine
(American, b. 1970)
Some of the People, All of the Time, 2019
Video (color, sound)
Excerpt of performance documentation from the Brooklyn Museum, May 23, 2018
Courtesy of the artist

Since 2016, David Levine has focused on the idea of fake crowds, a topic that has grown in prominence in the context of presidential rallies. Some of the People, All of the Time is a documentary of Levine’s recent work about the timely issues of paid protesters, Twitter bots, and other deceptive manifestations of the masses. In addition to this video, the museum hired Levine’s custom-crowd company GetPeople to regularly populate the museum with visitors tailor-made for specific events.

Videofreex
(American, formed 1969)
Fred Hampton: Black Panthers in Chicago, 1969
Video (black and white, sound)
Courtesy of Video Data Bank at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago

In the late 1960s, the first portable video cameras became available, offering a generation of video artists and citizen journalists the opportunity to shift mainstream perceptions. The Videofreex, a pioneering media collective, conducted a wide range of interviews from 1969 to 1978. This 1969 interview shows Fred Hampton, deputy chairman of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party, just weeks before he was killed.