

John Burtle

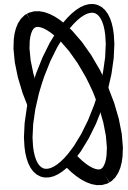
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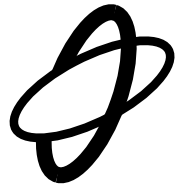
Elana Mann

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Addie Tinnell

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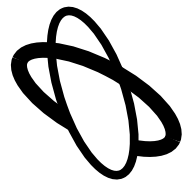


A.L. Steiner

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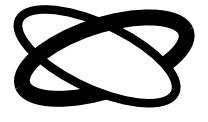
Robby Herbst

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Kate Durbin

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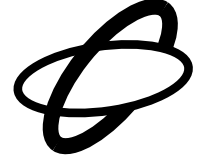


Guan Rong & John Burtle

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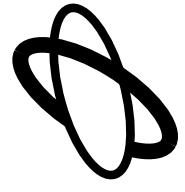
Matias Viegner

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Brian Getnick I wanted to talk to you about your process and its notation as a part of your artistic output.

taisha paggett You had said something to the effect of *Isn't process overrated? Why be so bound up in it? Maybe it's fetishized.* In some ways that makes sense because, no matter how deeply involved and structured ones process is, there are some things you never can prepare for during the exchange between audience and performer. It sometimes makes me wonder if my own process is about creating open structures and simply paying attention to what happens in the

your upcoming shows at the Whitney? **tp** Maybe. I'm on the cusp of deciding whether or not to export this idea. I might create a Youtube channel that documents and invites people to see the process before and after the performance. I don't know yet.

BG Do you feel nervous that all of the rich research and data that goes behind any dance performance won't be seen? Nervous that you would be perceived as only a moving body and not as an intellectual and a moving body?

tp No.

Ashley Hunt That gets at one of the anxieties that drives the gratuitous

taisha

moment. There is an idea in performance that there is no such thing as rehearsal, that the work comes into existence and unfolds in the moment of performance. That said, I do feel a need to have a thorough process to account for the references and influences that go into my work. I don't want information to get lost.

BG Are you considering displaying the ephemera of your research; the notation, journals or references for

presentation of process. We talk a lot about the difference between performance documentation that acts just as documentation versus documentation that, in a sense, becomes its own work. That second distinction is where the history of conceptual art is mixed up with performers of the Judson era, whose pieces were process and system based. Those systems were interesting in themselves, like poetry.

BG I sometimes feel that the work ends the moment it's on display.

towards me or the artist who wants his process validated.

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Sometimes the work is really in the process and in all these ideas that emerge along the way.

AH taisha and I talk a lot about different sites of reception and production. In some of the workshops we've done with people where there's some kind of exhibition later, we try to think that neither is more or less important than the other.

The people who are a part of the workshop might not come to the exhibition. What they're looking for is a good workshop. But just because it was a good workshop doesn't mean it's going to be interesting to look at by someone who wasn't a part of it. So how do you think about moving what's produced from one site of reception to another? Both might have their own meaning. For exhibitions, the strategy is not just to communicate what happened at the workshop, but to offer the viewer their own experience of the ideas that we explored, so that it acts as a piece in itself.

BG Can you think of an example where the workshop ended up being less valuable than the ephemera produced? Or where the engagement was more powerful as ephemera?

AH I've held workshops where people joined in a collaborative drawing process. Part of the purpose of getting people to do them is for the sake of the conversations that we have along the way. The presumption on my part is that there is something valuable about those conversations.

When it comes time for the exhibition, I hope that the work isn't valued only because on some abstract level you knew that the workshop was important to other people. There has to be something generous to the viewer in that exhibit, not just

BG Is there a third outcome that's interesting to you? Such as a change in social structures?

AH Well ideally, there is always the possibility that what we do will affect social structures. I'm optimistic and humble about what one can expect from a small group of people coming together. Once in a while you hear from someone who says, *ten years ago I saw the piece and it led to this or this happening* but you can't expect that. We don't have control over the reception of the work.

TR Can you talk more about art and activism? The idea that these formal strategies could be useful in a more activist situation. Where is that overlap and how do you navigate it?

AH One way to think about it is that we all live through an aesthetic experience. How things in the world come to make sense depends on what they look and sound like, before we process that information into language. I think that the world is filled with social forms: forms of life and technology; relationships to objects and relationships to others that aren't restricted to art. These have meanings and use outside of galleries, theaters and museums. However, I am interested in those spaces as sites of experimentation where people can find relationships between art and their everyday experiences.

For me the line between art and activism is potentially very porous. Especially since art often wants to change the world and activism tends to rely on aesthetic strategies. That's when activism becomes its smartest, when it understands itself aesthetically, and when it tries to say things that haven't already been said.

BG What's a concrete example of that?

AH One example is the 2006 immigration rights rallies. The political

in the process that would bring some of them back into the work in

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right was trying to describe the demonstrators as groups of thugs and criminals attempting to steal the country. In order to strip away some of the signifiers that embodied their argument, the rally organizers asked participants to not carry flags bearing their country of origin and for everyone to wear white t-shirts. Some on the left said that this was a conservative tactic. I found it strategic. It erased these signifiers from the image in a way that undermined the rights' interpretation to it, leaving their rhetoric as empty and hyperbolic. There were so many more people marching than the people had imagined were actually around and it shifted their image from "unruly horde" to a community and constituency. Even though the government hasn't done much, there has still been a powerful rhetorical shift.

taisha and I also experienced some of these questions during the piece at Cypress College. We were working with a group of student veterans at the college and at a

productive ways. An entirely different series of discussions would come up, including one that involved using a piece of canvas to represent a flag. We wanted this to be a non-flag that they folded like a flag. They had real questions about that, *What dimensions are these? This isn't a real flag.* One guy was thoroughly offended at first that we were asking him to go through this formal procedure without a real flag, and an amazing conversation arose out of that about questions of abstraction, recognition and movement.

AH It became about much more than just helping us hang the show.

tp Right. It was a temporary community that stayed present beyond the original framework we made for it.

AH It's obvious that if you want a community to share authorship in a project, it should be interesting to them. It's less obvious that participating in the creation of a work provides an entirely different relationship to the work and its ideas itself. Similarly, I had a piece where

Ashley

certain point we realized that the participants were not going to become authors of the work in a direct way, as we'd offered as one possible outcome of the workshops we'd facilitated with them.

tp We used that realization to frame questions of authorship and what it means to work with a community. Despite the difficulty of keeping the participants engaged with their complex schedules as students and uncertainty about how much they cared about an art project, at the end of the day, we were able to find points

I was drawing this big chalk map and had under budgeted the time it would take to complete it before the opening. I was at a school, and suddenly all of these students and other people on the campus began to help. There was a certain point, a threshold that got crossed, where this huge group of people started asking about the ideas in the piece. I think it had a lot to do with the fact that they were transcribing the work and that they were having a kinetic relationship to its forms and shapes. They experienced its size in relationship to their

bodies, which was different than just looking at it by themselves. To me,

impulses. They watch me go from here to there and I think, *Oh my god,*

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that is really powerful. We know how to describe these questions in terms of education, but less so in terms of what art does — how, in its process, it shapes and affects an audience.

BG This example reminds me of Tai's notion of entering a space and letting the work unfold there. Maybe part of why your drawing worked so well on the level of participation was that you had this rich research material that was embedded in the drawing itself. If that research hadn't been in place before they entered I'm guessing that it probably wouldn't have been as rich of an experience for anybody.

AH (to taisha) I feel like you don't like to distinguish between the object and how it got there.

tp I work very intuitively and also through a research oriented process. They weave into one another and so it's hard to distinguish at the end of a process. I'm so implicated in the ideas of the piece that to separate myself from the work feels very difficult.

AH What about the "Modest Epic" piece, where you had a two-day process leading up to the performance? Everything leading up to the event was a performance but then at the event it was suddenly visible to the public.

tp Yeah, I was talking about this with Chloë Flores. I lived in Public Fiction's space for three nights, and my idea was that I was in a performance the whole time. But at the public showing, when other bodies enter the room, everything changed. I was no longer just a body washing the dishes. Suddenly I felt I had a symbolic body. I immediately stepped outside of myself and thought, *How is my body being read in this context?* That affects all of these other

how fast am I doing this?

BG Did you speak to your audience?

tp Not at all. I wanted the audience to be a bit invisible or myself to be somewhat invisible to them. I was more interested in ghosting the space as opposed to saying, *Hey y'all, welcome, this is my house.*

BG There's the theater's wall to be contended with. How, without using language, can you decrease the theatricality of being the object that audiences project a narrative on?

tp I am more concerned with my ability to control the theater's wall, and how much it influences my movements. How to fall into the intimacy of performance. If anything, that's what I'm interested in paying attention to: the chemical shifts within my body the moment I see people around. It becomes part of the research that the performance is unfolding. At what point do I accept and allow the barrier between your body and my body to melt and meld and actually feel comfortable so that I can access this different place?

(Taisha slides a cup towards me across the table)

I need to move this because it needs to be moved, as opposed to moving it because I am aware of you watching me move the cup. I don't see this as a problem, but as something to pay attention to. I think that this permeable barrier between the person coming to experience the work and the work itself is something that I'm interested in dissolving further. That's what our project has been; you don't come just to look, you come to experience. The work cannot be understood by viewing alone. You have to become part of it.

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—Ashley

Ashley Hunt uses image, object, word and performance-based strategies to engage the ideas of social movements, modes of learning, and the relationships between our art worlds and the larger worlds in which they sit. His work is often concerned with questions of power and the ways that some people have more, others have less, and what can be done about that. Hunt's recent works include the ongoing inquiry into the politics and aesthetics of mass incarceration in the U.S., *The Corrections Documentary Project*; his ongoing collaboration with Taisha Paggett, *On Movement, Thought and Politics*; the performance, *Notes on the Emptying of a City*; and the multi-platform *Communograph* project at Project Row Houses.

taisha paggett's work includes individual and collaborative investigations into questions of the body, intuition, the lived experience, agency and the phenomenology of race. she maintains an ongoing project with visual artist Ashley Hunt, is co-founder of the dance journal project *itch*, and has had the honor of dancing in the projects of several LA-based choreographers and artists. paggett holds an MFA from UCLA's department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance and will be joining the full-time dance faculty of UC Riverside this fall.