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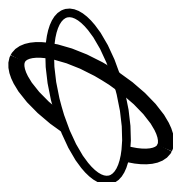
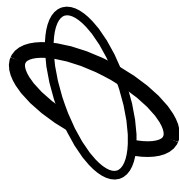
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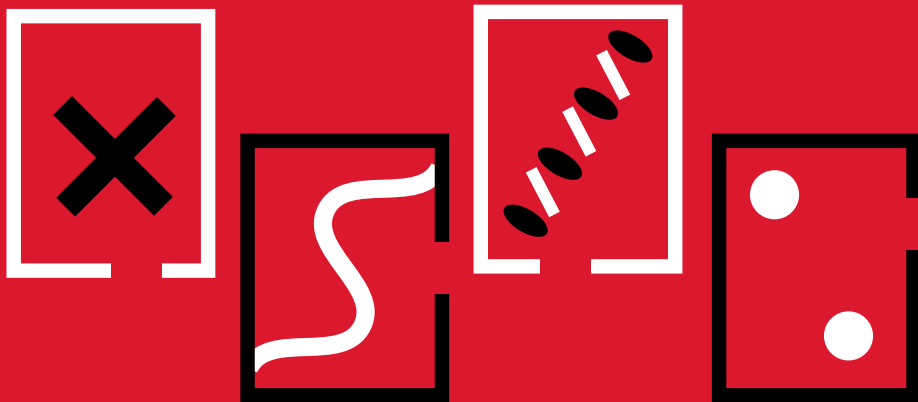
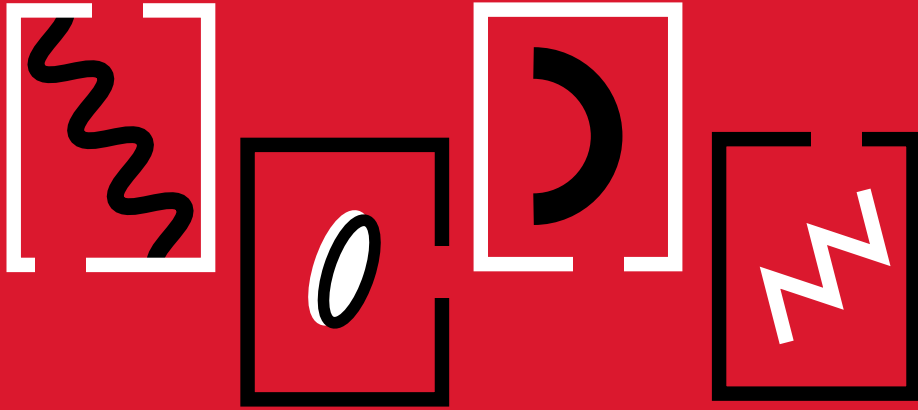
taisha paggett & Ashley Hunt

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Native\_Strategies  
Dispersions

summer\_2014  
issue\_4





Dear Reader,

Are you reading on July 11th, 2014 at our launch party at LACE or 20 years after? We hope that both are true.

*Native Strategies #4 — Dispersions* looks at the artists who consider the aesthetics and play of communication, distribution of politicized actions, and working in multiple channels and platforms to be an integral part of their performance practice.

The following interviews were broadcast live on KCHUNG radio in October and November of 2013.

The ideal institution would be flexible enough to accommodate whoever they feel is an important artist but that's a dangerous thing to give an institution that kind of power. That's why it's really important that artists participate in the means of distribution and become, well, producers. —John

Brian Getnick Can I just bite this?  
Tanya Rubbak Yes. You can bite it.

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06:00pm  
John\_Burtle

BG I'm eating spring rolls. I'm sorry. For those of you who are listening...

JB We're live. We're recording.

BG I'm Brian Getnick.

TR I'm Tanya Rubbak.

JB And I'm John Burtle and this is KCHUNG Radio 1630 am, broadcasting on kchungradio.org. And so Brian and Tanya, you do a publication called *Native Strategies*, right?

BG What do you want to know about it? From the beginning?

JB Yes. The whole spiel.

BG Well, I keep telling the story over and over again and I hope Asher doesn't mind but it was after I had seen Asher Hartman's performance *Annie Okay* at the Hammer Museum<sup>1</sup>. It was one of the most interesting things I'd seen in performance or art in general. After it was over, I felt that there should've been attention paid to it in writing.

## Introduction

I didn't know Asher at that time, and I was very curious about his ideas, so I proposed that he do another project at LACE. The people at LACE — Robert Crouch, Geneva Skeen and Carol Stakenas — encouraged me to organize more shows. In the end, there were seven different performances over four nights. Each of the performing artists were eventually interviewed and in those interviews I was finding a span of different perspectives. I was excited to see all that difference in the format of one...well what looked like one chapter of a book. So that's how it evolved. I just saw that first issue as the first chapter, each chapter looking at a different way of working within performance in L.A.

And then I met Tanya at *Signify, Sanctify, Believe*<sup>2</sup>?

TR Yes, at Public Fiction<sup>3</sup>. *Signify, Sanctify, Believe* had a library installation and you participated in one of the events. We

<sup>1</sup>For more information on *Annie Okay* by Asher Hartman: [hammer.ucla.edu/programs/detail/program\\_id/578](http://hammer.ucla.edu/programs/detail/program_id/578)

<sup>2</sup>*Signify, Sanctify, Believe* was facilitated by Claire Cronin, Tanya Rubbak, and Adam Overton. [signifysanctifybelieve.org/](http://signifysanctifybelieve.org/)

<sup>3</sup>Public Fiction is directed by Lauren Mackler. [publicfiction.org](http://publicfiction.org)

started talking because you were looking at the library that I designed and told me about *Native Strategies*.

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BG I wanted to work with you because I think we had a good dialogue from the get go. The way you installed the library was so playful and sculptural. It grabbed pieces of everybody's work and gathered it together and yet the reading library was also something completely on its own — its own embodied piece of art. I didn't know what that meant but it really excited me. So we embarked on a series of conversations that led to the second issue which was called "Next Steps", looking at people in L.A. who created space a for performance art and dance to meet.

JB Cool.

BG Well, that's like a sketch of the start.

TR These ... I have to say, these spring rolls, are especially good today. I don't know what it is ...

BG It's the beef and the shrimp together.

JB And, like, the herb is really potent.

TR I want somebody else to have this half.

JB Oh a spill!

BG I spilled the sauce.

JB Fish sauce. So, you were saying that the first issue was more of a catalog? The events happened and then the publication came after? Is that right?

BG I would say that first one ... I thought of it as a catalog of sorts but what it ended up being is still the format that we work with, which is a tool for hunting the core critical perspectives within artists' practices. I guess that's one of the most important things about *Native Strategies* — that it's asserting that artists already have richly researched critical frameworks, and if we're going to look at the full spectrum of what performance art is in Los Angeles, it's best to start by talking to the artists themselves. I would love to be able to foster more dialogue directly between all of those artists. And I think you know how and Carol Cheh knows<sup>4</sup>, but no one's come up with a perfect way.

JB Yes. I think it's something that certainly happens here at KCHUNG. Many different voices from lots of different spac-

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John\_Burtle

es. But I think something that makes the journal unique is its scope. So, thinking about the upcoming issue where most of the interviews will happen on KCHUNG in the next two weeks, can you talk a little bit about the scope of this issue?

TR Sure. We've been asking what is a *performative document*? This is attractive for me as a graphic designer. How do you make the process of designing, editing, and putting it together in line with the themes that are being addressed? So often the practicality of making a publication drives things. But if the content is highly experimental, how do we push the journal to embody the spirit of those experiments?

BG What we're doing right now, these interviews on KCHUNG, is a method of distribution. A way for us to distribute the ideas of the artists we're working with as well as record them. Right now, this discussion on the air is enacting what Tanya is talking about.

JB Embodiment?

TR Embodied document or an embodied production of the themes. This is a journal right now. It's happening.

JB And so what do you want to talk specifically regarding the themes for this issue?

BG One of the themes that is threaded throughout all the different issues is the idea of audience. With performance, the live audience is considered a given but people create performances for themselves or for the mirror and for the camera. Internal performances.

JB Radio is a weird example where the audience is invisible or you don't know what the audience is....

BG I've been trying to imagine — is the audience on the other end of this microphone? Are they tuned in?

JB Or are they in the future? They could be listening to this next week or a year from now. Sometimes I imagine that the audience is a single specific person. As if I'm speaking to her and anybody else is kind of extra.

BG For every issue we invite artists to do live performances and this radio component is one level of that. We also want

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to work with artists who already have built into their practice interesting ways of distributing their thoughts outside the conventions of standard visual arts spaces. The artists in this issue, you among them, are all on some level interested in provoking change.

JB Explicitly?

BG More explicitly. When you perform within the gallery, you're contending with a space intended to hold objects just so long as they can be held again by a potential purchaser and then held again by successive purchasers until they make contact with the canon making mechanisms of museums. And I think that performance artists' bodies are subjected to similar thoughts or ideals in that space, a space that anticipates future audiences or connects with historical audiences. In either case, the art venue values audiences that are actually not physically embodied in that space.

JB They might not even be alive.

BG They may never be alive. They may never come.

JB Or they might be dead.

BG That's important. They might be dead. They might be loved ones that are no longer around. They might be people that are just simply not there. Performances could be directed in all these different ways but not always towards the living audience that is present. And so the artists we're working with are taking the step to use different modes of distribution to reach audiences outside of the sphere of the art gallery.

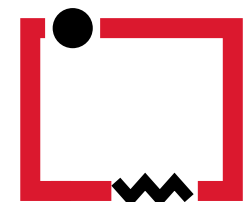
That's where we're starting. I should mention that what I just said is a flexible structure. I'm revealing a set of assumptions I have and I'm anticipating that these theories will be contradicted during the course of making this journal. I just want to reveal the place I'm inviting people into.

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*This is the idea of taking on different forms for different types of audiences, for different lengths and scopes of dispersion. The low production value has a wider reach versus the painting in the gallery and conversations with your peers and or maybe peers that you haven't even met that live in a different country. Sometimes I wonder how they can be brought a little closer together. Distribution is like an arrow in pointing in one direction away from the artist. Or it's like a circuit.—John*





**Tanya Rubbak** The idea of distribution made us to approach you about doing these interviews here at KCHUNG. First they'll be distributed on air, then they'll get transcribed and maybe they'll take on another form. We don't really know what we're going to make in the end.

**John Burtle** Radio's good because it's fast and immediate. But print you can edit, go over and make sure it's articulate. All the things that I'm going to say twice or three times, you can take those out.

surrounding the center and just knocked on people's doors and asked if they would give us an ingredient. We were wearing these suits that had acrylic felt hot-glued over them in a patchwork. Mine was bright green and John's was bright orange. We wanted people to take us seriously. It sounds silly but wearing a suit carries a certain type of professionalism. They were a funny icebreaker.

Then we would tell them that we're part of this exhibition at the Center for the Art's in Eagle Rock,

# John

**Brian Getnick** In addition to running KCHUNG, you also have a studio practice where you make paintings and objects. When I saw your paintings I was surprised because I know of you more as an organizer and as somebody who enables the art community to have a voice, literally through KCHUNG. The first project of yours I learned about is when you went door-to-door and gathered ingredients to make a soup.

**JB** That is a project that I did with John Barlog<sup>1</sup> at the Center for the Arts Eagle Rock<sup>1</sup> where we went door-to-door in the community

which is widely known in that community. We printed out what we were doing on their letterhead asking them to contribute an ingredient for the giant soups we were making. We ended up making three.

**BG** Soups not suits.

**JB** Soups. Yes. Suits for soups. We made three of them based on people's dietary constrictions because we wanted everybody that was contributing to be able to eat. One was vegetarian, one had meat and one that was dairy and gluten-free. They were all really good. One was a rice, coconut, peanut butter and ginger bread soup.

**TR** Wow.

**JB** With mushrooms.

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**BG** How do these different practices relate? You're painting and sculpture practice and making soup.

**JB** I have a soup-making practice.

**BG** Slash radio station-making practice slash Telethon-making practice?

**JB** Right. Yes. At times there was a lot of overlap and at times they were farther apart. The space between them is based on a lot of different things.

During the soup project with John, I was independently making a lot of paintings and drawings that I put into these boxes. They would just be jammed full of stuff: some of it trash, some it found things. Some of the stuff I made and some of it was made by other people. Then I gave them to specific people. In a lot of ways it was like portraiture, thinking about a person and over a long period of time producing this thing for them.

Those boxes were distributed by me just giving them to people. At that time, John and I were frequently making flyers that were instructions, actions or proposals and those were just dispersed on the windshields of cars or tucked within relevant books in libraries. They are all similar actions. Producing a physical thing and then gifting it into the world.

**BG** With the gift boxes and soup you have concrete audiences in mind. Does imagining that audience while making the gift inform your decisions formally and aesthetically?

**JB** Yes. Maybe not the soup, but with ... you know actually even the soup.

**BG** How similar or different is that gifting process to making a painting in terms of their recep-

tions by an audience?

**JB** It's definitely different. Some-

thing that I've always appreciated about art spaces is that they're there for us to meet and talk about stuff in. Even if we aren't talking about it there, maybe we are talking about it afterwards. That's why publishing art discourse is important. I'm glad you're doing this because it's a way for other people to engage with the work and be part of the conversation. The conversation will be formalized and it can exist over the course of time as record, but also in the immediate future for artists that are in a different city or country. That's important to me as part of this larger discussion. And it's probably why I have always been interested in painting. They can be exhibited in a gallery and participate in a certain conversation and tradition. Painting kind of carries a certain authority in some sectors.

**BG** When you say participate in a conversation, what do you mean?

**JB** History.

**BG** History yes, but it's also a method of distribution. Like how work circulates in a system that involves museums and private collectors. It's daunting to me because the message seems like it's really easy to get out of the artist's hands. That's almost the whole point of it. How do you set it up so when it is out of your hands it's still doing what you want?

**JB** I was riding the train last week with one of my roommates who works with a guy who was one of Mike Kelly's prime assistants. She was in New York setting up the New Museum show and she said that they were putting Kelly's work in spaces that she was uncomfortable with, like bathrooms and closets.

<sup>1</sup>Center for the Arts, Eagle Rock. cfaer.org



It's a good example of what can happen when the work gets out of

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the artist's hands, especially when they're dead.

I read about this Calder sculpture and that the institution that owns it frequently puts a pink ribbon on it for breast cancer awareness. They've done it like 50 times. The Calder Foundation was like, *You need to take this off or we're going to pull your funding* or something like that. And the director of the museum was like, *I don't know what the problem is, we've been doing this for 50 years.*

**BG** You just cited examples of two dead artists whose works got away from them ... so it sounds to me like you're thinking about the relationship between galleries and objects, how messages and intentions transform because of the nature of those spaces. How do you feel about the possibility of your paintings entering the museum, but not your other projects?

**JB** I'm not that worried about it. I feel like the other projects will enter. There are lots of artists who work across platforms. Martin Kippinberger is a good example. There are some people that only think of him as a painter, but then there's others who are interested in all the peripheral things he did. Also, there is a tradition of performance remnants and representations of performances that are entering the museum system. These objects are being dispersed and traveling through that system. What's exciting now is that the system is trying to support artists producing performances in a way that's made specifically to be reproduced. This gets back to what we were talking about in terms of documents embodying themes.

**BG** It works for artists for whom

reproduction is essential but there is an enormous body of

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artists that method does not work for.

**JB** The ideal institution would be flexible enough to accommodate whoever they feel is an important artist but that's a dangerous thing to give an institution that kind of power. That's why it's really important that artists participate in the means of distribution and become, well, producers.

**BG** This is one of the proactive qualities I like about your work.

**JB** What do you mean by proactive?  
**BG** Well, talk about your involvement with KCHUNG Radio?

**JB** Probably what attracted me to it was how I don't have to agree with everybody that participates in this station and can engage with so many different people. There's lots of people who don't identify as artists that participate. People from very different backgrounds. People that are in high school. People that were big musicians in the 90's and somehow they're here now.

Also KCHUNG is fairly egalitarian. It has the vibe where if you want a show, you get on the list. Then you get emailed when a slot opens up and you can either take it or not. It doesn't really matter what you want to do. You can write gibberish for your proposal and nobody's going to complain. And then if you decide to do a different kind of gibberish once you get your show, that's okay, too. I think that's what I appreciate here. KCHUNG's not about inclusion and exclusion, there's no editing here which I think is really hard to do in reality.

In a similar way, we always want the arm gallery<sup>2</sup>, to be open for everybody. Whenever someone asks me about it, whoever they are they, I say "oh it's a space for people

to do something, do you want to do something?" They almost always do.

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Maybe it's just interesting for them to think about. I have had people that I met on public transportation or from different countries do stuff that's really exciting.

**BG** This is the project where you and John Barlog have tattoos of square frames on your fore-arms?

**JB** Yes. Rectangles.

**BG** And inside them drawings take place?

**JB** Drawings or screenings. We've had video projections, photos, sculptures, and performances. It's a really wide range of stuff.

**TR** Is there an archive? Do you document it?

**JB** Yes and no. I try to take photos of everything that happens if it's not too invasive, but that's not really public. It's more for my memory. I purposefully don't publicize them because I know I can't adequately do it for everybody and sometimes the document isn't the most appropriate way to represent the work.

**BG** This project is interesting to think of in terms of distribution, they way it travels, right?

**JB** Right. Which I always have mixed feelings about. Because I'll have the rectangle probably for the rest of my life. But at different times it's used a lot more. Sometimes people know about the project before I've gotten to know them. Or they might have an expectation that there're things happening all the time. We started the project 7 years ago and we don't put as much energy into it as we used to. But things still happen. At least a couple of times a year. I really like it when other people curate it.

**BG** It's attached to your body. Is it a shared space?

**JB** Yes. Totally is.

**TR** It also brings up the consequences of the distribution. Like

the impact on the artist.

**JB** Oh yes. That's huge. A lot of people wanted to do something permanent, it is often their first reaction. Things like scarring came up. And we have to say, *it's like a normal gallery space and you have to leave it like you found it.*

**BG** Great.

**JB** In the same way most galleries won't like it if you alter the space permanently.

**TR** What about shaving?

**JB** Shaving is an option to artists.  
**BG** Thinking back to KCHUNG, besides being an egalitarian and inviting structure, it's a functional radio station with programming. And it's also filling this gap that you were talking about when you're describing the kinds of works that are not being collected by museums, representing a certain vein of performance.  
**TR** Or like with the *Eternal Telethon*, as performance for a live audience and also performance for a video.

**BG** The work is meant to be experienced as a video from the beginning.

**JB** Probably the majority of the audience is experiencing it on video.

**BG** So when it's existing later as a video, it doesn't get so far removed from the initial way that the work was meant to circulate.

**JB** This is the idea of taking on different forms for different types of audiences, for different lengths and scopes of dispersion. The low production value has a wider reach versus the painting in the gallery and conversations with your peers and or maybe peers that you haven't even met that live in a different country. Sometimes I wonder how

<sup>2</sup>Open Arms is a project and space by John Barlog and John Burtle.



TR Thanks John. Thank you for having us.

**BG** Good night.

**TR** Good night.



00:00hour  
Dear Reader

# 10/25/2013



The criteria for so much public work is *what happened?* or *What was the result which indicates success or failure?* I'm interested in things that have no success and no failure.—Elana







**Elana Mann** You sent me a list of questions and the first one was *how do you perceive the audience receiving your ideas and messages*. I'm curious about what you meant by that.

**BG** We were considering about the subject of listening and the act of listening. You make images that represent listening like the satellite dish you wore on your head<sup>1</sup> and the listening sculptures<sup>2</sup>. You also facilitate listening in your work.

**EM** When I was considering that question I was thinking about

I'm aware of them as audiences in museums, galleries and public spaces. They're all interesting in different ways...but if there were no scholars that would be sad.

Also, the context of the artworks I create, especially if I am working in public places, changes my thinking about the audience that encounters my artwork. When I did a project at Side Street Projects<sup>3</sup> they wanted me to create an artwork for a North Pasadena audience. To produce the artwork I needed to get to know that neighborhood and figuring out how that specific community listens.

## Elana

how art can stimulate ideas and feelings through different means of engagement. I am aware of different types of viewing styles that people have. There is the stroller, the stalker and the scholar. The stalker runs through an exhibit as fast as they can. The stroller takes their time. The scholar is there for eternity trying to understand.

**BG** You've been all of them haven't you?

**EM** Yeah, I have been all of them. They're not guides for making, but

**BG** How did you find that out?

**EM** It took many months. I went to community meetings, I went to local city government meetings, I met with local residents. Even while the project was up I was still learning about the neighborhood and how community members were encountering the work.

**TR** What would you say you learned, what obstacles did you encounter?

**EM** It was hard to gain trust. There are real issues that neighborhood

faces that I can't understand in a deep way. But because I don't live

there. But I could see certain things clearly and there were little shifts that I could make to open up spaces for listening. For instance I went to my first neighborhood council meeting and I thought, *I can't believe they're talking about street lamps the whole time*. Then I realized the real issue wasn't just about street lamps but about safety in the neighborhood. The street lamps were just a part of the picture. NW Pasadena struggles with gang violence and drug dealing and the lamps made people safe by allowing for visibility on the street. I organized a meeting between the neighborhood council and youth advocates and invited the Pasadena City government. At the meeting we listened to kids saying *I don't feel safe walking home because there is no lighting*. After the meeting the city installed more lighting. It wasn't that I fixed it, but I helped create more visibility for the issue through art and spectacle.

**BG** What was the spectacle?

**EM** There was a V shaped table. On one side was the neighborhood council and the students on the other. The youth advocates held up maps that they made, environmental scans of the neighborhood, and pointed out things that they liked and things that they didn't like. As a backdrop I placed these listening sculptures I had made. It was very similar to a city council meeting but then there were these kids directly confronting the neighborhood council and these subtle visual shifts that were changing the dynamic.

**TR** You illuminated the issue of lighting by putting a spotlight on it.

**BG** Getting back to the stalker, stroller and scholar. What you just described is this rich indexical aspect to the sculptures that

is actually about generating the conditions for change. Someone

looking at one of these listening sculptures and only seeing it quickly, how would they know about how you brought people together and how that sculpture was a part of it?

**EM** Within these sorts of socially engaged artworks sometimes the only person who gets to experience the whole project is the artist. There is usually no one else who is experiencing all the parts of the artwork and that's something we need to investigate. How can the scholar be more enmeshed in these sorts of practices from the very beginning? At this point even somebody that's really interested only experiences a small part of it. But that's OK, hopefully there will be some shifts in the future. For now, I'm pretty satisfied if someone just encounters a sculpture or attends an event or goes on my website or talks to me.

**TR** Could we talk about the Otis exhibit? I was really moved by the photos of the dresses. This idea of listening with your body and the clothing that's meant to receive sound.

**BG** Or a form of drag.

**EM** I made a dress inspired by a Louise Bourgeois piece, which is a dress with multiple breasts cascading down the front. I was thinking about receptivity, listening and femininity and how to translate that into a garment. I was also inspired by the *Fascinator* giant hats worn by English ladies. The queen wears them. My *Fascinator* was a satellite dish, and I made a canvass sack with speakers running down the dress. I wore this costume at a historical location of listening, the Jamesberg Earth Station, a giant satellite dish that was built to receive the Apollo Eleven signals. It was an

<sup>1</sup> Searching for a Signal was part of 3 Solo Projects: Audrey Chan, Elana Mann, Chan & Mann curated by Meg Linton at the Ben Maltz gallery, Otis College of Art and Design

<sup>2</sup> The Acoustic Sculptures were a part of *Listening as (a) movement*, a public art project in NW Pasadena, CA, commissioned by Side Street Projects, investigating sound and the human voice as physical entities that can move us emotionally, form deep interpersonal connections, and be agents of social change.

<sup>3</sup> Directed by Emily Hopkins, Side Street Projects is an entirely mobile artist-run organization that gives artists of all ages the ability and the means to support their creative endeavors. [sidestreet.org](http://sidestreet.org)

important site of communication  
between the US and the rest of

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the world and received the first  
Tiananmen Square images.

I performed for and with the satellite dish and saw myself as trying to be it, trying to channel the power and history of this dish. I made a video called *Searching for a Signal*. In it I'm moving, trying to receive signals that the dish was transmitting.

**BG** I don't see a direct connection to what we were talking about earlier, facilitating a dialog between communities, but it sounds more like you going inward, asking where does the sign of the satellite dish become a symbol for yourself. What were you looking for?

**EM** The connection is listening whether that is listening to a community or listening to internal voices that help guide us and give our lives meaning. I'm a spiritual person. I had a very religious background so I'm always looking for a sign, to know if am I on the right path. I'm always trying to understand what's happening to me and trying to understand the deeper meaning of events around me.

**TR** I can picture that level of investigation from the video and the way you moved in it.

**BG** It's good to hear about the wide spectrum of values in your work, not just aesthetics but values. You're civic minded and that's explicit in that the communication has a concrete end, and yet you allow the objects to be there with the spectator without demanding that they understand their connection to the specific politic.

**EM** I need to be alone and explore things happening inside of me simultaneous to exploring the outside world. I feel this duality of

experience is my ideology. I had this debate with a professor in grad

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school. I was showing him a work that was about exploring the interior and I was making the case that it was political. He claimed that, *politics is something that you do with groups outside of yourself, it's a collective endeavor*. I argued that it was both, that you had to have internal and external exploration happening simultaneously and you couldn't just have one. I don't know if it's a perspective from our generation who looked at the social movements of the 60's and 70's and experienced new age movements in the 80's and 90s'. Neither one provided an answer but what about combining them? Is there a way to navigate both? For older generations it might be one or the other. It's hard for me to work only in the public or my studio. I see-saw back and forth.

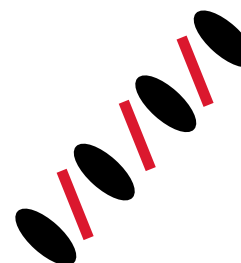
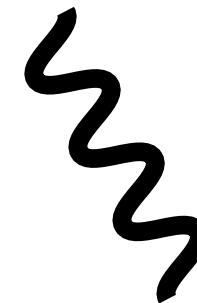
**TR** It makes so much sense when you think about listening because on the one hand it's about listening to others and on the other hand it's about listening to yourself. You can't communicate if you don't hear your own feelings.

**BG** Absolutely, and to facilitate that ideology in someone else by not always striving for the propagandistic.

**EM** This is something that I chew on when I work in the public in socially engaged ways. I start thinking *is there a way around something being totally functional and having results?* The criteria for so much public work is what happened? or *What was the result which indicates success or failure?* I'm interested in things that have no success and no failure.

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Elana\_Mann



Elana Mann is an artist based in Los Angeles, CA, who makes visible the unseen power of sound and listening. She has presented her work in city parks, buses, museums, empty lots and galleries all over the world. Mann is a recipient of California Community Foundation's 2009 Visual Arts Fellowship as well as a 2013 and 2012 ARC grant from CCI. Her projects have been covered by the *Los Angeles Times*, *LA Weekly*, *NPR*, *O Globo*, *El Pais*, *La Repubblica* and *X-Tra Magazine*, among others. She is the co-founder of ARLA, the *Artist Bailout Collective*, and the *People's Microphony Camerata* and since 2005 she has collaborated with artist Audrey Chan as the duo *Chan & Mann*. Mann received her B.F.A. from Washington University, St. Louis and her M.F.A from California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA and currently, she is a Visiting Lecturer at Scripps College. [www.elanamann.com](http://www.elanamann.com)



**Brian Getnick** If you're expecting to hear Addie Tinnell at 7:30 you might just hear bird song. Addie is on now until about 7:30 and then we're going to take another break and talk to Patrisse Marie Cullors-Brignac. Hi Addie.

**Addie Tinnell** Hey.

**Tanya Rubbak** We were just talking about fashion and anarchy.

**AT** The thing that I always say is: *how can I ever build community with someone that's shoving cargo shorts and ill-fitting t-shirts down my throat*

fashion. This was my last ditch attempt to be a man and wondering, alright, *there's got to be something in there for me.*

**TR** Something you could wear.

**AT** Yeah. But, it turns out there wasn't, which is okay. It's great actually, being a trans woman is great. I was writing a lot about anarchism and men's fashion and the way that the symbols of domination are reproduced. I got really focused on the Black bloc<sup>1</sup>, because if you think about anarchist men's fashion, they're the biggest topic that you

## Addie

*every day?* I mean, it's a joke but at the same time I work with a lot of real straight, manarchist types. They always put the onus on me to explain who I am or why I'm doing what I'm doing but their clothes have a history of violence to them. The symbology that they're invoking is not what they think it is. They think it's being anti-fashion, like casual, chill, whatever. But garments like those are derived from the US military. Just to throw them on without being cognizant of it is basically taking on a military presence in the streets or in the house unwittingly. I ran a blog for a long time that was looking at anarchism and men's

could think about. I got a lot of hate mail because my whole thesis is that the black bloc is a form of nation building and it's not a viable tactic for street militancy.

Egypt was a really good example. When Mubarak was ousted, you didn't see any Black bloc anywhere. People were doing what I call fluid anonymity. They would throw t-shirts on or cut up bottles, making masks against tear gas out of materials at hand.

I think people should be innovating, that anarchists should be innovating, instead of using Black bloc tactics because I think innovation is tactically more viable.

**BG** Can I make a connection to something you were saying

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earlier about fashion and trans status? Correct me if you feel like this isn't going in the right direction, but my understanding of trans as an identity is that it's not a fixed one necessarily. There's a fluidity that mirrors the strategy that you're advocating in anarchy.

**AT** Hmm...

**BG** Is that a connection that's worth making?

**AT** Fluid is a tricky term when you're talking about gender because there are people that identify as gender-fluid. I have a lot of friends that feel like if they could, they would be a boy one day and girl the next day but personally I don't really identify with the word fluid. Fashion is super fluid. It's really healthy to change your fashion regularly. I think that people should wear an outfit that they consider their uniform for a month or two and really dive into what those clothes mean and then totally change it.

**TR** What fascinated me about your court stylings is that here you have a charged, really intense situation, and you go into it wearing a fabulous outfit. It seems almost like armor. When I first encountered this project it was Adam Overton going for his court date for being held overnight at the Occupy Movement in LA and I was totally stunned. Then there's the Ariel project...

**AT** Yeah, well Ariel was actually earlier. That was the first fashion styling that we did. It's really important to address the moments where you, as a body, interact with the state as a punitive juggernaut of oppression. The courtroom is one of the most visible and powerful instances of that. I love styling people for court

because courtrooms are constructed in terms of dress codes. I'm really

interested in all the different reasons why the state needs people to be so subdued fashion wise.

Ariel was facing a lot of felony charges for smashing the windows of the democratic headquarters in Denver and so there were real consequences. On the one hand, you have to at some point figure out what you're going to say about innocence, because you want to be perceived as innocent, but as an anarchist you don't believe in the court system. You don't want to give it any sort of legitimacy.

So, there's that element of defiance...Lindsay Lohan was super defiant. Her fingernails said *fuck you* which is awesome, but, especially with Ariel it's that balance between innocence and defiance that I find really fascinating in court fashion.

**BG** Was there any public commentary on the way she was attired in court?

**AT** Her whole case, in a regional way, exploded. People were talking about her as a trans woman, people were talking about her as an anarchist. First she was a Republican because she hated Obamacare supposedly.

**BG** What? They were branding her as a Republican?

**AT** Yeah, they branded her as a Republican and then the Republicans branded her as a Democrat. Then they found out that she was a trans woman and an anarchist and they were like, *we really hate you now.* I'm interested in the way that anarchists and trans women can be re-contextualized in the public sphere.

**BG** The day I met you was at the anarchist's book fair and at that fair you were seated next to a union organizer from Long Beach, am I right?

<sup>1</sup>The Black Bloc is both an organization and a tactic. (Anarchy is the rhetoric of perpetual contestation)

AT Yeah. Slobodan Dimitrov.  
BG Right, and the pair of you

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together was to me symbolically compelling because one might get the impression from what we've talked about that you work exclusively in these radical collectives.

AT He always hits me up to go down with a bunch of artists to do some shit at the Labor Day march or whatever, and then I'm like, *dude, I would love to do that but the artists that I know are not organized. We are not organized in the slightest.* I always hit him up to do projects with me because he's just a really interesting guy, with super interesting politics. He's been through it all. I think he was involved in a lot of labor uprisings where he is from in Poland.

BG And how about the other group that you were talking about?

AT I'm a part of a group right now called Queerpocalypse<sup>2</sup> and that is about a death metal queer militancy. We were going to do a convergence and take over the anarchist book fair, glitter bomb the anarchists and fuck shit up, but now we're like, oh, well maybe we don't want to do that because there's bigger fish to fry than some cheesy manarchists. We might do it anyway. Either way it came down to the fact that we are announcing that we are giving away these kitty knuckles. It's like a three-day kitty knuckles for faggots bonanza, or whatever.

BG What's a kitty knuckle?

AT It's a really beautiful weapon that looks like a little plastic, really cutesy, kitty, but then you put your fingers through it and it's brass knuckles with spikes on it. I don't have one yet but some of the people in the collective have used them on the street and they're really effective.

Also we did a piece last week

and that's going to be released on facebook. It's just a little video of us

just kind of prancing around in black balaclavas and our underwear. We did a question and answer session, press conference-style. That experience excited people about the project and gave people a chance to talk about political things in a public sphere.

TR Would you say that the press conference itself is a platform or a medium that becomes an important part of the project?

AT The press conference is a social form, and the union hall is another form that I have worked with. The tea party is a form.

BG Our last question is about the future. What makes you hopeful?

AT Well, not the fact that the planet is dying. That does not make me hopeful.

BG Okay.

AT What makes me hopeful is that I feel like things are going to change completely. I feel like there's an energy coming that is really angry. I really feel like the film industry is dying and people are getting outsourced all the time. It is only a matter of time before that industry turns into Detroit. There's going to be all sorts of unemployed industry people everywhere and they're going to be ripe for radicalism. They're going to be radicalized by that process of losing their union jobs.

Then, because they have so many skills, they're just going to make all of this stuff that is totally shiny and radical. The cops are going to be disrupted by that because the film industry is well organized and when they protest, they're going to shut the city down and we radicals can for sure fucking take advantage of that in a number of ways.

I think that if Los Angeles

collapses, the empire's going to collapse in terms of the way that

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this city is connected with the global economy. It's cracking. It's so powerful when people in Los Angeles are electrified because there's no telling what they can do.

BG Don't give away too much on the air.

AT This was lovely.  
BG Up next is Patrisse Marie

Cullors-Brignac. She will be on air roughly around 7. In the meantime... I'm sorry 8, 8 o'clock. And in the meantime we're going to play some music. So we'll see you back at 8.

What makes me  
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ergy coming that is  
really angry.

—Addie

Addie Tinnel is an artist and organizer living and working in Los Angeles. She is a co-founder of *Cake and Eat It*, an artist collaborative with Kate Kershenstein. Her work explores the themes of politics and aestheticization, fem and trans visibility, police brutality and the social construction of autonomous spaces. She has helped to organize demos, actions, community spaces, lending libraries, free schools and numerous benefit shows as well as the *2010 Bash Back Convergence* and the *LA Anarchist Bookfair*. She was born in Conifer, Colorado.

<sup>2</sup>performingpublic-space.org/addie-tinnelcake-and-eat-it





**Brian Getnick** We're back.

**A.L. Steiner** There were so many people that had been sitting with dead air for so long.

**BG** Not really, we've been playing music and bird songs.

**ALS** I know, it's not dead. What is dead? That's the question.

**BG** That's what we're going to talk to you about.

**ALS** Okay, great, I'm ready.

**BG** Communication.

**ALS** Uncommunication. Dead Communication.

*personal/political are sexual.*

This points to a through-line in your practice: sabotaging the language of sexual definition. Do the tools for sabotage come from looking inward?

**ALS** The personal, political, and sexual are all ongoing collaborations with the subjective. For instance, a lot of problems within discussions about feminism are about "universal" concerns, which is problematic: whose universality is being promoted? It's been important to think

## Steiner

**BG** We've been talking to artists in this series about how their visual arts practices help politicize the action of communication. They also happen to do a lot of organizing, working with a lot of people, enabling communities to have conversations.

**ALS** You do that.

**BG** Yeah, we do that. It seems like it goes hand and hand. Artists that tend to look closely at communication as a form also work with lots of people. We were curious about a sentence which we found on your website, which goes *The*

about not only what am I trying to communicate, which is a huge part of making work that's public, but also what kind of relationships I formulate in my mind when I'm trying to create a practice around a certain politic. It's mine, it's personal, but then it's also a shared politic because it's open... Open not only to communication and discussion, but also open to criticism and to me understanding how to problematize it instead of closing it. I guess ultimately, it's about these questions or forms of openness that are possible through the political, through the personal,

through the sexual.

That particular line that you

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quoted came out of the writing and discussions that I had with my collaborator on that piece, A.K. Burns. We came up with that line to highlight the video's relationship to feminism through the sloganeering and theorizing that came from second- and third-wave feminism as the personal is political.

If you think about the things that you know to be part of your conscience, then you have to work with them. And that idiom was a part of mine. We say it or we think it if we're interested in feminist politics. But it's another thing to try to expand it. For instance, saying, "the personal or political are sexual" is an expansion of "the personal is political." The are statement clearly shouldn't be the end point either.

**BG** You seem to suggest that the very position from which one speaks in hopes of opening up or deconstructing might be too closed. I'm thinking about your visual arts practice in this regard. One could approach an installation of your collages without knowing about your other activities, your activism for instance, and still get a lot out of that experience. Yet, that experience might be diverging from some of the messages that you're constructing behind or around it? Is it any less propagandistic?

**ALS** Oh, I'm all for propaganda.

**BG** This is a different kind.

**ALS** A different kind. Well that's the thing, you're never not making a statement, but I don't believe the reception of individual work can be quantified or objectified in a way, because it's all subjective. As far as my installations, I don't frame them as a way to create messages, but I know that messages are created

through them. It's like skimming the conscious and unconscious process

at the same time. That's where I get the satisfaction in the work. That also relates to how they're read ultimately. I was just talking about a new installation I'm working on and there was discussion as to what would happen if there was a public response. I said, there's always a public response. There's always something that happens that I have to kind of manage. One time a picture, a particular picture, was taken out of a large scale collage, and it was a picture of my friend's son naked. The impulse for someone to take it could be interpreted in so many ways. Were they offended, or were they titillated by it? Were they trying to protect someone, or are they being perverted? For me those questions are totally open ended. I can't identify what the responses will be, and that's what's amazing about putting up art that's malleable, questionable, unfixed, and unstable.

**BG** You say you don't imagine a specific reception for these kinds of works. Do you ever construct an idealized viewer, a set of eyes that are going to be in contact with this work and receiving it?

**ALS** I mean it's interesting that you ask, do I construct a viewer or receiver? Ultimately my fantasy rests on a sort of idealized audience that sees the pleasure, celebration, and humanness in the collages. I mean there's such an inherently selfish pleasure in creation.

But often times you remember the bad story. You know, like that one time they took my picture down, or somebody was mad about this or that, or the one time they asked me to put up a particular sign and it felt like it wasn't beneficial for the piece. This is the kind of management that you do around the reception of your

work.

BG I've realized listening to you

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that I've been assuming that you had a target audience on whom you anticipated making an effect. But you seem to have this other notion of audience and reception: you don't know and it's productive not to know. Is that accurate? And are you carrying that openness into non-gallery, non-art institutional projects? In other words, is there a side to your work that's activism and another side that's art?

ALS The term "activist" has been a huge question. I mean, I've been thinking about it for years... decades. Now, I'm much more engaged with academia than I ever thought I would be. There's nothing apolitical about teaching at this point. Same with arts practice. There's no way to negate or disengage from the political essence of your statement, your objects, your intentions, your social practice, your arrangements within this world of cultural capital, which often... which sometimes leads to capital accumulation. For the most part, I can't distinguish when I'm being one thing or another. To say one is art, and the other is activism is a false binary. How do we take responsibility for the choices we're making? And before that, what choices are we making that are just not visible.

BG That question of visibility.

Tanya and I ask ourselves this all the time in terms of looking at Los Angeles, looking at this really enormous spectrum of forms that are all being produced under the auspices of performance art.

ALS It's interesting, your own engagement with performance. You have a mindfulness of what could and couldn't be, and what works and doesn't work, or what feels like it's doable or possible. It's like discerning in that way, like an editor or a curator.

I don't believe these practices of performing or producing or curating are

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different; they're really interrelated. They're all highly interdependent or inter-sectional. Some things that happen in the so-called studio happen in an office elsewhere. Or in your home, when you're on your iPhone. There's some sort of mobility too, and the mobility of thought really connects with all of that.

BG Meaning the virtual landscape or the building of thought?

ALS Well yeah, how thoughts are processed so quickly. The speed of communication and our relationship to hyper-production and efficiency. Efficiency and usefulness are now being projected onto our bodies. All day we are with our screens. Multiple screens at once. I think we can't really perceive what's happening to us yet. I think we're actually going through it, and we're trying to manage it as best we can.

A lot of us are trying, and whether it's a visual arts practice or ten million other ways, it's still making an imprint in the ether. That's why the Internet is so weird. You see these funny diagrams of the Internet like it's this open space above. How do we manage the open space?

BG That's is the first conversation I remember having with you. How unmanageable history and cultural memory are today. We still have this false conception that if we work for free in galleries or museums, those places will offer us a chance at being archived—which is always about immortality.

ALS Right. Immortality. And back to death. It comes full circle.

BG It goes back to death ...

ALS Yeah, that false promise of the past-historical, now post-historical. We don't know anything ultimately about the fruits of our efforts. It's about accessing some sort of integ-

ity or continual learning or questioning. I just hope to be continually

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understanding.

BG Absolutely. Well ... I think that's good for a start.

ALS Can we just keep this conversation between us? Erase it. John, Erase it.

BG Yes, John, erase the memories of all the listeners. I'm really

excited to reconvene with you and the other artists to start

mapping out the convergence of ideas about communication in Los Angeles.

ALS First we should change the borders and make Los Angeles somewhere else, right? All right, that's my next project. Thanks to you guys.



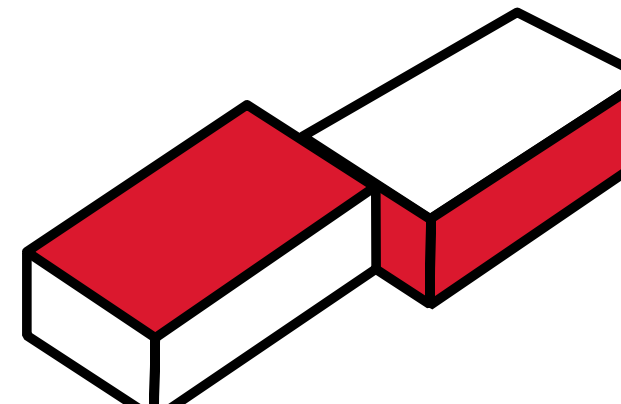
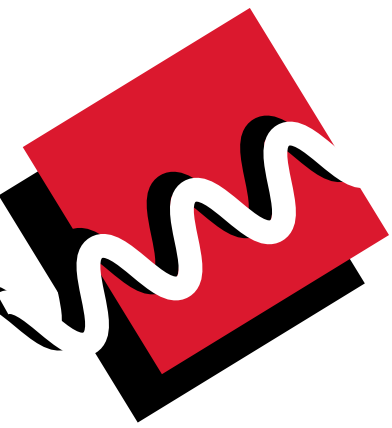
A.L. Steiner utilizes constructions of photography, video, installation, collage, collaboration, performance, lecturing, writing and curatorial work as seductive tropes channeled through the sensibility of a skeptical queer eco-feminist androgyne. Steiner's a collective member of Chicks on Speed, co-curator of *Ridykeulous*, co-founder/organizer of *Working Artists and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.)* and collaborates with numerous visual and performing artists. Steiner is Assistant Professor and Director of University of Southern California Roski School of Art and Design's Master of Fine Arts Program and Visiting MFA Faculty at Bard College in New York. Her work is featured in such permanent collections as The Brooklyn Museum of Art, Marieluise Hessel Collection and The Museum of Modern Art, and is represented by Deborah Schamoni Galerie. in Munich and Koenig & Clinton in New York.



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page\_25 Dear\_Reader

*To say one is art, and the other is activism is a false binary. How do we take responsibility for the choices we're making? And before that, what choices are we making that are just not visible?—Steiner*

The level of openness in Los Angeles is wonderful and yet that openness points to the very conflict of our time. It's an outgrowth of American democracy as it exists right now where you have this vast feeling of human freedom. The tradeoff with all that freedom is that there's nothing to push against. I have a desire to create friction, and the possibility of creating friction is limited in a certain sense because of that freedom.— Robby





**Tanya Rubbak** Shall we call Robby?

**Brian Getnick** Yeah, let's call Robby.

**Robert Herbst** Hello?

**BG** Hi, Robby can you hear us? Robby?

**RH** Hello, Testing, one, two, one. Can you hear me?

**BG** I think everything is okay to start the interview...oh wait.

**TR** I think we need to call him back or the connection ...

**BG** It came alive. Here let me try one more time...Robby?

**BG** Robby, I've been wanting to talk to you ever since we met at the LA Book Fair. That *Antagonist's Guide* that you created was an inspiration. Would you mind describing it?

**RH** *The Antagonist's Guide to the Assholes of Los Angeles*<sup>1</sup>, otherwise known as the *Antagonist Guide to the Fuckers of LA* came out of a desire that I've had for a long time to create a space for creative practitioners to engage in more didactic speech in the city of Los Angeles. This comes from a personal space

## Robby

**John Burtie** Just interview him through the phone.

**BG** Okay.

**JB** Yeah. Or you can plug in your phone into ...

**TR** [inaudible 00:04:48]

**RH** Brian, can you hear me?

**BG** Yeah, I can hear you, can you hear me?

**RH** I can.

**BG** I think we're good, I think we're on air.

**TR** Yeah, now it's crystal clear.

**BG** This is Brian Getnick, and hello Tanya.

**TR** Hi, it's Tanya Rubbak.

of feeling meek in public situations and also wanting to have a more challenging creative community around me. Along with other members of the *Llano Del Rio Collective*<sup>2</sup> we created the *Antagonist's Guide* to map out around 80 locations where jerks, assholes, and fuckers are. Then we put forward a history of antagonist art and social practices in relationship to this city, and invited people to do things in relationship to where assholes dwell.

**BG** I got stuck on what you said about feeling meek. What do you mean?

**RH** I'm always aware of passivity in the world. I always feel like there

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are so many opportunities to make change in the world at every moment of my life. I feel overwhelmed by that.

**BG** Are you describing something specific to being an artist in the world?

**RH** I think it's both being an artist, and being a subject in the world. I feel meek both as a human being, facing the challenges that face our species ... yeah, let's just leave it there. I feel cowardly in relationship the accepted normal streams of hegemonic art practice as it were.

**BG** I'm assuming you're talking about museums or galleries, or commodity driven gallery spaces? The situation in Los Angeles seems so different than one of dominant hegemonic structures with the artist operating in the margins. It seems instead to be more of an environment of collective effort and community based work. When you say you feel like an outsider where is that position from? You are within the community and you're one of the people making structures that help create community here.

**RH** I agree with you to certain extent but then I question your idealism. I've been a practitioner for this city for 15 years. I have experienced the joys and extreme pleasures of the do it yourself art world of Los Angeles and I could even extend that out to the do it yourself ecosystem of Los Angeles. At the same time I have an awareness that's developed in me in the last couple of years of the limitations of that kind of DIY culture. How that kind of DIY system is on some level a farm league as it were compared to institutions with louder megaphones.

The level of openness in Los

Angeles is wonderful and yet that openness points to the very con-

flict of our time. It's an outgrowth of American democracy as it exists right now where you have this vast feeling of human freedom. The tradeoff with all that freedom is that there's nothing to push against. I have a desire to create friction, and the possibility of creating friction is limited in a certain sense because of that freedom.

**BG** In order to create friction in an open field do you need to create a line in the sand, either for yourself or other people to cross? Maybe a provocation? A line drawn as a form of a provocation towards an oppositional force? If so, if I'm on the right track, would you name those oppositional forces or describe a method for drawing lines.

**RH** I thank you for reading the *Antagonist Guide for the Assholes of LA*. Yeah, clearly that project is about the desire to create an oppositional force. I am fascinated by counter culture. The counter cultures of the 60's and 70's were countercultural because at that at that time we lived in a much more structured society.

Neoliberalism is a massive project to get rid of those structures and frictions. This new liberal state has power that operates on us in a non-antagonistic manner. It operates in a place with no borders to push against.

The desire to create an *Antagonist Guide to the Assholes of LA* is a way to dream a situation in which we could begin to organize a unified front or a collective. We could begin a series of, to think in terms of contemporary Marxist thought, a series of civil wars that erupt continuously and consistently that the dominant power structure cannot help but

<sup>1</sup> *The Antagonist's Guide to the Assholes of Los Angeles* is available for download and purchase at [halfletterpress.com](http://halfletterpress.com) 1

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the *Llano del Rio Collective*, [ldrg.wordpress.com](http://ldrg.wordpress.com)

notice. I think art clearly has that potential.

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**TR** I see this friction you're talking about in the performative situations you create that are difficult to accomplish like climbing ladders or the group dynamics bondage. I was wondering if you can talk a little about the types of projects that involve this social play. Also could you talk about the role of the body in your work?

**RH** You're talking about this recent series of projects I did in New York and will be doing again at Human Resources in Los Angeles in January. The "I + We: Collective Movement Workshop for Beginners"<sup>3</sup>.

I have always been interested in the body as a subject and how the body enacts ideology and enacts belief. How ideology and belief become emotion and the effects of all three on politics.

With that work that you made reference to, I was interested in trying to unpack some of that language that is created between us whenever we're involved in group work. My interest in that stems from a political location because group work is kind of the basis of politics and collective social change.

**BG** What does that exploration look like to you when you observed your own workshops?

**RH** It looks like play. I'm trying to create situations where you are distant from the immediacy of the political and psychological moment and are entering in a space of psychological play or movement play. This is also really, really fun.

**BG** Does that state of play disrupt that politeness or softness which is a symptom of being in a neoliberal society? Does play actually uncover a kind of unspoken antagonistic position for these people?

**RH** Yeah, the individual subject engaging with the world in a creative

manner is radical. Some of the most interesting things happen when individuals find places of freedom, autonomy and creativity within everyday life. Of course this is problematized with what I was talking about with this kind of anarchistic state of practice we have in Los Angeles, but it's still ... it remains quite a liberatory space.

**BG** I have to say that when we began our discussion I was trying to find my footing because I've taken the position with *Native Strategies* that the feeling of openness and collaboration are what makes Los Angeles nearly ideal for artists. I'm interested in the discomfort with openness that you're suggesting. Forgive me if I'm stumbling a little bit, I'm trying to figure my way around a set of assumptions that I came to the interview with.

**TR** I keep thinking about the idea of a safe space, the richness of possibility and experimentation and play within such a space. But then at some point you have to come out of this space. What eventually happens?

**RH** There's a lot of there's a lot of art and cultural practice that gets out of the safe space. I am interested in criticizing, but at the same time that doesn't belittle what people do which is amazing and really powerful. It just doesn't always rise to the level of provocation that I desire.

Look at a city. Let's just say, to be easy, New York, where there is a lot of friction and a lot of antagonism. When we talk about creative ecosystems of cities in the arts, New York is clearly the antithesis (Note: the transcription's translation of "antithesis" was "antifascist") of Los Angeles. It is extremely hierarchical and it's very

challenging to get work done there and you don't have the sense that

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it's a laboratory. The trade-off for that of course is that work does have the feeling of friction at times.

The real question for me outside of the realm of art is how politics and political practice goes that way. If there's anything in the *Antagonist's Guide* it would be to try to get people to push creative models into truly antagonistic political spaces outside of people's artistic comfort zones and into places that where creativity is truly generative in political or social situations.

**BG** Are you making any bridges to these communities through your workshops and your projects?

**RH** Through *The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest*<sup>4</sup> I started focusing on Los Angeles and on creative ways that people engage with the city. I started to become less theoretical, more practical with writing theory. Immediately I became in communication with a lot more political organizations and individuals on the ground working outside of art spheres.

**BG** What was that transition like for you to switch from writing the

erudite language of theory into a practical, speakable, and understandable language that could get things done?

**RH** I had always entered writing projects with a desire to make a different kind of theory. I think we all did, but at a certain point there was a disagreement with what that should look like. I was always interested in making a theory based off of practice as opposed to a theory based off of another theory. It's been a very enjoyable experience to be working on this type of theory with *Llano Del Rio*. The guides, because of their address, in a certain way as science fiction, are so much more obtuse and I really like that. Even though their address is in some ways practical.

**TR** I love the idea of a practical way of writing theory.

**RH** Thank you. Hey, guys, I got to get going.

**BG** Thank you very much Robby, it was good to talk to you.

**RH** I very, very much enjoyed this.

**TR** Talk to you soon!

<sup>4</sup>The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest is an artist collective whose magazine sits at the discursive juncture of fine art, media theory and anti-authoritarian activism.



Robby Herbst is an interdisciplinarian interested in socio-political formations; social and behavioral architecture, languages of dissent and counter culture. He is a writer, artist, teacher, and something other. He co-founded, and is former editor, of the *Journal of Aesthetics & Protest*, and currently instigates the *Llano Del Rio* Collective. Recent projects include *New Pyramids For the Capitalist System* (Dumbo Arts Center, NYC), *I & We: Collective Movement For Beginners* (The Elizabeth Foundation, NYC & Human Resources, Los Angeles) and *An Antagonist's Guide To The Assholes of Los Angeles* (ephemeral project in Los Angeles). He's a contributing columnist for KCET TV's *Artbound*, co-editor with Nicole Antebi and Colin Dickey of "Failure! Experiments in Social and Aesthetic Practices", and written for many art and activist publications. He has lectured widely and taught contemporary art at USC, Otis College of Art, and Goddard College. He is a recipient of a Warhol Foundation Arts Writer's Grant for essays exploring the phenomenology of social practice art and protest.





(Music)

**BG** I think we're on the air. I think we're on the air. We are. Hi, Kate Gilbert.

**KD** "Durbin."

**BG** I'm so sorry.

**KD** That's okay. I love Kate Gilbert.

**BG** Actually, this is what this interview is about. Kate Gilbert. We're going to talk about her.

**KD** Oh, okay. I should have studied before I got here.

**BG** *Women as Objects*<sup>1</sup>. How did you begin it?

**KD** I can't remember exactly when

a space for young people to create their own aesthetics in a unique way because of the interface. The way that tumblr moves—how you can see other people's posts moving past you so quickly, how you can re-blog things—created a very unique soup for people to create aesthetics informed by each other.

Then it was the tumblr aesthetic going out into the larger popular culture and shifting the Zeitgeist. Of course, eventually, brands caught on.

For instance, teenagers were taking the Chanel logo and all these

## Kate

<sup>1</sup> *Women As Objects* is Kate's tumblr-based project where she re-blogged, from 2011 through 2013, notes and images from teenage girls in real time in order to create an archive gallery. [womenasobjects.tumblr.com](http://womenasobjects.tumblr.com)

it started, because on the internet there's no time or time is different than it is in the flesh. It was maybe three years ago now, definitely during a time when Tumblr was at its height. It's not quite as innovative as it was two or three years ago. That's when the project started.

**Tanya Rubbak** Why do you think it's less exciting now? More users, more corporate?

**KD** I think it is a little more corporate now. When I started the project, I did it because I was really excited by the artwork that I saw being produced on tumblr, as well as how tumblr was

different brand logos from high-fashion designers, really messing with them in interesting ways, and wearing them in ways that showed that they were obviously fake.

Not long after that, like a year after that, Chanel did a spring show and basically hijacked that aesthetic back from tumblr and put it on the runway, so they could commodify it. It wasn't long after that that tumblr was bought out ... I forget who bought it ... I think ... is Yahoo right?

**TR** Yahoo.

**KD** I have Yahoo email, so I can't complain too much. I don't know. I

think the innovation period is maybe dwindling a little bit. Also, teenagers,

totally irrelevant, but I think people are more aware now because of

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all of us in a way ... we like the next new hot thing.

**TR** We switch platforms all the time.

**KD** Totally.

**BG** Talking about fashion taking from tumblr, what tumblr took from fashion is a nice opportunity to talk about what you're wearing in our studio right now. You came in with such an incredible outfit, a piece of art. I was curious if your developing relationship to social media also informs your practice as a performer who wears very interesting, elaborate garments.

**KD** Yes. Thank you for saying that they're interesting and elaborate.

**BG** Can we describe what you're wearing? Is it okay?

**KD** We can, although I kind of wish I had worn a different dress. Yeah, do you guys want to describe it or should I?

**BG** You look like a pillar. The dress is red, and it fits your body perfectly. The sleeves go to the wrists. It drapes down to the bottom. It's like an Erté design, flowing to a puddle at your feet. Is it red velvet or velour?

**KD** It's velour.

**BG** It's velour. All over it, gallery and publications are painted. "Art in America" is right across your collar bone. "MOCA" is below that. "Sotheby's" is on your arm. It's all written in puffy paint, like teenager's puffy paint tee shirt design. On the back there's the New York version of the same publications, galleries, and museums.

**KD** Yes. LA on the front, New York on the back. Branding is a really interesting concept now, because it's almost ... I don't want to say it's

the Internet and because of that example that I just shared with you about the Chanel logo and its transference. We're aware of the fact that brands are just an idea and that they can be more easily hijacked now than ever before.

I'm especially interested in the way women's bodies are branded. I've always been really fascinated by those Juicy Couture sweat suits where the butt says Juicy across them.

I like to play with those ideas in the clothing I wear when I perform and wear everyday, but I'm also interested in this idea of transferring things from the disembodied space of the Internet into the physical space. There's so many texts that we encounter online, so many images of women's bodies, where we tend to think of women online as being completely objectified. I think one of the ways that we can counter that idea is by considering what we wear in the physical.

Oh, I should mention too, the designer of this dress is the amazing Peggy Noland<sup>2</sup>. One dress I had made recently is of my tumblr feed. It says *Women as Objects* on the top and has the description and then all these images of womens' bodies are on it.

**TR** You're wearing your tumblr feed on the street!

**KD** Yeah.

**BG** The way you're describing this makes me think of the way that music is sampled. You're talking about brands as if they can be sampled. You're not only talking about the image or symbol of the brand, but you're talking about all of its cultural cache and how even that can be blended creatively.

<sup>2</sup> More on the amazing Peggy Noland is here: [peggynoland.bigcartel.com](http://peggynoland.bigcartel.com)

KD As you sample it, you become a part of it, and it becomes a part of

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you. If you don't like that brand or something about it, sampling it, taking it into your own hands might be a way to shift it a little bit. The Chanel logo dripping for instance. It's bleeding now, and I think we wanted it to bleed ... Your eyes got all big.

BG You wanted it to bleed!

TR Since we're talking about the tumblr and *Women as Objects* project, I guess I was curious about your relationship to the women. A lot of artists in this particular issue are involved with communities or facilitation. *Women as Objects* seems like such a nice example of that, because you're interacting with these women. Then something I've always wanted to ask you—and I don't know if you want to share this information—is how many are there of them actually? How many followers do you follow? But you don't have to answer that.

KD I don't actually know right now. I feel like it's over 80. I have interacted with a handful, but initially I tried not to interact just because I consider it somewhat anthropological. I didn't want them to perform specifically for my project, but the girls would email me, *What is this, what are you doing?* Or, *This sounds awesome. Can I be in an art show?* I will say unequivocally that all the girls were excited about it and liked being a part of it. Actually, I really want to turn it into a book and that will be an entirely different beast in which I will interact very intensely with each person I bring on board for that project.

BG Going to go back to, *We wanted it to bleed* I would like to know your thoughts on the relationship between brands

and what you're doing with this community of young wom-

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en. There's a lot of fear in our society and amongst artists that when we make a transgressive gesture that it's dangerous to do so because immediately it is absorbed by mainstream corporate culture. They re-brand transgression as their own, and it sounds like you're almost turning that whole paradigm on its head and saying, *yeah, but it goes both ways, it's a constant exchange*.

KD I wrote a piece for *hyperallergic.com* where they wanted me to coin this aesthetic. So I called it the "Teen Girl Tumblr Aesthetic", and I co-wrote it with someone else. The reaction to the piece, for a variety of reasons, was quite explosive. People were very angry. A lot of people sent me hate mail. People on tumblr were really mad about it. After that happened, I didn't touch the project for a few months because I really wanted to look at my motivations, because what I was being accused of was the very thing you just described, hijacking these girls and trying to speak for them.

I also felt like some of the rage that was directed at me had a lot to do with the fact that I was a woman too. I felt like if it had been a man writing for teen boys on the internet that that wouldn't have happened. Then I realized I wanted to do a project where it made clear what my intentions were, but where the girls were able to outline what they're doing on the Internet and how they feel about the Internet and things like that.

BG Can you give me an example of what they're voicing to you?

KD No, not yet.

TR It's there. It's coming.

KD The other thing about that gen-

eration of kids who grew up on the Internet, they don't all feel the same

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way about the internet. Everybody is different. That's another thing that I would like to explore in the next project. Allowing space for a variety of feeling on the internet.

BG We were talking about that earlier, the jealousy and anxiety about the millennials. There is an assumption that their mantra is *I need to be seen, in order to be*, they are hyper-narcissistic, they're shameless.

KD It's funny when people accuse them of those things because we've always been that way. I don't think

we're more narcissistic now. We do take a lot of pictures now, way more

than people in the 1800's, who had like two pictures.

BG And a painting. Maybe half of a bust somewhere.

KD Totally.

BG The bust selfie.

KD Oh my gosh, I love busts. I have several around my house. Those are the early women as objects.



Kate Durbin is an artist and writer who lives in Los Angeles. Her books include *The Ravenous Audience* and *E! Entertainment*, and she is founding editor of the online journal *Gaga Stigmata*. Her collaborative iPad app and artist's book, *Abra*, received an NEA grant from the Center for Book and Paper Arts at CCC. Her tumblr project, *Women as Objects*, archived the teen girl tumblr aesthetic.

As you sample it, you become a part of it, and it becomes a part of you.

If you don't like that brand or something about it, sampling it, taking it into your own hands might be a way to shift it a little bit. The Chanel logo dripping for instance. It's bleeding now, and I think we wanted it to bleed...—Kate

*Sometimes I wish I could be behind that persona. You know, that's easier. You can become successful. You can totally talk about your persona. That is what society wants.—  
Guan*





[00:00:00 - 00:00:34] Music:  
Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Op. 30  
Brian Getnick You just flew in on  
a jet pack. That was so impres-  
sive; your entrance was incred-  
ible.  
John Burtle It's funny being inter-  
viewed here. We normally do our  
show together. Guan is on one side  
and I'm on the other side. Now,  
we're together on one side and  
you're on the other.  
BG That's right, we're you.

ipate in your playful activities  
like making tea baths for your  
feet and chopping onions on  
the ground. Then the chopping  
became so frenetic and crazy  
and at another point, John threw  
a big rock in the air and it rolled  
in a way that he couldn't have  
anticipated or controlled. You're  
both very approachable, nice  
looking people but there was a  
whirlwind energy in that piece  
that was aggressive and point-

## Guan

Artist Liz Glynn  
organized *Black  
Box*, a series of  
performances reap-  
proaching historic  
performance art  
works in LA for Getty  
initiative, Pacific  
Standard Time

JB I don't know. You're one of us  
and we're the other one.

BG Yeah, who are we? Are we  
you or are we Guan?

Guan Rong You're John cause I'm  
on this side away from all the ma-  
chines.

BG My first encounter with  
your work together was at the  
Black Box show that Liz Glynn  
organized<sup>1</sup>. You did a series of  
actions within a giant arena of  
objects and dangerous things.  
I was doing a performance next  
to your performance, and in the  
beginning, I wanted to partic-

ed. How did you set it up? Were  
you thinking about invitation and  
repulsion?

GR Basically we wanted to record  
immediate feelings which respond-  
ed directly to the objects we were  
using. Chopping onions is really  
direct: we would cry. The aggressive  
part came out of nowhere.

JB Yeah, when one of us would have  
a feeling, we would see if that feeling  
could be generated in the other per-  
son through all the different objects  
that we collected. The audience  
became, in a way, like an object that  
we could consider in changing either

a physical or emotional state.  
I remember one of the times we

were feeling vulnerable. Then we  
wanted to change it, so we just  
turned the lights off. That dispersed  
the audience.

Maybe that antagonism you felt  
came from treating the audience as  
a material. Does that make sense?

BG Absolutely. You seemed to  
push out against being con-  
tained by the audience standing  
at that border.

GR John is the person who is really  
engaging with the audience in term  
of his practice. But for me, I'm just in  
my own world. I do whatever I want  
to do in the performance. I don't  
really care about the audience.

BG What do you mean when you  
say you're focused on yourself?  
Maybe give an example of an-  
other performance you've done  
outside of working with John?

GR The performance I'm doing  
now... is trying to find a husband for  
me. So, I don't really care who that  
person is. It's all about me. I have re-

Well, I've had some responses, but  
it wasn't from the right person. They

didn't really get the message.

BG One would wonder, listen-  
ing to this interview, if you were  
sincerely interested in getting a  
husband or if you were interest-  
ed in the language of desiring a  
husband. Are you really inter-  
ested in getting a husband out  
of this?

GR Yeah. I'm really interested in a  
husband (laughs).

BG Are you going to get mar-  
ried?

GR Yeah. I'll have to get married but  
in my own way.

BG You're requesting an audi-  
ence of one, but you're sending  
out this message into the ether  
through these multiple plat-  
forms.

Tanya Rubbak Caltech is a really  
specific school. You are think-  
ing about audiences to fit your  
needs?

GR Yeah.

BG It's very interesting to me as a

## John

ally specific requirements. Whoever  
gets the message, will get me.

BG How are you sending that  
message out?

GR I did two posts on Facebook.  
Then I put a poster up at Caltech  
that says *I'm looking for a husband*.  
It's getting more specific. Now I  
think I'm going to do a book project  
sort of....

BG Is the book project a col-  
lection of the responses you're  
getting or is it the next genera-  
tive step in the search?

GR I think it's the next generative  
step. I've had no responses so far.

communicative gesture which ac-  
tually negates most of the listeners  
that you are reaching.

GR Yeah, yeah. John always says,  
he really loves people. We're totally  
different people. He loves every-  
body, maybe, do you?

JB Maybe, yeah.

GR And I don't like people.

TR Can I ask you about a project  
from a long time ago? It's from  
CalArts. I think we were there  
at the same time. I think it was  
the first couple of weeks of  
school, or something. Everyone,  
maybe everyone, it seemed like

everybody got this flier in their mailbox that just said: *Hi, my*

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*name is Guan Rong. Fuck you.*  
Do you remember this?

**GR** Yeah. It's not *fuck you*. It's *fuck*.

**TR** Oh, it's just *fuck*? Really?

**GR** It's just *fuck*.

**TR** Oh!

**GR** It said *My name is Guan Rong. Very nice meeting you*. Then just *Fuck*.

**TR** That is interesting that it's something else in my memory. I thought it was really amazing. It just seemed like a kind of *welcome to art school* kind of flier. There were people around me in my studios who were kind of freaked out by it and who had more of a negative reaction. They saw it as a much more antagonistic act than I did.

**GR** I was thinking... I don't know what I was actually thinking... but it was something like, *Oh, I want to introduce myself to everybody*. That's how I got in trouble. I also sent it out to maybe 300 people out of the museum member's list. 10 people complained to the school. I think 10, maybe only 10. They called the school so I had to write this whole apology letter.

**TR** Wow.

**GR** The *fuck* is sort of like, saying to myself, *Oh no. I have to meet all these people and 'very nice meeting you' doesn't mean anything*. I'm saying this *fuck* to myself, like, *why do I have to do this?* I'm a super shy, super introverted person.

**BG** There's a funny thing that happens when you come from a place where people are extremely direct about what they want and then you come to Los Angeles and there is a kind of sunshine social lubrication for lack of a better term.

**GR** Now when I see anybody and

they say, *Hey, how are you?* I feel like I get it. I get that meaningless

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greeting, just to have something to say. But in the beginning, I totally didn't get it.

**BG** If we actually said what was going through our mind the first time we encountered new people we would probably come up with something like *Nice to meet you. Fuck*. Both feelings exist simultaneously but one is uttered and one is suppressed at all times.

**GR** Yeah. It's like online dating. You spend all this time trying to answer the same question to like, ten, twenty people and then you don't even find one person to go out on a date.

**JB** I found somebody. It worked for me.

**TR** The show you do together is called *Nooooo!* How did you guys come up with that? What does it mean?

**JB** Nooooo!

**GR** I think we set that as the name and then we were like, do we want to change it? And we're like, Nooooo!

**BG** A lot of these projects you've initiated seem to be about power. Standing still to allow the object of desire to come to you. Have you been thinking how these projects are related to other systems of power in the world, outside of yourself?

**GR** Yeah. I do think about a lot of other things. Maybe I'm not trying to get too involved in any kind of structure. It's like, not applying. I don't want to apply for a library card. I'm not going to apply for credit card.

**TR** This reminds me of "Bartleby the Scrivener", a short story by Hawthorne. Bartleby keeps saying *I'd prefer not to* and refuses to work and participate. There's something in the way

that you're talking about not wanting to get a library card or a

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credit card and not really caring about what people think. Then at the same time, like, your actions, again, that mailer, reached so many people and interacted with the whole community. You actually reach people by thinking about what you're feeling or what you're doing.

**BG** That's a really interesting comparison because Hawthorne is not Bartleby. Hawthorne is positioning the character who's refuses as a political and philosophical statement. It took work to make that character. You could be in your room and isolated and never reach out. Instead, you are positioning a notion of refusal and of boycott, out into the world and

that's a different gesture than only considering yourself. It has

more ramifications.

**GR** People are saying, *Oh, you're creating a persona*, but it's not really a character. My self is the character.

**BG** It's not a persona to stand behind?

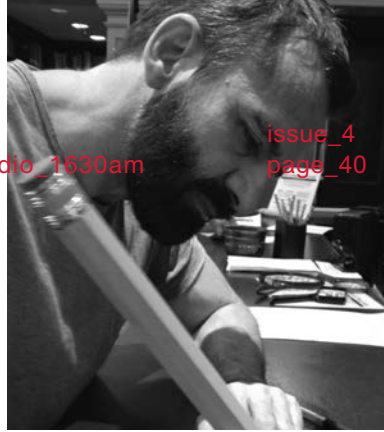
**GR** Sometimes I wish I could be behind that persona. You know, that's easier. You can become successful. You can totally talk about your persona. That is what society wants.

**BG** You could use it as a tool of seduction, if you wanted to. It's a common tactic to create a persona that is unreachable and unavailable, but it doesn't sound like you're using it that way...

**GR** No.



A semi-strong believer of sky, space, stars and the universe, Guan Rong was born with the Sun in Leo, the Moon in Pisces and Ascendant in Gemini. Based on Johannes Schneider's color oracle, the great importance to her now are joyful fulfillment of her desires, vigorous effort, peaceable avoidance of conflict, objective assessment of the situation, optimistic self-encouragement, and nurturing useful relationships. At the moment she feels most anxious due to her heavy burden of problems, inner restlessness, adverse existential uncertainty, continuing lack of enjoyment, distressing want for affection, and exhaustingly stressful situation. Buzzfeed has told her she should marry Jennifer Lawrence, she is almost too good at sex, and she hates people. It's true. But she hasn't totally given up faith in humanity and that's impressive. She still have a little more hate left in her to give. She is currently practicing on treasure that hate and save it for a special occasion.



**Brian Getnick:** After I took your drone workshop *Black Mirror* at Concord<sup>1</sup> I thought we had to have you for this issue. Would you talk about that project?  
#00:02:21.7#

**Matias Viegner** It's called *Black Mirror* for a number of reasons not least of which for the Arcade Fire song which I love. My drone is a consumer level, 300 dollar toy, operated by an app on the iphone. I work with groups of artists; playing with it, teaching it to each other. I want them to create an immediate relationship with the drone. Drones are going to be everywhere so the goal of the workshop is to get people to engage with this very frightening technology.

of the drone seeing you and you seeing it but not getting the same thing from that exchange the way you and I do.

The third part are these dream maps. There was a set of articles about drone operators who control weaponized drones in the middle east from trailers in New Mexico who have been having nightmares about their work, as well as PTSD. The articles revealed their dream material and I thought, wow this is so powerful. We thought we would be more comfortable killing each other by remote control but these soldiers are having the same reactions as soldiers who are on the killing field. I became interested in their dreams and by the people in Pakistan, where

## Matias

The second part of my work is a set of poems to and about the drone. I realized we're all being conditioned to accept drones by our acceptance of smart phones which are essentially little drones in our pockets that we sleep with. They can see us, hear us and track us wherever we go. They can do the things drones already do minus the propeller. The poems are all dictated to my iphone and I incorporate the mistakes that Siri makes when she translates them. They are slightly rickety poems that address the inequality

the drones are deployed and who are also having nightmares. The drones invade their dreams. I saw these phenomena as way of talking about how this technology invades every sense of privacy, including our minds. The dream maps are handmade; chalk on black paper or boards. They are bits of dreams of drone operators, people in the middle east, your dreams, my dreams. Thinking through social dreaming and the ways they reflect social realities. #00:08:00.5#

**BG** The workshop I participat-

ed in with the iphones and the drone; did you glean from our

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responses that people both liked and feared being seen by the drone. #00:08:38.6#

**MV** Yes, though I already knew that. I realized that we all fear being seen but also desire to see. There are very few people who say they derive no pleasure in seeing things they're not supposed to through spying. It goes further than that. We all want to be seen in idealized ways. We don't want to be seen looking bad but we all want attention in some form. The fear, the desire to be seen, and the desire to see are happening at the same time which is why drone technology is so interesting to me. #00:09:37.5#

**BG** Dreams are a floating consciousness where we get to visit other people and in the dream we get to enact physically with whomever we are looking at. It's even possible to change our environment at will. Drones seem to embody dreams on a certain level, but with the drone you can kill somebody. The drone is capable of altering what it sees. #00:10:40.3#

**MV** Very much something that always has fascinated me about dreams was that you could die in a dream and then come back to life and there's no contradiction. You can also kill someone, which in my dreams happens rarely, but then they're right back. So it has a video game quality looped up with the technology of the drone. This appeals to and horrifies us because it has very complicated relationship to our psyches. Let's start with everyone's relationship to their smart phones which they can't stop touching. #00:11:34.0#

**BG** In the workshop you're using the drone to point to a night-

marish extrapolation of power from the everyday desire to be

a voyeur. One could say that you are very Orwellian about the drone, that you are spinning a future that is a nightmare. #00:12:15.9#

**MV** I don't think I'm doing that. I think this is what's happening already. It precedes me. The Orwellian thing has been happening for much longer than we know, at least a decade. All the ground has been laid in the last five years for surveillance drones. Every police department is ordering them. The more sophisticated drones fly at really high altitudes. You actually can't see them. The newest ones are the size of insects or smaller and they are able to fly through your window screens and if your windows are shut they will fly through the cracks in your house and find their way in and out without you knowing it. The Orwellian nightmare is already here. I feel that part of my goal is too critique it but also to play with it. If I could push a button and reverse all of what's happened in this technology I would push that button, but there's no button. That's a pipe dream #00:14:31.3#

**BG** There's no app that reverses the nightmare #00:14:31.3#

**MV** Nope #00:14:31.3#  
(At this point during the interview, BG gets a message on his phone, not an iphone, a Samsung with no internet data plan...)

**BG** I wasn't just teasing you when I looked at my phone just a second ago but I asked my friend Megan Steinman to send me this phrase: "The singularity!": the state of merger between technology and humans. #00:14:56.3#

**MV** The singularity is connected to how we interact with our smart

<sup>1</sup>Concord is an experimental exhibit space and residency program in Cypress Park LA: concord-space.com

phones. Drones operate in non human space and non human time.

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They do not need to sleep or rest. They need fuel but not food. One drone can come in and replace another drone and since they have no individual identity the whole relationship between time and place is altered. There can be an infinite number of them, they can be everywhere. They are an extension of the video cameras which have been installed in our cities since the 1980's. The video cameras now have propellers and are tiny and everywhere. #00:16:04.2#

**BG** I lost my thought  
#00:16:04.2#

**MV** I scared you #00:16:04.2#

**BG** I was thinking about a drone as a fly stuck in my nose...I was thinking about the workshop as a ballast to the nightmare. You are making a poem to and with Siri, and you are also telling me about looking into the eyes of the drone and it seeing you and not comprehending you. This reminds me of John Berger's *Why Look at Animals* and I was thinking about his theory of how early humans developed language out of seeing that the animal recognized them but could not speak back to them. Between them was this gulf that could never be bridged and this gave rise to language. Is the emergence of this technology as profound as that? #00:17:10.9#

**MV** It is as profound as that on the paradoxical opposite of the animal. #00:17:26.4#

When your dog looks at you it's a very intense connection but you know you're not seeing the same things. The drone is different than a camera, even a video camera. Somehow the more autonomy the camera has, the more it floats and

operates through its own will, the more it seems to have this quality

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of equivalence. In reality it doesn't. Not least of which because you're always in the present and it records every second. It can look at you ten minutes ago, or twenty minutes ago. If it hangs around for a year it can look at you over the span of a year whereas you can only look at it in the span of a second of the present. All that stuff is one way of accessing a profound shift in how we live and in our reality. #00:18:57.0#

**BG** Is the drone a communicative vessel? #00:19:01.5#

**MV** I don't know if it's communicative but it's a tool of information. Certainly weaponized drones communicate your death. #00:19:30.8#

**BG** Do you ever have the desire to have the consciousness of the drone? Just to look and to float? #00:19:36.2#

**MV** I have a very busy mind so there is something that interests me in endlessly looking. Looking at you now, I would like to spin around your head and look into your ears and up your nose and for no reason other than the curiosity of looking. #00:20:05.4#

**BG** A dream of being a spirit? #00:20:13.0#

**MV** It's a dream of omniscience. We all want to know and see everything. It's the human thing of coming to a wall and needing to see behind it. #00:20:25.9#

**BG** No corporeal limitations #00:20:31.1#

**MV** The corporeal will disappear by and large. It's a paradigmatic shift or an epistemological shift. Back to communication, the poems are a way of talking to the drone through technology, through the smart phone. I don't imagine that the drone hears me. To speak to it through its own technology isn't getting control of it.

<sup>2</sup> For more info on Fallen Fruit: fallenfruit.org

Humans have lost control of the world. The ninety nine percent of

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08:00pm

Matias\_Viegner

people have lost control to the one percent irrevocably. I'm afraid it's too late for a revolution though I would like to see one. It was probably too late when occupy happened. #00:22:01.8#

**BG** You have identified yourself as an activist. #00:22:01.8#

**MV** Yes, I have a long history as an activist. #00:22:01.8#

**BG** Do you still identify yourself as an activist? #00:22:01.8#

**MV** Yes absolutely. #00:22:04.3#

**BG** But you feel that the world is irrevocably lost? #00:22:18.5#

**MV** I can still be an activist and be pessimistic. The work I've done before, *Fallen Fruit*<sup>2</sup> for instance, had an element which was playful and upbeat. Clown activism. All these issues I was concerned with: the use of space, sharing obligations towards each other. In the current economic model our only obliga-

tions are to ourselves and to earning as much money as we can to further

ourselves. There is no sense of any commonwealth. #00:23:27.8#

**BG** It's still so pessimistic. #00:23:28.6#

**MV** Yeah, but mixed with clowning. #00:23:39.3#

**BG** Sure, it draws people in and is disarming. #00:23:48.0#

**MV** It starts a conversation. What I'm trying to do is work with and talk to the drone operators and go to Pakistan and try to get close to people for whom these drones are not an abstract question. They are a terrible thing that they have to live with. It's imposed upon them entirely against their will. Americans are willing to live with drones because America is getting "more dangerous" and drones make us feel safer.

All the polls are trending towards accepting drones. #00:24:41.8#  
00:27:10.2#

Matias Viegner is a writer, artist, and critic working solo and collaboratively in the fields of writing, visual art, and social practice. He is the author of *2500 Random Things About Me Too*, a book of experimental non-fiction, hailed as the first book written through Facebook. In 2004 he co-founded *Fallen Fruit*, a participatory art practice focusing on fruit, urban space and public life, with whom he worked for nearly a decade. His work has been exhibited at The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art, The Kitchen, Ars Electronica, The Whitney Museum, Acuna Hansen, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE), Machine Project, The Hammer Museum, ARCO Madrid, and the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, as well as in Denmark, Germany, Austria, Colombia and Mexico. He's edited two anthologies with Christine Wertheim, *The Noulipian Analects* and *Séance in Experimental Writing*. He is the editor and co-translator of Georges Batailles' *The Trial of Gilles de Rais*. He has fiction in the anthologies *The & Now Awards—Best Innovative Writing*, *Encyclopedia F-K*, *Vital Signs—Essential AIDS Fiction*, *Men on Men 3*, *Sundays at Seven*, *Dear World*, and *Discontents*. His work has appeared in *Afterimage*, *American Book Review*, *Artforum*, *Art Issues*, *ArtUS*, *Artweek*, *Black Clock*, *Bomb*, *Cabinet*, *Critical Quarterly*, *Fiction International*, *Framework*, *The Journal of Aesthetics & Protest*, *The Huffington Post*, *Mirage*, *Radical History Review*, *Suspect Thoughts*, and *X-tra*, for whom he writes regularly on visual art. His academic criticism appears in *Writing at the Edge: The Work of Dennis Cooper*; the queer theory issue of *Critical Quarterly*; and *Queer Looks: Lesbian & Gay Experimental Media*; and *Camp Grounds: Gay & Lesbian Style*. As literary executor for the writer Kathy Acker, he has written and lectured extensively on her work, and edited a volume of her correspondence with McKenzie Wark which is forthcoming on Chiasmus Press. He teaches at CalArts and is the recipient of a 2013 Creative Capital Grant.



There are very few people who say they derive no pleasure in seeing things they're not supposed to through spying. It goes further than that. We all want to be seen in idealized ways. We don't want to be seen looking bad but we all want attention in some form. The fear, the desire to be seen, and the desire to see are happening at the same time which is why drone technology is so interesting to me.—Matias

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00:00\_hour  
Dear Reader



My first blossoming into politicization was when reading a poem at an event at age eighteen. I told the story of my brother and my family and I remember crying on stage. What's most important to me about making my art is performing it. The impact is actually about exposing it and exposing myself. —Patrisse Marie



**Brian Getnick** We were just talking about your name. Could we start there?

**Patrisse Marie Cullors-Brignac** I started using the hyphenated, *Brignac*, when my father passed away. He was my biological father. My mother gave me the name of the father who raised me whose last name was Cullors. For eleven years that's who I thought was my biological father.

When my biological father passed away there was definitely some sort of evolution inside of me,

huge b-boys and pop lockers; he was a part of that.

**BG** In what part of LA?

**PMCB** In Pacoima. That's where I grew up, in Pacoima, the San Fernando Valley, Van Nuys, Canoga Park area.

**BG** I'm not from here, so the valley territories are still totally foreign and exciting for me.

**PMCB** It's special, like a vortex.

**BG** I'm wondering if there is a division in the way you name yourself when you're working on projects which are straight up

## Patrisse Marie

<sup>1</sup> *Dignity and Power Now* is a multiracial grass-roots effort to protect the dignity of incarcerated people, their families and communities in Los Angeles. [nationinside.org/campaign/dignity/](http://nationinside.org/campaign/dignity/)

particularly around my art. I needed to create more so I added the name Brignac.

**BG** So it's like a surplus name for surplus projects, for more art; it meant more.

**PMCB** Exactly.

**BG** Was your father artistic?

**PMCB** He was. I don't know if he would have said that, but I definitely received much of my own art from him. He was a dancer, a b-boy. He and his siblings all had break dancing crews in the eighties. They were

activism, versus when you're doing things which are a mixture of activism and performance.

**PMCB** I started using Cullors - Brignac when I started my organization, *Dignity and Power Now*<sup>1</sup>. It's a non-profit organization fighting for the rights of four million currently incarcerated people. It's important to me to hold those names.

**BG** Did that name come to you at an intersection?

**PMCB** It wasn't until I took on Brignac that I started to really focus



on my art and my own personal evolution outside of the macro-political

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analysis. I started digging in personally and asking, *Where does my art actually fit?* Cullors-Brignac marked the beginning of that evolution.

**BG** When you look back on your macro-political work do you now see more of a personal attachment to it? Looking back, was it always there?

**PMCB** Yes. If we're going to perform a piece that's about something big and political, like racism or homophobia, we have to ask how that impacts our day to day lives. I ask my artists to start from their own stories before they tell the larger story; that's what I'm trying to do with my work, start with my story to tell a bigger story.

**BG** Because activism addresses opposition, do you also ask your artists how it has impacted their bodies? I'm thinking of your work at INSTALL: WeHo<sup>2</sup>, *Dressed in Queer, Cloaked in Now*<sup>3</sup>. I was moved by that piece and by you allowing the women to stand behind each other. Do you want to say a little bit about the structure you invited those women into?

**PMCB** When we tell our own stories, especially if we are coming from academic or political settings, we tend to ramble on or sometimes we will shut down in reaction to our own trauma. When you're witnessing another person's story, you feel accountable to that person.

**BG** One of the first things you describe in your promo for the *Coalition to End Sheriff Violence in LA Jails* is your brother's incarceration and beating. Can you talk to me about the evolution of that model?

**PMCB** I've always been a very sensitive person. My family's relationship

to big emotions is to not talk about it, to hide it, not show it. My relationship

to big emotions is always crying or laughing really loudly.

When I started developing politically, I didn't want to stop doing art. I wanted to make sure that my art came from the deepest parts of me, and that it was still connected to larger issues.

My first blossoming into politicization was when reading a poem at an event at age eighteen. I told the story of my brother and my family and I remember crying on stage. What's most important to me about making my art is performing it. The impact is actually about exposing it and exposing myself. That is really important at this time when we've been so pushed away from each other and there's such lack of intimacy in the world.

**BG** What do you mean by lack of intimacy in the world? Where are you sensing that?

**PMCB** We live in a place that uses cages to lock up human bodies; that points to a lack of intimacy. If a human being can put handcuffs on another human being and throw them in a cage, you've just destroyed the connection between those two people and their ability to feel intimacy.

**BG** You are equating the lack of intimacy with lack of empathy.

**PMCB** Yes, exactly.

**BG** I'm curious about when you perform as an artist or encourage other artists to perform. How do you think of communication and its effect on the world?

**PMCB** Tell me more, what do you mean?

**BG** Let's talk about a concrete project, *Dressed in Queer, Cloaked in Now*. The women are telling a sympathetic audience about their experiences.

**PMCB** That isn't necessarily the end all for me. When we started

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Patrisse\_Marie\_Cullors-Brignac

that piece, it was key for me is to use people who are not traditional performers. I have one person in my piece who actually wasn't visible in the piece at INSTALL: WeHo because he was incarcerated at LA County Jail right before the piece went to INSTALL: WeHo. That's Jermaine Davis; he's a rapper. I've known him since I was eleven years old. We told each other our coming out stories, cried with each other, sat with each other and held each other's hands. I rehearsed that piece for six months. It took about two to three months to just sit and tell things that we probably haven't told a lot of people.

I discussed the possibility of the team doing these stories in front of their parents because the stories are *Dear Parent* stories. Each one of them is speaking to one or both of their parents. The questions were, *At what point would you want to perform this in front of your parents?* and *Do you see that as a possibility?* Some said, *Never*. Some said, *Yes*.

**BG** You're challenging an assumption of mine about communication. It has to do with changing the audience which is on the other side. You're suggesting that the change is reflected back; the audience is reflecting back and enabling these performers to feel the confidence to transform themselves to perform this in front of an audience of their parents. I also wonder about the realm of queerness within art and then the realm of activism, which seems largely to do with incarceration. Is it a conscious shift from sphere to sphere for you? When it's art, is it tackling queer topics? And when it's activism, is it tackling

incarceration?

**PMCB** No, the key for me and my

art is intersectionality. Queer people have a lot in common with people who are incarcerated. Both groups understand isolation and loneliness. When I was coming out, my brother was actually incarcerated in LA County Jails. Because his situation was far more drastic than my coming out, my coming out was eclipsed by his incarceration. I had to put my queerness on the back burner in support of my family. I think there's an interesting relationship that I'm still evolving around my queerness and incarceration.

**BG** Are you talking to the populations within the jails as well?

**PMCB** Yes. One of the board members at Dignity and Power Now is currently incarcerated in Soledad. I've known him since he was fourteen. He's twenty-two now. He'll be in Soledad probably for the next six and a half years. He's doing amazing work inside talking to men about the impacts of patriarchy. He's a brilliant soul.

**BG** Again, the metaphor of being closeted and being inside a jail are linked for you.

**PMCB** I have a written piece called "Closets and Cages". It's important for me to link the stories, and also to differentiate the stories. But to link them...there's an opportunity there.

**BG** What's the opportunity?

**PMCB** It's the opportunity to break down homophobia and transphobia, and the opportunity to break down patriarchy. People don't realize that gay people go to jail too; their stories on the inside are significant and important to the sort of larger story around queerness and incarceration. If we think back on the human rights or civil rights movement for LGBT folks, it was transwomen in New York who were kicking off their

<sup>1</sup>INSTALL is a public art consulting group specializing in interactive exhibitions that showcase the work of LGBTQ-minded artists in the Greater LA area. [www.facebook.com/InstallWeHo](http://www.facebook.com/InstallWeHo)

<sup>3</sup>For a sample of *Dressed in Queer Cloaked in Now*: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1JBX-0D18qA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1JBX-0D18qA)

heels and fighting the police for coming in and harassing them. We

it's political art. I come from an artist community that's deeply connected

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have a long history of being on the front lines for our own liberation and for other people's liberation.

**BG** Do you need to remind people of that message in the larger activist community?

**PMCB** Always. What's fascinating is how many queer people are on the front lines fighting for all issues; immigrant rights, Black and Latino rights, queer rights. I think it's all together. There's so many of us that are on the front lines, reminding our organizations, *Look, we're here.*

*We're doing this work.* Even if we're not necessarily doing queer specific work, it's all queer, if we're in it.

**BG** By being present.

**PMCB** Totally.

**BG** Do you feel a sense of community here among artists?

**PMCB** My community is mostly Black artists who are trying to think about the Black imagination and working around gender, queerness and incarceration. They're made up of photographers, performance artists, dancers, singers and writers. We're all trying to support each other in this effort and we hold each other to a high standard. When I performed both "Stained" and "Warriors", a lot of people said to me, *Oh, that's really high art.* It's important that my art has a certain aesthetic and it doesn't get lost just because

to social justice and has a significant aesthetic.

**BG** What is the name of your community or communities?

**PMCB** There are multiple groups. My artist collective is called Freedom Harvest and the other artist collective is called **G.R.E.E.D.Y. City**; it's an acronym for a **Generation Righteously Enduring to Eradicate Dying Young**. That's Damon Turner's group. Then, another group is called **Beats Frames and Life**, which is a crew of Ashley Blakeney and Giovanni Solis, who are filmmakers and photographers.

**BG** Is there a home base?

**PMCB** We don't have one yet. Mostly we work out of our homes. My home is actually in an artist village called St. Elmo Village.

**BG** Where is that?

**PMCB** La Brea and Venice.

**BG** I've actually passed by that.

**PMCB** It's amazing, you should come check it out.

**BG** I want to come, can I come?

**PMCB** Yes, definitely.

**BG** Can I have tea?

**PMCB** Yes, definitely, definitely.

**BG** St. Elmo Village.

**PMCB** Yeah, it's the place to be.

**BG** Look at me, I'm inviting myself for tea on the air. I would like everyone to hear that she said I could come.



**Patrisse Cullors** is a native born Angeleno and identifies as an artist, organizer, and freedom fighter. She is currently the founder and Executive Director of Dignity and Power Now, and is building a coalition to help fight for civilian oversight of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's department and promote public awareness around issues in the upcoming election of a new County Sheriff.

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07:00pm  
Adam\_Overton



**Brian Getnick** We're recording. Hello, Adam.

**Adam Overton** Hi.

**Tanya Rubbak** Hi. Hi, everyone.

**BG** I was just looking through your website, there's so many different structures to explore, and also different persons such as Guru Rugu.

**AO** Yeah, I host his website too on there, one of the sites.

**BG** And Matador Oven.

**AO** Yeah, I don't think we have a page for Matador on there.

**BG** And also, Professor Padu?

**AO** Oh, Professor Padu Paga. He

mostly with a person that they're disciplined to.

**BG** Does Guru Rugu seek to have disciples?

**AO** Sure, he's a guru. He has a radio show. He wants listeners.

**BG** Does Adam?

**AO** Who?

**BG** Overton.

**AO** Oh, that guy. That jerk. He didn't even show up so I have to ... Me, I don't think about people as followers. But it makes sense to people like Guru Rugu and other kinds of voices that are interested in the rhetoric that goes along with per-

# Adam

<sup>1</sup>For more on *BESHT* and other projects by Adam: [plus1plus-1plus.org](http://plus1plus-1plus.org)

was involved with the *BESHT*<sup>1</sup> last year. I haven't talked to him in a while. I heard he's doing good.

**BG** I noticed that Matador Oven has a disciple translator which is you. Are you his disciple translator?

**AO** For Matador, yeah. Well, definitely, I've done some translation for him. There is a nice word for that—amanuensis. It's a fancy word for basically a scribe. But I don't know if I'm a disciple of Matador Oven. I mean, I like him a lot but I don't necessarily agree with everything he says. Disciples typically agree

suasion. From my encounters with Matador Oven and Guru Rugu, there is something that is very different about the two of them. Guru Rugu would maybe want followers. He's been around the block. He's not quite as positive as he used to be which doesn't mean he's lost faith but maybe he has a little bit.

Whereas Matador doesn't seem to be as concerned with people, with whether people are listening or not. He just assumes that as long as you shout loud enough like someone will hear you. They may agree with you

and they may not. He wrote  
*A Dabblerist Manifesto*. He believes

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everybody is a dabbler so in a way, he feels like even though he's shouting, he's preaching to the choir although they might not realize they are part of the choir yet.

**TR** Is there a difference in the form they use to communicate? One is more of a writer?

**AO** Matador Oven is much more of a writer and is firmer in his convictions. He's not a performer. But in a sense, both of them have done a lot of ghostwriting for each other and for other people. Guru Rugu is a bit more of an emcee at this point. He really enjoys other people's work. And so, he brings people on his shows. He performs meditations by Matador. Guru is a bit more of a public figure, more of a personality.

**TR** A guru.

**AO** Yeah, a guru. Although it's funny because that's just his first name. It's not actually his title. People don't really realize that.

**BG** This is the first time I've heard that. I thought he was a guru.

**TR** I thought his name was Rugu.

**AO** No. His parents named him Guru.

**TR** Is Rugu his last name?

**BG** It's like naming somebody Doctor.

**AO** Yeah, or Professor?

**TR** What a challenge to live up to a name like that. He's doing a good job.

**AO** Oh, good. I'll let him know that. He'll be happy to hear that because nobody ever calls him on the show to tell him that.

**BG** I want to talk a little bit about *UploadDownloadPerform.net*.

When did you start that project?

**AO** It launched in October of 2008. I went to school at CalArts and I was in the music school or at least that's where my home base was.

There are a bunch of fun composers there who were doing work that

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needed performers, and many of them were using indeterminate instruction-based scores, meaning that someone like me who is not that skilled at most things that composers need could actually participate in many of the pieces for instance, playing a note on a harmonica for an hour or tapping rocks together once a minute or once an hour.

We had a really strong group of folks who were writing a lot of interesting work, and performing together all the time at school, and for maybe the year after when we got out. Then, there was this big exodus and people left for New York, and for Berlin, and maybe a couple of other places.

We still wanted to keep performing with each other. Basically the procedure was every six months you would get an e-mail with anywhere from 5 to 30 PDFs from somebody. But after a while, that trailed off a little bit. We weren't part of the conversation of each other's work as much.

Around the same time a friend of mine who was still in school was like, *Hey, I think some of us want to make a website where we just distribute of our scores. It'll be a kind of label*. All the people were friends of mine, but my initial reaction was terror. I didn't want to have this tiny little clique of composer dudes. So I thought *wouldn't it be great if we just had a website where anybody could share stuff, even people who weren't, didn't consider themselves part of our crew or posse or whatever*. People can upload. People can download, and people can perform.

That was the initial thing of this need, and then also people disappearing and just waiting for people to send you e-mails, and

then wouldn't it be great to have a website where people can just put

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stuff up whenever and I'll just see it the next time I go there. I feel like one thing that Cage introduced, at least to me, was this notion of being interested in what was not known, the experimental model where one is opening one's self to receiving unknown results in the attempt to try not to prescribe.

**TR** When I think of your work, I always think of these different platforms that you create for others to participate in. It sounds like this might be one of the first ones. Some of the projects you and I worked on together seemed like a continuation of this idea, to play with a structure that allows for openness. Even in a project that is themed, and where you're working with say 15 people, as opposed to a huge platform on the Internet, there's still a possibility for surprise.

**AO** Well, one thing that became apparent to me a number of years ago is that I've always had a weird relationship to certain kinds of titles. For instance, I came out of jazz and was a jazz drummer. Even though I took some composition classes when I was in college, I never considered myself a composer because to me, a composer was someone who directed other people and also had a firm knowledge of melody and harmony. I didn't have that. I had knowledge of rhythm. Within jazz two or three people come together and there's improvisation around a theme. Every time, it's like an adventure. The improvisation leads to somewhere where maybe you didn't know you're going to end up. But later on, I was able to redefine my notion of what a composer was and feel comfortable with it when I realized that a composer could facilitate

something, lead people through a particular kind of experience.

Now, that kind of relationship of trying to figure out whether I feel comfortable with certain labels continues because since 2001, I've been very involved with organizing events which sometimes I call *curation*, and sometimes call event *production*, and sometimes it's *organizing*.

I once went into a situation where I proposed a performance series for a space in Chinatown and when I met with them I realized that their notion of curation was knowing exactly what was going to happen before it happened. They basically wanted an essay before it even happened.

I realized that the interesting thing for me about organizing things is when I see two or three or ten people who are working as artists or performers and who have relationships that they themselves may not notice. For me, it's fun to put them next to each other and see what comes out of that. Also, it's usually an *invitation* for someone to create new work.

I've always felt that this is kind of the rub. There seems to be like the two camps: One where you know it all before it even hits which is the more institutional kind of thing: ruling out danger, and also being able to guide the dialogue before it even happens. From my standpoint, the more exciting thing is the indeterminacy which is a mixture of improvisation and setting up a platform for something to transpire: a set of dominoes that might go in a bunch of different directions. Well, it's not actually dominoes, it's not setting up what falls.

**TR** Calling it an invitation is saying that artists can experiment with these forms and interpret

with these forms and interpret them. That seems different from

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curating or event organizing.

**AO** A lot of the things I've worked on have been very theme-based like working with you, Tanya, on the *Bureau of Experimental Speech and Holy Theses*, which was focused on public speaking, leadership skills, professional development regimes, and black magic.

These are structures that basically invite artists to work in a way that they haven't. I brought a class over here to KCHUNG the other day and talked to them about how so many artists have radio shows now. There are a lot of visual artists on the radio, a completely sound driven medium, and people doing stuff that's just with music and/or people doing stuff with just text or speaking.

Because the stakes are so low and you don't know if anybody's listening, it doesn't feel like your reputation is going to flounder and it gives people an opportunity to do something they wouldn't normally do. I feel meditation does that. It gives people a chance to engage with whatever. Concerts do that. They give you an opportunity to sit still potentially and listen for 60 minutes at a time. Art galleries do that.

All I see when I look around are models of putting people into different kinds of states of mind, ultimately. So, professional development regimes are one of those too, as well as workshop culture.

**TR** Soft skills.

**Adam** Thematic curational endeavors.

**Brian Getnick** How does the feeling that nobody might be listening manifest for you as an artist?

**AO** Well, if it were a cocktail ... I've been learning about cocktails, if it were a cocktail, it would be a really stiff drink with three-quarters of lone-

liness, and one-quarter of *I just need something to do to pass the time*.

**BG** Gin.

**AO** And Gin.

**TR** Some bitters in there?

**AO** Definitely some bitters in there, and a lot of cherries. The freedom of it is that you can do whatever, you know? I have a certain amount of humility about the things that I do so I don't have these grandiose ideas about trying to change the world or people.

It feels more useful for me just to do what I think I need to do and to create platforms for people to have a fun time together. I often just think of art as just something to do, like something to pass the time but in a positive way like a form of play.

**BG** The antidote towards that bitter drink is to make work that fills time, for people for that you know which is our listening audience.

**AO** Not necessarily always for people I know. It's much more public than just having a conversation with friends because that's for us, right? When you do a performance it's kind of for us but then you're doing it in another situation for others or with others. To be honest, it's hard to talk about it because I think about it all the time but it still hurts to talk about it in terms of what this is for, in terms of engaging with people who aren't necessarily directly part of the conversation already.

**BG** Are there people who are not directly part of the conversation already who you imagine?

**AO** I'm imagining a lot of naked people right now listening to this, just cuddling very sensually and sexually. Can you ask the question one more time?

**TR** I think you've answered it.

**AO** Okay, just making sure. I want to make sure I was answering your question and not my question.

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7:00pm  
Adam\_Overton

I realized that the interesting thing for me about organizing things is when I see two or three or ten people who are working as artists or performers and who have relationships that they themselves may not notice.—Adam

Adam Overton is an artist and organizer living in Los Angeles.



# 12/06/2013

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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. —taisha

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taisha\_paggett\_Ashley\_Hunt



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.

*Native Strategies*, co-directed by Brian Getnick and Tanya Rubbak, is a network of performance art makers, producers and critical thinkers who seek to invigorate and make globally visible Los Angeles's performance art community. We are engaged in a 5 year study (2011 – 2016) of LA performance modalities through the creation of 10 differently themed performance series and 10 uniquely designed journals, resulting in a book.

Getnick's performances have been seen at Station Independent Projects in New York City, at Honor Fraser Gallery, Red Cat, and Machine Projects in Los Angeles and at Croxhapox in Gent Belgium. He currently co-directs *Native Strategies*, a journal and performance art platform with Tanya Rubbak, and is the director of PAM, a theater space and artist residency in Highland Park.

Tanya Rubbak is an artist / graphic designer based in Los Angeles. She creates work in collaborative settings, focusing on publications and exhibitions. She's is an Adjunct Profesor at Otis College of Art and Design and has an MFA from California Institute of the Arts and BA from University of Pennsylvania.

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