

Performative Practices, Real-Time Activities and Script Works as Artistic Methods

SHADES OF TIME

While performative practices have a long history within artistic practice, it is only in the last ten years or so that they have come to occupy a central place in curatorial and institutional programs. Is this due to a higher consciousness regarding time-based and non-objectified aspects of art-making? Or is the more recent inclusion of such practices related to the specific utility of performances in expanding the “society of the spectacle”?

Performative practices, protocols and scripted works, as well as real-time activities and the like, are all of course far from being unknown territory or new genres. But whereas such practices tended to exist for some 30 years at the periphery of the art world, they have more recently come to occupy prominent positions at major art institutions and art fairs (take, for example, Marina Abramović at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, or “14 Rooms” at Art Basel in Basel). In the past, Burger Collection has likewise been involved in articulating its relation to such practices in a step-by-step approach: first by acquiring pertinent works and then, more recently, by organizing its own curatorial platforms for these practices.

Some of the works in the collection doubtlessly testify to a probing sense of time and to process as key methodological tools. Take Fiete Stolte’s critique of standardized time—in encapsulated in the seven-day week—in projects such as *8 Sunrises / 8 Sunsets (From: 8 Day Week Trip)* (2007), which involved traveling around the world through various time zones; Fiona Banner’s videos documenting actions with unforeseen results, for example *Jane’s* (2013); Vittorio Santoro’s extended series of time-based drawings, which involve the tracing and

retracing of sentences for three, six or more months with a view to renegotiating the ethics of engagement; or Fernando Bryce’s extensive drawing installations, which re-evaluate history by minutely examining its construction over time (see for example *The Spanish War*, 2003). Even artists hitherto better known for output in classical media, such as sculpture and drawing, have delved into important performative and community-based projects, such as the multilayered, long-term work “The Manora Project” (2009) by Naiza H. Khan. And even though he is most associated with baroque installations, Thomas Hirschhorn has probably remained in the game principally due to the ways he temporalizes his activist concerns with actions, happenings, readings, discussions and other quasi-pedagogical events. In a different manner, Theaster Gates has become widely known for his community and participatory works that extend in time and in doing so question the politics of urban development. Sophie Calle on the other hand uses performance in a 1970s sense to produce photographic-textual tableaux of encounters ranging from invitations to occupy her private space to the artist herself going into private spheres, such as in the series “L’Hôtel” (1983), in which she enters the hotel rooms of strangers disguised as a cleaning lady. Yet another instance is Filipa César’s performative readings that, along with her general critique of post-colonialist discourse, test out research materials within staged settings in front of audiences. What follows is a selection of works in the collection; or recently commissioned projects for “From Dusk Till Dawn,” organized by Burger Collection last year, that are indicative of such approaches.



TITUS KAPHAR

The work of American artist Titus Kaphar includes paintings and installations, and revolves around notions of race, history, memory and gender. In some of his work, the artist manipulates the surface of his paintings by slicing segments of the canvas or by affixing other layers, thereby decontextualizing their historical substance or frames of reference. Kaphar: "I had done a couple of exhibitions and people kept talking about the so-called 'violence' that was present in my pieces. This really bothered me because I didn't think of these cuttings as violent. I thought of them as surgical. At some stage I wanted to enable the viewer to observe the process behind the cutting in order for them to understand that it is a rather slow, meticulous and methodical process. It has very little to do with 'violence.' I can understand the implication of violence as it relates to the greater history of painting. I can understand someone coming to that conclusion, but I wanted to do the performances publicly so that people could see it was not about someone in a studio getting really upset and just taking a painting and going crazy with it. At this point, the process of, say, crumpling a painting or cutting a painting is not very different from the process of making the painting itself . . . I cut things out, take a step back, I look, compose, return again, I crumple it up a little bit, I look back and I recompose. There is this same back-and-forth technique that happens when I make the painting with the paintbrush. It's not a different state, but really continuous."¹

¹ Titus Kaphar, interview by Daniel Kurjaković and Linda Jensen, New Haven, January 14, 2011. To read the entire conversation visit the "Theory/Conversations" section on www.conflictingtales.org.



TITUS KAPHAR, *Doubt*, 2010, bronze and oil on canvas, series of three unique works: 170.2 x 116.2 x 95.9 cm each. Photo by Bill Orcutt. Courtesy the artist, Burger Collection and Friedman Benda, New York.



TITUS KAPHAR, *Making Space*, completed performance for "Re-Interpreting the European Collection" at Bermuda National Gallery, Hamilton, 2011, with (right) the artist's *Tax Collector*, 2011, oil on canvas, 221.6 x 145.4 cm, as a response to (left) Thomas Gainsborough's *Thomas John Medlicott*, c. 1763. Kaphar's replica of Medlicott has been cut out and crumpled in a waste container, and the artist has then discarded his jumpsuit and tools. Photo by Alice Higgins. Courtesy the artist and Friedman Benda, New York.



TITUS KAPHAR, *Making Space*, performance for "Re-Interpreting the European Collection" at Bermuda National Gallery, Hamilton, 2011, with (right) the artist cutting into his painting, *Tax Collector* (2011), using a razor, in response to (left) Thomas Gainsborough's *Thomas John Medlicott*, c. 1763. Photo by Alice Higgins. Courtesy the artist and Friedman Benda, New York.



WONG WAI YIM, *Sex Story to a Sex Story*, 2013, durational piece: 1 hour. Real-time activity during “From Dusk Till Dawn” at Cattle Depot Artist Village, Hong Kong, 2013. Photo by Alan Lau. Courtesy the artist and Burger Collection.



WONG WAI YIM, *Sex Story to a Sex Story*, 2013, durational piece: 1 hour. Real-time activity during “From Dusk Till Dawn” at Cattle Depot Artist Village, Hong Kong, 2013. Photo by Alan Lau. Courtesy the artist and Burger Collection.

WONG WAI YIM*

Chinese artist Wong Wai Yim contributed the large-scale video performance *Sex Story to a Sex Story* (2013) to the day of real-time activities entitled “From Dusk Till Dawn” at Cattle Depot Artist Village last year, inviting friends, strangers and acquaintances to converse with her and her collaborators about lust, desire and sex. Seated face to face with the artist in a tent, the participants divulged their various sexual experiences and preferences, or lack thereof. *Sex Story to a Sex Story* is part of an ongoing project about storytelling as an emancipatory strategy, getting people to re-acknowledge erotica and the body’s sensuality in Hong Kong and beyond. In a similar vein, in March 2013, the artist hosted a sex-toy workshop at the artist-run Hong Kong organization 1a space, having discovered that most of her acquaintances in Hong Kong never had been to a sex shop. As the artist recalls: “Some of them don’t have the idea to buy, or don’t know where to buy, or have never masturbated!”



WONG WAI YIM, *Sex Story to a Sex Story*, 2013, durational piece: 1 hour. Real-time activity during “From Dusk Till Dawn” at Cattle Depot Artist Village, Hong Kong, 2013. Photo by and copyright Alain Kantarjian. Courtesy the artist and Burger Collection.

LAU CHING PING*

Not having delved into any performative practice prior to “From Dusk Till Dawn,” Lau Ching Ping is known as one of the most prominent photographers of Hong Kong’s urban landscapes. As part of his photographic practice, the artist relies on a complex set of preparatory steps and strategies in order to conceptualize photographic imagery. Before taking any picture, the artist engages, with the help of drawings and sketches, in a process of remembering and mental searching—a purely mnemonic operation—in order to identify the sites for future imagining, a step that seems especially apt in view of the fast-changing face of the city. He then reconstructs, with the help of extended walks through the city, and also of Google Maps, the location of the site. The photographs ensuing from this process are eerie depictions of various sites located somewhere between end-of-time scenarios and spectral materializations of areas devoid of human presence. For his real-time activity the artist led participants on field trips, pinpointing some of the photo sites he had researched. What came to the fore was the psycho-geography of sites: where places are, how they exist, inherent memories of places, and changes in Hong Kong’s urban dynamics.



LAU CHING PING, *Elevated View of the City*, 2013, durational piece: 4 hours. Real-time activity during “From Dusk Till Dawn” in various locations, Hong Kong, 2013. Photo by and courtesy the artist.

CHOI YAN-CHI*



CHOI YAN-CHI, *Head to Head*, 2013, durational piece: c. 11 hours. Hong Kong lyricist Chow Yiu Fai participating in real-time activity during “From Dusk Till Dawn” around To Kwa Wan neighborhood, Hong Kong, 2013. Photo by and copyright Alain Kantarjian. Courtesy the artist and Burger Collection.

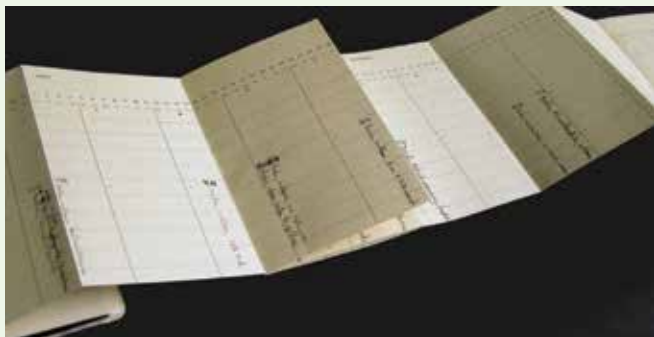
Hong Kong-based artist Choi Yan-Chi’s *Head to Head* (2013) immersed audiences in an alternative scenario: an exclusive one-to-one encounter between the general public and local cultural figures. Divided into pairs, the participants chatted via iPads, each individual on a selected route through the city in a van. That the pairing was anonymous created a situation of surprise and discovery. Each conversation was unique and non-repeatable, with topics touching upon art, culture or daily life. Set up as an artistic concept for producing knowledge within a specific physical and mental experience, *Head to Head* merged ad-hoc dialogues, the movement through urban space and extemporization. Artists and cultural practitioners who, along with ten members of the audience, participated in the work’s first appearance in 2013 (the artist intends to continue with the project) included collector Monique Burger, artist Filipa César, professor of cultural studies Steven Chan, artist Reds Cheung, artist Chow Chun Fai, pop lyricist Chow Yiu Fai, curator Daniel Kurjaković, writer Lawrence Pun and curator Matthew Turner. In this vein, Choi Yan-Chi has stated that “dialogues could be an interesting way to agitate thinking and investigate different opinions . . . It could be about art, culture and special issues. *Head to Head* takes place in a special situation to create a private and exclusive space for immersion in a ‘secluded environment.’ The idea starts from a suggestion by a writer who wants to ‘face the wall,’ a purification action ideally allowing one to create and the other to do the writing. *Head to Head* is a one-to-one dialogue session with an unknown ‘other.’”²

² Quoted from the artist’s statement as published on www.itthinktrains.org.

FLORIAN GERMANN*

Swiss artist Florian Germann explores the art of interpretation, drawing inspiration across the board, from contemporary to age-old myths, mixing fictitious scenarios in process-oriented sculptural settings. In the performative work *Wendigo River / The Crystal Source / Kowloon* (2013), set against the urban backdrop of Hong Kong, the artist worked throughout the night with sonic-sensitive digging tools, at the old aviation ground in Kowloon. Germann's labor-intensive night performance was an experimental steer in the direction of his ambitious "Wendigo River National Park" project, linking his global project with the city of Hong Kong through an underground tunnel. Germann appears to positively cultivate the murkiness and transmutability of the national park story: "In the park there are different levels of consciousness. You encounter different sites and see different types of language. The forms are palpable and can be seen; or you can see something else arise, as there is always potential transformation. This is the core of 'Wendigo River National Park.'"³

³ Florian Germann, interview by Linda Jensen, Zürich, November 23, 2013. To read the entire conversation visit the "Editorial Wanderings" section on www.torrentmagazine.org.



VITTORIO SANTORO, *12 Months Project Planner Piece (Silence Destroys Consequences)* (detail), 2010, pencil on a 12-months project planner in display case and 76 color photographs, dimensions variable. Photo by Marco Blessano. Courtesy the artist and Rosascape, Paris.



VITTORIO SANTORO, *12 Months Project Planner Piece (Silence Destroys Consequences)*, 2010, pencil on a 12-months project planner in display case and 76 color photographs, dimensions variable. Photo by Marco Blessano. Courtesy the artist and Rosascape, Paris.



FLORIAN GERMANN, *Wendigo River / The Crystal Source / Kowloon*, 2013, durational piece: 4 hours. Real-time activity during "From Dusk Till Dawn" at the old aviation ground in To Kwa Wan, Hong Kong, 2013. Photo by and copyright Alain Kantarjian. Courtesy the artist and Burger Collection.

VITTORIO SANTORO

In the various media that the Italian-Swiss artist Vittorio Santoro employs—ranging from installations, sculptural works, photographs and drawings to script and sound works—very often the structure of time plays a vital role. His works are rooted in everyday observations, but push beyond them to reveal latent historical, aesthetic, socio-political or even metaphysical realities. His script works, which require another individual or a group of people for their realization, often treat the idea of creation and reception, questioning the complex relationship between viewer and artist and consequently the social function of art: "The works that I call script works are works where I really rely on participation. I am doing this because I want to stress the issues of what an art piece is, how it can be used, and what people expect from it . . . These are very important questions for me because the reception of the public is a key element for the piece and for everything I do."⁴ And about the time-based work *12 Months Project Planner Piece (Silence Destroys Consequences)* (2010), a piece consisting of a one-year project planner in a display case and a total of 76 color photographs, the artist has stated: "During one year I would decide on a certain moment to voice the sentence 'silence destroys consequences,' be it on the street, on the subway, in a shop, in a movie theatre, or alone in my studio. I would then keep track with a pencil of the place and the time on a 12-months project planner and I would also take a photograph of what was in front of me with my cell phone at the moment I'd utter the sentence."⁵

⁴ Vittorio Santoro, unpublished interview by Daniel Kurjaković and Linda Jensen, New York, January 12, 2011.

⁵ Quoted from the artist's website www.vittoriosantoro.info, see rubric, and the respective comment about the work.



FIONA BANNER, *Torso (III)*, 2004, ink on paper, 115 x 90 cm. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.



FIONA BANNER, *Chinook*, 2013, still from 16mm film transferred to HD digital film projection: 10 min 14 sec. Courtesy the artist, 1301PE, Los Angeles, and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.

FIONA BANNER

The study of text and language lies at the heart of Fiona Banner’s practice, materializing across sculptures, drawings, installations and videos, as well as filmed actions and performances. Her early transcriptions of war films from the 1990s carry respective resonances that extend to her more recent works, which revolve around figure drawings as staged moments in front of an audience. A transcription of what the artist sees and senses, the works convey the shape, tone and flesh of the body through their language, constructing a corpus out of handwritten notations.

Regarding this nexus of research, the artist has stated in a 2009 interview (published in the *Guardian*): “I got involved in looking at and describing the human form through watching war films. It occurred to me, after a while, that their images were pornographic in nature—both alluring, seductive and repulsive. That got me into looking at porn films. I began to think that they were like life drawings, only with all the rules broken. They have very limited narrative: often no script, virtually no dialogue, just the hovering gaze. I described these films moment by moment, in my own words, and made very big pictures from them. They take something very private and domestic, and make it heroic. After that, I worked with a striptease artist. She came to my studio and undressed, and I began describing her act verbally. It became a kind of striptease in words. I generally never use life models—I usually work with people I know. We need a good rapport, especially for the performances I do, in which I stage a bare classical studio set-up with an easel, but then describe the nude model in front of a live audience. It’s a bit of theatre. It’s dead serious, but tongue-in-cheek as well. The performances are really taut, tense but oddly funny, for the audience as well as for me and the model.”⁶

⁶ Banner, Fiona. “Art Stripped Bare – Fiona Banner on the Nude,” *Guardian*, April 8, 2009. Accessed July 10, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/apr/07/whitechapel-gallery-fiona-banner>.



FIONA BANNER, *Jane’s*, 2013, still from HD digital film projection: 11 min 42 sec. Courtesy the artist, 1301PE, Los Angeles, and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.

Artists with * were featured in the real-time activity platform “From Dusk Till Dawn” on May 24, 2013, as part of the “Quadrilogy Part 2” exhibition and research project “I Think It Rains,” curated by Daniel Kurjaković, which took place at and around the Cattle Depot Artist Village, To Kwa Wan, Hong Kong.