

EMOTIONAL ECONOMY

A workshop on emotional labor and toward dispositions for a new economic ethos



Friday, Nov 22

1:30-6pm

Gilman 130D

1:30

Emotional Labor of Buttressing Masculinity in Tokyo's Entertainer Clubs

Rhacel Parreñas
Sociology, USC

Care & Theft: Intimate Labor and Female Migration in the Italian Psychological Thriller

Barbara Mennel
Film, University of Florida

Discussant: Emma McGlennen
Anthropology, JHU

4:00

Doing, Showing, Sharing: Ways to Un-pre-scribe Collective Artistic Processes

Liv Strand
Artist, Stockholm

Fragility and Activism

Bill Connolly
Political Theory, JHU

Discussant: Jennifer Watson
Art History, JHU

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Johns Hopkins University
Program for the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality
Co-sponsored by GRL, East Asian Studies and Art History

Doing, showing, sharing. Ways to un-pre-scribe collective artistic processes.

By artist Liv Strand

I am a visual artist and I will talk about different formatted practices that I use to make space for collective creative activity, in some art projects I'm involved in.

By formats I mean pre-decided limits that restrict, for instance the topic, or method, focused in a specific time frame, or the time frame it self. The reason for making restrictions is *to open up* for creativity to happen in an un-hierarchical way. My hope for the restrictions is that they can have a group skip, some social negotiations, in the benefit of other things to gain attention. The formats function as a kind of fence encircling moments of shared attention, allowing for a broader variety of associations to be made relevant. I would claim that many *different things can be made relevant* in a creative processes, and that an agreed format assure for a kind of center of gravitation for the shared attention, that places suggested associations as being close or far away in the geography of a specific topic. Evaluation is made out of the group as part of the process.

To decide on rules in advance is also about to distribute the care-taking of the moment among (all) participants. Insisting on including many different ideas from persons in a process, is for me to take another path than to be fast and smart in finding the "most accurate" response to a task or a devotion. On the contrary it is about trying to open up for *several sensibilities*, and to care for having them affect the result, by incorporating them.

To keep a focus –that has been agreed upon–, as a *collective* focus – include to prevent *for example* that the most articulated person in the room have an asymmetrical large impact on where the process heads. Another reason behind the strict formats is an attempt to re-direct ways discussions can take by suggesting a sometimes surprising compositions for how to collect ideas, or how to distribute and accumulate discussions and other materials.

One could compare the idea of formatting exercises to when kids agree in a game that function as long as everyone play by the rules. Limits for what a rule could be is set by how far ones imagination goes, in theory whatever strange form could possibly become a working model.

---Today I will talk about formatted practices by presenting some examples and to tell about some experiences that I find relevant.

TIME-control

In several art projects we work with *clocking the time*. This is conducted by setting

up exact time frames that *is timed* and ended by an alarm-signal. Sometimes as in a project called **Salon Material** –that is about discussing the leap from reading theory texts to art-making, me and my colleague Johanna Gustafsson Fürst set all frames being the initiators. Then we invite participants to join according to these conditions. It always includes to ask the participants to give presentations concentrating a certain material, in a decided timeframe. This series of presentations then informs the rest of an evening. A thing to consider can be for instance 'earth', as one of the four elements, accompanied by the sentence "Please wear warm clothes and bring some digging tool, we hope to have an earthy location nearby that we can visit." The presentations are normally short, 5 to 8 minutes. How to approach a material is up to each participant, it can be in a performance or by a texture or even reading a text. Mediums often overlap.

In other occasions the clocking aims to end an exercise, to make things wrap up. We also use it in the everyday practices when collaborative working on the content in performances. This was the case in the, now over three year long on-going project named **Through Composition as Explanation**, that I have with Marcus Doverud, a dancer and performer with a master degree in aesthetics, and visual artist and architect Amelie Rydqvist. The project took a starting point in a text by Gertrude Stein, one where she explains what it is to write –or to be creative *in general*, as she is pretty general in the way she ever allow for a text to explain anything. Out of that we went into extensive reading of related information as philosophical texts and artist writings. Later on in the process we *translated*, or transformed, the accumulated information we've experienced together into two staged performances. Insisting on that the same accuracy was to be found in abstract visual space and our moves that shifted that space. (At the moment in this collaboration, we work on writing text.)

One entire month we ended every day with a round where the three of us gave five minutes each, on something we named 'presentation-formats'. This article meant to take on the imaginations and phantasies, on *an over-all level* –about what the final presentation could be like, including what bits and pieces of moving material and readings and discussions we have had. It was a moment to zoom out... To make this round of imaginations every evening provided a location where shifts could be included and allow for changed expectations. It were conducted by clocking five minutes for each person, and some days we had to make a second round because there were so much that needed to be said. Other days someone asked for their time to be shorter, but most often we let silence fill the time if a person went silent. (((5)))

By this format everyone *was equally forced* to try to verbalize ones images and perceptions, and/or *limited* to restrict how much to tell about things that had been sparked off in that person by things that had happened that day. It can seem crude

but in my perception, it rather *shows* inequalities present when it comes to talking-time in-between people, rather than it serves to oppress anyone. Most people have to adjust their usual ways a bit, it can touch habits as always being the first, or last one to comment in a group –and more positively, it can allow for taking the task to verbalize something a bit more serious. To *give* your contribution in a group. The clocked time cannot be intruded by others commenting, or even helping to find an appropriate expression. Stuttering and hesitations is also communicating.

This kind of strict formats demands both that you as a group is willing to formulate what you like to work with –to be able to find the *accurate forms* for doing so. And as always is the case; format and content goes together, so the kind of formats chosen will have a large impact on what content that can get included. So, in my thinking, it must be a parallel strive to explore both forms and ways to create together dependent on wishes and missions.

I like to mention that this way of working also calls for a certain solidarity to emerge in a group. One have to treat suggestions with some tenderness. If participants engage too much criticality towards rules, these can no longer function as a *shared* tool. And if no problematization of the formats is allowed something can end up in some sect-like direction.

I move on to some more examples:

Capitalism as we live it is a workshop format that I've set up in collaboration with Swedish visual artist Andrea Creutz and Elizabeth Ward, a choreographer and dancer from the US. We first met in the spring 2011 in an art project in Athens, and the island of Hydra, in Greece. That meeting was dedicated to ideas about the former Greek currency the *Drachma*, its iconography and the possible return of it, because of the hit by the economical crises, and the problematic relationship to the European Union. No collaboration in this larger gathering really happened.

But some months later the three of us luckily encountered a shared interest in how capitalism could be discussed, *without* having to enter into extensive reading, and also not giving in to the sentiment that capitalism is too complex and overwhelming to even be talked about. *Capitalism as we live it* came out of this interest as an one and a half day workshop, set up for the participants to share thoughts and insights across a series of exercises and discussions. Collecting and arranging the concept and content of this workshop was a journey into our own three quite different living conditions, putting in open display different views on necessities and ontological stand points, more or less well articulated on beforehand.

At an early stage it was obvious that the *body* was a center of attention, for us. It has

at least two-headed reasons, by trying to make conscious reactive patterns that first is embodied –and secondly perhaps– voiced or expressed in other ways. The other reason to bring in the body is to process shared information and thoughts somewhere else than in our effective brains, –to be able to move more slowly together.

So our ambition in this workshop is to *be slow* and also to allow for urgent ideas to be able to be included. A bit contradicting to the slow ambition is that we in this workshop still have a fully planned series of exercises. This entails that many discussions started in one exercise will be interrupted, in the benefit of the next gathering, taking on one more aspect. Sometimes there is a later occasion where questions can get thought over again, sometimes there is just the interruption for the sake of a broaden experience.

One obvious critique to the presence of reoccurring interruptions is that a discussion never goes deep, that things stay on 'a surface'. I would claim that in the case of the workshop *Capitalism as we live it* the surface has a great importance, it is where reactions sparks off from, and for that reason it can be the *plane* to collect understanding out of.

Telling personal...

Capitalism as we live it start with a dinner for everyone to get to know each other. Up to that evening the participants that signed up, is asked to write a capitalistic record of one of the days in the week leading up to the meeting, we the organizers do so as well. Ending the dinner, along with coffee and cake, we have a round of readings that bring many different self- and world-presentations on capitalism to the table. It is stories that bring what someone think is important, and have full experience of, as part of *that* that is drawing our horizon –to be a shared and somewhat known horizon.

A journal can for instance be about all choices a day consists of. As choices on what to buy out of a vast variety of similar things, and also about how to position your-self by what objects and surroundings to affiliate –visually– with. A kind of intersubjectivity mediated by *'thing-sampling' as a consumer-collage*.

Another diary take on the different value the work of writing texts has, in aspects of how much is payed for the same number of characters in a cultural magazine compared to an review or even a translation. And also concerned with what kind of writing one individual recognize as the most valuable to devote ones time to, and how ones working time can (or can not) be negotiated. Free lance conditions versus academic demands...

Body-inclusion –and shared schedule

Next day will start with a relaxation, getting into breathing and moving along this breathing. It is a slow-down, non-verbally embracing questions on how much that a group can grasp together in one and a half day. We start by sharing the room and the air. It is about coordinating bodies, redirecting thoughts. Participants willingly do this –or not.

The circumstance that the days are formatted, is made public already in the invitation and on a schedule on the wall in the actual space. Implying that we're in command and have prepared a path. The kind of collectivity that can happen under this kind of conditions, in my experience, is a pretty playful one. It establishes a hierarchy between the organizers and participants. The organizers keep track of time and what that will happen next, the participants are more 'free' to explore ways they can find a suggested exercise meaningful.

(tree)

I like to share one more practical experience from an exercise called *the tree*. It is taken from the *handbook for nonviolent campaigns* (published by War Resisters' International) that we've found on-line. People pair up and work two and two, to try to find a word or sentence to write on the trunk of a tree, as a problem that needs to be unfolded. Branches and roots is drawn in and out of the trunk, as what that feeds it, respectively what that branches out of it. –And is there a "good" fruit to be found, is also a question to work on.

Performing this exercise has been a supporting structure to formulate bits and pieces of complex causality relationships. The trees involves people in dialogues that is more direct –by the demand that something has to be written and drawn on the paper, later on to be shared with the larger group. Most pairs will at some point talk about *the shape of* the tree itself, often as a bit problematic shape with hierarchical implications. Top-down... Some will stay at this level of representation and try to come up with better suggestions as cloud-formations or a horizontal cut of a trunk with the annual rings as the pattern. Some will lay the trees down horizontally and keep on building it, some will add worms and other unpredicted intruders as a way to complex how events occur within the structure.

We the organizers, have stopped to collect the tree-drawings, because they hardly turn to be out very interesting, on the contrary it is the *dialogues them selves* going on negotiating the drawing and the writing that is very valuable. And the larger discussion afterwards that opens up and conjoin different practical aspects and different levels of specificity in investigating a tree-trunk-problem.

Coming to the end

What does it mean to wish to work and think together? What is the specific quality, what does it mean and implement beyond the human activity: communication. I have a wish for *results* to emerge from somewhere in-between the individuals, as if ping-pong of associations, that travel across several minds could shape out of that very procedure. For me, it is about looking for ways to be interrupted and inspired in a shared *process of doing*. An ongoing process as *a material by its own quality*; a fog (–the cloud, or a tree...) –relating to a later-to-come result, the process is a **place** (a location) in itself, to visit and to be attentive over for. When 'things'; a lot of details-to-come is still uncertain and can still take on different directions or costumes (disguises). At **the place** (the location) of the process one aspect that is certain is that there is no right or wrong, yet.

Finally, I like to share the *drum session* in my recent exhibition *Non Cover*, in Berlin. The drum session being the act of poking on surfaces of things, discovering and sharing sounds. The poked surfaces related to the surfaces that the art pieces in the exhibition was showing –comparing one next to the other– as a discussion creating meaning by comparing. To emphasize the surfaces, attitudinize their being.

The *drum session* was the encounter of sounds from five individuals: me the artist, Marcus my performer/dance collaborator, Tilda my artist friend, Pär an writer and experimental musician, Axel a writer friend. We had met three times over the scope of some months to rehearse by doing in practice, and then talking about how sounds showed up. Initially there were me asking them (and others) to join, there were some expectations from me and from them, more or less verbalized. By doing the drumming together we found ways to do it for five hours during one exhibition-day's opening hours.

I mention this as it was such a loose and still stringent collaboration. In my experience, it was crucial that we met on before hand, mostly to build some trust in that we did not have to know *that much* –before we could share that doing with an audience. Then it was possible to share us suggesting ways of doing sounds and the in-and-out-of-some-rhythm-moves.

There is no over all conclusion that I can make. Different processes handle different materials. Sometimes a material is the drive for starting a work, or the act of translating materials or medias. I think of collaborative processes as being a tool rather than having an aim. I also think of *that tool* having the possibility to tinker with what can be –and how to understand– the intersubjective mediums (we use for communication).

– Now that's all -as Gertrude Stein would say.