

Close Readings

Hannah Black, Alvis Choi a.k.a. Alvis Parsley, k.g. Guttman,
David Kelley, Radio Equals

January 14 - February 25, 2017

Curated by Alison Cooley

What happens to critical distance when our internal noise, our debts, our anxieties, and our entanglements interrupt the process of being with an artwork? How can we maintain the political urgency of criticism when we are moved by artworks and deeply feel their effects on us? What do we do with the self-awareness of our own implication and entanglement? When artworks overflow and exceed the methods that exist for talking about them in established, detached ways, how do we inhabit new ones that hold together our criticality, our feeling, and our recognition of the space between them?

Influenced by performance, conversation, and writing as modes of engaging with criticality and intimacy, *Close Readings* brings together practices whose insides and outsides are difficult to distinguish. These practices are by turns invested in uncovering the frailty of language, prodding at cultural anxieties and individual pleasures, excavating and refusing legacies, asking for tenderness, applying pressure, attending to the complications and vulnerabilities of being together while we are implicated—politically, socially, personally—by artworks and their demands on us. While some of the works in the exhibition illustrate a complex and subjective coming-to-terms with an artwork,



DAVID KELLEY, *PRIMARILY DOMESTIC* (DETAIL), 2016. TWO-CHANNEL VIDEO, VINYL, AND COLOUR PHOTOGRAPHS. IMAGE CREDIT: RUBEN DIAZ. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

an object, a person, or a history, others craft performative structures for facing our own entanglements, political commitments, and anxieties as spectators. Together, they trace the possibility of alternatives to detached observation, of a move from critical distance to critical closeness.

Close Readings developed following several years as an emerging art critic. While completing graduate studies and then navigating the precarity of freelance writing in Toronto, I became preoccupied with the notion of “critical distance.” I was carefully attuned to possible conflicts of interest and wary of writing about work I could be seen to have a stake in. I was confident that the critic’s responsibility rested in description and sturdy interpretative judgement. At the same time, criticism has sometimes felt naked to me: I am struck by how often, upon reflection, it seems to be a baring of the critic’s own impulses and hang-ups, rather than the work’s, and how regularly the critic’s subjectivity is underlined by the attempt to conceal it through distancing.

I repeatedly encountered work that exerted some kind of pull on me, brought me close, drew me into its wilds. In the thick of that work—the touching, the complicated, the too-identified-with—clarity is hard, but untangling is important. How to see it and retain the necessary criticality? How to do justice, at once, to embodied reactions, coming-to-terms, not-yet-resolved feelings?

While I came to my thinking on this exhibition through these critical encounters, the works I have assembled largely do not speak directly to art criticism as a field. Rather, this selection of works holds together intimacy and criticality, exploring the way that linguistic gaps, the provocative dynamics of conversation, the implication of spectators and participants, and the failures of representation can produce unsteady and fruitful territory for analysis. I hope these works leave space for reacting and feeling as well as interpreting and decoding.

While David Kelley’s *Primarily Domestic* and k.g. Guttman’s *It’s like hammering into nothing when I speak it* wrestle with art and art criticism’s conversations about the intersections of life and work, other works in the exhibition play more obliquely with the combined difficulty and urgency of seeing something or someone up close. Hannah Black’s *The Neck* addresses the desire to represent oneself and carry politics through the body, while Radio Equals and Alvis Choi a.k.a. Alvis Parsley’s *The Great Glassies Operation* take as a point of departure the uncomfortable¹ intimacies of live performance, dwelling in performance’s capacity to implicate, unsettle, care, and confront.

The following conversation with fellow critic Daniella Sanader explores some of my curatorial impulses in the exhibition *Close Readings* on the occasion of its presentation at Gallery TPW.

Alison Cooley, January 2017

¹ I use the word “discomfortable” here to gesture to Antena’s *A Manifesto for Discomfortable Writing*, a small pamphlet published by the Houston- and Los Angeles-based language justice collective, and available at antenaantena.org.

Daniella Sanader: For the past few years, TPW has been experimenting with producing conversations instead of essays for our exhibitions, and the format feels particularly relevant to this case. Many works here deal with the dynamics of intimacy and distance through conversation in different ways, yet none of them presume that conversation is a pure and efficient form of exchange. What does conversation “produce” in *Close Readings*?

Alison Cooley: I didn't set out to curate an exhibition about conversation. More specifically, the show developed out of my interest in kinds of intimacies that I have been seeing in performance art, and these intimacies often happen to involve conversation in some way. In a lot of the practices I was interested in as I developed this exhibition, there was a kind of care, or hosting, or crafting of the situation. Several works in the exhibition implicate the spectator and are about how we respond when we're put in relation to something that pushes against expectations for our behavior as observers.

Early in this project, Claude Wittmann [of Radio Equals] articulated something that resonated with me. He described this kind of implication of the spectator and attending to the ethics of the situation as “care and shake”: the performer creates a disruption or unsettlement, but does so alongside a structure where that action or conversation is allowed to be tender and responsible and have potential. So in a major way, this exhibition is about those sticky dynamics.

But it's true, there's a lot of conversation, even if it's implied. k.g. Guttman's bookwork *It's like hammering into nothing when I speak*

it consists of transcripts of her interviews with the late art historian Nancy Ring. These were conducted over seven days and each repeated the same questions. The bookwork is installed at TPW across a long table and each of the conversations is housed in a coloured folio. But each conversation has been redacted as well, so the content in some places becomes very uncertain or secretive. I have the impression of reading something created by two people who are very connected but also of having some of that powerful intimacy withheld.

Similarly, David Kelley's installation is an attempt to get inside a conversation conducted by the Arte Povera artist Marisa Merz: a conversation with her daughter that the artist seems to have undertaken, spur-of-the-moment, in order to refuse being interviewed by the critic Mirella Bandini, in 1972. The conversation in *Primarily Domestic* is also familial and intimate, but very performed. In his two-channel video, Kelley has the mother-daughter conversation re-performed in various modes of acting, speaking, and reading. The screens hang against the backdrop of a mural-size installation of photos that gesture both to Merz's work and to her domestic life.

Alvis Choi a.k.a. Alvis Parsley's *The Great Glassies Operation* also addresses conversation. The work adapts a performance they've done multiple times in recent years that imagines a future in which people can undergo a process that renders their skin transparent. They pose as a representative of the company that offers this procedure, selecting audience members to undertake an initial evaluation and assess whether they're ready to transition. Those conversations are humorous but also difficult because they

address what it would mean to appear to the world entirely differently. For this new video work at TPW, conversations with those undergoing the transition to transparent skin take on a testimonial quality: they operate a bit like advertisements, but a discomfort surfaces throughout the video about how we address identity, our desire (or not) to eliminate or reject racial and ethnic identifications, and what it means to embrace or resist the homogenization of identity.

Some of these questions about the need or desire to anchor politics in the body arise in Hannah Black's *The Neck*, which is perhaps the least conversational of the works in the exhibition. Throughout the video, Black explores how language and visual representation fail to translate embodied knowledge. But even this non-conversation borrows some of the negotiating tactics of the other works: the voiceover returns to certain phrases again and again, recaps a series of tenuously related experiences, argues against unspoken assumptions, and revises and re-contextualizes.

Radio Equals, in many ways, looks the most like a conversation of anything in the exhibition. The project takes place over three conversations in which two people attempt to speak about equality while striving to be as equal as possible in the way they conduct the conversation. These conversations are live-broadcast into the gallery on January 21, February 11, and February 25, 2017. For this iteration of the project, each conversation partner invites the next—so while Claude Wittmann begins the first conversation, his first guest, Julian Higuerey Núñez, takes over a kind of stewardship for the February 11 conversation, and then Julian's guest takes over this "host" position on February 25. For

each conversation (which is not recorded), an invited writer will produce a piece of documentation that will be available in the gallery during the exhibition. But when the live conversation is not happening, Radio Equals's space is relatively sparse; it gestures to the potential of this mode of conversation (whether or not it's thought about as an artwork). That potential is immense, but, because the work takes place in this relay form, there is also a lot of uncertainty about what the conversations will do. The work is not tightly controlled, can be given life in different ways by different conversation partners, and is open to many peoples' ideas about what equality is and how it should be generated between people.

Returning to what conversation "produces," you and I have also spoken about how the desire for a conversation to have potential or to be productive can be misplaced. We have

the idea that through conversation we'll get to a place where we understand each other better. But sometimes conversations are just antagonistic or difficult or stumbling! Some in this show are. Or, rather, they're productive but they have their own inherent awkwardness.

DS: I like that you've phrased it as "coming to a place where we understand each other better," because I think it's a common ideal and I'd like to pick apart the language a little bit. It's interesting to think of that shared understanding or affinity as a kind of place, as something made spatial through conversation. It's the place of a table, a couch, an email thread, a Google doc, a gallery; but of course it's something larger, too. The conversations in *Close Readings* each spatialize those forms of exchange, but as you said they leave room for difficulty, for antagonism, for the gaps in understanding



K.G. GUTTMAN, *IT'S LIKE HAMMERING INTO NOTHING WHEN I SPEAK IT*, 2012. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

and interpretation that are a natural part of human communication.

Jennifer Doyle uses a phrase throughout her wonderful 2013 book *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*, which is a book you and I have talked about at length. When she speaks about certain projects she refers to the “performative field” they produce or exist within. I love this framework for thinking about any work—whether it’s performance-based or not—because it widens the frame of reference beyond the object or gesture in question to incorporate the context of actions that exists around it. These might be actions undertaken by the artist to produce the thing in question, but it also incorporates how spectators are implicated in the space that’s generated through that work.

AC: Right, this is in many ways particular to performance (because you can’t ignore a real person in front of you and the ways you interact with them), but it also operates in time-based media. As a spectator of, say, video, or as someone who intends to respond to it in some way (as a critic or a maker or a thinker), there is time and space to change your relationship to it as you watch. So you rethink and re-evaluate and come to new feelings as you live alongside the work and process it.

DS: With time-based media there’s a deliberate choice to sit with and watch through, to devote time, which can be a difficult choice to make in a given moment. And everything in *Close Readings* takes the form of time-based media, even k.g. Guttman’s book. How is time condensed and given form in k.g.’s piece at TPW, and are we as spectators given room to rethink and re-evaluate its shape?

AC: Yes, k.g.’s book is totally about time and

its passage. The question of repetition and its creative potential resounds throughout the seven conversations. But the way the conversations are condensed in book form is also incredibly partial, fragmented, withholding. First, the book is composed of folders of loose pages. Additionally, k.g. made decisions, after Nancy’s passing, about what was to be redacted that shifts the reading of the piece from a straightforward document of this set of conversations (the premise being very structured and the result being productively meandering) to a whole other arena of mysteries and desires and glimpses at something incredibly intimate.

I hope the way the book is laid out at TPW is taken as an invitation to spend time with it. As an object, the book is very orderly and accumulative. But it is different in an exhibition context; although the book is laid out chronologically, there’s no guarantee people will experience it in order, and that makes its presentation even more fragmented. Each omission creates a desire for more, but also, at least for me, creates a very subjective imagination of what more is. It is impossible for me to read that work without having to engage with my own role in fabricating its meaning. The content of the work is so rich: it delves into varied and sometimes hard-to-pin-down intimacies between k.g. and Nancy. The book as an object also necessitates a certain awareness of the practice of reading as a deeply subjective grappling with how we construct and come to meaning.

DS: Perhaps that’s what disrupts the so-called critical distance—or presumed neutrality, I guess—of a documentary gesture. We are triangulated into these exchanges between k.g. and Nancy. I love how this is echoed in the book’s physical manifestation at TPW. It’s easy to see display tables in the gallery

and think of the table where they shared their lunches, the tables sketched across the cover of the book, the shape echoed in blue-gray paint on the gallery wall. It's another form of documentation, perhaps, one more concerned with registers of intimacy than with straightforward transcription.

Thinking more about documentation and the residues it leaves in the space of the gallery, I'd like to turn to Radio Equals. Claude Wittmann's project—not unlike k.g.'s—was given new physical shape at TPW. There are several layers of “document” in Radio Equals: the transmission of each conversation, which are only broadcast live and are then no longer accessible—the texts produced by each conversation respondent; even the wall text that describes and contextualizes the project. The physical footprint of the project is minimal: a few plinths and benches, some texts. Like in k.g.'s work, the deliberate omissions in Radio Equals feel palpable. What does the gallery offer as a container for these gestures, these documents? Or does the project draw attention to what the gallery lacks?



RADIO EQUALS, 2017. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

AC: In terms of my desire to bring this work into the gallery, I'm aware that my connection to Radio Equals is incredibly personal.

I first encountered the piece at the 7a*11D performance art festival in Toronto in 2014, for which I was an embedded documentor writing about each performance. I continued to follow Radio Equals and to document it afterward, and it's a project that shaped my thinking about what it means to be close to a work and to still have a job to do as a critic or as a documentor (but not necessarily an objective one).

The work also has a tricky relationship to physical space because it operates through radio. Radio is potentially diffused across a large area, but it also has the capacity to be very intimate. People who are together in the gallery when the conversations are broadcast can share an experience of listening to these conversations about equality, conducted with a real level of attunement to the conversational dynamics. In my experience, Radio Equals often dives deeply into asking for a harsh honesty and tenderness between two people who may be relative strangers to each other. But folks listening to the broadcast elsewhere are invisible—there could be many or there could be none, and they might not meet or know each other.

But of course, it will be difficult for people to access these qualities of the conversations and of the being-together in the gallery without listening to the live Radio Equals broadcasts. For most of the exhibition, the wall text and any written documentation that has happened up until that point will be the only way in to the work. This is something Claude and I have talked about—whether documentation creates access, or whether it actually limits how people experience the work or stands in

for the work in a way that obscures what is actually going on. So in some ways, the life of Radio Equals in the gallery is a kind of provocation: show up or listen online and be open to receiving whatever it is that happens during the conversation. If you don't make the effort to engage with it, you don't get to assume it's always going to be there for you.

To react a bit against what you said earlier, in the case of Radio Equals, I wonder if the limits on the conversations' gallery presence are actually “omissions.” The gallery is often an imperfect container for performance, and, in this case, the performance exists as a performance and only very minimally as an “installation.” (In fact I'm even hesitant to call it that.) It's not necessarily withholding anything, it just is something different. And that something different has a place to resonate by virtue of being in the gallery. Sometimes that presence will be fairly conceptual: that this is an idea for how to have a conversation.

DS: That's interesting, and perhaps a good reminder of how an exhibition like *Close Readings* functions on multiple levels of identification, exchange, and display. What doesn't manifest on one level opens space elsewhere. I think I can speak for both of us when I say that this gallery is more than a white cube where we can put stuff up, but is animated by a whole series of gestures, conversations, etc. That's reflected in the programming accompanying the exhibition, which is inseparable from the “work” on display. There are performances like Radio Equals built into the fabric of the exhibition, and then there are other performances (by Alvis and k.g.) in conversation with respondents. Even something like the reading group you've organized becomes difficult to distinguish from the exhibition itself.

How do you feel about the layers of relation that play out across Alvis's project? We've both seen earlier iterations of this work, and the performance does a wonderful job of placing us in a speculative future where we are made to think critically about our own relationships to race. How have those conversations shifted for their project at TPW, from one imperfect container to another?

AC: In the video work, Alvis has re-centred the interviewees. The process of the conversation is less apparent, and what emerges shares something more with the format of the testimonial or the meditation on an individual experience. Which is interesting, because the performance to be staged at TPW in February carries some of the same dynamics around hosting and caring for difficulty that we've talked about in claude and k.g.'s works.

At any rate, I am interested in the future scenario that Alvis sets up in this work, and how thinking within the world of that future might re-structure our thinking about race in the present. In this hypothetical future, Alvis opens up all kinds of questions about how we identify (or not) with the markers of our own race or ethnicity, whether we understand our identities to be static, and how we live in them. I'm also very conscious of my own whiteness in the face of this project and the assumed neutrality of whiteness. In many ways, the promise of transparent skin that the scenario in the *Glassies* project offers seems to be a promise of neutrality. But it's also a promise of wearing your own desire to de-racialize yourself in a very public way, which is very sticky. These hypotheticals don't get answered head on, but Alvis's project guides thinking or imagining about another way of being or doing.

It is also a very canny kind of satire going on, I think. I was immediately reminded of Young Jean Lee's 2009 play *The Shipment*, which is all about a kind of unsettling humour around race that makes use of the audience's expectations and discomforts. I expect some people will not see this work as satirical and will read the endorsements of transitioning to transparent skin as very genuine. We were talking about time-based media and how it allows some shifting as you sit with it—this seems particularly true in Alvis's case.

DS: Alvis's project and Radio Equals both create spaces where care and antagonism are welcome—or sticky dynamics, as you say, I love that. It's those contexts for "care and shake." How does that translate to the other works in the exhibition that are less immediately participatory? I'm thinking about Hannah Black's video *The Neck*; what closenesses does that work produce?

AC: Initially I really thought about the exhibition as having two strata: one about illustrating what it could mean to be both critical and close—about representing or reconstructing a relationship to a thing or a person or a work—and one was about a conversational or performative dynamic that asked for very embodied empathy that still had some stickiness to it. And I would have put Alvis firmly in the performative dynamic camp and Hannah very firmly in the illustrative camp. But now I think that dichotomy is actually flawed, and I'm wary of breaking things up along the lines of what is performed or participatory and what is not. Rather, I think there are certain qualities that unite all of these works: an interest in getting deep inside a problem, a sensitive curiosity, an interest in the failures of both representation and language, an acknowledgement of the impossibility of understanding something without that understanding being clouded or intensified by our own attachments, a desire to step into



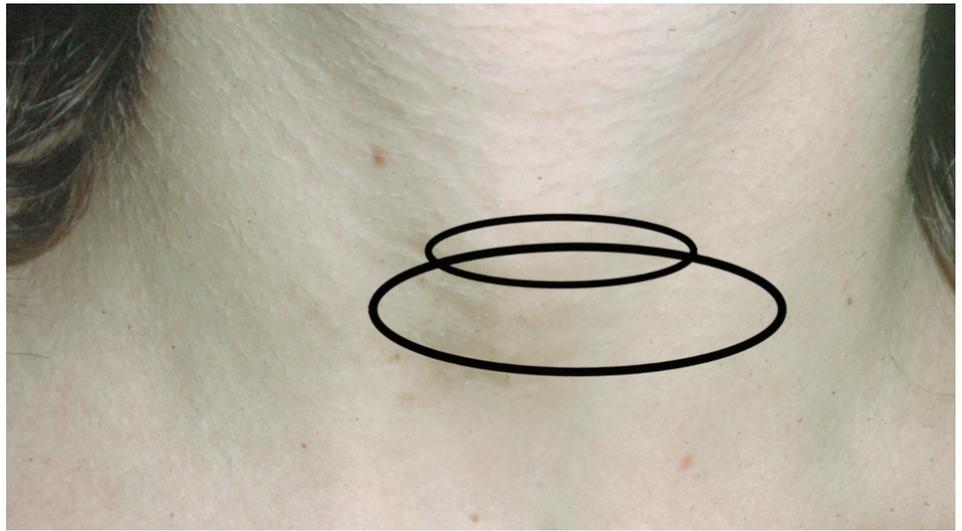
ALVIS CHOI A.K.A. ALVIS PARSLEY, *THE GREAT GLASSIES OPERATION*, 2017. DIGITAL VIDEO. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST. FEATURING TUKU.

the territory of decoding or committing to an opinion despite confusion, and some kind of responsibility to engage through the difficulty or complication that happens when we're moved or touched by something. I think the direct implication of live performance can perhaps produce all these things better than other modes of artistic practice, but I think language is a major way they live in all these works—in a basic performativity-of-language way.

Hannah is a writer and critic as well as an artist and is someone whose writing I have been drawn to. I think the rigour of her writing and her work is supported by its being anchored in feeling. I see negotiation in a lot of her writing and her video work—a back-and-forth between outside and inside, between whatever she's talking about directly, the affect of it, the context surrounding it (music, astrology, Brexit, whatever), and the things that seem to emerge out of nowhere but then provide stark clarity. In her lecture earlier this year with *C Magazine* and Art Toronto, she talked about art as the anxious overflow of the world...

DS: I have that written down in my notes from that lecture too! In very enthusiastic block letters.

AC: *The Neck* has a sense of anxious excess that is profoundly related to articulation and the desire to say something that may not come out neatly, that necessitates complications and nuances and repetition. Though the imagery in the video itself is quite visually consistent—different views of a neck overlaid with circular shapes—the text she speaks responds to the difficulty of seeing oneself and one's identity. Departing from her childhood drawings, the piece traces all these failures of representation, failures of



HANNAH BLACK, *THE NECK*, 2014. DIGITAL VIDEO. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

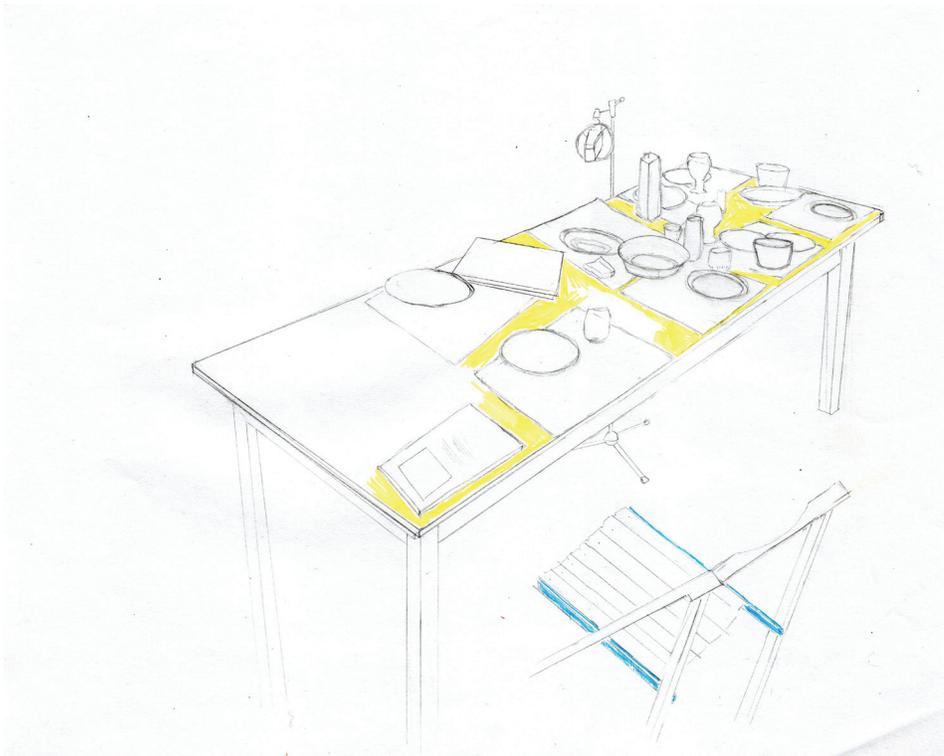
language, and at the same time explores the necessity of politics rooted in the self without anyone being able to say, "This is my self in its entirety. Here, let me show you!"

DS: This is something I find so wonderful about Hannah's video and her approach to narration, description, poetry. It strikes me that a neck is such an interesting visualization of these issues: after all, how do you picture a neck without the things that it connects, a head and shoulders? Necks are crucial yet vulnerable, intimate. Like an understanding of selfhood, they are tricky to define on their own terms, yet so much flows through them: nourishment, history, family, sex, colonial violence, to name a few from Hannah's video. Watching these flashes of expanses of skin... it's like, you can't really be that close to someone unless it's a violent or intimate gesture. I feel like that complicated, difficult proximity resonates throughout the exhibition.

But we haven't spoken about David! Like Radio Equals, a few "documents" circulate around *Primarily Domestic*: the conversation between Marisa Merz and her daughter

Beatriz that was published in *Notiziario Arte Contemporanea*, David's research, the poem by Francis Ponge read by Yve-Alain Bois, even a recipe for mayonnaise. Much of this is "read" quite literally in the video, and I find it interesting that the apparatuses for reading are left visible: a microphone, an open book, the turn of the page. It's as if the positions of reader and text keep fluctuating, all orbiting around this central exchange between Merz and her daughter, a moment that we, as spectators, feel as if we come to understand, even as it grows more distant. Does *Primarily Domestic* enact a form of close reading, in your eyes?

AC: Oh, completely—but not necessarily because of the repetition of the literal act of reading, but, like you say, through the shifting positions of reader and text and through the constant shifting of what or who we're meant to be relating to. One thing that resonates with this strongly is the layers of failure represented or enacted in the work and how David gets inside of them and picks them apart. There's the initial failure by Mirella Bandini to access Merz within the standard



K.G. GUTTMAN, *IT'S LIKE HAMMERING INTO NOTHING WHEN I SPEAK IT*, 2012. DRAWING. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

format of the interview, which points to a greater failure of art criticism to apprehend the private or the relational—especially within an incredibly masculine tradition like Arte Povera.

The re-performance of the interview text by two sets of actors suggests the potential for repeating this exchange over and over in hope of accessing new meaning—and, in a way, that repetition and the shifts in voice, relation, setting that go along with the stagings do achieve minute shifts in meaning. But ultimately the text of this interview doesn't crack itself open by being read and re-read, performed and re-performed. At one point, Merz was regarded as eccentric and reclusive and not particularly serious as a woman working within Arte Povera. And that is not David's reading of

Merz at all—instead, Merz's life and work and her choices about how to speak and to whom and when overflow with richness that begs examination. In *Primarily Domestic* that gets embodied through David's research—even when the email to Beatriz goes unanswered, there are views of the marketplace and the street that attest to the civic and domestic and gustatory space Marisa and Beatriz inhabit. Merz's refusal of the interview seems to be an attempt to shift the terms of the critical engagement with her work—but then the project grapples with this question of “shift it to what?” And so there are turns around Merz's work and this interview, attempts to look at it sideways, to think about it through and between and within other objects and people and texts. Of course it's not an accident that this feels very attuned to Merz's work and her interest in the everyday.... I've

been interested in how the language we use to consider artworks and their affective dimensions often mirror spatial terms: touched, moved, distant, close, even the “sitting with” and “watching through” video works. There's also a shift that Jane Rendell describes in her book *Site Writing* about the move from “writing about” an artwork to “writing to” or “writing alongside” or simply “writing” an artwork. And I think *Primarily Domestic* is very much alongside or in parallel with Merz's work.

DS: I like how you've brought it back to something spatial, because that's where we began this conversation. I'm thinking again of Jennifer Doyle's idea of a “performative field”—or even the idea of “making room for” something difficult. I wonder if “close reading,” or “writing to/alongside” as methodologies, are about navigating these spatial dimensions as well—choosing to inhabit a work or wading through a difficult text, acknowledging that we're deeply impressed upon by these structures as we try to make sense of them as readers and writers and spectators. It's about asking “what does it mean to live or feel or taste these words, and how do they engage with me?” It's a process of interpretation that goes both ways. In the context of this exhibition, “close readings” produces a series of questions. Who is reading what, and what is being read?

AC: I'm not necessarily thinking about close reading as something that I'm doing, but as something that the artists are doing—enacting these forms of closeness, but also untangling or unravelling something they're deeply invested in.

DS: It's interesting that you're not putting yourself in the position of curator-as-reader. There's no single, easily identifiable text in

this exhibition, either. But what I find valuable about close reading as a strategy is that it's not always about reading something against a lot of other things to contextualize it or to historicize it within a larger field. It's really about taking something on its own terms.

AC: Exactly. But I don't think this show, or the notion of being critically close, rather than critically distant, is about shying away from contextualizing things. What I would like to see from our reactions to artworks from artists and spectators and critics is perhaps more awareness or acknowledgement of how we carry some of the social, political, historical contexts with us to artworks. Works that produce these complicated identifications or intimacies often have to do with the political moment we're in, but they're also about how we live that moment or those politics.

That may be about politics, broadly, or ideology, and how we interact with ideas and political events. But it can also be about how we interact in an art community, and how we interact with others across professional and personal domains. We have to hold each other accountable. I strongly believe in the value of criticism, but these communities are small and we often make assumptions about the political or ethical investment of like-minded people without having significant conversations about them. So it's imperative that we find ways to do the difficult work of criticism and also do the generous work of criticism-within-a-community.

DS: How do you think this resonates against current trends in art criticism? There are those circulating arguments about a lack of rigorous or negative criticism in art writing, but I don't see a crisis in a lack of distanced connoisseurship. Instead, perhaps

what's politically urgent is an approach akin to what you're describing: a generous acknowledgement of closeness and a need to ask each other to be better, because we're all implicated in this community together.

AC: Different people ask for different things. As I've worked on this project, I've become aware of all kinds of calls, over the past several centuries, for different kinds of revivals of criticism and reconsiderations of critical distance. People like Walter Benjamin said "criticism is a matter of correct distancing," and added that it's ridiculous to mourn for an earlier mode of criticism. Or more recent critiques like Jennifer Doyle's or Jane Rendell's, which argue for a really deeply situated writing. But of course there are many strategies for performing criticism. The risk of criticism that tries to be close with the work is also that it could read as too personal or too self-important. I don't want to be prescriptive about how critics should or should not put themselves in their work, but I do want people to be realistic about their capacity to distance themselves from artworks. Profound experiences with artworks make it difficult to extricate oneself. And if we're not having profound experiences with at least some works, what are we doing here?

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Alison Cooley is a critic, curator, and educator based in Toronto. Her research deals with the intersection of natural history and visual culture, socially engaged artistic practice, and experiential and interpretative dimensions of art criticism. She is the 2014 recipient of the Middlebrook Prize for Young Canadian Curators, and her writing has been published in *Canadian Art*, *C Magazine*, *FUSE*, *Blackflash* and *Magenta*, among others. She is currently the Blackwood Gallery's Curatorial Assistant and Collections Archivist.

Daniella Sanader is a writer and arts worker who lives in Toronto. In her work, she regularly explores associative and speculative modes for thinking and writing about contemporary art, ones that emphasize queer/feminist frameworks, messy feelings, and embodied experience. She holds an MA from McGill University, and has written essays and reviews for arts publications and galleries across Canada. She works at Gallery TPW.

Hannah Black is an artist and writer from the UK. She lives in Berlin. Her work is assembled from pop music and auto/biographical fragments and draws on feminist, communist and black radical thought. Her videos have recently been shown at W139 (Amsterdam), Embassy (Edinburgh), 155 Freeman/Triple Canopy (NYC), MoMAW (Warsaw), and Sala Luis Miro Quesada Garland (Lima), and her writing has been published by magazines including *Dazed Digital*, *The New Inquiry*, and *Art in America*. She was a studio participant on the Whitney ISP 2013-14 and graduated from the MFA in Art Writing at Goldsmiths in 2013. She is the author of *Dark Pool Party*, co-published by Dominica & Arcadia Missa in 2016.

Alvis Choi a.k.a. Alvis Parsley is a Toronto-based artist, performer, facilitator and researcher born and raised in Hong Kong. Alvis is named in the 2014 list of *BLOUIN ARTINFO* Canada's 30 Under 30 and is a finalist of Toronto Arts Foundation's inaugural TELUS Newcomer Artist Award. Alvis was an Artist in Residence at lemonTree creations and Videofag. They have presented at the SummerWorks Performance Festival, Mayworks Festival, Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics – Encuentro, Performance Studies international (PSi), National Queer Arts Festival (Bay Area), the Art Gallery of Ontario and, most recently, the Mountain Standard Time Performance Arts Festival. Alvis obtained their Masters in Environmental Studies from York University in Toronto (2016) and is a collective member of Marvellous Grounds, a SSHRC-funded project that researches and documents queer of colour spaces within Toronto/Three Fires Territories and beyond. They work closely with Butterfly (Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network) as an artist, facilitator, and coordinator. In 2015, Alvis was appointed as the Chairperson of the Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter.

k.g. Guttman is an artist, educator, and research candidate in the PhDArts program of Leiden University and the Royal Academy of Art in the Hague, the Netherlands. Her work, funded through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), explores the intersection of choreography, site-specific art practice and territoriality. Her work has been screened, performed and exhibited nationally and internationally through institutions such as Mediamatic, Amsterdam, Palais de Tokyo and Galerie Khiasma, Paris, Ottawa Art Gallery, Galerie LaCentrale and VIVA! Art action, Montreal, and her choreographic works have been commissioned through the Canada Dance Festival, Dancemakers, LeGroupe Dance Lab, Ottawa, and the University of Sonora, Mexico. Her performance publication *Elapse I & II*, was launched at Art Metropole, Toronto and Galerie LaCentrale, Montreal, and is in the collection of the Library and Archives of the National Gallery of Canada.

David Kelley's work is a hybrid of experimental documentary and ethnographic practices that make use of imaginary, choreographic and performative strategies. His work has been shown in galleries throughout the world. Recently, he has had exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, White Box in Portland Oregon, and Commonwealth and Council in Los Angeles. Other recent exhibitions include The Bank in Shanghai, New Art Center, the de Cordova Biennial in Boston, BAK in Utrecht, MAAP space in Brisbane Australia, and the Jim Thompson Art Center in Bangkok. A 2010-11 resident at the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program, Kelley received a Master of Fine Art from University of California, Irvine. He is based in Los Angeles and is Associate Professor of Practice at the Roski School of Art and Design and the University of Southern California.

Radio Equals is a project initiated by claude wittmann in 2014 and which has been given life by about 15 people up until now. Radio Equals aims at being a thread of bodies and minds exploring equality in process and content and it manifests sporadically as one-on-one egalitarian, one-hour long conversations about equality. The conversations take place in intimate settings, such as a sound booth in a performance art festival, a closed kitchen of a gallery, a home or an office and this intimacy is extended to listeners through the intrinsic quality of live radio, be it FM narrowcast and/or FM broadcast and/or live streaming through an internet channel (NAISA, CFRC, CKUT, Wikiradio UQAM, Radio Equals temporary live-streaming site). Radio Equals is not recorded or podcasted.

claude wittmann was born in Switzerland and now lives in Toronto. He works as a bicycle mechanic and performance artist. He is currently concerned by the (disem)power(ment) of art in triggering social change. claudewittmann.ca

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