07MAY24

Nile Harris

minor a

The series opens with “minor a”, a very minor unfinished performance by Nile Harris in his studio at 99 Canal. With special guests Kwami Winfield, Ley Gambucci and Jonah Rollins, this can be understood as a very first iteration of his larger installation at the Shed in early August.

Curated by **Kyla Gordon**

08MAY24

Fana Fraser

AUTOGAMY

> noun. self-fertilization or the miraculous practice of self-pollinating to multiply in form and in substance.

To answer the question “what can performance do?” is to address the dividing line between theory and praxis, between performer and viewer, and between what makes reality real and theater, theater. In the case of Trinidadian artist Fana Fraser, who debuts AUTOGAMY on Wednesday, May 8, 2024 (7pm) at 99 Canal, performance can be a gift of wildness, a dance of nourishment, and perhaps at its most potent, a reminder to embody the transformative potential for being in “rigorous pursuit of the possible in [one]self.” 1

Building on previous performance work, AUTOGAMY explores the goddess and mother archetypes—their expressions of fertility, love, and divinity, inside of deep waters, mourning, and the erotic. Fana’s imagined character in AUTOGAMY plays with these opposing forces through sound and movement across time. The strangeness of her gestures may arouse
discomfort, make one giggle, or even cause surprise (at the boldness of the act itself).

Autogamy, a reproductive mechanism found in nature, requires a single flower’s union of masculine and feminine elements. Looking to this botanical process as a generative point of
departure, whereby an individual becomes its own nexus for further creation, the performance endeavors to be a form of autogamy that can yield a mothering and nurturing ethos. As June Jordan, Audre Lorde, Cynthia Dewi Oka, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Sobonfu Somé, my mother, my grandmother, and countless others remind us, mothering is learning to love and accept what we choose to create, fueling it with sustenance, and offering kindness and demanding discipline amongst bouts of failure and in the presence of achievement. Mothering speaks to “togetherness, not separation; love, not suspicion; a common future, not isolation.” 2

Perhaps AUTOGAMY is an invitation for the artist and the audience to remember a space or practice that nourishes them, that emboldens us to claim our innate power and soul urges. Or maybe this is demanding too much. In any event, AUTOGAMY demonstrates how dance can address the complex nature of the human experience.

1 Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches, (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 173.
2 Etel Adnan, June 2016.

By **Habiba Hopson**

09MAY24

Alvin Tran

Murder on Canal St

It’s 2022 when I ask the artist and choreographer Alvin Tran if he wants to participate in an exhibition I’m working on at the Appel Art Center in Amsterdam. I don’t really know him, but I know of him. Friend and curator, Anaïs Castro, has worked with him in Shanghai and
London, she says, and every performance turned out impressive. I look him up online and can only find a few short videos, but I’m taken. I can’t immediately

place his unique style. I reach out to him to ask if he'd be interested in presenting new work. He responds positively, telling me that he finds my theorizing of the body compelling, "I have so many fan questions!" After I speak to him over Zoom, I text my friend: "I love Alvin!!"

It often starts out like this, the relationship between an artist and a curator. Finding each other in our ways of seeing, understanding and translating the world, like any other relationship. Several hours-long calls follow between New York and Seoul, where Tran is based before he moves to New York late in 2023. We discuss art, dance and theater we see in Asia (mostly him), in the USA (mostly me), and in Europe (us both). During our conversations, I learn that he easily switches from critiquing pop choreography to referencing obscure dance performances I didn't know existed. The performance in Amsterdam never happens, but the idea of staging a new work by Tran keeps pestering me.

Then comes the invitation from 99 Canal. There is not a lot of time to prepare, but I remember my friend telling me that Alvin choreographed the performance in Shanghai and found his dancers within a week. Alvin tells me he'll be in London leading up to the performance date, but will create the piece there, collaborating with an old friend on the choreography. The scores will be recorded and shared with the dancers in New York. He shares fragments with me as he drafts the work. Rehearsals will take place in the days leading up to the performance.

And so I am writing this curatorial text without having seen the full work live: a common occurrence for any curator working with performance. How do you put into words a work that doesn't yet exist? I read Alvin's script, listen to his selection of songs, and manage to attend one rehearsal before the deadline.

I'll start with what I know; Tran is not a New York performance world fixture (yet). He was raised in Seattle and lived, studied and worked in the USA, Europe and Asia before finding his current home in Brooklyn. Originally trained at Pacific Northwest Ballet, he has done choreography work shown in museums and galleries, as well as for "The Inner Mongolian National Troupe of Song and Dance" and a range of K-Pop stars. His work contains odes to New York's performative history, while also slowly trying to corrupt its Western affect. Tran's choreographic language reads as a hybrid homage to Merce Cunningham, Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown and other post-modern legends, blended into a K-Pop and larger pop vocabulary. His scores are made through his hyperlocal and hyperglobal gaze, leaving the work feeling as personal as it feels collective. It makes for a movement invention that feels oddly familiar, yet doesn't quite quench a desire for resolution. Tight, yet messy. A bit unhinged. His musical selection flirts with a similar eclecticism, switching from nostalgic Brit pop to hyper contemporary Asian pop while occasionally resting on more instrumental avant garde sounds. He's an insider and an outsider.

The tension between legibility and illegibility in Tran's work means his work cannot be reduced to a pastiche of any of his inspirations. Yes, it contains an acknowledgement of the daily movements post-modern dancers pioneered in their iconic works, which still are the main fabric of our shared lives. But he also injects an awareness of "online behaviors," that now also imbue our contemporary pedestrian movements such as TikTok scores, often recorded in public space. I gather from the script, the scores, the music, and the conversations with Alvin a certain cultural disconcertment. How do we hold ourselves, he asks us, while continuously split between the physical and virtual in a world full of horror and societal erasure? We seek to regain control of events, inventing culturally networked gestures that unite the way we move through the world. We are one and the same. We are uniquely ourselves. "Where's the spokesperson that'll make it all make sense. Nowhere to be found," says the narrator in his performance script. Something's gotta give. Will we

unite? Will we dissolve? Will the performers in "Murder on Canal St" make good on their word?

By **Jeanette Bisschops**

10MAY24

Raymond Pinto

effigy: a shifting landscape

How did you arrive? The mapmaker would like to know.

This is a time both above and beneath you. Grasp for the strands that surge near and far. Unsettled and inherited is the (un)common ground upon which we stand.

Establish intimacy with stone. The hands knew it first, holding the surface close. Feet then followed. Birthed from an ancestral quietude are tremors of the terrain. This is a sonorous curriculum demanding valences of listening for a unified ecology of rigor. Press your ear to the earth for a lesson. It will entomb you. Be eaten. Your allness is embraced for the soil does not forget the taste of you.

Trust in its remembrance. Umbilically tethered in memory, an ancient love flowing between us. Basking in a radiance that shoulders the presence of displacement, I sift for the promise of return. Seneca Village you are held.

Seven o'clock has fallen, please remain devoted to your witnessing.

By **Diallo Simon-Ponte**

Acknowledgements to Kei Miller's *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* & Raymond Pinto *Sky Prints* (2024)

11MAY24

Kevin Peter He and Jake Oleson

FLUX

My two most underemployed friends and I were giddy as we embarked on an extremely spontaneous drive out to Montauk the day of the solar eclipse. There, according to the internet, there would be roughly 70% visibility and minimal cloud coverage, much better than anywhere within the city limits. Not one of us had thought to procure eclipse glasses, but we had agreed fastidiously in the groupchat the night before that all the warnings on the news about not looking directly into the sun were capitalist propaganda, part of some cynical corporate cash grab orchestrated by Warby Parker, and when some weirdo at the gas station just outside Amagansett offered to sell us a single pair of eclipse glasses for $40 ("supply and demand, baby," he smirked), we told him to fuck off.

Of course, when the clock struck 3:16 we couldn't see a damn thing. No amount of squinting, straining, doubling, even tripling up our sunglasses granted us even a vague sense of the moon's shadow as it passed over the sun. Thanks to the minimal cloud cover we had been so stoked on, I couldn't even look in the sun's general direction for more than a few seconds without my retinas burning. Tears were welling uncontrollably, gathering in beads on my eyelashes before running down my cheeks. It was freezing cold on the beach and I had to pee. Warby Parker had been right, and I really resented them for that. Wind-blown, mascara-streaked, bleary-eyed, and defeated, we stumbled back to the car and started the drive back home in silence.

It was okay though, because on the drive back I got to see the eclipse on my phone. It had taken only minutes following the event's conclusion for NASA's Earth Polychromatic Imaging Camera (EPIC) imager on the Deep Space Climate Observatory (DSCOVR) satellite to publish breathtaking images of the eclipse. Astronauts aboard the ISS had also already shared their exclusive view of the moon's shadow traveling across the Earth from 261 miles above the planet. A few more minutes and Nikon, Leica, and FujiFilm had all uploaded spectacular high-resolution images of the

eclipse thanks to state-of-the-art cameras boasting price tags in excess of most people's rent. Even Warby Parker, predictably, reposted a few select shots from users who had remembered to tag them.

The next day, Gideon Jacobs would publish an essay in the New York Times entitled 'Did You Really Need to Be There to See the Eclipse?'

"Monday's eclipse is already being called the 'most viewed' in history. When NASA estimated that 215 million Americans had viewed the 2017 eclipse, the agency combined those who saw it 'either directly or electronically'," writes Jacobs. He continues, "NASA's blurring of the lines that distinguish in person from remote watching is increasingly normal in a time when much of our everyday lives are lived via screens. Whether one's eyes are focused on three dimensions in the world or two at home, viewing is viewing." The essay is a rumination, however inconclusive, on the well-addressed dissonance between lived experience and experience mediated by a screen. It occurred to me later that even eclipse glasses were a technology of sorts, a kind of screen through which raw experience was mediated, modulated for safety, and improved.

No doubt, scrolling through pics on the car ride back from Montauk with the heat blasting was so much better than being there, standing on the cold beach, very possibly subjecting myself to irreversible solar retinopathy. Those images on my phone screened conveyed more detail, evoked more from me emotionally than anything I saw on the beach that day. I hadn't yet read Gideon's essay, but I was already pondering the question, "Did I really need to be there?" and was already getting depressed about the fact that I could have, and maybe should have, just stayed home. On that ride back, after gorging myself on the eclipse imagery that saturated my various feeds, I kept thinking about Kevin Peter He.

I had met Kevin only days before the eclipse through a mutual friend, who described him as a "virtual performance artist." If anyone is an expert on the competing instincts that define our paradoxical era, it is Kevin, whose work satisfies our generation's two mutually exclusive impulses: to experience authentic encounters with the world around us, and to consume other people's experiences of the world around them.

For his virtual performances, Kevin uses a joystick, a PC monitor, and an intimidating motherboard of knobs and buttons to navigate through virtual landscapes, which we see in real-time projected on a screen behind him. These are generally scenes from nature, like lush green forests, or sun-soaked riverbeds, or meadows dotted with pink and white wildflowers. These virtual environments are designed and built by Kevin ahead of each performance within a VR gaming engine using premade assets, but what happens within those environments is fully improvised in each iteration and highly variable, as is the musical component provided by Kevin's longtime musical collaborator Jake Oleson, who develops these performances alongside him.

Kevin and Jake's performance for 99 Canal is called Flux. It meanders through a loose narrative following a humanoid figure as it navigates its way through one such cyberscape, weaving through a thicket of tall, girthy trees and periodically breaking into spontaneous dance. The movements of this featureless protagonist are the product of a previous collaboration with dancers Kevin Pajarillaga and Mio Ishikawa, who donned motion-capture suits during a performance some months ago. Kevin then stitched together the dancers' movements and transposed the recorded motion onto the single virtual body that appears on screen. There are moments when the figure becomes vaporous, as if just a suggestion of itself, a visual expression of its own potentiality, then solid again, then liquid. The body contorts like quicksilver in the way that Carl Jung describes it, a substance that can assume any consistency. Kevin is in control of this shapeshifting effect. He is also in control of the environment's light, and can change the position of the sun at will, or introduce strobes, or turn the lights out entirely. Furthermore, he is in control of time. He can speed things up or slow things down, with disorienting, psychedelic results. All of this happens in what comes across as telepathic correspondence with Jake's sonic backdrop; the two collaborators look and

sound as though they are in tightly choreographed lockstep, and it is very easy to forget that each set is entirely improvised.

What we are seeing play out on the screen is Kevin embodying a camera as he controls it remotely. A drone pilot commandeering a weapon through enemy territory from the safety of an air conditioned building in Fort Worth comes to mind. “A camera is an eye,” he told me.

In this sense, Kevin and Jake’s background in film is obvious and apparent, but they describe what they do as “post-cinema.” Jake said to me, “A film is a dead thing.” He explained that what they do attempts to collapse the traditional cinematic process. Because their performances are live, and are witnessed by an audience in real-time, they are subject to any number of chance factors, including the energy of the audience, the space they’re in, the acoustics, the weather that day. Sometimes, it’s just about vibes. If film is a dead thing, virtual performance art is alive and breathing. The whole experience is dependent on a temporary suspension of bodily autonomy on the part of the audience. We are required to entrust our full breadth of visual perception to Kevin as we see what he sees, as we navigate through the virtual landscape with him in the driver’s seat. It’s more than embodiment, it’s occupation. It came as no surprise when Kevin recounted to me one exchange with an audience member, who told him after a performance that she felt physically exhausted, like she’d been in a state of exertion the whole time, even though she had been seated for the duration of the performance.

I get that this all sounds pretty complicated and convoluted when I try to describe it. In my defense, it’s hard to explain a performance like this to someone who’s never experienced it. I’d say you really have to be there to understand, but hey, maybe you don’t. Maybe you can just look at the pics and vids I’ll post of the performance on your phone after it’s over.

By **Emma Stern**

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