EMILY ROYSDON
If I Don’t Move Can You Hear Me?
MATERIALS: December 12, 2010–March 4, 2011
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY ART MUSEUM AND PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE

Conversation between Emily Roysdon and Phyllis Wattis curator Elizabeth Thomas

E: I want to start with improvisation because I think it’s something that is explicit in the form of the work you do but it is also very much a part of the development of the ideas that ground the process of making.

E: For the past few years I’ve been engaged with improvisation on a conceptual level and in my recent projects it’s also manifesting as the practical and material nature of the work. The emphasis on improvisation in both material and conceptual form is because the work is very much about the dynamics of a lived life, very much about interactions and collaborations with other people and about bringing things into the world. It is a realm in which that kind of interdisciplinary production and thinking is possible. It does come from a self-motivated resistance to a conceptualized, cultural and DIY ethos and legacy are a huge inspiration for what I do. On a conceptual level, with projects like the exhibition of other artists’ work that I curated, Ecstatic Resistance, I was relating improvisation specifically to struggle and improvisation, there’s a way in which those two things mirror each other.

E: Specifically talking about struggle and improvisation, there’s a way in which those terms relate to a vocabulary of dance and movement but also to a real-world matrix of public space—people’s belief in, even more than their use of, that space. If I’m interested in, and these become part of the printmaking process, they are the images less representationally or indexically and more through other kinds of actions performed on top of the image, the representation of movement layered in isolated stills.

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ET: One of the most interesting things about the way in which you think about language is that you've outlined for the project. It also ties back into the ideas about
improvisation in terms of allowing your ideas to go out into other people's brains before they come back to you.

ER: The writing projects are really important for me. Right now I've been moving through this vocabulary in different configurations for the last year and have been thinking about them in relation to a discursive practice. Writing is central to what I do and I hope to interact with my peers and I wanted that to be present in the MATRIX project. I asked other people to define the words that I've been working with, writing in pairs, giving them no restrictions at all. I let people define the discursive tension from the extreme interiority of being obsessed with certain words, but it's all about relationships and those associations. When I make images with words it becomes a very different process so I want to throw it back into the discourse.

ET: This expanse of definition, and the way you talk about movement, which is either heavy editing repeating the individual frames or by making very few cuts. But the frame of the image. I have experimented with this in two extreme directions—with natural sense of time, and wanting to focus on the interplay between bodies and the movement within the moving image.

EE: From my very first video I have manipulated real time and played with the exception of action in moving images. And yet, I saw video more as a "moving image" than for its narrative potential. This comes from wanting to deconstruct a natural sense of time and wanting to focus on this interplay between bodies and the frame of the image. I've experimented with this in two extreme directions—with either heavy editing replacing the individual frames or by making very few cuts. But both have the effect of de-dramatizing action in order to alter the expectations of
viewing and the force of realism.

ER: From my very first video I have manipulated real time and played with the limitations of that was for camera, but it also applies to my investment in a collective practice and "building new contexts." It's part of being in the world. It's part of your interest in pushing forward those ideas through a vocabulary of visual expression. You're always going to get with the way that I work in terms of taking people to collaborate and working with conceptual frames for ideas and questions. Inviting someone in an abstract or nonrepresentational image as if it didn't start there.

ET: I think this notion for you that abstraction doesn't start as abstraction counters the idea that in the last few years you've been working with, writing in pairs, giving them no restrictions at all. It moves from the extreme interiority of being obsessed with certain words for long amounts of time to an extreme exteriority where the definition of those words and their potential impact is defined by different people. It's all about relationships and those associations. When I make images with words it becomes a very different process so I want to throw it back into the discourse.

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