

Jay Chung and Q Takeki Maeda

in conversation with Aram Moshayedi

Aram Moshayedi: On the occasion of the exhibition at REDCAT, which points back to the origins of your collaboration, it seems pertinent to look at the span of time that led to the actual production of 10 Years of Jay & Q (2012), a work that had its first life in the context of a horse jumping competition in Ladeburg but that possibly originated some ten years prior. There are often rigid ideas about a given work's place in time, but your project refers back to the period that has elapsed over the past ten years, and seems to ask whether or not your relationship with one another could itself constitute an artwork.

Jay Chung & Q Takeki Maeda: We would not go so far as to say that our relationship in itself constitutes an artwork, but we have repeatedly used our friendship as an element throughout the past. 10 Years of Jay & Q only makes sense as a work because of this recurring theme.

If your friendship is only part of the project, how much should be read into this? In other words, what aspects are the result of your situation and environment? What should be focused upon or ignored? There is a tension that results from the ambiguity of what is essential and what is peripheral.

What you are describing is present in Douglas Huebler's video Second Generation Conceptual Artists (1970), which we recently watched together at the Getty Research Institute. It is a very touching piece in which Huebler's kids, who look like they are around 20 years old at the time, act out little scenarios that reference the work of artists like William Wegman and John Baldessari in a rigid, systematic choreography. You can tell that it is also a personal and sentimental home video of Huebler's children. The title has a brilliant double meaning, with an almost literary quality. The actors are second-generation in the sense that they are Huebler's children, but they are also enacting scenes derivative of '60s Conceptual art, mimicking their predecessors. It is a bittersweet dichotomy. The piece is self-reflexive, "insider" art, but it also makes the activity of Conceptual art into a metaphor for life in general.

One could argue that the video is not metaphorical, but rather it presents us with the set of circumstances you are describing entirely on their own terms, for what they are. It is a way of working or finding sentimentality within the work without the lens of art historical mediation that has been applied to it externally. You have mentioned elsewhere, for instance, that you consider the process of working together to be the very basis of your practice, to be the work itself, a statement that is matter-of-fact yet intangible.

Second Generation Conceptual Artists is certainly metaphorical in the sense that it compares a generation of artists and its successors to Huebler and his own children. That is part of what gives it its pathos. Huebler's body of work is all about mediation in the way that he sets up oblique pairings between text and image.

That said, Huebler's work has such a light touch — you almost overlook the artifice, and there is a sense of immediacy and effortlessness. But it is our feeling that this apparent "sincerity" is actually intentional. Huebler integrates the contingencies of one's existence into his work and it therefore presents a deliberate construct for the viewer. In regard to your question about art historical mediation, Huebler's work has a particular, seemingly effortless pathos, which is not usually discussed in relation to his practice.

The statement we made about our work and process was in a particular context. "Collaboration" has become a buzzword, and one can associate the term with anything from a leftist political bent to Davos' neo-liberal spirit, to an effacement of identity that comes from club culture. We are reacting against this. Our working together is *not* more efficient than working alone. We are not a constructed identity for the sake of a brand.

By responding to the question of time through a figure like Huebler, you also point to the relationship your work shares to the history of Conceptual art, or, rather, to "strategies of Conceptual art." Where do you place yourselves in this lineage?

Affinity is more important to us than history. More than anything else, it is necessary to find sympathies with other artists. When you are trying to find your own artistic identity, you try to limit that, to stand on your own two feet, so to speak. But then, later, you are just happy to find a couple of things you feel close to. These affinities are basically the essence of art. Their importance cannot be overstated.

Untitled (2012) brings together a series of statements from three generations of artists. For the project, you worked the passages into choreographed monologues that were then performed by an actor. Is there an idea of continuity that the piece tries to construct from the narrative of art history?

It is only recently that we, as artists, have even started to understand the idea of continuity. There are connections between artists that are more complex than just similarities in strategy or form or approach. Before starting this piece it seemed like a minor revelation that everything – our taste, our aspirations, our behavior, and even our scorn – was completely inherited, either from our immediate predecessors or from our peers. It is incredible that even something like disdain gets passed down as tradition.

The project points to the disillusionment that presumably tends to develop within artists over time, in a general sense. This actually comes to represent a different way of telling the story of the relationship between the avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde, or between Conceptual art and so called Post-Conceptual art. Can you describe what you sought to glean from these statements when researching Untitled?

Until now, we had not considered that this sense of disillusionment could be something learned or transmitted from artist to artist. You always think that your own take is specific and rooted in your own time and place. The quotes come from a span of artists from the last century, but there are similarities in their arguments and attitudes. In each case they criticize what they see as a decline, a lack of rigor in the young artists who are perceived to be their immediate successors.

We tried to look at all of the statements as a whole. The rhetoric in each case was the same, so when performed by an anonymous person, without any association to a particular artist, all of the statements blend into one consistent diatribe. The actor's performances lend the texts a sort of emotional coherence. Even though the actor was not familiar with the theoretical issues taken up in the original texts – a term like "appropriation" is really just jargon when it comes down to it – he could still deliver the text convincingly. To us, this says a lot about what these statements are actually conveying on a basic, human level. That level is completely accessible, even if you have no position on someone like Benjamin Buchloh or Hal Foster.

The projects at REDCAT reflect something that is deeply personal and has more to do with the intimate forms of exchange or relationships that often go overlooked by history. The idea of Conceptual art's neutrality, for instance, comes to obscure the moments of sentimentality that you mentioned before in Huebler's Second Generation Conceptual Artists. Over time, it is something one could see occurring in the discussions of your work, in the way that a number of projects are characterized as being ardently evasive or opaque, which is hardly descriptive or necessarily insightful, but rather propagates a kind of mythology. Have you found that a piece like Modus Tollens (2003), which more or less set the terms of your collaboration, has become reduced to a single gesture when its scope is more to do with the tangible reality of working in collaboration with one another?

When people look at artworks and categorize them with a reductive description, they are working in the wrong direction. In the process of creating a narrative or argument, nuances are the first things eliminated. One should tease out the complexities, open up the tiny differences and describe *how* those differences come to appear like enormous gulfs.

How does 10 Years of Jay & Q relate to this tendency? The project addresses the arbitrary nature of commemorating a decade or any period of time, but there is also some idea of the way in which personae and myth are fabrications of artistic identity. The narrative of pathos and self-doubt could just as easily be obscured by a viewer's desire for a triumphant narrative of artistic mastery and validation.

On the question of mythology, when we visited REDCAT for the first time, we talked about institutions' reliance upon artists to play the role of the executive, the mythological figure. The smallest of decisions need to be aggrandized into momentous events in order to validate and justify the institutional enterprise. Mythologies are constructed in a methodical, exploitative way. If you look at who we are, we seem unlikely candidates to fulfill that role of artistic authority. That is perhaps an aspect of the work. Again, it is about affinities.