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The Witness Goes Missing

Tue, Jul 7, 2015 at 3:27 PM

Daniel Neumann to No Longer Empty

Great! Let's do it! Friday is definitely ideal for us. So please put it in your programming as:

Friday, July 17 2015

7pm

Juan Betancurth and Daniel Neumann - Breaking The Cycle Closing Performance

Betancurth and Neumann will close out their installation in the basement with an intimate ritual in which the boundaries between objects, subjects and media are blurred. Objects become expressive, subjects become objects, a medium may suffer, the witness goes missing.

Thanks!

Looking forward!

Tue, Jul 7, 2015 at 8:21 PM

Juan Betancurth

Hey Daniel,

Sorry to be out of touch but the residency has been absorbing all my time, I opened my exhibition last Saturday and traveled to the mountains Sunday morning. I'm happy but exhausted.

I just saw the announcements for the performance but I was actually thinking to cancel or have a plan B since I've been not able to think about it. I will also have just one day to make everything, since I'll arrive in NYC July 15th late evening. I like the concept that I have in mind but I'm afraid of doing something mediocre because of the lack of time, I don't want to give it away, neither, we can do it better with more time and other venue, what do you think?

I like what you wrote about the performance,

J

Wed, Jul 8, 2015 at 9:20 AM

Daniel Neumann

Hey Juan!

Yeah I figured you were somewhere off the grid, and I'm sorry I didn't wait for your response. I just felt like I wanted to move this along, since it's getting late and I wanted to make sure we get a slot.

To me it is important to do a closing performance of some sort. And that's why I kept the description very vague. If you don't feel ready for the piece we were talking about, then it's definitely fine to not do that. Maybe we could come up with a plan B with my description as the starting point.

My goal is again to really max out the subwoofer and then see what happens. Another element could be that you replace the light bulbs with candles and through the air pressure changes from the subwoofer they should flicker quite a bit. Or you turn all of the lights off and only light one candle.

Ok, so here is the text again:

Betancurth and Neumann will close out their installation in the basement with an intimate ritual in which the boundaries between objects, subjects and media are blurred. Objects become expressive, subjects become objects, a medium may suffer, the witness goes missing.

So yeah, a lot we could already accomplish with just that strong physical sound, as an expression of objects - easy; which in a way also foregrounds the objecthood of bodies - you feel your body as an object in space through these low frequency waves. The medium that suffers is the subwoofer box, and then turning off the light in a way would take care of the witnesses ;). What do you think? There's definitely room for more from your part, but I kind of wanted to map out a minimum that still has an intensity. You could walk around in the dark and ask for the witness: "What happened?" he whispered in her ear. Or some other interpretation.. Curious to hear your thoughts!

Talk soon!

Greetings from your room!

D

Thu, Jul 9, 2015 at 3:17 PM

Juan Betancurth

Hey Daniel,

Yeah, I feel bad changing my mind about the performance, but as I said, everything turned very intense here. One of the owners of the show that I just opened is doing everything that he can to close my show, because in his opinion my work goes against a sane moral - sounds like a story from the past. Anyway, the exhibition has been a success, a lot of visitors and good comments from the local art scene. We'll see what happens.

I like the way you described the performance within the structure that you have in mind, the relationship between sound, space and bodies is absolutely interesting to me. The objecthood of bodies is exactly what I target with my work, that's one of the reasons why this old man in Oaxaca wants my work out of the museum :)

Let me think more about the performance and I will get back to you tomorrow. Cool?

I saw you're looking for a place, I think Shay is looking for someone. Did you ask him?

More soon,

J

Fri, Jul 10, 2015 at 1:57 AM

Daniel Neumann

Yes, take your time with thinking about it! And again, I'm totally fine with changing things. Important for me is just that we do the closing. So feel free to take the weekend to map out ideas.

I was there today, replaced some light bulbs, refilled the smoke machine, repaired one of the lights and cleaned some construction stuff up. So now it's back in good condition for the last two weekends.

The NLE people are definitely very excited for our event, and they again really love our space. And me too! Being there today, man, it's such an amazing installation! Oh, and the subwoofer is molding!! It's somehow interesting. And it relieves us from the decision if we should keep it. ;)

Looking forward to having you back!

D

Fri, Jul 10, 2015 at 2:19 PM

Juan Betancurth

Thanks man, I totally agree with you about the closing performance, I think it is important for the piece itself and also for us as collaborators. I have something in mind already, I'm putting it in a good structure to send to you.

I know what you are saying about the installation, I spent a day there with my Brazilian friend, we barely talked, just the presence of the objects in the space with the sounds made the day for us.

I'll send you more soon,

J

Tue, Jul 14, 2015 at 11:59 AM

Juan Betancurth

Hey Daniel,

For the last performance, I would like to use the smoke machine to create an atmosphere dense enough to hold two video projections. The smoke as an element in the installation operates in my opinion as performer, its fragility invades the space, powerful enough to transform it into an almost surreal reality. I think this plays perfectly with what you said in the last email, which totally touched me:

..."as an expression of objects - easy; which in a way also foregrounds the objecthood of bodies - you feel your body as an object in space through these low frequency waves"

Here are my words in images



I will need to experiment with the lights in the space, my feeling is that we don't need lamps, that the videos will light the space in an interesting way. We will need a couple of projectors. I have one. Can you help finding another two? 3 in total. I have another video in mind that would work, but I need to see it operating in the installation to make a decision.

Looking forward to hear your thoughts,

Wed, Jul 15, 2015 at 11:51 AM

Daniel Neumann

I definitely like that idea of the video, I just can't really imagine how it'll work. Have you tried projecting onto fog? Fog usually just washes out the image on the screen, but I've never tried it otherwise! That'd definitely create an amazing atmosphere if it worked and we have enough fog juice for sure ;)

So let's see what happens! I'm planning on going up there tomorrow to record, if I don't feel too wiped from the show tonight..

See you soon!

D

Wed, Jul 15, 2015 at 6:29 PM

Juan Betancurth

No good news

I missed my flight, cuz of the traffic to the airport. I can't make it to New York until Friday night.

I'm sad about it :(

Thu, Jul 16, 2015 at 11:28 AM

Daniel Neumann

Shoot.

What shall we do? Could you send me some kind of remote score of a sequence of things to do? I the vein of these 60s text scores:

- start playing
 - touch the floor with your hands
 - walk across
 - turn off light 1
 - walk back to audio station
 - change something
 - walk to light 2, wait
 - wait
 - walk back to audio station
 - close metal gate
 - change something
 - light candle
 - walk with candle to light 2
 - turn off light 2
- etc. etc. just maybe with some more interesting activities

Or you can write a letter of apology to the audience and in that give some kind of instructions or something..

What do you think?

Thu, Jul 16, 2015 at 11:58 AM

Daniel Neumann

And then a friend is selling this: <http://newyork.craigslist.org/brk/ms-g/5125178307.html>
(a cello!)

Thu, Jul 16, 2015 at 12:05 PM

Daniel Neumann

Another idea is to lay this cello on the floor and then make it feed back with the subbox. That could be nice! A dialog between those objects. And cello always feels so closely related to the human body somehow..

Thu, Jul 16, 2015 at 1:01 PM

Juan Betancurth

I love the idea, this is interesting, I always feel related to a cello. I have a physical and mental attraction to the instrument, I know it sounds bizarre, but normal at the same time, I can't help but fetishizing things around me.

What if we invite the audience to touch the instrument but in a different way. I think that can be interesting if we leave few objects around for them to interact with the cello, probably a couple of my sculptures. A brush glove, a hook,.. - people can use those or just their hands. You can take them from my studio. Another element that can be good for the night is a voice. What if I make sketches about the initial performance and you ask somebody to read it, using my graphics as a score for an imaginary performance. I find it poetic, the fact that the absence of the body becomes a mental picture for the audience.

I will set the person who is reading the score inside the "sound cave", where the grey theater speaker is.

what do you think?

we should own that cello :)

Thu, July 16, 2015 at 7:49:29 PM

Juan Betancurth to Philip Gates

I need you

Philip,

Do you have time to do something for me tonight?

I'm supposed to be part of a performance tomorrow in NYC, but I missed my plane, so I'm still in Mexico. My idea is to record your voice narrating the performance. I will send you sketches and you will use them as a score to describe a performance - the same way that you created stories to make me fall asleep. It doesn't matter if what you describe is not what I have in mind. The idea is to play with my absence and the idea of performing just in the mind of the audience.

What do you think?

xox

Thu, July 16, 2015 7:59 PM

Philip Gates to Juan

This sounds fun :)

What time do you need it by? Tonight is our closing performance and we are going to have a few drinks after :) But drinks always helped with the bedtime stories hehe. So hopefully I can squeeze it in? I'd love to help!

Thu, July 16, 2015 at 8:10 PM

Juan Betancurth to Philip

Excellent!

You're the best.

Any time that is good for you, just tell me around what time I should be ready. I will wait for you drinking wine :)

Good luck with the performance!

xoxo

Thu, Jul 16, 2015 at 10:11 PM

Juan Betancurth to Daniel

Hey,

I've been waiting for your comments. I don't want to misread your silence.
Having some words would be nice..

Fri, Jul 17, 2015 at 12:14 AM

Daniel Neumann

I just got this email now, sorry, I was sort of waiting too, have been to the Bronx all afternoon and maybe the reception problem caused me not getting this email from you. Anyways, this is circumstantial, my silence does not mean anything else! I checked my email around 7p when I was heading out from the Bronx, and still had gotten nothing, so I decided to just buy the cello!! So we own it now!

I like the idea of you having someone reading the score talking about your absence. I won't have enough time tomorrow to run to the studio to pick up more props, but I can remove the one brush we have installed and give it to one person in the audience. It's probably also good to control the interaction.

So yes, please send someone and yes, we'll have the cello!!

D

Fri, Jul 17, 2015 at 12:21 AM

Juan Betancurth

Awesome!

I didn't mean to be intense, but the distance makes things weird. Excellent about the cello!!!

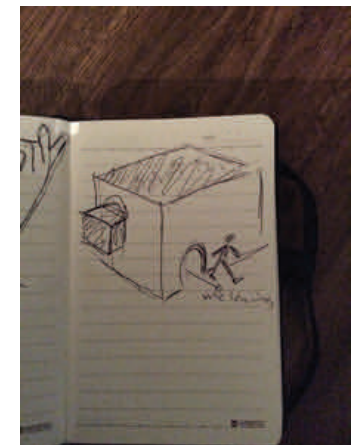
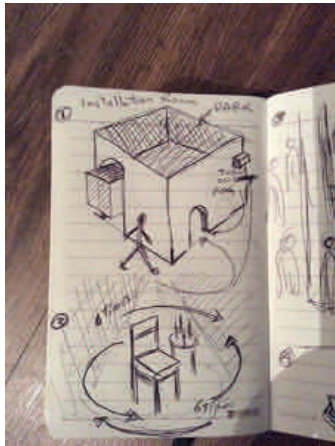
I'm trying to make a theater director friend of mine improvise a performance based on my drawing - I made them today - he's good with improvising stories. He's having drinks now, oops! but loves the idea. He can be even better with a couple of drinks, we'll see. I don't have recording equipment here, but I will use my computer mic. Hope you won't get a stroke when you hear the quality.

Fri, July 17, 2015 at 12:39 AM

Juan Betancurth to Philip

Performance/Drawings

These are the sketches for the performance, call me on Skype to let me know when you're ready.



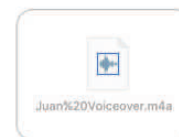
Fri, July 17, 2015 at 2:52 AM

Philip Gates

For you!

Let me know if this works!

XX



Fri, July 17, 2015 at 11:46 AM

Juan Betancurth to Philip

Thanks again Mr. Philip, you made my night!

xox

Fri, Jul 17, 2015 at 12:02 PM

Daniel Neumann

Ah, cool! So it's for playback, not a live person? The quality is probably not the most important aspect in this anyway. Looking forward to performing with the cello!!

So yeah, just send me any further instructions for tonight and I'll follow them as best as I can.. Remote controlled.

Fri, Jul 17, 2015 at 12:07 PM

Juan Betancurth

My friend also made a recording last night. I was trying to make a playback as plan B, but he was drunk, he was not in his mind and says a lot of weird things there.

Fri, Jul 17, 2015 at 1:21 PM

Daniel Neumann

I see, if you still want to send the recording to be played out of an object, potentially hard to understand anyways, let me know. More as a fragment, coming in and out..

Fri, Jul 17, 2015 at 12:02 PM

Juan Betancurth

Hey,

those are the drawings I prepared to sketch the performance. My friend who I told you about can't make it tonight. He couldn't get the night off. I'm gonna ask another friend, she is going to be at the Courthouse today. I'm running to the airport right now, but I will try to keep in touch.

I will ask her to contact you, her name is Dulcina.

I like the idea of using one of the objects we have in the installation to play with the cello. That's an interesting gesture, almost like starting with the deinstallation.

All the best today, I'm gonna miss being there!

J

Fri, Jul 17, 2015 at 3:05 PM

Juan Betancurth

This is

----- Original message -----

From: Philip Gates

Date:07/17/2015 10:26 AM (GMT-06:00)

To: Juan Betancurth

Subject: ???



Fri, Jul 17, 2015 at 4:47 PM

Dulcina Abreu to Daniel Neumann

Hi Daniel, I am Dulcina Abreu, Juan s friend. I received an email from him asking for help because his flight was canceled. I was trying to contact you earlier to know your availability with the time. Do you need me there around 5:30 or earlier? To have a sound check or something. . . Let me know and I will be there.

Fri, Jul 17, 2015 at 4:50 PM

Daniel Neumann to Dulcina Abreu

Yeah, 5:30 or 6p would be good. I'm stuck in downtown traffic, so I won't make it there earlier.. Thanks for jumping in on this!!

Fri, Jul 17, 2015 at 4:52 PM

Dulcina Abreu to Daniel Neumann

Always! See you there.

Fri, Jul 17, 2015 at 5:51 PM

Dulcina Abreu to Daniel Neumann

Daniel, emergency!

I ate a steak during lunch and I feel terrible. I went back home, I could not make it. I emailed Juan, I feel terrible.

Fri, Jul 17, 2015 at 8:11 PM

Iliya Fridman to Daniel, Juan

Subject: no show

Daniel and Juan,

Narora and I just spent two hours in traffic trying to make it to the Bronx. We finally gave up after realizing we would miss the performance. Sorry.

Hope it went well!

Iliya

Narora: Too bad we missed it and the traffic was bad because "the president is in town with his daughter" as I overheard today in the line to buy a coffee.

Fri, Jul 17, 2015 at 8:40 PM

Regine Basha to Daniel, Juan

Subject: I heard it was fantastic :)

I'm sorry I couldn't make it. I was planning to but had an issue with the kid and couldn't come back uptown.

Hope you both are happy.

XoRegine

Sat, Jul 18, 2015 at 2:51 PM

Daniel Neumann to Juan, Regine

Hi Regine and Juan,

Thanks for the note, and no problem for not making it, Juan didn't make it either :).

To be honest, I'm not really sure how I feel about it. I'm glad you heard it was fantastic! It was weird for me. But if you don't mind, could I give you both a little report, it feels appropriate, and I need some reflecting.

Firstly there was Juan's absence and before that an email exchange in which he stated the question if we should cancel the performance, because the timing seemed tight and left little room for preparation. We decided to still do it with what seemed possible and following our title and description, which was vague enough.*

Juan wasn't going to make the performance, since he was delayed in Mexico City I found out on Thursday morning. "What should we do?" I didn't get his response in time, but I bought the cello that I had asked him about. I know he likes cellos and once said he'd love to have one at some point. A friend of mine was selling hers, I found out Thursday morning.

Then I got Juan's response, for some reason 11 hours late, but he had found a substitute performer, who was going to narrate the originally planned performance score. And Juan liked involving the cello.

Then on Friday I booked the van for 2:30p to Fridman to pick up the gear. All seemed to come together finally. I decided to take the big board to allow me lots of control and flexibility. Then the van got stuck in traffic and only made it to Fridman 1 1/2 late! I took some backup material on the subway and went up to the Bronx. Up there, the substitute performer texted me that she got food poisoning from her lunch and can't leave the house and when I plugged in my backup oscillator it was broken! No van in sight.

Around 5:30p the van finally made it and Gus and I hooked up the board, the cello and my other synths, refilled the fog machine and then it was already time for the performance! I rarely felt so unprepared for a performance, but wanted to just go for it, focusing on the cello and acoustic feedback from the objects, mainly featuring the subwoofer box.

So, shortly after 7p, I turned on the fog machine, then walked around in the installation that was still playing the regular audio material. I then randomly turned of all the lights on the floor and the one above the entrance. It created a different focus. I then removed the brush from one of the columns and put it on Gus' arm. He sat down by the cello that was laying in the center on the floor. I slowly faded in some of the cello signal and turned down the installation audio. Gus was "playing" the cello while I was sending it to the different objects. It sounded quite aggressive, somewhat monumental and responded really well to the sub box! I was pushing it, then bringing in a voice recording - a recording Juan took the night before of a friend of him narrating the performance after Juan's description and drawings. I played the narration from a laptop and miked the laptop, which I then fed into some of the objects. It was only partially intelligible. I then felt that Gus was playing the cello too much, so I pulled it out and had only the voice playing. Gus then got up. I brought the cello feedback back, but more subtlety and added low frequency synth sound that vibrated the entire space, it got dense again, dark. I felt weird, not able to really focus in, lost of lost, so I pushed more, played more with the voice recording and the microphone that was picking up the laptop. Then after about half an hour, I brought it down, the descent, missing a possible ending, then just featuring the voice more to wait for a next ending, then fading the installation sound back in and walking around to turn the lights back on, then leaving the room.

Weird, I thought. Didn't know what to make of that, still don't, so it's nice to hear that people liked it.. The audio recording worked in parts, so I'll try to put something together. I have some images too. So if there's more audience feedback, I'd be very curious! But I now am ready for the show to close.

Greetings,
Daniel

* About:

Betancurth and Neumann will close out their installation in the basement with an intimate ritual in which the boundaries between objects, subjects and media are blurred. Objects become expressive, subjects become objects, a medium may suffer, the witness goes missing.

Sat, Jul 18, 2015 at 3:05 PM

Juan Betancurth to Daniel, Regine

The circumstances make it difficult to have clear feelings. It sounds like an interesting performance/improvisation. Daniel, you and I frequently talk about an external force that creates unexpected situations around our collaborations, and we respect it, seems like last night was another of those times. What an intense way to Break the Cycle. Thanks for making it possible. With everything that you described I can't help it but feel bad that I missed it.

J

Sat, Jul 18, 2015 at 3:24 PM

Daniel Neumann to Juan, Regine

Yeah, it definitely had this weird circumstantial intensity, and I definitely gave in to just making it happen, to just push, adapt and respond. I did not feel in control, which yes, now in retrospect, is part of our collaborative approach, to not be in control, but to push forward. And just to be clear, I don't blame you, so no need to feel bad towards me. I totally took it as circumstances, intense, but I guess it had to be to Break This Cycle! And you look good as a cello! ;)