



TEN QUESTIONS FOR AGATHA GOTHE-SNAPE

Sydney artist Agatha Gothe-Snape tells *VAULT* about the usefulness of limits, how dysfunction fuels collaboration and the thrills of returning PowerPoint to its rightful origin.

By Kim Brockett

A performance artist at heart, Agatha Gothe-Snape's work often employs the participation of others, whether she's playing free association games with art world luminaries or creating a lexicon of Lawrence Weiner's hand gestures for *Performa 15*. Drawing on forms as diverse as PowerPoint, improvisation, text, and performance, the visual language of her work recalls knowledge organisation methods and personality profile tests. Gothe-Snape, who has recently returned from New York, is currently working on a new commission for the Biennale of Sydney, 2016.

1. WHEN DID YOU START USING POWERPOINT?

I started using PowerPoint in 2007 or 2008, and I was coming out of an art school context. Because I trained in performance, I was used to doing very performative responses to problems. Strangely enough, it was PowerPoint that enabled me to answer these questions with a lightness and agility. It's such a perfunctory program with so many limits. The limits generate the work and now I feel the methodological approach to PowerPoint has been embedded in my practice. I like to use PowerPoint against its own logic; I try to exploit its limits so it's extended to the edge of usefulness.

2. IT'S FASCINATING THAT YOU'VE ALSO INTEGRATED THESE WORKS IN CORPORATE CONTEXTS, MOST RECENTLY AS PART OF *ACCA IN THE CITY* IN 2015, WHERE YOUR POWERPOINTS WERE SPLICED INTO DIGITAL ADVERTISING SITES, AND ALSO NOTABLY WHEN YOU TOOK OVER THE 8TH BERLIN BIENNALE'S SPLASH PAGE. WHAT DRAWS YOU TO THESE SETTINGS?

PowerPoint in its corporate context is almost entirely unfamiliar to me. In fact a working life, where you go to an office and work, is unfamiliar to me. There's a strangeness to my experience of PowerPoint, and to that whole corporate world. I'm fascinated by how people manage their relationships and time, and how they use technology to enable their workflow. With *ACCA in the City* and the Berlin Biennale, I came to both tasks with a sense that the world is so oblique, so hopefully I'm making strange things in places we take for granted.

3. YOU ALSO SELL YOUR POWERPOINTS THROUGH AN ONGOING SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE. IT'S VERY AFFORDABLE AND SUCH AN INNOVATIVE WAY OF SELLING WORK. HOW DID THIS COME ABOUT?

When Amanda Rowell [of *The Commercial*] began representing me, she needed to have something of my very ephemeral practice that could be commodified. We wanted a way of making the act of buying work a commitment to the artist. Patronage and building a relationship with an artist is more interesting than buying an object and having it sit in storage. So I came up with this idea of the subscription. I didn't really know how the subscription would end; how the PowerPoints would manifest; and what a good way to collect and disseminate them [would be]. I like the idea that they are unlimited editions and that subscribers are allowed to send them to friends or display them at parties. One of my subscribers uses them in boardroom meetings to break the ice. I love that they're returning to their natural home.

4. POWERPOINT IS NOTORIOUSLY FICKLE. HOW DO YOU NEGOTIATE ITS STABILITY AS A MEDIUM?

PowerPoint is very complicated like Flash Paint, my previous medium of choice. It's very unstable as the technology is always changing. I've faced problems like how to treat the works archivally without damaging their innate non-fixed quality. Sometimes, PowerPoint just breaks and I've tried to welcome that rather than resist it.

5. IS THIS A RESPONSIBILITY THAT YOU PASS DOWN TO YOUR SUBSCRIBERS?

As part of the contract I ask the subscribers to be custodians of the PowerPoint, so that each PowerPoint's location is always dispersed. Each person has to take care of that work, like any artwork.

6. YOU'VE ALSO BEEN WORKING COLLABORATIVELY WITH BRIAN FUATA IN THE DUO *WRONG SOLO* FOR SEVERAL YEARS NOW. HOW DID YOU MEET?

Brian and I met in Sydney, and we both ended up on a project at Performance Space with Guillermo Gómez-Peña. We just had a sense of *simpatico* when we met. We continued our relationship on and off, and in 2009 we came together again for a performance called *What I Think About When I Think About Dancing* (at Campbelltown Arts Centre). We like the idea of *Wrong Solo* having a dysfunctional relationship and collaborating at various times with different people. The dysfunction of life really characterises the dysfunction of our relationship – it's subject to personal politics, emotional intensities and conflict. We hope *Wrong Solo* absorbs these and actualises them in more formal ways.



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 AGATHA GOTHE-SNAPE
Rhetorical Chorus
 (LW), 2015
 The Society for Ethical Culture,
 New York
 Composer: Megan Clune
 The Transmitter:
 Joan La Barbara
 The Prologue: Brian Fuata
Rhetorical Chorus (LW) was
 commissioned by Performa,
 Performance Space and
 the Keir Foundation for the
 Perma Biennial,
 November 1-22, 2015
 Photo: Joe Jagos

Left
 AGATHA GOTHE-SNAPE
*The Scheme was a Blueprint for
 Future Development Programs,*
 2014-15
 Monash University Public
 Art Commission
 Photo: Zan Wimberley
 Courtesy the artist and
 The Commercial, Sydney

7. IN 2015 YOU PRESENTED WORK AT PERFORMA, A VERY SIGNIFICANT BIENNIAL OF VISUAL ART PERFORMANCE IN NEW YORK, WHICH ALSO MARKED YOUR NEW YORK DEBUT. WHAT WAS THE EXPERIENCE LIKE?

Performa was amazing for us as solo artists, and as *Wrong Solo* we also did a performance with Shane Haseman. Somehow, I think this desire for New York really consolidates this idea of provincialism. It's as if it's a bigger deal for Australians to know that we present work over there. It was not the glamorous debut in New York that you would imagine, although in some ways it was, because I got to present a work at this incredible venue, the New York Centre for Ethical Culture. It provided an international stage.

8. DID YOU EVER HAVE THAT SAME DESIRE FOR NEW YORK THAT SO MANY OTHER AUSTRALIANS HAVE?

I've never really romanticised [New York] and I always try to think about all opportunities in a non-hierarchical way. Part of *Wrong Solo* and *The Cosmic Battle For Your Heart* (an independent space co-founded by Gothe-Snape in 2009) was the idea that a presentation in a bedroom is as significant as a museum show. I never thought: "I'm so excited to be having a show in New York", but rather I was thinking about the work and how overwhelming it is to be in New York with a baby.

9. ANOTHER ONE OF YOUR WORKS IS *EVERY ARTIST REMEMBERED*, AN EXERCISE WHEREBY YOU INVITE NOTABLE AUSTRALIAN ARTISTS TO PARTICIPATE IN A TWO-WAY MEMORY GAME. *EVERY ARTIST REMEMBERED* HAS BEEN PERFORMED TWICE - FIRST IN 2009 AT FIRSTDRAFT, AN ARTIST-RUN INITIATIVE IN SYDNEY, AND FINALLY IN 2011 AT ACCA. HOW DID THESE TWO ITERATIONS COMPARE?

Every Artist Remembered was a work that was symptomatic of my space at the time. I was trying to visualise the field, and it was also a very selfish project because I literally wanted to have a visual representation of what art was and how people place themselves in the art world. When I presented it at Firstdraft it was really exciting because for the first time, I understood procedure as a method and that performing was as much the work as its outcome.

When [curator] Hannah Mathews got me to redo it for *Power to the People*, it was a real challenge to return to the process. Energy needs to be drawn into the world and that's the energy that enables you to make it. When I redid it at ACCA I felt a resistance. To return to a work when I didn't have that pressing need is a question I have to ask myself all the time now as I do more work in response to public briefings. It's really challenging.

At the second articulation at ACCA the selection of artists became more self-conscious, but because I was more confident as an artist, I could exercise it with more elegance and it had a more relaxed attitude. They both have really different qualities and I think it's amazing how the drawings absorb the conditions of their making. I don't think I will do [them] anymore - I see them now as being receptacles of knowledge, like a field study.

10. WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE WORK YOU'RE PRESENTING AT SYDNEY BIENNALE IN 2016?

I'm finding ways to investigate the ambience of Sydney through a series of performances, conversations, happenings, and finding a way to use text, as I always do. I'm building the process and it's tentatively titled *Here An Echo*. It's still very much in the making. **V**

Agatha Gothe-Snape will present as part of the 20th Biennale of Sydney, March 18 to June 5, 2016.

Agatha Gothe-Snape is represented by The Commercial, Sydney.
thecommercialgallery.com