

Duration & Dialogue

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and Patrick Ford

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*Reflections of my experience in Duration & Dialogue
Performance Art Festival – Session/Dialogue 3*

As a mediator, my participation in Session/Dialogue 3 of Duration & Dialogue II began with communicating via email with Clayton Lee and Patrick S. Ford. In one of the emails, Ford wrote: “I hope the audience can relax and share the experience, the slow unfolding journey with the accompanying sounds.” His words “the slow unfolding of the journey” instantly resonated with me, it’s an inspiration. Isn’t all performance a kind of journey through certain time-space? Experiencing a physical space in a limited time is only part of a performing journey, it can be profound and intriguing, depending on the structures and thinking embedded in the performance.

When I arrived at the space on Saturday night, January 28 (the Eve of Chinese New Year in Toronto, and the first morning of the new year in Hong Kong), Lee had already set up his performance installation *Informal Beginnings*, a live-projection of a google map showing the journeys of his family members, who are delivering various chicken dishes from three remote locations in the city. Meanwhile, we as audience members in the gallery, were encouraged to chat with his family on the road via cellphone. Thus, we were experiencing the journeys of his family by waiting and witnessing (Lee coined his three-part performance as: waiting, witnessing, and feasting).

In the back space of the gallery, Ford’s streamed performance *No holiday* also unfolded. He was walking quietly on a hill path, holding up a selfie stick to take a selfie, while also capturing a segment of sky, the seascape or the surrounding landscape. What Ford looked at, what his camera captured and what we saw, seemed to happen simultaneously. Ford maintained a moderate walking pace. Aside from his pink bag, and a temple he encountered while en route, nothing else seemed to denote a holiday. The audience virtually strolled with him over the hill, as if taking a casual walk while maintaining a state of peace. In the dialogue after the performance, Ford spoke about how holidays usually include anxious preparation. He wishes to turn the journey itself into one of enjoyment.

The experience during this journey echoes another performance by the same artist entitled *Releasing Sisyphus*. In this performance, Ford wonders if an endless repeating action by Sisyphus might also contain the possibility of happiness. Is it possible that in no-purpose and no-end human activities there is a consoling source? The answer is: truth lies in it. In our routine and/or unexamined activities, there lies the gift for our findings in life and art. Ford conceptualizes his performance with two interesting terms: “the choreography of the holiday experience,” and “found actions.” The first is about structured, rehearsed activities, and the latter referring to Marcel Duchamp’s “found objects”. Planned and unplanned, predictable and by-chance movements and activities, which are so common in our daily experience, are deconstructed and reconstructed and made tangible to us in Ford’s work.

For the Chinese New Year holiday, most people stay at home, watch TV and feast; or, in recent years, they travel with family to resorts and tourist sites. Lee and Ford disrupted our usual expectations for this year’s holiday. Through the journeys of Lee’s family, we witnessed the effort of a family’s coming together to prepare a feast. It has been a tradition for thousands of years. The presence of three generations of the Lee family in the performance space also raised topics of culture and emotion. One odd, intense, and striking part of Lee’s performance occurred after the audience finished eating the chicken, Lee collected our plates and ate the leftovers. I felt as if immersed in a ritual where a humble gesture is offered from the artist to the audience. Lee considers this to be his way of building an intimate relationship with the viewer. I think this action somehow transformed the performance. The artist violated multiple physical and psychological territories with the audience, and drew them into a state of emotional participation, so that they were no longer observers from a distance.

I find the pairing of Lee’s live performance and Ford’s streamed performance shared a common theme, the Chinese New Year, different strategies and attitudes were used to implicate the audience. The audience and artist responded to each other, which inspired a provoking dialogue and created an atmosphere of “holiday” by deconstructing traditional holiday activities.

I had a wonderful and enriching experience as a mediator and audience member. Thank you, Patrick, Clayton, Dario, Natasha, Johannes, Marianne and the team of Duration & Dialogue. I would also like to thank Lee’s family, especially Clayton’s lovely 86-year-old grandma, and Patrick’s wife Nina, for being part of the beautiful experience we had that night.

Yan Zhou.