

## Tedi Tafel and Vida Simon Approaching Stillness

by Andrew Frosst

Born from a mutual interest in each other's work, Tedi Tafel and Vida Simon's three part collaboration explores both the relation of an artist's performance to its audience and the effect of cosmic events on our daily lives. To approach this inquiry, the artists can be seen primarily as employing the element of play (not in the sense of competitive play, but as a sort playful dealing with everyday events). This can be seen in previous works such as Tafel's immersive intervention titled *From the Cougar Cabin to the Seven Cedars*. She explains that after wandering daily through her environment, "out of curiosity, I began to do rubbings of the patterns of the bark of a birch tree, using tracing paper and charcoal." In this case, her engagement with her surrounding environment can be compared to that of a child freely allowing observation to influence interaction.

As Allan Kaprow explains in his essay *The Education of the Un-Artist, Part II*:

Imitation... may be a way of approaching play on a modern yet transcendent plane, which because it is intellectual - or better, intelligent - can be enjoyed by adults afraid of being childish. Just as children's imitative play may be a survival ritual, this could be a stratagem for the survival of society. In [this stratagem] the artist's talent for revealing the interchangeability of things could be made available to «civilization and its discontents» - in other words, could be used for bringing together what has been taken apart."

In this case, "what has been taken apart" can be seen as the relationship between individuals and our link with the natural world within our routine ways of functioning in our man-made environment. To bring together however, does not mean to offer a solution. Through an experimental and improvisational imitation, the artists' work instead creates a point from which various analogies and resulting interpretations can be discovered.

Questioning the traditional relationship between the performer and the audience where one is separated from the other, Tedi Tafel and Vida Simon present the audience with various styles of interaction. Imitative of the numerous styles of interaction within society, the artists play with presence and absence as well as distance and proximity through the alternation of indoor and outdoor performance and the use of the window as a sort of "porous surface" which can separate the audience. For the artists, this becomes a sort of research into the method and intimacy of performance. For the audience it becomes an analogy, removed from its quotidian context, of the relations it has with other individuals or organizations.

In their final durational performance, Tedi Tafel and Vida Simon explore the summer solstice. Seeing it as a period of pause, where the light is at its maximum, they question its influence on our daily lives as well as its potential as an “enveloping metaphor”. Through experimental and improvisational representation, they suspend this natural occurrence in a sort of unnatural relationship to society. Therefore, far from being didactic, their work, unforeseeable to both themselves and the audience, remains open to interpretation. As a result, they manage to identify the structures of unconscious and conscious, and micro and macro relationships between humans and the natural environment.

No longer necessitating material devices such as Duchamp’s Readymades to distance an experience from the quotidian, their work, in a way differing from academic analysis, focuses on and displaces routine human relationships with their environment in order to offer innumerable points of interpretation. These interpretations can then be used to bring together the man-made environment and its natural counterpart as well as individuals, including performers, within their social environment. With a critical focus on preparation, research and presentation, these ritual-like performances become not only an exploration of nature and everyday life, but of the processes that lead to the performance, and their capacity to exist as part of the exhibited work.

**Andrew Frosst** is a protean artist with an eclectic amass of skills who generates literature and visual art both independently and with the Arbour Lake School Collective.

This text is part of a writing series by members of articule, reflecting on the works presented during the gallery’s 2009-2010 programming season. Andrew Frosst’s text has been produced for Vida Simon and Tedi Tafel collaborative research and performative project *Approaching Stillness* taking place at specific moments through the entire year, and is also available as a pdf on the gallery’s web site.

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