Cock
Paper
Scissors
Cock

Edited by
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and Kayleigh Perkov

Paper

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Scissors
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artwork. My partner and I moved out of the city and found an old, Jewish hotel in Upstate New York, and I lived there.

RF—Wow.

SW—It has forever affected my work... hence the planes that appear in so many pieces. The plane and the cockpit are in my work non-stop. There are different crew members and visions of where you might be going. Endlessly hopeful? So 9/11 happened, and your perspective and placement in the world changed. Quite soon after that I got the opportunity to teach as a guest lecturer at UCLA in 2005. It’s the one thing that I’m actually really good at: teaching [laughter]. The connection with people is so... it’s such a service, you know? To me it’s activism.

RF—Yes. Teaching is the art of being an interlocutor to people, essentially making dialogue into a way of life.

SW—Yes. It’s extraordinary. We have entire class discussions on diversity, feminism, and AIDS, and they’re so lucky!

RF—Students see and hear about all these issues and events and suddenly they say, “This happened?” and, “People participated in this? And the world can change because of collective action?” It’s amazing.

Now I have learned to accept the uncertainty of it, and that in some way liberated me to make works that are paused moments of transformation rather than a definitive thing.

Julia Bryan-Wilson—You work in many different media, including performance, textiles, drawing, collage, installation, and sculpture. What seems to connect much of your practice, even as it takes form in different manifestations, are questions of queer materiality. In other words, you ask: what is the stuff of queer memory, of queer fantasy, of queer futurity? Can you talk about how queer thingness provides a spark for much of your practice?

Jade Yumang—From the beginning I was already introduced to queerness as I grew up for the first seven years of my life in my mom’s beauty salon. I was actually named after it, although I never had the proper language around queerness until we moved to Vancouver, Canada. Then I lived in New York City for a while, which complicated things further. I always ask myself: what is the stuff of queer memory, of queer fantasy, of queer futurity? You can talk about how queer thingness provides a spark for much of your practice?

Jade Yumang, Weeklies #19.37 (New York City), from the series “Weeklies,” 2012
an existing system. Christopher Reed mentioned this in an article calling it imminent, as something looming over, or taking place. I love this idea, but it seems that queering can only be so by latching itself to something that is already there (marriage is an obvious one). Can a new form manifest independent from fixing or infecting something that exists? I can only filter what I see and experience through my actions. No matter what I do it will be queer, whether I announce it or not.

JBW—Cut paper forms the basis for your collages, “Weeklies,” as well as some performances you’ve done involving your body interacting with heaps of shredded paper. What draws you to paper? How do you think about paper both as a flat surface and as a sculptural form to be manipulated?

JY—Paper comes in many colors, patterns, thickness, what it is made of. It has a certain stiffness to it, but it can bend and fold. It is fragile, but that also means it is sensitive to any mediums. I always associate paper as a form of document or a recording of something. In this case it is a result of my obsessive and repetitive actions. As a flat surface, I am more delicate in how I manipulate the paper. When it comes to sculptures, I rarely sketch them or make an initial supporting structure. Instead, I make little things, which then I repeat hundreds of times to a point of exhaustion. I then end up with an accumulation of something that eventually dictates its final shape.

JBW—Do you have any sense of these works with paper as related to conceptual art? How has conceptualism been part of your own artistic legacy? I’m thinking of everything from what Benjamin Buchloh called the “aesthetics of administration” and how paper fits into that rubric to the poetic uses of paper stacks by someone like Felix Gonzalez-Torres.

JY—I love Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ work! He definitely used conceptualism and its devices but made it personal and also universal with its generosity. It was inside and outside, something that Andrea Fraser mentions in her article, “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique,” which updates Buchloh’s essay. In terms of my work, I rely heavily on manual labor—that is, how I work with materials through repetition, which then leads to some type of entropy. My hands are very present in my work and taste comes into play, something I imagine most conceptualist would be fearful of. However, I understand that it could be inverted, as I use a free and throwaway item, “Weeklies,” and transform it with my cut technique, which then freezes its initial agency and uses it against itself as a critique of an imposed lifestyle and superficial image.

JBW—Let’s talk specifically about your series using gay male magazines: “Weeklies” and “Ooze.” One central thesis of the exhibition Cock, Paper, Scissors is about collage as an interruptive tactic used by queer artists and feminist artists to intervene in mass culture. When did you first start using magazines as a basis for your work?

JY—I started when I moved to New York in 2010 to pursue my MFA at Parsons. Beforehand, a lot of the work I was doing were imagined figures, which I had full control as to how I want the body to look and how it is positioned in a picture plane. Our studios are located in the Greenwich Village, and there were a lot of gay sex shops going out of business. I couldn’t resist and purchased a box of 24 magazines for $20 from this man who told me and a friend I was with that those were the days when flipping through these pages meant so much more.

JBW—In the “Weeklies” images, you’ve embellished photographs to indicate lines of sight, or trajectories of desire, as visual flows. Some are elaborate and decorative and seem to extend the fantasy being represented in the photographs; others are excessive and disrupt the field of vision. How do you choose which images to work with? Can you describe your process of cutting and reassembling?

JY—I like to give myself parameters when I work on a series. This particular magazine comes out every week. So I decided to work with it the whole year, which meant that I had to go to places where they would have them available, which is usually in clubs or sex shops. It did two things: it helped me get over my shyness, and I had new material every week to work with. I did not have the luxury to choose the images, as I had to work with the cover of that week, whether I liked it or not. I assessed the cover, which is usually an archetypal cisgender white male with unbelievable abs, and then I cut the cover page and work my way, page after page, as the shape gets smaller and smaller until I can’t cut anymore or there are no more pages left. Sometimes the patterns are within the frame of the body, and sometimes it spills out.

JW—So there is also something like a durational performance in the making of this work. Each week you give yourself a task to be completed. There is something to that structure, those limits that can be very freeing, while it also creates strict constraints. Can you say more about the role of chance versus control in your work?

JY—I think they go hand in hand. I always start off with full control, and I get very obsessed about doing particular things one way, which I then repeat it again and again. Eventually something breaks from that habit. It is usually through exhaustion that I find other things about the process. I would initially call them mistakes, but they become another pathway to the work.

JBW—The covers of Next magazine that you work with project a certain kind of gay male lifestyle, one structured around and through class and race and age. Can you talk about how this series comments on race?

JY—This magazine gives you a sense of the fast-paced life of a supposed gay man, one that parties, goes to the gym, drinks a lot, has lots of sex, goes to fancy places, and repeats it again the next week. I love that the magazine has a short shelf life. As fun as it sounds—and, yes, it can be—it is hard to sustain. Pervasively that lifestyle is associated with masculine white bodies, one that seems to be immune to hangovers and has a disposable income. Of course, that is not true, but I remember coming out at the age of 19, and that is all I saw. I was already having an existential crisis being gay, but then I had to deal with how I am going to be perceived as Filipino as well. I knew from the beginning that the economy of my body could not compete with one that seems to be set in stone, which in a lot of ways is the opposite of queerness.

JBW—I feel like your work is also about cutting through layers of history, and reassembling different versions of queer pasts as they erupt into the present. There is something sort of dated—interestingly outmoded—about the magazines, now that so much of this information about queer life has migrated to the internet. What’s your relationship to magazines?

JY—I was just in the cusp of that moment when the internet started to be available for home use. I still remember going to a queer bookstore in Vancouver where they had lots of books, apparel, and a tiny room for all the curious. I would quickly sandwich a porn magazine between Judith Butler, Leo Bersani, a Martha Stewart Living magazine, and a rainbow bracelet before I was brave enough to go to the counter. Then they all go in the same black plastic bag. For me it’s the initial flipping through the pages, not knowing what you just purchased as you can only guess through the cover because it was sealed in plastic. Plus, the quality of the paper and print were really wonderful at that time. I’m nostalgic about the ritual of getting the magazines as I work up the courage to go to the Village and then circle around the store before I decide to go in.

JBW—These two bodies of work are really quite distinct. “Weeklies” are works on paper, while the pieces in “Ooze” leak from the magazine boundaries and protrude into the viewer’s space to create a sense of dimensionality. Do you consider these series connected, and if so, how?

JY—“Ooze” was about connecting to a particular past that I never experienced and only heard of and read about through books and personal accounts. And “Weeklies” is a direct experience.
JBW—Can you say more about the relationship of "Ooze" to the HIV/AIDS crisis and your relationship to that moment in terms of its art use of collage?

JY—The magazines from "Ooze" are from the 1980s to early 1990s during the AIDS crisis. I was born in the Philippines and grew up in the Middle East during this time and was oblivious to what was happening as this history was swept under the rug. For me, "Ooze" was a way to connect with the past that is messy and blurry. I'm trying to piece together—or more so cut through—the layers of magazines, vestiges where bodies meant for desire and lust are mutated as a form of fear and anxiety.

JBW—And in your series, as with Martin's work, the skin of the canvas suggests but does not rely upon the literal skin of the body. I look forward to seeing where else your scissors and X-Acto knife takes you!

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JBW—You've also worked with textiles, including creating slits into t-shirts to make lace-like latticework patterns. To me that body of work relates to the collages, in that they are also about cutting, reassembly, and reconfiguring found materials into something new. They also seem to be so much about histories of cloth. What led you to that series?

JY—It's still in progress, but the work is about my partner and our relationship. I haven't made anything personal for awhile, and I've amassed a lot of his used t-shirts. We were separated for some time as I was in New York for school and then decided to stay for a bit, while he resided in Vancouver. We would only see each other once a year. We've been together for 14 years, and you get used to someone's presence. At the time when we were apart, he would send me his used shirt in the mail every couple of months or so. I subsequently dress my pillow with his shirt so I can fall asleep. They were like a talisman for me. Now that I try to split my time between both coasts, I don't do it as much, but I ended up with a lot of material. I've been doing amorphous shapes for a while and was intrigued in using a skeletal structure for this series. The work alludes to abstract formalist paintings but is underpinned with a personal and corporeal source. Sometimes I imagine myself as Agnes Martin, but instead of a canvas and a brush, I have my partner's shirts and a blade.

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