

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: fidget

Meaningfulness: Process Project in Times of COVID

by Rhonda Moore

In this very particular moment in time, when close encounters of any kind are plagued with a plethora of COVID-related caveats, how can an enterprise such as Fidget's Process Project remain true to the organization's declared mission to decrease the distance between art and life, theory and practice? Deliberately working outside the confines of the standard performer-audience, "doer-viewer" format, the Process Project series presents, moreover hinges on, opportunities for intimate dialogue with audiences before and after each event. The content of each performance is always improvisation-based, with a time limit—thirty minutes, maximum run duration—being the sole fixed element. But recent social distancing sanctions have irrevocably erased such live, in-person audience exchanges.

On and off-stage Fidget partners Megan Bridge and Peter Price have welcomed people into their home and workspace for over a decade. Initiated in 2009, Process Project allows those present to experience choreographer Bridge and composer, video, and sound artist Price's creative process in a performative situation. Many 21st century performances have outgrown or blatantly ignored any semblance of a Robert's Rules of Order-style protocol (www.ccri.edu > pdfs > Appendix IVRobertsRulesOfOrder), and Fidget's philosophy on blurring the lines between envisioning, creating, perceiving, viewing, and experiencing art as a manifestation of life is more than just a notion. Bridge and Price invite strangers into their multi-tasked home—an unfinished drawing next to crayons on a low table, a pile of diversely-textured fabrics, shoes of all different sizes in cubicles, scents and smells of domesticity from behind the wall, young and not-so-young muffled voices intermingling, and the marley-floored stage with a billowing, white curtain that beckons, daring those present to sneak a peek—and elicit comments, opinions, and suggestions from those very same strangers. User-friendly and accommodating, but if we can't be there in the flesh, does this distance take us closer, or are we twice removed?

Fidget presented their first virtual Process Project via Zoom on May 19-23, 2020. Suddenly, a camera lens and individual home monitors represent the presence, complicity, intimacy, and engagement usually culled from living, breathing souls sharing proximal space.

Remotely, from my kitchen island and on my screen, I see Megan Bridge wander in the Fidget space, empty of viewers, noticing things and interacting with objects. Candle arrangements border the performance space. Peter Price tinkers around his sound-making machines, stroking, twirling, adjusting buttons. They explore, self comment, acknowledge each other's presence, work independently, collide in intention, respect and intrude upon the world they collaboratively conjure. Honestly, I don't see anything significantly different than I have in past iterations of Process Project. Bridge and Price have never veered from a fervid focus on investigation, layering, and accessing multiple modes of seeing, viewing, and hearing movement and sound. Given the fixed improvisational tenet of their practice, anything might happen. The remote delivery doesn't restrict the freeness of Bridge and Price's performance. As to the end results, the jury is still out, but this whole remote thing is nudging at me, jostling with all my ideas about presence, place, proximity, distance, and "being" in general.

In this go-round, ritual plays a major role, appearing in repetition, posture, presentation, object fetishism, iconic gesture. For Bridge and Price, it's all about intention, delivery, and the interaction coming from "offering up" their improvised eruptions, progressions, and developments—performances infused with the reflection and thoughtfulness of lived experience. Bridge's movement vocabulary is eccentric and personal, charmingly inviting and spatially investigative, especially through her regard for gaze. Her eyes are brutally, nakedly, innocently revelatory. Price's nuanced soundscapes take all these things into account, while pushing and pulling what we hear in one direction or another, adding shape, sculpting the aural atmosphere of everything we see.

Watching and listening to this sound-and-movement collage through the camera lens and the screen somehow upped the ante; what I saw, where I was, my co-viewers and their spaces, Megan and Peter in theirs—all was up for grabs. All of these worlds butting their heads, and my head reeling from the fullness. The sounds from the screen that somehow synced with my washing machine's spin cycle; Megan's "wall play" that cajoled me into my Spiderman imitation in my den; Peter's putzing that so reminded me of concocting dishes in my kitchen. The intersections were endless; all of this information: was it distractive or nutritive?

During the mosaic-like talkback, each person chimed in from their Hollywood Squares quadrangle, offering up their personal impressions for discussion, thoughts and ideas intertwining, diverging, escalating, piggybacking. Did we bring more of ourselves to the table due to our recent "apartness?" Admittedly, the sharing was tinged with something more revelatory, introspective, and personal than what I might have expected. Empathy showing its horns, perhaps? What more can one aspire to, inside and outside of COVID times?

[Process/Project: Fidget Series](#). Online access through Fidget Facebook/ Live. May 19-23.

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July 13, 2020