

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Dave Ratzlow

Intimacy Made Public

by **Emma Cohen**

At the conclusion of Gabrielle Revlock's *SEX TAPE + Nuptial Blitz*, I did something that I typically try to avoid at all costs: I lingered to chat with a relative stranger. Over the course of two pieces that grappled with intimacy in starkly different ways, the audience had developed a tenuous closeness of its own.

The first portion of the evening was devoted to *SEX TAPE*, a performance that Carolyn Merritt reviewed for thINKingDANCE [earlier this year](#). The second iteration of a [larger project](#), *SEX TAPE* reenacted a video of Revlock and a male lover. Here, the lover was performed by Michele Tantoco, a close female friend.

In the Flea Theater's cozy ground-floor space, shallow rows of chairs surrounded a red and beige rug. When Revlock and Tantoco took their places—Revlock kneeling, Tantoco resting her head in Revlock's lap—they were only a few feet from where I sat. In such a small space, the lowering of an eyelid amounted to a shift in mood, a flicked finger could palpably displace the surrounding air.

Revlock and Tantoco cycled through the postures of two people deeply familiar with and endlessly fascinated by one another's bodies. They cuddled and teased, lay on top of one another and sat side by side. The pedestrian quality of these gestures suggested that they were plucked from a long stream of exchanged touches, excerpts from a lexicon developed over years of closeness. Sex wasn't evacuated entirely, but it manifested as a sensual undercurrent, a tension pulsing between nearly-touching lips and thighs.

Although *SEX TAPE* was generated from a video, Revlock refused to flatten or neatly arrange the work for a viewer. Confronted by a performance oriented resolutely inwards, I found my vision sidelined and my sensitivity heightened: watching Revlock run her fingers through Tantoco's hair, I felt an echoed tingle on my own scalp. My breathing gradually synchronized with theirs. Eventually, my attention expanded to take in the slight shifts and swallows of the audience members around me. The tender attentiveness circulating between Revlock and Tantoco had seeped into the rest of us as well.

If *SEX TAPE* was turned away from the lens, in *Nuptial Blitz* Revlock reveled in performing for the camera.

As Revlock explained in an entertaining speech (aided by a slideshow of wedding photographs), she has grown fascinated with the rigid choreographies of wedding photographs. Hoping to trouble the gender norms and fantasies of monogamous love that these photographs perpetuate, Revlock resolved to undertake “embodied anthropology” to better understand the phenomenon.

To assist Revlock with her research, five audience members, who had volunteered prior to the show, processed into the room, now wearing wedding attire and more or less self-conscious smiles.

Armed with categories such as “looking into our future” and “the protector,” Revlock and the audience volunteers attempted to take on the giddy demeanor of newlyweds. Following the instructions of a recorded narrator, they held each other’s elbows, looked into each other’s eyes, and pretended to sniff one another’s hair.

The volunteers laughed, because it was funny and probably because they were nervous, but occasionally the narrator asked them to hold a pose for a beat longer than they had expected and their faces fell. Now they were aware of being forehead to forehead with a stranger. They looked vulnerable.

Watching Revlock and the volunteers navigate their poses, I could see the beginnings of an awkward sort of intimacy, something distinct from the affection they were simulating. I also sensed the audience laughing with unusual warmth, perhaps still resting in the camaraderie of our earlier conversations.

I failed to mention—earlier in the evening, after a brief intermission following *SEX TAPE*, audience members were asked to sit with a stranger and answer questions that had been printed on the programs.

The questions were personal (“how do you feel about your relationship with your mother,” etc.), and initially my partner and I laughed nervously and muttered about how difficult it was to come up with answers. I blushed trying to imagine “sharing something you consider a positive characteristic of your partner,” a woman I had just met, but after a few minutes I thought to myself, “her broad smile. Her eagerness to tell me about the song she sang to herself on the way to the theater.”

Unprompted, my partner and I found each other again at the end of the evening. I asked her how she found out about the show (she knew the photographer). She asked me if I had found my calling in life (I had not). Had the evening’s embodied anthropology resulted in any discoveries? I’m not sure. *Nuptial Blitz* is still a work-in-progress, after all, and there is further exploration to be done. But, for the time being, witnessing moments of openness between performers and among audience members felt like discovery enough.

[*SEX TAPE + Nuptial Blitz*](#), Gabrielle Revlock, The Flea Theater, Jan. 8-12.

By Emma Cohen

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