

Stigmergy

Maria Antelman
Ajay Kurian

6/15–7/14

Opening reception
Saturday June 15, 2013
7–10 pm

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A wandering ant locates a food source. It takes a piece and returns to the nest while secreting a trail of pheromones. His colleagues begin to follow this trail, each adding their own little markers, and over time a cluster of apparently random activity is focused into a shimmering vector of appetite.

So that's stigmergy, *pattern formation in a collective via an interaction with an environmental mediator.*^[1] The practice of leaving a "sign" (στίγμα stigma) for others to work (ἔργον ergon) with is a useful lense through which to consider contemporary art. In the field of "sign-work" known as culture production we call pheromone trails "trends" and we watch as positions aggregate, creating patterns which harden into nests. One particularly pungent trail caused little abstract paintings to ricochet across gallery walls; another whiff sent packs of saw horses galloping across their polished cement floors.

The thing to remember is that these serrated trajectories are never predetermined. It is only ideology, as necessity superimposed over contingency, a straight line drawn across a zig zag, which makes them seem so. What I mean is: reserve the right to swerve...

We might say that ant and artist act in accordance with their specific programs. Sounds bleak. But just because we produce symbols and our livelihood with one gesture doesn't mean that our life is reducible to these symbols. We artists don't have to become functionaries – those blissed out signal wigglers for whom *the codified world is reality 'tout court.'*^[2] – simply because we make it our business to tiptoe along the threshold wherein this transformation occurs.

Our position is privileged to the degree that it is perilous. Our ability to play the program called stigmergy is correlated to our acknowledgment of its existence. Luckily for us it is a game whose moves exist as local interactions, between bodies, through the medium of space. In this particular space Ajay and Maria have left us some piquant deposits. The question is what do we make of them?

– Sebastian Black

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1. Andrew Lambert, "A Stigmergic Model for Oscillator Synchronization and its Use in Music Systems," ICMC 2012: Non- Cochlear Sound (September 2012): 247

2. Vilém Flusser, *Post History* (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2013), 31