

Performing
the Sentence
Research
and Teaching
in Performative
Fine Arts

Carola Dertnig and
Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein
(Eds.)

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Publication Series of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna
Eva Blimlinger, Andrea B. Braidt, Karin Riegler (Series Eds.)
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On the Publication Series

We are pleased to present this new volume in the publication series of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. This book, published in cooperation with the highly committed Sternberg Press, successfully embodies the series' concept, devoted to central themes of contemporary thought about art. The volumes in the series comprise contributions from art theory, cultural studies, art history, and research at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, and form the quintessence of international study and discourse in the respective fields. Each volume is published in the form of an anthology edited by staff members of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Authors of high international repute are invited to write contributions addressing the respective areas of emphasis. Research activities such as international conferences, lecture series, institute-specific research focuses, or research projects serve as the points of departure for the individual volumes.

With this book we present volume 13 of the series, putting a concept on the map of art theory that has become increasingly important and productive, especially at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. *Performing the Sentence: Research and Teaching in Performative Fine Arts* deals with practices in contemporary fine art that are tied to performance art and/or performative art practices. These ties vary in mode and in degree. This book illustrates how such practices interlink, and how they shape a history of the performative in fine art (as opposed to concepts of the performative in dramatic arts). We would like to thank the editors Carola Dertnig and Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein for their excellent work in putting this book together; we are certain that it will become a milestone in the debate about the performative within fine art.

The Rectorate of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna
Eva Blimlinger, Andrea B. Braidt, Karin Riegler

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Introduction

Carola Dertnig and Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein

Ten questions for a
theorist and an artist
teaching performance together:

1. To enter a lecture hall and dance?
2. To enter a lecture hall and yell ?
3. To enter a lecture hall and sing?
4. To enter a lecture hall and cry ?
5. To enter a lecture hall and disrobe?
6. To enter a lecture hall and perform?
7. To enter a lecture hall and laugh?
8. To enter a lecture hall and research?
9. To enter a lecture hall and box?
10. To enter a lecture hall and perform in theory?

How do we start? How do we end?

This book serves as an open plateau for future thoughts on performance art, and is the “printed, pressed, and bound” outcome of a closing of ranks by the editors over the past ten years. Our own exchange—the exchange between an artist and a theoretician—has taken various forms over the years and has its roots in the question of what happens when experience in performance art is granted modes of knowledge production, of critical research, and understanding. We have employed both the language of art and theory, constantly swapping “the exploring” and “the explored” positions.

We started our investigations with tandem teaching, joint lectures, and research. The tandem mode has given us the opportunity to continually ask questions both of ourselves and of our students and audiences. The field of performance art, by its nature and history, has provided here the perfect context for continual exploration, experimentation, and discovery from various perspectives. The longer we exchanged views on performance art (history), the more we felt compelled to create an environment that allowed the broadest exploration of scholarly acts. What might it mean to act in a scholarly way in the field of performance—not only to perform the role of the scholar in a particular institutional setting but also to question how academic identities and roles are highly performative? Because of the only recent inclusion of performance art in academic institutions, current forms of teaching constitute major areas of research. But there is an additional factor: the integration of practice, research, and performance that this field investigates can mean that in particular situations, the practice of teaching becomes action research.

The conference “This Sentence is Now Being Performed” came out of discussions we had over the years and are still having. We wanted to hold a symposium that offers a substantial contribution to an ongoing discussion on how teaching and research can take shape and be organized within the field of performative art production—and on how an experimental and open-ended form of fundamental research could be generated and linked to a critique of the restructuring of science, art, and education policy currently underway in Europe. We both teach and research at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. A central starting point for our considerations was this institution’s unique position in leading the way for forward-looking thinking on performance within the fine arts. Over the past years the Academy has fostered a specific focus on practice, teaching, and research, based on a broad understanding of performance. A synergy has come about in which elements of painting, sculpture, sound, dance, architecture, photography, film, video, and digital media have been fused together with fragments of the everyday to form an overlapping, inter-media framework. Especially in light of the current political tendencies and strategies to simplify, homogenize, and unify the field of higher education within Europe—with extensive effects on practice and teaching at

art schools—a transitive performative practice has the power to intervene through acting within the conventions of education and research. Because of this we are able to discuss how artworks, exhibitions, the art market, art discourse, and teaching intentionally or unintentionally participate in constituting a certain mode of development, change, and history that constantly (re) produces institutional conventions. On the other hand, because these conventions are not independent but rather interrelated, a scope for action opens up. The subject of performance and performativity points out that meaning is produced, also within the fine arts context. It brings to light the conventions involved in the production, presentation, reception, and historicization, as well as their specific cultural and political implications. It also shows how these conventions are produced through or within each artwork, independent of their specific contexts. In this way, possibilities for transformation also open up.

This book brings into dialogue the various ways that “performative thinking” has developed—intergenerationally, in different national and institutional contexts, and within different disciplines in the arts—as well as the conditions under which it has evolved in experimental art schools. The performative paradigm and performance as research and practice have by nature no single, essential history. Performance is an integrative part of various narratives. We wanted to accumulate, without claiming completeness and with the awareness that inclusion always produces exclusion. Therefore we see this book as part of a work in progress and ongoing exchange. Together, the diverse contributions examine aspects of current meanings of performance art—and probably its future as well.

The authors included in *Performing the Sentence* all challenge the significance of these meanings for performance and performance art, offering ways of thinking beyond their usual frames of reference, while at once recognizing the substantial work carried out by artists, critics, and theorists who have built the meanings, references, and implications since the beginning of the “performative turn.” Various themes and sets of questions predominate in this book, woven in and out of the two key areas and highlighting the title from different perspectives.

The book’s first conversation—between **Yvonne Rainer** and **Carola Dertnig**—revolves around the question of how we can think about teaching activities, about mutual expectations within art institutions, among genres, between students, and about the special subtlety inherent in teaching a format that is as mobile as performance.

Susanne Neuburger, taking as her springboard Günther Brus’s “Viennese Walk” from 1965, traces Vienna’s specific historical yet contemporary significance

within the history of performance art. A cartographic glance at local performance history (making) is the source of the two essays by **Sabine Gebhardt Fink** and **Margarit von Büren**. They introduce their specific method of historicization by reconstructing a communicative memory, drawing oral history as exemplified by the Basel Performance Chronicle.

In her conversation with Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein, **Amelia Jones** discusses background of her scholarly career and her research into interdependency within the dynamics of contemporary art production. **Sabina Holzer**, relating the notion of the *Ignorant Schoolmaster* by Jacques Rancière to performative practice, formulates the difficulty of institutionalizing performance and reflects on what shape the practice could take within contemporary art.

Lilo Nein proposes in her essay a dynamic reading of the liaison between the live act and its surrounding texts. **Simone Forti** and **Carrie Lambert-Beatty** discuss Forti’s half-century in dance: her work, its changing contexts, and her perspectives on performance now and in the past.

Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein points in her text to the importance of revisiting art history with the performative paradigm in mind. With this integrative approach she turns to works by Eve Hesse, Josephine Pryde, and Carolee Schneemann. **Barbara Clausen** sketches three central exhibitions from her curatorial practice, asking how performance art as a method, a medium, and a practice of many histories can be (re)defined today within an institutional context.

Andrea Fraser, in her critical reading of the discursive development of the term “performativity,” proposes the concept of enactment instead, and explores its psychoanalytical potential. Drawing on the hermeneutics of the philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer, **Philip Auslander**, in conversation with Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein, seeks to develop a theory of performance documentation focusing on the audience’s phenomenological relationship to the performance document rather than the document’s ontological relationship to the original performance.

Mechtild Widrich asks what re-performance and re-enactment share, and suggests that, no matter which part we play, we construct an imaginary performance whose markers meld with our own being-in-time and which we want to convey to the future. **Martha Wilson**, in conversation with Dietmar Schwärzler, chronicles the interwoven stages of her own creative contributions to early feminist and socially engaged studio practice, as well as her dissemination of the work of like-minded individuals through the legendary performance space and archive Franklin Furnace.

Carola Dertnig questions the terms of one's own research, artistic exploration, and teaching, especially in connection with the varied educational relationships an institution always provides. Based on her teaching practice, **Marie-Luise Lange** outlines the inherent artistic, responsive, social, sensual, and emancipatory potential of performance art.

Sketching out the dynamics of her collaborative practice, **Stefanie Seibold** traces a history of performance art in Vienna (and beyond) through personal involvement as an artist, teacher, writer, and curator, and points to its contemporary role as one of the key conceptual-political practices in today's art arena. **Suzana Milevska** distinguishes between the "spectacular" and "performative" in her analysis of the archives and research in the project *Woman's Book* by Liljana Gjuzelova.

Sabeth Buchmann and **Constanze Ruhm** present the interim results of their long-term research into the subject of the rehearsal, which—when understood as a meta-reflexive medium—conjoins fine art, theater, film, and performative practices. A poetic statement by **Lilo Nein** rounds out—and at the same time opens up—this book.

Despite this stimulating range of thoughts on the continually urgent questions of performance art in today's cultural landscape, the plateau remains open, a free space (a *Spielraum!*) for future thoughts on performance art. We look forward to a discussion continuing beyond the pages of this book for many years to come.

Some Exercise in Complex Seeing Is Needed

Yvonne Rainer in Conversation with Carola Dertnig



Fig. 1
Yvonne Rainer, *Assisted Living: Do You Have Any Money?*, 2013.

Some exercise in complex seeing is needed.

– Bertolt Brecht, *The Literalization of the Theatre* (Notes to the Threepenny Opera)

From Carola Dertnig
To Yvonne Rainer
May 9, 2012

Dear Yvonne,
I hope this finds you well.

I just traveled from Vienna with a group of students to see your show in Bregenz. I said to them: Seven hours on the train is long, but there have not been many Yvonne Rainer retrospectives on offer yet, either in Europe or the States. So off we went ... during the Easter holidays.

It was so interesting to see the films and performances “all at once,” and to better understand the relationship between the performances and films and, later on, the relationship between your early performances and your more recent performances. One of the students, Janine Schneider, came to our opening in Bregenz. I think she spoke with you? Maybe you remember meeting her in 2007, when you were in Vienna—I think—for *Continuous Project Altered Daily*.

Two first-year students had the idea to interview you, and met you at the hotel. Of course they were excited to meet you and ask the questions they had prepared for the interview. In the middle of talking and getting the camcorder ready for recording, the fire alarm went off, and it was SO loud that you all had to leave the hotel. It was quite an exciting “fire alarm.” The two students were so embarrassed; they had just started studying Performative Art at the Academy and were just hoping that there would be no failure, and certainly no fire alarm! Anyway, Janine was one of those two students.

I often think of this funny beginning.

Meanwhile, Janine is my student assistant and I remember you loved the “fire alarm interview.” They showed the video at the students’ end-of-year presentations. The performance class, which I have been teaching at the Academy since 2007, has continued to develop ever since, and I still find it very challenging!

I remember when you and I once spoke about teaching and the question

came up: How does one teach performance? This still seems to be a very crucial question to me! Well, last year Felicitas Thun and I organized a symposium on the topic at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna called "This Sentence is Now Being Performed – Research and Teaching in Performance and Performative Art" (<http://blogs.akbild.ac.at/performancesymposium>).

It was a great symposium. For instance, Simone Forti came to hold a workshop and teach us her famous *Huddle*. Carrie Lambert-Beatty and Simone Forti had a really interesting public talk on Simone's work! Martha Wilson gave a great lecture, as you can imagine, on the history of Franklin Furnace.

We are currently working on the reader *Mapping Research and Teaching in Times of Performative Fine Arts* (working title), a collection of the contributions from the symposium that also includes further international perspectives on research and teaching in performance art. And I still have a question in mind that we once spoke about: How does one teach performance today?

And since Carrie (Lambert-Beatty) and I were in the same year of the Whitney Program (1988), your Performance Talk had quite an impact on both of us! I can (or cannot) imagine how busy you are! I know your show just opened in Cologne and that you also spoke on a panel there!

We would be extremely pleased if you would consider contributing a text to this publication! It would be a great honor to publish a text of yours on teaching performance. These are the other contributors we have asked so far, most, but not all, of whom took part in the symposium: Margarit von Büren, Barbara Clausen, Sabine Gebhardt Fink, Simone Forti, Andrea Fraser, Judith Hopf, Amelia Jones, Carrie Lambert-Beatty, Marie-Luise Lange, Susanne Neuburger (mumok), Constanze Ruhm (Academy of Fine Arts Vienna), Heike Roms, Martha Wilson (Franklin Furnace), and others.

I hope to hear from you soon, and I also hope you are very well!
All the best for now!

From Yvonne Rainer
To Carola Dertnig
May 18, 2012

Hi Carola: Great to hear from you in such detail. First, I must know the deadline for your book. I am very pressed this year with commitments, but the question "how to teach performance?" is indeed an urgent one. The more I

teach my "Materials for Performance" course, the less I know. It is like handling jello. In the '60s at least we knew what the previous expectations of "dance," "painting," "music," and "theater" were, so all you had to do was knock your head against those walls and come up with something interesting. Now that all the walls have been torn down, where does one begin? I am very old-fashioned, in a sense, in that I continue to work with trained dancers and, while using their technical skills, try to push them into other modes of behavior beyond their training, which is not always a stretch for them because they already, as mature dancers, have been exposed to all kinds of stuff. At the university where I teach, I deal mostly with visual artists who have no dance training, so my starting emphasis is on texts, which doesn't always lead anywhere. Sometimes I'm ready to throw up my hands and quit. But I'm willing to investigate the issues involved in more depth, given I have enough time. Thanks for thinking of me,
Yvonne

From Carola Dertnig
To Yvonne Rainer
June 1, 2012

Sorry for writing so late, but I had to figure out the deadline situation first, and it has been extended! Surprise! Well, we would love to have you in the book and I think this would be a great contribution. We thought the deadline was earlier, but applying for funding is taking longer than we thought (as usual). So let's put it this way: Is there a possibility for you to write a text this year? That sounded so familiar: The more I teach my "Materials for Performance" course, the less I know, (I thought that it is only me who has this problem). At which art school are you presently teaching performance?

When I started teaching performance at the Academy, the faculty and the dean believed performance to be an elusive medium, one that does not require a fixed space. So, when the school had to rent out a space for the class, we were repeatedly asked to leave the space! Then there was a university strike about student fees across Austria, in which our school was also involved. So, the performance students started to build a wall out of cardboard to create their own space, which they needed. The wall turned out to be quite well designed. We have kept the cardboard walls since the strike (even though it is over). The cardboard walls are still part of our space and the faculty loves them now, and the performance department has become quite popular ... (And, in general, performance has become quite a central topic within the art context ... which makes me wonder) ... I started teaching performance to visual artists, but then some dancers registered for the course and said:

“Where is the rehearsal space in this school for visual art? Why don’t we do any kind of warm-up?” And so we began doing just that ... Although we still don’t have a rehearsal space, I realized: “Oops, I need to integrate some warm-up training or have more practice focused on the body ...” But it’s not so easy for people with a visual arts background.

The students decided to create a bike tour through the city ... A performative bike tour ... Let’s see where it takes us. One student took us to a parking garage; we walked down below and he danced for us between the cars ... As he came back to the ground level he fainted ... The garage had some resemblance to Tati’s *Traffic*.

It is nice that the texts in your publication from Bregenz are translated into German, so we can read them in both languages ... I like that—sometimes I understand certain aspects better in English and others better in German ...

Until soon,
Carola

From Yvonne Rainer
To Carola Dertnig
June 1, 2012

Hi Carola: Interesting to read your experiences teaching performance in a visual art department. I’ve been teaching my performance course for the last five years at UC Irvine, an hour south of LA. Space is a crucial issue. A new art center building opened up this year, but the theater and dance departments seem to have the Black Box sewn up. It’s a turf thing. In 1975 when I taught for a semester at CalArts, my art students who wanted to work in video had to steal a key to the film department and go in at midnight in order to have access to equipment. So it goes.

I have so much on my plate till the end of this year—have to make two new dances—that I can’t see settling down to write anything extensive. Would an email conversation, such as this one, suffice? Yvonne

From Carola Dertnig
To Yvonne Rainer
June 6, 2012

Dear Yvonne,
Hmm: “the Black Box.” It sounds a bit difficult, doesn’t it? I have worked with a Black Box setting only once, in Oslo, and, although the productions at the event were quite diverse, they all felt a bit similar. So, I was

wondering if this might be a Black Box “issue,” or perhaps I have not fully understood it? Also, your work has been presented in several frameworks, but not set up for presentation in a Black Box setting.

That is an interesting story about CalArts ... (Today they seem to have quite a huge film and photo department.) In 2008, I taught performance for a semester there for master students in the photo department! I was quite impressed to see that all the students prepared a “live performance” at the end of the semester, some of which were really very interesting. Where I teach now there are often so many questions, and by the end of the course the students’ works turn out to be something totally different than a live performance.

I often give them this kind of assignment, because those working in the context of visual arts are often a bit shy about performing ... but it is good training. While I was teaching in LA there was a show on Allan Kaprow at MOCA. Some of the CalArts students were part of the reinventions there. And one student even had the opportunity to be part of the “reinvention” of Kaprow’s happenings in LA.

Already back then I was thinking that if the same assignment for a Kaprow reinvention would be given in Vienna it would probably become something totally different ... Sometimes I would like to ask my students: “Can you just do the assignment I asked for?” But maybe these are just different ways of doing things and reflecting on issues.

Well, this semester we were invited to do a Kaprow reinvention at a former commune called Friedrichshof. (The commune was run by Viennese actionist Otto Muehl.) It broke up in 1989, due to its entanglements with issues around power as well as child and drug abuse.

Paradoxically, at the same time, the whole of Eastern Europe broke down as well ... Otto Muehl ended up in prison for seven years. Since I remember the commune from my childhood, it always seemed to me to be a place that was tightly packed. Seven hundred people lived there. Loads of artists came to visit, people like Joseph Beuys and others ... Towards the end, the commune self-destructed ...

Now, the commune feels a bit empty, although it’s still there ... It’s been turned into a kind of wellness and nature hotel! Some of the artists still live there and rent “living and working spaces.” They also built a new exhibition space where they feature work by many artists, and now it’s Kaprow! So, they asked the performance class that I teach to reinvent Kaprow’s *Stockroom* happening.

The plan was to stay there for three days and work on the piece. Well, after half a day, the students did not feel like dealing with hidden and unreflected issues of the commune and making them into a Kaprow piece. So we canceled the project, which (again) was not the original assignment, but I thought it was quite an interesting move for the group to cancel the project and decide to work on something else.

So my semester plan ended up being “Monday bike tour scores/performing through Vienna,” which I guess were influenced a bit by Kaprow’s instructions. At the end of the semester I often ask myself: “Did we not start with different questions at the beginning of the semester than what we had at the end?”

In a visual arts department it is hard to work on one performance piece together, since there are all these personalities ... I once invited Simone Forti to do a workshop and I can still feel today how we benefited from the experience. For instance, I would also like to invite Sara Wookey to speak, as a preparation for *Trio A*.

Unfortunately, I was not able to attend the symposium in Cologne, but Sabeth Buchmann told me it was very good.

How do you produce two dances in one year? That’s quite amazing! It is so nice that your work touches so many people now; this sounds a bit silly, but it’s true. It makes me happy.

I still think of when Carrie and I were in the Whitney Program in 1997–98, and we heard one of the first lectures on performance that you had given in a while ... Anyway, it was an inspiring lecture for Carrie and I! Because it brought up both historical and contemporary issues ...

Well, I would love to continue our email conversation for the publication. Shall we set a time frame over the summer? Or what would work best for you?

From Yvonne Rainer
To Carola Dertnig
June 6, 2012

Carola: I think we have already begun. My problems in teaching performance these days circle around students who want to use their bodies but have no dance training, and who, when I steer them to some basic movement classes, end up being “the worst in the class!” So what they are doing seems to revolve around notions of “failure.” Foregrounding of awkwardness, much visible

effort invested in minimal or self-deprecating results. I’m thinking specifically of video artists, who have an advantage in making these efforts “work” via framing, close-ups, off-screen, etc.— all the devices that one can utilize in film and video.

As soon as one student suggested doing her movements live, I tried to convey to her that live performance is a totally different ball game. Whether you like it or not, the traditions of dance come into play and have to be considered. This may seem doctrinaire, but the postmodern challenges to the borderlines between disciplines only work when those borderlines are somehow acknowledged within the performance, so the spectator trusts that the performer knows what she is doing. OK, I’ll pose it as a question:

“If you’re going to knock your head against a traditional wall, should you show a couple of those bricks?”

As I articulate this, I feel very old-fashioned. The “bricks” for New York dancers in the ‘60s were contextual; that is, all kinds of people performed on the same program and in each other’s work: dancers, visual artists, composers. Sometimes it was clear who the trained people were, sometimes not. But back then it was easy to see the borders that had to be crossed or erased. Now it’s impossible to say anything prescriptive, so please take my question with a grain of salt.

Later, Yvonne

From Carola Dertnig
To Yvonne Rainer
June 8, 2012

Dear Yvonne,

Thank you! I am thinking, and I will reply soon and thoughtfully!

I am in the middle of assessing the final shows for the diplomas at the Academy (spring semester)! In the afternoons and evenings I have a charming six-year-old daughter who wants and needs some attention. This is just to let you know why it takes me a few days to reply!

Until very soon,
Carola

From Yvonne Rainer
To Carola Dertnig
June 8, 2012

I understand.
Yvonne

From Carola Dertnig
To Yvonne Rainer
June 11, 2012

Dear Yvonne,

I will try to develop my thoughts here regarding your last e-mail.

In Europe, historically, the term “performance” was originally more situated within a visual art context. The term was defined by performances, for example those by VALIE EXPORT, Peter Weibel, Günter Brus’s *Spaziergang*, and Abramović/Ulay. In the States, I came to understand that the term “performance” had various meanings in different fields, for example in theater, dance, or plays ... Today, performance may be at its “highest point,” and now it has come to be a term I sometimes still have a hard time understanding.

I think—at least, as far as I understand it (so please correct me if I am wrong)—the Judson period was a time when artists from different fields interfered with each other’s work. The main point I see is that it was clear from which background the artists were coming. Perhaps the problem we have today is that it no longer matters what one’s basis or roots are ... So today it might be that the very modern practice of transgressing borders and fields could make it all appear a bit mushy.

Now I seem old-fashioned too, but I do think being precise matters.

Regarding teaching performance: I wonder, since performance has become quite a wide-ranging mix within different art genres, if university programs for performance need to develop specific courses. Students could choose variations of performative techniques offered within the framework of a curriculum for studying performance.

On the one hand, creating a curriculum for performance would institutionalize performance even more (?). On the other hand, it might provide a deeper basis and foundation for performance education. The curriculum might include courses on language, spoken word, movement,

dance, live/performance, and documentation (performative video documents).

Since I work at a school for visual arts, we do not have any of the courses on live performance or dealing explicitly with the body (but we do have classes on video) ... For instance, the students and I have collectively begun collaborating with Tanzquartier. We develop the curriculum together, more or less, in learning by doing! Our school is based around the visual arts and, meanwhile, in comparison, isn’t UC Irvine now more oriented toward dance or drama? Maybe this is also something that needs to be considered?

When I started teaching performance in Vienna after living in New York—or rather, when I began to understand that I did not know what or how to teach—I realized it was because there was no visibility for what I wanted to teach: I couldn’t find anything on it in the library or archives! There was no material to be found except for what I had in my memories. Viennese Actionism was an important moment in art history, but I grew up in artistic circles in Vienna in the 1970s, and I knew that there was a different local history of performance that needed to be uncovered, documented, and worked with. And, after living abroad for many years, when I returned to Vienna for teaching, I was struck by how little value was placed on archiving performance art. There was a serious lack of documentation. That’s when I began a project with Stefanie Seibold called *Let’s Twist Again: If You Can’t Think It, Dance It. Performance in Vienna from 1960 until Today*. We used a sort of “snowball system” to build a structure for raising awareness of this lack of performance history. We started asking artists from younger generations who they were influenced by from the older generations. We gathered images and material about these works. Connecting these points and material enabled us to approach the history of performance art in Austria in a nonlinear way. In the end, after five years of research and two exhibitions on this subject, we also published a book. For me, it is an important resource for teaching. It is an important part of my theoretical grounding.

Regarding live performance: I agree that when dealing with live performance it is, as you say, a totally “different ball game.” Yes, dance comes into play, but so does the notion of language and the spoken word, in addition to a certain kind of “live presence” in the moment. I think this is why, often within a visual art context, students sometimes end up first doing “a video performance” and then a live performance—and sometimes I find this can be a bit boring. In a visual context it is often so important to take a serious performative risk!



Fig. 2
Carola Dertnig, Stefanie Seibold, *Psycho-geographic Map of a performative scene in Vienna, 2002*.

My mother was a feminist who began to dance at the age of thirty-five, and later, in her fifties, she became a Feldenkrais trainer. She had a kind of nonlinear dance career!

Ever since I was little, she would always say about doing something live: “Don’t be afraid of embarrassment! Just do it with passion!” I think she said it for the first time when we were traveling with a circus. The white-face clown—Circus Roncalli’s main attraction—fell ill, and I took on his role overnight. I was thirteen at the time, and was supposed to be the show’s opening act (and perform in front of 3,000 people). Accompanied by a drum-roll, I was supposed to jump out of an egg, but my nerves got the best of me and when I stepped out of the papier maché egg, I fell flat on my nose. The audience thought this was “part of the performance” and roared with laughter! So, one thing I learned from this moment, especially about live performance, was that one has to deal with awkward moments/failure, but with a certain kind of “stage presence,” which is where the body comes into play!

Regarding video/documentation/performance: I think these are different settings—live performance/video or film of a performance/documentation of a performance. How does one document a performance? What is a documentation of a performance? Is it a film? Is it a score? Is the documentation of the performance itself—of the live event?

Babette Mangold and Peter Moore come to mind here. Kurt Kren documented the actionists and made his own famous films. And, of course, there are your films and your book ... So I find it very challenging and important to think about the issue of performance documentation as a subject in itself. It might at least be a “good exercise” for video artists to also perform live.

Regarding the self-deprecating results of students: sometimes I think performance is often the best tool for self-deprecating results, and hopefully to finally overcome them and move on!

Good Night!
Carola

From Yvonne Rainer
To Carola Dertnig
June 11, 2012

Carola: You’re quite right. The term “performance” didn’t really appear until the 1970s or ‘80s. In the United States, before that there were “Happenings,” “Theater Pieces,” “Dances,” “Concerts,” etc. The difference in structure and content was an individual matter and not bound by nomenclature. And it was fairly clear who was a “dancer” and who was not, what was dance-based and what came out of the visual arts. Now, whatever happens in a museum context becomes “performance” regardless of content or creator. The term “performance” has become a catch-all.

At UCI the pedagogy remains primarily border-defined. The Dance Department teaches traditional techniques which are then utilized in what is “choreographed.” The Drama Department is a little more adventurous: Annie Louie teaches “Movement for Actors,” which incorporates dance-like movement within scene and dialogue exercises. I have seen some interesting material come out of that. I teach in the Studio Art Department and try to encourage mixing up traditions of movement and literary material. It is mostly visual artists who take that class. These pedagogical separations are characteristic of big universities, whereas smaller or autonomous art schools tend to be more flexible, or should I say less turf-bound.

That's amazing that you were a circus clown at such a young age! And that your mother is a dancer. This is a perfect background for thinking about and teaching performance. I have used early cinema with its vaudeville influences, as did people like Claes Oldenburg and Red Grooms. In dance, the shenanigans of people like Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy are a rich resource for performance ideas and movement. As I've indicated before, the problem is that students get attached to one manifestation or idea and think they've made "a piece," whether it's live or video. They are easily satisfied with short-term or single results rather than accumulation and distribution over a longer duration. Installation art is very often reductive in that the repetition of images on multiple channels does not deepen the meanings. "Mix it up," I like to say. Some people call me heavy-handed, and it's odd that I have a reputation for being a Minimalist, maybe because of the damn "No Manifesto." I prefer the use of "radical juxtaposition" as an aesthetic and pedagogical pointer.

From Carola Dertnig
To Yvonne Rainer
June 19, 2012

Dear Yvonne,
Please forgive me for my delay. June is a crazy time, with "final diplomas" at the Academy. I started to write a week ago, but then I was not even able to read my e-mails. Now this one has gotten a bit long ...

It was quite interesting because we had some performances as final diploma pieces. The commission is made up of art teachers, who are more accustomed to evaluating works in painting, sculpture, and—in more recent years—film and video. Performance, however, is a new medium for most of them. Performance also needs a commission that is sensitized to the fact that they are indeed evaluating a performance.

In the middle of a performance for a student's final piece, a member of the commission said, "The commission is here now, are you ready for our questions?" The person performing her final piece for her diploma said: "I'll be ready for questions when the performance is done." This was a good answer, but it made me realize that there needs to be a process that creates greater awareness for a medium like performance within the art institution.

It's interesting how it works at UCI. It sounds quite perfect that everything is in one school. Dance. Drama. Visual Arts. When I was teaching at CalArts, I also really liked that the dance, music, and visual arts departments at least crossed paths in the hallways! Dancers danced in the hallway, musicians played music, and visual artists did their work there. Even

though, pedagogically, this took place more or less on an "unconscious level," I still think it would be an interesting premise for putting together a serious performance program. In Austria, performance is studied at an academy for visual arts, so would a performance program need to be conceptualized? What would the perfect circumstances be for teaching performance? And what would the curriculum be like?

It's really funny what you say about the "damn 'No Manifesto.'" I think the "No Manifesto" influenced the worlds of conceptual art and dance. In the last few decades, the concept and thoughts of famous choreographers like Jerome Bell, Xavier Le Roy, and many others are based, so to speak, on the "No Manifesto" idea.

So you are teaching studio artists: Is it a bit like at the Whitney? I remember when you said this to me about "mixing up results" and other contents. I'm still thinking about it, but it doesn't work for everyone. I guess I am not a good mixer. Harun Farocki is one of the teachers I work with: young artists are often too quickly satisfied with a result. I mean, I am not so young anymore, but I am often very interested in simple results. I do not like too many ingredients when I cook, and there are some similarities to my process of making art.

Would you say that "Happening" was defined by Kaprow's writings and/or through his Happenings? "Happening" was defined around the same time as postmodern dance by Judson Dance at Judson Church? The early '60s ... what a time!

Simone Forti said that people who went to happenings might not go to dance pieces and vice versa.

At her talk in Vienna (where there is a big retrospective on Oldenburg at mumok), Patty Mucha spoke about the first major pieces she sewed for/with Oldenburg. She said Oldenburg's early pieces, for instance the *Storefront Pieces* at Ray Gun Theater, were called theater rather than a happening. (In retrospect, Claes Oldenburg's early work seems quite collaborative; I think Oldenburg sees it this way too, but this would take us to another subject altogether.)

As a child in the mid-seventies I remember that Haus-Rucker-Co (an important architects' group in Austria) created a large space with a giant inflatable mattress and lots of clear balloons. The visitors were allowed to jump on them, and of course us kids loved it! None of us ever forgot it. This event remained in my memory as a happening. I am not sure, though, if I understood it as such already then, or if this came later on.

Today, in retrospect, I would consider the Haus-Rucker-Co experience to be a happening.

I have other memories of things I grasped as performance. I am not sure anymore if the term performance arrived later, but I guess it did. It did not actually matter then, but it does today. Maybe, that's because, as you said, "performance became this overall term" for whatever one does with the "body or voice" within an institutional context. Now an opening without a performance is no opening at all! This makes me suspicious, because I still feel very strongly about performance history.

I see performance as a liberating feminist-queer political tool! As Leslie Hill once said: "Suffragettes invented performance art!" Through the early twentieth century, dance and particularly the female choreographers like Isadora Duncan—and later also through modern and post-modern choreographers (like you and Simone Anna Halprin)—performance snuck in and became a strategy in its own right. The strategy is to use performative techniques for political, feminist, and queer issues, and for performance art (which has its roots in feminism). It also includes the work of Pussy Riot, who are in prison now because they performed a song against Putin's politics in an Orthodox church in Moscow. It's quite harmless actually. In Europe, they would not have gotten any attention at all from the media.

I remember when I was in my first year of studies and a television crew came to the art school. We all had to come up with something fast for television! I remember seeing performances in my childhood and finding them embarrassing, because the performers were often naked. At that moment, I couldn't come up with anything other than wrapping myself up in toilet paper and jumping out naked.

In my memory this was a performance. It included being naked and doing something. Although it may not have been the best idea, I remember that it was my idea of performance at the time. The television crew was pleased, but I was not. I am still trying to figure out when the term performance became part of my set of concepts.

Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy! I am big fan of Jacques Tati and Buster Keaton as well, even though Laurel and Hardy are a good resource for movement. I also think slapstick and comedy are interesting fields for feminist thought and issues. I studied dance too, so I have some training, but I am dyslexic. Here is a link to a small video of mine, *A Car* (2007, 7 min.), based on slapstick. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=foHTjidgZgk>). Carola

P.S. I would also add Simone Forti's "dance reports" to the terms from the '60s and '70s, don't you think?

From Yvonne Rainer
To Carola Dertnig
June 19, 2012

Carola: That's a hilarious video. I call it a car poem or car performance. I'm too busy right now with my new dance to respond the way I would wish, so I must wait until the weekend. Yvonne

**From Carola Dertnig
To Yvonne Rainer
June 19, 2012**

**I am glad you like it.
There is no rush!
Carola**

From Yvonne Rainer
To Carola Dertnig

Dear Carola:

I am finally back in LA and able to address some of the many issues you brought up in your last e-mail a month ago. I spent the month making a dance that required the performers to do intricate foot work while reciting various texts, from leftist political tracts to bad jokes to newspaper stories. It was a difficult challenge, but they ended up doing it to my—and their—satisfaction.

I may have given you an inaccurate impression of the situation in the School of the Arts at the university where I teach. Although the actual buildings dedicated to the respective arts—dance, visual art, theater, music, etc.—are near each other, there is hardly any collaboration. The Dance Department is especially entrenched in teaching traditional techniques, training the body, etc., but as far as I can tell, the choreography that comes out of there is married to that training. On the other hand, some of my students in Studio Art have, with my encouragement, taken rudimentary technique classes either in Dance or Theater—Annie Louie teaches "Movement for Actors"—and are developing what I would categorize as a kind of hybrid physical practice. It is very body-oriented, very primitive. What I would like to see is fourth-year dance students taking some video or performance history courses that would give them ideas outside of the conventional dance histories. I don't see that happening. And since I'm retiring next year, it won't come from me.

When I first came to UCI, my performance course drew people from various disciplines—dance, art history, comparative literature, and studio artists—and the mix of people paid off in some interesting collaborations. Although the course continues to be cross-listed, I have not had that mix of people since then, I'm not sure for what reason. I have often thought that trained dancers are doomed to reinvent the wheel if they are not exposed to a community of like-minded rebels. In New York there are now many enclaves of crossover choreographers that verge on being called "performance artists," that is, they use a mix of body types and training. From the little I've seen, it is not always successful, but I am glad it is happening.

You are quite right about my bias for "mixing things up." It doesn't work for everyone, but I find it's sometimes necessary pedagogically when students come in with one idea and think they've made "a piece," especially in video. Repetition and extended duration are two-edged swords and must be used judiciously, or with a degree of knowledge about how they've been used historically.

About the term "Happening": as far as I know, it was Kaprow who first used it, to the displeasure of some of his contemporaries, like Robert Whitman, who call his work "Theater Pieces." Simone Forti is half right: happenings and dance concerts were somewhat separate in terms of audience, but I remember going to all kinds of events—music, dance, happenings, Fluxus, gallery openings—and seeing some of the same spectators there. Remember, the New York art world was a much smaller place in the '60s, and we who were studying with Cunningham and Robert Dunn were especially interested in our contemporaries' work, whatever their medium.

I love the paragraph in which you quote Leslie Hill: "Suffragettes invented performance art"!! That's right! I'm not so sure about my own forebears, Isadora, Graham, Humphrey, etc., who can be seen as continuing in a straight historical dance line. There's a way in which the history of performance art begins in political interventions and resistance—gay, feminist, civil rights, etc. Groups like Act Up, Guerrilla Girls, Gran Fury, Pussy Riot (new to me) all extend the parameters of performance art. Duchamp and Cage of course were influential. Could Act Up have happened without them?

Thanks for the video. When I get a decent video of my recent dance *Assisted Living: Do You Have Any Money?* I shall send it to you.

Very best,
Yvonne

Performing Vienna

Susanne Neuburger



Fig. 3
Günter Brus, *Wiener Spaziergang*, 1965.

“I was nervous about the action, of course, but I still had a good feeling about it. I knew I was making art history.”¹

It is noticeable that in Vienna of the 1950s and '60s there was an increase in the frequency of actions in the inner city, in the vicinity of the Vienna State Opera, Kärntner Straße, and Stephansplatz. Since Vienna has established itself over the last few years as a place where there is an increasing amount of teaching and research concerned with performative art, a broader view of the Viennese context is desired. In principle, KÖR—the Vienna municipal program for art in public spaces—has taken on the task of administering public space. A reappraisal could do much to contribute to the art (and cultural) history of Vienna, but cannot do so if it takes place in a fragmentary manner, full of gaps and imperfectly integrated historically, as is the case at present. What categories are available for a taxonomy? As with other programs of art in public spaces, KÖR encompasses both permanent and temporary projects. At the moment, these are chronologically listed on its website.² In addition, the “Art Walks” folder offers three tours on which forty-five works of art can be viewed. These are either in the city center or adjacent districts. The earliest work noted on the website is a 1962 sculpture by Fritz Wotruba located behind the Vienna City Hall. The next entries, for 1968, are *Kunst und Revolution* (Art and Revolution), along with VALIE EXPORT’s *Tapp und Tastkino* (Touch Cinema) and *Aus der Mappe der Hundigkeit* (From the Underdog File). *Wiener Spaziergang* (Vienna Walk) from 1965, one of the seminal performative works in Viennese urban space, does not appear in the KÖR records. As far as the 1960s are concerned, Arnulf Rainer’s 1968 action in Stephansplatz is also omitted.

It is certain that the locations of actions in the city center were intentionally chosen. VALIE EXPORT, for example, points out how impossible it was to exhibit in museums and galleries, and talks generally of the urban environment being a “necessity” because it allowed access to other levels of the public.³ The action with Peter Weibel, *From the Underdog File*, for instance, takes place on Kärntner Straße and ends when the two artists go on foot to the nearby Galerie St. Stephan. In addition to EXPORT, Günter Brus also emphasizes the consequences of outside space.⁴ On the morning of July 5, 1965, and with the explicit intention of making art history, he begins his *Vienna Walk*.⁵

1 Günter Brus in an interview with E. Znaymer in May 2005, <http://www.datum.at/0505/stories/782980>.

2 See <http://www.koer.or.at>.

3 VALIE EXPORT in an unpublished interview with Hildegund Amanshauser, October 9, 2007.

4 See Christel Wester, *Anfänge eines Künstlers in Wien*, www.dradio.de/dlf/sendungen/buechermarkt/760764.

5 See also Eva Badura-Triska and Hubert Klocker, *Wiener Aktionismus. Kunst und Aufbruch im Wien der 1960er-Jahre* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2011), esp. 54 and 299 with illus.

Brus is brought by car—ducking at every crossing, as he himself reports—and gets out on Heldenplatz. His route is predetermined. He wants to get as far as Stephansplatz, but has hypothesized before starting that he would not get far. In fact, halfway there, around Bräunergasse, he is taken into custody, escorted to the police station and, in the end, taken away by taxi.

In the title, Brus emphasizes the action of walking, but he likewise indicates his status as an image, a living picture.⁶ He is wearing a suit painted white with a dark line down the middle of both front and back. The line suggests both symmetry and laterality but, above all, a break, an injury, a wound. Brus has concentrated everything on his person, his picture, and conceives of his body—to use his own words—as “intention,” “event,” and “result.”⁷

His guise is twofold, doubled by layering two surfaces—the clothing and the paint—which would otherwise be alongside each other. At the same time, he is both object and subject: his body is also his picture and vice versa, in the same way that black and white can always be understood as a reversal. The line is at once picture and body. When, from the waist down, it deviates from the symmetrical and follows the right leg, it becomes a body, though this is revoked by the offset line on the back of his left leg. One could see it as an axis that cartographically encompasses body and pictorial space. Jagged and broken, it carries the status of the textile and can be interpreted as iconic critique, wound, and also difference (as EXPORT has often emphasized in relation to her own work.)⁸ It is then everything from a tear or cut to a stab—as Brus himself said—and a suture (as it has been called in art theory since the 1960s). However, it was not this tear, but the white paint that was to seal Brus’s fate: “By being painted white [you have] behaved in a manner likely to [...], and which did, in fact, cause a breach of the peace.”⁹

In one sense public order was also black and white, finding an optical echo in the black and white and frequently gray era of postwar Vienna. However, black and white was a habitus that had also acquired other connotations from Dada and Surrealism. Thus, while on a “Dada tour” of Holland in 1923 with his wife, Petro van Doesburg, Kurt Schwitters and Vilmos Huszar, Theo van Doesburg was called “negative,” whereby “everything that should be black is also white and vice versa.”¹⁰ The participants in the literary walk “Une soirée aux amants funèbres,” twelve years before Brus, offered these black-and-white pictures in the spirit of Dada. In this action, carried out in the summer of 1953 by HC Artmann together with the Wiener Gruppe (Vienna Group), “white asters or chrysanthemums,” “black clothing (quaint, old),” or “ribbons of black gauze” were prescribed as “decor.” “The men and women of the procession should appear entirely clothed in black and also with white make-up on the face.” The procession formed up at the Goethe monument and intended to take a route via the Opera, Kärntner Straße, Stephansplatz, Rothenturmstraße to the

Prater, where their destination was the “illusion railway.” However, it was halted by the police at the Urania and dispersed. During the walk, writings by Charles Baudelaire, Georg Trakl, and Gerard de Nerval were declaimed. Rühm emphasized “the simultaneity of the macabre and the poetic, [...] the protest against the conventional, normative, anonymity that was expressed more by a conscious otherness, being oneself and less by any overt aggression.”¹¹ Many years later (1999), Linda Bilda would quote a nineteenth-century regulation relating to social order at the Freeparty, which started from the Opera and moved around the Ring.¹²

Brus, however, is silent and initially appears before the public only in private or semi-private spaces. In contrast to the flaneur or Situationist, he shows little psycho-geographical interest in the city and its vestiges. Not unlike how Yves Klein “dived” into the city, Brus sets foot in it already fully costumed. For him it is a stage. He also does not stroll; he walks in a way that links the city with walking, as Thomas Bernhard described it in exemplary fashion in his 1971 text *Gehen* (Walking).¹³ Walking is a Minimalist and Post-Minimalist stylistic device, though there it usually deals with rural walkers, while Bernhard’s protagonists are underway in urban spaces, from Klosterneuburgerstraße to Steinhof; from special Viennese situations to those with a heterotopian character. In *Heldenplatz* Bernhard talks about the “Austrian stage.” He says, “Austria itself is no more than a stage/on which everything is crumbling, moldy, and decayed/a self-hating body of extras six-and-a-half million strong left alone with themselves/six-and-a-half million, moronic and raving mad.”¹⁴ It appears that it is this understanding of the “Austrian stage” that links the two artists. Brus had to leave the city, and Bernhard’s Austria, where one had “to be either National Socialist or Catholic, nothing else would be tolerated,”¹⁵ because of the *Art and Revolution* action, three years after the *Vienna Walk*.

6 See Günter Brus 1989, www.museum-joanneum.at › BRUSEUM › Werke in der Sammlung.

7 Quoted from Günter Brus, *Aktionen 1964/65*, photographed by S. Klein/Khasaq (Milan: Mazzotta, 2005), 3.

8 See VALIE EXPORT, “Der Riß im Bild – oder Raum-Zeit Brüche,” in *Suture – Phantasmen der Vollkommenheit* (Salzburg: Salzburger Kunstverein, 1994), 18.

9 Brus, interview by Znaymer, 2005; see also Wester, *Anfänge eines Künstlers in Wien*.

10 See Gabriele Mahn, “Kunst in der Kleidung: Beiträge von Sophie Taeuber, Johannes Itten und der verwandten Avantgarde,” in *Künstler ziehen an. Avantgarde-Mode in Europa 1910 bis 1939*, ed. Gisela Franke (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 1998), 68.

11 Quoted from Peter Csendes, *Wien: Von 1790 bis zur Gegenwart*, <http://www.books.google.at/books?isbn=3205992687761>. 12 See Carola Dertnig and Stefanie Seibold, eds., *Let’s Twist Again: If You Can’t Think It, Dance It. Performance in Vienna from 1960 until Today* (Gumpoldskirchen/Vienna: D.E.A. Kunstverlag, 2006).

13 See Angeli Janhsen and Thomas Bernhard, “Gehen. Gehende Künstler der Post-Minimal-Art. Gehende Rezipienten,” in *Politik und Medien bei Thomas Bernhard*, eds. Franziska Schößler and Ingeborg Villinger (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann Verlag, 2002), 51ff.

14 Thomas Bernhard, *Heldenplatz* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), 89.

15 Ibid., 63.

Besides referencing space and time, Brus uses painting as another reference point. His picture is one that has been tried and tested by modernity, where theater and performance often contain the defining medium integrated within them. In some cases, urban space also plays a role, as, for instance, when George Grosz wanders along Berlin's Kurfürstendamm¹⁶ as "Dada death," complete with cane and mask. Apropos costume, one could mention Oskar Schlemmer's dancers here as well. They staged themselves on the Bauhaus balconies, making other pictures of modernity. Schlemmer displayed his dancers as color fields or monochromes, inscribing them in squares, symmetries, and spatial axes. Here, movement was determined by the room axes, and these, in turn, defined the body.¹⁷ Brus shatters this polished image of modernity with impasto color, with materiality, a central break that reassigns meaning to any modernist referential ascription to the body as an "event." The act of painting is visible here, but it is not part of the action. This is quite different from Arnulf Rainer who, during this period, brings painting into the public arena. After his legendary Wolfsburg overpainting in 1961, Rainer was much in demand as a painter, and, around 1962, he was invited to take part in a large-scale urban project in Cologne by Wolf Vostell and Stefan Wewerka. He was supposed to carry out another public overpainting, but the whole project failed to be realized.¹⁸ He was to demonstrate his quasi-ritual self-painting of hands and face in 1968 on Stephansplatz. Like Brus, he was taken into custody.

As with the frequent choice of Stephansplatz, Heldenplatz as a location was never a coincidence. It was a site occupied by the events of 1938, and remained a point of reference, especially during the memorial anniversary year of 1988, when in Bernhard's *Heldenplatz* it took the title role and Krzysztof Wodiczko installed a large-scale projection there. It is not widely known that, two years after the *Homeless Projection* in Union Square, New York, Wodiczko made two works in Vienna. Wodiczko took Vladimir Mayakovsky's "the streets our brushes, the squares our palettes" literally, illuminating historical buildings, also in the sense of bringing light into dark places. He projected huge eagle wings on the Heldenplatz exedra, referring to the Noricum symbol above the legendary balcony. That in turn allowed Wodiczko to graphically refer to one of the greatest Austrian scandals of the 1980s. He also projected a horse at full gallop—front and back views—on opposite sides of the anti-aircraft bunker in Arenberg Park, once again "mobilizing" Austrian history.¹⁹

KÖR lists four projects for the year 1988— a sculpture exhibition at the BAWAG, "Freizone Dorotheergasse," "Querfeld I," and the Hrdlicka monument. This confirms the explosiveness of the above-mentioned sites, even though it was not Hrdlicka but Hans Haacke, with his 1988 work *Und ihr habt doch gesiegt* (And You Were Victorious After All) presented in Graz, who made a significant contribution to a re-assessment of the Nazi period. Fritz Wotruba, presented by KÖR as a boring modernist painter who had, after his return

from exile in Switzerland, "increasingly given up representational painting in favor of geometric abstraction,"²⁰ was also involved in similar confrontations. In 1955 he had to accept defeat when his design for the Staatsoper fire curtain—dark abstract forms—was rejected in favor of that by Rudolf Eisenmenger. The story of the depiction of Orpheus and Eurydice and the Dürer prize winner Eisenmenger (whom Hitler held in particularly high regard) would only be revealed in 1998 by Kara Walker with her shadow pictures. This introduced a new series of fire curtain designs initiated by the museum in progress. Even then (1998) it was still possible to collect 22,000 signatures from Eisenmenger supporters who were against the destruction of his work.²¹

Our traditional musical institutions such as the Staatsoper or Wiener Musikverein also conceal alternative histories. They had already been sites of a number of protests when, in 1982, the two artists Florian Sommer and Rudolf Herz stormed, naked, onto the stage during the New Year's concert. Acting in the name of the "Rosa Wirbel," they demanded "human rights for gays."²² And, of course, *Bitte liebt Österreich* (Please Love Austria) by Christoph Schlingensiefel, sited next to the Opera, has to be mentioned here. We are thus dealing with historically tried and tested locations for performative appearances. These have been repeatedly actuated, as they were in 2006, for instance, when the Opera was among the locations—the others being Stephansplatz, Heldenplatz, and Praterstern—chosen by US artist Sharon Hayes for her demonstration *In the Near Future*.²³

Translated from the German by Tim Sharp

16 See RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 68f.

17 Ibid., 102ff.

18 See Susanne Neuburger, "Köln, der Nouveau Réalisme und die Sammlung Hahn. Von der Stadtrundfahrt zum 'Postal Event.' Der Projektentwurf 'Cityrama II,'" in *Nouveau Réalisme*, ed. Susanne Neuburger (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 2005), 19, 23.

19 Commissioned by the Wiener Festwochen; the curator was Cathrin Pichler. See also Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Instruments, Projections, Vehicles* (Barcelona: Fondació Antoni Tàpies, 1992), 192f.

20 Quoted from KÖR-Folder "Art Walks."

21 See <http://www.mip.at>.

22 Dertnig and Seibold, *Let's Twist Again*, 46f.

23 Part of the mumok project "Wieder und Wider: Performance Appropriated," in collaboration with the Tanzquartier Vienna, 2006.

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Floating Gaps Considerations on the Basel Performance Chronicle, Part I

Sabine Gebhardt Fink

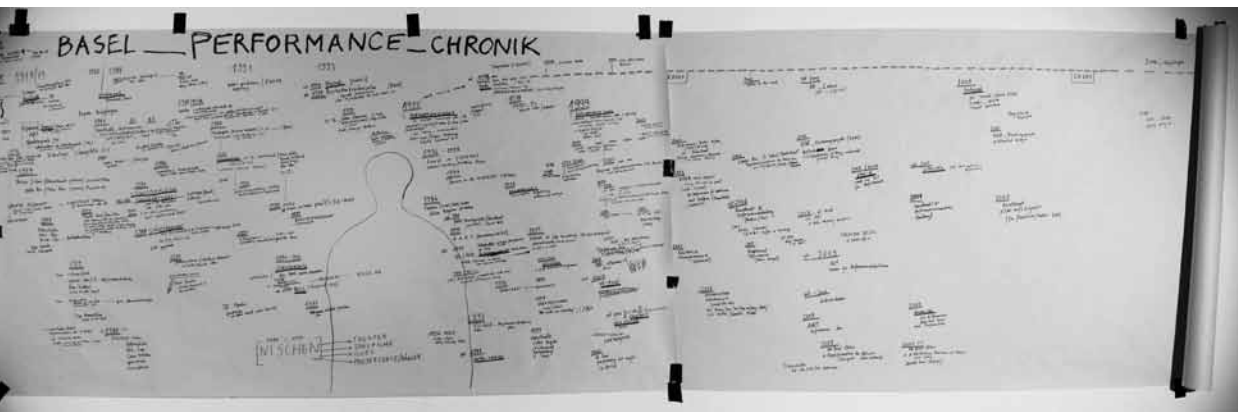


Fig. 4
Basel Performance Chronicle, *Map of Performance Chronicle 1970–2006*, 2009.

In the following essay, I will describe two key aspects of our work as the editors of the Basel Performance Chronicle. The main aim of this project is to reconstruct action art and performance art on the basis of pictorial material, personal testimonies, and interviews, and subsequently to make these art forms accessible to diverse audiences. In addition to the historical perspective, we also seek to pursue an artistic and communicative purpose. In fact, our aspiration is that these works—most of which have not yet been treated in the specialist literature—will be incorporated once again into the practice, teaching, and dissemination of art, as well as into present-day theory development. My part of the introduction to the research work behind “Floating Gaps” will first briefly describe the specific method we use (drawing on the discipline of oral history) to reconstruct a communicative memory. In her part, Margarit von Büren will write about specific interviews.

Preliminary Remarks

The Performance Chronicle is a cooperative network of artists, scholars, promoters, curators, and contemporary witnesses who have the shared aim of writing a critical history of performance art from the 1970s until the present day. The Chronicle addresses a wide variety of audiences who take an interest in the history of performance art and would like to make an active contribution to its reconstruction. In 2006, we used methods borrowed from the field of oral history to create a “map” of performance art in Basel. We decided to focus on a specific location so that we could elaborate both local and international aspects of this medium in close interexchange with contemporary witnesses. The Performance Chronicle collects and produces knowledge and recollections in an interdisciplinary manner and is explicitly more than just a network of artists or art historians. On the contrary, it seeks to productively unite different competences. It concentrates on a narrowly defined and exemplary field in which information about practices in performance art is collected and reflected upon.

Floating Gaps

The phenomenon of the floating gap, that is, a gap in collective memory that occurs over the course of oral recollection, was first observed by the ethnologist Jan Vansina in 1965.¹ According to Vansina, the structure of non-literate historical memory remains similar across different cultures. An initial phase characterized by plentiful information about the most recent past is followed by a second phase in which reports become extremely fragmentary. However, this is then followed by a third phase that once again yields a wealth of information and lore. The cultural theorist Jan Assmann called this interruption the

“floating gap.”² Assmann defined a floating gap as a gap in memory that is maintained with the passage of the generations and of which the historical consciousness of the community in question is not necessarily aware. Floating gaps manifest themselves in a type of memory denoted as communicative memory as opposed to cultural memory. According to Assmann, communicative memory comprises recollections that reach back around three generations (or eighty years), all of which concern the recent past. These are recollections that people share with their contemporaries but which disappear once again when the last bearers of the memory (representing a memory space) have died. The critical threshold for recollection lies at about forty years. This is where the first gaps begin to appear, until the information that has been transmitted by communicative memory completely disappears after about eighty years. The form of remembering in collective memory is through the mode of biographical recollection, which relates to the individual’s own experiences and the conditions in which they occurred, and is based on social interaction.³ One feature of biographical memory is the non-hierarchical participation structure that accompanies our everyday communication. In other words, every speaker has, on principle, equal competence. Another characteristic is the specific time structure mentioned above, which always spans around eighty years. With respect to performance art especially, an interest has now developed around memories of the genre and their collective meanings. In dealing with works from the 1970s, however, which are still familiar to an older generation, the collective lore is already on the critical threshold of beginning to be forgotten. This can be seen as a trigger for launching documentary projects such as the Performance Chronicle.



Fig. 5
Basel Performance
Chronicle, *Collective
Recollection, Via Studio*,
2006.

Incidentally, Vansina’s and Assmann’s considerations draw on theories proposed by Maurice Halbwachs in 1925.⁴ Halbwachs was interested in capturing the moment of transition from living memory, which he called “*mémoire vécu*,” to “*histoire*” or “*tradition*.” He saw this threshold as both an attempt to preserve the past against oblivion—and thus to promote transformation—and as an endeavor to establish lasting norms. In this view, we can already see an acknowledgment of the alliance between dominion or power and remembering or forgetting. Revolutionary societies are more likely to remember change, development, and shifts, whereas “cold societies”—the term stems from Claude Levi-Strauss⁵—build monuments and create documentation, such as genealogies, to legitimize their rule according to the following principle: “Dominion legitimizes itself retrospectively and immortalizes itself prospectively.”⁶ The aim of the first publication from the Basel Performance Chronicle was to capture collective memories from the time period 1968–1986 before the floating gap set in, to record them and to make them available to other interested parties.

Narration as a Research Strategy

Explorations of the process of meaning production have recently become a focus of interest again in the historical and social sciences.⁷ The renewed interest is accompanied by the quest for suitable analytical tools for subject constructions and also by questions about the “apparatus” as defined by Louis Althusser. What are being discussed today, therefore, are strategies of empowerment for interviewees and contemporary witnesses in relation to researchers, whereby both the former and the latter are seen as having expert knowledge regarding the situation under description. In this sense, the collection of data itself is already understood as a collaborative work process. The most important function here is the recording process, whether the medium used is an audiotape or a video documentation. Incidentally, the first audiotape recording of an oral history project was made by the researcher Alan Nevins in 1948, who recorded the memories of white, male members of an elite class of society; the work was published in Cambridge. The historian Valerie Raleigh Yow provides a working definition of oral history as a method

1 Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1965). The revised edition was entitled *Oral Tradition as History* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).
2 Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, 6th ed. (Munich: Beck Verlag, 2007).

3 Ibid., 52.

4 Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Alcan, 1925).

5 Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

6 Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 71.

for “recording of personal testimony delivered in oral form.”⁸ The concrete steps required, to which we also adhere, mean that the recording, the transcription, and the guided recollection in the form of in-depth interviews all belong to the work process. The basic assumption behind this method is that historical evidence cannot be grasped outside of the recorded interview and that the—verifiable—evidence is the result of the interview process. Given that the interviewer’s own position is clearly indicated, this method also takes into account the possibility of the research results being influenced by the interviewer’s own preconceptions, experience, background, and preferences. Generalization based on verifiable statements and on the rich variation in detail is developed over the course of the work thanks to the specific selection of the questions posed and the representational selection of the contemporary witnesses chosen for interview. If—and this is certainly the case with the Performance Chronicle—a dynamic documentation of events is sought, the overriding aim of the research work is to document both the events and their context. What is particular about the method is that the documents made available must be first collected, researched, and generated—in the form of video interviews. James E. Fogerty describes this as a unique form of documentation in the historical sciences.⁹ In order that the material collected can be subsequently made available for various uses, it is methodologically essential to clearly indicate the specific conditions of the interview in the transcripts—where the interview took place, the presence of third parties, the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, etc. Nonetheless, one must remain aware that, as Fogerty writes, “existing resources are thus used to create, not collect, a new resource.”¹⁰ The sources requiring documentation include: communication with the interviewee, the donor contract as original and copy, stills portraying the interviewee, and background research material.

Fogerty emphasizes that series of interviews such as those we carry out with contemporary witnesses for the Performance Chronicle entail “creating a focus, selecting the narrator, maintaining balance, and articulating issues during the interviews.” Rather than presenting a conclusive interpretation of the interview, the accompanying publication will present varying interpretations by different authors.

Collective Recording Processes

If we proceed on the assumption that performance art does not address the single viewer, but rather generates its particular public in a collective process, and also that the action space of performance art can be located precisely in this interaction between performer and viewer, then in analyses and theories of performance art it seems reductive to continue to take a universalistic, monologue-like perspective, which as a rule is embodied by the researcher



Fig. 6
Basel Performance Chronicle,
Via Studio, 2006.

him- or herself when a performance requires interpretation or analysis. In rare cases, the performance research cites a single contemporary witness, but such isolated statements seem so inconclusive that they can be used at best for backing up “hard facts”—such as place, time, duration—without making any significant contribution to the evaluation and analysis. It was in the attempt of Performance Chronicle to acknowledge different audiences and to afford them the space to speak with diverse voices that our collective chronicle of a shared history arose. We draw here, on the one hand, on Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of community as undone, diverse, and not yet existing, as he argued regarding the “confronted community.”¹¹ But we also draw on considerations by Markus Miessen, who very explicitly cautions against the violence of collective processes in citing Chantal Mouffe. Mouffe emphasizes that, “the disappearance of class identities and the end of the bipolar system of confrontation have rendered conventional politics obsolete. [...] The lack of any legitimate alternative means that this consensus will not be challenged.”¹² Miessen thus develops an alternative model of collaboration within existing practices, in which critical distance and the implementation of conflict zones play an important role in social processes. The Performance Chronicle also seeks to make such critical distancing possible so as to counteract the hegemonic writing of the history of performance art, which today mainly operates via artistic mythologies.

7 Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History. A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2005), 1.

8 *Ibid.*, 3.

9 James E. Fogerty, “Oral History and Archives: Documenting Context,” in *History of Oral History. Foundations and Methodology*, eds. Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless (Lanham, MD: AltaMira

Press, 2007), 197–226.

10 James E. Fogerty, “Filling the Gap,” in *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology*, 151.

11 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Die herausgeforderte Gemeinschaft* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2007.)

12 <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-08-01-miessen-de.html>.

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Floating Gaps Interviews in the Basel Performance Chronicle, Part 2

Margarit von Büren

The book *Floating Gaps (1968–1986)*,¹ published in fall 2011, is an artistic research publication that accompanies the online platform Basel Performance Chronicle and provides an exemplary in-depth look at the collection of material on performances by national and international artists in Basel. Basically, our methodology was to implement forms of communicative memory and to make the results available to the public. In our research practice, communicative memory, which was described by Sabine Gebhardt Fink in part one, resulted from interviews conducted with artists, mediators, and curators. The theoretical texts in the publication provide an in-depth examination of subjects such as performance teaching, image repertoires between social memory and transmission, performance as media critique, dance performance, and sonic theater. Furthermore, this volume contains images that has been made publicly available for the first time.

Documentation of Performance Art Versus the Authentic Experience

For the transmission of performance art, the existence of documents and artifacts and their availability as sources is prerequisite. This is particularly important for the analysis of performance art, as, here, only documentary material that has been made accessible can contribute to the historiography. The difficulties in analyzing performances of the 1970s and '80s are mainly due to the fact that until the 1990s performance art was seen as an art form that resisted the practice of reproducibility. For many artists, curators, and organizers, the live moment's ephemeral character was prioritized, and, in addition, any kind of documentation of an event was often prohibited. As late as the beginning of the 1990s, the performance theorist Peggy Phelan wrote: "Performance's life is only in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance."² The consequence was that the expectation of authenticity, the not represented "having been present," determined the documentation practice of performance art over a long period. Franz Mäder, a Basel-based gallerist who photographed performances in the Kunsthalle Basel in the early 1980s, expressed this in an interview: "I always had my photographic equipment, my camera and high-speed film with me, so that I could work with the available light. [...] It was necessary to be 'in' the artist's act while photographing, and I was often the only one who dared to do this. The problem was also: photographing

¹ Sabine Gebhardt Fink, Muda Mathis, and Margarit von Büren, eds., *Performance Chronik Basel. Floating Gaps (1968–1986)* (Zurich: diaphanes, 2011).

² Peggy Phelan, "Unmarked. The Politics of Performance," in *The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 146.

was noisy. If one was watching a music or dance performance, the sound of the aperture and the shutter did not cause as much disturbance, but in a work like that of Thomas Kovachevich [Kunsthalle Basel, April 23, 1980], in which he handled tracing paper almost soundlessly, it was distracting.”³ This statement illustrates the programmatic objection to multimedia documentation of performances, which was characteristic for these decades.

The idea that the live moment and, with it, the authentic experience represents the only valid approach to performance art has in recent years become obsolete. And since the end of the 1990s, significant steps towards a shift in positions have been made in performance theory, which attests to a transformation process in the relation of performance to documentation. Furthermore, research on the history and documentation of performance art is currently being conducted internationally in a number of projects and initiatives.

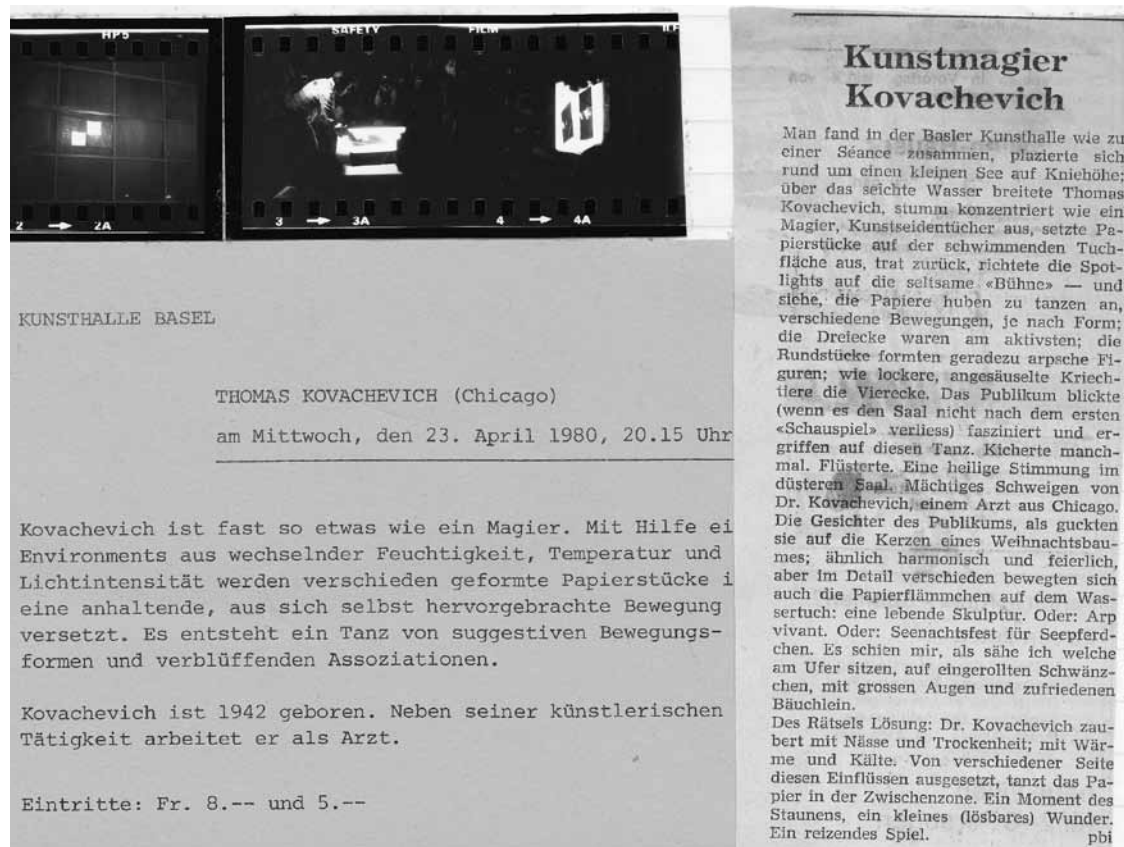


Fig. 7
Thomas Kovachevich, Kunsthalle Basel, 1980.

As an example, I would like to point to *archiv performativ*, a research project at the Zurich University of the Arts, which conducted an exemplary study of the archiving and transmission of performance art in the context of documentation and transcription.⁴

Interviews as the Basis for Recollection

Due to the special situation with regard to documents from the 1970s and '80s—manifested in the scarcity, inaccessibility, and/or fragmentary state of the artifacts—in order to transmit performance art, the memory of contemporary witnesses who recall the events of “back then” by talking about them is needed. This process is important, in that the eyewitness accounts are often the only contribution to a possible historiography. To this end, the interview based on the “oral history” method is particularly suited. Drawing on the knowledge of the protagonists, the interview reawakens a wealth of memories, and these fragments can be shared and supplemented by other eyewitnesses. The interviews that are included in the publication on the Basel Performance Chronicle illustrate, by example, how the repeated implementation of other art forms and multimedia, and the various categorizations such as the Act, Happening, Event, or Experimental Theater finally led to the term “Performance Art.” This example of a reconstruction shows how the knowledge base of the interviewees can be reactivated through the interviews and in a collaborative work process.

The previously mentioned interview conducted with the gallerist Franz Mäder gave us access to his private, unpublished image archive of Basel’s performance scene from 1979 to 1982, which without the interview would have remained undisclosed. In the analysis of this conversation one can, on the one hand, recognize how oral narration and recollection can only partially be reconstructed, and on the other hand, how with the image material performance history can nevertheless be made accessible. “In the eighties I had a lot of time to go to events, especially performances. Much of it included dance. At that time dancers like the American Dana Reitz had put together their own productions, and she also came to Basel, to the Kunsthalle. She was also in Robert Wilson’s *Einstein on the Beach*.”⁵

An oral witness report is subjective and fragmentary; it is very much connected to its author, that is, to the attitude and memories of the speaker. They are

3 Gebhardt Fink, *Performance Chronik Basel*, 130.
4 Additional information about the research project *archiv performativ* at the Zurich Uni-

versity of the Arts can be found at <http://www.zhdk.ch/?archivperformativ>.
5 Fink, *Performance Chronik Basel*, 131.



Fig. 8
Dana Reitz, Kunsthalle Basel, 1981.

often accounts of experiences that produce affective recollections through direct narration, thereby producing a sense of immediacy, and this, in turn, can be interpreted as a performative act. The ability to remember is stimulated through a combination of looking at photographs and other artifacts, while in the conversation it is not about an adherence to factual accuracy, but about the fragmentary interplay between narration and artifact.

The interviews with the “Damengöttinnen” exemplify how one reflects about a particular time or an event through subjective recollection,⁶ whereby in this example communicative recollection broaches the issue of a socio-political environment in the past, as well as the related issues. This provided us with insight into the context of the performative-artistic practice. Monika Dillier, one of the “Damengöttinnen,” explained in an interview how formative the political engagement had been for the actors of that period: “As far as I can recall, we were all active in the women’s movement back then. [...] We occupied



Fig. 9
Damengöttinnen, *Damengöttinnen am Äquator*, 1979.

6 Floating Gaps, “Die ‘Damengöttinnen am Äquator’: Ästhetische und politische Fragestellungen vorantreiben,” in *Performance Chronik Basel*, 35. We conducted the interview with Monika Dillier and Lisa Stärkle, who were part of a group of fifteen women

that performed during the women’s week at the Theater Basel in March 1979 with *Damengöttinnen am Äquator*.

7 Ibid.

8 This is described in greater detail in the introduction in *Performance Chronik Basel*, 17.

a building and declared it as the women's center. [...] From the beginning the group that was actively engaged was a very mixed one: There were artistic but also political issues. Everyone was open to the situation."⁷ The interview with the "Damengöttinnen" attests to the importance of an interview strategy that accords the interviewees the competency to provide a testimony. The recording itself is already considered a collaborative working process in which the interviewers, too, can take a personal position.⁸

In the interview, the two historical witnesses retrospectively express how aesthetic questions were also addressed through political activities. As Lisa Stärkle says: "I am no longer sure if I already knew it then, but it became clear to me later that it was also a possibility for me to leave the limited political work and to see the political in a larger context. The theater piece was something we felt like doing, a playground where we could try out things and other roles." And Dillier adds: "From the beginning it was very important for us to create something new. The piece wasn't intended to be a lament, but rather to convey strength, power, and an affirmative attitude." From this, one can read that different interpretative approaches are reconstructed through the activation of communicative memory, which allows one to sense that, in fact, there was a great deal of activity at the time, as well as indicating the political climate of that period. Oral forms of reconstruction of performances such as interviews and eyewitness reports are also useful in mediation and teaching, since the vivid reports by historical witnesses and the performative character of the narration make it possible to involve the listeners emotionally, which is close to the live moment of a performance. The communicative recollection by historical witnesses in front of an audience can be implemented in teaching as a critical practice that reactivates past performances via the setting and, thus, prevents forgetting before the "floating gap" sets in.

Translated from the German by Ann Nelson

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From the Document toward Material Traces

Amelia Jones in Conversation with
Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein

Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein: Since this book focuses on research and teaching in the performative arts, I would like to start our exchange by asking about your educational background, your experience as a scholar, and how you became interested as an art historian in the field of performance art?

Amelia Jones: I am thoroughly trained as an art historian (with some background as a film theorist) and I am self-taught as a performance studies scholar. I received a BA in art history at Harvard University, an MA in art history at the University of Pennsylvania, and a PhD at UCLA in art history.

However, at UCLA I made a point of minoring in film theory and began working on visual culture beyond the usual “high art” studied in most art history departments. When I started my first academic job just after finishing my PhD (in 1991), I began teaching the bits and pieces of visual culture I kept finding, which represented a general shift among US and European artists in particular in the 1960s towards a self-consciousness that the body of the artist was in fact always at issue in the making and meaning of art. That is, I found examples not only of performance art but of images of artists posing in dramatic and humorous ways in advertisements for their work in art magazines such as *Artforum*, from the late 1960s into the '70s.

This interest coincided with my commitment to feminist theory—I began to see that feminists in particular very commonly used their own bodies in or as their work. I began to theorize that this was because they sought to denaturalize the premises of high modernism: especially the idea that art had only “formal” signification, and that any interpretation had to be “disinterested” (that is, was by definition not attached through need or desire to a particular interpretation or value). Artists such as Carolee Schneemann, Yoko Ono, and VALIE EXPORT activated their bodies as a way of insisting that, in fact, no making or interpretation could occur *without* specific desires coming to play. Additionally, by activating their bodies they made it clear that women could be *agents* (subjects) as well as objects of art as they had so long been in male-dominated versions of Renaissance to modern Western art.

At the same time, younger male artists also turned to the body. Sometimes (I believe) this was for similar reasons, as when an artist such as Jack Smith began flamboyantly enacting himself in the public sphere—just as the women “gendered” the artist and made art world interpreters aware of the patriarchal biases of modernist values, so queer artists such as Smith put themselves in the public eye to create new modes of artistic subjectivity that subverted the notion of a “male genius” who was never

viewed as an object of desire. And artists familiar with street protest or civil rights issues, such as the artists associated with the Los Angeles-based collective Asco, as well as Lorraine O'Grady and Senga Nengudi, also began performing their bodies in their art practice in the 1970s.

So, with these insights and also with a commitment to antiracist, post-colonial, and Marxian theories, I began to argue that an attention to body or performance art was absolutely essential to understanding the most important shift in artistic production and reception in the period after the Second World War.

Since that time I have developed more and more ties with the actual field of performance studies and have tried to gain a deeper understanding of the historiography of that field so I can link it to my knowledge of art history and its quite different values and trajectory of development.

FTH: At present we can observe an increasing use of “live stream” by artists and by museums such as MoMA or Tate. In what ways, do you think, does this phenomenon affect the reception of performance art?

AJ: If you mean live stream to document performance acts, I guess this new tendency has to be viewed against the long history of methods of securing representations or documents of ephemeral acts (performance art, but also theater, dance, music, and one could even think of painting this way via Jackson Pollock turning painting into what appeared to be the record of an action) which are more durable or (as in this case) extendable beyond the space in which they are taking place. Live stream perhaps just expands the illusion that one can experience something in a more “authentic” way because it functions in “real time.” But, of course, it has to be presented through a camera lens (or lenses) and so it's already “framed” and contingent, not to mention that our mode of viewing it via a piece of software presents it through a particular visual style (usually interrupted by advertisements) on a flat screen, usually on a laptop or some kind of computer device, is highly overdetermined—none of these technologies are innocent, and so all of them shape, inform, and even define the work.

Chris Burden was already examining these contingencies in fascinating ways in his very earliest performance installations, in which he would make a performance action available to “live” visitors only through a video monitor playing live-feed imagery of it, but then not actually tape the action—so nothing of it remains as representation (see his *Match Piece*, 1972; I have just written an essay about Burden's early work for his show “Chris Burden: Extreme Measures” at the New Museum in New York!).

And yet, let me stress that being in the actual room with the actual person performing is no less constrained by frameworks, starting with the contingency of our own body, our ways of seeing, where we are able to stand/sit, etc. The very idea of a person performing an act (or acts) self-consciously as “art” is already what Derrida would have called a “parergon”—it is already a conceit, not to mention the structure of the gallery or performance space where the action is performed, the modes of getting people's attention for it (public relations), etc. There is no “authentic” way to experience a live act, any more than we know our own lives and modes of being in a direct and unmediated way (sorry, Sartre! we cannot throw ourselves into being in a truthful and direct way—we are always already mediated).

FTH: In your essay “Art History/Art Criticism: Performing Meaning” (in the book *Performing the Text/Performing the Body*, coedited with Andrew Stephenson, 1999), you ask in reference to Peggy Phelan: “What happens when works of art mark themselves, in their theatricality, as only ever ‘rehearsals,’ never final or fixed but always open to the muddying whirlpools of spectatorial desire?” A crucial question that has not lost its relevance—on the contrary! What would your respective thoughts be today—in the face of contemporary dynamics for institutionalizing performance art—on how to establish the relationship between (performance) art and its audiences?

AJ: If you mean what I think about how performance art is presented and represented as well as how it is historicized, I think this is one of the most complex questions facing the visual and performing arts, which are now at least partially in dialogue with the art world's current fascination with “live art.” It is a very good thing that we (art historians, for example) are more conscious of this as a *problem*; at least in theory we are. What is frustrating is the tendency, in spite of the current trend to analyze and question how time-based, ephemeral arts are experienced and, in turn, how they are written into history (or not), to fall back on modernist or even traditional ideas about “presence” or “authenticity” in the live act rather than fully acknowledging the contingency of every action on its context, reception, interpretation, and historicization. The most obvious case of this is the Marina Abramović phenomenon, and her own as well as her hagiographic supporters' claims for the authenticity of her live body (see my article in *TDR* in 2011 on this phenomenon). While I deeply admire Abramović's performance art work, and feel awed by her persistence and self-assertion, I am concerned that such unquestioned claims return us to a very worrisome and reactionary (in the literal sense of looking backward) state of seeing performance as somehow necessarily securing some kind of “presence,” a claim that many feminists and poststructuralists showed to be key to sustaining the art marketplace in critical writings from the 1970s and '80s.

So, the artist is not fully “present,” nor is the body ever “authentic”—whatever that even means! The most interesting work being done, I believe, is that which (whether curatorial, artistic, art historical, or from a performance studies point of view, or all of them together) through its modes of presentation and its models of critical engagement starts from this presumption that presence and authenticity are bogus claims that simply veil the privilege of particular kinds of subjects in a structurally unfair marketplace. Bodies and meanings (including whatever the meaning is of sitting across from a live artist in a gleaming massive modernist gallery atrium) are always already contingent.

The most interesting cases, then, are when curators or artists (often working together) have produced performative works that allow for this contingency, and even critically rely on it. I have written about, for example, how Jeremy Deller’s project *The Battle of Orgreave*, started in the early 2000s, addresses questions of social history, questions of performance art and its remains, and ultimately exists only as a totally open-ended historical and materialist project. What the “work” is, changes from venue to venue, medium to medium (objects at Tate, a film by Mike Figgis, a website). There are many other examples of artists and others who are willing to take risks and are not interested in the gallery or the auction house—or, for that matter, the performance studies discourse or art historical texts or exhibitions at biennials—as the ultimate arbitrating sites for value.

So, I guess what I’m saying is that the role of the viewer/participant/reader, the person who *engages* the work offered by the person designated as “artist” (such as Deller) is absolutely important in how we understand the histories of ephemeral and/or body-oriented practices. Deller is smart enough, in fact, to include *himself* as a kind of spectator *within* *The Battle of Orgreave*, as he commissions people involved in the original event as well as artists and other bystanders to re-enact a famous miners’ strike during Thatcher’s regime in the United Kingdom. But the artist in this case has to let go and acknowledge that meaning and value—whether of “art,” of “performance,” or of historical events themselves—are open and intersubjective, as well as relying on the contingency of institutional framings, etc.

FTH: In this sense, production and consumption, effect and perception, occur practically simultaneously—as a betwixt/between within performative understanding. The constitutive role of the participant during a live performance, of the viewer and the reader of constantly swelling archives and updates, rewritten every time fluid access is gained, whether in the form of written and spoken words, re-enactments, artistic appropriation, exhibitions,

etc., leads to constant transformation. This dialogic dynamic of knowledge production is the challenge that has kept Carola Dertnig, as a performance artist, and me as an art historian in a constant critical exchange for many years, whereby the present book is one of our whistle stops. How did your exchange and involvement with (performance) artists of various generations affect the way you started to think about what you were doing yourself as an art historian, writer, and teacher?

AJ: Great question. My relationships with performance artists, whether personal or just via an acquaintance or via only the work, profoundly shape how I think about their work and the methods I develop to understand and analyze them. I make this point in my project on “Material Traces,” which culminated in the exhibition “Material Traces: Time and the Gesture in Contemporary Art.” Here I presented works (only one was an actual performance) which in one way or another activate the spectatorial relationship—from Francis Alÿs painting a line on a road in Panama (bringing to our attention the action that produces the “material trace” of the painted line), to Alicia Frankovich’s performative action consisting of runners entering the gallery *after* the workout (the performance having been finished), to Paul Donald’s laboriously hand-carved wood two-by-fours, which leave the majority of the construction industry logos and unfinished surfaces untouched. Each work in the show made a direct connection between an action that “had been made” in order for the work to exist, drawing us in as spectators into the concept of action in the past. My model of “queer feminist durationality,” which I write about in my book *Seeing Differently*, performs a similar critical strategy of bringing together a group of works (including Donald’s, Cathy Opie’s series of self-portrait photographs, and Mira Schor’s paintings) and allowing their materiality (or references to materiality and change) to affect my modes of seeing and interpreting.

As for actual performance art, there is no question that experiencing works that are important for me transforms aspects of my sensibility and world view. I write about this in my piece in *TDR* on Ron Athey and Juliana Snapper’s performance *Judas Cradle*. I guess I would define really successful performance or art in general as that which sparks my response in just this way—encourages me to think differently, to see differently, and to find new strategies of interpretation.

FTH: With the curatorial statement just outlined and in particular with its title, “Material Traces,” you clearly address a move from the documentary trace of the event to the notion of a material trace. Against the backdrop of your theoretical and curatorial work, I would be very interested in finding out about the roots and motives behind your current proposal to think about

(performance) art production differently, via its material traces? And beyond that, if this shift could act as an opener in between the theoretical “belief systems,” pointing the way towards future performance studies?

AJ: With my exhibition “Material Traces: Time and the Gesture in Contemporary Art” (which took place at the Leonard and Bina Ellen Gallery at Concordia University in Montréal in February–April 2013), I explored the hinge between the artist’s action or labor in the process of making versus the made or representational object. The show included pieces by artists from Francis Alÿs (a video of him laboriously handpainting the road marking in the middle of a road in Panama); to Mark Igloliorte (whose delicately handpainted images of everyday objects, done in pairs from slightly different perspectives, make us aware of the contingency of making and meaning on perception); to Alicia Frankovich (who staged the aftermath of a performance at the opening, which was then left in its videotaped form throughout the run of the show); to Juliana Leite (whose giant falling rubber object documents the movement of her body “falling” down a stairway). All of the artists represented in the show provocatively examine this hinge between making and later viewing or experiencing—connecting us to the work through traces of effort that we then attach to in the present as viewers. What I loved about the show was the way in which it addressed, but also moved in a new direction away from questions of performativity and the ephemerality of the live—both obsessions in discussions of art and performance today. Each work was “material” and presented as such; each work obdurately displayed the signs of *having been made* (for example, Paul Donald’s wood two-by-fours, made of the cheapest construction materials, common to building houses and other small structures, showed the signs of his whittling and carving, with the ends shaped into penile shapes while the remainder of the piece remained unmanipulated construction material).

I do think this shift in framework might provide a different way of theorizing art and performance on a continuum—after all, all works of art and performance (and performative art) involve *making*. Even conceptual art, which involves thought and putting something into play (even if only text on paper or a simple photograph). If we think about how what we are *seeing* or *interpreting* as art or performance or documentation of performance reactivates the “having been made” of the work, it shifts our thinking away from the rather pompous and metaphysical claims made for either performance art (as “authentic,” delivering the “present” body of the artist, unmediated etc.) or the visual artwork (as a kind of fetish object, its value substantiated by the expressive genius of the artist). These beliefs and claims, which are linked to very entrenched (and patriarchal, racist, classist, and colonialist) beliefs in Euro-American

aesthetic traditions, sadly are still dominant in discussions about art and performance. It would, in my opinion, be very valuable if we could think about how we understand, experience, value, display, and position art and performance in our society (or societies—in each place these qualities are different), rather than making claims for value that are essentially Renaissance-to-modern conceits based on metaphysical thinking. These claims are not substantiated by our experience or by rigorous philosophical thought, only by ideology, authoritarianism, and the marketplace.

Performance is being made into spectacle and commodity through its positioning within the fine arts framework; if performance is being integrated on a massive scale into the art world (as it currently clearly is, with large exhibitions at conservative institutions such as the MoMA, New York, and Tate Modern, London), then we must understand and critique it through a more sophisticated attention to the legacies of aesthetics (returning to Kant, for example, who understood the tension between our subjective experience and the need to compel agreement by making judgments). Focusing on what is actually *happening* when we look at or experience any “work” in the art-performance continuum—and thinking about the *labor* that went into making and displaying the work in whatever fashion, so that we account for conditions of production—would be a more productive practice, I think, than unquestioned repetition of very problematic terms such as “genius,” “presence,” or “authenticity.” Performance studies might, then, be reenergized by attending to questions from the history of aesthetics and by developing a more critical discursive language with which to understand its links to other historical modes of art-making (and art commodification).

What if Life, Permeated by Art, Becomes a Work of Art?

Sabina Holzer

In the following text I relate Jacques Rancière's book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, which was first published in 1987, with the artistic practice of performance. I claim that "equality" in the "universal teaching" proposed by Rancière is practiced by performance artists, who again and again confront conventional categories and risk their social affiliations. I emphasize Rancière's materialism, which opposes explanatory schemata and insists on a verification of language through practice, using various text materials, (i.e., sections and intersections). The "sections" are divided into three parts through which I deploy my argument; the "intersections" are disruptions and are meant as subtext.

In the first section I introduce the key principles of the intellectual project called "universal teaching," which forms the basis of Rancière's reflections; in the second, I assign the de-hierarchization to performance, spot the difficulty of institutionalizing it, and discuss what performance could mean as a contemporary art practice. The third section, finally, points out the social and working conditions today. Art often gets commodified and related to a certain aesthetic regime that is supported by the establishment. Without being unduly romantic, I aim to elaborate my thought that performance as an artistic practice always finds ways to modify trendy and dominant regimes of the visible, the sayable, and the possible.

The three intersections deal especially with the deregulation of the categories of subject/object, mind/matter. This idea is associated with Rancière's argumentation that the overestimation of verbal language creates a social order. It is linked to the following quote with which I would like to commence my text:

"There is no language of reason. There is only a control of reason over the intention to speak. Poetic language that knows itself as such doesn't contradict reason. On the contrary, it reminds each speaking subject not to take the narrative of his mind's adventures for the voice of truth. Every speaking subject is the poet of himself and of things. Perversion is produced when the poem is given as something other than a poem, when it wants to be imposed as truth, when it wants to force action. Rhetoric is perverted poetry. This means that it too falls in the class of fiction. Metaphor is bound up with the original resignation of reason. The body politic is a fiction, but a fiction is not a figurative expression to which an exact definition of the social group could be opposed. There is really a logic of bodies from which no one, as a political subject, can withdraw."¹

¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 84.

1.

Jacques Rancière wrote his book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* as an intense argument for heterogeneity in languages and different ways of speaking and utterance. The book is a deep reflection on *equality*—which is, as Kristin Ross writes in her introduction, “the founding term of our political modernity”²—questioning dominant orders of class, and other conventions and categories our Western democratic capitalist society is built on, and still relies on. In Rancière’s view, thoughts and words are material, and language develops in the application of a certain order using (any) material. “In the act of speaking, man doesn’t transmit his knowledge, he makes poetry; he translates and invites others to do the same. He communicates as an artisan: as a person who handles words like tools. Man communicates with man through the works of his hands just as through the words of his speech: When man acts on matter, the body’s adventures become the story of the mind’s adventures.”³ This is Rancière’s materialistic version of the speech act.

— First interjection: The body is the body. We are all bodies. Some of us are more aware of it, some of us less so. Sometimes this awareness is related to gender, age, or culture. We realize that we are many bodies. We become aware of being bodies through the way we are treated and the way others relate to us. Because of being bodies, we can be touched and moved. In order to function in this society we are living in, we learn to move in a certain way. We learn to behave according to our sociocultural environment. We stand vertical to communicate with each other. We look each other in the face—mostly we do not close our eyes and touch another person to share our thoughts. Nor do we turn away or lie down if somebody is speaking to us. We, as bodies, know how heavy the glass is we want to drink from, or how far away the door we want to open is. We, being bodies, know a lot and are very quick and very slow. We are bigger than we are and smaller than we are. We are and are not bodies. We are one and many bodies at the same time, and we are surrounded by bodies. Some of them are called human, some of them have different names. All of this is body. The body is the body. It is alone. It is separated. Like human beings, who are beings of distance. Their language does not unite them, it is instead the effort of translating this arbitrary language (which at no time was given by God, nor is it a given law) which unites them.

In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Rancière describes a method of teaching that he calls “universal teaching.” He relates the term to an intellectual experiment by Monsieur Joseph Jacotot, a lecturer of French literature who had already had a long and eventful career, holding very different positions during the turmoil and disquietude of the French Revolution (1789–99) and the following

Napoleonic Wars (1803–15). He took on a tutorship during his Dutch exile in 1818, although he didn’t speak a word of Dutch. In order to communicate with his students, who spoke a different language than he did, he had to find something they had in common. With the help of François Fénelon’s bilingual novel *The Adventures of Telemachus*, which had just been published (in 1699), he asked his students to read the French text with the help of the translation. When they were halfway through the book, he instructed them to carry on with this principle, i.e., repeating the parts they understood and persisting in applying them until they would be able to recite them in French. The project was very successful, and even Monsieur Jacotot himself was surprised by the eloquence with which the students were able to share their thoughts and interpretations of *Telemachus*. Even though he knew that teaching was not about stuffing students with knowledge and having them repeat it, he still always expected some explanation to be necessary in order “to distinguish the essential from the accessory, the principle from the consequence.” But this time, he had explained nothing. The students had learned how to use the language and create sense by themselves. “Were the schoolmaster’s explications therefore superfluous?” Rancière asks with Jacotot. “Or, if they weren’t, to whom and for what were they useful?”⁴

“Universal teaching” exercised the following principles day by day: “1. All human beings have the same intelligence. 2. All is in everything. 3. The teacher does not transfer his knowledge through explanations. One can teach that wherein one is ignorant.” For Rancière the reason why this way of teaching fails if anchored institutionally or constituted as a method is that institutions are afraid of its consequences. “For as the usual instructor needs inequality, no government, no army, no school, no institution will ever produce a single emancipated human being,” he states. “As soon as universal teaching is constructed as a method and becomes part of the programs of reformatory or revolutionary parties, it is corrupted. Universal teaching can never specialize in producing a certain category of social actors. Only a human being can emancipate a human being.”⁵

Rancière distinguishes between intelligence and will. Everyone has the same intelligence, but the will is closely related to attentiveness, which is “an immaterial fact in principle, but material in its effects: we have a thousand ways of verifying its presence, absence, or its larger or smaller intensity.”⁶ Teaching is an encounter of two wills and intelligences. If the one will connects with the other, it is fine; however, if the one intelligence connects with the other, stultification is enforced. Whereas the act of an intelligence that only obeys

2 Ibid., xxiii.

3 Ibid., 65.

4 Ibid., 4.

5 Ibid., 102.

6 Ibid., 51.

itself, even if the will obeys another, is emancipatory. For Rancière, it is the artist who, by and by, opposes the professor's stultifying lesson. "Each one of us is an artist to the extent that he carries out a double process," he states. "He is not content to be a mere journeyman but wants to make all work a means of expression, and he is not content to feel something but tries to impart it to others. The artist needs equality as the explicator needs inequality."⁷

2.

"Everyone is an artist!" The famous utterance by Joseph Beuys brings us to performance art's similar ambivalence and struggle with institutions and dominant powers. Each performer makes his or her own definition of performance in the very manner of its process and execution. Performance developed in the twentieth century "as a permissive open-ended medium with endless variables. [...] Art historians have no ready category in which to place performance," RoseLee Goldberg states in her text "Performance: A Hidden History." For a long time performance artists and their work were rarely able to participate in the powerful legitimation of art institutions and academies and become part of officially recognized history. Goldberg points out that, "Although performance is now becoming generally accepted as a medium of expression in its own right, relatively little is still known about its rich and extensive evolution."⁸ As an applied critical practice, performance transgresses territories of disciplines and identities and challenges institutions, critics, art historians, and even other artists who want to develop and refer to a certain school or style in order to gain acceptance and support from the establishment. Because of its transmedia nature, the history of performance is written again and again in different ways, from different perspectives. Today the term "performance" has become part of our daily language, whether we talk about business, sports, or entertainment. The artists' claim of keeping the line between art and life fluid and indistinct has been realized in the past twenty or thirty years,⁹ but within a commercialized realm. In our service-oriented society, even the ephemeral character of performance (which used to take a radical stand against commercialization) often is commodified by the (art) market and becomes part of the society of the spectacle. How can a lineage of performance-related artistic practice be constructed without creating an exclusive discipline? And what could it be necessary for?

— Second interjection: If every human being is an artist, every artist needs equality, and all is contained in everything, then our whole life, permeated by art, is a work of art. Down with masterworks, with gentrified theater and formalisms! In the twenty-first century, the self as it has appeared until now from biological viewpoints and with regard to function is no longer applicable. Just as representative democracy, which fulfills its functions through the election

of a few who "speak on behalf of you," is no longer applicable. "Recollect that in you which cannot betray you." Truthfulness is not what "connects" people; it is singular, a "principle of the heart" that sends us into the orbit of a researcher. It is not society, its institution, and its aims that we have to listen to, for these are forms of aggregations. But people in fact are united by forms of non-aggregations. People are united because they are human beings, (i.e., people of distance). Spatial being. Spatial material. Material in space. "I am taking part of the aesthetics of my private life, my private environment to public places. I have tested the function of chaos. For me that was a possibility to conquer a space. I found out that in a certain sense it has an anti-fascist structure, because one cannot control anything. There is no order."¹⁰ There are no neutral spaces. "Free aesthetic play promises the abolishment of the discrepancy between form and matter, between activity and passivity, between object and subject. It is the abolishment of the discrepancy between a full mankind and a sub-mankind."¹¹ —

At the end of the book *Art Works. Aktion. Zeitgenössische Kunst* by Jens Hoffman and Joan Jonas from 2005, there is a discussion between artists from different performative fields, curators, and historians about the term "performance." Performance art has become a kind of historical style that deals with a Western, American/European way of abstraction and meanwhile is fraught with aesthetics and ideological conventions that are inappropriate in our globalized society. "Performance," on the other hand, mostly creates a setting according to theatrical conditions of perception, (i.e., entertainment). The term "performative" could relate to dance and performance and its critical practices in the 1950s and '60s. But also dance, even if it is contemporary, still (or again) seems to be struggling with a stigma of physical virtuosity and aesthetically traditional values. The term "extended choreography" as an organization of time, space, and different possibilities of production would closely relate to a contemporary notion of performance. But despite these terminologies, the really interesting and important point is that art is recognized as a cultural practice in which the space between artistic action/event and reception is a social space. This leads to a different way of thinking about spectatorship, reception, and public participation. Instead of being fixated on the work of art and its interpretation, one could look at the social situation in which art takes place. This would shift the order between subject/object, concept/matter and social/cultural conventions. A work of art does not just present a situation with

⁷ Ibid., 70, 71.

⁸ Cf. G. Battcock and R. Nickas, eds., *The Art of Performance – A Critical Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984), 24–36.

⁹ Reference to Allan Kaprow: "The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct, as possible." Quoted

in: *Assemblages, Environments and Happenings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966), 188.

¹⁰ Conversation with Elke Krystufek, "Museum in Progress," Vienna, May 1997.

¹¹ H. Ploebst and N. Haitzinger, eds., *Versehen. Tanz in allen Medien*, trans. David Ender (Munich: epodium Verlag, 2011), 130.

images and words; it also establishes it. Instead of commenting on society with visual and verbal metaphors, it creates and performs the social relationship. “We all know the signification of a door. You enter or exit a space through it. But if one asks about the performativity of this door, one alludes to the situation established by this door: the door can connect, separate, or exclude.”¹²

Jack Hauser, a visual artist based in Vienna who often works in the field of contemporary dance and extended choreography, had a door that he had taken from his art project *Wohnung Miryam van Doren* moved through the Lentos Museum of Modern Art in Linz during the Triennale in 2010: “The door (was) rolled from museum hall to museum hall every day and stood in the way there for several triennial-months. It showed itself, frameless and mobilized—more than just opened, but unhinged and set free, in dialogue with all the other artworks whose home the museum has become, where they are paid attention to and still may speak freely.”¹³ It was part of an installation called *Linz.Wohnung. Miryam.van.Doren.mobil* created from different objects taken from *Wohnung Miryam van Doren*, which is the apartment of the fictitious character Miryam van Doren. Hauser regards himself as her collector and proposes that one should get to know Miryam van Doren through the environment. During the opening and closing of the exhibition at Lentos Museum, there were additional performances lasting three and four hours with five other artists (working in the fields of performance and contemporary dance, performance and media art, and one of them a passionate amateur) who followed a score developed by Jack Hauser.¹⁴ Roles and identities constantly shifted, the artists were present, materials were performing, visitors became part of the artwork. It was a complex setting engaging in a vast variety of practices and concepts that overlapped with and infused each other.

3.

Today we are part of political systems striving to equalize methods in order to get standardized results. The currently practiced progress—which elevates progress to the state of a governable explanation of social order under the dictate of efficiency—shackles the order of society, promotes its stultification and the most elementary hierarchy of *good and bad*. Standards are set to keep our cultural values, which otherwise would go down the drain, in the tone of the argument. But already in the nineteenth century, this kind of justification was given in order to control emancipatory tendencies and keep the social order of inequality. “In Jacotot’s day there were all kinds of men of goodwill who were preoccupied with instructing the people. [...] All these good intentions came up against an obstacle: the common man had very little time and even less money to devote to acquiring this instruction. Thus, what was sought was the economic means of diffusing the minimum of instruction

judged necessary for the individual [...] Among progressives and industrialists the favored method was mutual teaching. This allowed a great number of students, assembled from a vast locale, to be divided up into smaller groups headed by the more advanced among them, who were promoted to the rank of monitors. In this way, the master’s orders and lessons radiated out, relayed by the monitors, into the whole population to be instructed.”¹⁵ Jacotot called this “the perfected riding-school” producing dressage horses.¹⁶ It completely differs from the approach of the ignorant schoolmaster, who does not perform his or her knowledge but gets the other involved with his or her intellectual competencies through (the art of) observing, comparing, and combining in order to understand and practice the various forms of *making*.

— Third interjection: “One must learn near those who have worked in the gap between feeling and expression, between the silent language of emotion and the arbitrariness of the spoken tongue, near those who have tried to give voice to the silent dialogue the soul has with itself, who have gambled all their credibility on the bet of the similarity of minds.”¹⁷ Turn to those who deal with this distance, question them. Investigate their works. One has to learn to question what one does oneself. Again and again. Universal teaching as the relationship of two people “who do not know how to read the book” dealing with this distance between emotion and expression. As a relationship of several, a temporary community of strangers who perform a joint research project in which each may follow his/her own intelligence. This research is process and product and for sure deludes the lines of the system of art in society. It unfolds them ever anew in reflective actions in order to create “an experimental rather than an objective image, an image that does not point out its hidden meaning but complies with its production conditions.”¹⁸ —

12 Cf. Jens Hoffmann and Joan Jonas, *Perform, Art Works Series* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 178–84. Participants in the dialogue: Carlos Amorales (visual artist living in Amsterdam and Mexico City), Ritsaert ten Carte (visual artist, former director of Micky Theater Amsterdam), Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset (artists, living in Berlin), Tim Etchells (author and artistic director of Forced Entertainment in Sheffield), Coco Fusco (works as artist, author, and curator in New York), Dorothea von Hantelmann (art historian, author, curator; lives in Berlin), Jens Hoffmann (exhibition organizer at the Institute for Contemporary Art in London), Chrissi Iles (curator for art films and videos at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York), Joan Jonas (visual artist, New York), Lisette Lagnado (art historian, author,

and curator; lives in São Paulo; coordinates the Hélio Oiticicia Archives in Rio de Janeiro), Xavier LeRoy (works as a choreographer in Berlin), Tim Lee (visual artist; lives in Vancouver), Yvonne Rainer (artist, choreographer, and filmmaker in New York), Martha Rosler (visual artist, lives in Brooklyn, New York).

13 <http://www.corpusweb.net/miryam-van-dorens-tuer.html>.

14 Jack Hauser (with M1+1) with: David Ender, Jack Hauser, Sabina Holzer, Sabine Maier, Michael Mastrototaro, Anton Tichawa.

15 Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 17.

16 Cf. *Ibid.*, 127.

17 *Ibid.*, 68.

18 Jacques Rancière, *Das ästhetische Unbewusste*, trans. David Ender (Zurich: diaphanes, 2006), 21.

Our mediated society today opens new ways of working, communication, and participation via Internet, social media, and virtual realities. At the same time, our European sociocultural context nowadays is pressed by the unpredictability of living (and working) conditions, minimum wages, increasingly de-structured and mediated work modes, and a new category of creative self-employment, which transforms artistic activity into an economic enterprise. Art institutions are confronted with the demands of study regulations and are assessed mainly by their numbers of visitors. The position of the artist seems to be disappearing from the social script.

Nevertheless, “Artists need equality. And all human beings are artists” is the assumption that should be maintained under all circumstances. “Keep going, see what you’ve done and what you can do, if you use the same intelligence you’ve already applied by being equally attentive to every matter, by not letting yourself be deterred from your path.”¹⁹ That is the ignorant schoolmaster’s lesson. Without tapping into the neoliberal capitalistic individualization of “you are the master of your own faith,” Rancière does make clear that his claim of equality requires continuous practice, verification, and self-discipline. Even if today “self-organization,” “experimentation,” and “collaboration” are mostly, in one way or another, part of the curricula of art universities, one has to be aware that this might just be technocratic rhetoric. Some institutions may very well offer temporary protection from the unacceptable dehumanizing dynamics of the neoliberal capitalistic market. Yet they are extensions of a political-economic system whose interest is to maintain inequality between people by devaluating ways of doing and existing. Participating within this institutional framework challenges every single person (teachers, students, administrators, and the school janitor alike) to see whether universal teaching as a claim and trust in equal intelligence is really exercised. Everyone is called on to play the role of ignorant schoolmaster in order for overlapping systems of diversity to appear.

Performing artists, who now seem indispensable and are an integral part of art history and institutions, had “the heart to follow their own reason.” They took their own aesthetic position in relation to issues in their surroundings, without being recognized. They were part and not part of a dominant sociopolitical system with a certain aesthetic regime. They created other systems and looked to those who did the same. In spite of political opposition and media differences, the artists took a personal, joint risk whose outcome was unknown to them. Many artists still do so now.²⁰ As all ignorant schoolmasters do.

Conclusion: In relating *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* by Jacques Rancière to the artistic practice of performance art, I formulated the question of how an art practice, which is regarded as a “permissive open-ended medium with endless variables,” can prosper through systemic empowerment and institutional

recognition without being absorbed by it. Since one of the major claims of performance art was the permeation of life and art, the critical attitude has to be applied to both segments, which obviously interrelate more and more nowadays. Any dominant structure, be it anchored in political or economic ideologies, diminishes multiple ways of producing and living, and enforces the superposition of a certain aesthetic regime.

“All is in everything” is one of the principles Rancière reflects upon. I followed this line of thought and came to the conclusion that everybody participates in this dominant regime and system, but at the same time has possibilities to emphasize and support different values, relating to and creating other systems than the dominant ones. Artists create their own practice and relate to those who do the same, and are, among those who do the same, the ignorant schoolmasters.

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¹⁹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 51.

²⁰ Following the de-hierarchization proposed by Jacques Rancière, I would like to thank a few people in my current immediate surroundings who accompany, stimulate, and encourage my transmedia artistic research, development, and production: Meg Stuart, Vera Mantero, Jeroen Peeters, Philipp Gehmacher, Milli Bitterli, Lux Flux, David

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Anatomies of Possible Speaking Positions Performance and Intertextuality

Lilo Nein

This text addresses performance as a topic of research and work, outlining some of the challenges associated with defining and understanding this subject. The focus here is not on the relation between performance and document, or on analyzing the value or function of having-been-there versus archival material. The issue addressed will instead be situated before or behind that question and will place that distinction itself up for debate. What I would like to propose here is an intertextual understanding of performance that views the relations between performances and the texts that surround them as dynamic and reciprocal. The associated thesis is that these relations affect the notion of performance (as a subject of research and work) as well as the meaning of individual performances. I will first speak about texts surrounding performances and how they relate to the enactments of the performance, in order to then examine the extent to which these texts influence the performances.

Performance, Text

A distinction between text and performance is admittedly not always useful. Performance can also be understood as text, and text as performance.

In the publication *TRANSLATE YOURSELF! A Performance Reader for Staging*, I dealt with “text as performance,” arguing that text and performance can enter into a reciprocal relationship and that one can be translated into the other without connoting any hierarchy.¹ It follows that the chronology and definition of performance as possessing an ontological status located between the time before its enactment and thereafter are called into question. *TRANSLATE YOURSELF!* proposed a cognitive model of the relation between text and performance that identifies both a score and a document as mediums for the functions of “documentation” and “production.” This implies that a score can be a document and a document can be a score. There are no formal distinctions or mandatory criteria here apart from the artistic practice and the decision-making processes in which these criteria are embedded. The subsequent publication, *THE PRESENT AUTHOR: Who Speaks in Performance?*, dealt mainly with “performance as text” and examined the extent to which performances can be depicted, presented, represented, produced, or changed by texts—and what role authorship plays in these relationships.

I think that text and performance are always interrelated, and it is this relatedness, these relationships that interest me and accompany me in my work. I hence distinguish between the concepts of text and performance in order to

¹ Lilo Nein, ed., *TRANSLATE YOURSELF! A Performance Reader for Staging* (Vienna: self-published, 2009).

highlight their connections and to illustrate how performances are embedded in texts and text relations. I distinguish between text and performance, however, insofar as they deploy different temporal logics and different bodies.

Intertext and Paratext

The *Lexicon of Postmodernism* tells us that the term “intertextuality” is used in literary studies to refer to the way texts refer to other texts.² Julia Kristeva coined the term in 1966 in her essay “Word, Dialogue and Novel,” in which she takes up Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of the dialogicity of texts. “Any text,” Kristeva writes, “is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.”³ All texts are hence related to one another, whereby Kristeva sees not only the written word but all cultural phenomena as text. Everything is text, and everything is interrelated. In order to be able to work with manageable categories again, literary studies subsequently tried to restrict the notion of intertextuality and abandoned the universality of Kristeva’s concept of text. Gérard Genette’s attempts to categorize text relationships have been particularly influential here. As he writes, “this text rarely appears in its naked state, without the reinforcement and accompaniment of a certain number of productions, themselves verbal or not, like an author’s name, a title, a preface, illustrations.”⁴ He goes on to note that these elements “surround [the text] and prolong it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in its strongest meaning: to make it *present*, to ensure its presence in the world, its ‘reception’ and its consumption in the form, nowadays at least, of a book.”⁵ “Thus the paratext,” Genette continues, “is for us the means by which a text makes a book of itself and proposes itself to its readers, and more generally to the public.”⁶

I would like to apply this theory to performance and claim that in the case of artistic works there are also texts that create the basis for these to be perceived at all—i.e., that in the case of performances enable the reception of performance as such. The most important paratexts proposed by Genette as analytical categories are: the editorial paratext (including the name of the author/anonymity/pseudonymity), the title, dedications, mottoes, preface, the original foreword, subheadings, and comments, and also publications outside of the book including interviews, discussions, correspondence, diaries, and the like.⁷ The editorial paratext has to do with the contextualization of the work through a representative, such as a publisher. This contextualization might include, among other things, the publication of the book as part of a certain series, in a specific edition, or in a particular format. Furthermore, the design of the cover, the dust jacket, the first page, the typesetting, and the typography all influence how a book is perceived. With regard to performances, the role of the publishing house is played by institutions that show a performance

during a theme-based evening, a program series, or a festival, or in the context of a symposium or a special curatorial concept. The institution as setting, the reputation of the curator, and the status associated with a festival in public opinion have an influence on the work and its reception, as well as whether the performance took place in a self-organized space, an off-space, or as an intervention in public space.

Texts Surrounding Performances

Here I would like to specify some other texts that play a role, or can play a role, in the context of performances and in relation to them. Texts can assume different functions in relation to performances; they may inspire, produce, preserve, transform, document, or interpret them, or make them understandable.⁸

Texts written by the artist her/himself as well as those by other authors/artists have a productive connection to performances, however this connection may be construed. There are texts that precede performances as well as texts that arise after performances, i.e., after the performance has been enacted or watched, or after the reception of documents or descriptions of the performance, whereby such texts can in turn be the catalyst for new performances.⁹

During the work process, various texts serve the author/artist in ideation and form-finding. These may include literature, poetry, theory, philosophy, and any other types of texts and cultural products by other authors or artists that are brought to bear in performances in the form of direct or indirect quotations, references, inspiration, methodology, paraphrases, and so on. Also part of the work process are texts written by the artists themselves that serve in ideation as well as the actual conceptualization and realization of the work. The process of ideation may be accompanied by notes, sketches, drawings, graphics, diagrams, drafts, spatial layouts or construction plans, photographic sketches, formal studies, descriptive texts, declarations of intent, and so

2 Patrick Baum and Stefan Höltgen, eds., *Lexikon der Postmoderne, von Abjekt bis Žižek* (Bochum: Projekt-Verlag, 2010).

3 Leon S. Roudiez, ed., *Julia Kristeva. Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 66.

4 Gérard Genette, “Introduction to the Paratext,” *New Literary History* 22, no. 2, Probing: Art, Criticism, Genre (Spring 1991): 261–72.

5 *Ibid.*, 261.

6 *Ibid.*

7 I am not following here Genette’s subdivision of the paratext into “peritext” and “epitext” but rather using only the blanket term “paratext.”

8 Conversely, there are performances that can carry out the same or similar functions with regard to certain texts. This aspect, however, is beyond the scope of this paper.

9 Lilo Nein, *TRANSLATE YOURSELF!*

forth. And during the actual establishment of the concept, its realization, or rehearsals for performative works, scores, scripts, manuals, instructions, guidelines, rules, and similar materials may be used. (All texts and written cues produced before a performance may play a role again here.) During the work process, some texts generate other—different—texts, movement, or action material. Other texts may (re-)appear in direct form—spoken or printed, for example—in the respective performance. Texts may thus have an effect on the work process, on the performance situation, or both, and are written and used by the producers for a variety of different purposes. In works that are collaborative, i.e., that are produced or performed by more than one person, such texts (for example scores) can be used for communication purposes, and/or for structuring the events. Used as a structuring element, a text can pre-determine what happens in parts of the performance. Or conversely, a text can be there deliberately to keep something open. The latter can be achieved for example with instructions or rules that must always be reinterpreted or “filled in” according to the respective situation. In practice, patterns often develop at such deliberately undefined junctures. In other words, there is a certain tendency to draw on the existing repertoire, be it musical, vocal, or movement-based, or to build such a repertoire—for example, to always tell a story in a certain way because this way has proven more effective than others, or to assume a role or apply a strategy/method with which one feels especially comfortable. Text can definitely help to counteract this tendency as well as to mediate between concept and improvisation or realization.

During performances, text is read, spoken, sung, or otherwise vocally interpreted or presented. It may appear as image, as projection, in the form of subtitles, as handouts or can take a three-dimensional form, as sculpture or stage decoration. It may be distributed to the public in order to inform or entertain them, to be taken home, or to give the audience opportunities for participation. Audience members can, for example, read aloud a text that has been handed out, have a say in the performance on the basis of the given information, participate on the stage or in the performance “space,” join in the action or do something independently, select or rate a certain element/action or a specific performer, decide the course of the performance or the end of the story, etc. These methods are of course also practiced using spoken language, but written text often generates a greater feeling of commitment.

After the live act and in connection to it, texts can arise from all participating and non-participating speaker positions. The artists themselves may write down various things, noting experiences or circumstances that should be considered next time or analyzing how the work “functioned.” They may rewrite their announcement texts, explanations, and artist statements, or change the title. They give interviews, try to mediate their work; they write lectures or presentations, update their websites, and prepare teaching materials.

Performers who are/were involved in the performance but not directly in its conceptualization may also undertake similar writing, descriptive, representative, and reflective activities.

After a performance has been watched, or documents or descriptions of it have been read, texts are produced by journalists, critics, curators, and historians. Audience members who are not directly professionally involved in performance express their opinions, for example on the Internet. People post feedback on reviews in online newspapers, press a “like” button on Facebook, or describe their experience in private blogs.

Insofar as these varying texts exchange views and influence one another, different statements about performances become part of art criticism and under some circumstances part of performance historiography. On the other hand, they also affect how the artists see themselves and their work. Although artists have a privileged reception position with regard to their own work, this does not rule out the possibility that aspects attributed to the work from outside harbor a certain cognitive potential and may be integrated into the artist’s own statements about it. These statements can then form the starting point for new works or for follow-up projects.

Another category I would like to propose here as paratext of performances is their documentation. This, too, affects the perception of performances in addition to exerting an influence back through/into history. Documentation of a performance may include written manuscripts, i.e., text in a narrower sense (for example, flyers, announcement texts, descriptions), as well as photographs, videos, films, and so on. Although these are not texts in the narrower sense, they can be regarded as such inasmuch as they are closer to text than performance with respect to their time-based logic. Documents are produced either by the audience present at a performance, or they are planned and designed by artists themselves. Of the latter type of texts, I would like to claim in particular that they not only influence how a performance is perceived but are already significant for the artistic work itself, or in the work process. Performance is no longer thought of and conceived by artists as a live act only but also includes contemplating and shaping the representation, mediatization, and documentation of this act—probably more so today than in the past. A partly intuitive, partly reflected understanding of the historical significance and ideological aspects of media is already in circulation today that forms an indispensable part of performance art. It makes a difference whether the artist opts for photography, video, text, or another medium; it makes a difference whether the artist operates these media her/himself or collaborates with photographers, filmmakers, or video artists; and it makes a difference where the artist decides to place this technology in space, whether a video camera is sitting in the first row or the photographer instead wanders around the

small gallery space and automatically performs along with the rest. Each medium and each form of technology has its own presence, takes up its own place in space, and produces its own noises (the shutter of a camera, for example). All of these decisions are today part of artistic processes and works; they are made consciously by the artists themselves and thus influence performances and performance-related works.

We can say the same for texts in a narrower sense and their relations to acts. Artists know very well that the live act is not independent of texts, descriptions, and interpretations. Sometimes these relations are an issue for the work, and a role is played by questions like: How is text used in performances or their work processes? What part of the action is written down or contains elements that are written down? To what extent does the text render the action independent of specific actors or reproducible? To what extent, or in how much detail, are the actors bound to the text or are the actions prescribed by it? Would the text tend to produce a variety of different performances, or is it more likely to give rise to similar results? Other possible questions might include: Should a text represent a performance or the underlying idea behind it? Should it describe/recount/illustrate the action or instead camouflage it in favor of the concept? Should it make the audience curious to see the next performance? Should it act exclusively or democratically, i.e., spread the performance and its idea or present it as unapproachable and unrepresentable? These text relations are likewise inscribed in performances and evoke certain meanings.

I have tried to illustrate how text relationships intermingle with the meaning and reception of performances and to elucidate how performances cannot be viewed as distinct from the intertextual and intermedial tissue in which they are embedded. In other words, I have sought to show what text and performance have to do with each other, how they are interdependent, where they touch or merge into one another, so that we can begin to understand performance as a text among other texts, and text as a process among other processes.

Translated from the German by Jennifer Taylor

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Beyond *Huddle*

Simone Forti in Conversation with Carrie Lambert-Beatty*

Acid	Dunn, Robert, composition	One thing and then another
Ambition, artistic	class of	thing
Bush, George W., letters to	Face Tunes	Onion
Cage	Fallers	Poem (see, Dance Instruction,
John	Feminism	Dance Report, Score)
animals in (Zoo)	Halprin, Ann	Score
Chess	Happenings	vs. instruction
Cinema	Huddle	Stomach, holding in of
Cloths	Judson Dance Theater	Tai Chi
Communal living	Language	Vienna, Festival of
Dance Construction	Movement and	Performance 1978
Dance Instruction (see, Dance	Logomotion	Voice / Singing
Report, Score)	Los Angeles	Wars
Dance Report	Mac Low, Jackson	Second World
Dancing	New York	Vietnam; Iraq (1);
vs. "dance as self-conscious	c.1960	Afghanistan; Iraq (2)
art"	now	Woodstock
vs. "being one who danced"	News Animation	Young, LaMonte
Drawing	Nourishment	

Fig. 10
Grid projected during the symposium "This Sentence Is Now Being Performed", 2010.

Carrie Lambert-Beatty: Thanks so much. I think you've been thanked a lot, but I will thank once again the organizers, Carola Dertnig and Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein, especially for this really exciting opportunity for me to talk with one of my heroines, Simone Forti. The title of the conversation is "Beyond *Huddle*," because it's one of those works that has the problem of being so amazing that it follows the artist around for the rest of her career. But this is from a very early moment in her career. I think we will talk about it, but also our goal is to talk about that moment in the late 1950s and early '60s when Simone emerged as an artist, and then to also talk about the rest of her long career and developments, especially as they might relate to questions of language and teaching, since that's sort of our theme today.

I have a few images that I brought in—sometimes it helps to have a visual aid—and what I thought we might do: I was thinking as I was preparing for this about something Yvonne Rainer once said that people quote quite a lot, which is that she remembers an improvisation one day in the studio she was sharing with you, where she was watching you work. And you did three different things, maybe go put a rock in the corner, go to someplace else in the room and talk, walk over somewhere else and do a different movement; and it was like a light bulb went on for her to realize that you can do that. That you can just go from one thing to the next thing, without a transition, without something that would make it make sense, which would be a much more conventional way to work. And that is the birth of one of the most important compositional strategies in performance and in other arts that would come to characterize the art of the 1960s onward. It is exactly or very similar to, for instance, what Donald Judd would say when he said his composition was one thing after another.

It's the idea of a kind of laundry list of activity that is really important.

Okay, all of that is meant to justify my idea of seeing whether it might work to use this kind of structure for the conversation today. So this is a list of Simone-related words. Do you agree?

Simone Forti: Yes.

CLB: And my thought was that we could just pick them ... I thought maybe we would do, you know, a "chance thing" ...

SF: Yeah. I was thinking we could just pick a number out of the air and then count down.

* During the Symposium "This Sentence Is Now Being Performed," Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, November 20, 2010.

CLB: Can we have a number?**Audience: Seventeen.**

SF: I was thinking that same number! That was my locker today at the museum—number seventeen.

CLB: It's "Anna Halprin."

SF: I met Anna Halprin when she was just deciding to let go of Modern Dance and to completely focus on improvisation. I was twenty-one, I didn't know I was going to go deeply into dance—I was just taking a dance class for fun—so it was very exciting to find a teacher when she was taking a step toward new work. She was very motivated at that moment and there were about five of us who were working with her every day; we were kind of her laboratory.

CLB: Can you describe the setting a little bit? This is in Los Angeles?

SF: No, this is in the San Francisco Bay Area, across the bay, so it's not in the big city. And in fact her home and studio was at the foot of a mountain, the foot of Mount Tamalpais.

Anna was married to Lawrence Halprin, a landscape architect and also a city planning architect. So, the studio was just a wooden platform in the woods.

I remember two main things that I learned from her: the main teacher is your own body. Your sensation, your experience of the force of gravity, your experience of momentum in space, your experience of moving slowly, of moving quickly ... The little bit of dancing that I had tried—I didn't like what I was being asked to do, like to turn out at the hip joint; my hips didn't want to do it. And I trusted my body more than I trusted the tradition that was being taught to me. It just seemed like, "No, this isn't the way my legs work—I like the way my legs work, just the way they are!" And Anna gave us the tools to really study what we have, so that we would even look at anatomy books.

Or she had a skeleton that we would study. And then maybe take, how the arm is connected to the collar bone and to the ribcage.

And it's only connected right here, where the collar bone connects to the ribcage in terms of bones. There are muscles, but otherwise there's all this freedom. And then we would look at how it is and we would maybe

spend half an hour experiencing, taking weight, momentum, muscle ... (*demonstrates what she is saying by moving her arm/lifts her right arm to visualize her words*).

And in doing that we would be improvising. Because when you start to do that, you start to be in your motor intelligence and in your reflexes. And, of course, the whole body supports that.

She also taught us to look at any movement, for example, (*demonstrates movement*)... ok, or ... (*demonstrates another movement: throws a red shirt in the air and watches it falling down*) ... It's still moving. Still moving.

To be aware of movement and to be open to whatever kind of movement, so that if you had a canvas—whatever color, whatever kind of line ... whatever image, whatever juxtaposition of images and color and space—that anything you wanted to use, you used it with awareness. And so it really opened many doors.

CLB: I have a question to follow up, as somebody who was told she was supposed to turn out from the hip and spent the next fifteen years trying to do that. Is it a personality thing? Was it something about the way you were raised? Why do you think you had such confidence in listening to your own body and not taking in that kind of social pressure?

SF: What comes to my mind is: I was taking a walk with my father, when I was little—I think I was eight years old—and he said, "You should tie your shoe, because your shoelace is untied and it will make you fall!" And I said, "No, it doesn't reach the ground." And he said, "Well, let's look." And we looked, we took my shoelace and put it back to the side of my shoe and it didn't reach the ground. And he said, "Remember, I'm much bigger than you are, but you were right."
(*general laughter*)

CLB: Parenting tips, excellent! It sounds like he was an important ... No, I'm getting away from our structure, already. Maybe we'll come back. Does someone want to pick another number? Do you want to pick a number?

SF: Eight ... "Cloths." Well, *Cloths* is a piece that dates from ... I guess something like 1967, '68, something like that. No, no, no, it's more recent, it's from 1982. Physically there are three frames, almost like frames you would make to stretch canvas on. And each frame has several pieces of cloth that are attached to the top of the frame. There's a person hiding behind each of the frames. And to begin, the cloths are all in back of the

frame. So you only see a black attached cloth.

The sound is ... I asked my friends to sing me their favorite song. Then I made a tape of these songs with some silences in between. So random songs and silence. And the people behind the cloths, over a period of ten minutes, they should sing three, each one should sing three songs at some point. And they're throwing the cloths over. So it's like a curtain that you throw over. So maybe it begins, there is a red here and a yellow and a plaid there. And then all of a sudden a cloth comes and it's black. And there's a song and then there's another song that starts partway. So there is this overlapping of cloths and songs. Three people, each singing a song once in a while, a song coming from the sound system once in a while, the color changing once in a while ... And you never see people.

CLB: Is it a dance?

SF: Who cares?
(general laughter)

CLB: It strikes me that that's such a great example ... It brings together a lot of elements of the work, that kind of composition using chance that we've talked about ... The fact that these are, I assume, not professional singers back there, right?

SF: Right.

CLB: And so you have a kind of voice just as in a lot of your work; you have a kind of body that is not necessarily one that's trained. Right?

SF: Okay ... you mean like in *Huddle* you have bodies that are not trained. Yes, but it takes a few hours of training even to learn to just do something. And to not emote, to not act that you are doing it.

CLB: This is something so fascinating that comes up when I talk with Yvonne, too, all the time, that you have to learn how to be natural ...

SF: Yes, Steve Paxton has a dance. I think it's called *A Satisfying Lover*. He walks around and he takes off his clothes ... and he has ... oh, is that a different one?

CLB: I think *A Satisfying Lover* is the one with the walking.

SF: Oh, okay ...

CLB: That's Flat.

SF: "Flat"?

CLB: I think so.

SF: Flat, okay. He takes off his clothes, he's walking around and he has some clothes hooks attached to his body. So he takes off his jacket and hangs it on the hook on his shoulder. Then he takes off his shirt and hangs it over a hook somewhere else. He doesn't get completely naked. Then he puts some of the clothes back on. There is one moment when he's sort of like the *Odalisque*, but just for a moment, and then he puts on his shoe. He has been working with Mikhail Baryshnikov, who has become very interested in a certain area of choreography. And when Mikhail tries to put the shoe on, he can't do it! It's an actor putting on a shoe. And it's wonderful to see someone who's so trained, who's such a master—he can't be on a stage and just put on his shoe, like you would do it in the morning. So that takes training.

CLB: Thank you, that's a good clarification. Another free move? Are there any of these you want to pick?

SF: No, pick them by chance.

Audience: Thirty.

CLB (counts): Let's make it "Onion."

SF: *Onion?* Ok, that'll go quickly, I think. In 1961 I was invited to contribute something for a publication that La Monte Young was making—I'm not sure what Jackson MacLow's relationship to it was, but anyway, they were both involved with it—called *An Anthology*. One of the things I gave them was what I was calling a "Dance Report." It was a report of something I had done when I was eighteen or I had set up for it to happen. I had taken a bottle and put an onion on it, on its side (*demonstrates the action with a bottle of water*). And then the onion started to sprout greens, and of course it transferred more and more of its matter from the bulb to the greens. So it got heavier and heavier until it fell. And that was an onion walk. So ... I don't remember the exact words: "An onion that had begun to sprout was placed on its side on the mouth of a bottle. As it transferred more and more of its weight ..."

CLB: ... "of its matter from the bulb to the green part until it had so shifted its weight that it fell off."

SF: That's the onion.

CLB: That's the onion. Why is that so beautiful to me? I could never put it into words.

SF: It is beautiful, it is beautiful. I don't know. There's the event of it, there's the perception, there's the thinking of it as an onion walk, there's the thought of a dance report—and it's small. It's kind of a haiku.

CLB: It is, yeah. What other works of yours does it remind you of?

SF: Of a very recent poem, which I will recite:

I pray
In a language I don't understand
In fact, no language at all
And I don't understand

CLB: Thank you.

SF: Six!

CLB: "Cinema."

SF: "Cinema" ... I'm afraid of the cinema. I'm a little afraid of my dreams, I'm afraid of the cinema, I'm afraid of going into the dark and having something else take control of me ... so let's go to something else.
(*general laughter*)

CLB: Okay, I'm going to pick one and count from the bottom ... and ask about it.

SF: "Woodstock"? ... Woodstock! Hm, I'm trying to think what would be valuable for us to hear about it.

CLB: It seems as if it was an important turning point for you. For a time.

SF: It was, for a time. I've kind of reverted. I think what was important for me in that whole experience—and it was an experience of taking a lot of LSD, a lot of acid for a period of a year—and to see that I had had a certain grid, or a certain grid that made me see a certain way. And then with the acid I found out that you can see other ways. It's hard for me to talk about it, because I don't really remember.
(*general laughter*)

CLB: You wrote about it a lot in *Handbook in Motion*. So that's why I was interested.

SF: Well, I talk about that a little bit, because Kasper König was the editor at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design Press and he was inviting a lot of the Minimalists and people like Dan Graham, Michael Snow ... Lawrence Weiner ... and he invited me, I think because of the *Huddle* and those pieces. And I was just coming out of Woodstock and I showed up with my beads and I had just done all this acid and I wanted to write about vibrational consciousness. And that wasn't what he had in mind. And we had a wonderful struggle. Martha, are you here?

Martha Wilson: Yes!

SF (*laughing*): Yes? Martha was a major character in that story. Anyway, at one point I had written the book and handed Kasper the manuscript and went on a vacation for a weekend to New York. And Kasper asked Martha to rewrite it, to paraphrase it. And I came back, you know, "Oh my god!" ... So we decided—Emmett Williams was there—and we decided that we all trusted Emmett, so Emmett was going to edit my manuscript. And Emmett took it, put it in a drawer, and kept it there for four months. And then he gave it to me and he said: "You have to retype it and you have to leave a margin of an inch and a half on each side. And this is your chance to make any changes you want." And it took me a summer to do that, because there were no computers then and if you made one mistake you had to type the whole page again. And I handed it to him at the end of the summer and he handed it to Kasper and said: "It's perfect." But maybe what is meaningful to say is that Kasper was interested in the *Dance Constructions*. And at that moment I was more interested in a different kind of awareness. We had to find a bridge between.

Right afterwards I started working with Charlemagne Palestine ...

CBL: ... he's a composer, a visual artist ...

SF: ... and also a performance artist. In his piano playing he was setting up tone settings; he was not playing melodies, but the chords that he would set up, in a stream of solid sound, would affect each other and would almost make melodies by themselves. And sometimes he would get the vibrational situation going, so that it sounded like wind instruments rather than piano.

We were working in a beautiful large studio at CalArts—California Institute of the Arts. I was running in circles, just tilting a little bit one way or the

other or shifting my weight by—if you lift an arm (*lifts her right arm for demonstration*), it will shift you this way; if you lower it, your balance will go that way (*lowers the arm to the side*). And it was affecting my trajectory. And I was letting mandalas in space happen by just running in the circle, shifting my weight, so that centrifugal force and centripetal force were in play. Or I might swing an arm (*swings her right arm*) and affect the momentum and these forces. And I was able in that way to integrate being not stoned, but working with the sensitivity that I developed through the acid. And I just want to say that I feel I was lucky that I didn't have an accident with the acid. Because some kids slip into a psychotic state that becomes permanent. So I wouldn't recommend it.
(*general laughter*)

CLB: Let's see ... Twenty-six: "Language."

SF: "Language"? Thank you. "Language and Movement" ... Well, I've been working with speaking and moving, and I'll just tell a little bit about why I started.

My father read many newspapers every day. He did that in Europe and then in the winter of 1938, when for Italian Jews it was getting dangerous. And he caught it immediately and we went to America. In America he read the newspapers all the time, and during the Cuban missile crisis he called everyone in the family and said: "If this really happens, we're going to Ojai, a little town in the California mountains." He said he had put some money in the bank so we're all going there, that's where we are going to sit it out. When he died, I decided I'd better start reading the newspaper. I'm not very good with information; I can't remember names ... But I realized that I could remember for instance that ... (*gets up and starts illustrating her words with body movements*) it was the Iran-Iraq war at that moment. I could remember that Iran ... or I could see that Iran had a long coast on the Gulf. And Iraq had just a little finger that touched the coast, because Kuwait was right here. And the estuary, the Shatt al-Arab, was here. And Iraq wanted more connection to the water. And so it invaded. And then I would read also that the Arab peninsula was slowly pushing north. And that's how the Alps had come up. And then it interested me about the complexity under the ground and the oil under there. And starting to understand the news by making kind of a physical map or graph of things in my body. That that was a way I could deal with information. And I was speaking and moving.

CLB: Is that News Animations? Did you come to call it that?

SF: I came to call it that ... In the workshop, we worked with movement

and language. And I realized that moving and speaking, if you already have a rational organization of what you're going to say, moving and speaking stay very separate. But if you have some awareness of the stream of consciousness that is going on—and it goes on, and you can tap into that and use it—then moving and speaking, both functions, can be responding to the thoughts you have before you have organized them or translated them into a language syntax. And I love the way they kind of throw each other off their timing. In speaking you would say something and then you would look for the next thing that relates; but then maybe as you're moving you look that way and you see that shape. And it reminds me ... it's reminding me of something ... I saw that shape today at the museum, only it was upside down. It was a Bruce Conner. He was making these ink on paper works and most of them are the whole page, but then there was one that had a shape like that, torn out of the top ...

Okay, we were talking about "movement and language" and I jumped to Bruce Conner ... And then I think of his film and the sexuality of women being sexual. Some of them being sexual on purpose and some of them just women just being sexual ... just sensing. And then war images, and a skull that just appears at one moment ... Juxtaposition, so that the meaning jumps, because it's not completely organized in a traditionally rational way.

CLB: That's great. How are we for time? Can we do a few more?

SF: Let's do one more.

CLB: Okay, one more.

Audience: "Los Angeles."

SF: "Los Angeles"... A nice thing about Los Angeles is that there is the Hollywood industry. And that takes care of that. So all hungry ambition goes there. So my experience with Los Angeles is that there is a lot of discourse, there are many small groups of people who collaborate on projects. I'm working a lot with ... there are five of us. And each of us is working in one or two other groups of three, four people. And so there is this network of influence, even among people who might not know each other. There is not so much the feeling of wanting to be on top, because there is no top to be on, except Hollywood and that's another part of the Los Angeles world that I'm never in touch with. And I think it's not surprising that John Cage is originally from Los Angeles. There is a sense of space. Maybe it's part of the improvisational dance world that

I'm quite a bit in touch with. I don't know; there is a sense of democracy within the community and a valuing of it. What do I mean by that? How can I be specific?

CLB: Can you compare it to another situation that felt the opposite?

SF: Yes, I mean, one of the strengths of New York is that you go see something and you say, "Wow, they really went for it. I have to really get stronger. I have to be very strong, so I can be that strong." So it's much more competitive, in a way ... I think there are times in your life when you need that and then times in your life when you need to not have that, so that you can just look into what you are looking at, what is meaningful to you, what you are discoursing, and you are not thinking about what place is it going to take in the world.

Carola Dertnig: I have a question: "How could I combine the numbers twenty-five, twenty-six, and twenty-seven together?" So that would be "Happenings," "Huddle," and "Judson Dance."

SF: "Happenings," "Huddle," and "Judson"... Well, with "Huddle" and "Judson" I would find myself speaking of John Cage. "Happenings" I think closer to maybe Kurt Schwitters, surrealist theater, juxtaposing many things. "Huddle" is more coming to one thing. With "Huddle" I would also talk about Gutai and Saburo Murakami, especially *Walking through Paper*, where there's one ... it's a single event, it's a single image and yet it's completely full and satisfying. For me, when I saw photographs of that piece, it opened up possibilities. "Huddle"—I was taking the class that Robert Dunn taught at the Merce Cunningham Studio. At that time John Cage was the artistic director of music and Robert Dunn, who taught the class, was very much studying John Cage. And one thing he told us that very much impressed me was that John had said, or at least this is how I remember it, that a myth changes. But John had said that he needed to be able to hear sound, and that when music has a traditional pattern of any tradition—even twelve-tone, for instance—or becomes a pattern, there are expectations. So you know if you've heard these sounds you might hear these sounds, you might hear these sounds, you might hear these sounds (points her finger in different directions) ... But there's going to be some resolution, that is already understood. So it's hard to hear the sound, because you have got this double image of the sound itself and what you are expecting. And he wanted to just hear sound. And by using chance he would lose that expected pattern and he would be able to hear. And that made me realize that whatever you really need, you can create a situation that'll give you that. I had just gotten to New York and I needed to ... everywhere I looked had been designed by

people. Only if I looked up, I saw some sky, but even that was framed in a design that was human-centric. And I had been dancing in the woods with Anna, and I needed to just feel my weight. Just to feel body. So I made that up. And it gave me something to climb, it gave us something to ... like when you get the weight of someone on your back ... Maybe you have your hand on someone else's leg. And that weight is going down in the ground, through your back, through the other person's leg and into the ground. And as they move, everybody kind of has to shift a little bit and the lines of weight, the line of force shifts through more than one body to reach the ground. So we're working together under there. I needed to experience that kind of reality of forces. And so I made *Huddle*.



Fig. 11
Huddle, workshop with Simone Forti, 2010.

Against the End of Art History Approaching Hesse, Schneeman, and Pryde with an Integrative View of Methodology

Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein

Dynamic developments in the visual arts in the second half of the twentieth century have put art history into a problematic position as a scholarly discipline. It has lost presence in the booming culture business (not to mention the theory business). But perhaps precisely because of the extent of diversification in cultural studies today, there is once again an acute need to use art history's methodological approach to reflect on these very diverse forms of articulation in art. Art history as a discipline must use its discursive potentials and methods to face this challenge by showing solidarity with art in establishing an affinity to it. It must also deepen its dialogue with cultural studies, which, due to their current dynamism, partially stand in opposition to their original intentions and have thus developed models that I would call hierarchical.

We must ask ourselves whether the various models of thinking represented by critical theory can correspond at all with the expanded areas in which the visual arts are capable of acting. At any rate, we must question whether the primarily language-dominated theories of cultural studies do not tend to bind the performative field of action in art that extends beyond the linguistic-discursive practice. This is where a critique of the current state of art history is required—of an art history that despite Marcel Duchamp's "retinal skepticism" is still today, it seems to me, determined by the theory of the eye. New interpretive and methodological practices are urgently needed.

In our times, culture has raised the media image to the status of fetish, compelling us to formulate new strategies for analyzing the flood of images. In the wake of industrial and digital revolutions, the great cultural accomplishment of Euclidian illusionism and perspective has been supplemented by a culture of simulacra. As a result of the great media euphoria surrounding these simulacra, reality and phantasmagoric spaces have increasingly begun to flow into each other.

Could it be that the homogeneity of these spaces, described by Michel Foucault as repressive and threatening, has led us to lose control over them? Or might such multidimensionality instead be liberating? At any rate, distrust of illusionist images has led to deconstructive investigations of visual perception in modern art. Today, art goes beyond the field of visual experimentation and reacts analytically to such threatening scenarios by means of new performative, synchronistic models of experience.

Developments of this kind have long formed the core of the artistic avant-gardes, especially in the 1950s and '60s. This period saw a link forged in paradigmatic steps to the programs of the classic avant-garde and led to a broadening of the concept of art. Today, with historical distance and awareness of the decisive achievements of the post-avant-gardes, it is still possible—and necessary—to call this shift in art an "avant-garde genealogy" and acknowledge

its continued validity. The emancipatory gesture that determined the system of the avant-garde in the twentieth century—the “performative turn”—attained an activist position for art, an autonomous position that placed it alongside social discourses in politics, science, and religion.

The ideas presented thus far are based on the notion of *performative writings* committed to continuing an emancipatory, system-critical avant-garde. It is necessary and inevitable that art history be called upon as a scholarly discipline to demonstrate continuity in the genealogy of the avant-garde, and that it tell this story. Postmodern, system-immanent ideological tendencies have heralded the possible “end of history”—and with it, the “end of art history.” In the face of such cultural hubris, I find it worth insisting on the potentials of traceable modes of narration.

Art historical discourse informed by the theories of Pavel Florensky, Foucault, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty has explored the avant-garde in terms of questions about the characteristics, conditions, and effects of *space*. While space was mainly static in early theories, *speed* later became a decisive factor for such thinkers as Paul Virilio, influenced by the postwar media revolution. Space and time have long been seen as the basic parameters for the avant-gardes; a historical approach finds in them the necessary structures for the integrative model I propose here.¹

Before analyzing three works by Carolee Schneemann, Eva Hesse, and Josephine Pryde, it is useful to review a concise history of the emancipatory process in art. Early positions in art in which space attained a decisive status as a parameter for reflecting on the basic structures of art are of particular interest here.

My interest as an art historian is to draft new guidelines for emphasizing modern art’s performative developments (as opposed to its more static aspects). This interpretation is therefore oriented not toward such external forms as material, instruments, style, and modes of time but toward the basic structures that unfold in space and time through a *process*.

Following these changed guidelines, I use an alternative historical anchor to revise the emphatically orthodox genealogies of twentieth-century art history by drawing out the performative element. In this alternative historical model, Duchamp, Kazimir Malevich, Antonin Artaud, and Jackson Pollock are the key points of reference for the origins of the performative turn in avant-garde art. Subsequent developments are then examined, taking transatlantic interactions into account.

The idea of performance in the work of Duchamp showed very early on the connections between the actual object of art and the imaginary and conceptual

mental space of a performative gesture. Ever since Duchamp, the act of thinking, the enactment in the mind, does not stand behind but rather before the object and strongly determines the basic concept of the artwork. Duchamp’s narrativity was countered by the radical abstraction of Malevich, who within the context of Suprematism (and the Russian Revolution more generally) succeeded in finally breaking away from the centuries-old canonization of the image. By radically reducing the function and structure of the image, he expanded its conceivable space into infinity.

Parameters emerged with Duchamp and Malevich that forty years later became the basis for a shift in paradigms. Considering the old cultural structures that prevailed in Europe between 1914 and 1915—at the start of the cataclysm of the First World War that would usher in so much revolutionary change—we must understand that the avant-gardes taking shape from Paris to Moscow were apocalyptic *Trauerarbeit* (grieving work). Here, from a mainly European point of view, were desperate attempts to establish new and sustaining rules in the face of the abyss. That this effort entailed enormous sacrifice by many individuals beyond Duchamp and Malevich is formulated by another figure of importance for the European cultural identity in the work of Artaud.

Artaud took up a third trailblazing position in his theoretical work. His subjectivist rites of passage based on a radicalized Surrealism raised questions about the location of the subject in art and the status of the author and his body. These questions were of immense importance to the performative positions of the postwar era. Finally, on the other side of the Atlantic, in the context of Clement Greenberg’s theoretical elaborations on modernism, we see the emergence of an emancipatory and representative American avant-garde (namely, Pollock and the New York School) in relation to Europe.

The second half of the twentieth century was characterized by sweeping revolutions in media and communication that are still ongoing today. These have influenced the arts significantly in both Europe and the US. The performatization of the fine arts is closely linked with developments in media, which went beyond merely reproductive image and film technologies. Electronic digitization of data subsequently has made a new and highly accelerated form of image communication possible, and the dynamics of the requisite perceptual changes in turn have influenced the concept of the work of art.

What becomes conspicuous here is that fine art reacted to these changes less affirmatively than analytically from the very beginning. The media revolution

¹ One of the main characteristics of the avant-garde is that the process by which an artwork emerges is based on a discursive interplay between art and criticism. This

process of continual self-referentiality, which art cannot forego today, assigns a basic processual character to criticism.

influenced not only the subject's potential for perception and reflection; the body—whether present or absent—has held a central position since the 1960s. Artaud and Pollock furnish an immediate historical link for this reactivation of the direct but also bodily presence of the subject in art. Their work continues to have an enormous impact. Indeed, the basic structural parameters of the fundamentally different developments that took place on either side of the Atlantic can be traced back to them.

The direct performatization of the artwork set in around 1960, with far-reaching consequences. The moment itself needs to be urgently reexamined, however, particularly in the context of the American system, which repeatedly leads us back to the “all-over” gesture in Pollock's paintings. In order to do justice to the actual diversification of approaches in post-avant-garde positions of the 1960s, however, we must also address Artaud. I emphasize the importance of Duchamp, Malevich, Artaud, and Pollock because their work shows an exemplary and demonstrative engagement with their respective social and cultural political contexts. Basic structures are discernible that enabled the post-avant-gardes of the 1950s and '60s to bring about the performative turn in art.

The threshold to performance was crossed when the projects of modernism ultimately placed the body at the center of aesthetic concepts. This of course also relates to the role played by art in the progress of the feminist movement beginning in the 1950s. It is crucial to note, however, that an exclusive concentration on the body's presence as factual material that is generated by text is not permissible. Art historians repeatedly make this claim, but it is a gross simplification of the true consequences of this development. Ultimately, the performative turn is much more about a process by which the body is represented through its material dissolution, about the emancipation of the body's physical gestures and its spiritual gesture through the sort of impression in space and of bodies in space that are like objects endowed with a certain function.

The performative bodily presence can be conveyed through every medium of art, naturally also through painting. It is by no means restricted to the work of live performance art (happening, action, or performance). The most crucial developments in art since the performative turn have been determined by this dualism of relations, by the direct presence (or representative absence) of the body and its mechanisms of perception, as well as by its coordinates that evolve in time and space, and the objects to which these coordinates are linked.

With this historical genealogy clarified, I can now proceed to examine the central conceptual dynamism that has emerged in art since about 1960 and situate it in the context of post-avant-garde positions and discourse around

literalism and psycho-physical naturalism. It is important to note that more, and other, meanings have been ascribed to the body in its material literalness in European art than in American art. Vast areas of the post-avant-gardes in their initial years (that is, in the 1960s) were concerned with European artists who continued a modified tradition of the Surrealists with their view of the body as a material surface of inscription with social and political relevance.²

With Abstract Expressionism and the New York School, American art first took leave of Surrealism's anthropocentrism and increasingly concentrated on mirroring the body and the traces of its gestures.³ Partly in reaction to the stringently formalist critical discourse of Greenberg, an art developed that did not define the body through its psycho-physical presence but as a restricted, superficial support for signs. In this way, the body became a medium among many others. With the performative turn as a central theme, this essay's analysis is suited to defining the coordinates that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century.

Performance developed in art through the use of the elements of space, body, movement, and recipient—i.e., the viewer or audience—within a reciprocally communicative net of references. “Body” here means not only the human body, which is merely a bearer or active perceiver in the center of the performative work of art. It can also be an umbrella term for the object of art, which is always an active reference to the artist as subject or the recipient within a communicative process. The subject as the virtual body or as represented by the body inscribed in the text can ultimately be constituted only in space.

I have concentrated my efforts on working out those structures in art that today play a constitutive role in an ever-present inclusion of the element of space. Several questions interest me: What are the reasons for—and the immediate consequences of—a repeatedly expressed crisis scenario as the motivation for an obligatory preoccupation with alternatives, techniques, and psychologies? How and with what results can art deal with and work with concepts of space? Furthermore, how and in what form can art that centers on space constitute such envisioned or virtual spaces? What processes lead to the emergence of concrete spaces for objects, for the subject or *communitas*, through the interactions of performative gestures?

2 Here I assume a position that counters the one outlined by Sabine Flach in *Körpersnarien: zum Verhältnis von Körper und Bild in Videoinstallationen* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 2002). My thesis is built on the continuity of the avant-garde, because I want to avoid any categorization or connotation of historical

developments in modernism and postmodernism. This shows that the presence of the body, or the image of the body, cannot be a phenomenon of postmodernism's aesthetic practice, as Flach claims. On the contrary, negotiating this presence has always been the central focus of modernism.

I propose defining the performative gesture as an autonomous act involving the aspiration of the artwork. It should mean that the processes involved in making the work (or merely a mental sketch) must be capable of assuming the communicative or aesthetic qualities of an artwork. In addition to the qualities and functions of space, it makes sense to introduce the pair of terms “gesture” and “object.” The very juxtaposition of these two terms suggests a modified analytical approach. In fact, the spectrum outlined here is always concerned with the tendency to emphasize and position the respective work of art between what is solely performance and its static or “frozen” state (to use Vilém Flusser’s term). The work of art after the performative turn is now constituted by a relational interplay between the gestures of the object-body within the prescribed space or the spaces determined by its placement. This energetic interplay results in the respective holistic concept of the work of art, which is something moving, as gesture in the sense of a performance’s processual character.

Two parameters have preeminent importance in the current situation in which art finds itself: the *free gesture* in either abstract or virtual form and the *space* created for it, within whose system of coordinates these activities develop productively. These parameters are present in all works of art, whatever value-free form they may want to assume in the age of intermediality.

In figurative, metaphoric terms, this process can simply take place. It can be of a media-conceptual nature, but it can also manifest itself virtually or be in the sphere of simulacra.

My model of analysis gives primacy to performance—that is, to the relational gesture that lies between subject and object through which space defines itself. The three works by Schneemann, Hesse, and Pryde I discuss here are excellent examples of the performative forms this emancipative gesture can take. The works span a period of almost forty years.

Pryde’s installation *Valerie* of 2004 makes pointed reference to one of the most significant works of the 1960s post-avant-garde: Hesse’s *No Title* of 1970. This fact enables me to formulate the questions within a thematic arch that reaches from Pryde’s current retro-position all the way back to the center of the stances of the 1960s post-avant-gardes that continue to have an impact even today. Considering these works alongside a third piece—Schneemann’s performance *Water Light/Water Needle*, first presented in 1966 at St. Mark’s Church in New York City—reveals basic content-related and potentially critical lines of argumentation.

Before exploring the three works’ more subtle affinities, two obvious points should be noted. First and foremost, all three works are by women artists.

This factor is certainly legitimate when we see the meanwhile widely received works of Schneemann and Hesse in the context of the feminist revolution and confront them with the distance that Pryde’s work conveys. Secondly, a dynamic, three-dimensional structure occupies the center of all three works: a sprawling mesh that dominates the space. While this is immediately evident in the cases of Hesse and Pryde (on account of the appropriative coherence of the works), it is only recognizable on second glance in Schneemann’s performance.⁴

A third common denominator must be added to these two points: each work only appears to be comprehensible when we connect the respective structure with the subjective presence. In other words, all three works appeal to the interactive potential of art—to one of the paradigms of art and performance.

Schneemann’s *Water Light/Water Needle* of 1966 and its predecessor, *Meat Joy*, differ from the New York happenings of Allan Kaprow, Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg, and even Mark Morris in giving a more radical definition to the body as the cause-and-effect goal of a psycho-dramatic analytical process.⁵ The work is marked by a seemingly explicit multi-mediality as well as a strongly sensual and communicative approach. In a performative scenario that oscillates between dance theater and a group dynamic exercise, Schneemann wanted to create a communal, atmospheric space by means of expressively placed bodies and their synchronous confrontations with various material values. The event could take place anywhere, determined solely by the process of relational interaction among bodies. The interaction of the bodies, with their suggested nakedness and strong sexual connotations, is defined within a ritual organization dictated by the artist’s instructions and the sensual effects of the materials. Like Kaprow’s happenings, Schneemann’s works also focus on the momentary and temporary interaction of the participants. Although the production of lasting objects was always of lesser importance, photographic and other media documentation have made it possible to communicate the work. Schneemann’s concept of art is radically activist and conceived as momentary and quasi “situationist.”

A different, more brittle, subjective, and homogeneous energy pulsates in the works of the German-American artist Hesse. Like Schneemann, she was also

3 Barnett Newman termed this fixation of European art “old geometry,” one that American art needed to overcome.

4 In *Water Light/Water Needle*, as in the many variations of this performance that Schneemann partly did outdoors in the form of a communal activity without an audience, mesh-like structures assume a central position. In her St. Mark’s performance, they

were attached under the ceiling. More generally, ropes, threads, and weave-like material structures play a decisive role in works by several American women artists. Schneemann’s often-enacted performance *Up To and Including Her Limits* (1973–76) is a case in point.

5 Carolee Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy* (New York: McPherson, 1979), 63.

originally a painter and was influenced by the Abstract Expressionists. (Her early paintings are partly reminiscent of Arshile Gorky and of the raw figurative style of Karel Appel.) In the mid-1960s, after a yearlong stay in Düsseldorf, she produced her key work, *Hang Up*, in which she extended painting into space and began to make her unmistakable objects. With *Hang Up* she positioned herself at a critical distance from New York's male-dominated Minimalist and Pop art scenes. We are of course repeatedly reminded of the "soft" materiality visible in feminist art and its stark contrast to the "hard" and "precise" materials of Minimalism. Hesse uses highly sensualized and even fetishized materials (rubber, hemp ropes, latex, and nets), developing a sensitivity in both the formal and material language with highly communicative and participatory implications. The sensitivity attributed to her work, as well as its unequivocal sexual connotations, connect it to Schneemann in a feminist context. As different as their work may be, in the context of performative spatial dynamics, participatory strategies are undoubtedly central to both. As Hesse does in her objects, Schneemann also uses materials in her performative works that can be experienced synchronistically. And much like Hesse's objects, her performances possess a surreal, sexually charged humor and are participatory in nature.

Hesse's objects, however, are examples of a different kind of performance. The recipient is not offered scenarios of experience in its absolute corporeality through homogeneously designed environmental conditions. Rather, the works contain scenarios in which the performatively charged object animates the recipient to carry out a participatory gesture, opening up an inherent possibility of interacting with the objects in a gestural manner.

Hesse's work contains potentially useful objects, similar in a sense to those of Joseph Beuys. (This aspect reverberates deeply with the artist, considering the tragic circumstances of her personal life.⁶) While Beuys's objects imply a clear functional determination, Hesse's works remain in a strange known-unknown sphere of biomorphic values of form and material. In this sense, they appeal to phantasmagoric spaces of consciousness (like the *Adaptives* of the Austrian artist Franz West), which makes them strongly performative and inscribed by a sculptural "key" that opens a participatory process.

The amount of force with which Hesse's work affects the spatial process can be seen in one of her last pieces: an ensemble of objects made in 1970 that remained untitled but is generally known as *7 Poles*. This large sculpture composed of seven L-shaped poles in various, seemingly translucent materials (aluminum wires, fiberglass, polyethylene bandages) was originally bound together into a single unit. Because of Hesse's poor health as well as the transport problems ensuing from the total size of the work, the individual elements were then left separate and she did not bind them together. According

to the artist's friend Gioia Timpanelli, Hesse was in principal not against using the individual parts or rearranging them in exhibitions.⁷

The associative title of *7 Poles* implies a performative process. The recipient, interacting with the individual objects, is presented with the task of constructing a space by placing the seven poles in a subjective and relational manner. Because of its material aesthetics and biomorphic-abstract form in activist and phantasmagoric constructions of space, it proves to be extremely light and open. This last and mature work by Hesse shows the quality of an object that is capable of opening variable spaces of experience in a performative process.

Pryde's installation *Valerie* of 2004 has a complex relationship to the works by Hesse and Schneemann described above. Undoubtedly, the momentum of interactivity is also central to Pryde's work. However, she does not express this interactivity as a humane, indeed biomorphic, appeal along the lines of a more or less communal call to "get involved." In Schneemann's work—and to some extent in the reduced and minimalistic work of Hesse—this invitation to participate corresponds to the socio-political references of the avant-gardes of the day. One general aspect inherent in the works of Schneemann and Hesse is their critique of media and technology. Indeed, the works of mainly women artists of the period addressed this, from Louise Bourgeois to VALIE EXPORT. The position has in the meantime been thoroughly revised, and idealistic romanticism of the 1960s has given way to a kind of sovereign and cynical willingness to go to battle that points to the heightened pressures of power structures. This basic problem complex adds to the aura of *Valerie*.

A biomorphic material aesthetic pervades the works of Schneemann and Hesse—with a distanced intervention taking place in Hesse's work when she artificially "alienates" the ropes by covering them with a thin coat of latex. Pryde, on the other hand, consciously creates a disturbing contrast in the installation's central sculpture, *Chains*, between the demonstrative, even aggressive, oddness of the material and her direct reference to Hesse. The bicycle chains, in contrast to the latex-coated ropes of Hesse's *No Title*, connote a wide range of alternative and present-day cultural experiences with which

6 Hesse was born in Hamburg and had to flee the Nazis as a child. Several members of her family died in concentration camps.

7 "I think Eva wanted this artwork to be played with. I walked into the room one day, and she had just finished the drawing. I looked at it and laughed. She was pleased with my response because she had meant the work to be funny—funny and yet dire at

the same time. When the work was exhibited publicly, the arrangement was very organized. I had the feeling that it should not be that way." Chad Coerverin, "Uncertain Mandate: A Roundtable Discussion on Conversation Issues," in *Eva Hesse*, ed. Elisabeth Sussmann (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 305.

she not only opens up an entirely different feminist discourse (e.g., machine aesthetics from the pop and metal undergrounds, various fetish cultures, the Riot grrrl movement, techno chic, etc.), but, independent of such speculations, also positions each of these codes in “high culture” by appropriating Hesse’s work.

I ask myself here whether Pryde’s approach is not on the same strategic and potentially affirmative level as media art and its crossover phenomena to advertising and consumerism. Is this not the same radical chic that made the Young British Artists so popular? And does it not in some ways thereby vengefully undermine the idealism of the post-avant-gardes?

As far as direct performance—the subject’s presence in the work of art—is concerned, *Valerie* has a momentum that is more connected to Schneemann’s work than to Hesse’s. Though Pryde’s work follows the same logic, there are notable differences as well. The rope structures in Schneemann’s performances create a staggered spatial matrix. They change the space because the bodies present in this staggered environment and communicating in it are given the possibility of having direct, synchronistic experiences and potentially developing communal communication ecstasies, and thus establish *communitas*. There is none of this in Pryde’s installation. She places the subject in the form of two artificially alienated and media-translated portraits of women in space. Although these two rather small-format photographs hang very close to the structures made of metal chains, they are separated from them by a room divider that is not used for hanging. The isolation of the two elements naturally corresponds to the distanced and critical approach of the artist, whose interest clearly lies in the analysis of cultural codes, including the values of art historical memory. Both photographs show different views of the same person. It is therefore a discreet approach to alienation through the series, beyond which the artist also uses solarization, a popular amateur technique in the 1970s (yet another media-technological means of alienating and distancing in order to heighten the total effect of the work and lend it an isolated/abstracted sign-like character).

Pryde’s demonstration, although it uses rather popular and obvious stylistic means, shows in exemplary fashion that art, through its preoccupation with powerful and explosive developments in real-time media (from video technology to the Internet) has escaped the threat of isolation and disenfranchisement by approaching them, and has considerably expanded its field of activity by means of media art.

This is in keeping with the stance taken by a number of artists in the 1990s, when social and cultural changes were perceived as effects of media (in contrast to the way the use of media was seen in the 1960s as supporting the

aforementioned changes). But the later notion also has its roots in the past, for instance in the fascination with technology displayed by the Italian Futurists and, later, by Marshall McLuhan. As early as 1964, McLuhan saw in media the actual materialization of the dream of a new form of perception expressed in the arts but overlooked by the artists themselves. This new form of perception persists in media theory today, for example in the writings of Friedrich Kittler, who claims that we can only “continue to confuse the output of media with art because design and screws in technical devices ensure that they remain black boxes.” For Kittler, the lids of the devices may not be opened by artists but “as the instructions tell us, only by the specialist. What goes on inside them, in the circuits, is not art but its end in data processing taking leave of the human being.”

I would prefer to leave open the question of whether such solidarity on the part of the avant-garde can only lead to the assumption that art deals with technology and consumerism in a purely affirmative manner. It seems to me that the necessity for this discussion lies especially in the similarities as well as the strong differences in the works that were developed during this time span and from whose paradigmatic structures art continues to develop today. Despite their basic differences, the three works discussed here share a common imperative of the performatively charged space. They all manifest a concept of the work of art in which the body as point of reference in relation to the object makes emancipatory gestures (even if it only appears as a code in the case of Pryde). The artwork, be it painting or sculpture, has therefore expanded space. From the viewpoint of the avant-gardes, this space is defined as a critical laboratory of experiences.



Fig. 12
Carolee Schneemann, *Water Light/Water Needle*, 1966.



Fig. 13
Eva Hesse, *Untitled*, 1970.



Fig. 14
Josephine Pryde, *Valerie (Chains)*, 2004.

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On Curating Performance Art and Its Histories

Barbara Clausen

Performance is everywhere and has no intention of disappearing again. The rising popularity of performative practices and the “re-discovery” of performance history in the visual arts is the result of the unceasing desire for a culture of spectacle and its economy of reproduction.¹ Through its reproduction, archiving, and historicization, performance art, in contrast to its original activist nature, has become an increasingly object-based and visual art form and an integral part of many artists’ practices and museums’ collections.² This ongoing institutionalization of performative practices, whether as a method of production or a tool of representation, has shaped the way knowledge is processed and communicated within and through the exhibition.

The renaissance of performance, within an art world that engages with an increasingly diverse and heterogeneous public, has found its echo in increased acquisitions of documentary archives and collections of performance art, as well as numerous exhibitions concerned with past and current performative practices. This has brought on an institutional awareness towards the performative that has led to the founding of curatorial departments dedicated to presenting, but also to collecting, performative practices.³ This focus on performance art’s self-reflexive practices as well as time- and process-based states of existence takes effect within, as well as outside of, the medium. Exhibiting a historical performance from a collection or an archival source (ranging from the library to the Internet), commissioning a series of new performances, or asking an artist to engage with a performance work in the collection or from art history has brought on numerous questions for artists, curators, and art historians alike, such as: How can performance art’s claim of authenticity be discussed, developed, and translated within the setting of an exhibition or a performance series? Or, in what ways can an exhibition context simultaneously function as a proscenium setting as well as a site of knowledge production, mediation, contemplation, and reception?

To further explore these correlating developments between performance art and its presentation within the framework of the curatorial, I would like to address three examples of my own curatorial work.⁴ Each of these three exhibition

1 Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

2 As a consequence, the work of documentary photographers of the 1960s and ‘70s, such as Bob McElroy, Peter Moore, and Babette Mangolte, has regained attention. See: Barbara Clausen. “Documents Between Spectator and Action.” In *Live Art on Camera Performance and Photography*. Edited by Alice Maude Roxby. (Southampton: John Hansard Gallery, 2007), 69.

3 I am referring to acquisitions such as the

archive of the Viennese Actionists by the mumok (Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig) in Vienna, the Fluxus Silvermann Collection by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the estate of Gina Pane by the Centre Pompidou in Paris, as well as the founding of curatorial departments dedicated to performance art at Tate Modern in London and at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

4 At the center of my work since 2005 are three performance exhibitions and series that I curated as a guest curator for the mumok in Vienna: “After the Act, On the (Re)

and performance series was initiated in collaboration and in exchange with artists, art historians, and curators and served as a springboard for thinking about the representational politics and significance of performative practices in the arts today. The central curatorial question addressed in “After the Act” (2005), “Wieder und Wider” (2006), and “Push and Pull” (2010–11) was how artists engaging in the politics of historicization and appropriation of performance art as a hybrid, process-based medium translate their research into their performative practices. Each project led to the next and offered the opportunity to think about the changing parameters of performance art and its discursive potential, as well as its affinity to the pro-scenic setting of the exhibition space, as a stage, an installation, and a sculptural environment.

The first exhibition and symposium, “After the Act,” focused on confronting the past with the present by asking how the revival of performance art and the re-reading of its histories were based on its various visual manifestations, from the documentation of an event to the staging of an image. Original works from the 1970s by Joan Jonas, Bruce Nauman, Paul McCarthy, Vito Acconci, Günter Brus, Otto Muehl, and Terry Fox were juxtaposed with contemporary works by Carola Dertnig, Luis Felipe Ortega, Daniel Guzmán, and Seth Price. The curatorial starting point in the exhibition was the presentation of Joan Jonas’s entire personal archive of hundreds of photographs and hours of unedited video footage that have accumulated since the debut of her seminal performances *Organic Honey’s Visual Telepathy* and *Organic Honey’s Vertical Roll*.⁵ Both works were paradigmatic for the history of performance art as well as video art by virtue of Jonas’s performative treatment of masking, gesture, and visual mirroring through the simultaneous recording and visual rendering of her self. Jonas echoed before the eyes of her spectators a broad range of media transcriptions, staging ahead of her time what Judith Butler came to articulate two decades later: that the performative staging of repetition offers the opportunity to transform, change, re-signify, and therefore re-constitute our understanding of gender.⁶ Jonas’s enactment of the dual indexicality of the absent, whether as a fleeting gesture on stage or as a gesture caught within the moving image, made visible how an immediate experience is sustained within the mechanisms of its own reproduction.

Making the complexities and porous moments of these performance histories visible by deconstructing the auratic claim of their authenticity and authorship through the re-creation of the invisible bodies of their protagonists was also at the core of Dertnig’s performative multimedia installation *Lora Sana*, 2004–05. The presentation included a series of collages based on documentary photographs within the museum collection and a text mural that recited a personal eyewitness account of an infamous action by the semi-fictional character and first female Viennese Actionist, Lora Sana. In addition to the images and the text, Dertnig decided to break through the wall of the exhibition space,⁷ literally

integrating her semi-fictional character based on true accounts of women involved in the movement within the heart of mumok’s collection of Viennese Actionism. Showing both Dertnig’s and Jonas’s works next to each other signified how performance art’s enactment of its archives was able to re-write its own histories within the context of its immediate showing. While still questioned at the time, it has become a recognized fact that every live performance is based on the potential of its iteration, just as media creates the “reality” and illusion of presence and absence in the first place.

“Wieder und Wider: Performance Appropriated,”⁸ the second exhibition and performance series, was the result of continuing conversations on the theoretical and ideological implications of artistic strategies that deal with the possibilities of performative re-enactments. Rather than attempting to reconstitute past events in a nostalgic and “timeless” fashion, the series of performances and lectures probed and discussed methods of critical appropriation within the performative field.

For the invited artists—among others, Tom Burr, Sharon Hayes, Jennifer Lacey, Gerard Byrne, and the collective Continuous Project—the conceptual and physical specificities inherent to their referenced sources served as the starting point for their site-specific appropriations. These included a score by Trisha Brown, Robert Morris’s silver cube sculptures, an unpublished transcript of a symposium at Dia Art Foundation in New York from the early 1990s, archival images of political protests and demonstrations in Vienna since the Second World War, and a minimalist sculpture by Donald Judd from the mumok collection.

One of the works I would like to discuss is Sharon Hayes’s “investigative gaze into the past” in her performance and installation *In the Near Future*, 2004–10.⁹ As

Presentation of Performance Art” in 2005, “Wieder und Wider: Performance Appropriation,” co-curated with Achim Hochdörfer in collaboration with Tanzquartier Vienna in 2006, and the two-part performance series and exhibition “Push and Pull,” presented first at mumok and the Tanzquartier Vienna in 2010 and at Tate Modern in London in 2011.

- 5 Barbara Clausen, ed., *After the Act: The (Re) Presentation of Performance Art*. (Vienna: Verlag Moderner Kunst Nürnberg, 2006), 11.
- 6 Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (London: Routledge, 2003), 392–401.
- 7 Lora Sana is a semi-fictional character Dertnig

assembled from her long-term research on the forgotten histories of Austrian performance art and a series of interviews with women artists involved in Viennese Actionism, who wanted to stay anonymous at the time. Through this spatial intervention, Dertnig added not only an artist but also a new room to the permanent collection of the mumok, dedicated solely to the “re-discovery” of the first female Viennese Actionist.

- 8 The title was translated and used in English as “Again and Against.”
- 9 *In the Near Future* was shown in 2005 in New York (“Art in General,” curated by Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy), in Vienna in 2006 (“Wider und Wieder,” mumok, Achim Hochdörfer and Barbara Clausen) and in

part of her ongoing investigation of protest, the work is based on “a series of anachronistic and speculative actions in public space.”¹⁰ For a period of seven days, Hayes went to different locations in Vienna, staging one-woman protests while carrying a different protest sign each day. Each of the slogans referred to a protest that had taken place in a respective location of the city since the beginning of the twentieth century. Rather than just observe, the invited audience was asked to follow and document her actions, with color transparency film provided by the artist. After each performance, the images would be developed overnight and installed and presented within a steadily growing collection of slide projectors. The exposure of this participatory labor justified Hayes’s presence in the public sphere, each day marking the other’s translational achievements of the performer and her performing audiences.¹¹ While the amassment of over five hundred images became agents of Hayes’s actions for the future, her conversation with Johanna Burton right after the installation of her last slide projector, announced as a performative event, allowed for a re-experience of what was missed by most of the exhibition visitors.

The aim of “Wieder und Wider” was to raise awareness about specific social and aesthetic constellations and to ask why references are made to a past event and how the meaning of historical works can change when they are re-enacted. Part of the curatorial concept was to not only consider the shift of context that automatically takes place when a work of the past is “en-acted” or repeated, but also to discuss and determine with the artists how the immediate spatio-temporal context can be translated and reflected through its immediate discursivation, thereby causing a crossing of various disciplines, contexts, and authors.

In “Push and Pull” the aim was to investigate the contingent status of performance as a mode of production rather than an event-based art form. This shift from genre to methodology was underlined in the decision to present “Push and Pull” in two subsequent editions, the first at the Tanzquartier and mumok in Vienna and the second edition at Tate Modern four months later. Taking its point of departure in the curatorial challenges addressed in “Wieder und Wider,” the spatio-temporal de-synchronization in “Push and Pull” offered the opportunity to engage and react to a different institutional framework. In Vienna, works were presented either on a stage or in the FACTORY exhibition space of the mumok, and in London the work was presented in a series of rooms on one floor. The projects that were chosen by the curatorial team¹² to be repeated in both locations were each presented in a room of their own with an additional room before and after left empty. This allowed the invited artists, who included Gregg Bordowitz, Andrea Geyer and Josiah McEhleny, Florian Hecker, as well as Sarah Pierce, to embrace the transitional moments that render visible the contingent media nature of performance art in relationship to site-specific installations. This demanded a kind of openness not

only on the artists’ side but also on the part of the institution, in order to expose their *modi operandi* and the rituals of exhibition-making.

The destabilization of usual timeframes in the works, the demand for awareness of different formats, as well as the reception of previous versions of the works became particularly apparent in Sarah Pierce’s *Future Exhibitions* (2010), a performance and installation within the framework of an iconic work in the history of performance art, Allan Kaprow’s *Push and Pull: A Furniture Comedy for Hans Hofmann* (1963), which is part of the mumok collection. Pierce was asked to curate the re-installment of *Push and Pull* for the first edition in Vienna.¹³ She decided to reconstruct its original installation from 1963 at MoMA rather than following its later iterations. In keeping with Hofmann’s concept, she collected and arranged a variety of office and museum furniture such as tables, pedestals, and paper rolls in two adjoining spaces that were constructed expressly for her performance.¹⁴ *Future Exhibitions* is composed of five scenarios, consisting of text fragments read aloud by Pierce followed by rearrangements of the objects from one space into the next acted out by Pierce with the help of two stage hands. While the mise-en-scène of a light and a dark room is a reference to Kaprow’s *Push and Pull*, the script is based on an archival image or document related to a historical exhibition that as such has been exhibited before. Pierce’s first arrangement abstractly resembles the infamous photographic document of the “0,10 The Last Futurist Exhibition” by Kasimir Malevich, from 1915. The second quote is from a letter written by Malevich in 1986 and published the same year in *Art in America*.¹⁵ She continues with Seth Siegel’s description of his exhibition project “One Month” from 1969, followed by a review of a recently republished conversation

Warsaw (Museum of Modern Art Warsaw, curated by Monika Szczukowska) and London (“Perplexed in Public,” curated by Elena Crippa and Silvia Sgualdini) in 2008.

¹⁰ See the artist’s website <http://www.shaze.info>, March 8, 2013, <http://www.shaze.info/projects>.

¹¹ The slides featured the artist standing with protest signs and slogans specific to the Viennese history of protest, ranging from the weekly protests against the conservative right-wing Austrian government at the beginning of 2000, to anti-nuclear protests of the early 1980s, to women’s rights demonstrations of the 1970s.

¹² The curatorial team consisted of Barbara Clausen in collaboration with Achim Hochdörfer (mumok), Sandra Noeth and Walter Heun (Tanzquartier Vienna), as well as Kathy Noble and Catherine Wood (Tate Modern).

¹³ The work consists of a wooden trunk filled with handwritten instruction signs made

out of cardboard. The execution of the work, which was originally presented as a participatory environment at the Museum of Modern Art in 1963, is variable and site-specific to its showing. See Allan Kaprow and Jean Jacques Lebel, *Assemblages, Environments and Happenings* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1966).

¹⁴ *Future Exhibitions* was only once performed within the original Kaprow installation; all other editions of this work have been executed in empty gallery spaces that appropriate Kaprow’s concept of a white and a black space filled with mundane objects.

¹⁵ The letter was installed as an artwork in the exhibition “ARTEAST 2000” at the Moderna Galerija in Ljubljana in 2004 and was most recently on view at VOX Centre d’Art Contemporain in Montreal in the exhibition “histoire s de l’art,” in spring 2012. See http://www.voxphoto.com/expositions/histoires_de_lart/histoires_de_lart.html.

with the critic Michael Compton, originally published in 1971 for Robert Morris's infamous exhibition, shut down soon after opening, "Bodyspacemotionthings" at the Tate Gallery in London. Pierce finishes with a citation from a letter written by a young artist claiming compensation for a destroyed artwork in the exhibition "Interaction 77" at the Project Art Center in Dublin in 1977. The final state of the room is a reference to an image of Morris's *Scatter Piece* installation at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 1970.

Pierce appropriates the historical documents as conceptual devices by literally translating her research on the history of exhibitions within a new exhibition context. As physical references to past exhibition-related events, these documents, which have already been displayed in the past, are reactivated through voice as well as action. According to the artist, they become literal markers through which the invisible procedures are performed that institutions maintain to anticipate "the work."¹⁶ Both versions, the first in Vienna and the second in London, affirmed *Future Exhibitions* as a site of encounter that visualized the continuing and accelerated existence of these documentary sources as artifacts and art objects. In other words, Pierce's performance of their transgressive media status affirmed their function as a source for new documents, a process inherent to the correlative relationship of performance art to its mediation.¹⁷ This became particularly apparent in Pierce's specific choice of images to represent the work in the future, such as in this publication, as well as in her directions to film the work not necessarily with the aim to capture every detail that takes place, but rather to physically represent the visible and invisible segments that a witness of the performance himself would experience.

For all the artists, curators, and theoreticians invited to "After the Act," "Wieder und Wider," as well as "Push and Pull," the cultural archive served as a medium as well as source material for performing, discussing, and exposing. The aim was to deconstruct the representational structures that are indicative for the historiography of performance art and its relationship to the history of curating. While Pierce literally performs the contingent status of knowledge production in relation to the institutional politics of art and the historiography of exhibitions, Dertnig's performative investigation of the status of the artist's intention in relation to the authorship of the witness questions the politics of gender inherent to performance art's canonization. Hayes on the other hand steps outside the exhibition space to investigate the tension between the anticipation, experience, and reception of a historical moment of emancipation that enters the realm of cultural memory through its translation into a performance-based installation.

The insistence on the potential of a counter-reading of the cultural credentials of performance art's canonization is key to the narrative subtexts that can be

traced throughout the three exhibitions. In retrospect, the collaborative work of Luis Felipe Ortega and Daniel Guzmán, the collective Continuous Project, or the joint performance and sculpture by Andrea Geyer and Josiah McEhleny embraced the performative as both a mode of research and a tool for blurring the dichotomy between the active and the passive within the institutional politics of performance art and its processes of historicization. They asked what the revival of performance says about an art world increasingly engaged in capturing the politics of everyday life within its walls. Their commitment to showing what is included or excluded is part of an effort to emancipate and, in the sense of Austin's speech act, to announce the disruptive potential of their actions over the heteronormative traditions that determine the canonization of art.

Consequently, the premise for curating performance art in the future lies in the conscious integration of the discontinuities and ruptures that are usually edited out in the process of performance art's historicization. This curatorial as well as artistic exploration of the interlinking of the archival with the present particularly through performative practices allows insight into the increasing collapse of time we are experiencing today. The site of the exhibition offers the opportunity to activate the tension between episodic and semantic experiences that culminate in the formation of cultural memory. We must also take note of the fact that the traditionally determined three generations it took for a revival of the past have been sped up to the extent that the present is immediately translated into the past. This is due to three reasons: performance's increasing institutionalization as part of the work, the growing interest in appropriative practices, as well as contemporary art and art history's interest in the role of cultural memory and its contingent relationship to collective experience and knowledge production. The goal is to keep the productive tension between the live and the mediated "alive," avoiding both the loss of a collective imaginary memory as well as the canonization of performance art into a linear narrative that automatically excludes rather than includes the many different streams and trends of performance. This would involve a hybrid media and a discursive practice that offers all its protagonists the chance to explore how one medium is implicated in the analysis and creative redefinition of the other.

¹⁶ E-mail conversation between the author and the artist, 2010.

¹⁷ Barbara Clausen, "Archives of Inspiration/Les archives de l'inspiration," *Ciel Variable*, no. 83 (Fall 2010): 23.

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Performance or Enactment

Andrea Fraser

The Problem with “Performative”

“Enactment” is a term I began using in the mid-2000s as an alternative to “performative” and “performativity,” terms that exploded into cultural theory with so much promise in the 1990s. As is widely known, the term “performative” first developed in linguistics and the philosophy of language. It is most often traced back through J. L. Austin’s 1962 book, *How to Do Things with Words*, which developed on the idea of “speech acts”—utterances that DO things. This idea was taken up by a number of people in the 1970s and ‘80s, such as Shoshana Felman in *The Literary Speech Act*, and John Searle, but it was Judith Butler who brought the term to the forefront of much thinking about culture and gender with a series of books, beginning with *Gender Trouble* in 1990, that developed the theory of gender performativity. “Performative” and “performativity” quickly became two of the most often used terms in art discourse, perhaps second only to “critical” and “criticality.” In the process, they became almost completely detached from their dictionary meanings as specifically linguistic forms, as well as from the theory and politics of gender identity with which they developed in Butler’s work.

When the term “performative” jumped from linguistics into literary theory, it promised to break down the boundary between doing, on the one hand, and saying, writing, or representing on the other. When it developed in feminist and queer theory to describe the often compulsory and normative character of gender performance, it promised to break down the boundary separating self-conscious and specialized cultural performance from the often unconscious and overdetermined social and psychological aspects of gender performance. In many ways, I see the rise of the term “performative” in art discourse, where it has come to describe any kind of artistically framed and conceptualized activity, recorded or witnessed, as a regressive re-inscription of these very boundaries.

For me, that generalized usage is a disappointment and a failure of the promise of the performative: of doing away with the opposition between saying and doing and thus freeing our conception of doing from the constraints of motility; of framing a reflection on what it is that we do when we do whatever it is that we do, whether speaking, writing, interacting, making objects or images, or even, of course, performing. The evolution of the term from a noun denoting a linguistic form to an adjective describing any element of an artwork that involves a physical action, or any aspect of a text or lecture that is conceived as dramatic or formally effective, may actually be a devolution. It’s gotten to the point that when I hear the word “performative” used to describe an artistic action, I want to jump up and yell, No! no! That’s not what it means! It’s a linguistic form! It’s not an action. It’s specifically not an action! It is doing something with words! I’m not sure why I care. I can’t feel any particular claim

to a legitimate usage, since my history with the term is superficial at best. My frustration, I think, has more to do with the function the term often seems to serve in art discourse—with what the term “performative” itself performs.

The term “performative,” it seems to me, has become a kind of camouflage or lure, a distraction or diversion such as those employed to augment a sleight of hand, in which we name something but only in order to distance, conceal, and contain it. Rather than opening up all manner of forms and activities to a reflection on what they do, even our capacity to use “performative” to reflect specifically on what we may be doing with words and other nonactions has been lost in artistic usage, as that primary meaning of the term is now mostly consigned to anachronistic and academic usage. But what this artistic usage has accomplished above all, it seems to me, is the re-enclosure of what is potentially unconscious or unthought, unwelcome, uncontrolled (and perhaps uncontrollable) in what we do within a sphere of artistically and theoretically framed intention and conceptualization and, ultimately, a kind of artistic and intellectual omnipotence.

In many ways, the explosion of the terms “performative” and “performativity” seems to have been less a response to a shift in art practice or how we understand it, or to any interpretive need, than to a need among artists and academics to reassure ourselves that we are actually doing something: that our works do not just sit on pages or shelves or hang on walls, but do things; that, within the forms of autonomy that have defined the field of art and have distanced and neutralized function, we can indeed have an impact. It seems to me, however, that the current usage of the terms has the opposite effect. Despite their apparent connotation of doing things (with or without words), the terms now more often seem to inscribe an ever larger sphere of activities within the symbolic and discursive systems of our artistic and academic fields. In doing so they tend to empty activities that are always inescapably embedded in a whole range of social, economic, and psychological and emotional relations of all but their artistically and intellectually intended and conceptualized meanings.

Enactment in Psychoanalysis

There was an afternoon in the mid-2000s when I was in a session with my psychoanalyst in New York, working diligently (as usual) to avoid some important issue, when I said, with the just-came-to-mind casualness with which I generally attempted to hide my efforts to impress him: “I am just so done with ‘the performative.’ It is overused and mostly MIS-used. From now on, I’m only going to use the word ‘enactment.’” He replied, “You better hurry.”

I’m not sure where I first came across the term “enactment.” Butler uses it in a fairly specific way, as does Pierre Bourdieu, and I imagine there may be a body of literature on the term in performance studies with which I’m unfamiliar. When I started using it in the mid-2000s, it came to me primarily through a range of psychoanalytic perspectives I was exploring at the time, particularly Kleinian, object-relations, and relational psychoanalysis. I soon became aware that the term “enactment” had been subject to intensive debate in those frameworks starting in the mid-1990s, roughly in parallel to the explosion of interest in performativity in cultural theory, but with no apparent connection to that term or its development.

In psychoanalytic theory, the concept of enactment emerged through a reconciliation of the notions of transference and acting out. One of the premises of psychoanalytic practice is that you can’t change something over there—by talking about it, interpreting it, representing it, reflecting on it. You can only work on what is made “immediate and manifest” (as Freud put it) in the “here and now” of the analytic situation. This principle has been central to my thinking about performance, critical practice, and site-specificity since the mid-1980s. Transference is the concept developed by Freud to describe the mechanisms through which psychological and emotional structures and relationships are made “immediate and manifest” in the context of psychoanalytic treatment, and thus available for analytic working-through. Freud was concerned primarily with the repetition of early relationships to primary attachment figures. Melanie Klein and others expanded on Freud’s narrow preoccupation with what she called “whole objects” to include under the rubric of transference phenomena the entire range of intrapsychic as well as interpersonal relationships with any object of emotional investment—including those that exist only or primarily in fantasy and thus can no longer be considered repetitions of early relationships.

If Austin theorized how we do things *with* words, psychoanalysis instead developed as a technique of doing things *without* actions. It developed by way of a prohibition on actions: physical actions such the manipulation or direct therapeutic treatment of the body or any physical contact between patient and physician. Psychoanalysis, as Freud described it, was to work through the replacement of compulsive, symptomatic *doing* by means of *speaking*. The neutrality and abstinence of the analyst, the patient’s relative immobility on the couch, and the strict boundaries of the analytic frame were all oriented toward limiting the potential for impulses to be “discharged in action,” so as to confine transference repetitions to the realm of thought and corral them toward speech, and thus toward conscious memory, symbolization, recognition, and integration. It was in this realm of speech that the “*therapeutic action*” (as James Strachey called it) specific to psychoanalysis was conceived. Other kinds of action on the part of patient or analyst were considered coun-

terproductive and labeled “acting out,” a term that developed strong implications of adolescent delinquency and a developmentally challenged need to communicate through actions rather than words. While the concepts of transference and acting out were clearly paired by Freud, they became split along lines parallel to the opposition of speech and action.

But the opposition between saying and doing, remembering and repeating, never really held up. By the mid-90s, many analysts were acknowledging that speech did not restrain or substitute for actions, but was itself an action, and that therapist and patient always enact the issues being discussed. The emergence of the concept of enactment was also spurred by the critique, developed by feminist and queer analysts, of the kind of normative thinking that linked terms like “acting out” to delinquency and pathology. It was also linked to a broad rethinking of counter-transference. While enactment encompasses a whole range of transference phenomena, it is used most specifically to describe “actualizations” of unconscious structures and impulses in which both patient and analyst participate. In this sense, the term has been strongly linked to what are sometimes called two-body (as opposed to one-body) psychologies, in the context of which it describes the intersubjective dimension of transference phenomena as distinct from what may be considered a projection of purely intrapsychic phenomena.

Despite over two decades of debate, there is not a lot of consensus within the field of psychoanalysis on what enactment is and whether the term describes anything new. Some analysts see it just as a new way of describing transference phenomena; others acknowledge that it now seems that everything that happens in analysis, as well as outside of it, can be called enactment. At that point, some suggest, the term loses its meaning and place in psychoanalytic theory.

From Performance to Enactment

For me, the value of the term “enactment” in engaging with culture lies not in the specificity of the phenomenon it describes so much as the perspective on phenomena it frames. First, it allows us to step back from the opposition between doing, acting, or performing on the one hand, and saying or representing on the other, by framing a focus on what we are doing within or beyond—and often in contrast—to what we are saying. At the same time, it allows us to look past the specifically and narrowly defined artistic motives and meanings of what we do, framed by art discourse above all (including the discourse of performativity) and begin to take into account the full range of motives and meanings of our activities, including those that are unconscious and unthought, compulsive and compulsory, and socially and psychologically overdetermined.

What the concept of enactment can bring into focus, in art as in psychoanalysis, are the structures of relationships that are produced and reproduced in all forms of activity. These may include intra- or intersubjective psychological relationships—particularly relationships to objects in a psychoanalytic sense, that is, anything that becomes a focus of emotional investment—as well as social and economic relationships that may be internalized, objectified, or institutionalized. What enactment implies above all is that in the production and reproduction of these relationships there is *always* an investment, and that the meaning of the enactment, its significance, function, and effect, is intimately and inseparably tied up with that investment. In most psychoanalytic frameworks, that investment would be understood primarily as an affective investment—emotional or sexual: an investment of psychological energy in which the body is always at stake on some level as subject to pleasure or pain, satisfaction or frustration, security or anxiety. I would say, more broadly, that it is always a *material* investment: *economic* in both the psychological and social sense of that term, inseparably, in which a whole range of objects, real and phantasized, from which we hope to derive some form of satisfaction—or fend off frustration, deprivation, and anxiety—are also at stake.

If we are always enacting, and if these structures are always there, performance art—and art generally, as I understand it—aims, first of all, to occasion a recognition of and reflection on those structures in their enactment: structures that include not only what artists, performers, or intellectuals do, but what audiences, readers, and other participants in any encounter also do. And this, for me is how “performative,” if I used the word, would be defined: that is, as enactment that performs itself and in so doing structures a recognition of and reflection on the relations produced and reproduced in the activity and, above all, on the investments that orient them.

Understanding Is Performative

Philip Auslander in Conversation with
Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein

Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein: In your lecture at the symposium *This Sentence Is Now Being Performed* in Vienna in 2010, you proposed in your roles as scholar, theorist, “exhibition archeologist,” and teacher a new methodological approach for establishing relationships between (performance) art and its addressees, under the umbrella term of “reactivation.” Your thoughts, based on Hans-Georg Gadamer’s concept of “contemporaneity,” open up a crucial point for major areas of performative knowledge production, whether research, teaching, or curating. This, as I see it, is because “contemporaneity” and “performance art” have similar (subversive) qualities, and are both in constant transformation. Could you please “reactivate” your dialogical concept for us in a few words to start off?

Philip Auslander: The term *reactivation* actually comes from Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (at least in the standard English translation). It’s in the passage where Benjamin describes how the reproduction brings the original artwork to the beholder using terms that suggest spatial displacement:

“The cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the studio of a lover of art; the choral production, performed in an auditorium or in the open air, resounds in the living room. [...] [I]n permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, [the technique of reproduction] reactivates the object reproduced.”

It seems to me that this provides a good starting point for thinking about performance documentation, which is after all a form of reproduction. Documentation brings the performance to us, and by reactivating the performance from its reproduction we have some kind of experience of it.

It is impossible, however, for us to experience the “original” performance as its original audience did (which could not have been a singular experience in the first place, of course). There is a tension between the fact that the event documented occurred in another place, at another time, in another situation, and the act of reactivation, which occurs in the here and now, in the immediately present situation. For this reason, I feel that a phenomenological account of performance documentation is needed, and I therefore turned to H.G. Gadamer.

I find Gadamer’s notion of *contemporaneity*, which he elaborates in *Truth and Method*, to be particularly useful (and provocative) in this context. Contemporaneity in Gadamer’s sense is not a characteristic of objects (as in “contemporary art”). Rather, it is a relationship that we, as audience, choose to assume to art objects that for historical or other reasons are distant from us. We must be able to perceive these objects as fully present

and immediate in order to engage with them as art despite whatever distance there is between our horizon and that of the object. As Gadamer says, this doesn't just happen—it entails approaching the object with a certain mindset and engaging it in a hermeneutic dialogue. I argue that something like this must be happening when we engage with a performance by reactivating it from documentation.

FTH: When you use the terms documentation and reproduction in this theoretical constellation, are you referring to the artwork or to the scholarly work? I understand that in Benjamin's meaning the two concepts accompany each other, especially regarding modes of technical reproduction, but the way I see it, these aspects represent only one segment of performance art. Here, even after the act we have endless material of various kinds that we can reactivate (sketches, drawings, paintings, etc.). Hence, your concept of reactivation and contemporaneity (my favorite!), oriented on Gadamer, offers free space for thinking. Gadamer's talk of "fragile repetition," where reactivation of the context takes place through language and contemporaneity, harbors future potential for performative knowledge that cannot readily be pinpointed and which moreover creates, as he calls it, an "event." Can we think about Gadamer's "event" as a kind of archive? Rewritten every time fluid access is gained? Whether updates in the form of written and spoken words, re-enactments, or a variety of artistic appropriations and exhibitions?

PA: What attracts me about Gadamer relates to what you're saying, I think. For Gadamer, interpretation is neither a process of extracting a meaning from something that is simply there, waiting to be discovered, nor a matter of imposing one's own ideas on the thing. Rather, meaning is a never-finished dialogue between the interpreter and the thing being interpreted. Gadamer says, "Understanding proves to be an event." In this sense, understanding is performative; it exists in and through an engagement with something, not as the end result of a finite process of interpretation. It is fragile, because it depends on finding and maintaining some kind of common ground with the thing we seek to understand. When we engage with performance documentation, we seek to understand the performance documented in it. Gadamer reminds us that this doesn't happen by our simply extracting the performance from the documentation. Coming to an understanding of the performance from the document is a never-completed process of dialogue and engagement with its documentation. The fact that it is never completed explains why we can come back to the same performance documents again and again without losing interest in them.

I admit that my analysis revolves around a basic scenario in which someone is looking at some form of documentation of a performance (photos

or a video, for example) and trying to understand the performance from it. But your question reminds me that there are other forms of engagement that I also see as exemplifying this process. For example, performance re-enactment is a kind of corporeal hermeneutics in which we try to understand (in Gadamer's sense) a performance by performing it ourselves.

FTH: Your notion of "Understanding is performative" encapsulates impressively the way that production and consumption, effect and perception, occur practically simultaneously in the performative process. This thought brings me to your essay "The Performativity of Performance Documentation" from 2006. There you argue that the audience is mostly marginalized in performance documentation hierarchies: "It is very rare that the audience is documented at anything like the same level of detail as the art action." Has this proportion of values changed since then? And what significance can performance scholars, curators, and you even mention re-enactment (by performing it ourselves?) have within an ongoing process of performative understanding (and historiography)?

PA: That's right: perceiving a performance from its documentation and understanding it are not separate operations. We don't first form an idea of what the performance was, then seek to understand it. We come to know the performance through a process of interpretation that also produces our understanding of it.

I'm not aware of any general trend toward documenting the audience more systematically than in the past. For example, there is a video of Marina Abramović's performance at MoMA, *The Artist is Present*, in which the camera focuses on Abramović and the person sitting opposite her. The audience is present in the frame, but the spectators are standing behind a line on the floor, and we can only see the bottoms of their legs.

On the other hand, the audience is quite present in the first two sequences of the film of Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces*. In the first segment, her re-enactment of Vito Acconci's *Seedbed*, Abramović is invisible and the audience is listening to her voice. As filmed, the performance focuses on the audience's response. In the second segment, we see the audience milling around and reacting to Abramović's static re-enactment of VALIE EXPORT's photograph *Genital Panic*. Thereafter, however, the audience largely disappears from the film. The audience's presence is suggested nevertheless by the sounds of bodies and muffled voices on the soundtrack. It is also the case that much performance documentation is produced from the point of view of a spectator, thus documenting the audience's experience even if not the spectators themselves.

I think that we as scholars, curators, and educators tend to treat performance documentation a bit too casually. We use it as evidence in our arguments, show it to our students, build exhibitions around it as if it and its meaning were self-evident: here it is. The process of engagement with performance documentation that I envision from my encounters with Gadamer is far more demanding and difficult than that. He describes contemporaneity not as something that is just there or just happens, but as “a task for consciousness and an achievement that is demanded of it.” I view our use of performance documentation in this way. We need to be more self-conscious about our engagement with it and to really think carefully about the processes by which we come to an understanding of the performance from it.

FTH: Beyond doubt your concept suggests a very open, hence anti-hierarchical, platform of thinking which is, due to its time/space-based character, open for transformation. Especially in light of the current political and economic tendencies or strategies to simplify, homogenize, and institutionalize, a transitive performative practice and theory has the power to intervene through acting within the conventions of education and research. The awareness of this inflationary trend was the initial point for this book.

Performance art and performativity by nature bring to light conventions involved in production, presentation, reception, and historicization, as well as the specific cultural and political implications associated with them. They also show how these conventions are produced through or within each artwork within their specific contexts and the spaces in which they occur. This brings me back once more to the idea of contemporaneity in relation to the question of space as crucial political element. In the words of Carola Dertnig: “How we know depends on where we know.” How, with regard to reactivation, does the (re)production and transformation of space influence performative practice and agency?

PA: As the quotation from Benjamin with which I started suggests, reactivation involves movement. Benjamin proposes that reproduction brings the performance to us and we experience it in our own spatial and temporal context, not its original one. I think this harmonizes with Gadamer’s concept of contemporaneity since the point there is that we must make works of art from other times contemporaneous in order that they may speak to us. These ideas are also consistent with your quotation from Dertnig: the ways we know are functions of where we are, as she says, meaning that in order to know something we must be able to experience it in our own space (in the broadest sense of the word). Gadamer insists, however, that this does not represent dislocation or discontinuity since the very fact that we are able to render something that is not immediate

to us contemporaneous means that we have found within it something that is meaningful to us, some common ground that permits dialogue, even as we remain aware that we are experiencing something that originated in a context different from our own.

I don’t know if this example is to the point, but it’s on my mind. I was recently in Canada, visiting the Université du Québec à Montréal. While there, I had an interesting conversation with Professor Louise Poissant and some of her colleagues. We were talking about listening to sound recordings from the distant past (of Caruso, for instance). The suggestion was made that we have to be able to get past the poor quality of these recordings to appreciate the performances they capture. To me, this suggests an attempt to make an object from the past speak to us in the same way as an object from our present, which is not possible. It is also not possible for us to hear these recordings the way their original audiences did. For me, the challenge lies in grasping the idea that this original audience did not perceive the recordings as being of poor quality: for the contemporary audience, they were state of the art! We cannot reconstruct the way people heard these recordings generations ago, and we cannot turn them into modern recordings by ignoring their technical limitations. Again, it is a question of finding the common ground that permits us to experience the performances on these recordings in a space that mediates between our making them contemporaneous and their historical alterity.

FTH: For this “common ground” where the reactivated artwork and its media transformation meet the receiver, it is crucial for the readability of the audiovisual artefacts that the different media formats supplement and comment on each other. This brings me to the issue of their arrangement in a presentation, including updates in the form of (virtual) exhibition archives, and a variety of artistic appropriations. In your essay “Pictures of an Exhibition,” you were confronted with the task of writing about two “virtual” exhibitions without having experienced them directly, neither the artwork nor the curatorial setting. You call your approach that of an “exhibition archeologist.” Could you please describe your “Icaric” perspective in such a specific cartography? What significance will the alteration and extension of artefacts have for knowledge classification and access to future archives?

PA: In using the word “Icaric,” I hope you didn’t mean that I’m flying too close to the sun! When I call myself a performance archeologist I don’t intend the term in a Foucauldian way. Although it is a metaphor, I use it fairly literally to suggest my experience of reconstructing performances from documentation when I’m researching them. I feel like an archeologist piecing together a sense of what happened in the past, or at any rate at

a distance from me, from the artefactual record: photographs, video recordings, audio recordings, written descriptions, artist statements, interviews, and so on. (As you've noted, my own work on performances becomes part of this record as well.) These things litter my desk and the floor of my study when I'm working on such a project; I move among them trying to piece together an idea of what the performance was like. I don't necessarily have a specific sense of how these different kinds of records complement one another or how many are necessary. Generally, I simply try to find as much as possible and work with what I have. Ultimately, the idea is to bridge the distance between myself and the event without denying that there is a distance. To be honest, when I write about performances or artworks I know in this way I do not usually acknowledge the process of reactivation but simply write about them as things I know. Once in a while, though, I like to incorporate reflection on what it means to write about things I haven't actually seen into critical work, as in the essay you mentioned.

I don't think we can talk today about archives without talking about the Internet and social media. Is YouTube.com an archive, for example? It and similar websites are certainly among my chief sources of material these days, including the two documentations of Abramović's work I mentioned earlier. And they make my life much easier. When I first started out as a scholar some thirty years ago, I would have had to travel to libraries and archives to find things I can now locate at the touch of a mouse. But they don't meet the standards of professional archives: the items are posted at random, often not in the best form available, they are haphazardly annotated (if at all), can disappear at any time (which has caused me to create my own archive of materials captured from these sites), and so on. On the one hand, the Internet has caused a proliferation of archives ranging from artists' own websites, to those of museums and libraries, to social media. Collectively, they have made such an astounding range of materials readily available that it is more interesting to ponder what is not available online than what is. On the other hand, however, even if individual sites are well-organized, easily accessible, etc., as a whole the Internet-as-archive is chaotic and requires enormous patience to navigate and sift through (another evocation of my archeological metaphor). The amount of information available at one's fingertips is unprecedented, but it has also become extremely important to be very conscious of where one is finding information and how one is using it.

FTH: Here we have experienced the same shift in paradigms in research and teaching over the years, as well in performance art. For me, the decisive questions have not in fact changed. We navigate, among other things, within

an extreme range between two ambivalent phenomena: the "mediatized society" and the realm exemplified by the "Marina Abramović Institute for the Preservation of Performance Art."

Have these developments in media technology and the associated popularity (e.g., *The Artist is Present*) made new modes of performance possible? And what do you consider to be the status and perception of live art between these two poles today?

PA: It's interesting that you pose these questions just now. I am currently working on an essay that is taking me back to some of my own work from about twenty years ago in which I was writing about performance artists' relationship to mediatized culture. I had the impression that, in the mid-1980s, performance artists could become quite popular (the primary examples I discussed were Laurie Anderson and Spalding Gray, but they could have been others). The lines between performance art, music performance, mainstream acting, and stand-up comedy seemed thinner than ever and it seemed quite possible for performers to move relatively fluidly between several categories.

Ironically, even though our society and culture are more mediatized than ever, it seems to me that performance art is no longer a launching point for a broader career as a performer. Now, Abramović is the exception rather than the rule—isn't she pretty much the only celebrity performance artist around? The kind of performance she does, for which she advocates, and which has contributed to her becoming a celebrity, is distinctly old school—I consider her the last woman standing in the realm of body art. It seems to me that her project is primarily about the preservation and perpetuation of a specific kind of performance that originates in the 1970s as a kind of tradition to be passed down to younger artists.

Perhaps part of the reason for this is that other kinds of performers with ready access to media exposure have usurped what used to be modes characteristic of art world performance. David Blaine, for example, describes himself on his website as an "illusionist and endurance artist." He has as much claim to the title of endurance artist as anyone from the 1970s, yet he practices this kind of performance in the context of mass-mediated, spectacular entertainment rather than that of art.

It is possible that the current conjuncture of media, celebrity, performance, and art is leading to some new possibilities in performance, but I don't see them coming from the art world. Rather, it seems to me that someone like Lady Gaga is operating at this intersection quite consciously and successfully to produce a hybrid performance that is rooted in pop music

but quite clearly has substantial connections to, and carefully selected precedents in, art and fashion. Researching Gaga, I have run into writers posing the question “Is she a performance artist?”; a question I have never seen posed about a pop musician. In a strange way, I suspect that figures like Blaine and Gaga ultimately will be more successful in perpetuating certain aspects of performance art and bringing them to new, young audiences than will Abramović’s preservation project.

FTH: If performance exists as an art form, Abramović is, among other artists such as Carolee Schneemann, doubtless at its center and has been for forty years. (Whereas I see performance as a media beneath others, which has in most of the artistic oeuvres the stance of a rite of passage within an intermedia mode of production.) What is distressing however in Abramović’s role as accreditor of “performance art” are the restrictions she proposes, for example on re-enactment. Building up voluntary limits and regulations for the following generations of artists (not for the institutions and the market in this case) inhibits the potential of performance. In the best case this attitude can serve as a touchstone for future generations.

Bringing in Lady Gaga prompts me to turn to the “category of performance,” as you stated already in your earlier book *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. Performance has gone through changes, even revolutions, in meaning. It’s in fact pointless to ask whether Lady Gaga is a “real” artist or not. Pop culture and spectacle have always appropriated art qualities. But essential for me is the shift that occurred concerning the way performance is treated discursively. The way it is perceived and discussed determines what and where it ends up being. So if we have this apparent instability to the category of art and what a work of art involves, what about the term of artwork as a category? Has it become a blend as well, like the notion of performance?

PA: I absolutely agree with you when you say that “the way it is perceived and discussed determines what it is.” The only definitions of art or performance that make sense to me are contextual or institutional ones: if an event is framed as performance art within the context in which it is shown, this is what makes it performance art rather than something else. David Blaine is a good example: his endurance actions are framed as spectacular, media-worthy events rather than art. But there is nothing about the formal qualities of the actions themselves that makes them entertainment rather than art.

All of this is quite important in the history of performance, since “performance art” (or “live art,” or any of the other terms) is a category of fairly recent invention. I don’t think, for example, that the makers of Happenings

in the late 1950s and early ’60s thought of them as “performance art.” If anything, they probably saw them as theater. I’m certain that the same pertains to Bauhaus performances, John Cage’s performances, and others that now make up the early history of “performance art,” a category to which they have been assimilated retrospectively. The whole genre of performance art and its history is primarily a discursive frame that imposes unity on what is otherwise a broad and diverse range of different kinds of events.

FTH: Pointing to performative art and its discursive frame, I do not want to close our exchange without getting back to your various readers on *Theory for Performance Studies*. Introducing your first volume, you asked the question: “Theory of performance studies, who needs it?”

So, how much theory does performance art need from the point of view of a scholar?

PA: If you ask me whether performance art needs theory, I would argue that “performance art” is a theoretical category rather than an “organic” one, for the reasons I just discussed. Without theory, there would be no such thing as performance art, a category created and sustained by theory. While artists may or may not be directly concerned with theory, if they make work they call performance they are participating in a theoretical tradition, not a formal one.

My own interest in this area somewhat reflects these issues since my background is in theater: I began working with a youth theater group when I was about twelve and I left university briefly to study acting at professional schools in New York City. My university education, on the other hand, was in art history, a field I came to somewhat by default because I wanted to develop my visual sense and my ability to understand and talk about visual arts as against the more literary orientation I had had to that point. For me, performance art was the point of intersection between my life in the theater and my interest in art history.

Is the “Re” in Re-enactment the “Re” in Re-performance?

Mechtild Widrich



Fig. 15
Jeremy Deller, *The Battle of Orgreave*, 2001.

In his political manifesto “A Plea for Leninist Intolerance,” Slavoj Žižek urges a taking up anew of Leninist politics, with much attention paid to the justification of repetition in art and life. And so he closes his proposal with a summing up of just this potential:

To repeat Lenin does not mean to return to Lenin. To repeat Lenin is to accept that Lenin is dead, that his particular solution failed, even failed monstrously, but that there was a utopian spark in it worth saving [...]. To repeat Lenin is not to repeat what Lenin *did*, but what he *failed to do*, his *missed opportunities*.¹

What he means by the “utopian spark” in repetition is illustrated through a performance. The storming of the Winter Palace in Petersburg during the October Revolution of 1917 was restaged with the help of “army officers” and “artists” three years later, supposedly including many initial revolutionaries. Less firmly, Žižek asserts that some re-enactors were involved in the defense of Petersburg taking place around them (though Petersburg had been under attack a year earlier, in October 1919). The purpose of this claim, however forced, is clear: a context of maximal authenticity, with past *and* present revolutionaries re-enacting themselves. Rather rhetorically, Žižek asks if the restaging is not proof of more than a “coup d’état” by some, of a “tremendous emancipatory potential.”² In these terms, re-enactment is not just the political orchestration of “living memory,” but a justification of what came before, the fulfillment of missed opportunities. Past, present, and future are strangely intertwined in this idea, suggesting that performers, in restaging themselves, are somehow marked by “authenticity” going beyond historical truth to change the meaning of the past itself in an evolving aesthetic and social process.

In the debates about contemporary re-enactments in artistic contexts, this idea of the authentic, tied to claims of personal identity of the agents, plays a central role. It is most prominent in the interpretation of Jeremy Deller’s *The Battle of Orgreave*, the 2001 filmed re-enactment of a 1984 clash between workers threatened by the closing of Yorkshire mines and police forces intervening on Margaret Thatcher’s command.³ Critics and theorists have stressed

1 Slavoj Žižek, “A Plea for Leninist Intolerance,” *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 2 (2002): 566. Despite its outspoken, self-consciously provocative quality (Žižek also quotes Stalin with approval), the approach resembles that suggested for Robespierre’s party in Patrice Higonnet, *Goodness beyond Virtue: Jacobins during the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). For more on the French Revolution, see below.

2 *Ibid.*, 560.

3 See Wolfgang Brückle, “Jeremy Deller’s Battle of Orgreave,” in *Authentizität und Wiederholung: Künstlerische und kulturelle Manifestationen eines Paradoxes*, ed. Uta Daur (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2013), 121–46. For first-person reflections by a strike leader, highlighting the complexity of the negotiations and the clash, see Arthur Scargill, “We could Surrender—Or Stand and Fight,” *The Guardian*, March 7, 2009.

the fact that several former policemen and miners participated, and were thus re-enacting themselves, despite the fact that a large number of the eight hundred people present were hired through professional re-enactment organizations with fantasy-laden names like The Vikings, The War of the Roses, and The Sealed Knot.⁴ In any case, whether new or returning to Orgreave, participants had the opportunity to take sides anew, and the two opposing parties now cooperated in a mutual, controlled chaos (stage blood was used, cuss words rehearsed), enabling an emotional grappling with history that visually and bodily resembled its subject. It seems to me that this staged nature of the event, the fact that it was not "real" yet precisely calibrated to what was thought to have occurred (not that miners and authorities agreed about the casualties, or the police aggression), was a prime factor in enabling a reflective, estranged, certainly *new* connection to what came before.

"Re-," the Latin prefix meaning "again," whether attached to "enactment," "making," or "performance," marks the most recent and perhaps significant shift in performance practice and theory. If we can theorize re-enactment as the staging of the historical, we have difficulties applying the term to "live art"—which used to be defined as a one-time encounter between artist and audience, unrepeatable, non-theatrical, not for sale, immaterial—in terms of repetition, staging, and history. Yet the last two decades have seen the emergence of re-performance, the restaging of performances by an artist decades after the fact, be it the original artist, a contemporary, or the representative of a younger generation, eager to "live through" their heritage. This new work is retrospective, even where it is most politically topical: as when Yoko Ono once again performed her *Cut Piece* of 1964–66 (filmed at Carnegie Hall in 1965), in Paris in 2003, as a protest against the second Iraq War (cameras were again present).⁵ Is re-enactment of a historical event at all comparable to re-performance, which involves the return of past art? After all, Ono was not in 2003 simulating 1960s audiences in London, Tokyo, or New York. In fact, it is striking that she chose a new and apparently neutral city—since the French refused to join the expeditionary force. Yet the violence she opposed, and her act of courage in exposing her aging body to nakedness and scissors, would hardly have come into focus without memories of the quiet, long-haired young woman, and of the repressed, aggressive, unpredictable behavior of participants and the press four decades earlier. In this way, re-performance, like re-enactment, both defies and relies on the passage of time.

History and memory, then, are the common denominators of re-enactment and re-performance, whatever their differences. Indeed, no one will confuse Ono or Deller with an American Civil War enthusiast—but the practical question of whether re-enactment and re-performance are the same phenomenon, and the corresponding theoretical question of whether a past moment or a

historically flexible act is being reconstructed—are urgent, whatever direction contemporary art will take in these matters. To answer them, I aim to show how experience is formed in the entanglement of past and present in an aesthetic context: what we might call the "monumentalization" or fixation of a possibly fictional interpretation of history through physical reconstruction in the present, a reconstruction that in turn is often so thoroughly documented as to make possible a continuous point of reference in opposition to the often fragmentary or sparsely documented original. This is not, to be clear, to say that the "original" could thus come to be excluded from a temporal unfolding of meaning relying entirely on simulated bodies, props, and documents. On the contrary, the acts and images of re-enactment and re-performance evince a reference to the past as forceful as that of any photographic or otherwise indexical document, which itself is usually a reconstruction insofar as only the master negative, and not the working prints or display copies that are used in exhibition and publication, bear any temporal continuity relation with the past event being documented. To put it bluntly, documents are already re-enactments. They may have functions that theatrical re-enactments don't (such as fixing the content for a re-enactment visually and performatively—by determining what speech acts were performed), but their mechanical reference to the past is transmitted to the actor's interest in getting the past right, within the historical framework by which all re-enactment is implicitly judged. The act of repetition, far from erasing all difference between an event and its later instances, is a marker that allows us to see this difference more clearly, often creating new meaning, formally and contextually, which can only be understood in the light of the distance to the reference work or event.

This historicity, especially in re-performance, runs against some of the claims of performance artists, who adopt the rhetoric of a reactivation of "authentic encounters" between artist and audience, a kind of subjective time travel, which they often contrast favorably to the static image in documentation. Marina Abramović is the most prominent advocate of such claims. Her *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005) consisted of seven evenings at the Guggenheim in which Abramović redid classic works of performance by colleagues of the 1960s and '70s: Joseph Beuys, Bruce Nauman, VALIE EXPORT, Vito Acconci, Gina Pane, and herself (*Lips of Thomas*, which in 1975 was called *Thomas Lips*). Famously, Chris Burden declined permission; the series ended with a new work whose monumental scale (Abramović as the Statue of Liberty?) gave a memorial tenor to the whole event. *Seven Easy Pieces* served to bring back

4 The groups, all of which have a web presence, are dedicated to re-enactment of the era suggested by their names—in the case of The Sealed Knot, named after a Royalist secret society of the Interregnum, the very name of the organization is a re-enactment of sorts.

5 On the history of this work, see Kevin Concannon, "Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*. From Text to Performance and Back Again," *PAJ. A Journal of Performance and Art* 30, no. 3 (September 2008): 81–93.

the body to performances that she, and most of us, knew only from pictures.⁶ Since 2005, Abramović has been attacked for her insistence on charismatic "presence," in which some see only a capitalist star system, coupled with her more recent practice of training young performers to redo her own earlier work. This delegation of the re-performance to other bodies was mobilized most famously for her retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in 2010, entitled "The Artist is Present" (under the same name, Abramović carried out a new and exhausting performance for the duration of the show). Much debate concerned the working conditions and exploitation of these young performers. However justified these claims may be, it seems that the shock over their presence in lieu of Abramović was just as much dissatisfaction that they were not Abramović: an indicator that perhaps audiences of performance are more wedded to a neutral reappearance (in which the change of context that always occurs is repressed) than the artist.⁷ Abramović is fascinating in this context because the tensions inherent in her attempts to revitalize performances of the past through bodily presence show that the body "brought back" can only constitute a past body imaginatively, for an audience informed in advance by historical documents. Re-performance cannot ensure an authentic return to an event independent of time, since time is constitutive of events; but history, stored and ever-changing in documents, memories, narratives, and other media by ever new layers of audience, holds bodily presence in tension between an irretrievable past event, a monument constituted in the act of remembering, and a new work in the present, itself liable to later reconstruction.⁸



Fig. 16
Eleanor Antin, *The Death of Petronius*, 2001.

The implications of re-performance and re-enactment for broader areas of art and life have not gone unnoticed in the literature. In her 2011 book *Performing Remains*, Rebecca Schneider ranges widely across disciplines in pursuit of the complex relation of body and history: she discusses not just performance, but military re-enactment, dance, theater, and academic research. What Schneider sees is a complicated, cyclical time of displaced presences and

ghostly returns. This is not to say, with those critics proclaiming "the death of presence" at the hands of documentation and re-enactment, that live acts don't matter.⁹ Rather, there is mutual entanglement: "[...] live art and media of mechanical and technological reproduction, such as photography, cross-identify, and, more radically, cross-constitute, and 'improvise' each other."¹⁰ So photography and performance both depend on each other, but is the whole world then a tissue of social construction? Not quite. According to Schneider, there is a past—it is just that we access it in the present, through bodily acts or performances, whether that is on a Civil War battlefield in period costume, drumming our fingers across a lending desk at the archive, or just sitting down with a book: "[...] one *performs* a mode of access in the archive; one *performs* a mode of access at a theatre; one *performs* a mode of access on the dance floor; one *performs* a mode of access on the battlefield."¹¹ To this we may add what Schneider is very conscious of: one performs a certain access to history as a working scholar, bringing certain aspects of the past into the discussion and occluding others.

In this view, then, re-performance takes place not just on battlefields and in art museums, but everywhere. All our acts of thinking and talking about the past fit the bill. This might almost sound like a postmodern echo of the modernist fusion of art and life, and in both cases, it should worry us that there is no way to distinguish overt re-enactment from the kind we perform without

6 See Mechtild Widrich, "Can Photographs Make It So? Repeated Outbreaks of VALIE EXPORT's *Genital Panic*," in *Perform, Repeat, Record* (Bristol: Intellect, 2012), 89–103, (a revision of a 2008 article first presented orally at Harvard University in April 2007), and the interview with Abramović by Amelia Jones in the same book: "The Live Artist As Archaeologist," 543–66.

7 The show was discussed in two essays in *Artforum*: Carrie Lambert-Beatty, "Against Performance Art," *Artforum* 48, no. 9 (May 2010): 208–12; Caroline Jones, "Staged Presence," (ibid., 214–9). Amelia Jones wrote a highly critical (and disappointed) article on the impossibility of presence in recent performance art: Amelia Jones, "'The Artist is Present.' Artistic Reenactments and the Impossibility of Presence," *TDR. The Drama Review* 55, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 16–45. See also my article "Präsenz--Schichtung--Wahrnehmung. Marina Abramović's *The Artist is Present* und die Geschichtlichkeit von Performance," in *Authentizität und Wiederholung*, ed. Uta Daur (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2013), 147–67.

8 I am not committed to "three things" in re-performance or re-enactment, but the past, a relation to it, and the present act of commemoration seem importantly distinct aspects.

9 On authenticity, the supposed original event, and its reappearance in performance art, see Philip Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," *PAJ. A Journal of Performance and Art* 28, no. 3 (2006); Amelia Jones, "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," *Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 11–18; Jane Blocker, "Repetition. A Skin Which Unravels," in *Perform Repeat Record*, 199–208, and my article in the same volume. This is not to say there is consensus: Peggy Phelan accepts a Derridean metaphysics of presence while excluding performance from the effects of repetition because it does not consist of arbitrary signs. See her *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993).

10 Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 7.

11 Ibid., 104.

knowing it. To name some concrete questions: Does it matter that the same or another person performs again, that the *site* or *objects* or *script* or co-performers were there before? One wants to ask such questions of the Winter Palace and of Yoko Ono, but they cannot be answered if the whole world is to some degree re-performance. When Eleanor Antin photographs, films, and writes herself into the saga of Eleonora Antinova, nostalgic black ballerina of the *Ballets russes*, what precisely is being re-enacted?¹² A life that never was? Is the relationship different when she stages photographically the death of the Roman poet Petronius (*The Last Days of Pompeii*, 2001), in sumptuous period costume, by a California swimming pool?¹³ Often enough, it is in commemorating impossible states of affairs—but also *real* history paintings by Nicolas Poussin and Thomas Couture—that Antin's work reveals its humor and incisiveness, and its link to more literal forms of re-enactment.

To clarify my position, I do not wish to dispute Schneider's suggestion that re-enactment and re-performance exist on a range (fairly continuous, but not uniformly populated) from scholarly history to parodic appropriation and hobby; what I insist on, and hope she would not object to, is that the asymmetrical relation between past and present is central to the understanding of the role of performers as opposed to audiences in such events. The audience of a war re-enactment, a strike re-enactment, *Hamlet*, and my act of going to the library are radically different, not just empirically, but in how they relate to and in some cases participate in the action.

This can be seen best in historical perspective. Going back beyond Žižek and the October Revolution, it is worth recalling that the French Revolution of 1789 invented revolutionary festivals as a comprehensive attempt to collectivize memory and political opinion through participation. There, as in the Russian Revolution, which re-enacted so many aspects of the French, scholars have put emphasis on the performers being the same persons who carried out the revolution, not in order to "work through" trauma and master it, as contemporary memory culture might ask of Deller's piece, but to make manifest the "People" or revolutionary collective of a new state order. As Mona Ozouf aphoristically puts it: "For the legislator makes the laws for the people, but it is the festival that makes the people for the laws."¹⁴ By the time of the Terror, this dream of government for, by, and of the people had turned into a farce, even as the rhythm of festivals intensified. For the re-enactors of the Civil War, the point is another entirely: often staged from a conservative point of view, these events offer the thrill of seeing oneself at a time before the decisive historical outcome, able to hope or imagine that the South will win—that it has won.¹⁵

Let me sum up these differing and to a certain extent contrasting approaches, intentions, and temporalities: there is re-enactment, the restaging of a historical

event, sometimes for educational reasons, to experience the past, to redraw it, to become part of history as an individual or member of a collective or even to overcome a trauma. And there is re-performance, done by the same artist in a new context, or by another, be it as reverence, revision, or with a historical end in view: to point to the fact that the world has changed around the performance. For this purpose, paradoxically, the most accurate performance would seem the best marker of change—in audience expectations and reactions. But just as often, there is something about the past act, not just about the past, that we want to keep or repeat—even if we must change the performance to retrieve it. Thus British artist Carey Young, for example, restages interactions with the built and natural environment by VALIE EXPORT, Kirsten Justesen, Richard Long, Bruce Nauman, and others, on site in Dubai and Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, shifting the phenomenological concerns of the 1960s to a discussion of global economics, labor, and their visible effects on the built environment.¹⁶ The reference to earlier performance in re-performance is thus a means to make us aware that times have indeed changed, not to recreate experience, but to allow for the tension between that which seems familiar (the bodily gesture) and the jolting difference not just in the setting of performance (the ongoing construction of corporate architecture in the desert) but in its meaning. Can an artist analyze these environments by acting in them as artists have done before?

In raising these complicated questions related to temporality, what re-performance and re-enactment in all its kaleidoscopic options share is that we, no matter if we are part of the audience, ourselves re-enacting, or watching someone else re-perform a piece we once did, refer back in time and

12 *Recollections of My Life with Diaghilev, 1919–1929*, was photographed between 1974 and 1979 and first shown at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, in 1980 (a better-known exhibition at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1981 is sometimes given as the exhibition date). See Eleanor Antin, "Eleonora Antinova's Journal," *High Performance* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 48–57, and the book form of the series Eleanor Antin, *Being Antinova* (Los Angeles: Astro Artz, 1983). There is a rare early portfolio, *Recollections of My Life with Diaghilev* (San Francisco: Black Stone Press, 1978).

13 The work is well-reproduced and discussed in Eleanor Antin, *Historical Takes* (Munich: Prestel, 2008). The Romans did have pools, which, as Augustine comments, are called *piscina* although no fish live in them. See Augustine, *De dialectica*, trans. B. Darrell Jackson (Dordrecht: D. Riedel, 1975), 95.

14 Mona Ozouf, *La Fête révolutionnaire, 1789–1799* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 16, translated by Alan Sheridan as *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 9. The surrounding discussion is interesting for its insight into how festivals reshape Enlightenment individualism: "Men were individuals, in theory all identical, all equal, but solitary. It was now the task of the legislator to connect them [...] the festival was an indispensable complement to the legislative system, for although the legislator makes the laws for the people, festivals make the people for the laws."

15 Schneider recounts on various occasions in her book that she had this impression in some re-enactments she visited. The attraction of changing the past is of course central to time travel narratives in many arts.

16 The series is entitled *Body Techniques*.

simultaneously forward, that we construct an imaginary performance the markers of which (inferred original, documents, narration, new event) meld with our own being in time and that which we want to convey to the future. "Ever-new waters flow on those who step into the same river," as pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus observed two and a half millennia ago. But this is not all: we may never be the same ourselves, and it is in this possibility that the "utopian spark" can unfold.

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Semiotics of Appearance

Martha Wilson in Conversation with Dietmar Schwärzler



Fig. 17
Martha Wilson, *Art Sucks*, 1972.

Dietmar Schwärzler: You started to work as an artist in Halifax, Canada, in the early 1970s. At that time you also taught English at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD). I would like to start to specify your approach to performance art by discussing your early conceptual video works, along with your photos, which you often combined with texts. These videos were made outside of a feminist community. What is the background behind the videos?

Martha Wilson: I left the United States as a result of the Vietnam War. I graduated from college in 1969, and the next year, on May 4, were the Kent State shootings in Ohio, where the National Guard shot at and killed four students during a demonstration against the war in Vietnam. My boyfriend and I decided it was a good time to leave America and to move to Canada. He did not want to be drafted for military service and I got a scholarship for Dalhousie University in Halifax. At that time America was divided over the Vietnam War. Hippies like me were protesting against the government's killing of women and children, while on the other side were the war mongers, who thought they had every right to go ahead and invade Vietnam.

In Canada there was a completely different academic environment than in the United States and also a different academic university system. The Canadians were connected to England, to universities like Oxford and Cambridge. In the United States you mainly studied horizontally. You looked at comparative literature, religion, philosophy, history ... whatever, but in Canada we were studying vertically. In the English department we were reading every single important work of English literature, from Beowulf to the present. But we didn't read books by women. The study wasn't very contemporary and also the environment was pretty conservative. It was similar at the art college, which was a radical school, but the crucial environment was conservative, male, and white.

In the art program, where I was teaching, the kids didn't want to read, so I also had to invent tricks to promote reading. The art school itself brought in all of the conceptual artists of the day, from Vito Acconci to Lawrence Weiner, Ian Wilson, Peter Kubelka, Sol LeWitt, Dennis Oppenheim, Dan Graham, and Alastair MacLennan, but few women. Back then I was allowed to audit Vito Acconci's workshops, which he held at the school for several months. I got the permission to use the video equipment because I was a faculty member. I didn't have consciousness of feminism. All I really understood was that I was a woman in an environment that was geared towards men. When I moved to New York in 1974 and wanted to start my own art organization, I was conscious of wanting to focus on works of art that had been marginalized and considered ephemeral and

not important: artists' books, performance art, installation works, street works, window installations ... I think my Canadian passage through the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design galvanized my feeling that I wanted to champion marginalized works of art and mobilize artists.

DS: Your initiation to performance art has been through words or language, actually something you share with Vito Acconci, who also started with literature and poetry.

MW: Vito was of critical importance to me, because he opened the door to sexuality as a legitimate subject of art. The conceptual artists of the day were just permutating things, things that did not seem to have an impact on people's life in my opinion. Vito's work was about sexuality and gender roles we all share and think about together.

DS: Was it a problem or disadvantage that your background lies more in English literature than in visual arts?

MW: I have never seen this as a disadvantage. The job of an artist is to extend the outlines and definitions of art, and it helps to know about economics, politics, philosophy, history, or ... anything about the world.

DS: In your early video *Premiere* (1972), you said: "A good performance transports style into self, or style into art." What does that actually mean?

MW: If you are not secure in calling yourself an artist, you cannot become that person that you wish to become. I was inventing my personality at that time. I did not have any security in myself. When I told my mentor Gerry Ferguson that I wanted to be an artist, he just said: "Well, women don't make it in the art world." So it's about making it up to try it anyway ... to go into the unknown and see what is happening there. In *Appearance as Value* (1972), my solution was to play practical jokes on myself, and I tried to be a confident artist at the same time. The self-image and the projected image in these senses are both performative.

DS: Were you actually alone when you shot your videos? Or did you have a collaborator behind the camera or even an audience?

MW: There was no audience. I was working alone for most of my videos, except the one called *Deformation* (1974), where I give the instruction to lower the camera. But I don't remember who it was. It could have been my boyfriend, Richard at that time.

DS: I have the impression that with some gestures—like the laughing in *Art Sucks* (1972), when you eat the photograph, or when you fall out of your role in *Method Art* (1972), that you are communicating directly with something outside, although this outside might be a mediated, imagined audience?

MW: I am communicating with an internal sense of audience. I was aware of the presence of the camera, so you could see the camera as an audience. Vito Acconci recommended a book to me called *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) by the sociologist Erving Goffman. In the book the author goes into the analysis of all the selves; that we play for the internal self, that we play for our sense of history, that we play for the people who are in the room and the people who are then gone. Teasing apart layers of personality was really what I was up to in all of these videos.

DS: In *Art Sucks* you switch between looking into the camera and looking aside. What is the reason for that glancing aside? Are you looking in a mirror?

MW: It's not really a mirror, but a video monitor next to the camera. I had to look at it to check what the camera was seeing.

In *Premiere* I am even talking about the monitor as a technological tool, but it is the camera that is recording me and not the monitor.

DS: The gestures I already mentioned, like when you are laughing or checking the camera, could also be understood, or misunderstood, as failures or mistakes. For me they are essential to the intellectual and also emotional quality of your videos, and I really like your decision to not cut them out or repeat the performance. I have the impression that the so-called "mistakes" give you great strength as a performer.

MW: Thank you, but as a performance artist my practice had a complete lack of training in terms of acting techniques or strategies. For example method acting, where you have to get into the self-induced role of another person to conceive their emotion.

DS: In *Method Art* you engage with this issue. You perform various emotions such as: 1. tears, 2. fury, 3. blushing, 4. laughter, 5. apathy, 6. fear, 7. compulsion, 8. sexual arousal, 9. physical pain. Being incapable of performing the first emotion, the first challenge, you end up with: "I can't do it." The commitment of "I can't do it" functions as a kind of methodology or counter-strategy to Lee Strasberg, who follows the Stanislavski rules. You also deal with this issue in *Routine Performance* (1972), in which you try to perform



Fig. 18
Martha Wilson, *I Make Up the Image of My Perfection/I Make Up the Image of My Deformity*, 1974.



Fig. 19
Martha Wilson, *I Have Become My Own Worst Fear*, 2009.

being as calm as possible, but then this attempt remains merely a desirable behavior. Is it possible to say you use mistakes or failures in a very positive sense? I think failures are often underestimated in art practices.

MW: Failures are in every sense learning opportunities. If you fail in something then you learn how to do it a different way.

DS: What status did irony have in these concepts?

MW: I grew up in a Quaker environment and being an outsider seemed normal to me. The Quakers also demonstrated against the Vietnam War and donated medical supplies to North Vietnam, which made the government furious. Their point was, of course, that everybody is equal in terms of need. The reason why I am telling this story is that I think that the word “irony” is another version of the word “absurdity” ... the notion that you act, even when you know your action will not change the world in any way; you try to do something. I think the ironic attitude comes right out of a political position in culture, in society.

DS: You mentioned once that one reason why you chose performance art as your art practice was because this format didn’t have much art-historical baggage. How would you perceive that statement today, specifically since performance art has become a subject at art universities and the appropriation of “historical performances” has become one key practice in this field?

MW: I think that Marina Abramović changed the scene enormously when she recreated performances at the Guggenheim in *Seven Easy Pieces*, in 2005. That was the big moment. Until then nobody had ever applied to Franklin Furnace for a grant to reconstruct a performance, but in 2006 we got proposals from two artists who wanted to recreate performances from the past. The scene has definitely shifted. I think that Marina’s introduction of the idea of recreation as a way to preserve or reexamine previous performances was a horrible failure.

I fail to see how being in the room, wearing VALIE EXPORT’S crotchless pants and holding a plastic machine gun, has any relationship to EXPORT’S performance in the porn theater where she was standing in 1968. It becomes a pastiche. Marina also had a retrospective in 2011 at the MoMA —there were beautiful young artists recreating the actions and motions of the original performances Marina and Ulay did. It felt empty to me; I liked the original videos. I could see the intention of the artist in the video and I could only see the acting lines of the score and none of the idea in the recreated performances.

DS: I think most of these historical performances lose their political and affective power in the recreation because they were the products of a specific time and specific backgrounds. Of course it meant something completely different for VALIE EXPORT to stand half-naked in a porn cinema in 1968 than it would today.

MW: Yes, completely different. And masturbating under a platform or ... All of them are completely different!

DS: In all your early video pieces you wear the same clothes. I guess the decision about what you wear is always—or often—a key element in performance art. Did you have a definite idea about these specific clothes—that sweater, for example?

MW: There is no intentionality behind the sweater. I had it, I owned it, I wore it a lot, so I also wore it in the videos. I don’t think I had a real good handle on how it would appear. A lot of artists at the university department wore uniforms. For example, Gerry Ferguson wore a black T-shirt and black jeans every single day. I did not do that. I had all kinds of fashion statements going on. I don’t wear any of those clothes today (laughs out loud); it was my fashion sense at that time.

DS: Going hand-in-hand with your conceptual video pieces is your practice of transforming or staging the self, where you often use photography combined with texts as your medium. In most of these pieces you walk the line between projections, the self-image, and the internal self. “It’s not about who you are, it’s about who you appear to be,” you might be saying. Or, as you once said: “Art-making is an identity-making process.” What was identity for you back then?

MW: After my beautiful artist boyfriend dumped me, I discovered I did not know who I was. Making art was one way I could construct personalities out of a vacuum that I felt was there when he was gone. I didn’t have any friends on my own, which is a very upsetting thing to recognize. I didn’t know my passions, the kind of music I like to listen to, the kind of environment I like to live in ...

DS: Last year I was in Marfa and went to check out the local bookstore. There, in the middle of the Texan desert, I found your really inspiring publication *Martha Wilson Sourcebook. 40 Years of Reconsidering Performance, Feminism, Alternative Spaces* (published in 2011). On the cover you have put Rose Sélavy, the alter ego of Marcel Duchamp, photographed by Man Ray in 1920–21. I think this choice is quite telling regarding your own artistic work. Why Duchamp?

MW: In this image Duchamp looks like a woman. Some years ago I saw this photograph at the Museum of Modern Art and recognized how Duchamp successfully appears to be female: in addition to wearing make-up, he has a woman standing behind him, putting her hands into the frame. That's the way he does it. So when you look at this image, you cannot tell right away that it is a man, because of that trick with the woman's hands. The ambiguity of that photograph and the ambiguity of sexuality itself are the motivating ideas behind everything I have ever done. Duchamp is the grandfather of ambiguity, multiple meanings, shapes, and differences. He is the grandfather of conceptual practice.

DS: What is extremely intriguing in your works as well is that they are not only about constructing an identity; they're also about expanding (concepts of) identities. The subjects are quite fluid and not fixed anymore, an idea that has been promoted in "queer studies" over the last decade.

MW: I agree with you, but I did not have any sense of fluidity at the time. I was trying to find solidity; I was trying to find anything that I could be. Wanting solidity and then finding out that it is not so solid really. It keeps evolving. My work now as an old lady is concerned with being an old lady, because that's what I have to deal with and to work with.

DS: In works like *Captivating a Man* (1972) or *Posturing Drag* (1972), you pose as a man impersonating a woman, and in *Age Transformation* (1973) a twenty-five-year-old artist pretends to be a fifty-year-old woman trying to look like she is twenty-five. You are using double transformations. My interpretation here would be that you are trying to avoid classical dualisms: male/female, subject/object, straight/gay, black/white, old/young ...

MW: I am really flattered by your ideas and considerations; they are very good and sound smart, but I think I was not consciously evading dualisms; I was trying everything.

DS: You also deal a lot with looks, beauty concepts, make-up, and appearance. Could you delve a little into that part of your work?

MW: Women have traditionally had to develop their surface more consciously and fully than men have done, although men are completely conscious of appearance, too. In fact Duchamp wrote a piece in the 1920s called "Men before the Mirror," which talks about the consciousness of men, how they are aware of being looked at and the image they are projecting. They have fewer tools in their toolboxes—suits, ties, and their haircuts—but like women, they alter their appearance. It's too good to be true, too obvious to be able to use make-up as an art medium. For

example in *Painted Lady* (1972) or *I Make Up the Image of My Perfection/I Make Up the Image of My Deformity* (1974), I was dealing with the way women use make-up to change the way they project themselves into the public sphere.

DS: *I Make Up the Image of My Perfection/I Make Up the Image of My Deformity* communicates directly with one of your current works, namely *I Have Become My Own Worst Fear* (2009).

MW: The idea of using this video from 1974 as the basis of a new work came to me around 2009. Becoming an old lady, I realized I now look like the last frame, in which I have become my own worst fear.

DS: The topic of aging—or age in general—is also quite evident in your work, and you play with it in a very humorous way. Instead of trying to hide it, you put it out there front and center, as in *The Legs Are the Last to Go* (2009), *I Have Become My Own Worst Fear*, *Red Cruella* (2010), or *Invisible* (2011).

MW: I believe everybody has the same fear of getting old and ugly, and the job of the artist is to be brutally honest with ourselves and with our public and to let people see this fear and these feelings. That has always been my contribution—to try to get to the bottom, to the most honest place—to look at what the conditions are.

DS: Would you say you make fun of age/aging?

MW: I am having fun with aging! I am doing a show at P.P.O.W. opening on June 27, 2013. It's a group show. One of the panels in the work relates to this song that Mitt Romney sang during his campaign for presidency (*Martha sings the campaign song*). I took photographs of my body and illustrated that song that everybody knows in this country. It's a well-known anthem. It's more fun to have fun with aging, because we can't do anything about it.

DS: Are you naked in these pictures you took of your body?

MW: OH YES! Naked!

DS: Ahh ... There are not that many pictures of you where you are naked, like many performance artists used to be in the 1970s.

MW: There is one image from the last show at P.P.O.W. called *Before and After*. Like in *I Have Become My Own Worst Fear*, used an image from 1973 to compare to an image of my torso (from my shoulders to my pubic

hair) in 2009 or 2010. It's funny because in these Before and After settings the person usually looks better after than before, but in this case it's the other way round. It's not only looking at beauty, but it's also about the way our society tries to intervene in the body medically and photographically in every possible way to fix the image.

DS: Another main artistic approach of yours seems to be collaborations. Would you call it a necessity in your art practice?

MW: It was a necessity. While I was in Halifax, being alone and trying to be a woman artist, there was nobody out there to talk to. All that work was occurring in a vacuum. So I moved to New York and found tons of other weirdos like myself—people in the downtown community, whom I felt happy to be with. We could be weirdos together. In 1978 we founded DISBAND, a band of women who could not play any instruments (*laughs*). We did have props, which we used to make noise. We had a rocking chair, flags, a radio, hammers ...

DS: What was your conceptual punk band DISBAND all about?

MW: We were active in the New York downtown No Wave scene that was going on in the late 1970s, early '80s. We disbanded in 1982 and about twenty-five years later Connie Butler curated a touring show called "Wack! Art and Feminist Revolution." She called and asked if we would do a reunion concert of DISBAND for the opening at MoMA PS1 in Queens in 2008. And we—namely Ilona Granet, Donna Henes, Diane Torr, and Martha Wilson—thought about it and finally agreed; Ingrid Sischy, however, said, "I will never get my fat ass up in front of an audience again." A curator from Korea saw us at PS1 and invited DISBAND to Korea. This year we also performed in Philadelphia twice. So DISBAND has rebanded and the ladies are dancing around.

DS: Your art persona in the band was Lov Storey—what's the background behind that name?

MW: Donna was a Hispanic person, and Sorpresa Cheeka Ilona Garnet had several identities, like Pinky or "Pansy I. Rock." Diane Torr called herself Dianatone, Ingrid Sischy was Susan; she wanted to be completely normal, not arty at all. I used Lov Storey and some other names, too. We changed our names constantly. They were not identities; they were about the fluidity of song and act. Each of the songs addressed a different issue. One song was about violence against women, one was about climate change, one of them was about the relationship of the United States to Iran. At that time we performed in Lower Manhattan, in the

clubs and art spaces. But what is so interesting is that even twenty-five years later the songs are still relevant, which is very disturbing.

DS: This obviously very political punk band leads us directly to your satirical performances or impersonations of conservative figures including Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, and Tipper Gore, which you started in the 1980s.

MW: The political impersonations came right out of DISBAND. In 1982 we were the members of Ronald Reagan's cabinet. I was playing Alexander M. Plague, Ilona was James Watts-a-Tree, parodying Reagan's Secretary of the Interior. Alexander Haig was the Secretary of State; none of us played Ronald Reagan himself, but we were all members of his immediate circle. Then I was invited to perform for SoHo-TV; so I did one performance as Ronald Reagan, which was completely unsuccessful.

DS: Why?

MW: I don't know. I had the feeling that I didn't occupy him at all. I didn't go into his character. He doesn't even have a personality—I mean, he is a movie actor. But then I got invited to The Artists Call Against US Intervention in Central America, a big city-wide effort to protest Ronald Reagan's policies in Central America. I found Nancy; I did a performance as Nancy Reagan. I made her say things like cancer is a natural response to the environment. Then I did Barbara Bush several times, before Bill Clinton was elected.

Once Clinton played saxophone at the MTV Inaugural Ball and the kids were overjoyed. Tipper Gore was there as well. Ten years earlier she had wanted a parental advisory labeling on records, so that the parents would know not to buy this record for the kids because it contains foul language or racist remarks. The youth of America at the MTV Inaugural Ball had not forgotten that Tipper Gore had done that. They booed her off the stage! I saw that happen and thought ahhhhhh. So instead of Hillary I took Tipper Gore during the Clinton years. Then G. W. Bush was elected and I thought about being Lynn Cheney, or Martha Stewart ... But I already had this wonderful wig and the suit for Barbara Bush and since then I have been performing as Barbara Bush, mother of the President, a lot.

DS: What about Michelle Obama? Would she be a candidate for you as well?

MW: She's too hot. I am an old lady now; I can't do Michelle Obama (*laughs*).

DS: How would you describe your current art practice?

MW: It's the same as my earlier art practice: identity, disturbance of things, the issue of aging, the self-presentation in everyday life as an old person in comparison to a young person. It's still fascinating to me how appearance in the theater of regular life is something we all share and we all understand and how it can be a way to talk to a wide audience.

DS: In your presentation at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in 2010 you stated: "Franklin Furnace is a museum for hot air; for artists' ideas."

MW: Franklin Furnace, an alternative artists' space I have run since 1976, is a place where artists' ideas have the most value. Not the object as the materialization of the ideas is what we preserve and publish. We didn't quite understand in the early years that we were making art history through documentation and later through digitization. Due to our work, several art practices will be embedded in art history and won't be lost.

DS: It's possible to make a direct link between your early video pieces and the way you start performances at Franklin Furnace, namely with readings out of artists' books.

MW: They were not called performances at the beginning; we called the series "Artists' Readings." However, not a single one of the artists ever did something like simple reading. They all wore costumes, used props ... Every single artist manipulated time, space, and materials to illuminate their idea. After the first two years we started to call them "performance art." The reason why I don't like the term is that it too closely relates to performing arts. In performing arts they direct a play; they tell somebody else how to perform. In our case, ninety-nine percent of the artists themselves are the creators of the action. I like "body art" as a term, which unfortunately fell out of fashion. It locates the art in the body of the artist. The body is the medium that we are talking about here. Many decades later, RoseLee Goldberg has proposed another new term, "visual art performance." I like how this term links Joseph Beuys's performances to his sculptures. It keeps them in a continuum in the visual arts world, where they belong.

DS: With a term like "body art," the performance might always be related directly to the body, but it is not always about the body.

MW: Well, I think that's why the term fell out of use. Artists were using every medium available. They use publications as the Italian Futurists did. You can do action on the street with unwitting audiences going by,

like the Happenings, or a performance inside for people in chairs. Video can become part of a performance or can be the performance itself, and now we can do it online. One of the common denominators in Franklin Furnace's work is that the artists are trying to broadcast their ideas, get an idea out to a wider public.

DS: You once marked the beginning of performance art with a concrete date; namely July 8, 1910, when the Italian Futurist painters and poets threw eight hundred thousand copies of their broadside from the clock tower above Piazza San Marco in Venice. Would you argue that performance art also was—and probably still is—closely connected to a rebellion?

MW: Yes—very much. Performance art is composed of often confrontational ideas; it takes place in "real" time; and the body is its irreducible medium, the locus where text and image intersect. Avant-garde artists share the desire to confront public taste. I believe artists can, do, and should change cultural discourse with their ideas.

DS: In your *Sourcebook* there is a very long interview done by Toni Sant, which focuses on the economics, founding, and history of Franklin Furnace; financial matters play a major role in that interview. I am also mentioning this because Franklin Furnace is one of the few art institutions that really had the policy of paying artists' fees.

MW: Everybody who works at Franklin Furnace is an artist. I am an artist, the person who runs the mailing list is an artist, the financial manager is an artist ... So the policy always was to pay as much as we could afford to the artist. It was not very much; in the early days maybe \$100 dollars, which went up to \$300 dollars in the 1980s. Now we are up to \$5,000 and \$6,000 dollars for a grant. So it is a warm, sympathetic place for artists. When I closed the physical gallery in 1997 and we went virtual/online, people were really pissed with me, because I was closing the club house, the place where artists could gather. People brought flowers like it was a funeral, which was pretty weird.

DS: You often use the word "ephemeral works" when you talk about Franklin Furnace. What would you say is "ephemeral art" these days?

MW: The most ephemeral art practice these days is art that happens online, because it doesn't have time and place anymore. In former days we knew for every event at Franklin Furnace the exact time and place when it happened. In case of art that occurs online these days, we don't know anymore where and when it's occurring. How do you preserve works like these? That is an important question we are dealing with today.

DS: How would you describe the effects of running an artists' space on your own artistic work?

MW: There were some advantages in having a giant loft, for example I could host DISBAND rehearsals in my house (*laughs*). The disadvantages were that running the art space took up a lot of time and I didn't have much time left over for my own work. At one point I mentioned the resentment that I felt to a friend of mine, Ann Focke, who had started an art space called And/Or Gallery in Seattle, and she said: "Why can't we consider our administrative practice to be an art practice?" That was very liberating for me. I don't worry anymore about trying to segregate my art life and my administrative life. I read *The New York Times* and get ideas for both my performance art and also for running an art organization.

Thanks to Johannes Schweiger and Thomas Brooks

Transformation in Teaching

Carola Dertnig

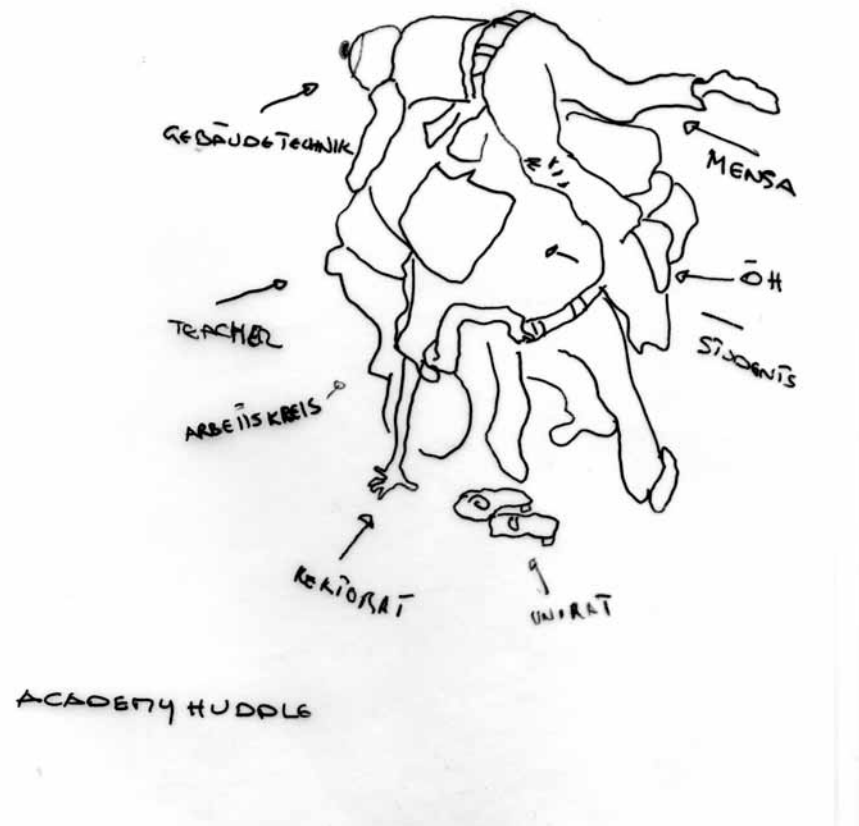


Fig. 20
Carola Dertnig, Nina Herlitschka, Anita Moser, Nicole Sabella, Janine Schneider,
Academy Huddle, 2011.

How might I best speak about my teaching activities, about mutual expectations within institutions, among genres, between students, about the special subtlety inherent in teaching a format that is as mobile as performance?

I would have to be personal, while keeping an eye on the big picture, avoiding the beaten paths of oft-repeated stock phrases, with a mind that is in principle extremely open to drawing connections, including those that have fallen by the wayside or have vanished in the mists of finishing touches.

And what sort of language would I want to use?

What would people say if I used an academic tone to recount a film or describe a picture? Would it convey the immediate experience of that film or picture? Would it be the same as personally absorbing its artistic content? I hardly think so.

With my apparent show of disrespect, I'm only trying to revive the figure of respect. Diverse. Vice versa. Upward and downward, sideways and crosswise. I thought for a long time about how to speak about things that are important to me as an artist but also as a teacher. I still find the medium of text meaningful as a way to express my ideas on the extremely mobile and moving medium of performance. But in which way exactly?

I find it overwhelming that I am continually asked to do something that is simultaneously the subject of widespread criticism (and to my mind rightly so): to speak about my work in purely theoretical terms, preferably in a "scholarly" mode. This is something I am expected to do as an artist but cannot do according to these strict specifications. It is in fact something I mustn't do—not in the sense of a condescending ban on such an attempt, but because I would then not live up to my identity as an artist. These are the considerations that have prompted me to express myself once again, in spite of everything, in the form of an article.

So many questions arise from this insight, so many tasks, so much earnestness when I take every single part seriously. As a teacher who will never abandon the artist, I would ask: Under which circumstances am I thrilled by impudence? By dead serious re-enactment? By rebellion? Even by the struggle for institutional recognition? Is there an underlying equation, or am I supposed to be indulgent and generous, as befits each respective situation, in my desire for comprehensible motives, aesthetically transformed in a compelling manner? Do I have to approach performance history in a nonlinear way, or is there a point at which everything that's demanded, all the claims made on art, degenerate into a compulsion, into the dogma of an older and more established generation? What do we—the students and I, their *lehrkörper*—have to offer

each other? (Yes, in the language of the bureaucrats, I am a “teaching body”—*lehrkörper*. What a horrible word, in every respect!)

Who is fresh? Who is experienced? Who knows what, who is willing to put herself to the test? Where are the conventions at home? The fragmented way in which education, artistic exploration, and one’s own research enter into relationships is still astounding to me.

I always like to illustrate such thoughts, this whirring beehive, with anecdotes. This visualization in words pleases me; I believe that it allows access, a familiarization, an inkling, a form of understanding, even if one is still far from attaining true insight.

The mother of a friend of mine told me that as a child, back when it was anything but a matter of course to have seen the sea with one’s own eyes, she imagined it as an endless row of swimming pools. She realized that there was a downside, however, and she racked her brain wondering how the ships could cross the walls in between the pools ...

I think this is a wonderful image of how we might very well realize that something is extremely complex and yet still try to make it fit into our narrow understanding. Instead of simply not worrying about it and accepting it as it is. That’s something we control freaks just aren’t capable of. Recognizing horizons that are beyond our ken—this is a form of respect we still have to learn. We have a way of shamelessly oversimplifying things while simultaneously and stubbornly making them more complicated than they are.

This could be said of a number of things, but I first want to talk about the establishment of the department of performative art at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. You could call it a prosaic piece of history with comic elements. Also of interest in this respect is the way that people today fall all over themselves trying to affirm the high regard in which they hold “performance.” It’s hard to believe that in the beginning (2006) the institution did not even provide a dedicated room to this new field within its walls.

The first concession came when an open area behind the auditorium was made available—with furniture on castors, so that it could be cleared away quickly in case the Academy needed to use the space for another purpose. My cautious conjecture: perhaps this was based on some mistaken conflation of the ephemeral character of performance art and an ability to make do without infrastructure. Nor can I resist remarking on the curious fact that performance, that “most transient” format among the “fine arts,” has in the meantime become a welcome guest, or taxi dancer, for all major art world events. No show would be complete these days without a live performance!

But setting aside a separate room for students? ...

That said, in the course of the university strike of 2009, the performative art class seized the area behind the auditorium as a permanent workspace. Since the class had not had any doors or walls up to that point, we decided to install a cardboard wall, including swinging saloon doors and pink-and-yellow windows—both as important working props (a door and a wall!) and a political statement saying that performative art needs a permanent rehearsal space/studio, just like other media!

Another interesting aspect of this action, which had more than symbolic meaning, was the reasoning that was eventually applied. Instead of referring to the unquestionable necessity of giving painters a studio, we pointed out that dancers naturally needed a rehearsal room ...

How long do codified standards remain valid? Until an artist is established?



Fig. 21
Department Performative Art, *The Cardboard Wall*, 2009.



Fig. 22
Nina Herlitschka and Toni Schmale, *Piano, Boxing, (improvisation)*, 2009.

How does one become established? How often does it happen that one succeeds only through almost Kafkaesque revelations to demand something—and to get it. And who was there first in the subsequent canonization? The disenfranchised yet demanding voice, or the power that at some point budges and then sees its advocacy as affirmation of always having been open-minded on the issue?

To proceed to the next layer of walls in this story: we still need to agonize in endless debates about the differences between performative art in theater, dance, and visual art. What is most amazing is that this is not in order to reach a rapprochement, with adequate respect for the particular qualities of the respective genres, but in order to be pitted against one another with regard to “genre differences.”

Criteria of quality are necessary, and in a sense categories are as well. But I find it unfortunate that such categorizations, which have long been regarded and criticized as “hegemonic programs,” are not only upheld but translated into rigid hierarchies. The history or histories of a term, a format, an art form,

are by contrast often enough blurred, so that we fail to develop an awareness of what it is we are actually doing, what we are building on.

I would like to bring in one of my favorite sentences at this point: “Suffragettes Invented Performance Art.” This is the title of a performance by the artist Leslie Hill that examines the simultaneous historical emergence of performance art and feminism, as well as their dual use by women. Hill’s work compellingly demonstrates in addition how well suited live performance is as a political and at the same time aesthetic tool.

Sometimes, as in this case, what is said before and surrounding a performance suddenly provides an insight into the revolutionary quality of a situation. Here, for example, we realize the significance feminist battles have had for our lives from the twentieth century onward.

In Austria alone, it is incredibly rewarding to establish alongside Viennese Actionism a feminist and queer Austrian performance history, an aspect that has hardly been explored in teaching and research on performance art to date.



Fig. 23
Helena Kotnik, *The Translation*, 2009.

This context can open up new interpretations of Viennese Actionism, or, on the basis of acknowledging more than one possible history, can help us to read it reflexively in a different way.

I pursued these issues in a book written with Stefanie Seibold, *Let's Twist Again*, and in two exhibitions on performance art. I was able to bring quite a few aspects back into the public eye that had been consigned to oblivion. This research forms my own foundation—both for teaching as well as for dealing with others in a more attentive way (student to teacher, artist to artist).

Such insights are infinitely more valuable than endless jockeying for position, for the loudest voice. They are more valuable than rigid scientific methods or coercive expectations to say, or be forced to say, the “right” thing—and to put it in such nimble words that it is always “the right thing” for the rapidly changing zeitgeist. Each season has its own fashion, which interrupts the previous disputes and sometimes even handles them condescendingly. Concepts and terms come into inflationary use (“discursive love and knowledge production”) ...

So much for fragmentations. So much for my opinion on distinct categories; on rigidly asserted “truths”; on stubbornness that sometimes doesn’t even bother to look around, to generate contexts other than the prevailing ones, to examine the struggles that surrounded what has evolved historically and hence enable us to relate to it again.

A re-enactment might sparkle with life precisely because it is aware of what went before. A video might genuinely claim to be a “piece” because the author does not view her/himself as the creator of each “take,” of each idea, but rather knows something about who has conceived it before, and when, and in what degree of complexity.

It would then be possible to convey that previous experiments are not boring spaces that are supposedly no longer accessible, but that they form a firm ground for engagement, where it is by no means an annoyance that someone else may already have had your “own” idea, perhaps even finding exactly the format you wanted to think of as “totally fresh.”

I find the term “appropriation” exciting in this sense, as a form of borrowing, not stealing, that can succeed based on concrete knowledge, a certain education, or on the kind of knowledge I would perhaps refer to as respectful or “modest,” in the sense that you are not the only talented person on this planet.

At the same time, a degree of nonchalance is of course necessary, because otherwise, out of sheer awe for what has already been “done,” your own creativity could only unfold as exemplary and controlled down to the last detail. This would certainly lead to an acknowledgment of your predecessors but not to any controversy, any jolting awake, any passion.

What I’m trying to say is that it is the mix that makes performative art, like other genres, interesting today. Too much of either ignorance or pandering is in any case a good way to feel frozen.

It is this mix—this open field that can never consist of boxes with their walls broken down—that I try to convey in my teaching. With propositions that are open and hence designed to incite more openness. As an artist I must always be in alert motion. I must stay agile, both in terms of what has gone before as well as in the courage to take leaps, to make decisions, to improvise, all while remaining conscious of my own limits.

I want my students not only to acquire knowledge and assimilate unfamiliar contextualizations but also to experience the broadest possible infrastructures. This is because performance can take place inside the protected but also controlling space of an institution, just as it can in sheltered settings—for example, a residency established specifically for performance such as the Performing Arts Forum (PAF) in France. But performance can also go out into the city and have an impact there.

Important to me in this connection, along with the variety of settings, are the kinds of opportunities for experience these respective places most directly enable. A school pampers the performer with everything necessary for productions. A city provides abundant space. A residency helps one confront the element of embarrassment that is so important to a performance, to take risks, and sometimes to also learn to cope with humiliation.

All of these types of performance are preceded by a joint closed session, similar to the working method in theater—a submersion in a concentrated work situation. Process-based working, non-hierarchical confrontations, a continuous questioning that doesn’t stop even despite temporary signs of uncertainty, are much more important to me than frontal teaching, giving instructions, power structures I consider outdated.

It would therefore be a shame if we were to try to conceal a certain, recurring crux: namely that students not infrequently expect conventional, professorial behavior and don’t know what to do when offered greater freedom, demanding instead strict pedagogical guardrails and classes that proceed according to a fixed structure. They project the expectation of perfection and its merciless

enforcement. Openness is hence often misunderstood as a sign of indecision; perfection, by contrast, as decisiveness, as strength—in an unquestioning adaptation of the self to the neoliberal conditioning of the subject.

But I have nothing against moments of embarrassment and humiliation of one form or another. I am in favor of working things out, not of perfect postulates. Freedom is something that must be learned. Freedom is the framework that makes concentrated work and productions possible in the first place.

What remains? At least no fear of humiliation!

Translated from the German by Jennifer Taylor

This text came about in the course of many conversations with Carola Platzek.

Literature

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Performance Action as an Emancipatory Metaphor for General Artistic Life Processes and Social Processes

Marie-Luise Lange

On the Happiness of Rowing on a Foggy Lake ...

I'm here presence body attention energy atmosphere space search
action materials work room of possibilities openness ending aggregate
space research signs uncertainty disruption bricolage process
construction displacement trace shift center periphery emptiness
correspondences laboratory context shifts embodied mind images
improvisation play transformation uniqueness repetition rhythm trust
fragmentation workshop body workshop interaction communication
participation chance suddenness blurred meaning horizons luck
unforeseeable events bygone times beginnings experience of time rule
reaction breach of rules sensory spill-over memory setting score idea
experience aggregate state perception fragility of the moment
transformation of a situation crossing frontiers pain endurance aesthetics
of heterogeneity to put yourself at stake changed manner of seeing shaky
ground engagement exposure life art long-duration performance site-
specific act body art intervention witnessing documentation energy
field risk responsibility group dynamics discourse impressive images
concentration event intuition documentation re-enactment tools
public composition topic break speed look inside-outside impulse
cooperation confrontation humor tension disengagement orientation
disorientation material characteristics of things metamorphosis non-
intentional reflection increase emancipation embodiment nomad
performance social strength nonlinearity stroll between semantics
meaning APPEARS playful deconstructions of meaning network change
knowledge of a place coherence space sculpture social field connection
transdisciplinarity intermediality matrix difference sensual added value
multiple focal points intuition contingency social political ecological
irrational surreal self-mockery criticism anti-authoritarian plurality
solidarity hedonism creating speech act setting happening inaccessible
event ecstasy alterity responsivity existence breakage cleft not-me
contemplation distraction sampling mix multimedia exceedance
appearance sensitivity mystery breathing movement direction silence
field of vision audience participants actors

My collection of various terms relating to performance and performativity describes a definitely unfinished cosmos of what makes performances effective.

My thoughts on that topic are fed by multiple sources:

- first, from the experience of performing myself and from experiencing other artists' performances, as well as from the knowledge of the general performative and transboundary strategies of contemporary art;
- second, from my studies on the aesthetics of performative and event-like artworks, on artistic and aesthetic research in the field, on constructivist educational theories that rely on an action-oriented pedagogy of the performative, as well from my knowledge of the gender and queer discourse and the feminist spectrum of cultural studies, for which a thinking in terms of performance and performativity is a constituent element;
- third, from my twenty years of experience as a performance art teacher, drawing energy, new thoughts, and a certain kind of happiness from the intensity and the variety of the performative and explorative processes exhibited by young performance artists;
- fourth, from the visionary, socially utopian and sociopolitical thinking that I share with many performance artists and academics—namely, the knowledge of the explicit potentials in the field of the debate about performance art and the performative as an open, action-oriented research process. It is a constructivist and de-constructivist way of thinking, which leaves certainties behind and excites curiosity for a space in which constellations of meaning appear whose durability is not guaranteed in the long run. It is about a thinking that tries to connect the practice of nonlinearity and meandering search in artistic improvisation and research with the development of current social, political, and educational discourses.

Because of the complexity of approaches to the topic of performance and the performative, the following considerations are important to me for this text:

1. Why do I almost always note a feeling of great contentment on the part of the activists during and after hosting performance courses and after performances? This is not a saturated feeling. In fact it is a feeling affected by curiosity about itself and the discovery of new artistic contexts of combination and mystery. What does it feed from?
2. Where can we learn from performances? Which components of performance and its preparatory education in groups form the connection to the desire to allow the culture of improvisation and fluid ways of thinking and acting to enter our everyday life?
3. How can synapses be generated between the talismanic gift of artistic performance as well as explorative, open-ended, and performative ways of life and the behavior in social, political, and educational processes?

1. Body ... Invent ... Ideas ... in Space – The Added Value of Performance

I will begin with the description of performances and the teaching of performance, because out of this context I want to define their inherent artistic, responsive, social, and sensual potential. Also, I want to point to the added value here, which can be found in the artistic quality, the nonverbal communication skills, and the educational after-effects of teaching performance.

Performance Courses

I usually teach students of art education at the Technical University of Dresden who graduate in Performance Art. At first they look at me with big, expectant, and even fearful and skeptical eyes. Looks that fear failure, looks that reveal curiosity, looks that show tension ...

The first exercises are practical:

- we free the room of all objects;
- we sweep the room and mop it together, in silence, in a row;
- then we open up the “damaged” body of everyday life with playful and experimental actions—first, to regenerate the body with its emotions, and second, to start experiencing the character of surreal and unusual actions;
- then we complete a few exercises that help us to get to know each other and to trust the people in the group;
- by doing so we develop greater sensitivity in the way we perceive our own bodies, the room, and the presence of the other participants in the room.

After reflecting on the previous exercises, we practice various tools that are necessary for performance work. The main topics include a broad range of research in the following fields:

- the body
- space
- time
- the materials and the items
- the ideas and actions.

We reflect on our intermedia experiences from the exercises and take notes on important artistic aspects for the performance. We put these notes on blackboards, so that everyone can see them, and in special workshop books that every participant can take home.

These include, among others, performance tools such as:

Notice the peripheral field of vision.

Act in actuality, don't pretend—most of the time that means neither to

playact nor to pantomime (unless these means are explicitly used in a conceptual way).
 Show presence, show “I am here.”
 Welcome chance and work with it.
 Don’t leave the setting, stay in the action.
 Allow, try out, and enjoy interaction, play, and improvisation.
 Open, not normative experimentation with body, space, motion, material, time.
 Define the performative space and always be aware of it.
 Study, play with, analyze, alienate, know, arrange materials and items.
 Devise the beginning and the end of performances.
 Develop, don’t illustrate, ideas from materials and experiments with actions.
 Compose performances, arrange them in rhythms.
 Devise action scores and anticipate events (draw, describe, make mind maps, take pictures, create collages, physically discover space).
 Wear clothing that fits the setting of ideas.
 Plan lights and shadows.
 Find friends to help out with the actual performance.

At the end of every course, the participants present their performances to the public.

We all wait with bated breath for this moment. After we have come to know each other extremely well during the course, there is usually a strong feeling of companionship. This is because the group members have gained an insight into each other’s performative attitudes and interests. By revealing a lot about themselves and by conceiving artworks, which might have been striking or still rather imperfect, the participants have developed a feeling of intimacy. Often, participants express the wish to continue working, researching, and living in a similar atmosphere. What are the reasons for this desire? Is there something to learn from the performances themselves, the field of teaching, or the work process, which extends beyond purely artistic aspects?

2. Performing and Subsequently Reflecting on It Reaches beyond Art

Despite all of its implications, art cannot merge into life. All attempts to that end have failed. But what is it about performative “playing” that can help us to cope with our highly contingent lives?

My first thesis is: improvising and playing during the preparation of their performances helps the participants to acknowledge each other. A social space is opened up, which serves as a democratic platform.

As mentioned above, teaching performance art encompasses a wide range of improvisation techniques. “Improvising implies playing and corporeality.”¹ In the scope of action, the subject makes decisions that are “not of a purely rational structure.” Instead, they are “connected to practical judgment, which derives from the social space of the community.”² Improvising means making decisions that are not related to things established in the past, but which demand seizing opportunities spontaneously and recognizing the contingency of the future. These decisions entail a certain momentary authenticity, whereby the players seem to be acting “freely.” The improvisers have a practical, social sense, causing a “temporal order/temporality determined by the actions” and the *flow*, a group-specific energy.³ By using our practical sense, which is both corporeal and intellectual, we’re able to notice and make use of these group-specific energies, which might occur at different times. “The more complex the situation becomes [...] and the more participants are involved in the improvisation, the more important it is for individuals to sense the right opportunity for directing their actions.”⁴ It is here in this “space of opportunity,” which is physically perceptible but can hardly be analyzed, that we feel “that certain emphasis of being in tune with the group, which could be described as a fulfillment” in the sense that we commit ourselves to solving conflicts and smoothing out differences.⁵

In the *flow*, there is no such thing as a “mistake,” since the effect and the meaning of an action unfolds within the interactive process itself. Consequently, “the success of an action [...] is not ascribed only to the acting subject but to the *flow* of events. We have to take the initiative, we have to be observant, and at the same time, we are not able to predetermine the situation [...]”⁶ Raising awareness for the moment of acting is the only goal of improvisation. Hence, we do not bear any responsibility for successes or failures. Our only responsibility is to participate.

Physical and interpersonal communication during group improvisation not only raises awareness for nonverbal thoughts and signs, but also enables the performers to share moments of social happiness and aesthetic pleasure. My second thesis is: group improvisation and experiments using the body, space, and different materials provide an unfamiliar identity experience by using unconscious mimetic forces. Reflecting on this experience within the group in an intelligible way and free of fear is a means of building confidence and forming a communication community.

1 Christopher Dell, *Prinzip Improvisation* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2002), 65.
 2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., 65–66.
 4 Ibid., 66.
 5 Ibid.
 6 Ibid., 68.

This thesis combines two trains of thought. On the one hand, it is all about encouraging the performers to conceptualize experimental and exploratory actions that suspend the “order of images.” Experiments with the body or different materials applying aleatory strategies developed by Surrealist artists or deconstructionist philosophers are intended to avoid the logic inherent in references to antecedent meanings. The pictorial actions that derive from these strategies reach beyond clear interpretations and possess high sensual qualities and subversive powers. Performative research is a quest for the pictorial void that renders the audience speechless and does not bypass the difference between the visible imagery of the signifier, on the one hand, and the signified, on the other hand, thus giving rise to a new artistic reality.

Those strong images are rooted in the individual autobiographies of the performers. Therefore, all performative actions are automatically linked to the development of the self. Nevertheless, the artistic concepts have to evolve without recourse to explicit references to the performers’ biographies, transforming and rendering them more abstract. Different nuances of the performer’s self are particularly prevalent during the playful and aesthetic interaction that occurs in the course of improvisations. Often, the performing subjects are dumbfounded by the mysterious and polyvalent meanings of their own actions. This is because routines are being suspended by unconscious and spontaneous reactions within improvised and experimental contexts.

The expressiveness and enigmatic significance of these images created during improvisations are reflected on during feedback sessions, which are also supported by videos and photographs documenting the improvisations. These imagery fragments lead to scenic concepts for images and actions, which serve as raw material for future performances.

My second train of thought is directed towards the momentousness of constructive criticism of, and reflection on, performative experiments within the group. The performers participate in a collective analysis of the form, content, and impressions created by their individual artistic work. Such reflections cater to the players’ interests and include physical and sensual aspects.

The main interest of artistic communities is to be found in highlighting differences and maintaining aspects of subversion, coarseness, and fragility within actions. This attitude is contrary to our society’s tendency to underrate or level out differences from the norm. Communicative spaces created by performance art allow for thoughts and communication about the so-far unmentioned, the “abnormal, the incommensurable, the irreducible” and the complexity of things. “This is because facing others in their outright presence and their discursive practices helps me untangle myself from my own redundancy.”⁷

Participants in improvisations and performative exercises develop unforeseeable and unintentional performative imagery and actions. The instantaneousness of the event is what creates sensual and physical potentials, which are inherent in playful activities. The players experience their group as a community of communication and as a platform of loyal and critical exchange. This creates the desire to transfer this space devoid of power, economic interests, and egotism to other social fields of reference, such as schools, universities, and the workplace. Teaching performance art would then be experienced as a model where unintentional performative events are manifested as *happenings*.⁸ These can only be experienced as something completely different, which leads to reflections that go beyond single-track truths.

In this way, the performative process of improvising individually or as a group could be regarded as a model of the paradoxical tension between spontaneity and reflexivity, which is the prerequisite for art and for a fulfilled existence of the individual and the society.

3. Performance and Self-Empowerment⁹

At the risk of sketching a megalomaniac mental construct, I have to admit that I see myself in line with numerous artists, philosophers, digital activists, and scholars in the field of cultural studies who have established the factuality and the urgency of self-confident and anti-institutional social intervention. In order to achieve self-empowerment and to gain your own voice and a personal language, you have to be able to claim competence. You need to have something to say. You have to be conscious of your own attitudes and beliefs.

Performance serves as a means of getting to know invisible and unconscious facets of the self, which leads to self-empowerment as well as to the invention of things and the courage to act in ways that had not seemed possible before the course, although they have always lain dormant in the subject’s individual potential. This process puts Joseph Beuys’s sentence into practice, which claimed that “everyone is an artist” and was intended to empower people to their self-empowerment. Art has always had the task of breaking up the routines of

⁷ Ibid., 136.

⁸ Dieter Mersch, *Ereignis und Aura. Untersuchungen zu einer Ästhetik des Performativen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), 9–10.

⁹ This was the title of a conference at the Department of Education at the University of Koblenz on November 16, 2012, discussing the history and the current artistic and political dimensions of individual self-empowerment. The term “self-empowerment”

was introduced by the philosopher Max Stirner and refers to the liberation of the individual from external limiting rules and ideologies in order to recognize the SELF as an empowered citizen and thereby escape disenfranchisement by laws enforced by institutions. See <http://www.uni-koblenz-landau.de/koblenz/fb1/gpko/termine/performance> and www.selbstermächtigung.net.

perception and opening up new perspectives. Nevertheless, it seems to me that movement, interaction, evolving imagery, and encounters during improvisation within performance art generate a polysemous density, “creating new things, which become—once more—intertwined in other cognitive processes [...]”¹⁰

As soon as young performers have learned to move within the realms of improvised modalities of action, which are both spontaneous and open, and to take pleasure in the unanticipated effect of improvisation, they have taken a major step towards self-empowerment. This process requires developing self-confidence and overcoming anxieties, and leads to a new personal conception of art and everyday life within society.

Translated from the German by Judith Lange and Antje Dudek

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Mind Art

On the Gradual Production of Meaning while Performing

Stefanie Seibold



Fig. 24
Stefanie Seibold and Teresa Maria Diaz Nerio, *Aktion Matt und Schlapp wie Schnee – Re-reading the Performance Works of Gina Pane*, 2011.

Performance is an artistic strategy with a rich history and a bright future, judging from the enormous amount of interest it has generated in the last decade. After a long sleep following its heyday in the avant-garde circles of the 1970s, museums and art institutions around the world are today readily adapting their buildings to present performance works in new White Spaces and Black Boxes dedicated to the multimedia format. This even proves to be profitable for institutions: diverse audiences are being generated repeatedly by a series of events from which the long-running shows in the main galleries also benefit significantly. In short, performance art, not so long ago regarded as an obscure, often somewhat embarrassing, commercially disappointing art practice, has become a success.

Between 1999 and 2004 I was part of several artistic curatorial enterprises contributing to a new interest in performance in Vienna, all of them not-for-profit, collaborative projects. The first was a live venue called “Salon Lady Chutney,”¹ and the other two were exhibitions on performance art titled “Let’s Twist Again – If You Can’t Think It, Dance It,”² and “Mothers of Invention – Where Is Performance Coming From?”³ All of them instigated lively new discussions around the then most unfashionable format, at the same time reclaiming performance from the legacy of male-dominated Actionism while challenging its dominant narrative here. In the process of these enterprises, my position kept changing from artist to curator to historian, researcher, writer, and editor. I became an expert in the then mostly unwritten history of an ephemeral art form and from there moved on to publishing a comprehensive book in cooperation with Carola Dertnig, including finding large sums of funding for our extensive, bilingual project. All of these positions were challenging and new but had become necessary to bring back to light many half-forgotten but nevertheless influential works and groundbreaking performative strategies that were important to us as artists and teachers, especially works by women and queer works. For this we had to make up our own tools and research techniques, to learn more about the history of an art form that most art historians—mainly trained to deal with images and not processes, and often overly fetishizing the significance of the live moment—apparently had regarded as “unresearchable.” Our focus on works by women, feminist, and queer works—marginalized within a dominant art historical canon—made it even more necessary not to rely on published materials alone but to use oral research methods and other alternative strategies of collecting knowledge for the complex project. In the course of our research, it became very clear that we could not leave this immensely time-consuming work to the so-called “experts”—if we wanted to find anything meaningful—but would instead have to become experts ourselves. We also felt that (our) historic research needed

1 A tiny space with an upstairs bar that featured one live performance or installation a

week for a year between 2001–2002 (with Katrina Daschner and Johanna Kirsch).

to be connected to present-day concepts and strategies in order to activate its potential and show continuities and differences within a newly developing field of (performance) art.

Although bodies seem to be central to performance art, *body art* as a defining category for performance works is extremely problematic in my opinion. It is particularly unhelpful in reference to works by women and queers, as it triggers old dichotomies like body versus mind, nature versus culture, etc., whereby women, and other marginalized genders,⁴ are ascribed the role of the unconscious, the untamed, the animalistic, thus obscuring the conceptual approach in body-based works. The idea of the French critic François Pluchart, who coined the term *L'art corporel* (body art), was originally a different one: he regarded body art as a sociological, engaged art form: "The intention of bodily action is to open the individual consciousness to major sociological facts."⁵

To address an audience, to intervene in places and situations, to change the meaning of the everyday or the meaning of art itself was a central motivation for artists to turn to performance from the very beginning. The Suffragettes developed performative strategies for museums and in the streets: if nobody wants to listen to what you have to say, doing something instead of speaking might actually be a good approach.⁶ For many of the avant-garde artists of the 1970s, a key motivation to develop performative strategies was to react to the political situation of their time, especially the Vietnam War and the feminist movement. As Adrian Piper pointed out in an interview at the time: to keep on working in the studio—and to withdraw a work from a show as a form of political engagement or protest—seemed just laughable, and was not an option for her.

Performance is a very powerful artistic technique with its ability to formulate, show, and to play with seemingly fixed and defining categories such as identity, ethnicity, or gender as well as many other political agendas. It has the capability to de-construct with great ease, fun, and elegance normative concepts and topics that structure and limit our everyday lives. Performance is capable of saying something very direct and concrete about these complicated topics. It can question—with a simple gesture, the "wrong" movement or a surprising costume—politically most relevant, and theoretically almost inscrutable, social constructs such as gender, identity, or sexuality.

Teaching performance is traditionally delegated to the department of sculpture: a body in a space, a volume against another volume. These are important parameters in thinking about and conceptualizing performance work, but this falls short of addressing the many and diverse artistic fields and practices that have been contributing to the formation of what presently fits under the

(once again broad) label of "performance art". In my experience, even though the concept of artistic "disciplines" has long ago dissolved into individual practices, teaching and learning about performance art profits greatly from critical frictions with specific areas of artistic production such as fine-art, theater, dance, film, or literature and their historically developed conditions. The most interesting performance works in a fine art teaching environment are being developed by young artists who have previously been seriously engaged in other artistic fields such as sculpture, installation, or painting—and have reached their limits within these fields. These artists have turned for a specific (artistic) reason to a performative strategy to get a point across for which the other strategies, formats, and materials did not offer a satisfying solution. This transitioning moment of exchanging one set of beliefs, ideas, and questions for another (e.g., from thinking about space, form, and representation to thinking about context, content, and presentation) seems to me to epitomize the analytical faculties at the core of performance art and underlines its status as a central conceptual practice.

Thus, the relevance of performance as an artistic strategy today does not lie in the experience of an artist performing a work herself, nor in the audience experiencing her experience, but in its propensity to produce contingent narratives that question and destabilize obsolete but nevertheless powerful (master) narratives on which our present (art) world still is based. The recent wave of fashionable performance works that feature neo-expressionist self-promotion and other revisionist gestures re-establishing the idea of a heroic artist figure, even in a parodistic or ironic manner, seem to me to completely misunderstand and to once again obscure the conceptual power of performative strategies in a contemporary art arena. My work as an artist and as a teacher consequently focuses on the subversive qualities of performative production of meaning rather than on questions and displays of the body.⁷

Much more than a body-related art form, with its continual placing of ideas over objects, its insistency on the contingency of artistic meaning production, its inherent questioning of the museum's legacies of contemplation and representation, and its questioning of the logic of the art market and its ever accelerating commodification of any art form, performance today plays a

2 Kunsthalle Exnergasse, a large alternative exhibition space in Vienna, Summer 2002 (with Carola Dertnig).

3 mumok Vienna 2003–2004, including an international symposium and live events (with Carola Dertnig).

4 As well as non-white, non-Western ethnicities, which are always already implicated in these binary divisions based on Enlightenment logic.

5 Quoted from Frédérique Baumgartner, "Reviving the Collective Body: Gina Pane's Escalade Non Anesthésiée," *Oxford Art Journal* 34 (2011): 247–63, here 252.

6 Leslie Hill, "Suffragettes Invented Performance Art," *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance*, eds. Lizbeth Goodman and Jane De Gay (London: Routledge, 2000), 150–6.

central role as a highly political, conceptual art practice. Historically, its many and diverse strategies can clearly be regarded as blueprints for many more recent, influential artistic approaches, be it participatory practices or relational aesthetics, etc. Teaching knowledge on the complex histories of performance art and of related contemporary practices furthermore is crucial to an understanding and development of fresh and innovative artistic strategies to come. As the art critic Adrian Searle of *The Guardian* stated in his article "How Performance Art Took Over": "It's hard to think of much recent art that isn't, at some level, performative."⁸

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On History and Solidarity Performative Reading of *Woman's Book* by Liljana Gjuzelova

Suzana Milevska



Fig. 25
Liljana Gjuzelova, *Woman's Book*, 2010.

Today, no one doubts anymore that research can culminate in an artwork rather than a scholarly analysis and factography. A dilemma still arises, however, on the question of how to distinguish academic from artistic research and on how the artistic presentation of a research project differs and enhances (or suppresses) the rigorous results of pedantic historical research. To clarify, the question of distinguishing an artistic from a scholarly, humanist approach towards research is not about whether the former is less rigorous, systemic, and pedantic than the latter. Assuming that the artistic project can also be thorough and rigorous methodologically, it is often expected that artists will offer a “performative” turn in terms of the visual presentation of the results. In this essay I’d like to argue that there is still a slight difference to be made between the “performative” and “spectacular” and that this difference is actually at the core of research-based art projects. I will build up the argument by pointing to this distinction between the “spectacular” and “performative” through the analysis of the “spectacular” and “performative” understanding of historical research in the project *Woman's Book* by Liljana Gjuzelova (June 2010, CK Culture Centre, Skopje, Macedonia).

This essay is also intended as an attempt to deconstruct the understanding of photography archives as supposed spaces for the guarding of the authenticity

and truth about certain events. I want to address the process of “unveiling the truth” through researching photography archives and to question the possibility of such unveiling. I will focus on the difference between the state (or public) archives and personal archives, while stressing the importance of the gendered perspective in dealing with family photographs when deconstructing state archives in various art projects. My interest in “de-archiving” of the archives stems from the need for a gendered interpretation when performing archival photographs during artistic research that is not necessarily based on “spectacularity” but actually tries to uncouple such relations.¹

Woman’s Book is an artist’s book (forty-six pages, 70 × 70 cm, cardboard, ink-jet photographs, texts, documents, embroidery, and drawings) presented as an installation that consists of the object laid on a table and accompanied by recorded sound. The narrative of the book was performed by the artist (who received help flipping the heavy pages from various assistants) on different occasions in front of varying audiences, by appointment.

The project was the result of a two-year art research project based on newly discovered details about one of the first socialist women’s associations in Macedonia (not a feminist one since the aims were the liberation of Macedonia from the Serbian occupation) before the Second World War. The organization was established in 1927 and existed until 1941. It had a manifesto and published its announcements in the Swiss, French, and Italian newspapers of the time. The artist’s mother, Donka Ivanova (later Gjuzelova), was a member of the group MTZO (Macedonian Secret Women’s Organization), so the documents were found in the forgotten family archive, while the documents in the national archives were ignored (because of the problematic aims of the group against the pro-Serbian government of the time).

This is the lesser-known history of this remote corner of Europe and its obscure past of women’s movements, in which many other members participated besides the artist’s mother. The MTZO was active while Macedonia was still within the borders of the Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs, and it operated as an activist support group for the Macedonian Youth Secret Revolutionary Organization (MMTRO), which listed as its main aim resistance against the Serbian assimilatory politics. MTZO members were very young students (according to the organization’s constitution, they were supposedly virgins) who vowed to support the activities of their male colleagues from the better-known male organization.

The most exciting part of the project was the newly written letter the artist dedicated and addressed to her late mother, encoded via an encryption system her mother and other members of the group once used for distributing messages to imprisoned members.

The historians in Macedonia have not yet made as much progress in researching this particular organization as the artist herself, due to the controversy surrounding the claimed ethnicity of its members (Bulgarian historiography claims the organization’s Bulgarian origin, even though during the period of its activity, prior to the Second World War, Macedonia was under occupation by Serbia). On the contrary, for the artist this controversy was not an obstacle to precisely uncovering the “underground” history of one of the least-known women’s movements active on the present territory of Macedonia in 1920s and ’30s, with about three hundred known members.

The itinerary that the artist pursued throughout her “journey” started from a single photograph, which was subjected to exhaustive and comprehensive cross-disciplinary research using additional documents, testimonials, and other materials traced in different ways. For example, the most extraordinary and rare details discovered during the project were results of two-year “excavations.” These included old letters and photographs from family albums, the organization’s constitution and other information collected by consulting local archives and archivists, interviews with direct descendants of the main protagonists in the rarer photographs and others knowledgeable about the period, even digging through and jogging the artist’s own memory.

The artist had no pretensions to interpreting this early women’s group as feminist. It was clear that the group operated under the auspices of the “father’s name” and that it defended the grand narrative of national identity. However, this “woman’s book” does supplement the spectacular history of known heroes and facts with yet another “page,” or rather a new, previously unwritten chapter about women’s movements that haven’t found space even in the margins of the main history books (at least in the Balkan region). Facts about the life stories of the main protagonists of the forgotten MTZO movement are accompanied by modified photographs and photocollages with subtle digital or hand-drawn interventions. In this parallel history, the heroines have at their disposal an arsenal of weird secret weapons: songs, poems, staged excursions as cover-up for conspiracy meetings, embroidered silk, encoded letters inscribed by dots over the printed letters in philosophy books, etc.

Squeezed in between two patriarchal powers and regimes of identity construction—the dominant power of the colonizers with assimilatory tendencies towards the subaltern Macedonian citizens and the dominance of the fathers, brothers, and lovers—these women construed their unique political subjectivity,

¹ I refer to Guy Debord’s critique of spectacle: “The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.”

Guy Debord, *The Society of Spectacle* [1967], trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 13.

which somehow raised them above the patriarchal hierarchy. Through their very commonality and solidarity, and collaboration with the male organization with which they shared their political views, the women's subjectivity manifests itself as a kind of necessary supplement that has always been there and complemented the fractured wholeness of historical truth that was once perceived as compact.

At the beginning, the selected photograph was mute, without promising the discovery of any intriguing information, being only a segment of the abandoned and purloined photographic archive. Among these six anonymous young women in their twenties, dressed modestly and unpretentiously but with a dignified air, in a uniform austerity style of the 1920s and '30s, the artist recognized only her own mother, Donka—and that was all she had to go on at first. The hypothesis that the women had bonded for some other reason besides merely friendship only later led to the revelation that they were all members in the MTZO.

The *Woman's Book* is a unique collage of the author's essayistic texts; personal letters written by her father, her mother, and her father's previous girlfriend; political pamphlets; the constitution of the organization (dated 1926) and the appeal signed by Gena Veleva (dated 1930); original documents accompanied by the responses to the appeal in the European media; photographs and documents from the archives of the Gjuzelov family; and copies of visual and textual materials found in various institutional archives and libraries. It is precisely this intertwining of the literary, essayistic texts inspired by the photograph on the one hand and the incomplete historical facts on the other that offers viewers an exciting performative experience as each viewer/reader of this book project comes up with her/his own version of the historical events. Every time the heavy cardboard pages are raised and flipped it is like a personal venture by the viewers. They too have a hand in the construction of this parallel history by participating in the informal performances and partial revelations of delicate questions and facts about unknown events and local personalities.

These personal encounters parallel history are emphasized by the sound of thirty thoughtfully selected words and names being uttered, filling the space with the artist's voice and with the expectation of each subsequent word-event. Thus the voice/speech/text and the image become interwoven in a grid of meanings that enable viewers to become accomplices in the unraveling of fragments of this strange, intimate, and clandestine history. Because of the uneven pace of the reading and the interruptions through the pre-recorded voice, the live performance was never repeated in exactly the same way. This means that there was never the same combination and relation established between the sound and image in front of any viewer, and that the

words and photographic representations of sadness, pain, and male and female history never overlapped.

This project was also an attempt at de-archiving the notion of archives in the Balkans. The presentation and the collated visual material challenge and deconstruct the problematic understanding of institutional archives as places dedicated to guarding and preserving the truth of written documents and visual imagery. Instead of focusing on the archive as the repository of some absolute truth (e.g., about national identity), the artist "performed" an archive of a personal quest for truth as a way of producing rather than acquiring knowledge.

A previous project by Liljana Gjuzelova that dealt with the unveiling/revealing/re-veiling of truth, *Eternal Recurrence (1-4)*, actually comprised a series of four projects that were developed from 1996 to 2006. *Eternal Recurrence* was presented as slide, video, sculpture, or text installations in various spaces. All four installations of *Eternal Recurrence (1-4)* were dedicated to the extremely sensitive and complex historic case of Gjuzelov's prosecution and execution at the end of the Second World War.²

To de-archive the archive in the Balkans is to base the interpretation of various archives of images on assumptions radically different from those explored in archiving in scientific/historical, political, and social terms. Although it would be an overstatement to claim that it is unscientific, de-archiving does aim to deconstruct the scientific belief in truth, facts, chronology, and evidence. While unfolding the old files, the artist created new folds. The folds/events thus enable rhizomatic relations and convergences to occur between different files, like multiple openings of a silkworm cocoon that "reveal and veil the unveiling of truth."³

The archive saves and preserves its contents: documents, images, letters, and "traces" are saved for future research and distribution. This effort assumes

2 The artist's father, Dimitar Hristov Gjuzelov, was one of the first educated philosophers and renowned intellectuals in Macedonia. He defended his doctoral thesis, "Schopenhauer's Pragmatic Critique of Reason," at Zagreb University in 1943. Before the Second World War, he was imprisoned after the "Skopje Student Trial" in 1927 as a member of the nationalist separatist youth group MMTRO (Macedonian Youth Secret Revolutionary Organization), which participated in the early national struggle movements against the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In 1945 he was executed by the Communists as a Bulgarian Fascist collaborator. His rushed

trial and execution are still questioned by the Macedonian historians. The process of investigating and discovering some of the circumstances still enveloping the tragic execution of her father, with different interpretations—a process later instigated by the opening of political dossiers in the year 2000—led Gjuzelova to produce art projects on this topic and present them at exhibitions, which she began as early as 1995.

3 Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 131.

that this “investment” can protect the memory, and ultimately the truth.⁴ But the archive, being simultaneously an “introduction” into both the past and the future, does not itself have one single access point, because there is no one single *archē* to the archive—a true beginning. One has to deal with multiple and erratic beginnings, in a temporal or spatial way.

On the one hand, even an organized and vigilant researcher who has made all sorts of necessary preparations may overlook an important piece of evidence because of the vastness, and idiosyncratic order, of the archive, whether official or private. Therefore, the desired event, the encounter between the researcher and the sought document/image, might never occur. On the other hand, an important *event* may take place unexpectedly; an image or document may appear by accident. The multiple *entrances* to the archive make contingent the *event* of its entering. An archive is always a labyrinth with many dead ends and no shortcut exits, which both confuses and seduces. The photograph of six women was the single entrance with many exits that enabled Liljana Gjuzelova’s erratic and painful yet profound and exhaustive research in her personal family history, but also in the delicate and not so “spectacular” national history.

Most of the national archives in the Balkans allow entrance to their well-kept premises, but only the most valued contents of the Balkan archives (the “big historic truths” about the origins of nation, national identity, nation-state, territory, national heroes, or ethnic minorities) are treated as relevant. Regardless of the relevance of the issue of representation of gender difference from a linguistic, anthropological, cultural, psychoanalytical, or feminist academic perspective, the Balkan archive authorities treat this issue as if it were of no scientific value. It is important to stress that bureaucratic rigidity in historical national library and museum archives in the Balkans is the result of strong political influence and of strict control over their management and leadership. Although the directors are given responsibility and power to lead these institutions, ostensibly in the name of some “inherent” idea of the “national interest,” in practice these appointments are often an extension of governmental politics. The regime of representation is still controlled by the authorities; it turns out to be unstable and always marked by a certain crisis. I propose looking at the representation of gender difference in the Balkans as if it were a “dangerous supplement” to, and a source of, this crisis.⁵

The complex rhizomatic structure of the de-archived archive defies any linearity in terms of the selection, gathering, historical periodization, and systematization of the images and their authors. The existing correspondences and contradictory relations among all these images and, most importantly, certain additional relations among all of these different images and concepts, emerge during the research itself and the process of de-archiving. On the

one hand, this archive seems to include everybody. However, the deconstructed *archive* does not employ the simple method of adding and including neglected or excluded images. It is actually an attempt to apply simultaneously the same two movements of deterritorialization—one through which the subjects would have to be isolated from the majority, and another through which they needed to rise up from their minority status.⁶ It is clear that the majority of images portrayed men, and not all representations of women were relevant for discussing gender difference.

The case of the six women who acted together in solidarity not only with their male companions but also among themselves (interestingly enough, in contrast to the male organization they were never captured and imprisoned) questions even the notion of historic spectacle. The images of women and images created by women, either historical or contemporary, are created in different contexts: documentary, ethnographic, anthropological, or artistic. The grand narrative about the “big” heroes begins to intertwine itself with stories about “less” important ones. The “grand” truths begin to intertwine themselves with the “small” ones; this raises the question of whether there can be such thing as a “small truth,” and of whether the discourse on gender difference can be qualified as a kind of *truth*.

The hierarchical notion of the archive claims to protect the origin and authenticity of identity. Therefore, it is important to explore the possibilities for a restructuring of the hierarchical archive into an archive of difference and to relate them to the crisis of representation through a discussion of photographic representation. This is a matter of the intrinsic “crack within the truth of the sign” that affects any representation of truth, since this crisis inevitably affects the signification of the archive.⁷⁺⁸

One of the most important questions is: How are the highly appreciated and concealed truths about the origins of nation, state, or language related to the problematic nature of gender difference? In other words, have these “big truths,” or rather *spectacles of truth*, not *always* been marked by gender difference as a kind of “supplement”? Gender difference understood as a “supplement” to difference and to national and cultural identity does not merely

4 Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Prentice Hall, 1982), 18.

5 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 144–57.

6 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 291.

7 Derrida, *Margins*, 10. The crisis of represen-

tation as conceived in Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction is an outcome of the crisis within the arbitrary structure of the sign and the troubled relation between the signifier and signified.

8 *Ibid.*, 11. If the word “history” did not in and of itself convey the motif of a final repression of difference, one could say that only differences can be “historical” from the outset and in each of their aspects.

supplement what is present but marks the emptiness of these structures.⁹ Gender difference destabilizes the “fixed” and “pure” structure of identity from the outset.

All of Gjuzelova’s works, in fact, talk about a constant revealing of truth that has no body.¹⁰ The unraveling of new layers and veils might appear to be accosting the final truth. It is, however, no more than an uncovering of further layers, as a result of the skeptical belief that there is no single truth, and that the different versions emphasize the improbability of its existence as such.

Even though the eternal return is never a return to the same, and does not imply repetition of the same *event*, even though with every repetition certain variations, which confirm the possibility of movement, occur, this story should be seen as a warning that any chance of a return to even remotely similar stories should be prevented.



Fig. 26
Reading performance of Liljana Gjuzelova's *Woman's Book*, 2010.

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⁹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 145.

¹⁰ The differing versions of her father's last day and his execution on Zajchev Rid, a hill on Skopje's northern outskirts, are what led Gjuzelova to draw a slightly open circle on the supposed resting place of the body: that is how her video *Eternal Recurrence 4* begins. The process of marking the unknown grave in red paint with a slightly open circle emphasizes the impossibility of bringing this story to closure—the impossibility of closing a dossier that still abounds with unanswered questions, confusing data, and absurdities. The

emptiness; the uncertainty and despair in the long years of re-examination, prosecution, and exile that led to serious human rights violations; as well as the burden of “inherited guilt” left to the whole family, have been, from the very beginning, the recurrent motifs in these projects. The video consisted of photographs, the personal letters, the Dimitar Gjuzelov manuscripts, and the newly found documents—such as the last letter Gjuzelov wrote to his daughter—and the documentation from the other three projects.

Subject Put to the Test*

Sabeth Buchmann and Constanze Ruhm



Fig. 27
Yvonne Rainer, *Lives of Performers*, 1972.

1.

These are my neighbors, these odd people. In constantly changing costumes. What are they doing there, I often ask myself. For some reason, they have decided to halt time in order to do certain things again. It's almost as if they wanted to limit themselves to give themselves less time. And since only finite things are given a body, they have perhaps resorted to this habit of repeating everything, because limitation through death does not suffice.

—René Pollesch, *Porträt aus Desinteresse*, 2008.

Under the title “Decide and Make Your Move,” the *Financial Times* recently presented sociological advice literature dedicated to the enhancement of decision-making.¹ Starting from the diagnosis that good management usually fails due to the nonexistent structure of those methods that lead to efficient decisions—a problem that also affects the organization of one’s own life—the professors and brothers Chip and Dan Heath suggest finding a remedy in the principle of trial and error. Short-time emotions that risk fizzling out all too quickly should be replaced by a regular reality check of one’s own convictions and methods. Only through a readiness to think beyond what is already known and to weigh the diversity of options does one learn how to deal with one’s errors and mistakes. Chip and Dan’s colleague, Francesca Gino from the Harvard Business School, is also of the opinion that an awareness of the extent of extraneous influences on decisions could help one better control them.

This kind of everyday wisdom along the lines of “practice makes perfect” or “make the best out of mistakes” seems to nestle up without resistance to the neoliberal ideology of “lifelong learning.” The theater scholar Kai van Eikels, for example, noted that improvisation techniques modeled on free jazz long ago entered into management and organization theories, where they are referenced as means to enhance creativity in collective production processes: “In a process of improvisation, there is neither definitively right nor definitively wrong, since everything that someone does is principally under reserve and attains its value only from what he has effected. [...] Valuation management, i.e., the control of possible extraneous perceptions in the relationship to oneself, replaces the simple do-it-well. Virtuoso performance in a team is essentially based on the ability to assess at each moment what I am worth to the

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Philip Delves Broughton, “Decide and Make Your Move,” *Financial Times*, March 26, 2013, 12.

others (or the value of what I am doing at the moment to what they are doing).”²

This view also corresponds with the widespread proposition made by theorists such as Fredric Jameson, Luc Boltanski, and Eve Chiapello that some forms of work possess a significant catalyzing function for capitalist dynamics—particularly those that in the name of commodity, alienation, and reification critique are committed to the non-perfect, processual, and temporary as well as project-related quality of artistic activity. Indeed, socially and affectively intensive—thus collaborative, communicative, and participatory—practices still count as effective ways to avoid market-oriented product thinking—even if the awareness of the expanding creative industry, which falls back precisely on these means, has certainly grown.

At this point, however, one shouldn’t cater too rashly to an explanatory logic that subsumes all artistic and human activity under an economic morality or that basically acts as if this didn’t play a role. No one can reject an interest in promising decisions—it accompanies any kind of work in a more or less conscious way: whether it is work on a text, on art, on life, on a relationship, or on oneself.

Precisely this only conditionally controllable relationship between decision and rule, productive repetition and stagnating routine, is the core subject matter of the rehearsal. As an artistic format, the rehearsal has become a popular means of the cross-media and cross-institutional linking of visual and performative forms of presentation. The format of the theater or music rehearsal is employed, for example, in (installation) films and performance videos, where it is understood as an integration of potentially dysfunctional methods that tend to challenge the rules of their own genre and question or replace what is all too skillful and virtuoso by the visible testing of new rules. In doing so, artistic production often performs itself as a structurally open-ended learning process in front of the running camera. According to Ruby Rich’s characterization of Yvonne Rainer’s debut film from 1972, *Lives of Performers*, in which the non-narrative conventions of minimalistic dance lead to symbolically broken narration on archetypical power and gender conflicts, it is often about a simultaneous act of rehearsal time and screen time.³ While on the one hand the format of rehearsal aims at linking distinct media and genres (dance, film, photography), on the other it is the mixing of private and public spheres of production that focuses on moments which are usually not included in the final product: moments of waiting and observing, of making mistakes and failing, of hesitating and repeating. Such experiences typical of artistic producers are staged in relation to social, emotional, and media-related behavior and role patterns. They frequently appear in the form of a both planned—because script-guided—and situation and process-dependent *making* of identities, affects, movements, gazes, and actions. In *Lives of Performers*,

the format of rehearsal is played like an instrument that inextricably entwines reality, mediality, and fictionality. Already here, there are signs of the interest, manifest in contemporary (installation) films, in reflecting upon the problem of artistic decision-making in regard to social relations of power and representation as well as to the prevailing forms of subjectivization. Examples of these tendencies can be found with George Kuchar (*I, an Actress*, 1977) and Andy Warhol (*Screen-tests*, 1960s), as well as in contemporary works by Rashid Masharawi, Omer Fast, Keren Cytter, Martin Beck, Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz, Eske Schlütters, Clemens von Wedemeyer, Maya Schweizer, Wendelien van Oldenborgh, and Constanze Ruhm—works in which a shift takes place away from the individual and toward collaborative and systematic forms of production consequently. The format of rehearsal provides the opportunity to have those involved in art production (artist or director, camerapersons, light technicians, assistants, etc.) enter the picture in the sense of a demystifying visualization of hierarchies dominated by the division of labor. It appears as if the format of rehearsal, mostly vacillating between improvisation-, communication-, and process-oriented staging, manifests the flipside of an all too genre-specific performance art and the linking of visual and performative arts at the intersection of “ordinary” and artistic work.⁴ The exposure of disciplining methods and standardizing conventions is accompanied by gestures of the aimlessly unproductive, aborted, wasteful, and erroneous—Warhol’s *Screen-tests* can serve as a historical example of this.

2.

Notably, the rehearsal, which is in most cases oriented toward the performing arts, can be found foremost in those performative forms of work that, while relating to theater, do not want to be theater in an explicit way. Staged as an anti- or meta-theatrical work-in-progress, the rehearsal is a self-reflective presentation of the rules based on the repetition of conventions, roles, and behavior patterns that the actors and actresses (and with them the viewers) must first comprehend in order to see through their own, oftentimes ambiguous, positioning within hierarchical orders permeated by claims to power and validity. For the

² Kai van Eikels, “Collective Virtuosity, Co-Competition, Attention Economy. Postfordismus und der Wert des Improvisierens,” in *Improvisieren: Paradoxien des Unvorhersehbaren*. eds. Hans-Friedrich Bormann et al. (Bielefeld: Kunst-Medien-Praxis, 2010), 125–60, here 146.

³ “If the performer could not be separated from the performance, nor the performance (with its ‘ordinary’ movement) from daily life, then how to sort the dancer from the dance? Thus rehearsal time was now screen

time, the private now public, and emotion [...] The unity of the film derives from its constant themes of artifice and deception, as variously manifested in dance or film, product or process, story or image, male or female, art or life.” See Ruby Rich, “Yvonne Rainer: An Introduction,” in *The Films of Yvonne Rainer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 4.

⁴ Cf. Jacques Rancière, “On Art and Work,” in *The Politics of Aesthetics* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 42.

evidently die-hard author, the rehearsal provides a stage for (self-)critical questioning. Nowhere else do artists appear in their privileged position as decision makers who are allowed to fail. At any rate, admitted failure makes them sympathetic and one of us,⁵ as the recipients agitated in this way could believe with relief. The hesitant subject tormented by the awareness of the form not completing itself corresponds with the code of conduct that is as critical of modernity as it is (neo-)romantic. Yet the image of the (self-)entrepreneur widespread in the context of post-Fordist and neoliberal debates often also appears broken in the genre of the rehearsal: time and again one sees directors beset with doubts, acting out their insecurity in exaggerated claims to perfection—in the face of which they must necessarily fail. Our proposition is therefore that, precisely in the format of rehearsal, one can discern an ambiguity between the logic of exploitation (in the sense of the performance optimization and efficiency enhancement of artistic resources) and its unavailability (in the sense of undercutting self-marketing and quality standards or a surplus of utilizable output), and thus a particularly suitable field for contemplating the tension between the autonomy and determinateness of artistic decisions.

For in the end, the rehearsal is also aimed at the institution and history of modern art, which thus appear as an instable repertory of rules and practices, and brings the validity of their constitutive rituals of rejection, which are based on repeatable norms, into the arena: Composition is followed by decomposition, the professional performer by the amateur, plan and script by participation and social experiment. Tellingly, the rehearsal also serves as a means to bring artistic decisions into agreement with the concerns of social milieus beyond the classical exhibition visitors. By operating as a source code to produce symbolic *and* real situations, the rehearsal becomes a fictionalized form of instructions typical of Conceptual art—a “linguistic” form of work, then, that allots the viewers the status of potential producers.

What began in Rainer’s *Lives of Performers* as putting something to the test—the entwinement of real and fictive, social and symbolic roles—today appears not only as *sine qua non*, but as a normative performance requirement of artistic productions between theater and film. They are often at the service of performatively rehearsing those flexible and self-reflective multi-identities that artists and media consumers share.

3.

I mean, you rehearse how to be someone else, and then you try to rehearse being the one who was first learning how to be someone else.

—Bree [Jane Fonda] in *Klute*, Alan J. Pakula, 1971.

Insofar as the rehearsal alternating between improvisation and staging in neo-narrative avant-garde film tends to intertwine “Minimalist” conventions (modularity, seriality, fragment) and ordinary gestures, actions, and movements, meaning the everyday body, it manifests itself as a biopolitically coded model situation. Reflecting on dominant forms of subjectivization in their interaction with institutional, social, and media-related identity formation, these kinds of rehearsal formats raise the question as to the portion of artistic work in the obviously fetishistic representation of “other” (because marginalized) actors in the art business. The (avant-garde) fear of the social ineffectiveness of art has given way to the fiction of a medial (re)producibility of socially precarious subjects. While the artistic “experiment” suggests a seemingly open-ended, improvised, and playful procedure, the artistically conceived rehearsal tends to stage the production process in correspondence or confrontation with institutionally and socially prevailing forms of the division of labor and the attendant subjects and bodies.

Nevertheless, it is by no means the case that the rehearsal merely serves to celebrate the artistic experiment as a social or media event, as was the case with the (neo-)Fluxus or performance spectacles starting in the 1960s. Instead, the rehearsal takes recourse to unspectacular routines of repetition, albeit to increase virtuosity. The impression of long-windedness and at times boredom is deliberately accepted—see Warhol’s *Screentests* or Masharawi’s *Waiting* (2002)—in those work forms that serve (programmatically voyeuristic) long-term observation. In these cases, it is less about optimizing performances than failure in the face of the task of not playing a role, of playing actors who act as if they were rehearsing the ability to play someone else, as if one were this other person—and for the first time at that: “You try to rehearse being the one who was first learning how to be someone else.” Run-on and unclear. Try: Such a ritual—constantly starting anew, not fulfilling nor wanting to fulfill a well-played role—produces a motif like that in rehearsal. It parallels exemplary positions in painting (from Edgar Degas, to Simgar Polke, to Silke Otto-Knapp) and works conceptually situated between drawing, photography, film, sculpture and installation.

4.

Production forms that resemble rehearsal processes examine and expose mechanisms that require a deviation from repetition. Additionally, they imply a fundamentally work on art.—understood as “history,” “institution,” “business,” “system,” or “network.” It is therefore historically and socially specific forms of

⁵ In allusion to the work and exhibition title of Martin Kippenberger and Tanja Widmann.

organizing actors, methods, and resources that point to altered or changing power structures, and give rise to an interest in the readability of artistic decision-making as a process alternating between plan and contingency, system and chance, coercion and free choice. Annemarie Matzke's recently published study, *Arbeit am Theater. Eine Diskursgeschichte der Probe* examines such tensions between autonomy and heteronomy.⁶ Regarding the rehearsal as an ideal "medium of representation for artistic work,"⁷ the theater scholar and performer attaches to it the distinction between labor and agreed wages, which is "pre"-artistic and structurally underpaid artistic labor. Matzke analyzes "the relationship between art and labor [...] via the discourse on theater rehearsal [...]: in the sense of working on theater."⁸ This labor can be contradictory in its complicity with the political-ideological constitution of the institution of theater (or art or cinema).

5.

As for the question of whether and how artists—or even more difficult, groups of artists and activists—come to decisions regarding the forms and contents of their productions, the rehearsal appears to be a means to answer. It enables one to overcome idle habits, routines, and role relationships by visibly acting them out and revising them. At the same time, rehearsing in front of the camera demonstrates an interest in overcoming stereotypical perceptions and emotional patterns through unpredictable affects, allowing the possibility of the new, of what has not yet been tested.

In contrast to the rhetoric of experiment that established the unintentional, processual, and never-ending as a value in itself, the described examples also imply the recognition—which could be called ethical—of the impossibility to exploit every emotion, every idea, and every performance. The rehearsal inevitably also produces unusable time—precisely because it aims at optimization and results. For the process of rehearsal (or its performative undermining) not only consists of progress, but also of setbacks, empty rituals, and routines that fizzle out. Something else can only emerge through (Fordist) repetition or, as Matzke's book shows, also through (seeming) inactivity or senseless activity. She cites the account of a rehearsal given by Carl Weber, one of Bertolt Brecht's assistants and dramaturges, from 1967: "I walked into the rehearsal and it was obvious that they were taking a break. Brecht was sitting in a chair smoking a cigar, the director of the production, Egon Monk, and two or three assistants were sitting with him, some of the actors were on stage and some were standing around Brecht, joking, making funny movements and laughing about them. Then one actor went up on the stage and tried about 30 ways of falling from a table. They talked a little about the Urfaust-scene 'In Auerbachs Keller.' [...] Another actor tried the table, the results were compared, with a lot of

laughing and a lot more of horseplay. This went on and on, and someone ate a sandwich, and I thought, my God this is a long break. So I sat naïvely and waited, and just before Monk said, 'Well, now we are finished, let's go home,' I realized that this was the rehearsal."⁹ In the example described by Matzke, which reminds one of photo and video works by Bas Jan Ader, Bruce Nauman, Francesca Woodman, and others created at the intersection of visual and performative arts at the end of the 1960s, the life (of the artists) appears as a permanent rehearsal in the inextricable field of tension between play and work. Not only the difference between production process and work, but also the difference between art and life, is literally put to the test here.

What remains, in the end, is the necessarily open question of whether the modern avant-garde's dream of transferring the practice of art to the practice of life has now been transformed into the neoliberal imperative of optimization that keeps subjects in a permanent state of productivity, exhaustion, and precariousness, imposing self-chosen limitations on themselves. Understood in this way, the rehearsal would convey itself as a contemporary form of life.

Translated from the German by Karl Hoffmann

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6 Annemarie Matzke, *Arbeit am Theater: Eine Diskursgeschichte der Probe* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012).

7 Ibid., 78.

8 Ibid., blurb.

9 Carl Weber, "Brecht as Director," *TDR* 12, no. 1 (1967-1968): 101-7, here 102; cited in: Annemarie Matzke, *Arbeit am Theater*, 237.

Conversation between Text and Performance

Lilo Nein

Text sees a Performance of himself and is pleased. He is reflected in her, almost feels a bit flattered. He likes her and wants to meet her. Performance doesn't even know he exists, let alone that he is here this evening. After the show, he approaches her. When she sees him, she is irritated and doesn't really know what to make of him.

Text: Hello, Performance! Delighted to meet you. Let me introduce myself: I am the Text.

Performance: Um, hello, Text. Yes, well, as you obviously already know, I am the Performance. Or, to be more precise, I am a performance.

Text: No need to be so humble! You were fabulous. I really recognized myself in you.

Performance: What do you mean you recognized yourself? I didn't even know you, I don't recognize you, and you can't possibly recognize me.

Text: I didn't mean to question your independence. I would never do that. You are absolutely unique.

Performance: Yes, that's what I think, too. But I don't need you to remind me of that.

And you? Who are you? You saw me and immediately thought you knew me.

Text: I wanted to show my appreciation for the wonderful performance.

Performance: Good. But I also want to learn something about you.

Text: Yes, well, I am a performance.

Performance: Hmm, you too, then? With all due respect, I see a text here before me.

Text: That's right. Well observed. But in principle I'm actually a performance.

Performance: Just now you implied that I was derived from you. And now you admit not existing without me. Very funny! By the way, I am also a text. So we no longer need to talk about mistaken identities.

Text: Yes, I admit that we first had to get to know each other. Or better still: to learn to love one another. After all, we could really use each other's help!

Side by side, each as the complement of the other. Isn't that a nice thought?

Performance: Well, if that is all our relationship is going to be about ... I, for one, certainly imagined love to be something completely different! What do I need a text tugging at me for when I'm already a text myself?

Text: You're right. Why should I love a performance when I myself am a performance? And if I'm so wrapped up in self-love, then who will love you?

Performance: Admittedly, in the act of performance I am you; you appear in me. However, we are not united from the start. You should think about that.

Text: Are you talking about a separation?

Performance: I just want to say that you were not already me before me. That's why we could only get to know each other before you saw me. Maybe we should go have a drink, and you can tell me about You and I can tell you about Me.

Text: I don't understand. How am I supposed to recognize you before you exist? And don't tell me that that won't be a problem for me.

Performance: That's just what I wanted to tell you, and one more thing as well: As long as you don't start thinking for yourself, I will always have existed in your imagination long before we met.

Text: I don't want to dream you up for myself. And I don't want you to appear for me. I wish we could agree on a place where you could reveal yourself. I just want to know where I can wait for you.

Performance: I can tell you the place. It will be the place where you would still have been Performance and I would still have been Text.

Text: Okay. Then you'll wait for me there, and I will rediscover myself in you.

Translated from the German by Jennifer Taylor

Image Credits

**Some Exercise in Complex Seeing Is Needed
Yvonne Rainer in Conversation with Carola
Dertnig** (PP. 16–34)

Fig. 1

Yvonne Rainer, *Assisted Living: Do You Have Any Money?*, 2013. Performers: Patricia Hoffbauer, Emmanuelle Phuon, Yvonne Rainer, Pat Catterson, Keith Sabado, and Emily Coates. Photo: Ian Douglas.

Fig. 2

Carola Dertnig, Stefanie Seibold, *Psychogeographic Map of a Performative Scene in Vienna*, 2002. Mapdesign and realisation: Linda Bilda. Stage object and book cover for: *Let's Twist Again If You Can't Think It Dance it*. Performance in Vienna from 1960 until today by Carola Dertnig and Stefanie Seibold, Vienna 2006.

Performing Vienna

Susanne Neuburger (PP. 36–42)

Fig. 3

Günter Brus, *Wiener Spaziergang*, 1965. Photo: Ludwig Hoffenreich. © Museum Moderner Kunst Siftung Ludwig Wien, donation by the artist.

**Floating Gaps: Considerations on the Basel
Performance Chronicle, Part 1**

Sabine Gebhardt Fink (PP. 44–51)

Fig. 4

Basel Performance Chronicle, *Map of Performance Chronicle 1970–2006*, 2009. Photo: Jan Voellmy. © Jan Voellmy and Basel Performance Chronicle.

Fig. 5

Basel Performance Chronicle, *Collective Recollection*, Via Studio, 2006. Video still: Sus Zwick. © Basel Performance Chronicle.

Fig. 6

Basel Performance Chronicle, *Via Studio*, 2006. Video still: Sus Zwick. © Basel Performance Chronicle.

**Floating Gaps: Interviews in the Basel
Performance Chronicle, Part 2**

Margarit von Büren (PP. 53–59)

Fig. 7

Thomas Kovachevich, Kunsthalle Basel, April 23, 1980. A Kunsthalle Basel invitation, newspaper article and photographs from the archive of Franz Mäder, Basel. © Franz Mäder.

Fig. 8

Dana Reitz, Kunsthalle Basel, April 30, 1981. Photographs from the archive of Franz Mäder, Basel. © Franz Mäder.

Fig. 9

Damengöttinnen, *Damengöttinnen am Äquator*,

March 21, 1979, debut performance, Theater Basel. © Damengöttinnen.

Beyond Huddle

**Carrie Lambert-Beatty in Conversation with
Simone Forti** (PP. 86–97)

Fig. 10

Grid projected during the symposium "This Sentence Is Now Being Performed", Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, 2010. © Carrie Lambert-Beatty.

Fig. 11

Huddle, Workshop with Simone Forti, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, 2010. © Anita Moser.

**Against the End of Art History: Approaching
Works by Hesse, Schneeman, and Pryde with an
Integrative View of Methodology Felicitas
Thun-Hohenstein** (PP. 98–114)

Fig. 12

Carolee Schneemann, *Water Light/Water Needle*, 1966, live performance, Aerial Kinetic Theater at St. Mark's Church, New York. Photo: Charlotte Victoria. © Carolee Schneemann.

Fig. 13

Eva Hesse, *Untitled*, 1970, installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. © Estate of Eva Hesse.

Fig. 14

Josephine Pryde, *Valerie (Chains)*, 2004, installation view, Secession, Vienna. © Matthias Herrmann.

**Is the "Re" in Re-enactment the "Re" in
Re-performance?**

Mechtild Widrich (PP. 142–51)

Fig. 15

Jeremy Deller, *The Battle of Orgreave*, 2001. Directed by Mike Figgis, co-commissioned by Artangel and Channel 4. Photo: Martin Jenkinson.

Fig. 16

Eleanor Antin, *The Death of Petronius*, 2001. From the series "The Last Days of Pompeii", 2001. © Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

Semiotics of Appearance

**Martha Wilson in Conversation with Dietmar
Schwärzler** (PP. 152–66)

Fig. 17

Martha Wilson, *Art Sucks*, 1972. Four video stills. Courtesy: the artist and P-P-O-W Gallery, New York.

Fig. 18

Martha Wilson, *I Make Up the Image of My Perfection/I Make Up the Image of My Deformity*, 1974. Courtesy of the artist and P-P-O-W Gallery, New York.

Fig. 19
Martha Wilson, *I Have Become My Own Worst Fear*, 2009. Courtesy of the artist and P-P-O-W Gallery, New York.

Transformation in Teaching

Carola Dertnig (PP. 168–75)

Fig. 20
Carola Dertnig, Nina Herlitschka, Anita Moser, Nicole Sabella, Janine Schneider, *Academy Huddle*, according to Simone Forti's *Huddle*, 2011. Drawing, ink, 29 × 21 cm. © Carola Dertnig and Gallery Andreas Huber.

Fig. 21
Department Performative Art, *The Cardboard Wall*, during the strike, 2009. Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. © Nina Herlitschka.

Fig. 22
Nina Herlitschka, Toni Schmale, *Piano, Boxing, (improvisation)*, 2009. Live performance, Performing Arts Forum, St. Erme/F. © Julia Kolbus.

Fig. 23
Helena Kotnik, *The Translation*, 2009. Live performance, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. © Georg Oberlechner.

Mind Art: On the Gradual Production of Meaning while Performing

Stefanie Seibold (PP. 186–91)

Fig. 24
Stefanie Seibold and Teresa Maria Diaz Nerio, *Aktion Matt und Schlapp wie Schnee: Re-reading the Performance Works of Gina Pane*, 2011, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Photo: Maria Ziegelböck.

On History and Solidarity: Performative Reading of Woman's Book by Liljana Gjuzelova

Suzana Milevska (PP. 192–201)

Fig. 25
Liljana Gjuzelova, *Woman's Book*, 2010. Audio installation with an artist book (70 cm × 70 cm × 15 cm). A photograph from the artist's family archive of six members of the women's group MTZO (Macedonian Secret Women's Organization). Photographer: unknown. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 26
Liljana Gjuzelova, *Woman's Book*, 2010. Reading performances of the artist's book (70 cm × 70 cm × 15 cm). Photo: Elizabeta Avramovska. Courtesy of the artist.

Subject Put to the Test

Sabeth Buchmann and Constanze Ruhm

(PP. 202–9)

Fig. 27
Yvonne Rainer, *Lives of Performers*, 1972. 90 min, 16 mm. Reprint with courtesy of Zeitgeist Films. © Yvonne Rainer.

Biographies

Philip Auslander is a professor at the School of Literature, Media, and Communication of the Georgia Institute of Technology. His areas of research include performance studies, media studies, and popular musicology. His books include *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music* (2006) and *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (1999 and 2008). He has written numerous articles on performance theory, performance art, media culture, and music, as well as catalogue essays for art museums internationally. He is also a working film actor.

Sabeth Buchmann is an art historian and critic in Berlin and Vienna, and professor of the history of modern and postmodern art at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Her publications include *Hélio Oiticica, Neville D'Almeida and Others: Block-Experiments in Cosmococa* (2013) with M. J. Hinderer Cruz (coauthor); *Film Avantgarde Biopolitik* (coedited with H. Draxler and St. Geene, 2009); *Denken gegen das Denken: Produktion, Technologie, Subjektivität bei Sol LeWitt, Yvonne Rainer und Hélio Oiticica* (2006); *Art After Conceptual Art* (co-edited with A. Alberro, 2006); and *Polypen* (coeditor, b_books, Berlin). She is an advisory board member of *Texte zur Kunst* (Berlin).

Barbara Clausen is a curator and professor of performance theory and history in the art history department of the University of Quebec in Montreal. She writes extensively on performance art and performative curatorial practices and is the editor of *After the Act: The (Re)presentation of Performance Art* (2006). She worked at Dia Art Foundation in New York City (1997–2000), at documenta 11 in 2002, and has curated numerous exhibitions, symposia, and performance series, including “After the Act” (2005), “Wieder und Wider/Again and Against” (2006), and “Push and Pull” (2010–2011) at mumok, Vienna and Tate Modern, London, as well as “Down Low Up High” (2011) at Argos, Brussels. In 2012 she curated the performance series “Something to Say, Something to Do” and in 2013 the first retrospective of the work of Babette Mangolte, both at VOX centre d’art contemporain. Clausen most recently curated the exhibition and performance series “STAGE SET STAGE: On Identity and

Institutionalism” (2013–2014) at the SBC Contemporary Art Gallery in Montreal.

Carola Dertnig is an artist interested in upturning and overwriting aspects of performance art history through strategies of feminist historical revisionism, including imaginative reconceptualization and performative interventions with existing documentation. She currently lives and works in Vienna and has been a professor of performative art at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna since 2006. She was a participant in the 1997 Whitney Museum Independent Study Program in New York City and was a guest professor at CalArts in Los Angeles in 2008. Dertnig’s work has appeared in several exhibitions, including at the MoMA PS1, Artists Space, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, and the Secession and mumok in Vienna. In 2006 she coedited with Stefanie Seibold the book *Let’s Twist Again: If You Can’t Think It, Dance It. Performance in Vienna from 1960 until Today*. From 2009–11 she was part of the research project “Performing Knowledge in the Arts.”

Simone Forti is a dancer, choreographer, artist, and writer. She began dancing in 1955 with Anna Halprin, a pioneer in dance improvisation. In 1959 Forti moved to New York City and studied John Cage-oriented composition at the Merce Cunningham Studio with musician/musicologist Robert Dunn. In the spring of 1961 she presented a full evening of *Dance Constructions*, innovative pieces influential in the formation of the Judson Dance Theater. Since the early 1980s, Forti has been performing *News Animations*, spontaneously weaving together movement and spoken words, with a focus on world news. Her work has been featured at venues including the Museum of Modern Art, New York City, and the Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe. In 2011 Forti received a Yoko Ono Lennon Award for Courage in the Arts.

Andrea Fraser is an artist whose work has been identified with performance, feminism, research, context art, and institutional critique. She was the 2013 recipient of the Wolfgang Hahn Prize, in conjunction with which Museum Ludwig in Cologne presented a retrospective of her work and published the book *Texts/*

Scripts/Transcripts. Fraser is professor of new genres at the University of California Los Angeles.

Sabine Gebhardt Fink studied art history, philosophy, German literature, and theater studies at the Universities of Munich and Basel (PhD diss. "Transformation of Action," published in Vienna in 2003). After curatorial practice in performance art (Performance Index Festivals), a Postdoctoral position at the Institute for Cultural Studies in the Arts at Zurich University of the Arts from 2004–2008, and a lectureship in contemporary art history at Ruhr University Bochum, Germany from 2009–2011, she now holds a professorship in visual culture studies and is director of the master of arts in fine arts program at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, School of Art and Design. Her research fields/projects funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation include: *The Situated Body, Perform Space, Intermedia Conditions* (e.g., *Concrete Poetry*), *Exhibition Displays*, and *Hermann Obrist: Intermedia Conditions*. Currently she is working on *Soundscape/Public Spheres*. Relevant publications: *Performance Chronik Basel*, coeditor (Zurich/Berlin 2011); *Process Embodiment Site* (Vienna 2012); *Hermann Obrist and Intermedia Conditions around 1900*, co-edited with Matthias Vogel (Berlin 2013).

Sabina Holzer is a performer, choreographer, and author who has worked since 2005 in a close artistic companionship with the visual artist Jack Hauser, creating interventions and performances at various venues, international festivals, and museums. She engages in several trans-medial collaborations and research projects and performs in projects by international choreographers and artists. Holzer is an author and editorial member of *www.corpus-web.net* and publishes in different media.

Amelia Jones is a professor and Grierson Chair in Visual Culture at McGill University in Montreal. Her recent publications include essays on performance art histories and theories, queer feminist art and theory, and feminist curating. In 2012 she published *Perform Repeat Record: Live Art in History*, co-edited with Adrian Heathfield, and her own book *Seeing Differently: A*

History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts. Her exhibition "Material Traces: Time and the Gesture in Contemporary Art" took place in 2013 at the Leonard and Bina Ellen Gallery, Concordia University, Montreal. Jones is directing an event to take place in September 2015 for the annual Performance Studies International conference series, under the rubric "Trans-Montréal."

Carrie Lambert-Beatty is a professor of visual and environmental studies at the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, where she also teaches history of art and architecture and is director of graduate studies for the PhD in film and visual studies. Her focus as art historian is on art from the 1960s to the present, with a special interest in performance in an expanded sense. She is author of the award-winning book *Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s*. Lambert-Beatty's writing on recent art appears in journals such as *Artforum* and *October*, of which she is an editor. Her essay on recuperation—both neurological and ideological—in the work of the art team Allora + Calzadilla accompanied their representation of the United States at the 2011 Venice Biennale. Lambert-Beatty is currently at work on a book for the University of Chicago Press that will expand on her 2009 essay "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility" (*October*, no. 129), exploring deception, confusion, and states of doubt in contemporary art and culture.

Suzana Milevska is a theorist and curator of visual art and culture. Her interests include postcolonial critique of hegemonic power regimes of representation, feminist art and gender theory, and participatory and collaborative art practices. She holds a PhD in visual culture from Goldsmiths College London and was a Fulbright Senior Research Scholar (2004). She taught visual culture and gender at the Gender Studies Institute at the University of Skopje and Methodius in Skopje (2013) and history and theory of art in the same university's Faculty of Fine Arts (2010–2012). Milevska initiated and was the director of the Centre for Visual and Cultural Research in Skopje (2006–2008). She published the book *Gender Difference in the Balkans* (Saarbrücken:

VDM Verlag, 2010). In 2012 Milevska received the Igor Zabel Award for Culture and Theory and in 2013 she was appointed as the first endowed professor for Central and South European art histories at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.

Marie-Luise Lange lives and works in Dresden and has two children. She studied art, education, and German language and literature in Berlin. From 1977–1990 she was the chair in art education at Humboldt University in Berlin. She wrote her dissertation in 1985 and after 1989 began creating her first performances. From 1992–1998 she was an assistant in the art education department at Justus Liebig University in Giessen, where she wrote her postdoctoral dissertation "Cross-Frontier Ways to Performance: Body – Action – Intermedia in the Context of Aesthetic Education." Since 2000 she has been professor for the theory of artistic embodiment at the TU Dresden, where she teaches gender and identity, art intervention, exhibition and curating, culture of remembrance, art of the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries, contemporary art, and performance art. She also does research on teaching performance art and cross-frontier art and is a member of the performance group "Seite 30."

Lilo Nein is a visual artist engaged in conceptual performance-related practices. She works with and about an understanding of performance between live act, exhibition, and text/publications. Nein is currently a PhD candidate at Leiden University, carrying out research related to her own artistic practice. Her publications include *TRANS-LATE YOURSELF! A Performance Reader for Staging* (2009), *THE PRESENT AUTHOR: Who Speaks in Performance?* (2011), and *If Analyses Could Be Poems... Works between Text and Performance* (2013). Her works have been shown at the Vienna Art Week, Künstlerhaus Passagalerie, Kunstraum Niederösterreich, VBKÖ, Ve.Sch, Diagonale, Kunsthallexnergasse, ESC im Labor Graz, Salzburger Kunstverein, Neuer Kunstverein Wien, Galerie 5020 Salzburg, Index – The Swedish Contemporary Art Foundation in Stockholm, and the MA*GA Art Museum in Gallarte. She has presented performances for, among others, Tanzquartier Wien, the Young Artists Biennial in Ancona, and

Künstlerhaus Wien. Nein received a Start and State Grant for Fine Arts from the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts, and Culture, as well as the H13 Performance Prize of Lower Austria in 2012.

Susanne Neuburger is curator and head of collection at the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien (mumok). Since joining the museum in 1983, she has organized several large-scale survey exhibitions, including "Nach Kippenberger" (2003), "Short Careers" (2004), "Nouveau Réalisme" (2005), "Concept. Action. Language" (2006), "Bad Painting" (2008), "Nam June Paik: Music for All Senses," and "The Moderns" (2010; with Cathrin Pichler and Martin Guttmann), and "Reflecting Fashion" (2012; with Barbara Rüdiger).

Yvonne Rainer was a co-founder of the Judson Dance Theater in 1962. She choreographed dances from 1960 to 1973, made seven feature-length films between 1972 and 1996, and returned to dance in 2000. Her work has been seen internationally and rewarded with museum exhibitions, awards, and grants. Her latest dance for five people (2013) is called *Assisted Living: Do you have any money?* Her book *Feelings Are Facts: A Life* was published in 2006 and *Poems2* was published in 2012. She currently lives in New York City.

Constanze Ruhm is an artist, filmmaker, curator, and author based in Vienna and Berlin. From 1987–1993 she studied at the Academy of Applied Arts Vienna. She did postgraduate studies at the Institute of New Media, Städelschule Frankfurt am Main. In 1996–97 she was guest professor for visual communication at the HfG Offenbach am Main. In 1998 Ruhm did a Schindler-Grant residency at the MAK Center for Art and Architecture in Los Angeles. From 1999–2006 she was a board member of the Vienna Secession, and vice president from 1999–2001. From 2004–2006 she was professor for film and video at Merz Academy Stuttgart. Since 2006 she has been professor for art and media at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. From 2008–2011 she was adjunct professor at the Art Institute Boston at Lesley University. Ruhm has participated in international exhibitions, film festivals, projects in public spaces, publications, and symposia.

Dietmar Schwärzler is a film mediator, freelance curator, and writer based in Vienna. He has conceived and organized several projects in the film and art world on topics such as Austrian television and film history, early films by well-known feature film directors, concepts of friendship, and feminist performance art. Since 1999 he has worked at the distribution company six-packfilm and as co-programmer of the DVD label INDEX, which focuses on Austrian and international film and media art. In 2013 he published the comprehensive monograph *Friedl Kubelka vom Gröller. Photography & Film* (JRP|Ringier, in collaboration with Index).

Stefanie Seibold is an artist working with performance, installations, archives, video, and texts. She has curated several performance-related shows and self-organized spaces in Vienna and just recently concluded a long-term research project on the performance work of Gina Pane. Her work has been shown at venues including the De Appel Arts Center, Amsterdam; the MuhKa, Antwerp; Museum Moderner Kunst, Wien; Akademie der Künste, Berlin; and Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart. She is coeditor with Carola Dertnig of the comprehensive book on performance art in Vienna *Let's Twist Again: If You Can't Think It, Dance It*. Seibold currently teaches the performative art and sculpture class at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.

Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein is an art historian, art theorist, and curator. She is professor for art history and head of the Institute for Art Theory and Cultural Studies at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Her area of research is performative art production, performance art, and performative curatorial practice. Thun-Hohenstein has curated numerous exhibitions, symposia, and performance series, most recently the exhibition "Aesthetics of Risk" on the artist Roberta Lima, part of the "curated by" series at Charim Galerie Wien, 2012. Her performance series include "Neuer Kunstverein Online," Neuer Kunstverein Wien, 2013–14; and "Mirror Me," Austrian Cultural Forum, New York City, 2014. Recent publications include *Synchronicity: 11th Cairo Biennial* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2008) and *Performanz*

und ihre räumlichen Bedingungen: Perspektiven einer Kunstgeschichte (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2012).

Margarit von Büren is a cultural theorist. She received a degree in theory of art and design at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) in 2001, and then did cultural and gender studies there, graduating in 2006 with a master's thesis on concepts of performative theory. From 2010–2012 she was engaged in the SNF/DoRe research project "archiv performativ" at the Zurich University of the Arts, Institute for Cultural Studies in the Arts. From 2006–2012 von Büren was a member of management and the organization team of the "migma" performance days in Lucerne. In 2011 she co-edited (with Dr. Sabine Gebhardt Fink and Muda Mathis) the website *Performance Chronik Basel* and a publication on the performance scene in Basel in the 1970s to mid-1980s.

Mechtild Widrich is professor of contemporary art history at the University of Vienna. Her research focuses on ephemeral practices in relation to the built environment, urban activism, and global art geographies. She is the author of *Performative Monuments: The Rematerialisation of Public Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014). Her essays and reviews have been published in the *Journal of Architectural Historians* (JSAH), *Art Journal*, *Grey Room*, *The Drama Review* (TDR), *Performance Art Journal* (PAJ), *Log*, and *Thresholds*.

Martha Wilson is a pioneering feminist artist and gallery director who over the past four decades has created innovative photographic and video works that explore her female subjectivity through role-playing, costume transformations, and "invasions" of other people's personae. Esteemed for both her solo artistic production and her maverick efforts to champion creative forms that are "vulnerable due to institutional neglect, their ephemeral nature, or politically unpopular content," she has been described by *New York Times* critic Holland Cotter as one of "the half-dozen most important people for art in downtown Manhattan in the 1970s." In 1976 she founded Franklin Furnace, an artist-run space that champions the exploration, promotion, and preservation of artist

books, temporary installation, performance art, as well as online works. She has received fellowships for performance art from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York Foundation for the Arts; Bessie and Obie awards for commitment to artists' freedom of expression; a Yoko Ono Lennon Courage Award for the Arts; a Richard Massey Foundation White Box Arts and Humanities Award; and in 2013 an Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University.

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Performing the Sentence brings into dialogue the ways that “performative thinking” has developed in different national and institutional contexts, within different disciplines in the arts, and the conditions under which it has developed in experimental art schools. This anthology is a collection of twenty-one essays and conversations that weave in and out of the two key areas of research and teaching within performative fine art. They bring to light the conventions involved in the production, presentation, reception, and historicization of performance art, as well as the specific cultural and political implications. The various contributions also show how these conventions are produced through or within each artwork, independent from their specific contexts, offering ways of thinking beyond their usual frames of reference. At the same time they recognize the substantial work carried out by artists, critics, and theorists who have built on the meanings, references, and implications of performative thinking since the beginning of the “performative turn.”

With contributions by Philip Auslander, Sabeth Buchmann, Margarit von Büren, Barbara Clausen, Carola Dertnig, Andrea Fraser, Sabine Gebhardt Fink, Simone Forti, Sabina Holzer, Amelia Jones, Carrie Lambert-Beatty, Marie-Luise Lange, Suzana Milevska, Lilo Nein, Susanne Neuburger, Yvonne Rainer, Constanze Ruhm, Dietmar Schwärzler, Stefanie Seibold, Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein, Mechtild Widrich, Martha Wilson

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