Exposer l’art de la performance : un laboratoire historiographique ?
L’hypermédia, l’hétérotopie, le répertoire et la parallaxe

Exhibiting Performance Art: a Historiographical Laboratory?
Hypermedia, Heterotopia, Repertory, and Parallax

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EXHIBITING PERFORMANCE ART: A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL LABORATORY? HYPERMEDIA, HETEROTOPIA, REPERTORY, AND PARALLAX

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Translated from French by Richard Whelan

Abstract

A few years after the 1988 publication of the first “general” history of performance art, Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present by RoseLee Goldberg, several museums organized large-scale exhibitions devoted to performative works of art from both the recent and not so recent past and from hegemonic cultural centres as well as local and peripheral ones. Because performance art has developed in reaction to the hegemonic history of art and its institutions, because these works are ephemeral, and because they involve the body, the “living,” and the “direct,” these curatorial endeavours have encountered a certain number of obstacles and paradoxes. They could not move away from, or dispense with the historiographical thinking that questions the categories, methods, concepts, places, sources, genealogies, and stories of the history of art. The questions that thus arise are the following: Can an exhibition on performance art generate a historiographical thinking? Should this analysis be the responsibility of the curators? What role can the artists play in this construction of historical representations? Are we seeing a remodelling of the respective responsibilities of art historians and theorists, exhibition curators, and the artists themselves? The analysis of four recent exhibitions allowed us to identify certain experimental approaches that are renewing, through unique strategies, the ways in which art histories are written, namely hypermedia, heterotopy, repertory, and parallax.

Keywords: performance art; historiography; exhibition

A few years after the publication of the “general” history of performance art, Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present by RoseLee Goldberg (1988), several museums organized large-scale exhibitions devoted to performative works of art from both the recent and not so recent past and from hegemonic cultural centres as well as local and peripheral ones. We have only to think of Hors limites. L’Art et la vie 1952-1994, presented in 1994 in Beaubourg,¹ of L’Art au corps. Le corps exposé de Man Ray à nos jours at the Musée d’art contemporain in Marseille in 1996,² of Outside the Frame/Performance and the Object: A Survey History of Performance Art in the USA since 1950 at the Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art in 1996, and of the very famous Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979 at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art³ in 1998 (Figure 1). More recently, in 2009, the exhibition 100 Years, a collaboration between MoMA PS1 and Performa,⁴ presented film and video archives of

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performances along an uninterrupted timeline that ran horizontally throughout the exhibition halls (Figure 2). All these organizers had the same goal, namely to write a general, national, or international history of performance art. This historical aim was expressed through chronological divisions and a mapping of the main centres and movements.


Figure 2. Installation view of 100 Years (version #2, ps1) (Nov. 1, 2009 – May 3, 2010), Long Island, MoMA PS1. Image courtesy of the artists and MoMA PS1. Photo: Summer Kemick.
The traces and remnants presented in these exhibitions were almost exclusively divided into two hierarchical categories. The first were promoted to the rank of works of art and had a fully aesthetic function; the second were relegated to the level of documents and filled subordinate functions, explaining and providing context for the others. The former were exhibited as works of art, the latter were shown in a dependent relationship, in the immediate circle of or further removed from the former. Sometimes live pieces were organized on the periphery, enhancing the exhibition through an event-based reasoning.

The shortcomings of this model of exhibition making are numerous. The separation that it creates is foreign to the whole idea of artistic performative practices and the documents and artefacts they produce. On the contrary, artists work to voluntarily blur the line between documentary and artistic categories. Furthermore, these curatorial proposals do not properly grasp the aesthetic function of the documents, which are relegated to the bottom of the value scale. They apply fine art categories to the most valued artefacts, pieces, and documents, obliterating their functions as performance accessories, as props, direct mediation, or feedback. When there is a live element, they often renew the traditional layout and ordering of spectacle and theatre that the performance artists have long since rejected.

Despite the fact that performance art has often developed in reaction to the hegemonic histories of art, museum exhibitions tend nonetheless to conform to this hegemony. Their curators often dispense with the historiographical analysis that would allow them to question the categories and traditional concepts of art history that they are readily employing: links and filiations, chronologies, decades, stories, centres, etc. What are the assumptions and implicit effects of these borrowings? What historical representations do they promote or proscribe?

The following questions are raised: Can an exhibition on performance art generate a historiographical thinking? Is this analysis the responsibility of the curators? What role do the artists play in this production of the historical representations? Are we seeing a remodelling of the respective responsibilities of art historians and theoreticians, the exhibition curators, and the artists themselves? I will look at four recent exhibitions, each one based on particular approaches – though none constitutes a model per se –, namely hypermedia, heterotopy, repertory, and parallax.

HYPERMEDIA

The first exhibition was organized in 2011-2012 at the Villa Arson. It had two parts, *Le Temps de l’action – Acte 1* and *À la vie délibérée!*, and it examined performance art on the Côte d’Azur from 1951 to today. The organizers decided to exhibit the technological tool that they developed to carry out the research. It was a database created in a form that I would qualify as a “historiographical hypermedia,” because it substituted a nonlinear, interactive navigation in the exhibition space for the more traditional linear historical narrative.

From 2007 to 2012, the institution led an ambitious project entitled “Une histoire de la performance sur la Côte d’Azur de 1951 à nos jours.” The first step consisted in identifying, locating, and meeting the artists, who were the main protagonists in this story. An inventory was made of their archives, which were temporarily borrowed to be digitized. Interviews were recorded and the information collected was uploaded into a relational database.

There were certain paradoxes to carrying out this project in an institution such as Villa Arson: this exhibition centre, which is associated with an art school, focuses on contemporary art and has no heritage or historical vocation. This explains why a large number of obstacles were avoided by making the database the focal point of the research. By not making Villa Arson the place where archives were stored, the issue of the “domiciliation” and the position of authority that it confers were avoided. And by digitizing the documents, the originals could be left in the artists’ possession and kept active.
The database also constituted an alternative to producing a historical narrative. According to Lev Manovich (2010), the narrative and the database are in sharp contrast with each other. The former “creates cause-and-effect relationships between elements (events) that in appearance are not ordered” (Manovich 2010:403, our translation), whereas the latter multiplies navigation possibilities through organized and structured information. In a narrative, relationships between elements are defined by the author; they are by definition predetermined for the reader. In a database, the user can follow multiple trajectories. The database is anti-narrative: it proposes an aggregate rather than a story. New data can be integrated at any time and any place.

That being said, narrative constitutes one of the main components of Villa Arson’s database: stories of performance and intention, told in writing or orally by artists or their collaborators or by those who witnessed the events. There was a polyphonic aggregate of stories, one through which all itineraries were allowed but which never constituted a meta-narrative.

This perspective is particularly relevant in any consideration of the historiography of performance art. In addition to developing their performance practices in reaction to official art history, artists have also produced their own history (think of Fluxus) with heterodox methods (think of the diagrams of George Maciunas) and with aims in keeping with their aesthetic, political, and cultural convictions (and battles). These discourses, along with their contradictions, deficiencies, and biases, have constituted the main resources for art historians who have not only adopted the contents but also the forms. This is why the database developed at Villa Arson is a sort of “historiographical hypermedia,” that is close to the ideal form imagined by the historian of Fluxus, Bertrand Clavez (2010:221-257). Historians should not, in his opinion, paraphrase artists’ tales nor copy their discursive strategies, nor take sides in contradictory and partisan stories, but rather draw out paths through the historical material that the artists have brought together.

How can this historiographical hypermedia be brought into exhibition spaces? The stage design of the exhibition’s two parts was the work of students from Monaco’s École supérieure d’art plastique. Le temps de l’action – Acte 1 proposed an immersion in the virtual space of the database that was under construction (Figure 3). The personnel worked there daily under a dome. The data were projected from the centre onto four screens. Clouds of keywords were inscribed on the walls. A soundtrack evoked the work in progress. This scenography, which combined the windows of a computer screen with a far-ranging virtual reality, acted as a metaphor for a history of performance art that was being written and whose ephemeral works could only be grasped, a posteriori, through temporary configurations of information.

Organized one year later, À la vie délibérée! proposed another way of employing the database. It took the form of a winding path through sixteen rooms, each one devoted to a type of space where artistic creation occurs. This typology made it possible to explore the Côte d’Azur region without showering it with praises or labelling it as an artistic centre. It highlighted sociological and anthropological issues. It also showed “that the artists […] had moved away from the traditional art spaces” (Mangion 2013:34, our translation) and had conquered new territories.

The documents were hung up with pins from one room to the next (Figure 4). None of the originals were exhibited, only printouts. This choice made it possible to hang and display work in a way that could not be done with the originals. It avoided fetishizing documents and evoked the world of search engines. The layout evoked the interface of a database or the display of icons in Internet search engines. A bench invited the spectators to sit down and read the descriptions of the performances in an accompanying pamphlet or to listen to the artists’ stories with headphones. A tablet could be used to choose the sequence of the stories. Areas dedicated to searching, consultation, and data collection were likewise set up.
Visitors had to explore and discover for themselves. It was up to them to choose their paths through the museum, to organize their own listening and visualizing sequences. The experience proposed in the exhibition was quite similar to that of consulting the database and the historiographical hypermedia that composed it.
HETEROTOPY

The second exhibition, SIGMA, was presented at the CAPC Musée d’art contemporain of Bordeaux in 2013-2014 and focused on the Sigma festival that was held in Bordeaux from 1965 till 1996. The curators juxtaposed numerous representations and historical discourses in the exhibition hall that normally would not be seen side-by-side, forming what I would call “a historiographical heterotopy.” This Foucauldian figure consisted in setting vastly different sites next to each other and forcing their practices and discourses to interact for a while (Foucault 2009).

The exhibition looked at the eponymous festival that was held each year in Bordeaux from 1965 to 1996. Directed by Roger Lafosse, this “week of research and cultural events” presented the Bordeaux public with the most experimental artistic practices in fields as diverse as theatre, dance, music, cinema, visual arts, happenings, performance, circus, and art-science collaborations.

The exhibition was the fruit of a collaboration between the CAPC and Bordeaux’s municipal archives, to which Lafosse bequeathed the festival archives in 2011 shortly before his demise. To make up for the lack of audiovisual documents, a third partner was approached, the Institut national de l’audiovisuel (Ina), which had numerous recordings from the public television stations that covered the annual editions of SIGMA.

The difficulties were numerous. How does one evoke, through the presentation of archival documents, a festival’s vitality and the role it played in the cultural and social life of a city? How does one make up for the inherent limitations of pictures and short, televised journal recordings to sufficiently describe works of art produced over time? The collaboration of three public institutions with distinct mandates represented an additional challenge. The municipal archives are dedicated to the history of the city, Ina, to the national audiovisual heritage, and CAPC, to “the changing forms of contemporary art.”

The exhibition comprised three zones: at one end, there was a zone dedicated to the archives, in the nave of the building, the documents (Figure 5), and, at the other end, a multimedia scene with terraced seats for shows, performances, films, and discussions. The overall cohesion came from the Will Holder’s stage design. As an artist, graphic designer, performer, editor, and writer who is interested in the status of writing and text in contemporary artistic practice, Holder gives material form to language by playing with its extra-linguistic qualities. In Bordeaux, he saturated the exhibition with text and images. The word SIGMA was reproduced on all the picture rails, like an invasive subtext. This saturation evoked the intensity of the festival experience while ensuring visual coherence.

The exhibition created a dialogue between six forms of transmission, both tangible and intangible, mediated by different “objects,” that I will discuss in succession: the archive collections, the exhibition of documents, the experts’ statements, the amateurs’ comments, the creativity, and the culture of festivals.

The Sigma archive collection was set up in the CAPC during the exhibition and was open for the first time to researchers and the public in keeping with archival institution rules. In this way, spectators could experiment with archival work techniques, examine original documents, and understand institutional organization methods.

The documents covered all the exhibition space in the nave. All of the documents came from the municipal archives collection and Ina. As in Nice, they were printed out in a wide-ranging formats that were not necessarily true to the originals. They were organized in constellations (rather than in categories) that were built on a system of keywords and sub-keywords (the machine, the whole being, the absurd, the psychedelic, utopias, the festive, subversion, cross-dressing, dressing-up, the queer, the comic and burlesque, etc.). These keywords were not however given to the visitors. It was their responsibility to grasp and give their own words to whatever it was that linked the images. No pre-defined path was suggested. None of the history of Sigma was told. By hanging up the documents in constellations, the

Conferences were organized all throughout the exhibition in order to integrate the discourse of experts from knowledge institutions (universities, specialized media, etc.). Sigma’s faithful followers, anonymous or amateurs, were likewise invited to share their thoughts in the form of oral testimonies. In so doing, the curators wished to maintain the tradition of festival rumours and to keep the numerous anecdotes alive that were not recorded in the official history.

Recent examples of performing arts – performance, dance, experimental music, etc. – addressed the archives, memory, history, repertory, and re-enactment in large numbers. What is more, they incorporated another level of memory into the Sigma exhibition, namely that of performance works. For example, the young musicians at the Conservatoire de Bordeaux Jacques Thibaud interpreted electro-acoustic and experimental musical creations from a Sigma-associated repertory. The butô dancer Carlotta Ikeda, who participated in several editions of the festival, and Hamid Ben Mahi created a dialogue between two distant corporal languages, the butô and hip-hop. There was no reconstitution or reenactment of Sigma performances in this live program, but rather the myriad ways artists revisited and highlighted the memory of works of art through the very process of creation.

Similarly, the curatorial team also worked to pursue and update the culture of the festival headed by Lalosse. The CAPC requested the collaboration of other festivals in the city in order to highlight the survival of this culture in the younger generations despite an unfavourable political context.

Bringing foreign modes of transmission into close proximity, modes issued from different social spaces, coordinated by participants who normally would not work together, far from levelling out these spaces, creates a place for rethinking them. Accordingly, taking into consideration the places where historical
discourses were produced is essential for any historiographical reflection wrote Michel de Certeau (1974) in “L’opération historique.” “Place” permits some research and forbids others. It leads to methods, techniques and practices that, in turn, produce certain forms of discourse. Consequently, this heterotopy made it possible to bring together a wide range of “situated” discourses. Their fabricated nature and the characteristics of their construction became all the more obvious.

REPERTORY

The third exhibition, Moments. A History of Performance in 10 Acts, which was presented at the ZKM in Karlsruhe in 2012, substituted the notion of repertory for a historical narrative. This repertory cannot be reduced to a fixed list of available works of art. Instead, there is the idea of creation in the word repertory, whose Latin etymology reperire signifies discover. It is changing, expansionary, dynamic, and, above all, creative, since it authorizes multiple combinations. Contrary to a collection or a heritage that is conserved, a repertory is waiting to be replayed, put back into play, recycled, re-created, and actualized. It calls upon corporal knowledge, to the extent that Howard Becker and Robert Faulkner (2009) talk about “repertoire in action,” while Diana Taylor (2003) speaks of a set of movements transmitted by the body through living practices based on a process of repetition and differences.

Moments examined the performative and choreographic practices (performance art and postmodern dance) produced in the 1960s and 1970s by ten female artists from various countries (United States, ex-Yugoslavia, Argentina, Germany). Some were well known and others, very little. The stage design by the artist Johannes Porsch consisted in tilting the display frames into a horizontal position, transforming the exhibition space into numerous scenic spaces, allowing actions and activities to be held simultaneously while allowing spectators to move from one to another (Figure 6).

The exhibition was made to evolve. It opened up onto an empty space, waiting to receive documents. The curators did not try to give a fixed, set form to the history of performance. Rather, they developed a mechanism that would kindle personal experiences that would in turn generate forms of knowledge. Moments was organized into four acts. The first was Act – Stage and Display, which consisted in showing the remnants and documents left. Each artist decided how to display their archives, then was invited to share this experience during conferences and workshops. The second act, RE-ACT – Interpretative Appropriation in the Artistic Laboratory, saw a laboratory being given over to choreographer Boris Charmatz so that he could develop strategies for the appropriation and reinterpretation of performance pieces. He invited ten artists and theorists, coming for the most part from the world of dance, to think about these archives through sets of acts, bodily gestures and performances. He also invited the artist Ruti Sela to produce a film. The next act, POST-PRODUCTION – Film Editing, was devoted to film editing. This was then integrated into the exhibition, where it played an important part. Finally, REMEMBERING THE ACT – The Performative Mediation of the Exhibition Process by Artistic Witnesses, was managed by ten students from ten different European art schools who were invited to act as witnesses. Present during the whole duration of Moments, they had to share their observations of the whole process in the form of acts.

The exhibition changed continuously and was never completely stabilized. A process in which documents were moved, transformed, made, and added was put in place from the beginning. Accordingly, during the first act, the recordings of conferences and workshops given by the artists were progressively added to the exhibition. Some of these recordings were used by laboratory participants in the second act. Infinite chains were thus generated, creating paradoxical effects. Older performances faded into the past as new documents, stories, and movements were created and accumulated.

From the viewpoint of the history of performance art, the exhibition was deceptive. It did not create the historical narrative that its title promised, but rather proposed an acting out the documents. In the
laboratory phase, one of the activities consisted in visiting the exhibition while activating a partition by Channa Horwitz taken from the Sonakinatography series. The participants moved over a grid on the floor which was transposed from a diagram by Horwitz and successively interpreted a piece by each one of the artists in the exhibition using 70-beat sequences, in keeping with the notation. This activity made it possible to link together all the pieces in the exhibition without proposing a historical narrative of performance art.

Moments was also deceptive from an aesthetic viewpoint, because it resisted creating finished products that looked like works of art. It voluntarily remained at the trial level, that of practice and the rough copy, that of the experimental. The only work of art completed during this creative experience and presented as such was the film Witness by Sela, which was a deliberate effort to invert the traditional restraint of the exhibition. Here, the document served in lieu of a work of art.

The exhibition created an intergenerational dialogue between four groups: the ten female artists, the ten laboratory participants whom Boris Charmatz invited, and the ten students and the exhibition visitors. Each group was asked to tell the others what they experienced. The figure of the spectator as witness was central to the layout set up by the curators. Witnesses had an ethical responsibility towards those in whose name they were speaking and those whom they were addressing.

Nonetheless, this transgenerational community did not always reach a consensus. In fact, there were numerous disagreements – sometimes vehement – in this negotiated creation of historical representations. Some artists were open to the idea of their work being manipulated, others were not. For instance, Lynn Hershman Lyson was quite upset that the dress and wig of Roberta Breitmore, the famous alter ego that she invented and incarnated in San Francisco in the 1970s, was used against her wishes and, unfortunately, damaged. The curators and museum director were overtaken by a situation
that they themselves had initiated. To ensure the safety of the artefacts, they had to control and limit the usage that was made of them.

There were obvious tensions between the laboratory members too. Some considered that the exhibiting of the archives was enough. Instead of “acting out” the documents as they were invited to do, they would have preferred conferences and discussions with “experts.” In other words, they would have preferred transmission of already defined knowledge. Others felt it was relevant to “perform” documents, but were not at ease with the considerable space made for improvisation, a certain laxness, and a lack of self-critique with regard to the quality of the proposals.¹⁸

Though *Moments* made only a limited contribution to the history of performance art, though it resisted producing works of art, and often ended in disagreements and conflicts, must we nonetheless conclude that this exhibition was a failure? Not from the point of view of the question that it raised, namely what are the limitations of museums in the understanding of performative works of art? Can museums be performative, that is produce embodied knowledge instead of presenting knowledge conceived by professionals? Can museums bring repertory into their archives and go so far as to substitute repertory for history.

**PARALLAX**

Finally, the last exhibition, *Re.Act.Feminism #2 – A Performing Archive*,¹⁹ was composed of archives of the performative practices of female artists from the 1960s and 1970s, which served as paradigms for feminist productions dealing with gender questions. The two curators, Bettina Knaup and Beatrice Ellen Stammer, insisted on performance’s capacity for political and social subversion and resistance. Their project consisted in having the archives travel to six European countries, each host organization being invited to enhance them with new documents and develop different interpretation and mediation strategies. This mechanism resembles the parallax phenomenon in which an object appears to be modified when the observer changes position. The aim of increasing the viewpoints was to produce heterogeneous histories of performance art.

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Re.Act.Feminism #2 was preceded in 2008-2009 by an initial, non-travelling edition in Berlin: Re.Act. Feminism – Performance Art of the 1960s and 70s Today.\(^{20}\) Drawings, photos, video and film screenings, and the installations of twenty-four female performance artists were presented in the halls of the Akademie der Künste in keeping with the traditional exhibition standards for works of art. Video archives could be consulted at nearby computers. Moreover, the curators integrated a large number of artists from Eastern and Southeastern Europe and from former East Germany (GDR) so as to renew the canons of feminist performance, which were primarily developed in the USA.

Re.Act.Feminism #2 re-used video archives from the Berlin exhibition and added a photography section in order to integrate performances for which there were no recordings. Between 2011 and 2013, it was successively presented in Spain, Poland, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, and Germany. The documents were transported in five cases which, once opened, transformed into one consultation stand and four individual viewing stations (Figure 7). Knaup and Stammer delegated much of the responsibility to the members of the personnel of the host institutions, whom they saw as co-curators. They decided how to present the crates and activate the documents. They could organize exhibitions based on the archives or on artists from national and local stages, and schedule screenings, performances, events, workshops, and discussions. Finally, they were invited to enhance the collection with new documents. All of this resulted in a delocalization of the exhibition.

After the initial Berlin exhibition, the two curators decided to include archives from Latin America, the Mediterranean basin, the Middle East, and South Asia in order to fill in gaps and, above all, to shake up canonical positions. Responsibility for this was given to the Brazilian artist and theoretician Eleonora Fabião and to the German curator and author Kathrin Becker, the former for Latin America, the latter for the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia (MENASA). Both women reported having difficulty fitting their work into the proposed decades (Becker 2014; Fabião 2014). According to Fabião (2014:33), the 1960s and 1970s were a “chrononormative framework” stemming from the centres and enfeoffing the “periphery” to the history of Western art.
Consequently, Knaup and Stammer (2014) substituted “critical and thematic mapping” for the chronological approach, thereby making it possible to generate a transcultural and transgenerational dialogue. They borrowed this notion from the text by Marsha Meskimmon (2007), “Chronology Through Cartography: Mapping 1970s Feminist Art Globally.” The author criticizes theoreticians who persist in seeing feminist art as an evolution from the 1970s’ essentialist view into the 1980s’ representational critique and emphasis on the myth of progress and a teleological view of history. To make up for these unproblematized chronological approaches, she suggests a critical cartography, a spatial history that highlights the coexistence of strategies, forms, and practices in diverse geographical regions and at different periods. For instance, Meskimmon encourages the comparison of canonical and non-canonical figures so as to weave a new network of affinities. It is in this same spirit that Knaup and Stammer proposed a series of seven “thematic fields,” clearly subjective but nonetheless chosen for their transgenerational and transcultural recurrence: dis/appearing subjects, resisting objects, labour of love and care, body controls and resistance, extended bodies, art herstories, and conflict and vulnerabilities.

The exhibitions and the diverse activities developed by the host institutions fulfilled the mandate of this program. They made it possible to establish a dialogue between consecrated artists and local personalities (e.g., during the exhibitions of artists from the Balkans at the Tallinna Kunstihoone in Estonia) and to evaluate the subversive capacity of present-day performances in comparison to those of the past (during the exhibition devoted to the Muscovite punk rock group PUSSY RIOT, at the same institution). These exhibitions also provided the possibility to explore Knaup and Stammer’s thematic fields from other viewpoints (in Barcelona, several workshops explored the themes proposed by the two curators) or to propose new themes (the Galerija Miroslav Kraljević organized a workshop on the integration of animals in performances and another on the art of noise). At each one of these stopovers, Re.Act.Feminism #2 generated new possible histories at the local level, without pretending to provide a meta-narrative.

It was the creation of these heterogeneous histories that was favoured, the before rather than the after, the doing rather than the already done, or in other terms, the historiographical worksite that is developed collaboratively. Art historians and theoreticians, curators, artists, and students all contributed during the workshops, conferences, discussions, and seminars. Reenactment played a considerable role in underlining the contribution of the artists’ thought process in revisiting and re-examining through their works the histories of performance. In Vitoria-Gasteiz, Stefanie Seibold and Teresa Maria Díaz Nerio proposed a new reading of Gina Pane’s performances; in Barcelona, the Filles Föllen paid homage to the performance artists of the 1970s. At the Museet for Samtidskunst in Roskilde, the students took part in a workshop on the renewal of performative art using the archives.

According to Slavoj Žižek (2006), the interest of parallax is to renew a philosophical discussion on the relationship between the subject and reality. The delocalization and divergence between multiple viewpoints encourage us to think not of the difference between two objects but of the differences of an object with respect to itself. A parallax view could thus be a weapon against essentialist conceptions. It associates the idea of a perpetual change of objects and phenomena – “explainable by the history of their relations with subjects” (Poirier 2009) – to the relativism that arises from the localization of subjects. The heterogeneous histories of feminist performance art that Re.Act.Feminism #2 endeavoured to produce with its nomadic, dialoguing organization stemmed from this twofold position.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL LABORATORIES

In light of these curatorial practices, exhibitions would appear to be places for the production of historiographical analysis. First of all, exhibitions allow us to question the visual sources of the history of performance, namely photos, film, and video documents. Exhibiting documents entails numerous decisions about how to present them. Should they be shown horizontally on a table or vertically on a
wall, should we present the originals or the prints and digitized versions, should we opt for isolated images or series, remain faithful to the dimensions of the original document or enlarge them, and so on and so forth? Above and beyond their practical character, these questions have a theoretical and historiographical facet with regard to the status of the documents and how they interrelate. The curators at Villa Arson opted for digitized prints and film, a critical choice as concerns the transformation of performance documents into works of art. In Bordeaux, a twofold experience of the documents was proposed, namely as they were conserved in the archive collection and exhibited as digitized prints of diverse formats. Re.Act.Feminism #2 kept them in a strictly documentary form. The originality of the ZKM’s proposal was to see documents as scripts with which to reactivate performances. As for the objects, they were reinstated as costumes, accessories, scenery, etc. These four curatorial proposals, each in their own way, all aimed to avoid forcing the document and performance remnants into the fine arts categories.

As for narrative-history, it was resolutely pushed to the side. At Villa Arson, the database was in competition with and opposition to the narrative form. As a hypermediatized object, it likewise presented conceptual affinities with performance art, given that hypermedia can easily be described as performative. At the CAPC, gathering the work into constellations favoured montage over narrative. Knaup and Stammer opted for a thematic and critical mapping that was both transgenerational and transcultural. In Karlsruhe, the intergenerational dialogue that was chosen favoured orality and the figure of the witness. The multiple points of view that it brought together were conducive to dissensus. This criticism of narrative-history is obviously not found solely in exhibitions. It has been widely conducted by theoreticians, whether they be historians, philosophers of history, art historians, or otherwise. Still, would it not be fair to say that exhibitions remain above and beyond the analysis of essays? Indeed, their ability to criticize the historical narrative would seem to reside in their heterogeneous and inter-textual nature. Whatever the terms used to describe exhibitions, be it Reesa Greenberg’s “discursive events” (1995) or Elitza Dulguerova’s “intermediality” (2010:11), it is in the nature of exhibitions to put forward multiple perspectives. In so doing, exhibitions bring together distinct, contradictory, and complementary histories of performance art that come from diverse places and authors.

Exhibitions likewise make it possible to integrate into their own characteristic polyphony the histories of performance art as they are produced by artists through their writings, editions, and performance pieces. In SIGMA and Re.Act.Feminism #2, the artists joined their voices to those of the other participants. In Nice, the organizers developed a hybrid historiographical object. It arose out of the type of inquiry that art historians conduct when delving into unexplored territory. But it also borrowed a number of strategies from performance artists who, up until recently, have been responsible for their own style of historiography, namely a fondness for anecdotes and word-of-mouth, a reluctance to make selections, etc. It was at ZKM that the most room was made for artists since a large part of the document interpretation was confided to Boris Charmatz and his team composed almost exclusively of artists. This laboratory dropped all historiographical pretence so as to explore the diverse possibilities and viability of a performance art repertory and turn it into a motor for artistic experimentation.

It would be presumptuous to present hypermedia, heterotopy, repertory, and parallax as models or typologies. These approaches allowed us to characterize exhibition strategies which were not exclusive in nature but which rather modelled and were superimposed on each exhibition. The repertory framework, even though it was the most polemical, was underlying to all four projects, and not only because of the reenactments or interpretations of past performances that were programmed. The mechanisms that were proposed called upon operations that stemmed from the replaying and recombining inherent to repertory. The spectators at Villa Arson, the hosts of Re.Act.Feminism #2, and the designers at the CAPC drew from document archives and then combined, positioned, digitized, magnified, actualized, and performed them in order to create temporary configurations that could be called historiographical creations. By making exhibitions a place where one can reflect, explore, and engage in dialogue and debate, these approaches
denoted a desire to avoid representing the history of performance art as a fixed, smooth, unified, sanctified, and exclusive product produced by experts and offered to the public. These presentations of current research represent a particularly good response to the difficulties posed by integrating performance art in museums and to the ephemeral, corporal, performative, and dissident nature of artistic proposals.

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NOTES


3 *Outside the Frame/Performance and the Object. A Survey History of Performance Art in the USA Since 1950*, exhibition organized by the curators Olivia Georgia and Robyn Breitman, Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, Cleveland, Ohio (February 11 – May 1, 1994). *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979*, exhibition organized by the curator Paul Schimmel, The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (February 8 – May 10, 1998), and then other museums (June 17, 1998 – April, 11 1999).

4 *100 Years (version #2, PS1, nov, 2009)*, exhibition organized by the curators Klaus Biesenbach and RoseLee Goldberg, MoMA PS1, Long Island City (November 1, 2009 – May 8, 2010).

5 I will not comment further on the limitations of performance documents in portraying the live aspects of performance work, since this subject has been abundantly discussed in the literature. Among the essential texts, let us note those by Peggy Phelan (1993), Amelia Jones (1997), Rebecca Schneider (2001), Philip Auslander (2006).

6 I have shown elsewhere that the documents that artists produce on their performances can be approached as both documentation and works of art (Bénichou 2010).

7 *Le Temps de l’action – Acte 1 (une recherche sur l’histoire de la performance sur la Côte d’Azur)*, an exhibition organized by the curator Éric Mangion, Villa Arson, Nice (June 24 – October 30, 2011); *À la vie délibérée*, exhibition organized by the curators Éric Mangion and Cédric Moris Kelly, Villa Arson, Nice (July 1 – October 28, 2012). Unless otherwise specified, this information comes from an interview the author conducted with Éric Mangion and Cédric Moris Kelly in Nice, November 28, 2013.

8 The research was carried out by Cédric Moris Kelly, research project manager for new media and the web at Villa Arson, and Christine Bavière, at the time a student in conservation and restoration at the Ecole supérieure d’art d’Avignon. Éric Mangion conducted almost all the interviews with the artists.

9 The typology of the spaces was as follows: 1) Festival de Cannes/Cannes Film Festival. 2) Bar, hotel, restaurant. 3) Heritage site, place of worship. 4) Business, company, shopping centre. 5) Countryside, village. 6) Theatre, café-theatre, cinema. 7) Street. 8) Cultural and sport infrastructure. 9) Municipal cultural centre. 10) Alternative spaces, artist’s studio, home. 11) Museum, foundation. 12) Administration centre, social centre, hospital, school, university. 13) Municipal park, public square. 14) Art gallery. 15) Villa Arson. 16) Seaside.

10 *SIGMA*, an exhibition under the direction of Charlotte Lahuard and Agnès Vatican, with guest curator Patricia Brignone, as well as Romaric Favre and Jean-Cyril Lopez, at the CAPC musée d’art contemporain, Bordeaux (November 14, 2013 – March 2, 2014). Unless otherwise specified, this information comes from an interview the author conducted with Romaric Favre in Bordeaux on December 4, 2013.

11 The guest curator, Patricia Brignone, was in charge of researching texts and photographic documents in the Sigma collection of Bordeaux’s municipal archives, while Romaric Favre searched in the audiovisual archives of the Institut national de l’audiovisuel.


13 As a counterpoint to these temporal fits and starts, a complete video performance was shown every day non-stop in the stage area.


15 I have borrowed this idea from several authors who, despite their different disciplines (music, theatre, performance, literature, etc.), insist on the instability of repertories: Maud Pouradier (2015), Valentina Litvan and Marta López Izquierdo (2007), and Christian Biet and Richard Schechner (2014).

16 The four acts were respectively held on the following dates: March 8 – 17, 2012; March 18 – 30, 2012; March 31, – April 14, 2012; April 15 – 29, 2012.

17 Alex Baczynski-Jenkins (choreographer and dancer), Christine De Smedt (choreographer), Nikolaus Hirsch (architect), Lenio Kaklea (choreographer), Jan Ritsema (director), Gerald Siegmund (dance and theatre theoretician), Burkhard Stangl (guitarist), and Meg Stuart (choreographer).

18 These diverging viewpoints were expressed in the exhibition catalogue: Sigrid Gareis, Georg Schöllhammer, and Peter Weibel (2013).
19. *Re.Act.Feminism #2 – A Performing Archive*, itinerant exhibition organized by the guest curators Bettina Knaup and Beatrice Ellen Stammer and presented from 2011 to 2013 in six countries: the Centro Cultural Montehermoso, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain; the Instytut Sztuki Wyso, Gdańsk, Poland; the Galería Miroslav Kraljević, Zagreb, Croatia; the Museet for Samtidskunst, Roskilde, Denmark; the Tallinna Kunstihoone, Tallinn, Estonia; the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, Spain; and the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Germany.


**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


