



INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

Re-Constructing Performance Art

Processes and Practices of Historicisation,
Documentation, and Representation (1960s–1970s)

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS





PHILIP AUSLANDER

Performance Documentation and Its Discontents; or, Does It Matter Whether or Not It Really Happened?

It has become commonplace to assert that performances, as live events, cannot be adequately documented, or cannot be documented at all, or that performance documentation is at least highly problematic. Many critiques of performance documentation are premised on the belief that ephemerality is the key defining characteristic of performance – that it is in performance’s nature to disappear and that to force it to remain through reproduction is to violate its very being. My approach to performance documentation is chiefly pragmatic. It is quite obvious to me that we regularly rely on documentation of one sort or another to give us a sense of performances that are not immediately available to us in live form. While I certainly recognise that the experience I can obtain from this record is not the same experience I would have had by participating in a live event, I still understand it as an experience of the performance. I do not carefully frame the experience of examining a performance document as an experience of the document only, to be understood as separate from and not necessarily related to an experience of the performance itself. If anything, I operate on the assumption that one can gain usable information about a performance and come to a valid understanding of it on the basis of its documentation. From my perspective, the limitation of most discussions of performance documentation is a near-exclusive focus on the ontological dimensions of the subject, an overemphasis on the relationship between the performance and its document and on the accuracy and authenticity of the latter’s representation of the former. One of my central arguments is that, ultimately, the ontological relationship between a performance and its documentation is far less significant than the phenomenological relationship between the document and the beholder who experiences the performance from it.

Philip Auslander is a professor in the School of Literature, Media, and Communication of the Georgia Institute of Technology (Atlanta, Georgia, USA). His books include *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*; *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music*; and *Reactivations: Essays on Performance and Its Documentation*.

Disclaimer

The information and views set out here reflect only those of the authors and the Research Executive Agency (REA) and the European Commission (EC) are not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

Photo

Installation view of the exhibition ‘Staging Action: Performance in Photography since 1960’. MoMA, NY, January 28, 2011 through May 9, 2011. Photographer: Thomas Griesel (copyright: The Museum of Modern Art NY). Catalogue no.: IN2146.13. New York, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).



BARBARA BÜSCHER

Easy Access?

Book as Archive of Performance Art and as Source Material of Its History

It seems to be self-evident that a great part of the communication about and historiography on performance occurs in and with books. But the discourse on the complementarity of live event and medial representation – which has changed the conception of historiography in this field during the last few years – never touched on the constitutive role of books in this process.

The book as a medium (of art) is something that lasts – be it from the temporary configuration of an exhibition or from a performance. Simultaneously, the book offers a rather easy access to these events. Its specific structuring allows the writer/graphic designer and the reader to order the collected information and reproductions of artefacts. What kind of narrative on the characteristics of an artist’s work is implicit in this structuring? What is the relation between documentation of events and representation of the work?

In cooperation with Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) in Halifax (Canada), Kasper König established a publication series in the 1970s, which made accessible information on the work and the artistic procedures of artists who were part of the performance/dance and conceptual scene of that time. Yvonne Rainer: *Work 1961–73* is one of the most important source materials on her early work, and it appeared as part of this series in 1974. At that time, artists had a widespread interest in book publications, as part of “a rebellion against the increasing elitism of the art world and its planned obsolescence” (Lucy Lippard 1977).

Some 40 years later, we realise that – in the context of exhibitions and other events dedicated to performance artists and performance art history – a remarkable number of exhibition catalogues, monographs, etc. have been published, e.g., on the work of VALIE EXPORT, Carolee Schneemann, or Joan Jonas.

In my presentation, I would like to examine some of these books as archival space preserving documentation, material, ideas, and views on performance art. What kind of material is published according to the capabilities of a book and its traditional structuring features? What information do the artists and curators offer to a wider public as representation of their work? And what do researchers on performance art historiography discover from these books?

Barbara Büscher is professor of Media Studies/Intermediality at Leipzig Academy of Music and Theatre. She has published numerous essays on post-dramatic live art, performance theory and media art, art and technology, and on performance/performing archives. She is co-publisher of the online journal *MAP – Media | Archive | Performance* (www.perfomap.de). Recent publication: *Fluid Access: Archiving Performance-Based Arts*, (co-edited with Franz Anton Cramer; Hildesheim/New York, 2017).



BARBARA CLAUSEN

On the Interplay of the Archival and the Curatorial

© UQAM 2018

Barbara Clausen will discuss how art historical image, text, and sound-based documentary materials and the various archives that house them have become a source of infinite knowledge and inspiration for artists, curators, and historians. As the trace of a message, they not only contribute to the image archive of art history but are also part of their own ongoing cultural canonisation, unfolding continuously through their enactments and staging within the tension field of the archive and the exhibition.

As part of her research on the intersection of the archival, the performative, and the curatorial, Clausen will discuss one of her case studies, the development of The Joan Jonas Knowledge Base. This open-source database and digital information resource for curating, conserving, and researching the pioneering work of the American multimedia and performance artist Joan Jonas is a collaborative and trans-disciplinary Digital Humanities project. Dedicated to the interplay of the archival and the curatorial as well as aesthetic and material parameters of two of Jonas’s early key works, *Organic Honey* (1972/1973) and *Mirage* (1976/2004/2018), Clausen will discuss how the visualisation and chronological layering of the performative can be kept alive through various processes of representation and conservation.

Barbara Clausen is an independent curator and associate professor of Contemporary Art and Performance in the Art History department of the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM). Since 2000, she has lectured and written extensively on the historiography and institutionalisation of performance-based art. Over the last ten years, she curated and collaborated on numerous exhibitions and performance series in Europe and North America. Since 2017, Clausen is the curatorial research director of the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base, which is part of *The Artists Archive Initiative* at New York University. She is currently a visiting research fellow at TATE Britain and a visiting scholar at the programme for Museum Studies at NYU, as well as the ZeM, the Brandenburg Centre for Media Studies in Potsdam.



SABINE GEBHARDT FINK

*Re-Mediating and Remembering Performance Art and Activism
in Collaborative Constellations
Some Thoughts about the Methodology of Performance Chronicle Basel*

In my lecture, I will explore how performative artistic strategies, derived from concepts used by several feminist performers in the 1970s – e.g., Miriam Cahn and VALIE EXPORT – could be re-mediated and remembered in a collaborative process. I will analyse and reflect on our research for Performance Chronicle Basel and its main goal to remember feminist artistic strategies by sharing materials and thoughts and so, creating performative “embodied media forms”, as Red Chidgey has described (Chidgey 2008: 92). My personal focus in the research group lies, on one hand, in elaborating counter-understandings of feminist strategies in art and activism to override the broad narration of performance art, which usually essentialises bodily concepts. Red Chidgey has stated: “Part of feminism’s cultural battle is thus to secure the role of women’s movements in popular memory”, referring to DuPlessis/Snitow (1998) and Heller (2004), “to put forward ‘counter understandings’ of social roles and activities [...]” (Red Chidgey, “Hand Made Memories: Remediating Cultural Memory in DIY Feminist Networks”, p. 87, in: Sanjeev Khagram and Peggy Levitt (eds.), *The Transnational Studies Reader: Intersections and Innovations*, London and New York, 2008: 87–97). By exploring feminist performance strategies, I want, on the other hand, to activate a form of “aesthetic mutiny” after Melissa Autumn White. She explains the reasons for aesthetic mutiny in the context of agency and empowerment of QwB persons as follows: “[...] as a launching point from which to think about (is) [...] the future-oriented political promise of aesthetic mutiny [...]. I am convinced that thinking through the ways we frame our political struggles (and goals) is key to realizing their subversive and transformative potentials.” (Melissa Autumn White, “Queers without Borders? On the Impossibilities of “Queer Citizenship” and the Promise of Transnational Aesthetic Mutiny”, in: Sanjeev Khagram and Peggy Levitt (eds.), *The Transnational Studies Reader: Intersections and Innovations*, London and New York, 2008: 117–134).

Sabine Gebhardt Fink is professor for Contemporary Art and director of the Master of Arts in Fine Arts – Art Teaching, Critical Image Practices, and Art in Public Spheres, at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Lucerne, Switzerland. She is collaborator in the artistic-scientific network Performance Chronicle Basel together with Muda Mathis and Margarit von Büren, and co-editor of *Performance Chronicle Basel – Floating Gaps* (2011) and *Performance Chronicle Basel – Recordings and Remembrances* (2016). Her writing includes *Performance Chronicle Basel – Recordings and Remembrances* (Zürich and Berlin 2016), with Muda Mathis and Margarit von Büren and the text *Queer and Feminist Strategies in Performance Art Today*, *Performance Art Network Switzerland* (ed., Basel 2018).



GABRIELLA GIANNACHI

*How a Record Becomes Art
The Role of Documentation in the Preservation, Exhibition, and
Experience of Performance Art*

The introduction of performance within the museum has led to radical changes in documentation, conservation, and exhibition practices. Depending on where documentation is placed within the museum, documentation can be a record (in the archive), an exhibit (in the collection), or a mode of engagement (on social media). It is through documentation that museums orchestrate the historicisation, value creation, and spectacle of art. These findings about documentation show that artworks must no longer be considered purely as objects, or even as processes, but rather as instances in a rhizomatic assemblage of relational and contextual trajectories. By “assemblage” here I mean not so much the use of the ready-made, or the found object, as is the common use of the term in art history, but rather I refer to the philosophical use of the term by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). The original French term *agencement* refers to the idea of an arrangement as a topos for the analysis of fluidity, exchangeability, and multiple functionality of entities and their relationality or connectivity to other entities. The notion of assemblage, and so, more specifically, that of arrangement, thus indicates the possibility that it is the assemblage (rather than the entity) of documentation that provides its meaning and value. Using case studies from Tate, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, MoMA and LIMA, and analysing the evolving role that documentation has played in these museums since the 1970s to today, this paper shows that whether as a remain, ontological evidence, a preservation method, an art exhibit, or even a strategy for re-interpretation, the assemblage of documentation constitutes one of the most complex and dynamic fields of enquiry in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Gabriella Giannachi is professor in Performance and New Media at the University of Exeter, UK. Her most recent publications include *Performing Presence* (with N. Kaye, 2011); *Performing Mixed Reality* (with S. Benford, 2011); *Archive Everything* (2016) and *Histories of Performance Documentation* (with J. Westerman, 2018). She has worked with Tate and LIMA on a number of projects on performance documentation and preservation.



TANCREDI GUSMAN

Toulouse-Lautrec at the Beach:

Documentation and Its Role in Performance Art History

Any investigation of the history of “performance art” has to first take on the task of defining and delimiting this historical-artistic object. From the earliest accounts of this category’s usage, around 1970, until today, artists, critics, curators, and scholars have posed the question “*what is performance art?*” Thus, it is perhaps hardly surprising that, as regards an art practice perceived as intrinsically elusive, the answer has proved, time and again, to be provisional and partial. This has led to the frustration of all attempts at providing a definitive delineation of this category. Yet, if analysis today aims to go beyond individual artworks and cases as well as grasp – if only in the slightest – a level of generality, answering questions of this kind is more necessary than ever: What is the historical-artistic object we call “performance art”? What makes a performance a piece of performance art? And what are the instruments for studying this specific artistic object and its history? As the inaugural text introducing this symposium on processes and practices of historicisation of performance art, this paper addresses such questions anew. However, its goal is not to provide answers of an ontological nature or universal value, but to historicise these questions and interrogate how specific modes of representation and conservation of performance art have constituted this artistic category. From this perspective, the “document” of performance art plays a crucial role in two senses: on the one hand, it is the vehicle of processes of historical constitution of this artistic category, and, on the other hand, it is revealed to be the tool for investigating such processes. The paper is thus devoted to this junction of history and historicisation and to the functions that the document performs within it.

Tancredi Gusman is Marie Skłodowska-Curie research fellow at the Institute of Theatre Studies, Freie Universität Berlin, with the project *Between Evidence and Representation: History of Performance Art Documentation from 1970 to 1977*. His research focusses on history of ideas and art practices, addressing performance art and documentation, German theatre and criticism, aesthetics and theatre theories. Main publication: *L’arpa e la fionda: Kerr, Ihering e la critica teatrale tedesca tra fine Ottocento e il nazionalsocialismo* (2016).



© Zan Wimberley

ADRIAN HEATHFIELD

Recurring Imponderables

Returning to a work towards the close of the period in question, Abramović and Ulay’s *Imponderabilia* (1977), this talk discourses on a certain fecundity of performance, lodging between act and trace, that sets in motion various apparatuses of historical iteration, capture, and release. Examining the historical significance of a work, its marking and revealing of cultural currencies, is necessarily entwined with considerations of the many afterlives of the event, which disclose the limits and potentials of its integrities. I re-read the original work through its subsequent transformations. Rather than focussing on the content of this performance’s alleged offence and its suppression, I will also look at phenomena peripheral to its initial reception, that mark some coordinates of future aesthetic and cultural difficulties: the event of touch, the gendering of judgement, the culture of surveillance, the era of participation. How does the “animateriality” of performance, its generative unruly force, interface with historical and present cultural imperatives of production and reception?

Adrian Heathfield writes on, curates, and creates performance. He is the author of *Out of Now*, a monograph on the artist Tehching Hsieh, editor of *Ally* (2017) and *Live: Art and Performance*, and co-editor of *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* (2012). He is professor of Performance and Visual Culture at University of Roehampton, London.



ANNETTE JAELE LEHMANN

*Exhibiting Performance Art of the 1970s:
Outlining Central Questions in a Case Study*

Prevailing accounts and concepts of performance art are still essentially based on representational systems and forms that were predominantly developed along traditional research and exhibition formats for images and objects in a specific dispositive of space and architecture, and in a context of analogue technologies. The relevance of revisiting and revitalising performative art of the 20th and 21st centuries, particularly in exhibitions over the last decade, thus requires a profound shift in new models and methods of telling histories of (performance) art, as well as developing more experiential knowledge and learning practices in inter-institutional collaborations.

Performance is widely regarded as that which cannot be archived – its presentness is at odds with the archive's quest for permanence, its disappearing acts resisting the desire to label, stack, and store. Performance and performative arts transcend their radical ephemerality, and, at the same time, the demand for documenting and archiving their practices on behalf of performance research and historiography has grown. What then is the relationship between performance and the archive? How can contemporary exhibitions explore and challenge this relationship in all its facets, including the role of performance in the culture of museum collections and the role of the archive in conceptualisations of performance; the cultural histories and ideologies of archival practices; the future of performance and the archive in the digital age; performance as an archive of its own history; performative interventions into archival culture; the role of forgeries, rumours, and lies in the development of performance history; the role of the document in performance research; the practices of performance archives; and performers' archives?

This contribution will outline some of these central questions in a case study on the contemporary and ongoing curatorial and exhibition project *Post Studio – Cal Arts the Early Years 1972–77*, where projects like “Womenhouse” or “House of Dust” where temporary locations for performative art practices in the context of an art school.

Annette Jael Lehmann is professor of Visual Culture/Theatre at the Institute of Theatre Studies, Freie Universität Berlin. She has a strong inter- and cross-disciplinary focus in research and in practice-based collaborations with various institutions in academia, art, and culture. Among her fellowships are University of Oxford, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and Harvard University. Her books include *Black Mountain Research* (Bielefeld, 2016); *Exposures. Visual Culture, Discourse and Performance* (Tübingen 2009); *Kunst und Neue Medien*, (Tübingen, 2008).



LORENZO MANGO

*Historical Roots of “Performative Theatre”:
The Italian Post-Avantgarde*

Over the past decades, theatre studies in Italy have highlighted the crisis of the notion of theatre as representation, identifying a somewhat elemental degree of theatre's language, thus defining this phenomenon as “Nuovo Teatro” (New Theatre).

The introduction of new categories has a strategic function in the comprehension of aesthetic objects; however, it is of fundamental importance that these categories do not produce “absolutes” on the conceptual level but must be understood in relation to the history they aim to describe as well as their own historicity. With this paper, I intend to focus on the experimental Italian theatre of the seventies and, in particular, on the Post-Avantgarde, wherein a radical resetting of the theatrical code and the affirmation of the scene as an independent system of signification took place. The objective of such a strategy was the decomposition of theatrical language into its elementary units that refer to the *hic et nunc* of physical action. What are the differences between this way of conceiving theatre and performance art? What distinguishes the category “New Theatre” from that of “Performance Art”? Understanding what happened in the Italian theatre of the seventies helps us not only to construct a history of New Theatre as a “performative theatre” (which is indispensable) but also to address, in a more dialectical way, the question of the categories no longer intended as absolute principles but relativised in relation to history.

Lorenzo Mango is professor of History of Modern and Contemporary Theatre at the Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”. He is co-director of the journal *Acting Archives Review* (www.actingarchives.it). Among his books are: *L’officina teorica di Edward Gordon Craig* (2015); *Il Principe costante di Calderón de la Barca/Slowacki “per” Jerzy Grotowski* (2008); *La scrittura scenica: Un codice e le sue pratiche nel teatro del Novecento* (2003); *Alla scoperta di nuovi sensi: Il Tattilismo futurista* (2001/2015); *Teatro di poesia: Saggio su Federico Tiezzi* (1994); *La scena della perdita: Il teatro tra avanguardia e postavanguardia* (1987).



HEIKE ROMS

Performance Documentation as Artistic Self-Historicisation in the 1960s and 1970s: Modalities of Performative Historiography

In this illustrated lecture, I will examine several key instances where performance was first historicised in the 1960s and 1970s – all of which occurred within artist-led (rather than scholarly) contexts, including artists' publications, performances, and exhibitions. I will begin with a discussion of what is probably the first major body of writing about performance-based art practices, namely the cluster of publications on Happenings that appeared in 1965–1966 in the span of just over a year (Becker and Vostell 1965, Hansen 1965, Kaprow 1966, Kirby 1965, Kirby and Schechner 1965, Lebel 1966). The second set of examples includes several mapping projects carried out by artists affiliated with Fluxus (George Maciunas, Mieko Shiomi, Dick Higgins, Nam June Paik) in the mid- to the late 1960s, each of which used different cartographic or chronographic techniques to figure the genealogies of their work. And the final instance refers to a curatorial-archival approach to performance histories as exemplified by Harald Szeemann and his concept for the *Happenings and Fluxus* exhibition in Cologne in 1971. I will propose that all of these instances utilised documentation of various kinds (photographs, charts, maps, or scores) and forms (on the page or displayed on walls) to create performative historiographic spaces, within which performance histories were not merely represented but enacted, examined, and evaluated through particular combinations and juxtapositions of discursive and visual elements – long before the supposed “first” written accounts of the history of performance art appeared in the late 1970s.

Heike Roms is professor in Theatre and Performance at the University of Exeter. Her research into the historiography of early performance art won the UK's David Bradby TaPRA Award for Outstanding Research in 2011. She is currently working on a book with the working title *When Yoko Ono Did Not Come to Wales: Locating the Early History of Performance Art*. www.performance-wales.org



SILVIA SASSE

Practical Aesthetics: Performance Art (as) Theory in Eastern Europe

In the 1960s, artists in Eastern Europe began carrying out performances, actions, and happenings, which were characterised by aesthetic debates from the beginning. It was not just a matter of discussing the “new” genre in small circles but of conducting aesthetic experiments in the performances and actions. Aesthetic and theoretical questions became part of the artistic work itself. Conversely, in specially developed genres – in seminars, theory parodies, discussion actions – the performative of the theoretical itself was examined. The lecture deals with this interaction and shows different examples – among others, Collective Actions, TotArt, Raša Todoršević, Ewa Partum – of the theoretical potential of artistic action.

Sylvia Sasse is professor of Slavic Studies at the University of Zürich, and principal investigator of the ERC project *Performance Art in Eastern Europe (1950–1990): History and Theory* (www.performanceart.info). She is author of books and exhibitions on literature as well as of theory of theatre, literature, and performance in Eastern Europe. Most recently: *Forensik eines Bildes: Der Sturm auf den Winterpalast* (exhibition and book with Inke Arns and Igor Čubarov in Zürich and Dortmund HMKV). Current projects: *Subversive Affirmation: Kritik der Kritik revisited* (book; 2019), *Artists & Agents: Performance Art and the Secret Services* (exhibition; 2019).



DOROTHEA VON HANTELMANN

Dorothea von Hantelmann is professor of Art and Society at Bard College Berlin. Her research focusses on theoretical questions concerning contemporary art and contemporary exhibition culture. Her publications include *How to Do Things with Art: On the Meaning of Art's Performativity* (2010) and *The Exhibition: Politics of a Ritual* (2010).



DORIS KOLESCH

Doris Kolesch is professor of Theatre and Performance Studies at Freie Universität Berlin and co-director of the DFG-funded Collaborative Research Center "Affective Societies: Dynamics of Social Co-existence in Mobile Worlds", where she heads a research project on "Reenacting Emotions: Strategies and Politics of Immersive Theater".

Her research interests include theory and aesthetics of theatre, voice and acoustic culture, performance and performativity, and affect and emotion studies. Her innovative research has received various awards, among them the Essay Prize of the German Society for Theatre Studies and the Heinz Maier-Leibnitz Prize of the German Science Foundation (DFG).



JAN LAZARDZIG

Jan Lazardzig has studied Theatre Studies and History. In 2006, he completed his doctorate about History of Theatre and Knowledge of the 17th Century. Since 2017, he is professor of Theatre Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin. Fields of research: history of architecture, technology, and knowledge of theatre.



MICHAEL LÜTHY

Michael Lüthy is professor of History and Theory of Art at the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar. He studied in Basel and Berlin, gained his PhD with a study on Édouard Manet and his habilitation with a study on Wittgenstein's aesthetics. His main fields of study are 19th-century French art, post-war American art, and theories of modern art.

November 2018

Organised by

Tancredi Gusman, Principal Investigator of the research project *Between Evidence and Representation: History of Performance Art Documentation from 1970 to 1977* (Marie Skłodowska-Curie IF, Horizon 2020, Project ID 747881)
Assistance: Stephanie Pröm, Halvard Schommartz

Contact

Tancredi Gusman
Institut für Theaterwissenschaft
Grunewaldstr. 35, 12165 Berlin (Steglitz)
symposium.performance2018@gmail.com
tancredi.gusman@fu-berlin.de
Tel. +49 (0)30 838 50 314

Layout

Center für Digitale System, Universitätsbibliothek, Freie Universität Berlin

Copy-Editing, Translation

Omid Soltani

Website

<https://blogs.fu-berlin.de/performanceartdocumentation/category/symposium/>



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 747881.