Reckitt, Helena

To Make Time Appear


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Amelia Jones
Introduction

Performance or live art provokes an encounter with history that art history as a discipline is unprepared to accommodate fully without distorting the very claims for the immediacy of the "live" which supposedly make performance art unique. This distortion is made clear in the recent retrospective of Marina Abramović’s performance career at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA), which trumpeted in its subtitle the most commonly purveyed (and paradoxical) belief about performance art: “The Artist is Present.” Abramović’s durational performance at the center of the show in the MoMA atrium (which is now of course “past”) aside, if the “artist is present,” then what were the vitrines of performance relics, rows of photographic documents, and video footage, not to mention the reenactments (also now “past”) by younger performers throughout the galleries, doing in relation to past performances?

Performance art, in the context of art history and its institutions, throws in question the most basic assumptions about how we “do” history in a field constitutionally attached to material things (such as artworks, buildings, archival documents). While art history has of course shifted and mutated across the decades, the discipline in its deepest formations and assumptions is based on the capacity to “freeze” the object of study as paradigmatic of its kind and/or as a masterpiece. Kantian aesthetics, key to the establishment of the discipline and still foundational to the way we teach, exhibit, write about, and market art, demands a moment of encounter wherein the work of art can be apprehended and judged. The visual arts are the only form of culture linked directly to a global market that in turn depends upon the hierarchical disposition of “original” and “unique” objects to be bought and sold. Curatorial practice and the global art market in particular depend upon this freezing—after all, something tangible (whether a painting, plans for a Renaissance garden, a conceptual art statement, or a performance art document) must be evidenced in order for us to exhibit, describe, and market what we call art. Art history classes depend upon the projection of digitized images and/or (increasingly) film and video clips. And so on.7

This need for things (the “present” artist and/or documents substantiating the past existence of the live event) is at odds with the common claim that performance is ephemeral and thus actual and immediate. In turn, if the artist were indubitably present, if the performance were always already immediate, there would be no need for objects, putting the lie to this claim so often made in art history and in performance studies texts on performance art histories. It is, in fact, for historians that these questions become the most acute and contested, since a performance as we are watching can be said to be actual (whatever that means), but a performance as always already over must be known through other means. And this is the case even if we witnessed the performance firsthand. After all, memory is not a simple transcription of the real but (as Henri Bergson elaborated at the turn of the twentieth century) is itself a complex representational process of referring our body-mind complex to past experience in order to make sense of the present for the future.8

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1. I am grateful to Christopher Bedford, Chief Curator of Exhibitions at the Wexner Center in Ohio, who initially sparked my interest in this project but was unable to contribute.

2. I have explored these issues at length in my introductions to Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History, coedited with Adrian Heathfield (New York and London: Routledge, forthcoming), and in “The Artist is Present: Artists Re-Enactments and the Impossibility of Presence,” TDR 55, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 16–45.


Walter Benjamin’s ruminations on history and the relics of past events in his Theses on the Philosophy of History were written just before his own annihilation while escaping the Nazis in 1940. These ideas have had enormous weight and influence, what one could argue to be a performative agency, over the past fifty years. Benjamin wrote: “The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. . . . To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it “the way it really was” . . . It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.”

In what I see as the best writing on live art (within art history and performance studies), performance has been thought of not as confirming presence but as provoking, precisely, “moments of danger” that flash up and (if we are open to it) open the possibility for acknowledging the impossible fields in time that defy every desire to write history in the old-fashioned, art-historical sense as a final and true choreography of objects processing over time. The evanescent nature of a live art reminds us that we cannot fully know or codify the past, whether it flashes up to us in the form of objects, text, speech, or what have you. In what I see as the weakest moments in performance art’s histories, the time has been ironed out. The art critic, or art or performance historian purports to deliver the performance as a final truth—whether through her own memories of a supposedly immediate encounter with the artist herself (as many of the visitors who sat across from the artist at the Abramović have claimed) or via elaborations on a key iconic document or set of documents. It is at such moments that performance art is often claimed to secure presence—and also to promise a particular kind of physically immediate, intense, and emotionally authentic experience that ensures aesthetic, personal, and/or political transformation. Ironically, as noted, this claim takes place inevitably through memories, documents, and other detritus from the act itself, which can never go on forever. I would suggest, in contrast, that the writing of histories about performance, carefully thought through, can be just as affecting and effective as the experience of performance itself.

In fact, as Bergson and others have made clear, the profound paradox of live events (such as, in our case, performance art) is that they are only accessible through human perception, even in the “live” instant (if we can imagine such a thing), we perceive and make sense of performances through bodily memory, itself impossible to pin down or retrieve in any full state. This is the paradox of live art—that it articulates the impossibility of securing presence (the graspability of the “now,” as well as the immediacy of the artist) even as it claims to define itself on the basis of doing so. Performance art thus exposes the radical conundrum that continually bedevils human existence (not to mention performance and art theory): the impossibility of knowing, keeping, or anchoring the present (present experience) without it slipping away. I have worked extensively in recent years on the problem of the live addressed from an art-historical perspective informed by performance studies. Briefly, I argue that both live and documentary art (in a broad sense) take place inevitably within the context of aesthetic practices, where (as Kant argued) things in the world become “art” because we can engage with them through a disinterested (monocular) capacity of appreciation, and thus they are to some degree fixed in their qualities, art history (and its attached marketplace).

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7. See my “Live Art in Art History: A Paradox?” as well as the additional sources in n. 1.

4. Benjamin, Theses on the Philosophy of History (1940), sections V and VI, online at www.scu. ca/~andrewf/CONCEPT2.html (accessed October 22, 2010). Benjamin is citing Leopold von Ranke with the phrase “the way it really was.”

5. The Internet was rife with such claims during the exhibition; some are transcribed at www. moma.org/explore/inside_out/category/visitor- the exhibition; some are transcribed at www. moma.org/explore/inside_out/category/visitor-

6. This is Bergson’s key argument in Matter and Memory.
Yadong Hao here presents thoughts on her curatorial project NOTES in a strain, wherein she commissioned younger artists to engage with previous performances at the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle. Borrowing the French word emblème for its double meaning when crossed over into English ("research," and "quest" or "search"), Yadong Hao posits both the "originals" and the "redos" as simultaneously search and re-search (both "new/original" and always already redone). Reckitt’s equally thoughtful 2008 show at the Power Plant in Toronto, Not Quite How I Remember It, includes Hayes, whose work addresses past histories (of art, culture, and politics) and activates, precisely, the hinge between performance and history by engaging with time-based events in an art context. These are performative actions that were initially directed toward the gallery as a site of display. Here Reckitt ruminates on the current trend of reenactments, clearly partial for this circuit of action and historical replay. Finally, academic scholarship on these issues is here represented by this contribution by myself (an art historian), and texts by Steven Lütticken (an independent scholar working across art criticism and performance studies) and Branimir Jakovljević (an art theorist) who can thus address it easier because we do not have to grapple directly with the dilemma of what to do with materiality (not "the things themselves," because that would be to presume things preexist our apprehension of them, but the materiality that, as Bergson has said, can only be understood through human perception, which is embodied and shaped through processes of memory). We can spin out abstract theories, ideally touching base with specific examples from a "history" of live art known itself through material traces of acts from the past, and call it a day. Written scholarship is limited in its format and cannot activate the material results of past actions as directly as can curatorial practice. But with written insights of writers, we would be at a sorry pass, since scholars, through the very immateriality of the text, can explore the far edges of problems that cannot be directly tackled in museum display. This is a deliberately polemical division I am making here that, in fact, does not hold, since we scholars also curate, the artists also teach, and so on. But in making this forced separation I am attempting to highlight the way in which the different modes of expression and different practices relating to performance art demand or propose different structures of contemplation in relation to the very problem of its own materiality. Lütticken’s critique can thus address in theoretical terms the tension between the ontological privileging of the live art work and the urge to restage (and thus represent) these supposedly unique and one-off live events; his intervention suggests that it might take a slightly more distant and abstracting point of view (one that of course is still inextricably immersed in the paradigms, since we scholars, too, write texts that "fix" the live) to explore the contradictions at play in these oppositional structures. And, as Jakovljević notes, reenactments have focused on putting up fake or authenticity. In these theories, we continue (as did Derrida and Deleuze, and as does Lütticken) to work bodies, to curate shows, and otherwise to establish that which we argue to be unknowable. As noted, in the visual arts the tension is particularly acute given the existence of a global art market demanding works of art, the value of which can be, at least momentarily, established and priced as inherent to the work. It is not a question of cynicism here but of acknowledging the apparent impossibility of escaping some element of being and some valorization in the marketplace. 8

8. Of course, from Jacques Derrida, to Gilles Deleuze, to Jacques Rancière, many poststructuralist theorists have questioned these attempts to "fix". While many of us in art history draw on these theories, we continue (as did Derrida and Deleuze, and as does Lütticken) to work bodies, to curate shows, and otherwise to establish that which we argue to be unknowable. As noted, in the visual arts the tension is particularly acute given the existence of a global art market demanding works of art, the value of which can be, at least momentarily, established and priced as inherent to the work. It is not a question of cynicism here but of acknowledging the apparent impossibility of escaping some element of being and some valorization in the marketplace.

9. For two valiant attempts at applying Deleuzian metaphors to the study of the visual and other arts, see Dorothée Riepenhoff, Gilles Deleuze and the Flux of Representation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), and Simon O’Sullivan, Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought beyond Representation (London: Polity/PMA, 2006). Both books rely on the flux of deterritorialization, as does Deleuze himself when he addresses art directly, as in his rather unfortunate psychological book Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sense (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). Srebrenica massacre in the former Yugoslavia as a "politics of reassocation on terms of ethnic identity." Jakovljević notes that the ideological reifications of the postwar reconstruction of this area of the world are critically examined through the "performance forensics" of Grupa Sponemak; through an attention to forensic detail, the group points out that the claims to retrieve the authenticity of this fraught past are a performative reinvention.

These important critical interventions point to the importance of self-reflexivity in addressing the complexities of history-making in relation to live events, whether art or politics. This collection, "Performance: Live or Dead," could of course be viewed as just another form of fixing time into spatial coordinates, reifying the complexities of performance histories into words frozen in print. We, art historians in particular (as well as curators and even many artists) do this very well—fixing things, if momentarily, for the perusal of others at future times. We seem to require of art that it be frozen in order to be seen and interpreted. For what art is (as some of the Fluxus artists asked if it is only a command that can be executed by anyone) Fluxus provides a useful exemplar of the limits of our desire to claim an escape from the reifications of space over time in art historical terms, the fixing of objects in a value structure both abstract and, via museums, art history texts, and so on, concrete.

The limits of Fluxus’s interrogation of the materiality of the art and the correlating commodifying structures of the art world are evident today in the numerous inclusions of Fluxus works in performance festivals (via reenactments), publications (via textual and photographic documentation), and exhibitions (via relics). In this way, the work of the Fluxus artists can now be found in reified form in the halls of even the most conservative and commodifying art spaces, such as MoMA, where, down the corridors from Abramovic’s “the presence of Frida Kahlo” and the remnants of Fluxus acts and events were encased in vitrines and displayed in a gallery devoted to the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection at the same time as Abramovic’s show in the spring of 2010. By definition, then, we will attempt to repeat that which we claim to be unique and ephemer(al)—we can do nothing else, apparently, in the late-capitalist economy of art and culture (including scholarship). In European-based cultures, knowledge formation, since at least the Renaissance, has involved a process (presented as final act) of finding a (fixed) point of view from which to assess the problem of history and the trace of past times in (in)art historical terms, the fixing of objects in a value structure both abstract and, via museums, art history texts, and so on, concrete. But within art history, Deleuzian claims of nomadism, deterritorialization, lines of flight, and the ruin of representation are fabulous and enticing, but frankly, pipe dreams, as far as I can tell, aside from philosophical ruminations (themems, themselves encased in books and journals, possibly downloadable on the Internet), I have yet to see deterritorialized flows anywhere other than, perhaps, in the structures of late capitalism. Deterritorialization and lines of flight are wonderful metaphors, but apparently unreachable in contemporary thought other than as abstractions. The world is permeable, and yet we will try to make sense of it.
through structures like exhibitions and art history. The best we can do, as the powerful contributions in “Performance: Live or Dead?” suggest, is to be aware of the reciprocal interrelations between thinking and knowing, perceiving and expressing—between past performances and present modes of documentation, reenactment, and history writing. To keep the “moment of danger” that, as Benjamin argues, “flashes up” and becomes evident as historically important, active and in play.

I sent the contributors the following email in August to solicit their thoughts and interventions.

Dear XX,

I am writing to you with an invitation to participate in what I hope will be a groundbreaking dialogue on the very current phenomenon of documenting, reenacting, and/or exhibiting traces of past performances in art institutions such as galleries, museums, and mainstream art magazines. You have been central in developing a critical relationship to these practices and we hope very much you will be willing to participate in a brief email dialogue on the topic.

The key question in this dialogue will be: What are the costs and benefits of the current move to institutionalize performance art by documenting it (often on websites or in archives), reenacting performances, and/or exhibiting performance art histories in galleries and art museums?

. . .

Best,

Amelia Jones

Amelia Jones is Professor and Gismondi Chair in Visual Culture at McGill University in Montréal. Her recent publications include major essays on feminist art, contemporary art in general, curating, and performance art histories, as well as the edited volume Feminists and Visual Culture Reader (2001; new edition 2009). Her most recent books, Self Image: Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject (2006), will be followed in 2012 by Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification in the Visual Arts (2012), and her major volume Perform Repeat Record: Live Art in History, coedited with Adrian Heathfield, is due out in 2012.

Ron Athey

Getting It Right . . . Zooming Closer

Performance documentation, performance-for-the-camera, restaging the “iconic” performance image for the camera, to get it right—all are editing, retouching, mediating, specifying, forcing the gaze, and not the full experience, which can essentially lie, enhance, mislead.

Most of the performance work I have done is multiple images, scenes and actions, performed at various speeds from frantic to still, from solo to twenty-five persons involved.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, I only understood how a performance went off by how it felt during, and how it sat with me after. Video and photo documentation showed me that and something more . . . . I had to adjust to the flattening. But something about what the camera person focused on actually made the represen-
This introduction of photographic documentation has the same effect on my work as another form of how the work resonates: the retelling of it in words. Always described and reviewed are the shock moments, the violation of the flesh, rarely ever text, humor, flow. I have a churchy outlook on the role of audience: they serve as witnesses, and this is what is needed to make the experience possible. In order to justify performing for the camera, I have to imagine being a step away from that chemistry. In the ambitious project I made in 2000 with Catherine Opie, for which we shot thirteen large-format Polaroids in two days, I ran through a selection of scenes from my performance history, restaging them in costume (or look), without any form of set pieces except in three of them. None of these is true to the performance it is referencing, except possibly the St. Sebastian image, which was shot last. Working in a more minimalist way to cooperate with the style and vision of Opie, they are portraits, not performances for the camera. But they express the essence of suicide bed, solar anus, Sebastian suspended. This reduction becomes something else as, especially with the images of earlier performances, they are removed from the politics and issues of their time.

Most of the images I have shot with the photographer Manuel Vason, aside from the Sun card for the SPILL Festival tarot deck, were either taken as the performance setup was finished but before the audience was admitted, or restaged in an improvisational way after the performance. So, less stagy setup for him, but the final effect more perfected with his post-production cleanup techniques. For restaging performances indicate a release of sorts? the answer to this question is ambiguous: there is no denying that many such restagings hold the promise of getting closer to what the original event was really like, but at the same time the restagings will be based in different degrees on photos, videos, written descriptions, and memories that may in turn have been shifted, shaped, and interpreted, by media representations. My 2000 exhibition project Life, Once More: Forms ofRemembrance in Contemporary Art did not include a single live performance (if we except lectures). At that point, the tradition that privileged the live performance over any of the performance’s other media incarnations still seemed to be strong, and my exclusive focus on video, photography, slides, and language was an implicit polemic against certain theorists and artists. I wanted to emphasize the interdependence of media representation and reenactment by creating a constellation of different gen-


Sven Lüticken
Perfoming Time

Recent years have seen a somewhat paradoxical confluence of two tendencies. On the one hand, there is an increase in scholarly interest in the ways in which documents such as written accounts, photographs, and video shape our current understanding of historical (art or dance) performances. If we compare two books dealing with overlapping subject matter, Sally Banes’s Democracy’s Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962–1964 (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1980/1983, rep. 1993); Carrie Lambert-Beatty’s Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s, the difference is striking. Whereas, on the whole, Banes tries to use various documents (especially, in her case, written ones) to give an impression of the actual performances, Lambert-Beatty foregrounds the fact that her object of study is “a series of traces, shaped and redrawn by the interests, desires, and ways of seeing of everyone from the artist to the photographer who documented the events to the historian herself.” The performance—dance performance in this case—emerges as scattered across various memories and different media, and these reflections transform the performance, impact our perception and understanding of it.

On the other hand, there is the recent increase in reenactments or restagings of historical performances—sometimes by the original artists themselves, sometimes by others. This development would seem to indicate that, after all, we still long to experience the original event or some approximation thereof. If the most sophisticated performance scholarship has decisively abandoned the ontological privileging of the live performance over media representations that marked both historical performance art and performance studies, does this vogue for restaging performances indicate a release of sorts? the answer to this question is ambiguous: there is no denying that many such reenactments hold the promise of getting closer to what the original event was really like, but at the same time the restagings will be based in different degrees on photos, videos, written descriptions, and memories that may in turn have been shifted, shaped, and interpreted, by media representations. My 2000 exhibition project Life, Once More: Forms of Remembrance in Contemporary Art did not include a single live performance (if we except lectures). At that point, the tradition that privileged the live performance over any of the performance’s other media incarnations still seemed to be strong, and my exclusive focus on video, photography, slides, and language was an implicit polemic against certain theorists and artists. I wanted to emphasize the interdependence of media representation and reenactment by creating a constellation of projects that problematize this interdependence in different ways. One piece that does this in an exemplary way, but that was not included in Life, Once More for the simple reason that I was not yet familiar with it, is Babette Mangolte’s 1993 film Poor Poor Moris, which restages four crucial dance/performance pieces from the period of Robert Morris’s involvement with the Judson Dance Theater. As Mangolte writes in a statement about this film: “Film is the medium of duration, but what we call duration is historically determined. Film spectatorship expectations greatly change in different generations. My biggest question was how to represent the sense of time of another generation. I gambled that if I could create a sense of heightened

13. Lambert-Beatty, 16.
One of the performances restaged by Mangolte, 21.3, had an oddly syncopated temporality to begin with. Morris, dressed conservatively, mimed to a tape recording of a passage from Erwin Panofsky’s introduction to his 1939 book in which Panofsky famously used the now-antiquated gesture of the lifting of one’s hat as a greeting to illustrate his three-part model of iconological analysis; the miming, however, was not perfectly in sync with the tape. At an early moment, in 1963, this performance already challenged budding essentialist notions of performance as escaping from the dominance of language; in 21.3, the specificity of performance lies in infra-thin differences, in minimal but stubborn slips. Mangolte obviously based her restaging in part on the famous black-and-white film stills from Babette Mangolte, 21.3, film, 16mm, black and white, (other segments of Mangolte’s 1993, Babette Mangolte, all rights of reproduction reserved).

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to cough or sneeze, which suddenly erupts on the stage itself as Hay unleashes a furious, sneeze-like blast—a trained and disciplined eruption of symptomatic remainders that dance usually seeks to suppress. This is dance, this is performance at its best; in its manipulation of the audience’s sense of time, it articulates, however mutedly, some of the constraints under which both performer and audience members operate, and stages little liberations from them.

At a Dutch performance of *No Time To Fly*, I met one of the curators of *If I Can’t Dance*, who expressed her own amazement that she had essentially absconded from one of the biggest art-world opening weekends to attend this performance in a dance context. Even if the Judson Dance Theater stands for crossovers between dance and visual art, for her (and for me) this performance in a dance context is also blessedly free from the need to self-perform, though this was of course not necessarily the case for audience members who belonged to the dance community. It will be interesting to see if performance art can develop more pointed ways of reflecting on and perhaps to some extent disabling the temporal and economical constraints under which performance works come into being—the constraints of our culture of generalized performance. There is freedom to be found in not being present, in missing the event—an event one can then reconstruct and reconfigure from its media fallout, like historical performances.

However, a more difficult but ultimately more rewarding freedom might be gained from working inside the event and turning cybertime against itself.

Sharon Hayes

The Not-Event

Amelia Jones, question framing this dialogue:

What are the costs and benefits of the current move to institutionalize performance art by documenting it (often on websites or in archives), reenacting performances, and/or exhibiting performance art histories in galleries and art museums?

Sharon Hayes

On the one hand, I would be naive to disagree with the stated ground on which this question is formed—that performance, past and present, is enjoying a particular currency at the moment and that that currency relies upon the skillful and seductive materialization of performance(s) in and through various documentary materials: photographs, film, video or audio recordings.

On the other hand, I think it’s important to challenge the assumptions that come along with this assertion: 1) that performance has not heretofore been a part of the institution(s) of art, and 2) that the diverse and unstable field of performance practices (at least those of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries) has not always had a foundational relationship to documentation and documentary materials: written and spoken description, photographs, film, video, audio, etc.

For me a performance is not, and has never been, separable from what (even if refused or denied) carries on in place of the performance later, whether physi...
Sophia Yangdeng Hao
Memory Is Not Transparent

Something happens, but by the time we notice, it has begun without us; our access to the beginning is necessarily incomplete, fragmentary. —Peggy Phelan

The attempt and rejection of the institutionalization of performance artworks is an ongoing dialectic in which I am partially implicated. Between the event, but, in doing so, they alter other elements. I’ve never been disturbed by this but rather have found the tension between what I call the event and what I call the not-event of the document to be productive place to work as an artist. Lately, I’ve been most interested in thinking about performance documentation in relation to Bertolt Brecht’s description of the demonstration. In Brecht’s revolutionary epic-theater, the actor is replaced by the demonstrator Brecht writes:

The demonstrator need not be an artist. The capacities he needs to achieve his aim are in effect universal. Suppose he cannot carry out some particular movement as quickly as the victim he is imitating; all he needs to do is to explain that he moves three times as fast, and the demonstration neither suffers in essentials nor loses its point. On the contrary it is important that he should not be too perfect. His demonstration would be spoilt if the bystanders’ attention were drawn to his powers of transformation. … It is most important that one of the main features of the ordinary theatre should be excluded from our street scene: the engendering of illusion. The street demonstrator’s performance is essentially repetitive. The event has taken place; what you are seeing now is a repeat.13

That this demonstration, this repetition, can circulate within the art institution(s) in a way in which a live act cannot is a material condition to cause dismay but rather one, I think, that can be a field of deep investigation.

Sharon Hoppen’s work moves between multiple mediums—video, performance, installation—in an ongoing investigation into the internecine among history, politics, and speech. She employs conceptual and methodological approaches borrowed from practices such as performance, theater, dance, anthropology, and journalism. Hoppen is an assistant professor at the Cooper Union. www.sharah.info.


By adopting the title of a preexisting artwork, Phlip Bocheur’s Language Is Not Transparent (1975), and restating it as a “memory is not transparent,” Dunning highlighted the obfuscity of NOTES on a return and raised the question of how to engage in acts of memory and remembering without introducing the reduc- tive dynamic of the archive and its paternities, histories. The signifier is from Peggy Phelan, “Dwelling,” in Our New: The Collected of Tishling Horsh, ed. Adrienne Haupt (London and Cambridge, MA: P A Press, 2004), 341.

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Notes on a return began its life as “archival” installations and audio installations. Each of the original artists was invited back and asked to use this archival space as an opportunity to initiate a creative dialogue with his or her memory of the performance. Bean, for example, undertook a physical and private restating of the work itself as a mnemonic tool to trigger her “body-cell memories” of the original performance.14 As noted below, artists from a younger generation were also commissioned to respond to the original performances. In addition to the artists’ own material, each installation consisted of facsimiles of letters between the artists, audience members, and the curators, notes and sketches made by artists and audience members, and past reviews of the artworks. While this material referred to the performances, its origin did not lie in the actual moment of the live event, but in the periods before and after it. The primary elements in the archival installations were audio interviews with the artists themselves, in which they recounted the work. In tandem to this, audio interviews were made with specific audience members who witnessed each work. These interviews took all place in the (physical) space within the gallery where the works had originally been performed, even though that space has since changed beyond all recognition. It was this material from before and after the original performances that provided the starting point for the new works by the artists from a younger generation. Each of these artists was paired with one of the artists who made the featured 1980s performances and given his or her contact details, in expectation that each younger artist would initiate a dialogue: Viola Yeşiltaş, who was paired with


Viola Yeşiltac, Adding Salt to the Sea, 2009, installation detail, NOTES on a return, Laing Art Gallery, 2009 (artwork © Viola Yeşiltac, photograph by the artist)

Archival Exhibitions: Bruce McLean, 2009, installation detail, NOTES on a return, Laing Art Gallery, 2009 (artwork © Bruce McLean, photograph by the author)

vnotes
Writer John Dummett (right) with his work Memory Is Not Transparent, 2009 (artwork © John Dummett, photograph by Stephen Collins).

Dummett was one of three writers commissioned to make live writings in response to the NOTES on a return symposium and performance events.

English, chose to not develop a dialogue with English, however, but instead focused exclusively on the audio recording of the interview with her. In a statement for the project’s final publication, English speaks of being “unprepared for the forceful shock of recognition I experienced in seeing Viola Yeşiltac’s installation, Adding Salt to the Sea . . . . This visceral response I myself had was, I remembered, something that I had read in reviews about my own work of the 1980s which ‘left behind a dumbstruck audience thrown to the edge of some complex insight.’ . . . . I found myself in turn dumbstruck, moved to tears and thrown to the edge of some complex insight—but of what?”

From only the recounting of an event, Yeşiltac reconstructs a tangible and visceral presence for the new version of the work and demonstrates in her approach how this action of recounting grounds the meanings and specifically the insights offered by the live event. Moreover, Yeşiltac discounts the necessity of attempting to replay or reenact an identified moment in time as the methodology to situate performance work inside the institution and art history.

NOTES on a return operated as a present-tense staging of history. This present tense dispels the apparent certainties often purveyed within the discourses of the institution and art history when past performances are exhibited. NOTES on a return worked with the strategic notion of the event (or history itself) as an ongoing
Sophia Yadong Hao is a curator and artist. Her curatorial projects include NOTES on a return, which critiqued the documentation of performance art by staging history as a set of live questions that query the reasons and conditions for remembering. Her current curatorial research is focused on the functions of the world’s collaboration as a de-materialised studio. Hao is currently curator of exhibitions at the Visual Research Centre, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, in Scotland.

Branislav Jakovljević

On Performance Forensics: The Political Economy of Reenactments

The question concerning documentation, reenactment, and exhibiting of past performances points to the temporality of before and after; of sequentiality, endurance, and survival; of the materiality of traces and their permanence. It also points to the reversed order of writing in performance: the kind of "textual" production intuited by the early modern theater, according to which labor is not ever lost but, paradoxically, remains forever irretrievable. This labor as investment and accumulation points, finally, to the order of actuality: what once may have happened is made actual, that which was a contingency turns into law.

Conventional capitalist economies make use of both efficacy and possibility. They seek to extend (and profit from) the promise of future repetitions of that which was once actualized and regularized. It seems that with performance art, this work differently. The history of attempts at reenacting one-off experimental performances suggests that the reenactments always stop with the desire to actualize, to turn contingency into law.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s there was a series of stage revivals of the works of the pre–World War II avant-garde. For example, the 1980s Mel Gordon worked on restaging performances of Russian Constructivists and German Expressionists (e.g., scenes from Vsevolod Meyerhold’s 1922 landmark production The Magnanimus Cuckold and Lothar Schreyer’s Cuckoo from 1930). This work on excavation and restoration of past works of the theatrical avant-garde prompted some scholarly interest in performance reconstruction. In his introduction to the 1984 special issue of The Drama Review dedicated to this stage practice, its editor Michael Kirby wrote that because reconstruction is "theoretically"—"guided by standards other than contemporary taste, it offers us the possibility of something unexpected, surprising, and radically different."26 Kirby hoped that the actuality of the work would somehow automatize and preserve the properties of its "original" potential. Not only did it fail to do so, it was unsuccessful in forging new reconstructions.

Virtually all experiments in performance reconstruction have ended with the desire to actualize, to turn contingency into law. The answer it furnishes at the same time is that it serves to produce more documents, but of a different kind—photographs, video recordings, books—returning us to the good old economy of commodity production. 27

In another article published at the end of the 1980s, the sound artist Gregory Whitehead took the disaster of the Space Shuttle Challenger as a point of departure. In his 1988 paper "The Forensic Theater," Whitehead took the disaster of the space shuttle Challenger as a point of departure. The latter omits the scope of the field of vision to include that which was deemed invisible.

Over the past two decades, the development of new technologies has created the illusion of total retention and total recall. If performance art of the 1960s and 1970s sought to undo the theatricality of death, to use Franko’s words, it now produces life by now seen as a new kind of text. In their 2002 book, Theatre/Archaeology, Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks argue for a performance archaeology (and archaeology conceived as performance) that draws “upon disciplines, principles, methods and terminologies other than those of textual analysis.”28 Relying on documents and artifacts, performance archaeology turns from textual analysis to the analysis of textures. Not surprisingly, Shanks and Pearson find the epiphenomenon of the forensic theater. The forensic site is plagued by the sense of heightened significance. In it, the smallest detail becomes impregnated with meaning; “everything is potentially important;” “every contact leaves a trace,” “anything can be relevant at the scene of crime.” It is this sense of the infinite possibility of retrieval that drives some of the most acclaimed recent artworks that employ documentary technique. Consider, for example, Auri Sala’s 1998 video piece Intervista, in which the author enlists lor rela- 


27. In the 1980s, the attempts at performance reconstruction in theater and dance took place within the cultural moment that was marked, in the field of theory, by the idea of postmodernism, and in culture in general, by wide proliferation of new technologies of recording and dissemination of images, such as video and satellite and cable television. The new technologies for capturing, manipulation, and dissemination of images were of central importance for artists such as Sherry Levine and Richard Prince. Indeed, an inventory of “re-inventions” of the 1980s would be incomplete without the mention of repairing or replicating. (Gerold Maron’s article on Levine, a major protagonist of appropriation art, is entitled, appropriately, “Art in the Replicating,” see Art News 85, no. 5 (May 1986): 90–99.) The question of appropriation art and its relation to performance is vital, but it would take me beyond the scope of the present discussion. Suffice it to say here that the development of new reproductive and communication technologies, which significantly accelerated in the 1990s, had an impact on performance that goes beyond appropriation art, video documentation, and the digital manipulation of images.


This method was subsequently used in a number of other disaster sites, such as Indonesia after the 2004 tsunami and New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Dürrenmatt’s play The Visit. What drives the interest in and approval of this kind of documentary work is not only the wonder of technological possibility of the total retrieval (reperformance) of the past, but an underlying ideological imperative of the universal redress and reparation of misdeeds from the past.

Last in this inventory of “re-” artworks that I want to address is the project Mathemes of Reassociation by Grupa Spomenik (Monument Group), a collective of artists and theoreticians from Belgrade in Serbia and Tuzla in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Established in 2002 in response to the Belgrade city government’s open call for proposals for a public monument dedicated to all victims of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, the group proclaimed the monument to be its public meetings in which participants debated this attempt at an ideologically blind take on the recent violent past in the former Yugoslavia. The group started its most significant project to date, Mathemes of Reassociation, on the occasion of Belgrade’s 49th October Salon in 2008. The work was presented as a series of public lectures that took place over the course of five days. In three of these lectures, the invited speakers were forensic anthropologists, forensic archaeologists, and DNA analysts from the International Commission of Missing Persons (ICMP) located in the Bosnian cities of Sarajevo, Tuzla, and Lukavac. ICMP was established in 1996, soon after the cessation of armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in order to assist with the resolution of the large number of citizens who went missing in the armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia from 1991 to 1995. In Bosnia and Herzegovina alone, the number of missing was over thirty thousand. Over time, the main project of ICMP became the identification of the remains of the 1995 genocide in the east Bosnian enclave of Srebrenica, in which some eight thousand men and boys had been summarily executed. In order to hide the crime, the perpetrators dug out the bodies and reburied them in secondary and tertiary graves, which called for the development of new and innovative methods of bone reassociation and DNA analysis.30

In a lecture Grupa Spomenik organized as a part of Mathemes of Reassociation, the ICMP forensic anthropologist Admir Jugo explained that, as the result of reburials in the aftermath of the Srebrenica massacre, a single primary grave could be related to as many as thirteen known secondary graves, and that parts of the body of one individual were found in four different graves. In another lecture the DNA analyst Šejla Idrizbegović spoke about the process of matching of DNA samples harvested from the surviving relatives and extracted from the bones found in the mass graves. The lectures of scientists engaged by ICMP expounded on the two key phases in the process of identification of victims. The title Mathemes of Reassociation refers to these two phases. The first is the allocation of the bar code to each sample so that DNA analysts work with “blind samples.” According to ICMP, this temporary suppression of information about the victim’s ethnic identity guarantees the objectivity of the procedure of identification of the remains. The second phase, reassociation, refers to either physical matching of the crushed bones or grouping of the remains through DNA analysis. Idrizbegović has pointed out, the ICMP and the families of the victims consider 77 percent of an individu-
al’s skeletal remains sufficient to carry out a burial. This reassociation of the pul
verized body and its reintegration into its ethnic and religious community stands for the reintegration of the country devastated by war, albeit on ideological and political premises that caused the war in the first place.

It is precisely this politics of reassociation in terms of ethnic identity that the members of Grupa Sponenik want to bring into question. Apart from the scientists from ICMP, they organized a lecture for the young Bosnian writer Sejla Sabahović, who gave a public reading of her story “Rovejda.” In the story, a young Bosnian woman living in the United States comes back to Bosnia to give a blood sample for the identification of the remains of her missing grandfather; at the last moment she grabs the vial with her blood and storms out of the identification center. In his lecture “Gendering the Bone,” Damir Arsenijević, a Tužla-based member of Grupa Sponenik, takes this instance from Sabahović’s story as a “moment which cuts through the symbolic” of the law. Her action refuses precisely the ideological coercion of the actuality of the moment implemented as the law that insists on the bringing back, reassembling and “reassociating” the body in what Arsenijević calls the “brute here and now.” As Arsenijević points out, the efficacy of this law depends on repressing the actual body, which remains “beyond the limits of law’s symbolization, revealing its finiteness, arbitrariness, revealing the limitation of its power, revealing it as incomplete.”

In her lecture “Towards an Emancipatory Politics of Witnessing,” another Tužla-based member of Grupa Sponenik, Jasmina Husanović, describes this law as the law of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the state designed and administratively facilitated by international bodies such as the European Union and the United Nations. Husanović recognizes the medicalization (of the past), the mythologization (of the present), and the depoliticization (of the community) as the three main strategies of this state whose citizens are trapped in a state of postwar and postsocialist transition. This is the state in which, as Arsenijević points out, people rummage through dustbins because 15 percent of them live below the poverty line—a state that depends precisely on the production of reassembled bodies, on bringing the dead back into the present, on reperforming the trauma, because it furnishes the ideological operation according to which the “discourse of trauma displaces the discourse of hunger.” Yet, the bodies that are brought back and made the centerpiece of elaborate spectacles of reburial stubbornly refuse their full reintegration into this political economy of erasure. This erasure has material and ideological effects. I end with the words of Arsenijević, which he offered in response to the question from Milica Tomić, one of Grupa Sponenik’s founders, about “surplus bones,” the skeletal remains that remained unidentified and unburied: “If the unidentified bones are the result of genocide politics, then the politics of the society after the genocide is, in fact, the politics of [making an] ossuary of that remaining surplus of bones, that invisible remainder that you can’t integrate any more, and you don’t know what to do with it.”

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William Pope.L

Canary in the Coal Mine

o. Institutionalized art performance reenactment is about empying as much as it is about remembering. Memory is a smoke screen for a set of anxieties possessed by both the packrat and the king. Both hoard to define some unspoken, unrecognizable absence. Both use the myopia of repetition to pleasure their perspective and bestow upon their project an illusion of progress and community.

o. Warhol’s object production was an incredibly narrow, near-perfect bit of institutionalized art performance. If everything is an object then no one gets near, no one gets in, no one gets hurt. His performance created pleasure by reproducing a poor representation of a thing. The thing itself incited pleasure, a sense of safety in the familiar. The poverty of the objects signaled something lost. A poverty of liveness? Maybe the absence of real things and bodies helps us to keep afloat in the fantasy that we are above all being alive.

1. Karaoke is an example of performance reenactment in which participants derive pleasure by knowingly reperforming that which has been reperformed many times before. A poorly performed example can be a terrific example. Drinking alcohol, loud carousing, singing off-key late into the darkness collaborate in a ritual obliteration, the goal being community-cohesion via public obliteration. Can you reenact something until it’s rendered completely invisible? Until its true color finally shows through? A transparent color suffused in dust, cobwebs, and melancholy?

1. Performance reenactment has been an important part of Fluxus art practice for some time now and serves a similar function as it does for karaoke: group cohesion. The ritual repetition of some action or event by a group helps to mark that group off from another. The reenactment is reenacted as the ultimate thing. The concerns and fears of the group are contained in the repetition. The difference between reenactments is negligible. Reenacting empowers the group and disempowers originality, craft, the author, and property.

1.0. However, there is a strong element of self-consciousness in Fluxus; for example, the obsession with documentation. If karaoke is memorialized via the hangover, Fluxus is memorialized via the boxed performance relic. Notwithstanding Fluxus’s utopic desire to level the playing field of art, the issue of quality still matters. Unlike karaoke, differences between performers and performances in Fluxus are tracked very carefully.

1. Fluxus is part of the avant-garde tradition, and its early rationales were platformed on challenges to property, the author, and originality. Today these rationales remain but rub uncomfortably against the movement’s more businesslike attitudes. So—when Fluxus is happening and the status quo isn’t burning, what is being obliterated?

2. The recent attempts to institutionalize performance art by major museums and galleries mark a desire to make packaged objects of a form. Performance art as a form is unique because of its live character, its supposed unrepeatability, which has allowed it to slip and slide through the cracks of the market. Indeed, cultural

32. Ibid., 2.
institutionalization usually involves strategies which maximize profit, use, or value by enabling the multiple consumption of a product. The ideal is to sell a single product as many times as possible. Unlike karaoke or Broadway, art performance typically secures its rep via very few performances; sometimes we only know of certain canonical performances via legend.

2.2 The collecting of performance objects, residues, props, scores, and zines laid the groundwork for the end of the idea of live performance as the final defense against the “sale.” The advent of videotape was the penultimate nail in the coffin. Suddenly the vaunted unrepeatability of performance was in question. Even so, a videotape is not the thing itself. However, if an idea or a piece of music or a novel or a sports star can be sold, why not a performance? What is a performance but a bundle of ideas? Theater has been selling bundles of ideas for a few centuries.

2.3 Is resistance to the art market essential for performance art? Did its celebrated slippery resistance ever truly exist? Is resistance an obsolete concept for today’s consumers?

3. For my money, resistance to established power is always necessary, even if, especially if, the established power is radical, avant-garde, or subversive.

3.1 Or a gleaming castle on a hill that sells artworks, snacks, and central heating.

4. Yes, let’s set aside reenactment, performance art, liveness, and institutionalization for a moment and focus on bigger fish, like social responsibility.

4.1 Let’s put our foot down and state something significant: resistance itself is a product. What would real resistance look like? Real resistance always looks like betrayal cause it’s extremely difficult if not impossible to defeat an enemy and not become the enemy.

4.2 Let’s say live performance art is some kind of canary in the coal mine. What is its death trying to tell us? Or more interestingly, its middle years, what are they trying to tell us about a form that lives and dies on liveness? And what does it mean for artmaking not only as a practice but as a business?

5. After life, we, performance artists, should sell what? Tacos? Medical supplies for diabetes? Real estate in California? No, the real shit, the next shit, is the soul. I don’t know if it actually exists, but I know almost everybody wants one.

5.1 And in terms of marketing, if it doesn’t exist, that makes it even more special.
Something exciting accompanied the arrival, roughly a decade ago, of reenactments by artists such as Tania Bruguera, Jeremy Deller, Omer Fast, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Pierre Huyge, Tina Seghal, and others. A ubiquitous trope, made banal through its use in community theater, historical pageants, and crime TV, suddenly acquired formal and critical punch. Perhaps it was the pervasiveness and obsessiveness of reenactment that gave it this edge. After all, why stage an event or an artwork when, in our digital era, you can easily sample it online? Why do the temporal and material demands of reenactment make it such a compelling aesthetic device?

Exhibitions and performance series in Europe and North America fueled my curiosity about reenactment’s resurgence. Revisiting political, social, and cultural histories, artists participating in these programs turned reenactment against itself to make the past anachronistically current. Under such illusion that they could faithfully reproduce bygone eras or revist a coherent past, they sought to surpass mere citation by staging affective relationships with historical figures and events, seeming to process them through the bodies of the living. To researchers and scholars, these projects offered fresh ways of experiencing, analyzing, and archiving time-based art. Informed by feminism and other countercultural positions that valued process above product, time-based art had often eluded conventional scholarly approaches and consequently was underrepresented and critically devalued. Perhaps reenactment could make ephemeral works that had previously been studied via photographic documentation or fast-deteriorating video tangibly present. To facilitate that process, through individual performance reenactments or homages, artists have become historians themselves, making a space for other artists within their work. As a skill in their creative precursors with gestures that profess to give them their belated due. Both the bodies of artists producing reenactments and those of other people that they involve in the realization of their remakes become conduits between now and then. Embodied approaches to animating a preexisting archive such as these present a non-linear view of time in which past, present, and future coexist. They resonate with the literary critic Elizabeth Freeman’s conception of queer temporality as “a non-narrative history written with the body, in which the performer channels another body . . . making this body available to a context unfamiliar in its bearer’s lived historical moment.”

While it takes about twenty-five years for fashion trends to become desirable “vintage”—witness the return of 1980s-style shoulder pads, leggings, and asymmetrical haircuts today—we tend to be able to gain perspective on the social and cultural past after approximately two generations have elapsed. As with fashion revivals, at this point our ideas about previous eras coalesce around stereotypes and generalizations. Promoting a speculative view of both current and former times, reenactment offers the possibility of a more complex view of history that acknowledges the effects of historical representation on art’s dissemination and reception. This form of “sideshadowing,” as the literary scholar Gary Saul Morson terms it, aims to open the past to reveal untold maybe-have-beens and might-haves, rather than following the prioritized paths suggested by foreshadowing.

Intrigued by these fresh ways of revisiting history, in 2008 I organized Not Quite How I Remember It at the Power Plant in Toronto. As its title implies, the exhibition explored the space between an event and its recollection and memorialization. Many works built on earlier radical social and artistic projects in order to reflect upon the disparity between their utopian promise and our less idealistic times. Following Candice Breitz’s conception of artistic influence as a pattern of “call and response,” the physical act of copying another person’s work took on overtones of apprenticeship and learning, empathy and homage.

Can the present harbor the past as the ground shelters a dormant seed, the exhibition asked? Can a living artist collaborate with a dead one? Or, as the artist Darío Robleto wondered of his piece I Miss Everyone-Who Has Ever Gone Away, a flimsy mobile made from the shiny wrappers in a Felix Gonzalez-Torres “candy spill” that Robleto made in 1991 and reconstructed in Toronto, “Can a creative gesture begun by one artist be passed like a baton through the years to be continued or completed by another artist in another time so that it never has to end but fulfills Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s ambition to become ‘endless copies?’”

Helena Reckitt

To Make Something Appear

5. So—the next product for us, performance artists, to sell is the soul. Not our own, of course. Why would we want to do that? But the thing itself.

5. And let’s say for argument’s sake, we’ve already established our practice. Business is good. We’ve amputated a foot or a hand or a leg or a sex part here or there, always thinking at the back of our minds that if things get really tough we’ve still got the organs and the head. Then, of course, the hard times arrive, maybe they stay too long until one day the only thing we have left to sell is whatever is essential that makes us human—

[William—please enter a short bio of 60-80 words here, or e-mail to me at freeman@northwestern.edu]
ton, [1968]), 139–42. 47. Though the suffragette Alice Paul wrote the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923, it is still not United States law, as only thirty-five of the necessary thirty-eight states ratified it.

By turning time-based works into tableaux vivants and drawing on well-known documentary photographs, Abramović failed to account for the differences of time and place, context and body between her source material and its restaging. Far from reigniting the vitality of past works, her project under recourse performance’s limitations. For all the physical demands that they put on her, Abramović’s composed, pictorial set pieces seemed museological—even mausoleum-like. They left the uncomfortable impression that, now that performance art’s time is passed, it can be codified and canonized as just another genre, devoid of its original meaning and impact. To take another example, I recently learned of a reprise of Yoko Ono’s Cut Piece, originally performed in 1964, the reprise was staged in 2009 as part of a North American museums show on the mode.44 As an artist associated with Fluxus, which fostered the concept of art as a score to be interpreted, and one of the pioneering female artists of the early 1960s, Ono was an understandable choice. But the reenactment departed from her work in problematic ways. In the now-celebrated original, Ono kneels on stage with scissors that audience members used to cut away her clothes. Her emotionless expression and still body became blank screens upon which members of the public projected and acted out their fantasies. However, the remake by Julianna Barabas and Kristen Hutchinson did away with Ono’s mute inertia; Barabas, assuming Ono’s role, instead conversed with gallery visitors and encouraged their participation. When asked about this change, Barabas explained that the conservative nature of the museum and its public made her wary of alienating the audience.45 But this substitution of conviviality for aggravation demeans Ono’s work of its criticality and its aim. After all, the response of audiences to Ono’s provocative passivity was part of its point. While in Tokyo they were tentative, at the 1966 Destruction in Art Symposium in London the crowd’s aggression prompted security guards to offer Ono protection.46

Such restagings function largely as quotations. They serve to shore up their source’s reputation while gaining from their association with it. Reducing radical projects to images and brands, they ignore or accept uncritically the shifts in time, place, and context between the contemporary versions and their precursors. Despite their spirit of homage, these works often reduce rather than reflect the power and complexity of the art that they honor. “The ego wants to incorpo-
rate this object into itself,” Freud wrote of early object relations, “and, in accor-
dance with the oral or cannibalistic phase of libidinal development at which it is, it wants to do so by devouring it.”47 Similarly, these citation reproduces consume their precursors in the process of appropriating them. To be fair, anachronism and tautology always grounded artistic reenactment, generating its powerful status as aesthetically dubious. Based in historical narrative, figural representation, literary references, and theatricality—those declared enemies of vanguard art that Michael Fried notoriously denounced in his influential 1967 article “Art and Objecthood”—this work is out of step with the mainstream twentieth-century avant-garde. Certainly, reenactment is not inherently radical, critical, or interesting: as we know, even the most audacious and chal-
enging art can coalesce quickly into a new aesthetic status quo. But such dilution is inevitable in reenactments that stay at the level of citation, where the processes of historical representation—what gets remembered, what gets forgotten, by whom and how—remain unexamined.

Several artists who work in a historically reflexive way have addressed some of these problems within their work. In the ongoing performance series begun in 2005, In the Near Future, Sharon Hayes stands on the street and holds placards bearing
tableaux vivants of earlier political protests, such as “Who Approved the WAR in Vietnam?” from the US 1960s antwar movement, and “I Am A MAN,” the Memphis sanitation workers’ rallying cry that became famous as both a demand and an image when Martin Luther King, Jr., traveled to Memphis in 1968 to sup-
port to their march and was assassinated. Clearly not a typical demonstrator, Hayes is decidedly unemotional. Blank, dazed, and affectless, she appears as a living relic of and a witness to an outdated and endangered form of public dissent. Anachronistic signs create a sense of time that is layered and confused: who is this woman and what does she want? In many cases, however, demands that seem past actually remain current. “Rafiy the E.R.A. Notes” recalls the fact that Equal Rights Amendment Act never became law, while “Votes for Women” reminds us that women throughout the world lack many rights, not just the vote.48 Though far from nostalgic, Hayes’s works evoke a sense of troubled longing for earlier periods of urgency and radicalism.
For the recent project I March in the Parade of Liberty, But as Long as I Love You I’m Not Free, begun in New York in 2008, Hayes once again takes to the streets. Standing on various corners, again alone, she speaks into a megaphone as if to a long-forgotten lower. Combining chants from earlier political protests with more intimate forms of address (including the prison letter written by Oscar Wilde to Alfred Douglas that was published posthumously as “De Profundis”), Hayes calls out to a “you” who is at once a person and representative of a collective movement. Desperate to contact an elusive loved one, Hayes evokes the stages of erotic and political infatuation—the shared excitement and euphoria followed by disillusionment, to contact an elusive loved one, Hayes evokes the stages of erotic and political infatuation—the shared excitement and euphoria followed by disillusionment, and departure. Speaking of In the Near Future, Hayes has described her role as that of a placeholder. “I’m holding the place of a kind of address that had meaning and resonance and impact at a certain moment in time. And I’m thinking about the possibility that that resonance and impact could be present at a future time.” Her anachronistic forms of public address make time appear as a legacy passed on between generations and perhaps prompts questions about how subsequent times will represent our own. Moreover, her art sharpens our awareness of historical place and perhaps prompts questions about how subsequent eras will represent our own.

Hayes’s work shares much with the concept of “temporal drag” that Elizabeth Freeman uses to explain our powerful identifications with earlier activist and cultural projects. Evoking the appeal of movements and moments that are not just past but seemingly passé, Freeman stresses the drag act’s immersion in “retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past upon the present.” In her discussion of Elisabeth Subrin’s 1997 film Shulie, Freeman considers the prelife of radical feminism. An almost shot-by-shot remake of a 1967 film about the nascent feminist activist and author Shulamith Firestone, unlike most works that are revisited through reenactment Shulie derives from source material that is hardly iconic. In fact this obscure student film was never distributed, partly because Firestone asked its makers not to release it. Far from erecting a feminist heroine, Shulie, Freeman argues, “partakes in the love of failure, the rescue of ephemera, that constitutes the most angst-ridden slice of queer camp performance.” Exploring the awkward immaturity of both Firestone and the women’s movement that she would help to lead, Freeman sees in the film an examination of feminism’s unrealized potential. “Shulie consistently undermines the idea that an intact political program has been handed down from older women to younger ones,” suggests Freeman. “The messy, transitional status of [Shulie’s] thinking asks us to imagine the future in terms of experiences that discourse has not yet caught up with, rather than as a legacy passed on between generations.”

Artists like Hayes and Subrin and writers like Freeman acknowledge our complex affiliations with countercultural projects that exceed our own historical times, and our efforts—however troubled, doomed, or flawed—to access them through reenactment. “Laying political desire and personal desire on top of one another,” as Hayes has described her work doing, these artists and thinkers suggest that we harness and breathe life into radical movements and moments whose time, though passed, has yet to arrive.

Helena Reckitt is senior lecturer in curating at Goldsmiths College, University of London. She is organizing a solo exhibition of Karen Cymmer’s work for Oshawa Galleys, Ontario, and is one of the curators for the 2012 edition of Nuit Blanche in Toronto.

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