

Time-Based History: Perspectives on Documenting Performance

Nik Wakefield

In this review of literature on performance documentation, I aim to highlight strengths and weaknesses of existing scholarship in order to suggest ways in which the field might develop. Although I will be most forthright about my own stakes in this development at the conclusion of this review, I should say that my perspective is oriented toward the fields of performance philosophy and practice as research, while also invested in fashioning a temporal aesthetics, or what I call the time-specificity of performance. This text is positioned a step before a more fulsome elaboration of time-specificity but nevertheless addresses the need for such a concept through its very process of selection. For example, the kinds of literature to be found here are mostly all located *after* performance. Few take account of the production of documents before and during performance, such as the scores that are a part of much contemporary dance practice or the elements of performance that are being taken up by many in the field of poetic practice. Part of what time-specificity acknowledges is the multiple temporalities of performance: the before, during, and after, and how they persist through time.

This review begins with the notion of ephemerality as ontological disappearance, as posited by Peggy Phelan. I also take up the wide array of responses to Phelan from performance theory and practice, while also adding in some perspectives from art history and criticism, philosophy, and political theory. Some of these writings were published before *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993) but were not included in that study nor taken up as responses to it. Central concepts that I will explore in what follows are, of course, documentation and performance, but also disappearance, presence, archive, archaeology, memory, becoming, form, and, finally, vital materialism and time-specificity.

Why is a review of this literature important? Because an understanding of practical and theoretical approaches to documenting performance has implications for the historiography and institutionalization of theatre, drama, and performance. More importantly, a sense of clarity on the two dominant practices of our field, performing and writing, is necessary in order to maintain the confidence to sustain such practices. Exploring the relation between writing and performance might bond artistic and academic communities through evaluation and demystification. I write and perform to find out what you will perform and write back to me. Between us is the affirmation of difference, the emergence of value translated not as tolerance or agreement, but rather as heterogeneity. This is perhaps what makes a review important, as it is itself a document of multiple performances: performances of thought, critical thinking, and writing that sustain the continuity of multiplicity in a diverse field.

Disappearing Presence Performing Live

The questions surrounding the documentation of performance have generated a vast amount of discourse. Photography and writing are often the primary mediums academics use to access

Nik Wakefield conducts artistic research in the realm of performance philosophy. His practice-based PhD is titled *Time-Specificity of Performance*. Recent solo works include *Three* and *2: untitled*, performed in London, Helsinki, California, and New York. He participates in international conferences through presenting and organizing, and recently founded a gallery of practice as research. He received an MA with Distinction in Practising Theatre and Performance from Aberystwyth University and a BFA Cum Laude from Boston University in Theatre Arts. Nik has worked professionally with Heritage Arts Company, Every House Has a Door, Robert Wilson, and Punchdrunk.

performance outside their own spatiotemporal location. Discourses about performance and documentation often lean into philosophical territory as researchers find themselves needing to clarify what it is exactly that is being documented and the relationships performance has to photography and writing.

In the field of performance studies Phelan's 1993 book *Unmarked* has shaped much of the debate about how performance is documented and what it is. She writes that performance "becomes itself through disappearance" (Phelan 1993, 146). It is an axiom of Phelan's theory of ephemerality that what once was now is lost. She posits that the critic's work has the potential to erase the performance. That any complete documentation of performance itself is impossible is stated precisely in order to stake an ideological position regarding performance's radical stance against commodification. Phelan's is an ontological argument in the face of the archive, gallery, and museum as structures of capital. It defines performance as something that cannot be sold because it is gone before it is over. Although Phelan's point about disappearance has come to dominate appraisals of her subtle and nuanced work, she goes on to make important points about how different kinds of writing can retain the ephemerality of performance.

In direct opposition to Phelan's privileging of disappearance is Philip Auslander's 1999 book *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. He takes issue with any notion of directness in the experience of performance before it is written about. His argument is that the same mediatization that for Phelan erases performance is already functioning as an inherent aspect of experience. Performance is already mediatized, so documenting it cannot be said to alter it.

Advancing this argument in a 2006 article titled "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," Auslander defends the role of documentation as a formative part of rather than secondary practice to performance. He states that documentation can be the end goal of performance, referencing Kathy O'Dell who had previously argued that "performance is the virtual equivalent of its documentation," a reciprocal approach that perhaps deviates from Auslander's overall argument of an aesthetic of mediatization (O'Dell 1997, 3). Auslander goes further, suggesting that some performances are even staged in ways that configure documentation as more important than the audience. Unconvinced by an intersubjective definition of performance as an act between performer and audience, Auslander posits that if performance were really about this relationship then documentation would not omit the audience, as it does in most cases (Auslander 2006, 7).

Amelia Jones has written extensively on the issue of presence and its role in both performance and documentation. Like Auslander, Jones seeks to problematize the notion of an original and pure performance. In a 1997 article, "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," she defends the position of only being able to view performance as documentation because the differences "are largely logistical rather than ethical or hermeneutic" (Jones 1997, 11). For Jones, whether one attends to performance or documentation makes little if any difference because "neither has a privileged relationship to the historical 'truth' of the performance" (Jones 1997, 11).

In her extensive article on Marina Abramović's "The Artist is Present," published in 2011, Jones expands on her earlier work, arguing that the artist is not actually present if we accept that presence is something that cannot be documented or commodified. For Jones, an art historian, performance must be able to be preserved. Sympathetic to Jones, and yet still prioritizing the phenomena of experience, is Simon Bayly, who in his 2011 book *Pathognomy of Performance* reveals the complexity of the issue, writing that while "'presence' is never coexistent with its experience . . . the 'liveness' of human (co-)presence is still something profoundly and doggedly meaningful"

(2011, 57). Bayly admits that the relation between performance and presence is not simple. Perhaps this is its very importance. His perspective is persuasive unless one advocates an evolution in which performance becomes a subgenre of photography or film more easily reproduced mechanically for widespread dissemination. Jones and Auslander rightly reveal the non-original and already mediated operations of performance. While their points are surely not calling for an end to performance, they do run the risk of problematizing liveness to the point of it losing value. In contrast, Bayly admits that presence is not secured by performance without severing the tie to living experience.

In 2012 Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield published their edited tome *Perform Repeat Record: Live Art in History*, in which commentators grapple with how to historicize performance, with documentation and disappearance emerging as central themes. The first section of the book, entitled “Theories,” contains numerous essays, most of which, like Auslander’s “The Performativity of Performance Documentation,” specifically respond to Phelan’s notion of disappearance. For example, Sven Lütticken argues against the notion of disappearance by referencing the dematerialization at the heart of contemporary art practices such as that of Tino Seghal. The fact that no material or documentation may be produced or disseminated about Seghal’s work is the exact reason his practice becomes so highly valued and commodified in a culture based on performing for capital. Christopher Bedford’s response to Phelan is also convincing; he argues for an ontology of performance that acknowledges the way it continues into the future and multiplies historically, stating that “performance is a myth-making medium and as such essentially viral in nature” (Bedford, in Jones and Heathfield 2012, 86).

Reenacting Remains

One provocative response to Phelan’s framework is Rebecca Schneider’s 2011 book *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, which expands on theories advanced in an earlier article titled “Performance Remains” (2001). Schneider critiques Phelan’s logic, making use of the process of reenactment and Jacques Derrida’s 1998 book *Archive Fever*. She argues that Phelan’s privileging of an ontology of performance as disappearance ends up reinforcing the “logic of the archive” (Schneider 2011, 98).

Rather than ontology, Schneider applies a theory of reenactment in order to arrive at a version of performance that does not disappear. Her title thus has two meanings: realizing that reenactors perform remains signals that performance remains. Reenactment, Schneider suggests, shows that performance reappears. Following this logic, “when we approach performance . . . as . . . remaining we are almost immediately forced to admit that remains do not have to be isolated in the document” (Schneider 2011, 101). If Phelan’s argument was to encourage modes of writing able to capture the ephemeral ontology of performance, Schneider’s point is to take care with how the remains of performance are returned to. As useful and convincing as both these approaches are, they also are positioned after the performance. It will be useful also to have theoretical frameworks that take account of performance before and during its becoming, a point to which I will return.

In his 2007 book *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance*, Matthew Reason finds that disappearance is a contradiction, because “some continued existence and retention within memory is always at least implied” (Reason 2007, 26). He also examines the tensions between mechanical and live reproduction—in the case of big-budget musicals, for example—and notes that even in this situation a “transience” exists in the link between the live body and the represented character (Reason 2007, 18 and 20). But here Reason makes the

assumption that the live body can lay claim to authenticity, which Auslander and Jones would take issue with.

In her article on Marina Abramović, Jones points to an implication of reenactments in the same way Schneider points to the hidden function of the archive. Each makes knowledge available for future “repetition” (Schneider 2011, 108). Jones writes: “While often posed as confirming the truth of the past, paradoxically re-enactments activate the now as always already over, the present always already turning into the future—and both continually escaping human knowledge” (Jones 2011, 43). Jones shows that tensions between past and present are inherent in both documentation and reenactment, as neither of these phenomena would be complete without a double and more. Further complicating Jones’ conception of the impossibility of an original moment, Adrian Heathfield and Andrew Quick, in their introduction to “On Memory,” a special issue of the journal *Performance Research* in 2000, indicate the similarities between memory and reenactment, explaining that the work of reenacting performance is analogous to an act of memory, in that the “lost originary moment is (partially) retrieved and reconstituted” (Heathfield and Quick 2000, 1).

Reenactment brings with it the same paradox that is found in photography, according to Susan Sontag in her 1973 monograph *On Photography*. She explains that photographs have a “pseudo-presence” because the image is a material artifact existing now; but the photograph is also “a token of absence” because it is contingent on a past event that was photographed (Sontag 1973, 16). In 1989, Henry M. Sayre made a similar comment in *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde Since 1970*. His dialectic of presence and absence is construed as “ritual” and “narrative” (Sayre 1989, 17). The former does while the latter tells.

The phenomenon of reenactment problematizes performance as ever able to be original because it returns something that may have otherwise been considered lost. Reenactment reveals that performance is rarely, if ever, singular. It functions with memory and enforces a nature of multiplicity concerning its origin. Abramović herself prescribes a method of reenactment that by its lack of specificity reveals this difficult issue, saying that “any re-enactment should address the big issues that the original piece was about at the time” (Abramović, in Jones and Heathfield 2012, 554). Which issues are big is a question that I will return to at greater length below.

Jan Verwoert’s 2010 book *Tell Me What You Want, What You Really, Really Want* looks at how community is made through art and philosophy. Echoing Auslander, Verwoert’s comment on visual art could just as well describe the contradiction hidden in documents as in reenactments: “These paintings are not a live performance. But they perform live” (Verwoert 2010, 151). What they perform live and the implications arising from this are more problematic. Focusing on how artists appropriate history, Verwoert tellingly questions a central caveat of appropriation, which may also be an aspect of reenactments: “The only thing we should maybe be less optimistic about is the possibility of thinking of the object of appropriation and the knowledge it generates in terms of property” (Verwoert 2010, 134). The notion of property brings with it the notion of possession, and thus the economic implications of reenactments mirror the issues of authenticity that Jones questions in Abramović’s redo’s of other artists’ performances.

Historical repetition brings up the fundamental question at the heart of Jones and Heathfield’s *Perform Repeat Record*: how to do performance art history. Perhaps live art should be studied like painting, in which students copy masterpieces in order to develop personal technique; or as drama, in which seminal performances become reenactable scores no different from *Hamlet*, with a credited author and a copyrighted form. In both cases, understanding the nature of memory is helpful. As Jan Verwoert explains,

As you write or paint, words you have read or images you have seen elsewhere (including those which you have forgotten) are present in your work as latent memories. The same latencies are in play in the moment of reading or looking at a painting as when the words of the pages you have read before reverberate in the words you presently read, or the images you have been exposed to resonate with what you see when you look at what you presently face. (Verwoert 2010, 30–31)

The long quote is important because it demonstrates the creativity of memory in both the artist and the beholder. Memory is the vehicle through which the past interpenetrates with the present. In the work of the artist and the critic the past is retained, in ways that are sometimes conscious and sometimes not, through the differentiations that new work manifests.

Archaeology

In the discussion of her place in reenacting other artists' performances, Marina Abramović casts herself in a surprising role, saying "I was feeling like an *archaeologist* really" (Abramović, in Jones and Heathfield 2012, 549). Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks use the same language in *Theatre/Archaeology* from 2001:

It may ultimately be more appropriate to discuss performance (particularly devised performance) through archaeological rather than literary means, with performance as a kind of prehistory of scripted drama, and to imagine the retrieval and recontextualisation of performance as constituting a theatre archaeology. (Pearson and Shanks 2001, 13)

In this seemingly simple theoretical move, they thus privilege the experience of performance over its material through a focus on the deeper time of, surprisingly, material and the more enmeshed conception of performance in context. What follows in their book is a convincing argument for an interdisciplinary theory through the delineation of practical approaches.

Pearson writes from the perspective of a performance maker/theorist and Shanks as archaeologist, though as the book proceeds the lines are crossed, blurred, and erased. They work first to show how archaeology, like performance, is a creative act of "cultural production" (Pearson and Shanks 2001, 11). The opportunity archaeology presents to performance documentation is that it aims at "making a past work a present presence" through objects and sites in which embodiment is long gone (*ibid.*). Performance reveals to archaeology concrete manifestations of the relationships between the live and the material.

The work of theatre/archaeology starts with the present. It inventories only as a way to begin. It travels into history, acknowledging that the past is virtual. The present is the site of the critical acts of theatre/archaeology, Pearson and Shanks argue, in that "we should retain the ambiguity and tension which is actuality; actuality is the *primacy*, but not *superiority*, of the present over the past" (Pearson and Shanks 2001, 42, emphasis in original). The relationship between past and present is ambivalent and unpredictable. Various sites of archaeology and different forms of documentation require specific iterations and explications of a past moment's ties to now. The writers even go as far as to suggest that the "temporality of performance and the archaeological project is neither linear nor a slice through time; it is convoluted. Memories, pasts, continuities, present aspirations and designs are assembled in the work that is performance and archaeology" (Pearson and Shanks 2001, 55). Theatre/archaeology commits to a heterogeneous temporality of performance. Its temporal perspective is mobile as if moving around the time of the work rather

than always coming after it. Which implies, then, that when it returns, the performance will have changed. Repetition through time is not of the event, but of something else altogether as “nothing ever happens twice, because it has already happened before” (Pearson and Shanks 2001, 55).

What is repeated is not ontologically destabilized because it has been or will be repeated, but instead because what is being repeated was never static in the first place. Experiences are not objects. For Pearson and Shanks, both the performance and the document are simulacra (Pearson and Shanks 2001, 92). Originality, on the other hand, presumes stability, and theatre/archaeology comes close to wholly rejecting it: “To think authenticity as essential and intrinsic obscures the relationship of exchange which exists between past and present” (Pearson and Shanks 2001, 114). It is not only the past that has an effect on the present. The novelty of the present occasions reinterpretations of the past which can be powerful enough to appear to change the past itself, whether or not they actually do. Rather than dwell on the complexity of that issue, the authors commit to a practice outside the trappings of fixity. Instead, they advocate an aesthetic of the “unauthentic” which proposes to bring the practitioner and attendee into a creative relation (Pearson and Shanks 2001, 119). Inauthentic performance might make a claim to originality or truth whereas the unauthentic transparently reveals its sources. Pearson and Shanks’ suggestion here retains a complex sense of time as multiple because it reveals an interpenetration between the past and the present.

Theatre/archaeology reveals a different kind of relationship between the formative documents of performance and their manifestation. When performance is rendered unauthentic, its sources are transparently separate. The moment of embodiment brings with it a “haunting past” that it never attempts to conceal, possess, or contain (Pearson and Shanks 2001, 126). Advocating a transparent relationship between aims and outcomes, “the work [of theatre/archaeology, which might be a performance and might be writing about performance] is a reading ‘onto’ and ‘into’ rather than a reading ‘from’” (Pearson and Shanks 2001, 146). The benefits of credited appropriation resurface, referring to Verwoert’s caveat, as practices outside of economic and ontological operations. In this case “performance occasions reinterpretation,” enacting a mode of documenting performance that is as critical as it is creative (Pearson and Shanks 2001, 59).

Pearson and Shanks advise thinking forensically about what kinds of performance documents can be used to discover and preserve different aspects of performance (Pearson and Shanks 2001, 59–61). Theatre/archaeology, then, is a way through the problematic practices of reenactment, performance, and documentation. It enables thinking qualitatively through these issues, which allows for the constant invention and reinvention of forms, lives, and objects to be at the heart of the historical evolution of performance. It also implies that historiography might want to reflect this process. Performances and documents erupt of the present, not without a diverse swathe of accomplices. They are continually doing so.

Appearance, Form, Becoming, Transformation

In a chapter in the 2006 collection *A Performance Cosmology*, edited by Judie Christie, Richard Gough, and Peter Watt, David Williams indicates that Phelan’s ephemeral ontology is founded on a paradox, noting that “disappearance is the function of appearance” (Williams, in Christie, Gough, and Watt 2006, 105). Remaining and reenactment, too, can only be functions of appearance. To take this point further, I suggest that whether a performance disappears or remains after it ends is impossible to determine. Before getting to any prediction of what may happen in the future, performance must first do something other than disappear or remain.

Performance appears. This is necessary in order for it to disappear or remain. But appearances must be unlocked from primarily visual and representational modes. For Bayly “there is a void at the heart of appearing,” but perhaps the void is only that which is past or future (Bayly 2011, 58). I am advocating an appearance defined in terms of becoming as a result of transformation. This is the processual nature of performance through its various iterative appearances: plans, scores, experiences, documents, and memories. Each becoming is a transitional process. Such an approach rejects the fixity implied in the word being. Becoming opens processes to the past and the future, as Elizabeth Grosz explains in the introduction to her edited book *Becomings* (Grosz 1999, 15–28). Appearance as becoming can offer an ontology of performance rooted in performance itself.

The way performance becomes and appears is not only visual. It is multisensory, cognitive, affective, spiritual, and charged with memory. These kinds of becomings and appearances have been called “forms” in art history. In the mode of appearance as becoming, form is not only a result of creative forces but also a part of those forces. In this perspective, form aligns itself to a particular manifestation of an artwork and virtual counterparts. Form is therefore multiple as it is located in the present of the artwork but not separated from the past through memory and the future through desire. This multiplicity is the immanent temporality of form including present, past, and future. The present form is continuous with past and future forms.

Form is in and of the document and the performance. In *The Life of Forms in Art*, the French art historian Henri Focillon argues for a reconceiving of art history that identifies form as living (Focillon 1948, 33). Because Focillon theorizes a vitalism at the core of art history, which responds to Platonic antitheatricity by taking appearances seriously, his framework is useful for live art historiography. Following Balzac, Focillon writes that “Life is form, and form is the modality of life” (Focillon 1948, 33). The book never pins down a singular definition of form. Form translates into a plethora of scenes, and like theatre/archaeology what this nebulousness makes possible is an approach to art history that takes change to be fundamental: “Art begins with transmutation and continues with metamorphosis” (Focillon 1948, 169). Form is what goes on living, is what remains, because it continues to change. In Focillon’s view, form is prehistory and it is inescapable. But this is not deterministic, because form is life, so it moves, changes, and even acts: “Man works on himself. But he does not, it is true, rid himself of the age-old deposits laid down by time, and they are something that must be accounted for. What they constitute is a tonality, rather than an armature or a foundation” (Focillon 1948, 142). Focillon accounts for the interpenetration of the past and the present, specifically as the past creating the conditions for the present as opposed to determining it through causality. The agency of the artist remains intact, empowered by history.

With the artist’s work, the life of forms breathes through each painting, performance, and document. As Focillon notes, “A score of experiments, be they recent or forthcoming, are invariably interwoven behind the well-defined evidence of the image” (Focillon 1948, 41). Here form is in the realm of the barely visible. It is not only already there but also waiting to happen. Form is the document of the performance that has yet to be imagined, but form is also in the tendencies that will lead to performance. Form is what allows the painting to create space (Focillon 1948, 65). In live art, form is what allows performance to create time. Focillon indicates that seeing art in this way cancels any sense of static images: “Form is always, not the desire for action, but action itself” (Focillon 1948, 119). Art as action accounts for its creative relations with time and space. Art in this way is not about allowing agency, but perhaps becomes agency itself. Performance makes time; this is one manifestation of its temporal specificity. Becomings of form are temporal creations.

Form may manifest as action in performance documents as well. Imagine you tell a story about your childhood, holding the actual object the story involves, showing the scar left by the moment. The life of forms for this performance suggests several sets of documents. One set might transcribe the spoken words of the story while another set gives a prompt to tell a story about your childhood in which you show an object that gave you a scar and then you show the scar. There are many other ways such a performance could be documented, and any will in some way provide access to the past through memory.

Those different kinds of documents lead to new interpretations that would each preserve different aspects of the original performance. Each one would also substitute something entirely new, as the framework of Joseph Roach's surrogates expresses. What documentation of performance proves here is less that performance is not authentic and more that it works through alteration. As Heathfield explains, "the multiple lives of performance, dissected, represented, re-performed [suggest] that one of performance's most consistent and recurring conditions is *transformation*" (Heathfield, in Jones and Heathfield 2012, 32). The disappearance of the live through writing indicates the creation of a new appearance in writing. The reenactment substitutes locational context but creates a congruent dramaturgical form. Each one maintains the life of forms, and each one is an appearance that becomes. Even disappearance is a kind of becoming.

David Williams writes that "appearances, like love, can be transformative becomings" (Williams, in Christie, Gough, and Watt 2006, 105). Williams here is working through Phelan's logic of love to carve out, through writing, a space of appearance for performance. The immediacy of these becomings substantiates their reality and at the same time reduces them to a factor of the ongoing processes of transformation. They are neither eternal nor ephemeral because of memory. Each becoming brings about and is brought about by movement.

In the 2007 book *Theatres of Thought: Theatre, Performance and Philosophy*, edited by Daniel Watt and Daniel Meyer-Dinkgrafe, Laura Cull and Matthew Goulish compose a performed document called "A Dialogue on Becoming." Beginning with a particular anecdote about how identity is a part of theatre company Goat Island's working process, they arrive at a central idea, that "[a] performer is becoming" (Cull and Goulish, in Watt and Meyer-Dinkgrafe 2007, 56). Identity is not fixed. It is constantly being made. It requires continuous analysis because it is always becoming. For Cull and Goulish, the work of Goat Island resists ontological, archival, mediated-based and reenactment-based thinking about what performance is and does: "All the different beings, identities and entities we conceive in conscious experience are but the effects of a primary, universal becoming" (56). Manifestations are the particulars and specifics that will again be renewed.

For Cull and Goulish, becoming is based on a process inseparable from two phenomena: moment and movement (61). The immediacy of performance is contestable but irreducible. It does happen in time and of duration, but time here is something mobile. Becoming depends on these processes, and these processes depend on becoming. While these ideas developed out of their working processes, notably their practice of creative response, Cull and Goulish admit that finding the temporal philosophy of Henri Bergson gave them a framework within which to reference their intuitions. Specifically referring to Bergson's *Matter and Memory* (1912), Goulish writes, "the notion of identity as becoming, it seems to me now, comes to us via this understanding of perception and memory" (Cull and Goulish, in Watt and Meyer-Dinkgrafe 2007, 61). As will be shown toward the end of this text, Bergson's writing on memory opens up a productive relationship between the past and the present through matter and memory.

The Double Archive: Experiences and Memories

Published between and to a certain extent bridging the central ideas of Phelan's *Unmarked* and Schneider's *Performing Remains* is Diana Taylor's 2003 book *The Archive and the Repertoire: Cultural Memory and Performance in the Americas*. Like Schneider, Taylor finds that performance is repeated continually as an operation inherent within culture: "The repertoire . . . enacts embodied memory . . . all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge" (Taylor 2003, 20). She suggests the repertoire has a relationship to the archive that is symbiotic. Taylor maintains that writing and performance are not "binaries" or "sequential," in which one process causes another (Taylor 2003, 22). She insists that what is performed from the archive and how its contents are valued are different throughout time, reinforcing the belief in the archive's stability but introducing change to its reception, an idea both Jones and Schneider will return to. Whether one believes the archive or the repertoire to be more significant, Taylor asserts that it has always been the case that "writing was far more dependent on embodied culture for transmission than the other way around" (Taylor 2003, 17).

Attending to the relation of performance and archives is Gunhild Borggreen and Rune Gade's 2013 collection *Performing Archives/Archives of Performance*. This nearly five hundred-page collection of essays again takes up the notion of ontological disappearance via Phelan, but with a different approach to that taken by *Perform Repeat Record*. Where Jones and Heathfield's book addressed historiography, Borggreen and Gade's collection "proposes a twofold movement of ongoing and mutual interaction" between performance and archives (Borggreen and Gade 2013, 10). The book is notable for its diversity of theoretical approaches, such as Heike Roms' astute essay "Archiving Legacies: Who Cares for Performance Remains?" In this essay Roms thinks through the archive for its practices of caring for long durations, as "one documents a piece of work, but one archives a body of work" (Roms, in Borggreen and Gade 2013, 36). The book as a whole is also significant for its delicate treatment of how a kind of archival turn may currently be taking place in practices from performance to visual art and curation.

Using the terms of performance in a manner like the selection of volumes from an archive, Joseph Roach provides yet another analysis of performance as it presents itself to the future in his 1996 book *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*:

The process of trying out various candidates in different situations—the doomed search for originals by continuously auditioning stand-ins—is the most important of the many meanings users intend when they use the word *performance*. . . . Performance, in other words, stands in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and to replace. (Roach 1996, 3–4)

Roach prosaically explains here that there is always a doubleness, at least, to the operations of performance. This definition offers a framework for a longer life of performance beyond the present. Roach shows how memory is not inert in the action of performance. As Jean Baudrillard writes in his 1981 book *Simulacra and Simulation*, memories of performance, as reenactments and as documents, are copies of a copy, simulacra, because there is no original.

It may be that Baudrillard's theory of simulacra finds an excellent example in the conception that documentation and reenactment are not less truthful than performance because the experience itself is not without its own set of precursors. As Schneider puts it, "in performance *as* memory, the pristine self-sameness of an 'original,' an artifact so valued by the archive, is rendered impossible—or, if you will, mythic" (Schneider 2011, 100). Phelan too does not

proceed without admitting the link, explaining that the “document of a performance then is only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present” (Phelan 1993, 146).

Returning to Heathfield and Quick’s introduction to their edition of *Performance Research*, “On Memory,” they note there that: “Just as performance is a vital component in the operation of memory, remembering and forgetting are crucial dynamics in the make-up of performance” (Heathfield and Quick 2000, 1). Memory is a crucial part of the reality of performance beyond its representational aspects because it aims attention toward specific becomings and forgets others. Likewise, as necessary as memory is for making the performance it is also a part of observing it: “Performance, like the traumatic event, can exceed its spectator’s understanding and consequently set in play the need for its repetition through memory, language and representation” (Heathfield and Quick 2000, 3). Trauma is substantiated over a longer duration than experience itself. The continuity of these kinds of memory creates an excess of affect. Through this continuity countless repetitions are possible. There is a multiplicity to memory. It performs a past in the present. This multiplicity gives way to another, the double of memory shaping performance from behind and repeating it forward.

This points to a pivotal question at the heart of how to document performance: the question of scope. For example, is a performance enacting or reenacting an artist’s intention, visual shape, or narrative content? What kinds of documents would leave traces of each? Surely documents of performance need be as multiple as performance itself in which different perspectives accumulate toward its wholeness. Another question of scale, as it refers to the position from which the work is viewed, is what role do documents cast the viewer into: audience or artist? How the document configures remembrance of performance is essential for a comprehensive history of performance. That experience and memory are multiplicities leads to the position that documentation also should manifest as a multiplicity. It will offer the fullest memory of performance if it channels several, sometimes contradictory, scales of experiencing performance.

Document Memory and Vital Materialism

Claims of a binary existing between writing and performance collapse under not only the weight of memory but also of time. Stuart Brisley corrects any misconceptions about performance documents lasting forever: “The issue is not one of the ephemeral versus the permanent. Nothing is forever. It is the question of the relative durations of the impermanent” (Brisley, in Jones and Heathfield 2012, 30). Taking account of other durations beyond human scales makes the fragility, or temporariness, of appearances visible. For example, it is only from an anthropocentric perspective that photographs do not visibly decay. Temporality reveals that both performance and documentation are temporary. The repertoire may continue long after the walls of the archive have been reduced to dust. Memory allows access to the past. Performance is unimaginable without some memory. Memory’s various repetitions through different moments and media are constitutive of the transformational process of appearances constantly becoming. Specific manifestations will, as in Roach’s definition of performance, substitute various stand-ins for the role, but later memory might forgo the role and perform the stand-in. The purposefully unauthentic aesthetic of theatre/archaeology seems to paradoxically return reliability to performance. The memory persists because it appears, disappears, remains, is reenacted, archived, and performed. Memory, like performance, appears.

As Matthew Reason suggests, “ideas of time are central within discourses of documentation,” because performance only disappears if time is represented as a spatial line, a discrete succession of moments (Reason 2006, 210). When the past and present are constantly interpenetrating, through memory, it is very difficult to remain confident that disappearance will not soon give

way to another different appearance. Of course, it is possible to imagine any number of performances that may have completely disappeared if the people who once remembered them have now forgotten or are dead. It is also likely that some effect of this hypothetical performance memory would influence future action unconsciously through habit.

For philosopher Henri Bergson there is recollection and habit memory, and for him memory appears when the action in the present necessitates knowledge of the past. The appearance in the document itself has temporal orders and its own duration. It has a duration of apprehension that depends on use and obsolescence. When the document begins to fade, it is disappearing. When the document suddenly is used for reenactment, as Auslander suggests, the resulting performance might have more integrity to the documentation than the previously documented performance (Auslander 2006, 2). The document does have its own power over the living memory of performance. Performance documents have a spirit, if for no other reason than they can never be complete.

The vitality of documents might be theorized through the work of Jane Bennett. In her 2010 book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Bennett identifies the way non-human entities act in political events. In a move that mirrors the trends of posthumanism by brilliant thinkers such as Rosi Braidotti, Bennett offers a materialism with vitality, by which she means “the capacity of things . . . to act . . . as forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (Bennett 2010, viii). Bennett’s work is especially significant because it allows performance studies to take account of the vitality of objects of performance documentation in a shift that might do away with stultifying binaries. Bennett’s work also speaks to how performing and writing might take place. Is not her question “how to describe without thereby erasing the independence of things?” after all a parallel interrogation of the potential power of visibility through writing that Phelan was concerned with in *Unmarked* (Bennett 2010, xiii)? If Phelan was questioning whether certain kinds of writing might betray performance, Bennett’s framework offers a way to see “events as encounters between ontologically diverse actants, some human, some not, though all thoroughly material” (Bennett 2010, xiv). In the vital materialist mode both performance and documentation are intertwined in a greater ecology of transformation.

Time-Specificity

Transformation is driven by the constant becoming of difference that is at the core of duration. Time-specificity of performance defines temporality as duration and develops concepts of lived experience from this perspective. It arises therefore out of the philosophy of Bergson and artists such as Tehching Hsieh, Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša, and Every House Has a Door. While Bergson in *Matter and Memory* seeks to overcome the metaphysical problems of dualism by determining the connection between *l'esprit* (mind) and *corps* (body) as not a question of where but when, a when that is memory, each of the three groups of artists develop modes of documentation as a generative constraint. The same qualities of attention given to composition of performance are devoted toward documents. Tehching Hsieh and Adrian Heathfield’s 2009 book *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh*, for example, shows every still image from the strip of film Hsieh used to photograph himself, one frame at a time, every hour of a year from 1980–1981. The performance produced this document, which can be displayed as a sequence of still images or as a six-minute film.

In my own practice as research that has developed as a critical and creative response to Bergson and these artists (see Wakefield 2014), I have explored how each act of artistic creation might be continuous with the same tendencies that drive evolution, or what Bergson calls *élan vital* (vital impetus). In *Three*, the last in a trilogy of works responding to Hsieh, Janša, Janša, Janša, and

Every House Has a Door, I attempted to adapt to the conditions of the theatre as if it were an environment. An ongoing illness impaired the physical abilities that I had made use of for the previous works. The solution I relied on was to fold memories from my personal life into the composition of the performance in the same way I had previously done with certain demanding physical techniques such as slow-motion movement or tennis choreography, the intention being to make visible the past that was being made present. However, the personal memories were displaced, not explained or given context. For example, I performed a very simple magic trick that friends of mine have seen countless times. In *Three* the trick became a part of a moment exploring the concept of a “pre-performance,” or a work that is being gestured toward in a present but cannot be performed presently. The pre-performance would be magical, dangerous (wielding a sharp knife), and composed (holding a piece of paper containing the score of the performance). Thus the third performance maintained the sense from the previous works that a regular and processual practice had gone into the making of the work. An evolution had taken place that allowed me to perform that day, but the adaptations included not only deliberate practice of a certain kind of moving but also conceptual organization. I could not have avoided adapting to the environment of the theatre because the time of the performance was continuous with the time of my body, its illness, and therefore the very materials of evolution. Now that I have reached a stage of remission with this illness, future iterations of *Three* would need to be altered.

The implication of this continuity is that thinking theory and doing practice, performance and documentation, caring for the archive, and any act of memory are all becomings of a heterogeneous assemblage of forces. If I attempt to in any way advance an argument with this text, it would be that taking account of temporality as a force prompts the creation of new relations between elements of practice that enable creative freedom through constraint.

References

- Auslander, Philip. 1999. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. London: Routledge.
- . 2006. “The Performativity of Performance Documentation.” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 84: 1–10.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 1981. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Translated by Sheila Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Bayly, Simon. 2007. *A Pathognomy of Performance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Benjamin, Walter. 2008. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. New York: Penguin.
- Bennett, Jane. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Bergson, Henri. 1912. *Matter and Memory*. New York: Zone Books.
- Borggreen, Gunhild, and Rune Gade, eds. 2013. *Performing Archives/Archives of Performance*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Christie, Judie, Richard Gough, and Peter Watt, eds. 2006. *A Performance Cosmology*. London: Routledge.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1998. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Translated by Eric Prenowitz. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Focillon, Henri. 1948. *The Life of Forms in Art*. Translated by Charles B. Hogan and George Kubler. New York: Wittenborn, Schultz.
- Grosz, Elizabeth, ed. 1999. *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Heathfield, Adrian, and Andrew Quick. 2000. “Editorial On Memory.” *Performance Research* 5 (3): 1–3.
- Heathfield, Adrian, and Tehching Hsieh. 2009. *Out of Now: the Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh*. London: Live Art Development Agency.

- Jones, Amelia. 1997. "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation." *Art Journal* 56 (4): 11–18.
- . 2011. "'The Artist is Present': Artistic Re-enactments and the Impossibility of Presence." *TDR* 55 (1): 16–45.
- Jones, Amelia, and Adrian Heathfield, eds. 2012. *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*. Bristol: Intellect.
- Kubler, George. 1962. *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Lavery, Carl. 2009. "Is there a Text in this Performance?" *Performance Research* 14 (1): 37–45.
- O'Dell, Kathy. 1997. "Displacing the Haptic: Performance Art, the Photographic Document, and the 1970s." *Performance Research* 2 (1): 73–81.
- Pearson, Mike, and Michael Shanks. 2001. *Theatre/Archaeology: Disciplinary Dialogues*. London: Routledge.
- Phelan, Peggy. 1993. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge.
- Reason, Matthew. 2007. *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Roach, Joseph. 1996. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sayre, Henry M. 1989. *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde Since 1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Schneider, Rebecca. 2001. "Performance Remains." *Performance Research* 6 (2): 100–108.
- . 2011. *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*. New York: Routledge.
- Sontag, Susan. 1973. *On Photography*. New York: Penguin.
- Taylor, Diana. 2003. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Verwoert, Jan. 2010. *Tell Me What You Want, What You Really, Really Want*. Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press.
- Wakefield, Nik. 2014. "Time-specificity of Performance." *Choreographic Practices* 5 (2): 183–97.
- Watt, Daniel, and Daniel Meyer-Dinkgrafe, eds. 2007. *Theatres of Thought: Theatre, Performance and Philosophy*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars.