

# Books

***Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History.*** Edited by Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield. Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2012; 652 pp.; illustrations. \$95.00 paper.

In recent years, performance re-creation has become a prevalent concern in theatre and performance studies. In a sense, reperformance is nothing new or unusual. Revivals of plays, remounted dance pieces, and everyday rehearsals all involve the repetition of prior acts of performance. Theatre artists devoted to original historical practices and repetiteurs employed by choreographic trusts have long since institutionalized self-conscious performance re-creation. Yet a distinct phenomenon has appeared in this century: meticulous performance re-creations that pay attention to gestural, material, and other nontextual elements, often with the aid of photographs and other documents. In the past decade for instance, the Wooster Group and the Rude Mechanicals have applied such techniques to both re-create and recontextualize theatrical works by Grotowski's company, Mabou Mines, and the Performance Group.

As Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield make clear in their substantial new anthology, such undertakings are best understood alongside recent trends in what is variously called live art or performance art. While they are embedded in the spaces, critical discourses, and consumer economies of visual art, events such as Marina Abramović's recent re-stagings of durational artworks highlight the cognate theoretical and practical challenges that confront artists, curators, repetiteurs, and all those who record and remake prior performances. Given recent investments in spaces for performance-based work by the Tate Modern gallery and Abramović's own Institute for the Preservation of Performance Art, it seems that reperformance is not merely a transient strategy adopted by savvy contemporary artists, but a curatorial practice with a long horizon. The re-creation of performance is also tied to a question that reverberates into every corner of theatre and performance studies: as Jones puts it, "the conundrum of how the live event or ephemeral art work [...] gets written into history" (11).

The volume that Jones and Heathfield have put together deftly approaches this question with transparency, modesty, and an ethos of inclusiveness. The editors emphasize the disciplinary positions—in art history and performance studies, respectively—that bring them to the topic. They acknowledge, too, that they do not exist outside the systems of cultural and capitalist value circulation that enfold works of art—and whose protocols performance artists have endeavored to expose and disrupt. Rather than attempt to define a new subfield of art or performance history with this book, Jones and Heathfield explore a set of theoretical quandaries that arise from ongoing efforts to theorize and enact performance art's various afterlives. Two introductory essays by the editors introduce a range of salient contextualizing ideas for the historiography of live art: the historical conditions that may have fostered the recent resurgence of embodied durational artwork, the culture of re-enactment, as well as glosses of performativity, deconstruction, trauma theory, and Merleau-Ponty's notion of the chiasm.



Containment and temporality, however, emerge as the volume's most potent binding concepts. For Jones, containment is a condition that modern Western aesthetics has imposed upon fine art, which "a consideration of the performative" effectively undoes in part by "reminding us that meaning and value are contingent" (12). Containment is also crucial to Jones's outlook on performing bodies, none of which, she claims, necessarily resist containment or can be fully contained by exertions of power. Time similarly presents paradoxical tensions central to the book. Heathfield notes that performance "bears a temporal paradox: it exists both now and then, it leaves and lasts" (28). Rather than attempting to arbitrate between critical standpoints that see performance as fundamentally disappearing or remaining, Heathfield notes that such divergent views concur that performance transforms into remembered, reiterated, and recorded forms as a matter of course.

Ambivalence toward containment and a spirit of inclusiveness help account for both the size (44 chapters) and quirky organizational strategy of the book. The first section, or "zone," "Theories and Histories," includes important discussions of performance ontology by Christopher Bedford, Rebecca Schneider, Sven Lütticken, and Jane Blocker, and meditations on the function of documentation in contemporary art by Philip Auslander and Boris Groys, interspersed with essays that model "new modes of writing the histories of live and performance art" (43). André Lepecki's account of curating, along with Stephanie Rosenthal, re-creations of Happenings first devised by Allan Kaprow, and Eleanora Fabião's fascinating look at the virtually unknown Afro-Brazilian artist Arthur Bispo do Rosário give a sense of the range of the section's diverse inclusions.

Though the first section veers into numerous documentary accounts of live artworks, the section that follows, "Documents," is dedicated explicitly to various kinds of artifacts of performance and durational art reaching back to the late 1960s. In a gesture toward curatorial methods that, if expanded, would encompass a generous and diverse archive of global performance art, the editors have chosen "a sampling of some key coordinates" from recent decades and continents outside the usual scope of art history (237). This section also demonstrates a variety of means of committing ephemeral occurrences to printed pages. The poem "Waiting," written, recited, and reperformed in recent years by feminist artist Faith Wilding, is followed by pages of full-color reproductions of a 2007 exhibition documenting Lynn Hershman Leeson's work in the persona of Roberta Breitmore, whom she fabricated during the 1970s and redeployed in the 1990s. Helpful introductory notes by Jones precede both the Wilding and Hershman Leeson chapters as well as many others in the section. Along with these documents of American live art, "Documents" also includes a personal archive in the form of text and images (from slides) from a performance lecture by Lebanese artist Rabih Mroué, an extensive and delightful art-historical self-chronology written by Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and Meiling Cheng's annotated fragments of processual artworks by three Chinese artists. Fourteen additional short chapters comprising scripts, lectures, photographs, essays, and a timeline round out this printed archive-in-miniature.

The final section, "Dialogues," includes interviews in a variety of formats conducted by Jones, Heathfield, and a few collaborators with figures including Carolee Schneemann, Tehching Hsieh, Tilda Swinton, Janine Antoni, Ron Athey, Marina Abramović, and Jean-Luc Nancy. Abundant and engaging illustrations and a few short essays of introduction accompany these chapters. Thus, besides opening up a "space for the artists to examine and contest their critical and historical reception" (437), this section also provides brief engagements with some artists who are underrepresented in existing live art scholarship. Many of these conversations—such as the one between Mathilde Monnier and Jean-Luc Nancy—are interesting on their own merits, but hold only loosely to the central announced themes of the anthology. Certainly, as Heathfield notes, dialogue amounts to a "vital dynamic in both the creation and historicization of performance and live art" (435), but under such a pliable rubric, any communication among artists associated with performance art would merit inclusion.

*Perform, Repeat, Record* collects a wealth of insights, artifacts, and exchanges germane to pressing issues at the nexus of performance and historiography. Scholars will find it essential to navigating emerging currents of thought at the dynamic intersection of visual arts and performance studies, and it will serve as a useful supplement for courses on performance art. Its likely impact on the field is more difficult to assess, in part because of the multiple and loosely affiliated aims that it serves. At once a collection of otherwise dispersed essays on the structures that stitch performance into time, a sampling of diverse historiographical and curatorial procedures, and a survey of the edges and seams that compose the evolving archive of live art, it seems to have absorbed from many of the artists discussed in its pages a tendency to defy definition.

—Pannill Camp

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***Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life.*** By Kenneth Gross. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011; 224 pp.; illustrations. \$25.00 cloth, \$15.00 paper, e-book available.

Kenneth Gross's *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life* is a refreshing and grounded response to the apparent mystery of puppet performance. In it we can see Gross, a scholar of Renaissance literature at the University of Rochester, forcing himself to come to terms with the challenges presented by puppets, and above all the particular nature of the object as the center of performance focus.

Modern Western scholarship has generally considered theatre history as equivalent to drama history—a record of literature interpreted onstage by actors. Performance Studies has radically redefined the scope and nature of the field (one need only consider the seismic shift from *The Drama Review* to *TDR: The Journal of Performance Studies* to see this in action), and yet the scholarly study of puppetry is still searching for a consistent and clear identity and a set of theoretical underpinnings.

Performances focused primarily on objects, with humans playing a secondary role (and text in a tertiary position, or not present at all) present particular conceptual challenges. In Western culture, puppetry is generally understood as the primeval roots that theatre happily outgrew on its way to modern drama. Consideration of puppetry in college theatre history textbooks has, until recently, generally been limited to two areas: the first chapter, where it is seen as essential to the primitive rituals of *ür*-drama; and next, a few paragraphs and many centuries later, in the chapter on Asian performance, which might seem to be presented primarily as a 20th-century inspiration for Artaud, Brecht, and other Western modernists.

