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PERFORMING THE ARCHIVE AND EXHIBITING THE EPHEMERAL

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It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation.

Walter Benjamin (1999: 462, n 2a, 3)

The performer sees herself as a medium. Information passes through.

Joan Jonas (cited in Crimp 1983: 139)

Over the last two decades, artists and choreographers together with curators have come to perceive the format of the exhibition as an ideal environment in which to embrace a growing multitude of live practices and its parallel existence as an increasingly image- and object-based art form. This heightened attention towards the relationship between direct experience and knowledge is based, on the one hand, on the unique proximity artists and audiences are subject to within the exhibition space when they experience a live event; on the other, on the increasing accessibility of knowledge related to both live practices and archives dedicated to the history of performance in the arts.¹ This development has allowed for a range of performance-based practice to not only find its way into art history, but to continue its evolution as an inherently interdisciplinary art practice, whose contingent nature is rooted in the tension between the live and the mediated.

Performance's shift from a body- and action-based genre towards a medium and method that takes on various forms—from relational to participatory practices to objects and images—has during the 1990s led to its current recognition as a cross-disciplinary and discourse-based art movement. The growing engagement of artists with the site- and time-specificity of performance is not only reflected by, but in fact constituted through, the representational politics of documentary recordings,

affirming performance's valorization and ideological impact within the white cube (Kotz 2005). The mechanisms and politics of this development reflect the desire of art institutions, from museums to art fairs, to partake in the promulgation and the collection of performance-based art practices.

This revival of performance art and its ongoing institutionalization is based on the interdependence of its present and past. Recordings and photographs of actions, sometimes witnessed by many, sometimes only by the photographer hired to take account of the work for the future, have not only established the authenticity of the live, but also shaped our understanding and collective understanding of what constitutes a performance within the visual arts.² Initially as a press image, then as a historical document, and finally as a work of art, these images, which in fact blur the boundaries between the staged or the documented, become part of the cultural archive. As the trace of a message, this material not only adds to the image archive of art history, but is also part of the ongoing process of its own cultural canonization, unfolding continuously through its reception. As time progresses, our view and understanding of both the significance and the authenticity of past performance events continuously changes, more often than not gaining attention and value.³ This visual and physical embodiment of the double representation of both the act of doing and the act of looking is fundamental for the evolution of a collective imaginary and historical consciousness of the aesthetics of performance-based practices, rooted in post-dramatic theater, postmodern dance, and conceptual and new media art from the 1960s and 1970s. These new forms of artistic encounters that have come to exist and persist within and outside of the institutional framework of the museum were consciously captured in a range of documentary sources that framed and conserved not only the events as they unfolded, but also the acts of agency they represented. The recordings and archives of artists and photographers such as those of Peter Moore or Babette Mangolte have in recent years become an essential source material not only for the field of art history, but also for performance-based practices whose appropriations of historical works and critical research into the past come to life within the exhibition space. The layering of time and space within the photographic and moving image (and its recognition as a threshold where we see how the past collides with the present) has enabled the correlation of the archival and the politics of the live. This synthesis of the archival and the performative is most visible in the recognition of the documentation of performance art as both an inherent part of the medium as well as an integral part of the practice of performance.

This essay explores the ecology of performance's media-based contingency, specifically looking at the pictorial and performance-based strategies of four case studies: the work of Joan Jonas and Babette Mangolte in the 1970s and that of Sarah Pierce and Jimmy Robert since 2010. Despite the wide range of approaches and methodologies, their work is representative of an ongoing interest in the parallels of the politics of the body and the archive, articulated through the site-specificity of the exhibition. Exhibition-, curatorial-, and installation-based strategies play an integral part in how these artists use performance as a

medium to engage with the pictorial, physical, and imaginary spaces they occupy in their art. Each one in their own particular way addresses a time frame of four decades spanning from the 1970s until today. The image-based source materials addressed in relation to these four case studies range from documentary recordings, testimonies, and other archival materials that require intensive research, to live streams and clips available on various social media platforms. These images, regardless of being staged or documentary, lead us to reflect on how works of historical relevance embrace the dialectical relation of the live to image- and object-based art forms, and how they touch upon a sense of contemporaneity emblematic of their transdisciplinary existence.

The images they work with function as sources of inspiration, foils for reflection, as well as structures and scripts to act out and upon. In their installations and performances, Robert, Pierce, Mangolte, and Jonas reference the continuous activation of the performative through the image as a medium that inherently incorporates various layers of time through its reproductive qualities. Their work addresses how the staging of documentary images of performances can constitute and carry forth the political agency of both past and present instantiations (Clausen 2007). They acknowledge and address the parallel and overcrossing construction



FIGURE 11.1 *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, Festival d'Automne, Musée Galleria, Paris, 1973

© Joan Jonas, 1973, *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, Photo: Béatrice Heiliger

of discourses within art's historiography that have enabled performance's transition towards a hybrid and discourse-based practice: a way of working, a tool as well as a medium, which constitutes and establishes its own processes of valorization production, conservation, and reception within the space of the exhibition. The exhibition as a medium and site of production thus becomes a site that literally frames the work as a process rather than an autonomous or singular act, instigating a simultaneous collapse and iteration of time.

From early in her career, Joan Jonas was aware of the relationship between immediate experience and its various afterlives. In the early 1970s, Jonas began to stage her own working process of exploring the presence, movement, and image of her body within the setting of the performance space. This composition of spaces by layering drawings, videos, and still images was held together through the artist's gestures. Jonas's ongoing experiments with the complexity of visual layers, specifically the meeting of the live and the technological, is based in her interest to juxtapose different times and narrative threads that would allow her to make time 'a material that I manipulate, and divide, and rearrange' (Jonas, cited in Richard and Huberman 2015: 3).

There is a photograph of Jonas performing as Organic Honey, taken in 1973 during one of the first renditions of *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll* at the Festival d'Automne in Paris, that is both emblematic of Jonas's exploration of the politics of space and gesture within the pictorial, as well as of the potential the documentation of performance art would hold for the future. When I first saw this photograph, I became interested in two questions: first, the compositional significance of the woman on the left side of the image, recording Jonas's actions, and second, Jonas's choice of this moment (and this particular photograph) to represent the work in the future. It is a black-and-white photograph that captures the presence and action of three women, of whom two are performing and two are engaged in the act of recording. The photographer who documented this performance, Béatrice Heiligers, remains outside of the frame. She is present through her subjective gaze that also simulates the position of the audience. The woman behind the visible camera, Babette Mangolte, is performing as well as recording. Her back is turned towards the spectator as she looks through the lens at Jonas; she is not only part of the technological setup, but also an integral part of the event. She is also central to the composition of the photograph, taking on the role of a narrative figure as she acts out her function and role as a cameraperson. The performer at the center of the image is Jonas. While the spotlight follows the fictitious female character, Organic Honey, the viewer becomes witness to the process of illusion that frames the visual interactions. Like her female protagonists in the stories they unspool and weave, Jonas holds the threads of the crossing gazes that unite the narratives as well as the temporal and spatial layers captured in her images.

The continuous fracturing and duplicating of her self and her own image put into action what Judith Butler came to articulate two decades later—namely, that the performative staging of repetition offers the opportunity to transform, change, re-signify, and therefore reconstitute our understanding of gender (Butler 2003: 392–401). Jonas's unraveling of the hidden mechanisms of visual regimes via a

crossing of technical and social patterns specifically related to the cultural representation of women continues to be relevant for the fields of gender studies, performance history, and visual art.⁴

Viewers become witness to the de- and reconstruction of the visual regimes behind and in front of the camera, most notably in the video performances *Vertical Roll* (1973) and *Left Side, Right Side* (1974).⁵ In both works, Jonas's body is captured between the mechanical processes of recording and projecting, producing a situation of spatial enclosure and self-reflection that underlines the dual indexicality of her presence and absence hovering between the original and its reproduction. Jonas's use of the screen as a structuring device for her movements and gestures highlighted this duality even further, and led her to point the camera towards the monitor, creating an infinite and yet fragmented, at times purposely desynchronized, image.⁶ This particular use of the closed-circuit video effect created a doubled psychological and physical collapse that was iterated through its mediation (Krauss 1976: 53).

The process of transforming the live event into the image was made visible through its perpetuation, which, whether as a gesture on stage or as a represented gesture in the image reproduced in the media, makes a process visible that is emblematic for performance art as a genre and its historicization.⁷ Jonas's recordings, both those staged for the camera and the results of photographers and peers documenting the *Organic Honey* performances, have been increasingly sought in recent years. In the past, only a few carefully chosen images have been at the heart of performance art's historicization, but since the late 1990s, the ongoing institutionalization of performance art and its various forms of documentation have resulted in an increased interest in the archives of numerous chroniclers and artists. These archives offer insight into the significance of performance, not only as a tool and a method of working, but also as a meta-genre that functions increasingly like an umbrella, framing interdisciplinary practices concerned with the idea of presence and immediacy in the visual arts (Clausen 2006: 12). This becomes especially apparent in the case of the *Organic Honey* series that was performed over a dozen times between the early 1970s and early 1980s, and which continues to have an afterlife as a series of videos, a multimedia installation owned by the Stedelijk Museum, and in the form of an installation-based presentation of the artist's archive, *Organic Honey Archive*, consisting of over 100 documentary and staged photographs, notebooks, and hours of unedited video footage that continue to accumulate over time. Presented twice, once in 2005 in Vienna and a second time in 2016 in Montreal, these curated presentations of Jonas's archive typify the significance of the archive to the institutionalization of performance art.⁸

While clearly identified as an archive and not as an artwork, the presentation of the materials in 2005 as part of a group exhibition differed from its display in 2016 when it was part of the artist's retrospective. Despite the similarly chronological hanging order, the second rendition allows the visitor to question the status of the installation as an archive in relation to the artwork. This shift of the status of an archive of documentary sources on display in relation to the latest, more staged

setting is detectable in three instances: first, the uniformity of the framing aesthetics of the photographs; second, the choice of the gray wall color so emblematic for Jonas's installations and a decision by the artist that was aligned with other installations on view; and third, the contextualization of the archive with Jonas's video works from the time, such as *Duet* (1972), *Vertical Roll* (1972), *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* (1972), as well as Richard Serra's *Anxious Automation* (1971). These video works were part of the performance of *Organic Honey* and, within the presentation of the archive in the exhibition, were situated in relation to the varied documentary footage of the performance, such as *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll* (1973), as well as the photographs, posters, drawings, and scripts. The first installation in 2005, which was part of a group show, did not include art videos related to the corpus of this oeuvre, but included two vitrines with the artist's original notebooks and drawings, as well as hours of unedited footage on display. These vitrines were not presented in the more recent installation in 2016. These displays of a collection of archival materials and their evolving representational choices exemplify how the transition from document to artifact unfolds through the act of exhibiting. These developments and ongoing processes inherent to performance's historicization eventually will lead the *Organic Honey Archive* to become an accompanying extension or even part of the multimedia installation of the work itself.

Projected into the future, the documentary material that remains from the performance is not just a visual proof of an event, but constitutes the ability to comprehend the image as an index of its various future forms of existence as image, trace, and object. Jonas's cross-disciplinary explorations are closely aligned to her engagement with space as both a sculptural and pictorial device, and the ability of video and digital media to reproduce and render depth, distance, and perspective. Like an antipode to the claims of authenticity and disappearance made for the live act, Jonas's work is not driven by a longing for illusion, but by, as the philosopher Martin Seel states, 'the striking production and emphasis of a presence, of a right here, right now of something taking place. And because it is happening in the present, it evades every attempt of grasping it completely' (Seel 2001: 53). In Jonas's work, the apparent disappearance of the authentic act is counteracted by a medial translation and the past's doubling in the medium of its staging as an 'act of appearance', which makes it tangible in the present as well as the future. The images produced on either side of the suspended screen have extended the life of the artwork.

The investigation of time and space within the process of visual reproduction and its relationship to the exhibition format is a central focus in Babette Mangolte's work in both film and photography. Upon her arrival in New York City from France in 1970 and until the early 1980s, she documented a wide range of performances in dance, theater, and the visual arts.⁹

Considered a 'first layer of history',¹⁰ Mangolte's photographs of Trisha Brown, Richard Foreman, Robert Whitman, Joan Jonas, Yvonne Rainer, Stuart Sherman, and many others are particularly significant for the historiography of performance art, dance, and theater in New York. The reason is not only Mangolte's technical

expertise, but even more so her precise composition and framing of the space that surrounded the bodies. This particular attention to the space that surrounds the body proceeds, on one hand, from her training as a cinematographer, and, on the other, her awareness of her own intermediary position between the action and the spectator. This presence defined by its absence was part of Mangolte's strategy to remain invisible and to avoid any kind of identification with her subject. This became a guiding compositional principal for her photographs as well as her films and videos (Clausen 2010). Mangolte's images, like mirrors as much as windows, reflect an awareness of the process of labor in front of and behind the camera. This consciousness for performance's specific relationship to time and space in the 1970s manifests in the particular angle Mangolte takes her images from and the focus she holds on the space between the camera and the subject. Mangolte's goal was to make palpable a set of assumptions around duration and space that was so familiar, almost invisible to those who were there at the time, but that has to be translated and presented to an audience from another era (Mangolte 2006: 48). The last time Mangolte documented a performance by Jonas was in 1979. The photographs documenting Jonas's performance of *Upside Down Backwards* at the Performing Garage in Soho marked the end of a decade-long working relationship that started with the live recording of *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* (1972), followed by *Glass Puzzle* and *Funnel* in 1974, and the performance documentation of *Delay, Delay* (1972), *Mirage* (1976), and *Juniper Tree* (1977). By the late 1970s, Mangolte stopped documenting New York's Downtown performance scene, while continuing to work as a director of photography and cameraperson for filmmakers such as Yvonne Rainer and Chantal Akerman and, most importantly, embarking on her own work as an experimental filmmaker.

Mangolte's first film, *The Camera: Je or La Camera: I*, shot in 1977, is indicative of her quest to visualize duration and space as vital factors for a new emancipatory cinema that subverts the heteronormative gaze of the spectator. The film scholar Ann Wagner recognizes in these early feminist videos and films a desire to find a new audience that will be courageous enough to engage in these new visual strategies: 'They must be made to see anew. To see actively, to see critically, to see suspiciously. To see themselves doubled, maybe duped, by the artist who is the object of their gaze' (Wagner 2000: 80).

There is a brief sequence, which is relevant both to Mangolte's view of performance art's transcription into the two-dimensionality of still and moving images and of its translation into three-dimensional installations—a mode of working with documentation she developed later on. In this three-minute segment of an interior shot, we see an empty loft in Downtown Manhattan. The city appears as a façade behind the grid of the windows, as a backdrop of sound and image. At first, we see a still shot of a man in mid-step. He suddenly steps out of the frozen frame and resumes walking through the space. A staged interplay begins between the camera following two men walking through the room in opposite directions. Both men follow a choreography of movement and stillness, stop and go, framed by the camera and the iron grid of the loft windows. Neither the rolling footage nor the fictitious

sound of the shutter of the camera we hear—pitting the still against the moving image—is in sync with the rhythm of the actors' movements as they traverse the space. The scene's dynamics derive from waiting for the image to freeze: 'When in the middle of a flow', according to Mangolte, 'you suddenly interrupt the constant motion, and when with striking swiftness you shift to stillness, the opposition between stillness and movement creates dramatic tension, a jolt'.¹¹ It is this captured 'jolt'—the moment that is to represent the whole in the future—that speaks of the correlating influences and dependency between fictional and documentary modes of representation within the performative field. What makes this scene indicative of the relationship between the performance and its visual reproduction is the dynamic between the representational time of the protagonists' movements in space and its framing through Mangolte's staging of the subjective camera as the main character of the film (Clausen 2010: 42). Her gaze (and ours in turn) ceaselessly follows and directs its protagonists, poised for the audience 'to reassess the way they look at film' (Mangolte 1998) and to simultaneously establish an awareness of the recording apparatus and the process of production. This question, which also echoed Mangolte's own explorations of 'how we look' at art, remains a core theme in her own films throughout the 1970s, one she was able increasingly to address due to the recognition of her artistic practice from the early 2000s onwards.

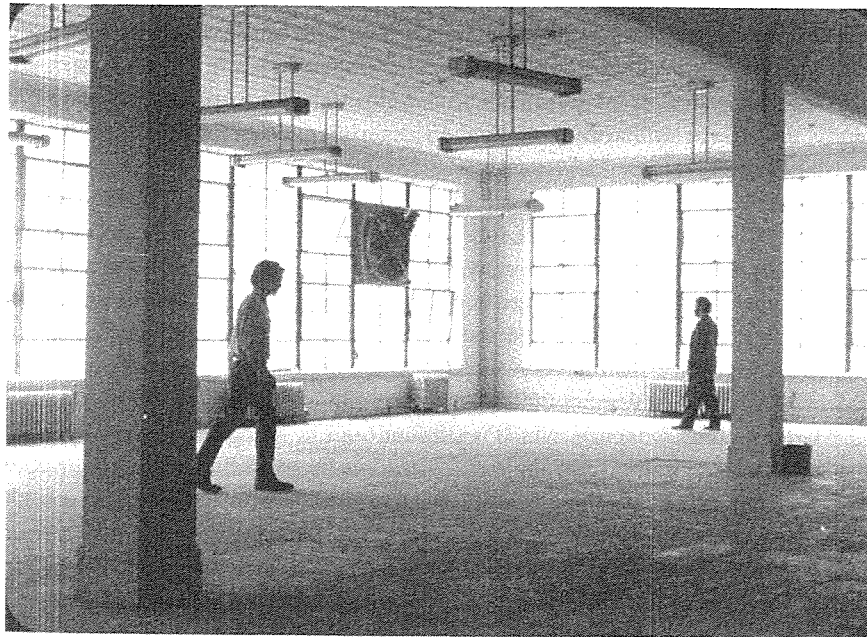


FIGURE 11.2 Babette Mangolte, still moment in the film *The Camera Je, La Camera: I*, 1977, for the Muybridge Sequence shot in a loft in Tribeca

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This particular filmic staging of Mangolte's first exhibition in *The Camera: Je, La Camera: I*, as a time-bound space, can be understood as a key moment in Mangolte's future explorations of the format of the exhibition within the medium of film, as well as in her installation-based works. In her archive-based installations such as *Looking and Touching* (2007) or *Rushes* (2008), the staging of her archive is not only one of the main topics, but also the principal medium of her artistic production. These multimedia installations are key to Mangolte's reflection on the archive of her own work as a chronicler, filmmaker, and photographer, as well as on the work of those captured in her images. The archival quality of her conceptual displays reflects equally on her methodology, her subjects, and on the expansion of her practice from filmmaker and photographer to visual artist. Similar to her careful treatment of space as a key protagonist within her films and photographs, Mangolte systematically uses the format of the exhibition as a situational structure, a time-space in which she can address how we perceive and therefore experience movement in time as an integral part of an aesthetic experience. The juxtaposition and appropriation of the cinematic and the curatorial, as an artistic practice, and the correlative translation of one within the other, gave her the space to develop an aesthetic dispositive that frames her own archive within the theatricality of the exhibition space. In particular,



FIGURE 11.3 Babette Mangolte, *Rushes Revisited, P.S. One Dismantle*, 2013, view of the exhibition *Babette Mangolte, VOX* (Montreal), from January 25 to April 20, 2013

© VOX (Montreal) and Michel Brunelle

her installation of *Rushes* consists of a conceptual reconstruction and portrait of an exhibition from 1978 within an exhibition in 2009.

Mangolte translates the process of capturing an event (the planning and deinstallation of an exhibition) within her installations, arranging photographs, films, and items to reflect not only the passing of time, but her own relationship towards her archive. The central element of the installation, *Rushes Revisited, P.S. One Dismantle* (2013), is a short film entitled *Rushes—P.S. 1—Dismantle* from 1978. This footage is in fact the epilogue of *The Camera Je, La Camera: I*. In it, we see Mangolte in the process of installing and dismantling, together with the curator, her first exhibition at PS1, entitled *How to Look*, in 1978. The projection faces a vitrine that holds a series of playing cards and photographs depicting friends, colleagues, and family, as well as building façades in Downtown New York, all of which are also visible as part of the exhibition depicted in the film. Mangolte's *mise en abyme*-like installations tell the story of her own relationship to the experience of duration and are an act of acknowledgment of time passed as well as of immediacy—a folding of time that is central for the staging of her own archive from the 1970s (Clausen 2016). Looking back, the period in which she herself remained largely invisible as a cultural producer has become the means for the artist (four decades later) to be granted visibility within the shadow of performance art's historicization and the spotlight of its rediscovery. Mangolte's translations of her own archive of performance documentation from the 1970s into her recent multimedia installations display the complex economies that determine the symbolic systems generated through performance art's semantic particularities caught in its correlative relationship between materiality and medial translation.

Similar to Jonas, Mangolte reflects on and uses her past works, carefully orchestrating her multimedia installations rooted in the constantly evolving and cross-disciplinary character of their artistic projects—from performance, to film, to installation, to photography, to script. For both artists, the exhibition is not a site to stage a live event, but one in which the recoding and production of actions, images, and objects collide. Their installations announce, produce, present, chronicle, and reflect the changing status of authorship, reception, and witnessing—all inherent to our experience and understanding of performance art—predominantly through the many still and moving images we are left to look at, after the act.

Artists who look to deconstruct the experience of the live as a layered experience create scenarios that acknowledge the museum as a heterotopic site, a continuum, where spectators and actors are offered a chance to continuously rethink the various relationships contemporary art entertains between the public and the agency of the archive. This interlinking of the archival within the exhibition space as a contemporary mode of production is indicative of the present collapse of the time spans that shape our cultural memory—from a period of three decades to that of several moments.

Jonas and Mangolte's interests in the perception of time and space in relationship to the moving body, a body that specifically addresses the representational politics of gender and how our understanding of gender is constituted

and perpetuated not only through images, but also the spaces these images are projected upon and presented in. This interest in the exhibition as a medium through which the anachronistic relationship of historical documentation of performance art to the present can be negotiated echoes four decades later in the performances and installations of Sarah Pierce and Jimmy Robert.¹² Pierce, in *Future Exhibitions* (2010), and Robert, in *Draw the Line* (2013), investigate through performative acts, carried out within the context of their installations, how the respective parallels and de-synchronicities in the history of performance art are played out as an infinite game of references and appropriations within the institutional framework of the exhibition. Both Robert and Pierce have developed strategies in which the stories that form the spine of art history's own narratives, accumulated over time through the interactions of events, documentary sources, and, crucially, the idea of witnessing, not only affirm performance history, but also are seen to be as important as artists' original intentions. The layered histories and events they address serve as structuring devices and references that reflect on the original time period and political context as well as the historiography and reception of the works. It is important to underline here that neither of the two artists engage in literal re-enactments, nor make references to the past in an homage-like manner. While Robert explores the intersection of choreographic thinking and site-specificity inherent to the ecology of images that feed the contingent existence of performance art by physically adapting and acting them out, Pierce uses the exhibition space as a site of production as well as a format to investigate the politics of the ephemeral and its physical manifestation at the heart of museum politics and the increasing desire for event-based art.

In *Future Exhibitions*, Pierce echoes the contemporary museum's growing desire to shift from an authoritative role focused on devising and upholding official narratives, to one that rethinks its own politics of public engagement (see Bishop 2012, 2013). For Pierce, the destabilization of time, the awareness in the present of the future, and the notion of contemporaneity within the archive are key issues and elements in her performance and installation *Future Exhibitions*. The work is composed of five scenarios, each one based on readings of fragments of art historical documents and images. They are presented within an environment of various objects spread out and arranged between two adjoined spaces.

The first time Pierce was commissioned to present the piece at the Museum of Modern Art (mumok) in Vienna,¹³ she was offered the chance to stage it within Allan Kaprow's installation *Push and Pull: A Furniture Comedy for Hans Hofmann* (Kaprow and Lebel 1966). The work is part of mumok's collection and consists of a wooden trunk filled with handwritten instructions on cardboard. Kaprow first presented this work in 1963 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York as a '(comedic) action room' (p. 315), in which the visitors were challenged to perform the interaction between art and real life by freely moving objects from one space to the other, following his instructions spelled out on a series of hand-painted cardboard posters, which were both announcements of his pieces and the work itself. Pierce used Kaprow's iconic performative environment and its



FIGURE 11.4 Sarah Pierce, *Future Exhibitions*, 2010–2011, video still of the performance within the reinstallation of Allan Kaprow's *Push and Pull: A Furniture Comedy for Hans Hofmann*, 1963, in the exhibition *Push and Pull*, 2010, at the Museum Moderner Kunst mumok, Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna

Photo by Katharina Cibulka, courtesy of the artist

instructional character as a framing device and scenographical structure for the unfolding of *Future Exhibitions*.

Pierce adapted Kaprow's initial concept for the work from 1963, displaying the crate with the cardboard posters made by Kaprow at the entrance of the black-and-white space and hung all the original posters along the wall of the first, white room. Pierce then proceeded to collect a variety of office and museum furniture such as tables, pedestals, and paper rolls, and arranged them in the two adjoining spaces, one black, the other white. The seemingly random yet carefully chosen utilitarian objects served as both props and protagonists. Pierce describes the 20-minute performance as a script:

A PERFORMER describes FIVE SCENARIOS to an audience. Each scenario relates to a particular document of an exhibition. After each monologue there is a scene change, witnessed by the audience, that involves re-arranging the objects as sculptures on the stage. This change is done with the assistance of stage hands, under the direction of the performer and is unrehearsed. The performance takes place in a black or white cube space.¹⁴

Future Exhibitions consists of five acts and shifting arrangements. Pierce's first arrangement of objects resembles the setup of the famous photograph of the '0,10 The Last Futurist Exhibition' (1915) that features works by Kasimir Malevich and Vladimir Tatlin. The performance begins with the lines, 'This is a photograph of

an exhibition . . .'. Pierce continues with a reading of 'A Letter from Kazimir Malevich' in the black box, giving voice to the artist from the afterlife, cynically commenting on the past and present state of the art world in 1986. This letter, obviously written many years after the artist's passing, is an anonymous artist's project, first published within the pages of *Art in America*, and which has been exhibited numerous times since its first appearance.¹⁵ Moving between the spaces, Pierce continues to rearrange the setup for her reading of Seth Siegelaub's description of his exhibition project, *One Month* (1969), within the white cube space. Shifting to and continuing the rearrangement of objects within the second, black box-like space, Pierce, lying on her back on a diagonally slanted board, reads aloud a review by the critic Michael Compton. The review was published in 1971, and describes Robert Morris's infamous exhibition, *Robert Morris*, at the Tate Gallery in London, which closed soon after opening due to safety concerns. Pierce concludes the five scenarios with an excerpt from a letter written by a young artist claiming compensation for a destroyed artwork in the exhibition *Interaction 77* at the Project Art Center in Dublin (1977). The plea of the young artist is staged in the final state of the room, the objects scattered and piled in no apparent order within the white box space. The composition of objects is a direct reference to one of the publicity images of Morris's *Scatter Piece* installation at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 1970, looping the iconic image of *The Last Futurist Exhibition* together with Morris's infamous rupture of the visible and invisible symbolic orders that constitute the exhibition as a public event.

Each of the five short choreographic sequences, punctured by Pierce's readings of her script, is constructed around a series of misunderstandings, moments of personal struggle, or a lapse of memory within the writing of art history. Pierce, through her artistic agency, recalls and brings these personal instances that are also integral to the symbolic value of the iconic works she sites, to our attention, by announcing and acting upon a series of forgotten but in hindsight significant moments in the history of art. *Future Exhibitions* is emblematic of Pierce's continuous cross-reading of the unconscious realm of art history, drawing out an infinite map of social relationships that enfold the minor with the major, the known with the unknown. Her chosen resources, all of which have a history of public display, become literal markers, through which the invisible, administrative procedures the institutions maintain to anticipate and conserve 'the work' as art are (re)performed.¹⁶ From a curatorial perspective, *Future Exhibitions* activates the history of these documentary sources as artifacts and art objects through their performance within the exhibition, a *mise en abyme* that affirms not only their contingent status, but their potential as a source for new documents and recordings (see Santone 2008: 147; Clausen 2010: 23).

Pierce, similar to Jonas and Mangolte, questions the mental and physical division that alienates the viewer from the reality of his or her experience when witnessing a performance as a recording (or even as a live event). This became particularly apparent in her concept for the video documentation of her performance in *Future Exhibitions*. The aim for the documentation of her own work was not to produce a neutral or ideal representation of the work, but to emulate the visual experience of

first-person witnessing, of only seeing fragments of the performance. Pierce asked the Austrian artist and filmmaker Katharina Cibulka to follow and record her actions during the performance. Cibulka was instructed to work in an authentic, improvised manner, letting the eye behind the camera follow the event the same way a spectator on-site would and to record the entire performance in one shot. This overlap of the performing and the recording of the event, echoing Jonas's early strategy of her video performances, allowed Pierce to re-enforce our understanding of 'reality' and the illusion of presence and absence by extending the lens's duality of vision to a third dimension, that of the editor and viewer. Avoiding any edits or cuts and shooting the entire performance in one take, we the viewers move through the two spaces, as those present did. We recognize, through the frame of the camera, the limited visibility of the live event as well as the tension felt between the spectators, the performers, and the apparatus that follows and strives to record the event. The sometimes exact, sometimes de-synchronized doubling of the improvisational movements of the performance with the movements of the camera is a staging of a subjective camera as an independent protagonist, neither artist nor spectator, but chronicler and, hence, author of the events as they unfold in front of the camera. While the exhibition becomes the object of its own perception, the camera simulates the porous process, the gaps and the multiple viewpoints that come together in the writing of art history. The jumpy camerawork lays bare workings and multiple voices significant for the historiography of the documentation of performance art, and its claim and constitution of authenticity through media-based translations.

Pierce allows the spectator to be aware of what is normally discarded over time, calling on history to reveal itself to us in new ways.¹⁷ She uses the documentation of her own work as a device to capture how the cultural production of time becomes visible in the slippages that occur during its recording and reproduction. Watching the documentation of *Future Exhibitions* allows viewers to comprehend how heteronormative narratives and power relationships inherent to the writing of art history take their outset in the institutional politics and administrative procedures within the museum (see especially Molesworth 2010: 504–5). For Pierce, an interest in acting out the museum's operational anachronistic relationship towards its own past within the tightly curated framework of her performances and installations is not intended as a re-enactment or recovery of this forgotten history. Rather, she allows her findings about the entangled roles these documents played to serve as a blueprint for future action, visualizing the inevitable transition of their status and cultural value from historical source to artifact and artwork. Pierce continuously renegotiates the terms for making art, as an ongoing process, visualized through the act of the rehearsal. A contingent representational format that, according to the artist, highlights the potential for dissent and self-determination, the slippages between individual work and institution, and the proximity of past artworks.¹⁸ This interplay of visibility and invisibility, and the various material translations over time constituted through the documentation of performance art, play a vital role in artistic appropriations and a rising interest in feminist genealogies in performance's various histories and herstories.¹⁹

The final case study is dedicated to Jimmy Robert's research and the cross-disciplinary practice he has created since the early 2000s, which takes the historical documentation of works by Robert Morris and Carolee Schneemann's *Site* (1964), Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1965), or Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A* (1966) as the basis of his often collaborative projects. The exhibition is a site for Robert, in which he inscribes and alters the continuous flux of process-based events of the histories he appropriates. Robert uses the documentary sources he takes out of performance histories' archives as a structural device through which he explores the complex relationship between the genealogies of feminist practices he frequently references. The photographs, manifestos, and documentary footage he unearths or chooses become scripts with which he explores the limits of dance in relation to performance, photography, and film.

Performance's relationship to the image, to the body, and to the changing histories it entertains are at the core of Jimmy Robert's image- and text-based, site-specific installation and performance, *Draw the Line* (2013). This work is based on Carolee Schneemann's seminal performance installation, *Up to and Including Her Limits* (1973–1976), which consisted of a performance, a text, an installation, as well as a series of documentary photographs. For Robert, who wanted to use the work 'as a starting point to do something else', a manifesto written by Schneemann in conjunction with the piece at the time, was the key to deconstructing and reassembling the documents he chose to work with.

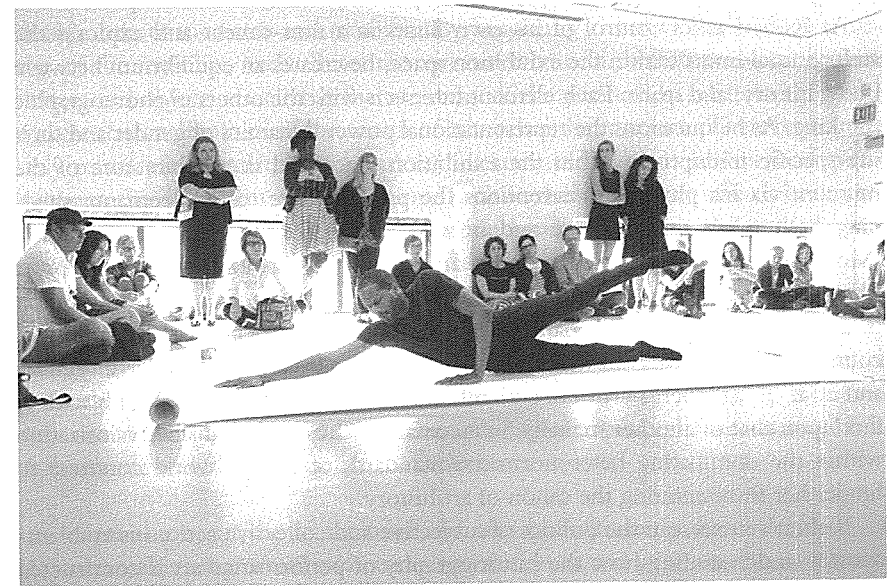


FIGURE 11.5 Jimmy Robert, *Draw the Line*, 2013, performance at the Power Plant, Toronto, 2013

© The Power Plant, Toronto, photo by Henry Chan

Commissioned by the Power Plant in Toronto and curated by Julia Paoli, *Draw the Line* was first of all an architectural intervention that consisted of flooding the exhibition space with natural daylight by exposing a series of windows behind a wall; second, it included a stack of takeaway posters that announced a performance; third, there was a collaborative drawing collage (produced with Kate Davis in 2010) based on the photograph of *Up to and Including Her Limits*. In addition, Robert presented a sound recording of himself writing in pencil on a smooth surface and a roll of large photographic paper unfurled throughout the exhibition space, which was also used as a sculptural prop for a performance that took place a week after the opening. During the performance, Robert executed a series of choreographed movements and poses while reciting Schneemann's text. Robert 'moves into the text and image',²⁰ using both speech and movement as tools (Paoli 2013). In this sense, both the exhibition and the performance of *Draw the Line* can be read through its various modes of expression: as a poem, seen as an image of a script, or heard as a score.

Schneemann's constrained horizontal markings are lifted off her entrapped vertical body, liberated back into the three-dimensional as Robert writes out the script with his body. He deconstructs the privileged status of the historical document through its live rereading, staging an encounter that questions the cause and effect relationship between the original performance as an ontological event and its valorization within the museum as an artifact and art object. Schneemann's feminist critique of painting's canonization and inherent relationship to indexicality as a male gesture is, both figuratively and conceptually, translated into the present.

As Robert takes control of his own limits as a non-dancer and explores the architectural limits within the exhibition space, he creates an equilibrium between body, history, and space. Each element intersects with the others in choreographic thinking. As he questions the representational power dynamics of gender and their site-specific inscription within the exhibition space and the architecture of the museum via his physical interventions, he pays homage to Schneemann, shedding light on her incomplete and belated recognition and institutionalization (Molesworth 2010: 501). The physical inscription of his body within the Power Plant's white cube architecture as he draws and dances stands for the expression of a physical and temporal mark within the context of social networks and discourses that determine the constantly changing representational codes of gender and ethnicity. Robert's claim of authenticity is affirmed by transcribing his state of flux upon that of another, namely Schneemann, whose late and slow valorization within the dominating heteronormative standards of the art world continue to hinder her from entering the canon of art history.

Robert's interest in the politics of subjective and collective actions is emblematic for understanding how the historiography of performance art is constructed over time, long after the act of the performance itself. Due to the continuously evolving relationship between the live and the mediated, the canon of art history has also evolved to include more early feminist and emancipatory performance-based works. This new inclusivity is due to an endless flow of documentary

materials and archives of performance-based practices reproduced and made available alongside an infinite stream of images of performances in the now. Whether presented as art, digitized for a wider audience, or captured on social media, each image questions and also confirms the process of valorization that takes its outset within the exhibition (von Hantelmann 2010: 20). This interest has led to the recognition of artists whose disappearance by virtue of their works' ephemerality has led them to remain in the shadows of art history, often only recognized in their status as artists' artists or as well-kept curatorial secrets. The categorization of performance art as ephemeral—despite its original critical, anti-commercial, and anti-establishment connotations and socio-historical impact—has also facilitated the exclusion of many marginalized vanguard artists, women, and non-white artists from a predominantly heteronormative canon for many decades. Starting in the 1950s and 1960s with Yves Klein's and James Lee Byars's uses of signed certificates issued during events, conceptual practices have relied on such gestures to affirm their presence and valorization within the realm of the art market as well as art history.²¹ At the same time, performance and early video art were continuously branded as not sellable because of their material contingency and ephemerality. The question of performance's ephemerality appears differently when we recognize performance's status as a practice that affirms rather than denies its contingent material status through the process of being performed.²²

Both Pierce's and Robert's methodologies and awareness of the past are comparable to Mangolte's and Jonas's compositional positioning and awareness of the future. In their montages of performer, space, and audience, they take on the double role of mediator and medium. By becoming a medium and hence a carrier of the invisible, each allows the visitors' attention to shift between subject, image, and object, visualizing the economy of the personal in relationship to the representational politics of the canon of art within the museum. Their bodies not only reinterpret historical information, but activate the pictorial layers of space, between the document and the action. Each in their own way affirms how performance art is anchored in the relationship between the physical and pictorial space that surrounds the body of both the performer and the spectator—a space crucial to Mangolte's specific aesthetic when documenting performance, dance, and theater.

This awareness of how we look at art speaks of an effort to take into account not only what spectators experience on each side of the stage, but also what they experience moving back and forth between and within the spheres of art and life. A spectator, according to Richard Schechner:

sees the event, he sees himself, he sees himself seeing the event, he sees himself seeing others who are seeing the event and who, maybe, see themselves seeing the event. Thus there is the performance, the performers, the spectators, and the spectator of spectators, and the self-seeing-self that can be performer or spectator or spectator of spectator.

(Schechner 1985: 8)

Despite their generational differences, the four artists under consideration are guided by the extension of structural principles of the postmodernist credo of plurality and heterogeneity into the complex system of performance art's parallel historicization and institutionalization. This extension is rooted in an awareness that performance operates and can be appropriated not only from one medium to another, but also from one time period to another. Each of these artists speaks about their respective contemporary conditions of artistic labor and visibility while encouraging a dialogue with the past and the future. They bring to light how a performative act becomes a contingent entity of its own, from a documentary source to a performable script, from a prop to an artifact.

The works share a sensibility towards the site- and time-specificity of the institution in which they are situated. Despite their differences, these practices are based on the interest to translate and enact their sources through the framework of the exhibition, exposing the exhibition as a performative medium, and which, similar to a live act, remains visible through its medial translation into still and moving images. For Jonas, this meant simulating an object of desire embodied through the translation of her gestures into installations and sculptural forms. Pierce, like Mangolte, is interested in deconstructing the relationship of the theatricality of exhibition-making to the cultural archives it references, employs, and valorizes, exposing the chronological and performance-based nature of the exhibition format itself. Pierce continuously renegotiates the terms for making art, as an ongoing process, visualizing the potential for dissent and self-determination, the slippages between individual work and institution, and the proximity of past artworks.²³ In contrast to Pierce's engagement with a present yet hidden history that re-encounters its own agency and historicity through the actions and words of the artist, Robert's performing body did not become the locus of an historical encounter, but rather a filter that puts its documents on view. Bound to infinitely reappear and explore the contingency of its various contents' forms and relations to both the past and the future, *Draw the Line* embarks to unveil the temporality of all of its sources. Robert carefully stages his work within the architecture of the exhibition space by being at once inside and outside of his work—similar to Jonas's mirroring of her own presence through the medium of video and other performers. Finding new ways to expand the idea of sculpture through the relationship between gesture and object, Robert investigates the status of the body in the exhibition by questioning the representation of its archival status through choreography, juxtaposing various temporal layers that unfold equally within the exhibition as a site of display and as a performative setting. While Robert plays out the parallels and de-synchronicities as a *mise en abyme* of the correlative relationship of performance art to its image-based and archival status, Pierce addresses how the historiography of minimal and conceptual art through its exhibitions thrives in the tension between its overlapping self-referentiality and its various inherent institutional realities (such as being highly collectible despite its ephemeral character). Their interpretations consciously expose and integrate the discontinuities and ruptures that are usually edited out in the processes of performance art's historicization and institutionalization, rendering visible

the contingent nature of performance art, while acknowledging of all its transitional moments, formats, and histories.

Jonas, Mangolte, Pierce, and Robert have created scenarios in which a temporal and psychological collapse between the experience of actually witnessing a performance and the experience of acquiring knowledge—by reading about an event or seeing a recording—can unfold and come together to become another version of the original event, affirming performance's contingency as an ongoing process. For all four, their modes of working and addressing the exhibition space as a site of production, reflection, and conservation allow the viewer to bear witness to numerous art historical references and to perceive them as echoes of the struggles embedded in the present. Said differently, these works enable the viewer to acknowledge the invisible procedures performed by the artist, the institution, and art history, all in efforts to maintain an idea of originality that can be iterated infinitely in the future.

Notes

- 1 A number of studies and research projects since the early 2000s have focused on the strategies of documentation, and specifically the significance of performance archives (see, among others, Clausen 2006; Morris 2006; Bégoc *et al.* 2010; Bénichou 2015; Büscher and Cramer 2016).
- 2 I am referring here to a debate that has evolved out of an exchange of opinions and essays between Peggy Phelan (1993), Philip Auslander (1999), and Amelia Jones (1997). According to Auslander, our idea of what we consider to be live is based on its potential of repetition as well as factual reproduction. Auslander's inspiring analysis can be traced back to Jean Baudrillard's (1981, 1984) and Jacques Attali's (1985) writings on the simulacrum and the economy of representation. Contrary to the belief that the live event in the arts can withdraw itself from the regime of reproduction, Auslander as well as art historian Jones have proven that the live, as an unfiltered experience, is not only created through media, but guarantees the existence of people's fascination with media.
- 3 This is the case for the photographic archives of performance art's most well-known chroniclers such as Mangolte, Peter Moore, and Robert McElroy (see Clausen 2006: 10).
- 4 See Catherine Wood's and Pamela Lee's acknowledgment of Jonas's pivotal role in the arts (Lee 2015; Wood 2015).
- 5 Both performances are emblematic for Jonas's visual experiments with the fragmentation of the gaze and the performance of the impossibility of looking into one's own projected eyes during the process of live recording and rendering one's image (Doane 2003). For an exact description and script of this work, see Simon (2015: 54). In a recent public conversation with the author, Jonas elaborated on one of the inspirational moments while working on the Organic Honey performance series in 1971: 'Organic Honey, was based on the idea of watching yourself on camera while an audience watches you. I actually got the idea, when I read somewhere that Marilyn Monroe sat in front of a camera, and people were watching her being filmed. I realized that the experience of seeing her in front of the camera was totally different than what the camera would see. So, I made a whole performance based on that idea, that the audience sees the image that the camera sees simultaneously with the performance'. This conversation took place during her retrospective exhibition, *Joan Jonas: From Away*, which I curated, at DHC/ART in Montreal in 2016. See <http://dhc-art.org/joan-jonas-exhibition/> and <http://www.hexagram.ca/en/activities/affinities/> (accessed August 28, 2016).
- 6 As in her video *Vertical Roll* (see Crimp 1983: 9; revised version Crimp 2015: 136).
- 7 See also Christiane Kuhlmann's analysis of early twentieth-century dance photography (Kuhlmann 2003: 194).

- 8 I was engaged in a series of curatorial projects addressing these particular questions around the historization and institutionalization of performance art, in a series of exhibitions presented between 2005 and 2010 at the Museum of Modern Art in Vienna. One of the concepts for the exhibition and conference *After the Act: The (Re)presentation of Performance Art* in 2015 was focused on the reception of performance art through its documentary images. Jonas gave me permission to present the entire archive of approximately 200 images taken by a dozen photographers, culminating in the choice of a select 10 images that have represented this over the last 50 years.
- 9 Mangolte was responsible for the camerawork on a variety of Jonas's projects, such as *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* and *Vertical Roll* in 1972 and 1973, followed by *Glass Puzzle* in 1974, as well as the photo documentation of the *Mirage* performance at Anthology Film Archive in 1977 (see Clausen 2010).
- 10 From an unpublished transcript of a public conversation between RoseLee Goldberg and Babette Mangolte during the exhibition *Art Lies and Videotape: Exposing Performance* at TATE Liverpool, November 15, 2003.
- 11 From an unpublished interview of Connie Short with Babette Mangolte, dated 1996, from the archive of Babette Mangolte, New York.
- 12 Here, we could also mention the work of artists, performers, and choreographers such as Janes Janda, Sharon Hayes, Ai Karawa, Ryan McNamara, Andrea Geyer, Lili Reynaud-Dewar, Gerard Byrne, Sophie Bélair Clement, Xavier Le Roy, Boris Charmatz, Pauline Olowaska, and others.
- 13 This commission was for a two-part performance series and exhibition entitled *Push and Pull I & II*, a co-production between the mumok in Vienna and Tate Modern in London, curated by Achim Hochdörfer, Catherine Wood, and the author in November 2010 and March 2011.
- 14 See images, sources and script for *Future Exhibitions* (2010) by Sarah Pierce (see also Pierce and Frank 2013: 136–57).
- 15 For more on this appropriation of Malevich's persona by an anonymous Slovenian artist, see Milena Tomic's 'Homage à Malevich: Black Square Continued' (Tomic 2015).
- 16 Email conversation between the author and the artist, 2010, during the production process of the piece for the exhibition *Push and Pull I* in Vienna.
- 17 An interest that Pierce shares with artists of her generation, such as Andrea Geyer, who in her work *Three Chants Modern* (2013) has also addressed the loss of information through the process of historization. See also www.sbcgalleries.ca/#!andrea-geyer/chtq (accessed February 9, 2016).
- 18 See artist statement at <http://themetropolitancomplex.com/> (accessed November 30, 2016).
- 19 See, for further elaboration on the practice of appropriation, Jones and Heathfield (2012).
- 20 Conversation between the author and the artist, May 2013.
- 21 See also Lippard (1973) and Ward (2012).
- 22 See also Buskirk (2003).
- 23 See Pierce and Frank (2013) and artist statement at <http://themetropolitancomplex.com/> (accessed November 30, 2016).

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12

AT THE EDGE OF THE 'LIVING PRESENT'

Re-enactments and re-interpretations as strategies for the preservation of performance and new media art

Gabriella Giannachi

Well, I often wish that I had a camera and just took the thing as it went along, because, certainly, very often in working one loses the best moments of a painting in trying to take it further. And, if one had a record of what it was, one might be able to find it again. So it would almost be nice to have a running camera going all the time that one was working.

Francis Bacon (cited in Silvester 1980: 158)

In June and September 2016, two workshops organized by Gaby Wijers and Lara Garcia at LIMA in Amsterdam reflected on the use of re-interpretation in the context of conservation of media arts. The term re-interpretation was chosen vis-à-vis others, like re-play, re-mediation, re-staging, and re-enactment, to reflect the fact that works were not simply to be re-performed or re-staged, but also interpreted anew. The interdisciplinary team brought together at the workshops, which were part of a one-year project, 'Unfold: Mediation by Re-Interpretation', reflected on the affinities and differences between these terms, looking also at practices such as arrangement, homage, reappropriation, and emulation, that are commonly utilized in other disciplines. In this chapter, I show why such practices constitute fundamental strategies for preservation, focusing specifically on re-enactments and re-interpretations. By preservation, I do not so much mean the conservation of something that occurred in the past, but rather a claim to its 'living' quality in the present. I start by looking at case studies that include both historic and artistic re-enactments, as well as re-interpretations of past works through different media. I then move on to explore the notion of repetition, building on Giorgio Agamben's proposition that repetition is what prevents the medium from disappearing, where, by 'medium', Agamben (writing about cinema and following Hegel) intended 'an image, a word, or a colour' (Agamben 2002: 318). Finally, I show that performance generates an environment whose unfolding through