

# Editorial

## The Place of Performance

I remember Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker walking casually onto a dark, almost empty stage, save for an old-fashioned record player.

I remember distinctly her gesture of lifting the tone arm and putting it down, the distinct sound of the needle hitting the grooves of the vinyl record, audible even to an audience sitting several meters away. Suddenly, the clear voice of Joan Baez, accompanied by an acoustic guitar, fills the theater. De Keersmaeker kicks off her shoes and begins to dance, like a teenage girl would do in her bedroom, absorbed in the peace songs of the musician and activist, oblivious to us, or so it seems. And yet, I remember (but perhaps this is only a trick of my memory) that she briefly looked up at us when she walked in, registering our presence as one does entering a busy public space. I always remember De Keersmaeker's 2002 solo piece, *Once*, as a landmark of performance: the absence of acting, the subtle distinction between her space and our space, the way it made me think of everyday gestures as performance—something that would impress me so much, years later, when I discovered it in the work of sociologist Erving Goffman and his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956).

Enactment, re-enactment, performance, re-performance, live, static, documentation, experience, non-experience, the body, transgression, music, scores, the voice, choreography, movement, notation, staging, gestures, scripts, theatricality, the politics of place, the politics of space, the white cube and the black box, performing gender, performing politics, labor, history... These are a number of terms to which we kept returning as we discussed what this issue of *Stedelijk Studies* should envelop—quite a lot, basically. Since the striking performance of De Keersmaeker recollected by Sophie, the choreographer has staged her work, in duration, in the white cube space of Wiels (Brussels) in 2015; it is one sign amidst many of the current cross-fertilization of choreography and visual art. Hendrik's recollection of historical performances presented to him through photographic and video records, as well as other documents that either precede or emerge from a live act, raise the issue of performance documentation in its many forms, in addition to the question of how the history of performance requires being perpetually rewritten anew, as we envisage how to navigate through the field of performance today.

The 1990s marked the first wave of the historicization of performance, particularly through large-scale exhibition surveys

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The first time I experienced a work of performance, I was a student sitting in a classroom. We were looking—collectively—at the documentation of works by the feminist pioneers of performance in Europe and the United States in the 1960s and 1970s: Carolee Schneemann, Ulrike Rosenbach, VALIE EXPORT, Hannah Wilke, and others. Performance was probably not even called performance yet, but instead action, gesture, happening, body art. The stories and the myths around these works were as compelling as the images—oral history and art history conflated into one narrative. In fact, many of these historical positions are transmitted to us through documents, whether in the form of audio, photographic, or video documentation, written reports, storytelling, scores, scripts or instructions, and other records. From the very outset, through the conceptualization of performance through its documents, liveliness and embodiment have, for me, been connected to their abstraction: disembodied and distilled.

that sought to uncover history and display its relics and fragments, predominantly focusing of the European and North American contexts. Exhibitions such as *Hors Limites: L'Art et la Vie 1952-1994* (Centre Pompidou, 1995) and *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979* (MOCA, 1998) relied on then recent art historical research and a corpus of smaller solo presentations in American and European museums in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as eyewitness reports from the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, to excavate and present narratives of performance in the white cube of the museum. These exhibitions unified body and live artistic practices as a movement in art history, inextricably connected to Fluxus, feminisms, conceptual art, etc. One could argue that this was also the phase during which a variety of different historical terminologies—action, happening, instruction, and confrontation—were collected under the banner of “performance.” Informed by the formative thinking and writing of such scholars as Philip Auslander, Judith Butler, RoseLee Goldberg, Amelia Jones, Peggy Phelan, and others, performance as a discourse in art history emerged.

By and large, the 2000s saw a shift from historicizing performance to the museification of performance. Alongside large-scale monographic exhibitions of historical figures (Marina Abramović at the Museum of Modern Art, for example), a number of prominent museums appointed curators of performance and/or live art. Some of these museums developed specifically designed spaces for performance (The Tanks, Tate Modern), while others increasingly devoted large multifunctional spaces to the programming and commissioning of performance (Stedelijk Museum). Within this context, much discourse became devoted to institutional questions: the acquisition and conservation of performance pieces became an important topic, in addition to questions pertaining more widely to the collecting and presentation of performance, and to the conflation of white cube and black box. Several conferences and publications since then have been dedicated to these issues. This present issue of *Stedelijk Studies* is, by contrast, less devoted to these institutional questions than to bringing together and exploring artistic and art historical positions regarding performance today and, in part, shifting the focus away from the predominant European-American (institutional) narrative.

We chose, as a title for the issue, *The Place of Performance*, in order to bring these positions to the fore. Indeed, “place” not only evokes the geographic, spatial, and temporal parameters of performance, it is also an invitation to explore the disciplinary place or non-place of performance amidst dance and choreography, theater, public space, visual art, and political activism. Moreover, we see it as an invitation to explore the places of performance within art history. The authors who responded to the call for papers and were invited to contribute to this issue approached these topics in multiple ways.

Several authors have chosen a monographic approach, devoting their texts to historical as well as lesser-known contemporary figures within performance practice: the essays of Massa Lemu, Robin Kathleen Williams, Amelia Jones, Neylan Bagcioglu, Stephanie Sparling Williams, Arnisa Zeqo, and Miguel A. López. Some authors examine queer and/or feminist positions: Amelia Jones, Robin Kathleen Williams, Paul B. Preciado, Arnisa Zeqo, Miguel A. López, and Giuseppe Campuzano. A number of authors look at disciplinary traditions and questions of display, such as Joe Kelleher and Kirsten Maar, or political articulations,

like Bojana Kunst, Roger Nelson, Giuseppe Campuzano, Paul B. Preciado, and Miguel A. López. Many articles are concerned with documentation and the document and, in some cases, the objecthood of performance: Massa Lemu, Robin Kathleen Williams, Stephanie Sparling Williams, Barbara Büscher, and Sarah Happersberger. Local or national perspectives are the subject of three pieces, by Massa Lemu, Arnisa Zeqo, and Neylan Bagcioglu, as is the question of labor in the essays by Joe Kelleher, Neylan Bagcioglu, and Bojana Kunst. Joe Kelleher, additionally, investigates issues of audience and spectatorship.

As this enumeration makes visible, most authors simultaneously address several points. As a result, rather than divide the issue into sections, we decided to think of a montage marked by thematic continuities and ruptures. One article develops themes that are, in some cases, continued from a different perspective by the article that follows, or that, on the contrary, move into an altogether different direction. The themes outlined above thus serve as a common thread guiding the reader's approach to this issue.

Artistic positions are disseminated throughout the issue, intermingled amidst the academic articles. Their purpose is twofold. On the one hand, these documents perform the question of how we can envision the prevalent chronological relationship between the live event and the document(ation)—as the one preceding the other—in a different manner. On the other hand, they show the variety of ways that text can be used in performance: as a score or script for a live act (Tim Etchells), as a collection of textual references that inform and meander through the performance (Emily Roysdon), as an instructional document with a clearly defined autonomous position (The Bureau of Melodramatic Research), or as both performance and documentation, in the case of Zhana Ivanova; a script for online discussions that we witness everyday on YouTube and other channels.

Ultimately, these artistic positions serve as a kind of user's manual for the historical perspectives. Bringing the two together enables us to underscore the richness and multiplicity of performance today—in all its phases and places.

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