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Repetition and the Critical Discourse on Performance Art

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Performance and Repetition – Foreword

The themed section „Performance and repetition” is devoted to contemporary changes in performative practices and critical revisions of the prevalent theory of performance art. According to this theory, the specific feature of performance art is its “unrepeatability”. The impossibility of repetition is perceived in four different ways. Firstly, performance art is not a reproduction but a live creation – not a repetition of a readymade script but the surging forth of a creative process during the event itself. Secondly, a performance, as an improvised live action, and cannot as such be repeated. Thirdly, the documentation of a performance, in other words a form of repetition that remains once the performance has past, should not – if one were to stick to the rule of the ephemeral – exist at all; when it comes into being, it is only as a relic which is not capable of representing what once took place and became irreversibly lodged in the past. Finally, performance art should not repeat itself in its essence and definition, in subsequent performances: each performance should be an individual transgression and a new self-definition of performance art.

The texts that are gathered here aim not only to depart from this traditional theory of performance but also to reflect on the fact that more and more strategies of repetition have been widening the field of performative practices. Tomasz Załuski outlines a changing approach to the problem of repetition in performance art since the sixties and seventies until the present day, as well as highlights “the critical discourse on performance art” that is developing as a result of the changes. He comments upon the concepts, interpretation strategies and themes of the discourse that have the greatest analytical, critical and cultural potential. Ewa Wójtowicz presents the contemporary forms of performance art in existence in the networked culture. She analyses some ways of reusing the documentation of ephemeral actions, the new relationships between performance and documentation, and practices that are specific to the networked culture, such as a “code performance” or the creating of one’s identity in the world of Second Life and social networking websites. In this way, performance becomes one of the post-production re-practices that becomes inscribed into contemporary remix culture. Katarzyna Bojarska applies the psychoanalytical theory of repetition and the subject of traumatic memory to *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising* by Miron Białoszewski. This work is interpreted as having an element of memory performance: as a multifaceted process, continually replayed anew whilst working-through the author’s memories of the uprising. The literary work becomes a documentation of this memory performance.

Editor of the section Tomasz Załuski

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In the heroic decades of the sixties and seventies of twentieth century, performance art was defined as a form of anti-repetition art. Later, in the eighties and nineties, there was a move away from this anti-repetition ideology towards an ever-growing interest in documentation, re-performances and re-enactments. A configuration of factors: historical, cultural, artistic, technological, institutional, economical, socio-political and educational played a decisive part in this process. Together with it came a change in the theory and historical narration of performance art: since the late nineties there has been developing what the author of the article terms „the critical discourse on performance art”. Its aim is to re-examine the conditions, the possibility of existence and the functioning of performance in cultural and social spaces. The key is to rethink the relationship between performance art and repetition, most importantly in the form of documentation and re-enactment. The article presents some major themes that appear in the texts of various proponents of this discourse. It analyses, at times also in a critical fashion, the new approaches to performance art offered, indicates their possible

applications but also their internal tensions and limitations. It is an attempt to focus on the shape of the arising discourse on performance art and repetition as well as to find among its concepts, the ones that seem to carry the greatest potential for research and critical interpretation.

Re-practices in Performance Art – Documentation, Remediation and Networked Distribution

Ewa Wójtowicz

Performance art does not operate in isolation from the broader circulation of the networked culture. Just like any other media, the documentation of performance can be dispersed throughout the network: to be remixed or recontextualised or become the component of a mashup. The documentation of performance events in the reality of the contemporary network culture does not play a subordinate role to the event as such, since the distributive network not only disseminates information about the event, but also generates a discourse. Analysed examples include the forms of creative activity such as re-enactment, looping online video performance or intervention in the real-time documentation. There are also the new possibilities of artistic expression that come with the persona of a “code performer”. The examples of artists’ approaches include: Constant Dullaart, Ryan Trecartin, and Gazira Babeli and duos, as Eva and Franco Mattes or MTAA. The theoretical framework is based on the theory remix by Eduardo Navas, and the notion of “culture as a screenplay” introduced by Nicolas Bourriaud. It is important to apply it not only to a remediated performance understood as a work of art. Also, the continuous creation of an online identity – both in the world of the Second Life, as well as through social networking platforms – is an ongoing performance in front of potentially global audience. Re-practices within contemporary art rely on the appropriation of historical events and their continuation, which allows for the creation of a third reality of some sort. This third reality becomes a common one, within which – paradoxically – constant change is a sign of the need for preservation. As a result, the documentation material is open, being part of a game with an ever-changing system of references.

To Live in Repetition: Performance, Memory and Trauma

Katarzyna Bojarska

The article “To Live in Repetition: Performance, Memory and Trauma” offers a reflection on the psychoanalytical concept of repetition and its role in the understanding of the functions of traumatic memory and performance. The author offers the concept that performance can be understood not so much as a separate medium but as a very way of living through history and experiencing historical events towards the end of modernism. Thus performance seems to be most of all the means and not the aim of the artistic operation, while what is being produced (and remains), the material work itself, is not considered mere documentation. In such a context, performance emerges as a threshold genre, where the past becomes present in order to soon become past, this time however, necessarily shifted and dislocated by the very gesture of repetition and remaking. The author analyses the work of Miron Białoszewski in his war-time memories as a performance of sorts which is based on the dynamics of repetition and reenactment: the subject of the interpretation is not only the written aspect of the memoir, but also gestures towards the process preceding the writing, such as the author’s oral performances, his “talking” as well as recording and last but not least, the oral reenactment of the book in the Polish Radio studio.