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From Re- to Pre- and Back Again

Over and Over and Over Again: Reenactment Strategies in Contemporary Arts and Theory, ed. by Cristina Baldacci, Clio Nicastro, and Arianna Sforzini, Cultural Inquiry, 21 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2022), pp. 1–16

ABSTRACT: Tracing the complex history of the term 'reenactment', back to R.G. Collingwood's philosophy of history, on the one hand, and popular practices of war reenactments and living history museums, on the other, a survey of its current contribution in art and museum practices highlights — the importance of historicity — a category the postmodern was supposed to have vacated — in a wide range of examples, from Rod Dickinson and Jeremey Deller to Alexandra Pirici, Manuel Pelmuş, and Milo Rau. Performance reenactments, in particular, are premised on performance art having become historical, but also threaten to digest history in favour of a mere productivist mobilization for the needs of current attention economies. An alternative could be the attempt to counter historical with dramatic time in order to unlock unrealized possibilities and futures, as the term preenactment promises.

KEYWORDS: reenactment; preenactment; performance; mediation; historicity

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While the term 'reenactment' has a complex history, both in the philosophy of history and in the popular domain of historical (usually: war) reenactment, it migrated to the sphere of contemporary artistic production around 2000. The aesthetic strategies of pieces such as Jeremy Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001) and Rod Dickinson's *The Milgram Re-enactment* (2002), as well as works by Omer Fast such as *Godville* (2005), clearly referenced popular forms of historical reenactment in the context of war reenactment societies and living history museums. This development indicated a new interest in the performative engagement with history in contemporary art. On the other hand, by 2000, performance art itself had accrued a significant history, which raised the question of how to preserve or actualize it. From happenings and Fluxus to later forms of performance and body art by practitioners ranging from Abramović and Ulay to Chris Burden, the performance art of the 1960s and 1970s had been canonized, or was just undergoing canonization; however, it was far from self-evident how these historical works could be presented for contemporary audiences.

HISTORICAL REENACTMENT

Some of the first exhibitions and publications that attempted to chart, historicize, and theorize the newfound relevance of reenactment

around 2005 consequently made various montages of artistic reen-
actments and other forms of historical reenactment, following cues
in artworks that already made such connections.[1] Rod Dickinson's
Milgram Re-enactment (2002), a careful restaging of Stanley Milgram's
infamous psychological experiment on obedience based on original
transcripts, referenced popular reenactment culture mostly in its title,
as the lab setting and repetitive succession of experiments with dif-
ferent test subjects was a far cry from popular war reenactment. By
contrast, Jeremy Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001; filmed by Mike
Figgis) actually took on the form of such a war reenactment, swapping
World War II and other armed conflicts for the political and social up-
heavals of Thatcher's Britain in revisiting the eponymous fight between
striking miners and police in 1984.[2] Deller frequently appropriates
popular forms; in this case, one can wonder if his attempt to politicize
the applied historicism of the reenactment culture was not undercut
by the wholesale adoption of its trappings.[3]

Such works are based on a popular type of reenactment immedi-
ately rooted in the American Civil War reenactments that took place
during the war's centennial in the 1960s, such as the 1961 Bull Run
(or First Manassas) reenactment on the battle's original site. These
events can be seen as historicist happenings for a wide audience. In its
most general sense, the term 'historicism' designates those tendencies
in modern philosophy, historical writing, and culture that attempt
to reconstruct various periods in their alterity, while also trying to
provide some kind of access to the inner workings of this culture and
its denizens.[4] With the advent of historicism in the decades around

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1   Cf. *Experience, Memory, Re-enactment*, ed. by Anke Bangma, Steve Rushton, and
     Florian Wüst (Frankfurt a.M.: Revolver, 2005); an exhibition I curated, *Life, Once
     More: Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art*, ed. by Sven Lütticken (Rotterdam:
     Witte de With, 2005); *History Will Repeat Itself: Strategies of Reenactment in Contem-
     porary (Media) Art and Performance*, ed. by Inke Arns and Gabrielle Horn (Frankfurt
     a.M.: Revolver, 2007).
2   *The Battle of Orgreave*, dir. by Mike Figgis (Artangel Media, 2001).
3   See also Hito Steyerl, *Die Farbe der Wahrheit. Dokumentarismen im Kunstfeld* (Vienna:
     Turia + Kant, 2008), pp. 50–53.
4   On the history and the different interpretations of the concept, see Georg G. Iggers,
     'Historicism: The History and Meaning of the Term', *Journal of the History of Ideas*,
     56.1 (January 1995), pp. 129–52. On historicism in the arts, Hannelore and Heinz
     Schlaffer's *Studien zum ästhetischen Historismus* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1975) is
     still unsurpassed in many respects.

1800, past cultures were no longer regarded as just relatively different, perhaps falling short of some timeless cultural ideal, but as essentially and fundamentally different.[5] This was a project riven by internal tensions; Hegel's attempt to reintegrate the alterity of past epochs into a single metahistorical narrative was countered by the work of historians who attempted to reconstruct the past 'the way it really was' ('wie es eigentlich gewesen'), to use Ranke's phrase.[6]

The latter form of historicism in turn had its aesthetic counterpart and was itself in part dependent on aesthetic strategies; Stephen Bann has analysed the work of Ranke and Prosper de Barante in conjunction with the novels of Walter Scott.[7] To pinpoint similarities in strategies of description and narration is not, of course, to suggest identical intentions. Nor does it mean that historical writing does not have evaluative criteria that are specific to it. Rather, it examines the ways in which various disciplines (scholarly as well as artistic) engage in the fundamental problem of historicism: that of *presenting*, of making present, a past that has become problematic. For two centuries, theatrical and performative strategies have played a crucial role in this regard. As Walter Benjamin noted, the archetypal nineteenth-century interior aimed to give the bourgeois the impression that a historical event such as the crowning or the murder of an emperor could have taken place in the next room.[8] Follies like Walter Scott's quasi-medieval residence of Abbotsford, or the fantastic series of 'historical' rooms constructed by the writer Pierre Loti in his house in Rochefort-sur-Mer, provided their owners with such phantasmagoric interior, while parades and pageants provided more public forms of historicist theatricality.

A last hurrah for parades in which citizens dressed up in the garb of past centuries was the Kaiser-Huldigungs-Festzug in Vienna in 1908, which celebrated the continuity of Habsburg rule a mere six years be-

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5   See Sven Lütticken, 'An Arena in Which to Reenact', in *Life, Once More*, pp. 17–60; it
    contains many additional references.

6   Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis
    1535. Erster Band* (Leipzig: Reimer, 1824), p. vi.

7   Stephen Bann, *Romanticism and the Rise of History* (New York: Twayne, 1995), especially pp. 17–29.

8   Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1972–91), v: *Das Passagen-Werk* (1982), p. 286.

fore the outbreak of World War I. Meanwhile, the US was swept by a veritable craze for historical pageants — performed before a grand-stand by a large troupe recruited from the town itself against a pictur-esque background, such as a castle.[9] Both in parades and in pageants, with their sequencing of successive groups or tableaux, the overarch-ing historical narrative often trumped the experience of *Jetztzeit* or 'now-time' evoked by Benjamin. The forging of such a now-time was clearly intended with the 1920 mass spectacle of *The Storming of the Winter Palace* in Leningrad, which influenced the similar sequence in Sergei Eisenstein's *October*. Having little similarity to the actual events of 1917, *The Storming of the Winter Palace* was a mass spectacle that did have roots in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century pageant culture, and which yielded images that would be presented as docu-mentary evidence of the 'real' event.[10] Only a few years had elapsed, but the act of monumentalizing that took place in 1920 showed that the October Revolution was already seen as an event similar in importance to the French Revolution — which, in turn, was brought close to the present in a revolutionary *Jetztzeit*.

One 1918 commemoration of 'October' took the form of a festival titled *The Burning of the Hydra of Counterrevolution*, inspired by a French revolutionary holiday.[11] With the action largely being confined to several stages erected in front of the palace, and with elements of allegorical abridgement in the script, the 1920 spectacle was still rather 'stagey' in comparison with reenactments and living history museums since the mid-twentieth century, which tend to emphasize immersion in a particular historical moment or era. The *Storming of the Winter Palace* oscillated between representation of the past and its *re*-presentation (the making present again in a flash of now-time). Today, the desire for *re*-presentation and immediacy prevails, but the growing

9   On historicist parades in Europe, see for instance Werner Telesko, 'Der Triumph- und Festzug des Historismus in Europa', in *Der Traum vom Glück. Die Kunst des Historismus in Europa*, ed. by Hermann Fillitz, 2 vols (Vienna: Künstlerhaus Wien, 1991), I, pp. 290–96; on US pageants, see David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

10   See *Nikolai Evreinov & andere: 'Sturm auf den Winterpalast'*, ed. by Inke Arns, Igor Chubarov, and Sylvia Sasse (Berlin: Diaphanes, 2017), pp. 251–71.

11   James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 41.

emphasis on interactivity and experience — which has only become more pronounced with the emergence of video games, many of which revisit historical wars and battles — glosses over the sense that the present seems gridlocked and the historical horizon clouded.

Perhaps the most important prefiguration of this new popular reenactment culture is to be found in the distinctly highbrow form of R.G. Collingwood's early twentieth-century philosophy of history, which uses the notion of reenactment to denote a central intellectual tool, or faculty, of the historian. For Collingwood, when the historian tries to understand Caesar's actions at a given moment, this means that he (I'm following Collingwood's gendered language here) has to '[envisage] for himself the situation in which Caesar stood, and thinking for himself what Caesar thought about the situation and the possible ways of dealing with it'.[12] Collingwood thus posits a form of armchair reenactment: a mental exercise aimed at understanding historical processes. By contrast, much popular and artistic reenactment is open to the accusation of providing nothing but an escapist simulation of historicity. And yet, in attempting to overcome the alterity and non-identity of past actions and periods through subjective identification, Collingwood effectively arrives at a more considered and analytical version of what some of the more fanatical and dedicated contemporary war reenactors call the 'period rush' — the momentary illusion of being inside the original stream of events, not in a restaging.[13]

This focus on experience and immersion in contemporary reenactments complicates a familiar trope from 1980s theories of postmodernism: the waning of historicity, as symptomatically manifested in the replacement of a 'proper' engagement with history and its antinomies by superficial pastiches and retro fashions.[14] The 'hardcore' reenactors' penchant for authentic details and immersive experience can be seen as

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12   R. G. Collingwood, *Human Nature and Human History*, Proceedings of the British Academy, 22 (London: British Academy, 1937), p. 13. See also William H. Dray, *History as Re-enactment: R. G. Collingwood's Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

13   See a popular account of Civil War reenacting: Tony Horwitz, Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War (New York: Vintage, 1998); in addition, see Jenny Thompson, War Games: Inside the World of Twentieth-Century War Reenactors (Washington: Smithsonian, 2004).

14   The locus classicus is of course Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

a critique of precisely this kind of postmodern negation of history, but in the process they come to identify and reify history with a concrete and delineated set of artefacts and events, and to espouse an ideology of concrete (co-)presence in the (restaged) event. Here, dramatic time annuls historical time, rather than establishing a productive dialectic with that time scale; historicist play absorbs and annuls history. As a result, this history is highly susceptible to endless instrumentalization: witness the problematic allure of Confederate soldiers and Nazi troops in war reenactment.

This is not to say, however, that the form cannot also be used in other ways — not by those claiming the ownership of history, but precisely by those who contest these masters of history and their own genealogies. Under the Duterte regime in the Philippines, the annual activist reenactment of the 1985 Escalante massacre gains in urgency, as a dismal now-time has emerged between the Marcos and Duterte eras.[15] Here, folk reenactment loses the 'national heritage' aspect it has in Deller's work (in spite of Deller's determination to infuse the demotic form with critical content). Joshua Oppenheimer's film *The Act of Killing* has former death squad leaders triumphantly reenacting their own crimes during the 1965 to 1966 mass killings in Indonesia; they have never been held to account and are glorified by a powerful right-wing militia. In this 'perennial 1965', so to speak, Oppenheimer and his associates use reenactment in an almost therapeutic manner — it is the role change from perpetrator to victim that finally causes their protagonist to break down. Both the Escalante reenactments and *The Act of Killing* are interventions in situations in which the past is all too present; they make the ongoing effects of these massacres perpetrated by US-backed regimes painfully sensible„ rather than offering an escape from the present to a more heroic past.

In a less directly interventionist mode, Eran Schaerf's *Scenario Data* presents a series of artworks focusing on the staging of history,

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15   See, for instance, on the blog of the progressive union of agricultural workers
      UMA Pilipinas: '"Cultural Revolution" Pursued in Escalante Massacre Memorial',
      20 September 2016 <https://umapilipinas.wordpress.com/2016/09/20/cultural-
      revolution-pursued-in-escalante-massacre-memorial/> [accessed 10 March 2019];
      Barbara Mijares, 'Militants Reenact Escalante Massacre', *ABS-CBN News*, 20 Septem-
      ber 2017 <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/09/20/17/militants-reenact-escalante-
      massacre> [accessed 10 March 2019].

from seemingly innocuous war reenactments to more sinister forms of stagecraft. If the masters of history perpetuate the historical crimes that created their position of power and privilege in the first place, thus effecting a colonization of the now by a past that refuses to die, the perpetuation of this power in turn facilitates the remaking of history. *Scenario Data* is based on an elliptical scenario that Schaerf has realized in various media: in printed text/photo spreads, for instance, but also in large installations in which revolving slide projectors cast images related to the scenario on the walls. These images include Napoleonic reenactors, old chairs scattered around a campfire during the Yom Kippur War, and an astronaut in an eighteenth-century period room. This still, from the end of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, is reframed in an accompanying text by Schaerf:

> The American space agency Odyssey suspects the Kubrick Company's lost futurologist may be in an eighteenth century French salon. The agency has requested the support of the Israeli secret service. Meanwhile, the French Baron Edmund de Rothschild declared his intention to donate an eighteenth century French salon to the Israeli Museum of Period Rooms to ensure that in the case of the lost futurologist's return, it will be in Israel.[16]

At one point in Schaerf's allusive fiction, 'Israeli soldiers disguised as Palestinian women' come to blows with 'European war-gamers disguised as Napoleonic Guards'. This occurs, of course, in the 'Museum of Period Rooms', which has been advising the army on disguises.[17] The past is actualized and instrumentalized in perplexing ways; the fantasy of time travel reveals itself as temporal colonialism, as history is reenacted in order to perpetuate the present order that sprang from it.

NOTATION AND MEDIATION

If pieces such as *The Milgram Reenactment* or *The Battle of Orgreave* could be accepted as contemporary visual art, this was ultimately due

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16   Eran Schaerf, 'Scenario Data #39', in *Life, Once More*, ed. by Sven Lütticken, pp. 9–16 (p. 9).

17   Ibid., p. 10.

to the performative turn in the art of the 1960s and early 1970s; after all, such pieces reintroduce some of the tropes of historicism into performance art. By the early twenty-first century, the work of the first and second generation of performance artists had itself become historical. How to deal with these works, which were, by their nature, ephemeral? Many of them had been documented in some ways (in the form of photos, films, videos, and written accounts); could and should they also be reenacted? In 2001, the project 'A Little Bit of History Repeated' at KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin, curated by Jens Hofmann, put the issue of the reenactment of historical performance pieces on the map.

What is the status of the 'original' performance or performances of a given piece? Is the piece considered to be score-based and therefore repeatable, re-performable, in the manner of many musical compositions? In the wake of John Cage, during the early 1960s, Fluxus artists developed a type of event score that allowed for a wide range of interpretations. George Brecht's 1961 *Word Event (Exit)* was a case in point: the score, which is reduced to the word 'exit', can be performed by exiting a room, but Brecht also selected a readymade 'exit' sign as a realization of the piece. However, in spite of this openness of the post-Cagean score, specific 'historical' executions of such a score can still be auratized. Written accounts and especially auratic black-and-white photographs created a mystique around such iterations. This is especially true with charismatic performers such as Beuys, or with the more complex happenings staged by Allan Kaprow or Wolf Vostell.

Kaprow, for one, tried to counteract such mystification by increasingly refusing the mediation of his happenings, even doing away with live audiences and restricting them to active participants, while producing scores that would allow for a myriad of different realizations, not necessarily controlled by him. The 2006 to 2008 travelling Kaprow retrospective contained a number of 're-imaginings' of old Kaprow environments and happenings. What was problematic about these re-imaginings was that they seemed to have been executed with very little imagination; they were normalized, bureaucratic versions using an IKEA aesthetic. One space was dubbed an 'Agency for Action'. This was an office space in which one could find, for instance, photocopies with instructions for happenings. With its generic office look

and its aura of administrative aesthetics, this space seemed singularly inappropriate and jarring. But perhaps this quasi-corporate version of Kaprow's piece is in fact an apt actualization, as it foregrounds the effects of institutionalization and the need to come to terms with the work under vastly different circumstances — situating it in the gap between then and now, rather than enshrining it in 'wie es eigentlich gewesen'.[18]

In the context of the neo-avant-garde, and indeed of the Fluxus network, Beuys is representative of a performative practice predicated on a single performer and his ritualistic act. While Beuys's pieces from *Filz TV* (1970) to *I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974) could be reduced to fairly simple instructions, any new version risks appearing as an impoverished knock-off, lacking its star performer. Furthermore, could a new performer — or even, in some cases, the same performer some thirty years later — not fall into the trap of going through the external motions, without arriving at a Collingwoodesque recreation of the impulses behind the actions? Marina Abramović has staged a number of versions of her own works, and those co-created with Ulay, as well of pieces by other 'historical' artists. Increasingly, younger performers take her place in new iterations of her pieces, though Abramović has only become more iconic as part of today's media-celebrity complex.

The use of other/younger performers in such restagings can be seen as a specific form of *delegated performance*; as such, it is part of a wider reconceptualization of performance art beyond the paradigms of the 1960s and 1970s.[19] This delegation of the performance of a historical piece to others, however, coexists (at times uneasily) with an increasing valorization of documentation engaging with a piece's past iterations. A contemporary version of Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A* (1966) in a museum, danced by a number of young performers simultaneously, does not take away the need for other forms of engagement with historical versions that were performed by Rainer herself.[20] The

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18   'Allan Kaprow: Art as Life' ran at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven from 10 February to 22 April 2007.

19   On delegated performance, see Claire Bishop, 'Delegated Performance: Outsourcing Authenticity', *October*, 140 (Spring 2012), pp. 91–112.

20   Such performances took place, for instance, during 'Yvonne Rainer: Space, Body, Language' at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne from 28 April to 29 July 2012.

last fifteen years have seen a marked increase in scholarly and theor-
etical interest in the afterlife of ephemeral performances and dance
pieces. How are performances remembered and reconstructed after
the fact? If critics and scholars once treated the 'actual' performance as
a privileged event and relegated all mediations to secondary status, the
process of mediation has now come to be seen as an integral element of
performative practice. Oral and written accounts, film, and video are
no longer seen as derivatives of the 'real' artwork but provide access
to it even while (re)shaping it. In her study of Rainer, Carrie Lambert-
Beatty foregrounds the fact that her object of study is 'a series of traces,
shaped and serially reshaped by the interests, desires, and ways of see-
ing of everyone from the artist to the photographer who documented
the events to the historian herself'.[21]

At first sight, the rise of performance reenactments would seem
to indicate that, after all, we still long to experience the original
event or some approximation of it. If most sophisticated performance
scholarship has decisively abandoned the ontological privileging of
the live performance over media representations that marked both
historical performance art and performance studies, does this vogue
for restaging performances indicate a relapse of sorts? There is no
denying that many such reenactments hold the promise of getting a
close approximation of the original event. The most successful reit-
erations of historical performances counteract this by acknowledging
their mediated nature. Here one could think, for instance, of Babette
Mangolte's 1993 film *Four Pieces by Morris*, which restages four sig-
nificant dance/performance pieces from the period of Robert Morris's
involvement with the Judson Dance Theater. Mangolte's version of
the piece *21.3* (1964), which saw Morris lip-synching (not quite in
synch) to his taped reading of an Erwin Panofsky text on iconology,
is a black-and-white film that refuses to imitate the filmic documents
of the period in any literal manner. Mangolte obviously based her re-
staging in part on the famous black-and-white photo of this piece, but
she did not attempt to recreate Morris's look in detail. The voice on
the tape is Morris's, and the performer, Michael Stella, is dressed and

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21   Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA:
     MIT Press, 2008), p. 16.

bespectacled in a way that seems to evoke the early 1960s, as well as the late 1980s and early 1990s; in this way, memories of Morris in the original performance may become mixed with more recent stage images. The film seems suspended between periods, fracturing Morris's already multiple temporalities as if in a colourless kaleidoscope.

Film was a crucial medium for the survival of aesthetic historicism in the twentieth century and beyond, from early films after Scott's novels such as *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1909) and *Ivanhoe* (1913) to Spielberg. *Saving Private Ryan* coexists and competes with live war reenactments, with many reenactors serving as extras during battle scenes, even as some may resent having the action cut up into film takes. Both forms, however, try to create a suggestive and immersive experience of the actual happening. Mangolte's take on film as a medium of historical reconstruction could hardly be further removed from this. Morris's original version already was a remediation of print in oral form, turning the performing subject into a neurotic puppet; in this sense, the performance was not 'original' in the first place. The mediacy rather than the immediacy of film is stressed.

A different piece by Morris, which took the form of a minimalist column standing erect on a stage and suddenly falling over (pulled by a wire), has more recently been recreated in Gerard Byrne's large video installation *A Thing Is a Hole in a Thing It Is Not* (2010). This work consists of a series of videos dealing with Minimal Art and its controversies. They include a restaging of Tony Smith's legendary New Jersey Turnpike ride and of the 1964 Public Radio broadcast *New Nihilism or New Art?* (1964) with Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, and Frank Stella. Here and elsewhere, Byrne's work often involves actors reading out historical texts — usually transcripts of interviews. In other words, the actors reenact conversations on the basis of their translation into print. Such forms of aesthetic practice double as potential aesthetic theory, providing crucial incentives for theoretical and historical writing. The best scholarship and theory on reenactment is just beginning to catch up with the ways in which art unpacks the complexities and contradictions of reenactment.

RE- AND PRE-

While performance scholars have increasingly focused on perform-
ance documentation as more than just a pale and passive reflection of
the 'real thing', as archival materials with an intrinsic value and per-
formative qualities in their own right, artists have increasingly taken
to performing various archives within the context of exhibitions.[22] Ex-
amples include:Hans Ulrich Obrist's Swiss Pavilion at the 2014 Venice
Architecture Biennale — in which documents of the work of Lucius
Burckhardt and Cedric Price were activated through a choreography
devised in collaboration with Tino Sehgal and other artists — and the
2015 Black Mountain College exhibition at the Hamburger Bahnhof
in Berlin.

    Analysing Jean-François Lyotard's take on the postmodern con-
dition, Tom Holert argues that a specifically 'postindustrial and post-
modern relationship between competence and performativity […]
opens up a new area of activity for the artist which, though perform-
ativity, is distinguished by a potential freedom of choice and interests
and omni-accessibility to databases and archives'.[23] In the process, his-
tory has increasingly been transformed into a deposit of potentially
valuable materials to be mined by artists and other post-Fordist work-
ers (i.e., creative and cognitive workers). In other words, we are dealing
with a productivist mobilization of the historical record.[24]

    We can see this mobilization, in more or less critical forms, in pro-
jects such as the various iterations and divisions of Boris Charmatz's
Musée de la danse, or pieces by Alexandra Pirici and Manuel Pelmuş

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22   On the more productive role now accorded to documentation, see, for instance, Philip
        Auslander, 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation', in *Perform, Repeat,*
        Record: Live Art in History, ed. by Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (London:
        Intellect, 2012), pp. 47–58, and Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched*.

23   Tom Holert, 'Exhibiting Investigation: The Place of Knowledge Production in the
        Visual Arts *Dialogue/Discourse/Research*, 1979', in *Troubling Research: Performing*
        Knowledge in the Arts, ed. by Carola Dertnig, et al. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014),
        pp. 28–81 (p. 50).

24   In this context the phrase 'performing the archive' and variations thereof be-
        come buzzwords. See for instance *Performing the Archive/Archives of Performance*,
        ed. by Gunhild Borggreen and Rune Gade (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum
        Press, 2013), or the programme of the 2015 NUI Galway conference *Perform-*
        ing the Archive <https://performingthearchive2015.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/
        conference-programme-final.pdf> [accessed 10 March 2019].

such as *Public Collection of Modern Art* (2014). In such projects, per-
formers enact various historical performances, or even (in the case
of Pirici and Pelmuş) artworks in any medium, as well as political
manifestos. The activation of the archive here becomes a matter of
living labour; it is not just re-performed by someone pushing a button
on a DVD player but through physical enactment by professionals or
unskilled labourers, as well as by the visitors who are confronted with
and challenged by the 'official' performers. Many of the pieces and
texts reenacted on behalf of Pirici and Pelmuş in the Van Abbemuseum
in 2014, during the first iteration of *Public Collection of Modern Art*
speak of the utopianism of modernist and avant-garde movements.
Vladimir Tatlin's Tower, Dada slogans, and a Piet Mondrian painting
meet the Communist Manifesto and the Cyborg Manifesto, as well as
the Accelerationist Manifesto.[25] That this genealogy ends with the cod
vanguardism of Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams suggests Karl Marx's
dictum about tragedy being repeated as farce; in the age of Twitter
theory, utopian vistas have been become memeified fodder for the
attention economy.

    Some of Pirici's solo pieces play with a variety of projected futures.
Her 2016 piece *Signals*, which was put on in a dark space by performers
wearing motion capture suits, contained some elements that were
also part of Pelmuş and Pirici's *Public Collection of Modern Art*, such
as Tatlin's Tower, but it combined (art) historical and contemporary
references with futurist entries such as 'EU flag with five stars collected
by Tate Modern in 2032' and 'Abramović holograms for her 2030
MoMA retrospective'.[26] In the latter case, the performers *preenacted* a
future sci-fi techno-reenactment. A notion that has come to the fore in
recent years, preenactment is a rehearsal for a future that may or may
not be actualized. One work reenacted by Pirici and Pelmuş's young
performers at the Van Abbemuseum was the single-channel version

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25   On the piece's conception, see Paul Dunca's interview with the artists, 'Public Col-
    lection: An Interview with Alexandra Pirici and Manuel Pelmuş', *Rivista Arte,* 14
    December 2014 <https://revistaarta.ro/en/public-collection/> [accessed 23 March
    2021].

26   For a list of the meme-like elements that make up *Signals*, see the artist website
    <http://alexandrapirici.com/> [accessed 23 March 2021]. However, this list is not
    the (entire) score: the components were performed in ever-changing sequences on the
    basis of a selection made by online users and a content-ranking algorithm.

of Harun Farocki's *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1995) , which itself
reuses historical films, starting with the 'first film' of workers leaving
the Lumière factory, and continuing with subsequent scenes that could
be regarded as (usually unintentional) remakes of that first film. At
the Van Abbemuseum, the performers reenacted Farocki's work by
leaving the exhibition space, only to return and continue with their
gruelling schedule. The repetition suggests that you cannot leave the
'social factory'; it is a preenactment of a future that at present appears
forestalled.

Milo Rau's *Congo Tribunal* (2015–17) presents itself much more
assertively as 'the illusion of a future in which this symbolic would be
to some extent normal' ('das Vorleuchten einer Zukunft, in der dieses
Symbolische gewissermassen normal wäre').[27] An artist-led tribunal
without any official status, the Congo Tribunal is part of a larger con-
stellation of historical and contemporary activist and artistic tribunals,
such as the various 'people's tribunals' from the 1960s and 1970s Rus-
sell Tribunals to the present. Rau is well aware of such precedents, with
which the Congo Tribunal shares its absolute powerlessness in jur-
idical terms. One could term this 'paralegal performance': its efficacy
lies in publicity, not in the legally binding speech act of a judge or jury.
Rau's *Moscow Trials* (2013) constituted a free replay of actual trials
against artists and curators in Putin's Russia; they were a reenactment
in which a jury had to arrive at verdicts that could (and did) differ from
the actual verdicts. Rau conceives of such pieces as preenactments of
a justice to come.[28] This is particularly pronounced in the case of the
Congo Tribunal, which did not restage any prior event, in the absence
of any actual political and/or juridical process that would stop the
violence.

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27   Milo Rau, *Das Kongo Tribunal*, ed. by Eva Bertschy, Rolf Bossart, and Mirjam Knapp
     (Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag, 2017), p. 24.

28   Drawing on psychotherapy, Céline Kaiser uses the term 'preenactment' in 'Auftritt der
     Toten. Formen des Re-, Pre- und Enactment in der Geschichte der Theatrotherapie',
     in *Szenotest. Pre-, Re- & Enactment zwischen Theater und Therapie*, ed. by Céline Kaiser
     (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014), pp. 44–58. Milo Rau, who participated in the *SzenoTest*
     project (see Kaiser, 'Vorwort', p. 7), has adopted and adapted the term for his practice:
     see, for instance, Avi Feldman>, 'An Interview with Milo Rau', *OnCurating*, 28 (Janu-
     ary 2016), pp. 50–53 <http://www.on-curating.org/issue-28-reader/an-interview-
     with-milo-rau.html> [accessed 10 March 2019].

In contrast to the *NSU-Komplex auflösen* tribunal (2017), a grass-roots initiative for which Forensic Architecture produced a video reconstruction of the murder of Halit Yozgat by the NSU Neo-Nazi group, Rau's Tribunal is an authored project: a show with a clearly identified director who exploits his position of privilege. While certainly not beyond critique, the *Congo Tribunal* provides many productive points of departure for further elaboration, precisely through critical examination. Rau has used dramatic time not to represent, but to intervene in and (potentially) transform historical time. Recalling Harold Rosenberg's frequent play on the different registers of 'acting', from theatrical performance to political action, Rau stages an only partially scripted tribunal in which actors play themselves in a future courtroom.[29] This is history as preenactment, which is something different than visionary anticipation. In J. L. Austin's terms, one could conceive of the tribunal as an *illocutionary* speech act that, while not having the power of *perlocutionary* speech acts — 'I sentence you to ten years in prison' — can nonetheless have an effect through rhetoric and affect.[30] But what, precisely, is being preenacted? Would a 'real' Congo Tribunal be a proper historical event — such as, say, the storming of the Winter Palace, or even the Battle of Orgreave — that ruptures the status quo or would it prevent the further strengthening of the status quo though a UN-approved model of conflict resolution and population and conflict management?[31] It may not be a flaw, but rather, a quality — a feature rather than a bug — that the project raises such questions and provokes a chain reaction it cannot control. Semiscripted though it may be, it opens onto an unwritten future.

In an essay on the concept of performativity that is highly critical of art-world uses and abuses of Austin's speech act theory, Andrea Fraser discusses the term enactment (without any prefix) in a framework informed by psychoanalysis. As an extension of the notion of trans-

29   On Rosenberg, 'action painting', and the slippage between different modes of acting in his writings, see Sven Lütticken, *History in Motion: Time in the Age of the Moving Image* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), pp. 223–27.

30   J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

31   Oliver Marchart defines the theatrical preenactment as 'preforming' such a future event; see Marchart, *SoDA Lecture 09.07.2014 'The Art of Preenactments'*, Hochschulübergreifendes Zentrum Tanz Berlin (HZT Berlin), 9 July 2014, online video recording, Vimeo <https://vimeo.com/114242197> [accessed 10 March 2019].

ference to include nonverbal, physical elements, 'enactment' indicates that structures of relationships 'are produced and reproduced in all kinds of activity'. For Fraser, enactment implies 'that in the production and reproduction of these relationships there is *always* an investment, and that the meaning of the enactment, its significance, function, and effect, is intimately and inseparably tied up with that investment'.[32] What kinds of (psychological, social, economic) investments inform our re-, pre-, and other enactments? What do we perpetuate and what do we modify in each iteration? What is (re)produced in the process? These are some of the questions in the ongoing tribunal that accompanies any practice worthy of the name.

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32   Andrea Fraser, 'Performance or Enactment', in *Performing the Sentence,* ed. by Carola Derning and Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), pp. 122–27 (p. 127).

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