

How can performance act historiographically?

Enacting the New York avant-gardes of the 1960s and early 1970s

Submitted by Andrew Thomas Field, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Research in Drama in April 2012.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with extending the role that live performance might play in our understanding of the work of the interrelated avant-garde performance communities that emerged in New York in the 1960s and early 1970s. This is a practice-led project that uses my own performance work as the site of its enquiry.

In the last decade performance itself has begun to play a significant role in our understanding of and relationship to past performances, in the main through the increasing pervasion of re-enactment as an acknowledged historiographical trope. However, as a consequence of its association with re-enactment, the nature of the historiographical role afforded to performance is still primarily determined by its proximity to the archive and institutionalised modes of performance history. Challenging the primacy of the re-enactment as a means of embodied engagement with past performance, this research project explores how manipulation of my own performance practice might generate new forms of historical knowledge. In particular my focus is on using this practice to develop a new understanding of how the work of this earlier period altered y the experience of the urban landscape for those participating in the work, audience and performers alike.

Structured around a rigorous analysis of three specific works from across this earlier period, I conceived a series of spatial 'blueprints' that were applied to my practice to create three new performance pieces. Using my own research and practice to renegotiate the relationship between live performance and the archive, I demonstrate the possibility for a new historiographical approach to past performance. This approach emphasises the role of the participants in the performance as generators of an alternative form of historical understanding embedded in ways of operating in the city.

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LIST OF ACCOMPANYING MATERIALS

DVD – Performing Historiography: three works by Andy Field