

Putting Rehearsals to the Test

Practices of Rehearsal
in Fine Arts, Film,
Theater, Theory, and
Politics

Sabeth Buchmann

Ilse Lafer

Constanze Ruhm (Eds.)



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On the Publication Series

We are pleased to present this new volume in the publication series of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. The series, published in cooperation with our highly committed partner Sternberg Press, is devoted to central themes of contemporary thought about art practices and art theories. The volumes in the series comprise collected contributions on subjects that form the focus of discourse in terms of art theory, cultural studies, art history, and research at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, and represent the quintessence of international study and discussion taking place in the respective fields. Each volume is published in the form of an anthology, edited by staff members of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Authors of high international repute are invited to write contributions dealing with the respective areas of emphasis. Research activities such as international conferences, lecture series, institute-specific research focuses, or research projects serve as points of departure for the individual volumes.

With Putting Rehearsals to the Test: Practices of Rehearsal in Fine Arts, Film, Theater, Theory, and Politics we are launching volume nineteen of the series. The book presents the results of a research process that has been conducted at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in close cooperation between two departments/studios: Modern and Postmodern Art Theory Professor Sabeth Buchmann, and Constanze Ruhm, head of Digital Media Studio, have been dealing with the topic of “rehearsal” in many different formats, from many different approaches and with great dedication. Curator Ilse Lafer, who is coeditor of this volume, has also been instrumental in conceiving the exhibition that has been prepared in parallel to the publication of this volume, and which took place at VOX-Centre de l’image contemporaine, Galerie Leonard & Bina Ellen—Université Concordia, and SBC Galerie d’art contemporain, Montreal, from September to mid December, 2016.

This volume spans a broad arch from fine arts to theater, from politics to theory to film. And it presents artworks contributed by Silke Otto-Knapp, former head of the Figurative Painting studio at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and now professor at UCLA, which in a pronounced way points toward one of the central hypothesis of this book: that the practices of rehearsal not only prove to be productive fields of scholarly inquiry, they are imminent to the practices of art and thus art practices in themselves.

We thank the editors of this volume, Sabeth Buchmann, Constanze Ruhm, and Ilse Lafer, for bringing together this wide range of expertise, and for their continued work on the rehearsal. Their commitment to this book project was tremendous. We thank—as always—all the partners contributing to the book, especially Sternberg Press.

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Putting Rehearsals to the Test

Introduction

Sabeth Buchmann,
Ilse Lafer, and
Constanze Ruhm

Despite the popularity of the format of rehearsal in film, theater, music, and fine art, it has been scarcely considered as a theoretical topic in contemporary art discourses. It is against this background that this publication—as part of an ongoing research-based project that branches out into film screenings and lecture programs¹ as well as, most recently, the format of an exhibition—investigates the role as well as the function of the notion of “rehearsal,” understood as a methodology, a *modus operandi*, a medium, a site of representation and reflection for artistic production processes, and as an instrument of critique of institutional power relations.

The impossibility of distinguishing between rehearsal and performance—a specific feature of the so-called post-dramatic theatre²—appears as an analogy to certain practices existing in an area of conflict between so-called individual/fine arts and collective/performing arts: these practices oftentimes lean toward narrativizing as well as staging artistic events going beyond a rigid category of “artwork.” As Annemarie Matzke has shown in her instructive book *Arbeit am Theater: Eine Diskursgeschichte der Probe*³ and in her essay “Contingency and Plan,” published in this reader, formats of rehearsals seek to debunk the embeddedness of art into the social division of labor: “In other words, the way rehearsals are conducted in the theater says something about the society in which this theater is made.”⁴

Since this is true for other genres and media as well, the topos of rehearsal also inscribes itself into seemingly static formats such as drawing and painting—as Christine Lang points out in the case of Diego Velázquez’s *The Spinners, or The Fable of Arachne* (1655–60), and as Silke Otto-Knapp shows in her etching series “The Common Reader” (2015). It achieves this by turning the canvas, the paper, and/or the printing plate into the (performative) medium, where the artistic labor process merges with the activity and/or work as the subject of representation.

Regarding this condition, artists, activists, and theorists working with and on strategies of rehearsal focus on moments of contingency within (pre-)existing systems and schemes in order to debunk their mutual function of establishing *and* transforming social divisions of labor that correspond with the reciprocity of cementation and subversion of power relations. Therefore, Matzke

1 “Putting Rehearsals to the Test” was the title of a series of seven evenings, including screenings, performances, discussions, and lectures at the mumok, Vienna, with a concluding conference hosted by the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. The series took place between March and June 2013.

2 See Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Das Postdramatische Theater* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1999).

3 Annemarie Matzke, *Arbeit am Theater: Eine Diskursgeschichte der Probe* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2012).

4 Annemarie Matzke, “Contingency and Plan,” in this volume, 58–70.

investigates how processes of rehearsal are understood as an “attempt” or “experiment” reveal processes of professionalization of the actors and actresses as well as the institutionalization of the theater as a genre to be distinguished from the entertainment industry. Conceiving rehearsal as a practice suspended precisely between (pre-)determined and experimental role-playing, as part of rule-bending “work performances,” the entanglements of system/scheme and contingency/randomness appear as a pendulum between the conventional and the searching creation of new knowledge.⁵

Assuming that systems and networks are interrelated modular forms of labor and knowledge, the relation between “role” and “rule” continues within an investigation of the intersection and the interaction of the open form of rehearsal, while at the same time working with and against given conventions. By defining the methodology of rehearsal as a system-related format, we can observe the nexus of performative arts and fine arts. The processes of rehearsing and staging emerging from classical forms of theatrical production aim at perfection and virtuosity—in contemporary art discourse they reappear as a counter-model of a practice within which the final product frequently is the result of a fragile, fragmentary, incomplete, and experimental setting that reconstitutes and performs itself always anew by way of repetition and difference.

It is exactly this aspect that leads us to the notion of post-dramatic theater, conceived by German theater theorist Hans-Thies Lehmann in his eponymous 1999 book that summarizes a number of tendencies and stylistic traits occurring in avant-garde theater since the end of the 1960s. The theater Lehmann calls post-dramatic is not primarily focused on the dramaturgic development of the narrative itself, but develops a performative aesthetic in which the text is set in a specific relation to the material situation of performance and stage. The moment of rehearsal in post-dramatic theater appears as a form of underlying instruction, a score, or a text that is not “interpreted” hermeneutically anymore, like in traditional theater, but is open to reinterpretation, thus also to variation, repetition, augmentation, non-finality/unfinishedness, and so on. Citing Giorgio Agamben, Richard Ibgby and Marilou Lemmens state that this is the core of practices in fine arts too, where the goal of a production is “joyously forgotten” and is considered “to show itself as such, as a means without an end”⁶—or as Achim Lengerer’s text “Our Attempt/Notre Tentative,” about the social worker and writer Fernand Deligny, who lived together with autistic children, lets us sense writing as an experiment dealing with undetermined, sonic forms of communication.

At this point, a link could be established between this specific notion of post-dramatic theater and certain genealogies of classical Conceptual art, which are based on both linguistic procedures and on performative practices. This

very nexus becomes a tool to figure out reasons behind the shift away from static aesthetic norms toward an interest in variable and alterable rules to improvise and/or rehearse new conjunctions between artistic practices, linguistic structures, and daily procedures. This shift that can be seen by works in the context of Fluxus (e.g., Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions and Drawings*, published in 1964), and of the Judson Dance Theater (e.g., Robert Morris’s *Continuous Project Altered Daily* from 1969). Exemplary films such as Shirley Clarke’s *The Connection* (1961), John Cassavetes’s *Opening Night* (1977), or Chantal Akerman’s *Les années 80* (1983) demonstrate the comprehensive meaning of improvisation and rehearsal as a tool for questioning the foundations, routines, restrictions, and limitations of institutionalized genres. This becomes obvious in experimental film as well as in recent Hollywood mainstream productions, such as Alejandro González Iñárritu’s film *Birdman*, Olivier Assayas’s *Clouds of Sils Maria*, or Antoine Barraud’s *Le dos rouge* (all released in 2014). In all these films, rehearsal constitutes not only the framework for, but becomes the actual production: the “work” and its documentation or staging overlap. It is precisely this “in-the-making” that is the subject of Stefanie Diekmann and Ekkehard Knörer’s conversation with filmmaker Eva Könnemann, as well as Rainer Bellenbaum’s challenge of the stage understood as an “empty space” beyond social and aesthetic inscriptions, and Stephan Geene’s analysis of rehearsal as an “attempt to get a grip on the ontological implications of the fact of film”⁷—as Geene puts it in the title of his contribution: *rehearsal as film*.

While tackling the question of what exactly the specific—even though not always conscious or even, at times, masked—significance of rehearsal is, this publication seeks to reveal either internalized and/or new conjunctions between art, labor, and life; conjunctions that provide deeper insights into the shifting and overlapping of material and immaterial, alienated and de-alienated, productive and unproductive, heteronomous and autonomous types of labor. As such, they evoke concepts of self-as-work-performance between refusal and self-optimization/collaboration. These overlapping concepts go along with changing interactions between production processes and aesthetic judgments, as well as between mechanisms of subjectivation, medialization, and institutionalization.⁸ And even though with neo- and post-avant-garde productions, the credo of the transfer from art into a practice of life seems long dead and

5 Ibid., 20–21.

6 Giorgio Agamben, quoted in Richard Ibgby and Marilou Lemmens, “Rehearsal without the Performance,” in this volume, 138–80.

7 See Stephan Geene, “Alive Supreme: On Rehearsal as Film,” in this volume, 234–43.

8 See Matzke, *Arbeit am Theater*; and Sabeth Buchmann, “Shared Production (-Values),” in this volume, 32–45.

buried,⁹ one can nevertheless state that those transformations manifested in and by practices of rehearsal touch on dominant attempts to animate labor: to negotiate given social divisions of labor and the imperative of (self-)improvement—in neoliberal terms of “lifelong learning.”¹⁰ Considering the imperative of staging “real life,” life itself appears as a never-ending rehearsal, as the staging of its very conditions: subjects being suspended between productivity, exhaustion, and precarity, who accomplish their work with joy and curiosity. As Kai van Eikels points out in his essay “What Your Spontaneity Is Worth to Us: Improvisation between Art and Economics,” the self-command-based “improvisational formation” is constitutive for the “work performance in twenty-first-century companies.”¹¹

Our thesis is that rehearsal appears predominantly during periods of artistic-aesthetic and sociocultural transformations; that is, during times when traditional norms and standards are being considered as dogmatic and hence obsolete, and new concepts, procedures, and rules are imposing themselves in their place.

It is precisely this historical condition and social circumstance that can be observed in Yvonne Rainer’s *Lives of Performers* (1972), as Rainer—who until then was known as a choreographer and dancer closely associated with the Judson Dance Theatre—decided during a period of artistic, political, institutional, and personal crisis to make a film;¹² her first one. In *Lives of Performers*, it is quite striking to observe the rediscovery of narration that had been banned by the (post-)avant-gardes of the 1960s—a rediscovery and a re-introduction resulting from the conclusion that avant-gardist registers of expression became more and more inadequate. To Rainer, these registers no longer seemed to be apt mediums to encompass the madness of social relations. To properly articulate subjects of established hierarchies in the art world—feelings of love and jealousy in relation to inclusion and mostly exclusion (of female artists), sentiments of failure and dependency as crucial aspects of interhuman social relations—one needed a different form of articulation. It is exactly this implicit “research drive” that allows, as Jenny Nachtigall and Dorothea Walzer convincingly show, a comparison of Rainer’s use of minor genres, like that of the rehearsal, and melodrama with Theodor W. Adorno’s “The Essay as Form” (1958), which pleads for “a non-doxological form of knowledge acquisition, an experience-based and context-sensitive type of learning.”¹³ In this light, Vincent Bonin’s reflections on the interlinkage between the “cinematic” and “psychoanalytic performance” provide a reading of rehearsal practices not only as “analytical acts,” but also as “political interventions” into the nexus of film/art and psychoanalysis as an institutional field touching on the *dispositif* of the clinic.¹⁴

Once more, rehearsal appears at the same time as a means of reflection and as one of abstraction, mediating between formal-aesthetic conventions, sociocultural constellations, and media conditions. As we have argued above, rehearsal appears at moments of instability and change—and regarding its oscillations between heteronomous and autonomous labor represents transformation.¹⁵ In that sense, we consider rehearsal interchangeable with post-revolutionary moments in order to touch on unfinished political processes and their potential meaning for possible futures. As José M. Bueso elaborates in his essay “The Play’s the Thing,” there are a number of films linked to this subject that depict pivotal moments in history where “history could have gone one way or the other,” where attempts to “go beyond the tension between rehearsal and staging” promise the possibility to rewrite (the cinematic, artistic, and/or political) play itself.¹⁶ Those attempts are characteristic of the (intellectual and political) film history that seeks to respond to the failed revolution through a performative analysis of social communication, conceived as a possible motor for the transformation of ruling power relations in moments of standstill. Examples here are Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Beware of a Holy Whore* (1971), Jules Dassin’s *The Rehearsal* (1974), Peter Brook’s *Marat/Sade* (1967), and Alberto Grifi and Massimo Sarchielli’s *ANNA* (1972–75).

Assuming an inherent bond between artistic and political processes, the always already transformative character of the rehearsal lets one raise the question of its timings: Is it, as Ibgby and Lemmens suggest, thought to be a principally unlimited process? Or does the time of rehearsal, as Kathrin Busch argues referring to René Pollesch’s *Portrait aus Desinteresse* (Portrait for a lack of anything better to do) from 2008, point to the margins and limits of production and productivity? According to Busch, it is precisely their recognition and acknowledgment that generates new ways of being more apt to describe all those fragile and multiple fractured instants and relations between art, labor, and life. As in the case of Pollesch’s *Portrait aus Desinteresse*, the actors and actresses leave the stage and their director behind and start directing themselves, according to their own ideas: “These guys are my neighbors; these strange people.

9 See Sabeth Buchmann, Helmut Draxler, and Stephan Geene, eds., *Film Avantgarde Biopolitik* (Vienna: Schöffer-Poeschl-Verlag, 2009).

10 Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October* 59 (Winter 1992): 3–7.

11 Kai van Eikels, “What Your Spontaneity Is Worth to Us: Improvisation between Art and Economics,” in this volume, 22–30 (our emphasis).

12 See B. Ruby Rich, “Yvonne Rainer: Eine Einführung,” in Yvonne Rainer, *Talking Pictures: Filme, Feminismus,*

Psychoanalyse, Avantgarde (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 1994), 12f.

13 See Jenny Nachtigall and Dorothea Walzer, “The Rehearsal as Form: An Essay on Yvonne Rainer’s *Lives of Performers*,” in this volume, 182–94.

14 See Vincent Bonin, “In Abeyance: It is Perhaps Now Time to Leave, Once More, the Clinic...,” in this volume, 196–210.

15 See Matzke, *Arbeit am Theater*.

16 José M. Bueso, “The Play’s the Thing: On the Politics of Rehearsal,” in this volume, 108–19.

They wear always-changing costumes. What are they doing here, I often ask myself. For some reason they've decided to stop time in order to repeat certain things."¹⁷

Since rehearsal represents zones of transition, where the time of production and that of the presentation/performance become confused, it also tends to replace the tension between reality and fiction by casting as-if actions in opposition to the rationality of agency to create a moment investigated in both Constanze Ruhm's essay "Casting as Agency" and in Geene's reflections on the film as rehearsal, as already mentioned above. Seen in this light, the topos of rehearsal points to the fictitious kernel of the real, preventing the narration from finding its ending in another sense than in the deactivation (Busch) of (neoliberal) rhetorics of "possibility" and "potentiality." This renders the methodology of rehearsal at the same time into a *Praxistheorie* and a critique of "practice" that does not turn reflection and self-reflection into an allover, instant solution, or into the key to resolve all kinds of representational problems and issues—as it is precisely the rehearsal that provides the space to experience that artistic labor/work succeeds and/or, as Susanne Leeb unfolds with regard to the drawings of Tamar Getter, fails in a perceptible way. As Leeb argues, "Getter's works stage the fascinating yet self-defeating pursuit of the ideal of perfection as a source of necessary frustration."¹⁸ Moments of joy and progress occur when the artist does not reflect too much on ideal strategies and tools of depictions. It is quite the opposite: when artist(s) let go of mechanisms of control, implemented rules become visible and negotiable. This includes an openness for unseen deviations that were not intended in the planning of a work, were not yet noted in the script, or happen while interacting with others and/or the audience.

If the rehearsal, on the one hand, participates in new definitions of authorship, reception, and artistic production, on the other hand, its correspondence with the transformation of the work turns rehearsal into an overall societal topic. Accordingly, contemporary subjects are expected to constantly signal their willingness to work on their role in the sense of an always more efficient performance in order to pass as market-compatible. Therefore, the rehearsal appears as a showcase format that documents and produces narratives about successful as well as failing forms of "becoming a subject," which at the same time are the privileged topics of artistic critique.

Not least, the topos of rehearsal appears of importance because it brings out the interrelation of artistic methods and subjects with new technologies, thereby attesting to the interweaving of social and fictitious roles as a collective and/or collaborative experience—an experience, that, as van Eikels, Matzke, and (with regard to the conjunctions of studio and exhibition practices) Sabeth Buchmann argue, are embedded in this context into advanced forms of

judgment and evaluation. Frequently, the suggested gaze backstage is staged as a situation before or after the rehearsal, thereby becoming even more performative as a strategy of representation, stimulating and regulating the interaction of social-media performativity and possible audiences measured in "likes."

The rehearsal also appears as an experimental laboratory, where not only the elements pertaining to an artistic-theatrical-filmic production are put to the test, but also the formation of the subject through exactly those (cybernetic) feedback systems that today serve as what Martin Jörg Schäfer describes as "power technologies." In a conversation, Avital Ronell and Schäfer discuss the mutuality of procedures of "test" and of "rehearsal" as being embedded into the history and practice of philosophy as well as into the manifold entanglements of politics, media, and economy. Consequently, the nexus of test and rehearsal tends to destabilize existing belief systems, according to Ronell, in favor of "a harassingly provisional logic that breaks itself up at every moment."¹⁹ Avant-gardist means of artistic methodology, such as chance, repetition, accumulation, seriality, and so on, mix with new forms of storytelling and representation rooted in social media and the Internet, the "test drive" (Ronell) is part of the establishment of contemporary sites that represent hybrid and inconstant scenarios of information, communication, and interaction.

Obviously, it is not only artists but also curators, activists, mediators, and writers who react to those tendencies by giving their functions and discourses a trial. They explore and test procedures of rehearsal as a site and medium of collective formation to work through the aesthetic, social, psychic, and economic rules and boundaries incorporated, reproduced, and modernized by the ways we encounter an expanding field of art. Therefore, artists and curators seek to integrate the affective and the emotional, the contingent and unforeseen, the failures and blackouts, the simultaneousness of animated events and exhausting routines that level off our ways of learning about contemporary art.

Inasmuch as the rehearsal appears as a literal manifestation of the "functional site" (James Meyer), it articulates a set of rules that are situative and temporary. As such, the topos of rehearsal helps us to reflect on the manifold relations between the physical, real, documented, mediated, symbolic, and fictional sites of art, as well as in workshop-like scenarios aiming at counter-appropriations of curatorial, discursive, and architectural competences and skills. In that sense,

17 René Pollesch, *Portrait aus Desinteresse* (Portrait for a lack of anything better to do), 2008, 60 min. (our translation).

18 Susanne Leeb, "Upheaval in the Despot's Wake: Rehearsal and Drawing in the Work of Tamar Getter," in this volume, 160.

19 Avital Ronell, "Re-rehearsing the Test Drive," in this volume, 126.

the revision of methodologies pertaining to institutional critique by various site-specific strategies relating to the notion of rehearsal serves to enlighten one's own complicity in power relations from an audience's perspective. This would point to just one of the multiple political dimensions of the topic of rehearsal—the one regarding institutional space.

In relation to Ilse Lafer's contribution to this volume,²⁰ we therefore would like to address the idea of "curating rehearsal" in terms of a possible model that allows us to unfold the exhibition as rehearsal.²¹ Considering the exhibition as an entanglement of content, method, and form, where each component is indissolubly linked, the idea of rehearsal is not reducible to an assumed method underlying the exhibition. It is rather the work that an exhibition as rehearsal is able to release—a work that isn't always visible—which implies rehearsal as oscillating between "the making of" (rehearsal as narrative subject) and the notion of rehearsal as something "in-the-making" (rehearsal as work to be offered). Thinking the exhibition in such a way links to the motif of "passion," as seen in Jean Luc Godard's film of the same title. By inventing a new form of filmic storytelling—based on images rather than on a written screenplay—Godard explored the work on the screenplay as work with and through images, rendering passion as a form of resistance against the script, turning passion into a hidden device to generate another form of in-the-making.

Replacing, or rather encircling the very motif of his film with two other concepts (work and love) and enmeshing them in different forms of movement, Godard unveils passion as something that reinvents itself, as an embodiment that is the "in-between" of moving concepts, the invisible geography between images. Considering rehearsal in this way as spatiotemporal encounter of work *and ...* (objects, texts, staging devices, moving bodies), the notion of work released from the object, operating between the objects, or between objects and subjects becomes the exhibition as rehearsal (a work to be offered). In this very sense, working *on* (curators, artists) and *with* (audience) the exhibition implies literally reflecting and testing its structural conditions (institutional framings, the economics and politics of exhibition making, role models, the neoliberal conditions of work itself), but also being actively involved in the mutual interference of text/script, image/representation, and performative events. Here, a sequence of symbolic and real writings, actions and speech emerge that, indeed, ask for a specific constellation allowing to host them. Rehearsal appears to become an improvised as well as a staged form of in-the-making: a biopolitical model, where "life" and "survival" as forms of work of and on the subject and its body are put to the test. In such settings, the physical movement of the human body through space cannot be neglected. It frequently develops a character, or form of expression, that could be described as "autobiographical work" that needs to be always actualized anew.

With regard to the utmost instructive and complex contributions of the authors, we have tried to outline in our introduction the rehearsal as a topos, format,

medium, site, and tool that can be understood as part of an ongoing process of activating and deactivating, staging and de-staging, learning and unlearning of the rules and roles that constitute the artistic work as part of highly charged social, institutional, and economic systems. The idea of the rehearsal is meant to debunk common convictions and fictions about work, labor, and productivity that it, at the same time, evokes, promotes, contradicts, and undermines.

Therefore we would like to follow Matzke's claim that understands "rehearsal procedures" as possibilities of thinking "a new indeterminateness of doing," while also recognizing the limitations of "doing" and "acting," and the (im-)possibilities of (re-)presenting rehearsal as unmediated lifetime experience.

We would like to express our gratitude to all contributing authors as well as to all artists who took part in the exhibition and in the screening programs in Vienna and Montreal. It is their work that made it possible for us in the first place to conceptualize and to realize the project "Putting Rehearsals to the Test."

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²⁰ Ilse Lafer, "Passion in Work," in this volume, 46–57.

²¹ Here we discuss our exhibition "Putting Rehearsals to the Test" at Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery—Université Concordia, VOX—Centre de l'image contemporaine, SBC Galerie d'art contemporain, Goethe Institute and Cinémathèque québécoise, Montreal, 2016.

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Sabeth Buchmann, Ilse Lafer, and Constanze Ruhm
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What Your Spontaneity Is Worth to Us Improvisation between Art and Economics

Kai van Eikels

A substantial number of artists from the music, dance, theater, and performance worlds are currently giving workshops (on an occasional basis, or even as their primary source of income) for corporate employees, especially upper management, in which those work performers are supposed to learn improvisation techniques. Organization theory, a discipline that develops new work and cooperation models for companies, theoretically supports and promotes such transitions between artistic and economic performance. Transferring improv concepts and practices to the workplace might seem out of place or irregular, but it does produce effects in the working environment. And I believe it is important to analyze where economic interests intersect with artistic work, which aspects of art are being seized upon, and what it is about the aesthetics and artistic practices that makes this economicization possible or even accommodates it.

To the question of why companies are interested in improv, the first and “official” answer is that the markets in which they operate have become so turbulent, developments can only be foreseen within a short limited time, and workers are often confronted with unexpected situations. However, this need for improvisation that workers are faced with only represents the situation in which many of us find ourselves in as soon as we come in contact with other people and try to deal with them. After all, the reactions of other people (and partly even our own reactions) are always to some extent unpredictable. Particularly in cases where a large number of people are interacting—and strangers participate in these interactions—the unpredictability increases sharply. It could be that improvisational abilities have atrophied somewhat in our nationally framed, institutionally managed societies, because in many areas of life indirect communication through the more predictable institutional procedures now replaces, or redetermines, the direct settling of affairs.

From this quotidian improvising, we ought to distinguish improvisation as something I *choose*, something I might try based on the recommendations of others because it promises me solutions to problems where I cannot achieve my goals through planned procedures—much like the fictional addressee in Heinrich von Kleist’s “On the Gradual Formation of Thoughts in the Process of Speech,” which is written like a letter to a friend. In his cheerful brutality, Kleist places clear emphasis on a moment of improvisation that tends to be overlooked or trivialized in the discourses of organization theory and management (but also in group therapy and teaching); namely, the moment of conflict or competition. When he gets bogged down working out a math problem or a legal case, as Kleist’s narrator imparts—which may be due precisely to knowing *too much* and being capable of *too many* things, so that in effect the abundance of possibilities clogs, as it were, the present—then he starts to explain the issue to his sister, although she knows nothing about either mathematics or law. The purpose, hence, is not mutual discussion, an exchange of information,

but rather “a movement on the part of [his] sister indicating she wants to interrupt [him],” which puts the young man on high alert: “For my strained mind becomes even more excited by the need to defend this inherent right to speak against attack from the outside. The mind’s abilities grow like those of a great general who is faced with a very difficult situation.”¹ In this state of high excitement, the narrator is now talking for his life—he stutters and stammers, produces “inarticulate noises,” and saves himself through long drawn out, connecting words and superficial appositions during the empty time in which no continuation occurs to him. Through this process of continuing to speak at all costs and connecting with himself through talking to deflect the attempted interruption, he finally succeeds in doing what previously seemed to elude him: at some point he blurts out the solution.

The “other” is, in this specially initiated improvisation, a partner whose task is above all to be the opponent in a dispute not about content, but rather about *speech*, about *performative dominance over speech*. And he (or in this case: she) performs this task without actually contributing anything. The person I call on for improvisational formation of my thoughts only *embodies* the *threat* of fighting me for control of the situation. This option of reclaiming dominance over a situation after consciously exposing oneself to the risk of losing that dominance seems highly attractive as a dynamic of improvisation for work performance in twenty-first-century companies. It brings a type of self-command into play that was new in Kleist’s day, around 1800, but is quite familiar to us: *performative self-command*, which does not relate to a status, enjoyed because of noble birth or office, but rather becomes evident *in action*, in the actuality of performing—and actually consists in nothing but this evidence.

The institutional political self-command possessed by someone who inherits a throne or, in the age of modern nation-states, takes on the office of a ruler or administrator, is essentially *potestas* (e.g., a power that exists in the form of *possibility*). Performative self-command, in contrast, is a power that people gain only by effectively carrying out actions, and this requires them to put their status at risk to begin with. Here, improvisation stands for the deliberate creation of a state of exception: I put myself in a situation that I cannot control by my rank or office, which therefore at first suspends my control over myself as well. And in this suspension, I regain control over myself and the situation.

This reorientation toward performative self-command uncouples self-command from politics in the sense of institutional authorities, from government action authorized by rulers or the state. It suddenly appears on this side of the central public sphere, in a scene of private work and study. And Kleist’s political-military framing of such a domestic, economic problem-solving exercise betrays something important about performative self-command: it has no exclusive or even merely privileged sphere of activity, and it no longer applies to an

exclusive or privileged circle of persons. Kleist’s poetics of improvisation, which also comes up with various other examples, transforms the “General” from a military rank into a figure of *generalizability*. All activities that rely on being performed, and their style of being performed, can be carried out with masterful self-command. By self-command we mean today a certain kind of excellence, namely, a way of doing something very well that expresses, in light of the admiration we grant it, a particular *superiority*—a superiority over others who do (or could do) the same work, and simultaneously the superiority of a capable ego over another ego in the same person that fails to achieve it. The proof of performative self-command, no matter where it takes place, sends a message about the drama of a successful self-conquest to those who testify to this self-command by allowing themselves to be impressed by it.

We live in a society in which many of us participate in this game of self-command—and the processes of work and of cooperation in particular have become the primary venues for competition for performative self-command. One reason for this is that so-called post-Fordism has led to a *crisis of assessment*. Flexible teamwork is central to the post-Fordist reorganization of work. For more and more workers, it is a standard requirement to communicate with others in a way that allows for optimal assignment of responsibilities and use of individual contributions, and for arranging work procedures through mutual discussion—as well as determining the nature and amount of their output in goal agreements, while competent negotiation and capable presentation of the results may be more important than the action undertaken. If working means working together in teams, which consistently decide during the course of the work process how they are going to do something and how individual competence will be realized in a collective *performance*, how is the contribution of each individual employee to be judged? Compensation for work still mostly takes place via the abstract exchange medium of money, which in its generality implies an ability to generalize the paid work. Even though different forms of work vary enormously in how well or poorly the workers are paid in deregulated employment markets, at least the same work in the same place ought to receive the same compensation (or if not, one should be able to demand it in the name of equal pay for equal services, and criticize current practices). But how does one evaluate the collective accomplishment on the level of the individuals involved when the work of each individual not only refers to that of others, but acquires a value in the first place through what each one

1 Heinrich von Kleist, “On the Gradual Formation of Thoughts in the Process of Speech,” trans. Christoph Harbsmeier, University of Oslo website, accessed March 1, 2016, [http://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/projects/tls/publications/Kleist\[1\].pdf](http://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/projects/tls/publications/Kleist[1].pdf).

has contributed to others' work—through their organizational value for the team?

Since the 1990s, we have observed a downright inflationary multiplicity of evaluation services advertising processes that companies can use to measure the work performance of their departments and individual employees. Yet the variety of competing approaches and methods itself is already an indication of how little certainty there is about which data should be gathered, and above all how it is to be interpreted, since the relationship between the company's balance sheet and employee activity becomes more difficult to reconstruct the more complex internal structures become. Employees may contribute great specialist knowledge and rack up hours of overtime in the office without actually providing any benefit to team practice. Is it because they lack the ability to synchronize their expertise with colleagues? Or is the problem to be found with one of these colleagues, who is not making use of valuable preparatory work, perhaps consciously or unconsciously blocking it? Could it be that certain personalities just do not go together and it would be better to put them on separate teams? Or does the workflow have to be moderated until the people involved adjust to each other? Or does someone need to be fired and replaced with a more suitable employee?

Despite all attempts at objectification and standardization, post-Fordist liberalization of work processes has caused an upsurge in *personal dependencies*. The evaluation of workers increasingly takes place in the dimension of affective reactions, based on their conduct—in the dual sense of behavior and of self-presentation as a service subject in an intersubjective network of cooperation. It is precisely here that a motive can be discerned for corporate interest in artistic improvisation processes. Improvisation in the performing arts is, after all, not only one of the disciplines in which performers impress an audience by demonstrating their confidence. The performers also evaluate and judge each other in the course of their common efforts. *How* an improviser reacts to what the other has just done—whether he or she reacts at all; to what extent he or she tries to make something of what the other has done; and what kind of a model he or she supplies to the other co-performers or makes as a response to the first one: all this produces a value judgment that the fellow actors recognize, understand, and incorporate into their own reactions. Conversely, the value of this value judgment depends on how highly regarded a given participant is by the other players—and finally also on whether this judgment itself enhances the performance as a whole, or at least creates an opportunity for enhancement in its effect on the reactions of the one being judged and the others.

Achievement criteria are intimately bound up with the dynamic of social recognition and esteem in these ways of interacting. This problem has long

been recognized in improv theater. Instructions suggest establishing the so-called yes-anding principle as a connective agreement.² This means that a player should always relate to what another player does in the form of “yes, and ...”: first affirming it in order to then continue the matter, or to give it another direction. In extreme cases this could be the opposite of what was suggested by the other, but it must still be formulated in a “yes, and ...” manner, rather than ignoring or directly rejecting, since both of those will hurt a performer whose offerings are literally nothing without being acknowledged.

Although occasional references to yes-anding are not absent in organization-theory literature, at the center of economic engagement with improvisation is a genre in which the performers work with precisely these kinds of psychosocial offenses—or with a strategic withholding of recognition that operates at the margins of the offensive and tests out this marginal zone as the true realm of artistic *peak performance*; namely, jazz, in those forms where, on the one hand, improvisational freedom is guaranteed and where the musicians standing together on the stage participate pointedly as (virtuoso) soloists in the ensemble performance, but, on the other hand, in tune with tradition to an extent that a high significance can be ascribed to reputation. Musicologist Nicholas Gebhard, in his study *Going for Jazz: Musical Practices and American Ideology*,³ investigates the relationship between ideas of peak artistic achievement in jazz and an “American ideology” that combines capitalistic production and evaluation forms with a basic tone of aggressive emotionality—an *affectionately aggressive* emotionality. For in the interactions between professional jazz musicians, a certain conviviality combines with an aggressive-pugnacious spirit into a special frame of mind. The instrumental “talk” in the collective performance of jazz is similar, according to anthropologist Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, to the playful “duels” that African-American communities call “signifying.”⁴

In signifying, one actor provokes another by offending him or her in a masterly, amusing, or original way, either verbally or by means of twists that cast doubt on the competence of the other. In jazz this can happen when a musician does *not* play what the conventional continuation of the routine pattern would require—and thereby creates a situation in which it will sound like a mistake, unless a fellow player rescues the phrase through an original, spontaneous invention that sounds excitingly different from the routine, rather than simply wrong. Whether the result of this break in routine will be recognized as a gaffe

2 See Vera Dusya and Mary Crossan, “Theatrical Improvisation: Lessons for Organizations,” *Organization Studies* 25, no. 5 (2004): 727–49.

3 Nicholas Gebhard, *Going for Jazz: Musical Practices and American Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

4 See Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, “Signifying as a Form of Verbal Art,” in *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel: Readings in the Interpretation of African-American Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 310–28.

that puts the entire performance into a bad light and exposes the reactor as a failure, or as an innovation that brings them and their fellow musicians fame, depends entirely on the reaction. And how disconcerted or how excellent the reaction seems will determine whether the improv session comes across as the scene of a (lost) battle or of a collective virtuosity, where the battle as such is not obvious; rather, the performers up the ante through mutual playful challenges, test their confidence on one another, and win prestige with every test passed.

Kleist presents improvisation as a battle in a war of the subject with himself, where the other functioned solely as an oppositional figure. Here, in contrast, several people compete in the mode of improvisation with each other, and this competition is also part of their cooperation: the performative gibes and ripostes create an elastic consensus that no performer can ever break, if the collective project is not to collapse. In this atmosphere, as jazz cultivates it and makes it extremely productive, the organization theorists identify the ideal milieu for interlocking cooperation and competition, which business jargon calls “co-competition” or “co-opetition.” For the post-Fordist enterprise, it is crucial to incorporate moments of competition into mutual relations, so that the competition never ends—as the battle does, when the victor punches the air and the other lies prostrate as the loser. In capitalism at all levels the goal is to organize endlessness: dynamics that in and of themselves *cannot* come to any conclusion.

Since Adam Smith’s claim that competitive egoisms have charitable effects for the community, the task of economic reason is seen as binding destructive powers into a dynamic in which they bring forth productive effects. Advocates justify the competition model by pointing out that it is so far the most successful solution to this task. From the battle, only its affect, aggression, is absorbed to animate a form in which several competitors act against each other for an individual advantage. This robs them of the decision a battle will bring, obliging them to repeat the competition incessantly. Even monopoly, or “market dominance,” may not represent a final victory. As soon as a victorious finale becomes apparent, the more successful competitor must orient their actions toward the time *after* that, which would be their own victory and the defeat of the competitors; and precisely through the immanent reorientation involved in carrying out the competition itself, the victory does not take place—it is skipped and postponed: a “new” challenge takes the place of the old, in which the old one, which was not fought to an end point, continues to exist and waits to become the new one again.

Evaluation must adjust to this dynamic. And because of this, it helps in the establishment of co-competition as a form for how we interact—at work and in all those areas of life influenced by an expanded understanding of productivity—if

evaluation remains provisional, if it orients itself toward the actual reactions of co-performers rather than general and time-resistant standards.

In such a work process there is nothing definitively wrong, because it is only when other team members react that what I have done is shown to be a mistake or an impetus toward new paths—indeed, perhaps it is the very push into the unknown that the process will have needed. “We paint ourselves in and out of corners all the time, the saxophonist Jeff Clayton once said.”⁵ Improv explicitly allows making mistakes, or risking making mistakes, as an attempt. But that also means there is no definitive right choice, no matter how well I can do something for myself, as long as the others are not able to derive some gain for their performance from what I am doing. If I cannot at least get them to *expect* that sort of advantage for themselves, my knowledge and ability become useless. And *whether* I navigate with my solo contribution to the team performance on the track of a shared enhancement or end up marginalizing myself is something that I only find out each time I do it, because the evaluation of the work does not take place outside the work period, but rather coincides with the carrying out the respective cooperation. The value of what I do is—and remains—as provisional as the action in the mode of improv itself.

The word “improvisation” comes from the Latin *im-provisus*, or unexpected. Still, improvisation as trying something out initially requires everything that happens in the process to be provisional. This has a liberating, unburdening effect, especially at the beginning, and as long as improvisation is imagined as a repeated beginning. But in the long term, to the extent that the improvisation process makes its participants become aware of time passing, the darker sides of this deliberate provisionality are also revealed—and this includes deferred recognition and a type of interpersonal esteem that is also only conditional, always delayed a little further, to the next challenge and the challenge after that.

Translated from the German by Aileen Derieg

5 Cited in Alessandro Duranti and Kenny Burrell, “Jazz Improvisation: A Search for Hidden Harmonies and a Unique Self,” *Ricerche di Psicologia* 27, no. 3 (2004): 84f.

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Shared Production (-Values)

Sabeth Buchmann

I. Divvy Up and Evaluate

Shot in an eat-in kitchen repurposed as a film studio, *Before the Rehearsal*,¹ a 2009 film by the French artist Maya Schweizer, documents a rehearsal of the Afro-American and LA-based comedy ensemble Slow Children Crossing—the actors are working on a send-up of the edutainment genre—and a subsequent group discussion led by a coach in which the comedians explore not so much improvements to their performance on conflictual gender relations as ways to optimize their self-marketing. The scene has all the hallmarks of improv theater—desultory dialogue, routine physical exercises, ephemeral actions such as screwing a light bulb into a socket, and so forth. Still chatting, the performers start watching episodes of sitcom shows online. As the film scholar Madeleine Bernstorff has argued, such shows “often function by having you watch people on television who are sitting across from you and looking at an invisible television in whose place you are sitting as the viewer.”² Let in on the genesis of the “performative product,”³ the viewers-turned-prosumers confront the same questions the performers ask themselves: for example, “whether they should start by focusing on their stage presence or whether priority should be given to media presence with a DVD, maybe television and the internet, YouTube clicks.”⁴ There is no question that artistic production here blends into the administrative work of organizing it. We get the impression, for instance, that the shows the performers watch structure their (self-)perception as well: “we don’t just watch the actors rehearsing, we also see them practicing to be marketable, entertaining subjects.”⁵ In other words, the documentarist’s camera represents the very nexus of labor and medium such self-optimization requires, enabling the performers to supplant the position traditionally occupied by the director with controlled self-observation. Moreover, it ties in with collaborative structures that emerge within the framework of the institutional division of labor. The same film Schweizer presents in exhibitions and art-house theaters is used by the group as a promotional video and “work in progress” advertising their performances.

1 I have discussed this film in several essays published elsewhere, including “Probe aufs Exempel: Über den Topos der künstlerischen Probe im künstlerischen Film,” in *Die andere Szene: Theaterarbeit und Theaterproben im Dokumentarfilm*, ed. Stefanie Diekmann (Berlin: Verlag Theater der Zeit, 2014), 114–33; and “De-/Aktivieren: Zu Praktiken der Probe im zeitgenössischen künstlerischen Film,” in *Ausstellen: Zur Kritik der Wirksamkeit in den Künsten*, ed. Kathrin Busch, Burkhard Meltzer, and Tido von Oppeln (Zurich: diaphanes, 2016), 121–37.

2 Madeleine Bernstorff, “Before the Rehearsal: Commentary,” in *Maya Schweizer: Dieselbe Geschichte an einem anderen Ort weitererzählt, verstreut, fragmentiert, täglich, rückwärts und wieder von vorn / The Same Story Elsewhere Continued, Spread, Fragmented, Daily, Backwards and All Over Again* (Leipzig: Spector, 2010), 110. Unless otherwise noted, all translations by Gerrit Jackson.

3 Ibid. 111.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

A development that has been variously described as a “growing awareness of a prevalent culture of performance that triggers a visualization of working methods and their attitude toward (self-)evaluation,”⁶ as the integration of improvisational techniques into neoliberal evaluation management,⁷ and as an oscillation between rehearsal and testing procedures,⁸ casts closely associated catchphrases of the day such as “collaborative praxis” and “collective agency” in a new light: they now appear in the context of fully integrated feedback systems. There is a reason why “shared knowledge,” “shared production,” “shared skills,” “shared space,” “shared interests,” and similar phrases have become shibboleths in the networked fields between art, film, and theater. In light of increasingly precarious conditions of production, the question of the form in which artistic labor is organized, a traditional subject of institutional critique, has become a pivotal theme of its (re)presentation. Artists, Annemarie Matzke notes in her study *Arbeit am Theater: Eine Diskursgeschichte der Probe*, present themselves as being workers as well.⁹

These observations suggest one reason behind the recent spate of works of visual art operating with the rehearsal format: it allows for the model of individual authorship, which remains dominant, to be tied back to the “history of collective and collaborative labor”¹⁰ that has attained fresh relevance with the emergence of today’s networked economies and the hybrid collaborative-competitive relationships they engender.¹¹ The superimposition of “societies of control” over the “disciplinary societies” of yesteryear¹² has largely severed access to traditional categories of the collective such as the working class, and so, as Jacques Rancière has demonstrated very persuasively,¹³ the “public principle”¹⁴ of art has come to function as a literal and/or metaphorical “stage” on which accepted distinctions between individual and collective, artistic and nonartistic, productive and unproductive forms of labor are put to the test.¹⁵ With regard to the visions of a caring and sharing society (possibly entailing the redistribution of wealth) proposed by aesthetic theories as well as (post-)Marxist art discourses, the rehearsal would seem to be an ideal format, most obviously because it marks the interface between “those kinds of labour contained in artworks” and the “realms of heteronomous labour” that autonomy must enter “through heteronomous labour’s (workers’) own collective agency,”¹⁶ which, as the art theorist John Roberts has argued, are crucial to a new understanding of artistic autonomy in the framework of post-autonomous social techniques.¹⁷ As I will argue, with reference to Bruce Nauman’s studio films, the dialectic of “deskilling and reskilling” that, according to Roberts, was set in motion by the readymade affects rehearsal practices as well:¹⁸ they are “learning exercises” that always also imply the “unlearning” of abilities and skills that have become useless.¹⁹

And so it is not coincidental that the most in-depth portrayal of and reflection on this dialectic may be found in deliberately equivocal rehearsal genres hovering between semi-documentary and semi-fictional cinematic and/or theatrical formats of the sort that artists like Martin Beck, Keren Cytter, Loretta Fahrenholz, Harun Farocki, Omer Fast, Ana Hoffner, Wendelien van Oldenborgh, Mathias Poledna, Constanze Ruhm, Eran Schaerf, Maya Schweizer, Clemens von Wedemeyer, and Katarina Zdjelar began to adopt and combine with visual art techniques in the early 1990s. This development raises the question of the specific function of the rehearsal. One answer might be found in the reorganization the theater as well as the film and art businesses have undergone in the age of feedback-based “project management”:²⁰ enforcing the primacy of public relevance, media presence, and ratings, it has put artists and curators as well as the institutions they represent under growing pressure to devise more collaborative forms of production. What is crucial for rehearsal practices is that the feedback systems rooted in (post-)Minimalist or (post-)Conceptual practices are apt, on the one hand, to dismantle hierarchical distinctions (labor and work, work and institutional context, leading and supporting cast and amateur actors, artist and viewers, foreground and background, etc.); on the other hand, as *Before the Rehearsal* illustrates very clearly, this ostensibly hierarchy-flattening integration is inextricably linked to the cybernetic “transformation of the mode of production,”²¹ whose primary purpose, as the French authorial collective Tiqqun has argued, is to “improve the circulation of goods and persons.”²² In other words, feedback systems always also promote the further

6 Cf. Richard Ibgby and Marilou Lemmens, “Rehearsal without Performance,” in this volume, 138–50.

7 See Kai van Eikels, “What Your Spontaneity Is Worth to Us: Improvisation between Art and Economics,” in this volume, 22–30. Cf. van Eikels’s concept of “evaluability management” in “Collective Virtuosity, Co-competition, Attention Economy: Postfordismus und der Wert des Improvisierens,” in *Improvisieren: Paradoxien des Unvorhersehbaren*, ed. Hans-Friedrich Bormann, Gabriele Brandstetter, and Annemarie Matzke (Bielefeld: Kunst—Medien—Praxis, 2010), 146.

8 Avital Ronell and Martin Jörg Schäfer, “Re-rehearsing the Test Drive,” in this volume, 120–29.

9 Annemarie Matzke, *Arbeit am Theater: Eine Diskursgeschichte der Probe* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2012), 72.

10 John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (London: Verso, 2007), 53.

11 See van Eikels, “Collective Virtuosity.”

12 See Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October* 59 (Winter 1992): 3–7.

13 See, for example, Jacques Rancière, “Le théâtre des pensées,” in *Le fil perdu: Essais sur la fiction moderne* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2014).

14 Jacques Rancière, “On Art and Work,” in *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 42–43.

15 See Roberts, *Intangibilities of Form*, 5.

16 *Ibid.*, 4.

17 *Ibid.*, 6.

18 *Ibid.*, 5.

19 See Eric de Bruyn, “Dan Grahams filmische Topologie,” in *Dan Graham: Werke 1965–2000* (Düsseldorf: Richter, 2002), 352. Exhibition catalogue, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf.

20 Tiqqun, *Kybernetik und Revolte* (Zurich: diaphanes, 2007), 75.

21 *Ibid.*, 68.

22 *Ibid.*, 69.

differentiation and expansion of techniques of social interaction and hegemony that cannot be neatly distinguished from what Roberts calls “heteronomous labour’s (workers’) own collective agency.” As Schweizer’s video, like numerous other models of community constructed in the mode of rehearsal, makes us aware, “organization in networks, ‘participative management’ [...] consumer polling and quality controls” have significant implications also for contemporary concepts of work and authorship.²³

Consider, for example, three works commissioned for dOCUMENTA (13) and produced in partnership with the public television stations 3sat, ZDF, ORF, SRF, and ARD, and German and international galleries and museums: William Kentridge’s *The Refusal of Time*, Omer Fast’s *Continuity*, and Clemens von Wedemeyer’s *Muster (Rushes)*, all 2012). These artists—the latter two in particular—have helped define the rehearsal genre, which, it appears, encourages compliance with the imperative to collaborate. The implications of the latter are thematic in the (documented or staged) mode of the “learning exercise”: pieces such as evaluation-based work performances in which evaluation serves to assess not only the quality of the work but always also the “quality of social interaction.”²⁴ Such social interaction is the point, notably, of institutional efforts to promote collaborative projects, which circulate both as material works and as “immaterial” advertising media. “In the recent past,” Wikipedia—itself a showcase example of the “sharing economy”—notes, “business models characterized by the joint [...] use of resources that are not needed on a constant basis [...] have become increasingly significant, especially online, where content and knowledge are no longer merely being consumed, but also being disseminated using Web 2.0 technologies.”²⁵

Put differently, the exposition of the “‘workly’ quality”²⁶ characteristic of rehearsal formats also brings into focus the nexus between “immaterial labor”²⁷ and “immaterial media”²⁸ in the sense of the communication- and distribution-oriented production of knowledge and information—assets that, as “common goods,”²⁹ are emphasized in the “mission statements” of progressive institutions that define themselves as coproducers of (major) art projects.³⁰

To the extent that works presented and performed in the rehearsal mode, such as work by Fast, Schweizer, and von Wedemeyer, exhibit a mixture of role-performance in the spirit of institutional critique³¹ and post-minimalist learning exercises, the linkage between processes of artistic subjectivation and social transformation (the rise of the media society) would seem to be crucial. As in *Before the Rehearsal*, the structurally voyeuristic glimpse of what is going on “behind the scenes” plays with the fiction that “no game” is being played here,³² that we are observing “real” work and reflection being performed—yet this play at once appears as work, simply because it stages the presentation of a fiction as work on the fiction: *Before the Rehearsal* thus confronts us with the

programmatic question of whether what we are watching is a performance of a rehearsal (or a rehearsal of a performance) or in fact documentation of a performance (or documentation of a rehearsal). Given the fact that the artist collaborated with a comedy group, her film suggests that the rehearsal may no longer be the mark of distinction it once was, setting the theater apart from the entertainment industry.³³ As viewers, we accordingly face the question of what it is that we mean to evaluate: the work performance of a comedy ensemble practicing how to produce successful entertainment, or a work of art that pulls the rug out from under the manifestly untenable fantasy of an exclusive and hence undivided aesthetic sphere?

The expansion of the zone of artistic research and production into backstage and stage areas, casting, sound, and movie studios, workshops and social media, employment agencies and therapy centers, shopping malls and hotel lobbies, offices and common areas in shared apartments—a phenomenon that comes into view not only in Schweizer’s film, but also in the works of the other abovementioned artists—attests to a web of “multiple locations around the globe” that, populated by a “network of multiple artistic, institutional, and social actors,”³⁴ stand for contents of public relevance. In other words, the nexus of collective agency and “site production” is often integral to collaborative projects, one of the “tasks” to be performed by the artists involved in them. For example, a brochure issued by dOCUMENTA (13) notes that credit for scouting the scene of von Wedemeyer’s film installation *Muster (Rushes)*, a combination of footage from three different rehearsal scenarios—the former monastery at

23 Ibid., 75.

24 Roberts, *Intangibilities of Form*, 109.

25 “Share Economy,” on Wikipedia, accessed April 25, 2016, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Share_Economy.

26 Kim Paice, “Continuous Project Altered Daily,” in *The Fall of the Studio: Artists at Work*, ed. Wouter Davidts and Kim Paice (Amsterdam: Antennae Valiz, 2009), 48.

27 Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1996), 139.

28 See Gertrud Koch, Kirsten Maar, and Fiona McGovern, eds., *Imaginäre Medialität—Immaterielle Medien* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2011).

29 See Magda Tyzlik-Carver, “Interfacing the Commons: Curatorial System as Form of Production on the Edge,” Digital Aesthetics Research Center website, accessed April 25, 2016, <http://darc.imv>.

au.dk/publicinterfaces/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Tyzlik-Carver.pdf.

30 See “Unexhibit,” on the Generali Foundation website, accessed June 17, 2013, <http://foundation.generali.at/en/info/archive/2012-2012/exhibitions/unexhibit.html>.

31 Prominent examples include Christian Philipp Müller’s *Kleiner Führer durch die ehemalige Kurfürstliche Gemäldesammlung Düsseldorf (Small Guide through the Former Electoral Gallery in Düsseldorf)*, 1986; and Andrea Fraser’s (video) performances *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989) and *May I Help You?* (1991).

32 With reference to R. D. Laing’s behavioral training, see de Bruyn, “Dan Grahams filmische Topologie,” 358.

33 See Matzke, *Arbeit am Theater*, 21–22.

34 Wouter Davidts and Kim Paice, introduction to *Fall of the Studio*, 6.

Breitenau near Kassel, which exemplifies the highs and lows of German history—is due to the show’s artistic director Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev.³⁵ The rehearsal model thus also attests to how profoundly the concept of “site-specificity,” formerly associated with institutional critique, and its recourse to temporality, functionality, and media³⁶ have been transformed in what is called post-studio practice: a transformation in which the urgent question of where to locate artistic production (and where it locates itself) intersects, on a fundamental level, with that other question—that of the social locus of art.³⁷

II. Rehearsing (in) the Studio

The studio not only constitutes the “spatial ontology” of artistic creativity,³⁸ it has also undergone a fundamental temporalization in which it has been de-centered and dislocated. That is hardly a new insight: as Kim Paice’s analysis of Robert Morris’s *Continuous Project Altered Daily* demonstrates, its double status is connected to the increasingly equivocal distinction between the process of making and “finished works” that is characteristic of work in which visual and performative arts overlap. By the late 1960s—when Bruce Nauman made the studio films that, by blending post-minimalist dance rehearsal with Dadaist video performance, parodied what doomsayers were decrying as the “fall of the studio”³⁹—rehearsals were an established part of studio practice:

The artist’s apparent interest in blurring lines between genres and places related to his being a sculptor and a dancer, who was sharing a studio with other dancers, who themselves had highly inventive practices. He was undoubtedly inspired by and valuable to partners Simone Forti and Yvonne Rainer, with whom he shared a studio on the top floor of a building on Great Jones Street. The studio “was completely open,” recalls Rainer, and “Morris made small sculptures in a corner, like the *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making*. Simone rehearsed us in *See Saw* at one end. I rehearsed my first solo, *Three Satie Spoons*.”⁴⁰

The coexistence and intermingling of genres that were utterly incompatible by the accepted standards of medium-specificity is illuminating for the issues discussed here because it sheds light on the influence that a practice in which rehearsals were routine may have had on how the visual artists in the orbit of the Judson Dance Theater approached their work.

The interest visual artists shared with dancers in post-disciplinary improvisation—as Rainer has argued, it promised not so much a recovery of natural or individual expression but rather an understanding of “changes in ideas about man and his environment”⁴¹—points to the overarching significance the rehearsal had in New York’s avant-garde scene at the time. The rehearsal

represented, and still represents, a type of labor that works not only on the product to be made but also on the maker’s body. If we define the rehearsal as “working on the working,” it is, as Matzke has argued, the paradigmatic scene and medium of (self-)transformation:⁴² to rehearse is to change oneself and what one does. Hence the hope that the rehearsal will let the artist elude the reification of his work—*after the rehearsal* is (always) *before the rehearsal*.⁴³ Indicatively, the resulting inextricable conjunction between the respective apparatuses of rehearsal and production is reflected by the very “fall of the studio,” which was concurrently reborn in the format of the studio performance (and its media of dissemination).

III. Walk the Gaze

Nauman’s famous studio films, including *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square (Square Dance)* (1968) in which the artist recorded himself performing a half-banal, half-grotesque (dance) routine in an artist’s studio, are especially illuminating in this context.⁴⁴ In a nod to time-based procedures in structural film, the black-and-white films have a running time of ten minutes, or one reel of 16 mm film. The field of view is chosen to include a piece of wall and a square marked out on the floor with duct tape,⁴⁵ with the camera set up ever so slightly above eye level to suggest an outside view of the scene.⁴⁶ What the film documents is utterly trivial, confirming the suspicion aroused by the title that we may be watching no more than an exercise (though a public one): the quality of the choreography makes it rather unsuitable for public

35 *dOCUMENTA (13)/ anders fernsehen*, ed. Presse- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit 3sat (Mainz, 2013).

36 See James Meyer, “Der funktionale Ort/ The Functional Site,” in *Platzwechsel* (Zurich: Kunsthalle Zürich, 1995), 25–41. Meyer discusses works by Ursula Biemann, Tom Burr, Mark Dion, and Christian Philipp Müller.

37 I am grateful to the curator and writer Laura Preston, who raised this question in a conversation with students at UCLA about Harun Farocki’s films.

38 Davidts and Paice, introduction to *Fall of the Studio*, 4.

39 See the title of Davidts and Paice’s book.

40 Paice, “Continuous Project Altered Daily,” 45.

41 Yvonne Rainer, “A Quasi-Survey of Some ‘Minimalist’ Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of

Trio A,” in *Minimal Art, A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), 264.

42 Matzke, *Arbeit am Theater*, 37.

43 *After the Rehearsal* is the title of a work by the artist Eske Schlüters. With a view to the temporal dimension of the rehearsal, Matzke observes that “to reflect on work [...] is always also to reflect on the work in the theater as preparatory work, rehearsal work, and work on the production.” *Ibid.*, 18.

44 Eric de Bruyn points out that the films were shot in the studio of the painter William T. Wiley. Eric de Bruyn, “The Empty Studio: Bruce Nauman’s Studio Films,” in *Hiding Making—Showing Creation: The Studio from Turner to Tacita Dean*, ed. Rachel Esner, Sandra Kisters, and Ann-Sophie Lehmann (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 192.

performance, while on the other hand this is not a case of purely private busywork. Rather, what the camera brings out is the indeterminable hybrid status of what it lets us see—it looks like the rehearsal of a “redirection activity” for what we would expect to witness in a studio: an artist busily making a work. The room is bare except for a few pieces of apparel (perhaps costumes?) scattered across the floor that may, as Eric de Bruyn has argued, be emblematic of the “collapse” of the modern studio and hence of the Fordist work regime that has governed it since the dawn of modernism.⁴⁷ By formatting the nexus between the partial view of the space and physical movement, the camera’s static gaze sublates the studio’s “spatial ontology” in the “temporal ontology” of the medium that enables Nauman to literally internalize the formatting and normalizing function of the viewer’s gaze, usually excluded from the sphere of artistic production, by means of repetitive movements.⁴⁸ The artist, de Bruyn writes, “exhibits a simplified conception of ‘training’⁴⁹—a training, one should add, whose objective is the supplantation of the (director’s, choreographer’s, conductor’s, or else the artist’s own) scrutinizing, controlling, correcting, and evaluating gaze for the viewer’s.

The film puts a damper on the widely credited simplistic notion that the fall of the studio opened the gates of the art world to the democratic spirit of audience participation. Beneath the surface of the undecidable oscillation between performance and rehearsal in *Square Dance* as well as Nauman’s three other studio films looms a monotony that unmistakably undercuts the fantasies of emancipation and creative self-realization that buoyed the generation of ‘68. Though the artist may have been relieved—or may have broken free—of the necessity to produce objects, that compulsion is unexpectedly replaced by a different set of constraints that may reach far deeper and transform his body as well as soul: the camera’s eye, in that sense, also stands for the mechanism of (self-)observation we have long internalized—not least in the way that, as Schweizer’s film illustrates, we are all thoroughly involved in the techniques and technologies that make us performers of our selves.

By letting us see the studio artist’s body as a “new mode [...] of interaction between humans and technology,”⁵⁰ Nauman’s film, like Schweizer’s, reveals the documentation of a rehearsal to be a generative and fictionalizing register rather than a tool of retrospection and verification.⁵¹ To peer behind the scenes, we realize, is the very act that ostensibly “makes” the work before our eyes. Considered in this light, the trope of the studio rehearsal also echoes painterly traditions consistent with realism. For instance, as the art historian Svetlana Alpers has pointed out, Rembrandt was in the habit of composing several-figured portrait studies based on arrangements resembling “blocking rehearsals”: he assembled groups of human actors in his studio and then worked as he circled around them, “stopping to look [and] making suggestions about their gestures.”⁵² What was meant, in Rembrandt’s case, to demonstrate that he

was not merely a skilled craftsman but a genius capable of intellectual and conceptual invention allows us to see that the studio was a place where visual and performative practices intersected as early as the seventeenth century. As Alpers has argued, rehearsing helped Rembrandt create a pictorial world that undercut iconographic conventions and owed its existence solely to his stagecraft.⁵³ It also allowed him to devise a business model for his studio that enabled him to be independent of patrons and anticipated the modern artist producing for a market.⁵⁴ Part and parcel of this model was the image he cultivated of a beholder whose deep involvement in the painted action made him a uniquely qualified judge of his own productions; his eye’s only possible rival was that of a true connoisseur. The same ambition is evident in Edgar Degas’s endless variations on the motif of the ballet rehearsal: the figure of the implicit beholder present in each picture—he might appear in the guise of a maître de ballet or a musician—visualizes the “subjective position of production”⁵⁵ as one of appraisal and judgment of the work coming into being at the moment of the (painted) act of highly gendered looking, or, in other words, before the (male) painter’s own eyes. Degas links this instant of a work in the making to the strenuous physical discipline that is even more palpable in the ballet rehearsal than in the virtuoso onstage performance; the distant resemblance to Nauman’s self-experiment is presumably not accidental.⁵⁶

The filmmaker Harun Farocki pinpoints the same connection in a discussion of Jean-Luc Godard’s *Passion* (1982), whose characters are shooting a film by recording scene after scene in blocking rehearsals and reviewing the rushes. Regarding a scene in which Hana, one of the two female protagonists, undresses, he notes: “We realize [...] that ‘to undress’ is a metaphor for another kind of exposure—self-scrutiny, or even self-criticism. Perhaps Jerzy and Hana expend more effort looking at the video than they did making it. That activity has always seemed to me the biggest part of filmmaking.”⁵⁷

45 The setup recalls Samuel Beckett’s *Square* (1980).

46 De Bruyn, “Empty Studio,” 199.

47 De Bruyn, “Dan Grahams filmische Topologie,” 356ff.

48 De Bruyn, “Empty Studio,” 198.

49 De Bruyn, “Dan Grahams filmische Topologie,” 357.

50 Roberts, *Intangibilities of Form*, 23. The phrase echoes Walter Benjamin’s essay on “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1935).

51 See Diekmann, *Die andere Szene*.⁵² Svetlana Alpers, *Rembrandt’s Enterprise: The Studio and the Market* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 46.

53 *Ibid.*, 33.

54 *Ibid.*, 62.

55 This is the succinct phrase proposed by Constanze Ruhm.

56 De Bruyn seems to have seen the connection, reading Nauman’s studio films with Paul Valéry’s essay on *Degas, danse, dessin* (1938; published in English as *Degas Dance Drawing* in 1948), which explores additional layers of meaning implicit in the motif of the rehearsal.

57 Kaja Silverman and Harun Farocki, “Moving Pictures: *Passion* (1981),” in *Speaking about Godard* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 183.

The (gendered) nexus between scrutiny and production has another aspect that Farocki's own films articulate. In *Leben—BRD (How to Live in the German Federal Republic)* (1990), exemplary social subjects (neglected children, apathetic mothers, parents-to-be, befuddled seniors, unemployed people with criminal records, policemen-in-training, customer consultants, etc.) find themselves exposed to the scrutinizing gazes of authority figures such as instructors, teachers, therapists, coaches, and so forth. The film's implicit and explicit subject is the lifelong process of (self-)testing, which begins in childhood and continues throughout adult life and even into old age; a process Farocki associates with product testing and that therefore demonstrates its embedment into consumer culture. The characters and merchandise are under examination, and so what they do under our watchful eyes are effectively *Probe-Handlungen*,⁵⁸ both "sample actions" and "rehearsals for action": "virtual" reality checks highlighting the regulative and normalizing effects that are also apparent in Nauman's and Schweizer's evocations of the immanent outside gaze. By tying his chosen approach of "participant observation" back to the social technologies that reveal a structural connection between educational-therapeutic behavioral practice and techniques of digital simulation,⁵⁹ Farocki thus addresses the intrinsic logic of the same feedback systems that power the share economy as well. It is then up to the viewers to recognize themselves in these sociologically representative sample subjects whose behavioral patterns, rote actions, and consumer preferences are quite literally being reviewed.

IV. Conclusion

As I hope the examples sketched above illustrate, the rehearsal is a tool that produces a programmatically risky entanglement in the complicity between participative and collaborative approaches and the quality, evaluation, and control-management regime increasingly pervasive in society today. Practices of the share economy are hardly exempt from such complicity. By shining a glaring light on this complex problem, the rehearsal formats, practices, and techniques I have discussed initiate a reflection, especially on the social regulations underpinning artistic practices that aspire to privilege collective agency over authorial control: the question they raise of whether and how the "kinds of labour contained *in* artworks" may be both extracted from and anchored in the "heteronomous labour's (workers') own collective agency" has implications not least importantly for the nodes of aesthetic and political participation that are of particular relevance to contemporary art.

I would argue that these works, and others, offer a number of disconcerting indications that the "play" that comes into view in the rehearsal only pretends not to measure the value with which we endow the labor on our work performances with the same solemnity with which we have internalized (self-)

evaluation as the readiness to enter perpetually improvable cooperative partnerships between producers (who promise to generate surplus value) and consumers (who promise to generate profits).

I would like to thank Ilse Lafer and Constanze Ruhm for their feedback, which has been a constant source of inspiration.

Translated from the German by Gerrit Jackson

⁵⁸ This useful concept was proposed by Helmut Draxler.

⁵⁹ The term "participant observation" is used to describe field studies conducted in the framework of systemic and/or ethnological social-science research.

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Passion in Work

Ilse Lafer

*Voir le scénario*¹ (“look at the screenplay”): a recurrent formula traversing images, bodies, and places in order to write the (im)possible story for a film, roughly, in the sense described by the American philologist Milman Parry for the “formula style” used by Homer in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey* as poetry not composed *for* but *in* performance.² Taken in this way, these kinds of formulas are, as Giorgio Agamben further explains, “hybrids of matter and form, of creation and performance, of first-timeness [*primavoltità*] and repetition.”³ It is of particular interest that against this backdrop, Agamben identifies the twenty-six figures from Aby Warburg’s pathos formula “nympha” of the forty-sixth panel of the *Mnemosyne-Atlas* neither as an original nor simply only a copy. Instead, the nymph stands for a being “whose form punctually coincides with its matter and whose origin is indissoluble from its becoming”:⁴ a being, in other words, that presents itself as time. Pathos formulas are consequently “phantasmas [...] around which time scripts its choreography.”⁵ If we take into consideration that the passion connoted by pathos enters into the field of meaning of *passio* over the course of the history of the concept—even though originally only passive moments were denoted there,⁶ Jean-Luc Godard’s “work” on *Passion* (1982) could be described as choreographed time spanning between pathos and formula.

A screenplay needs something; it needs nine months. A whole story, love and work.⁷

Voir le scénario is more than a formula. It comprises a series of operative procedures that shape the actual contents of Godard’s video-poem *Scénario du film Passion* (1982). Subsequent to the actual film in time—as a kind of after-image or of the same type as Raymond Roussel’s *Comment j’ai écrit certains de mes livres*⁸—with *Scénario du film Passion* the filmmaker presents a form of

1 Unless otherwise noted, quotations in the French are taken from Jean Luc Godard’s film *Scénario du film Passion* (1982).

2 Giorgio Agamben, *Nymphs*, trans. Amanda Minerva (London: Seagull 2013), 4 (brackets and italics in original). Originally published as “La passion de la facticité,” in *Heidegger: Questions ouvertes, Cahiers du CIPH* (Paris: Osiris, 1988).

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., 5.

6 Kathrin Busch, *Passivität* (Hamburg: Textem Verlag, 2012), 41–44. The conceptual analogy between passion and passivity became clear to be during my year-long lecture series, “What Can an Exhibition Do?” (2015/16), at the University of Applied Arts

Vienna. Here I would especially like to thank Stephanie Kaiser for her suggestions and discussion contributions.

7 Godard, *Scénario du film Passion*. Quotations in this essay from the German transcription of the film have been translated by Aileen Derieg. Joachim Paech, *Passion oder die Einbildungen des Jean-Luc Godard* (Frankfurt am Main: Kinematograph Nr. 6, Schriftenreihe des Deutschen Filmmuseums, 1989).

8 Raymond Roussel, *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, trans. Trevor Winkfield (New York: Sun, 1977); originally published posthumously in the French two years after Roussel’s death as *Comment j’ai écrit certains de mes livres* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1935).

the screenplay that, contrary to the conventions of the film industry, is not based on a story that can be told, but rather on one that is to be seen: "I didn't want to write a screenplay, I wanted to see it."⁹ Seeing here means telling a story with and through the effect of images, as Godard draws from the history of European painting from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. In *Scénario*, though, seeing also means reconstructing the gaze at the images, (re-)producing it as work on and with images. Related to the traditional interdependence of screenplay and film, *Passion* could consequently be considered the realization of a not yet written/seen *Scénario*, which produces the film itself as work, as work on the *Passion*. Or, in other words, an "in-the-making" based on a doubling of the film in film, two nested, nervous narratives that, like countermovements, intersect, overlap, drift apart, coincide, where love and labor—the central topoi of the filmic narrative—are realized as an allegory of *Passion*.

Voir le scénario, est du travail ("seeing the screenplay is work") is a complicated equation. It is complicated because it is played through in respectively different ways in *Passion* and contains a multitude of modes of manifestation. Perhaps its most simplest expression is that of a movement of love between three figures in Tintoretto's painting *Bacchus, Venus and Ariadne* (1576), which Godard transfers to his three main protagonists Isabelle (Huppert), a factory worker, Jerzy (Radziwilowicz), a Polish filmmaker, and Hana (Hanna Schygulla), a hotel owner and wife of the factory owner, Michel (Piccoli). It is not so much the iconographic level, but rather the moment of touching not yet completed that interests Godard. This is the moment when Bacchus hands the wedding ring to Ariadne, and Venus, floating between the two figures—as a connecting third—places a crown of stars on Ariadne's head. The gestures of the figures, their bodies arranged in a circle, are what the filmmaker in *Scénario* imitates with his hand in front of the screen, describing this as the dynamic movement between love and labor, which is supposed to be realized in *Passion* from out of the image and between the images as a story. The basis for this is a specific way of dealing with the filmic image; on the one hand, Godard's formula that "cinema is not one image after another, it is an image plus another, which together result in a third,"¹⁰ or as Gilles Deleuze has described it: "Given one potential, another one has to be chosen, not any whatever, but in such a way that a difference of potential is established between the two, which will be productive of a third or of something new."¹¹ On the other hand, according to Volker Pantenburg, with Godard there is "the utopia of 'penetrating into the image' and finding a place 'within the image,' from which thoughts 'about the image' can be articulated."¹²

The image itself, what is that? A reflex. A mirroring on a disk, does it have density? Now it is conventional in cinema to remain outside this mirroring, external. Contrary to this, I wanted to see the back of the

image, to see it from behind, as though being behind the screen instead of in front of it. Instead of being behind the concrete screen, as though being behind the image and in front of the screen. Or even: on the inside of the image itself. The way certain painters convey the impression that you are actually in the images.¹³

Voir le scénario, est du travail would consequently mean that the filmic narration results from the image or the selection of images and the work on the image/ the images: image and work = narration is then the equation in brief, according to which the "work" on the (cinematographic) image has always appeared to be tied to the technological and economic production conditions of the film industry.¹⁴ Godard's endeavor to realize *Passion* not as a written text but rather as a screenplay-in-the-making, the work in the factory, and Jerzy's unsuccessful attempt to generate a story from tableaux vivants of historical paintings thus stands on the one side of the equation (image and work), the reverse of which is the unredeemed or perhaps unredeemable promise of the narration. This is the reason for the crisis in permanence, which reveals itself to be a crisis of the sensual-aesthetic, economic, and social dimension of the cinema at the same time. From this perspective, Godard's *voir le scénario*, or "image and work = narration (in crisis)," thus provides the basic matrix for the film structure in which the pathos (of the images), comparable with the not yet completed touch in Tintoretto's painting, shows itself in the state of in-the-making.

Voir le scénario, est du travail is therefore the formula that traverses every action and coincides with the realization of the film. The aforementioned protagonists each correspond with three places: the film studio in a Swiss village, in which Jerzy reenacts the historical paintings by Rembrandt, Goya, Delacroix, El Greco, and Watteau; the factory as place of work, with Isabelle and the owner, Michel; the hotel managed by Hana, in which the social differences and conflicts between work on the film and the factory culminate. Godard superimposes a further structure on this topology, based on the principle of

9 Godard, *Scénario du film Passion*.

10 Godard, quoted in Volker Pantenburg, *Film als Theorie: Bildforschung bei Harun Farocki und Jean-Luc Godard* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2006), 129. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by Aileen Derieg.

11 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 180.

12 Volker Pantenburg, *Film als Theorie*, 129.

13 Godard, quoted in *ibid.*, 135. Originally published in Jean-Luc Godard, "Lutter sur

deux fronts," in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard, Tom I: 1954-1984*, ed. Alain Bergala (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1988), 322.

14 See Sabeth Buchmann and Karin Gludovatz, "Farbe macht Arbeit: Überlegungen zu Jean-Luc Godards *Passion*," in *Kunst und Arbeit: Zum Verhältnis von Ästhetik und Arbeitsanthropologie vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Anja Lemke and Alexander Weinstock (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2014), 161.

doubling whereas the film-in-film by Jerzy, which is also titled *Passion*, thematizes work on the film as work on the tableaux vivants—which are already doubled images by definition—Godard’s meta-film succeeds in interlinking Jerzy’s work on the image with the work in the factory and the social interaction in the hotel. It would be insufficient, however, to consider the factory as being solely allegorical; in other words, a moment of reflection on the production conditions in the cinema industry. Godard’s point seems rather to draw work itself as a political and social topos and to negotiate it under the auspices of love. The role of Jerzy, the filmmaker in exile, is also to be understood against this background. The factory strike, incited by Isabelle but unsuccessful, implicitly integrates the Polish trade union movement *Solidarność*, which was violently repressed the year *Passion* was made, into the events depicted, but without becoming caught up in a merely mimetic simulation of the political.¹⁵ Jerzy accordingly functions not only as an alter ego for his own failure with the filmic narration, but also reflects Godard’s political, activist ambition during the Paris revolts around ’68, his disappointed withdrawal, and his critically received return to cinema in the early 1980s—*Passion* is considered the second film of this era, following his *Sauve qui peut la vie* (1980).

The work in the factory as a dimension of film production, as an allegory for work on the screenplay, is given an additional twist with the factory owner, Michel, to the extent that he also turns out to be Godard’s alter ego. “I am Isabelle’s employer, she is my employee, I have many employees, a big family, the whole team,”¹⁶ says Godard in *Scénario*, while projecting a shot of the first discussion of work with the film team on the screen. What he then presents to the crew as the starting point and foundation for the film plot is Tintoretto’s *Bacchus, Venus and Ariadne*, describing it as a process of in-the-making that is already a “finished picture” for the crew. The real conflict looming here becomes a constitutive component of the fiction of the film. It shows the arguments between Jerzy and his production assistant, between Isabelle and the factory owner, the film producer and Jerzy, the revolt in the factory, Jerzy’s struggle with the angel (from Delacroix’s *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, 1857–61) and is continued at the level of the tableaux vivants. In *Passion* itself there is no “finished picture,” since none of the reenacted images, for which extras are significantly recruited from the factory, reaches the status of completion: they are passion/pathos in work.

“The after-life of images is not in fact a given,” Agamben says, “but requires an operation [work]: this is the task of the historical subject (just as it can be said that the persistence of retinal images calls for the cinema, which is able to transform it into movement).”¹⁷ For *Passion* we could add that what consistently fails at the level of the tableaux vivants in Jerzy’s film-in-film, Godard’s *Passion* and his *Scénario du film Passion* seem to provide as “after-image”: namely, the reversal of the relationship of image and story and telling a story

from images. This, however, requires video technology, which means replacing the means of cinematographic narration through editing and montage with the technique of “image mixing.” It is therefore hardly surprising that *Scénario* was shot entirely in the studio, the director’s workplace, showing Godard himself in front of his video mixer and a screen that is to be newly filled again and again:

I stand before the non-visible.
Here the white beach, Mallarmé’s famous white page.
Like a sun much too bright at the beach.
Everything is white.
Yes, that’s right. You have to do the work of a writer [...]
But you don’t want to write. You want to see it, you want to conceive it. [...]

Seeing a screenplay is work.¹⁸

Paul Valéry saw Stéphane Mallarmé reading his “Un Coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard” (A throw of the dice will never abolish chance) “in the most unpretentious way imaginable, as though he wanted to prepare me for an even greater surprise; then he let me look at the text arrangement. It seemed to me that I was looking at the form and pattern of a thought, placed for the first time in finite space.”¹⁹ Godard’s *Scénario du film Passion* could be considered in exactly the opposite way as the (pictorial) figuration of a story, which first reaches language through “reading” the pictures. The comparison seems obvious here, to the extent that Mallarmé wanted to newly found the principles and rules of poetry and, like Godard, introduced his “revolution” with reference to other media. “From music: in the preface to ‘Un Coup’ Mallarmé suggested that the poem could be read as a score. From dance: language becomes gesture on the page.”²⁰ Related to cinema, to Godard’s “revolutionary” formula *voir le scénario*, it is the media of painting and theater that he draws on to generate a screenplay to be seen from the written screenplay. Language is consequently used more as an interruption or a hindrance (Isabelle’s stuttering, the constant coughing of the factory owner), whereas music, in its at once complicated and surprising function as an “in-between image” is equated with the image. What can be presented in *Scénario* as image mixing, as seeing speaking, thus requires complex transformation processes at the level of the analogue

15 Ibid., 172.

16 Godard, *Scénario du film Passion*.

17 Agamben, *Nymphs*, 7.

18 Godard, *Scénario du film Passion*.

19 Paul Valéry, *Collected Works of Paul Valéry, Volume 8: Leonardo, Poe, Mallarmé*, Princeton Legacy Library, vol. 1, trans. Malcolm Cowley and James R.

Lawler (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 309.

20 Michael Newman, “Abyss and Constellation: The Artwork as a Unique Model,” in + *Que 20 Ans Après: Collected Words and Images*, ed. Sabine Folie (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 43.

film, with a simultaneous reflection on its media and economic conditions. But perhaps it is precisely in the film that what Michael Newman developed for Mallarmé's "Un coup de dés" becomes evident: that the text is at once revolutionary poetry and a reflection on the revolution.²¹ At the same time, though, it is not so much the media used that initiate the "revolutionary"—if the term is to be taxed here for this—but rather the manner in which these media assist the realization of Godard's formula. In relation to the central topoi of love and work, seeing (the screenplay) necessarily brings expressive qualities into play in the image work and drama, and in body images and their corresponding language gestures; in short, pathos. Or to put it another way: it is the work on pathos that first realizes Godard's formula. From this perspective, taking recourse to the genre of the tableau vivant only makes sense. As silent theater reduced to pure pictorialness, it is also an object of film archeology, to the extent that movement and montage, as well as the aesthetic of the standstill make up its media history.²² Unlike theater or in analogy to film, the tableau vivant—in keeping with its model—is limited by an unambiguous framing (frame) and thus organized in terms of a pictorial space of perspective. By taking up this aspect in his essay "Diderot, Eisenstein, Brecht," Roland Barthes achieves a remarkable comparative study.²³ Along with Denis Diderot's theater, Bertolt Brecht's epic scenes, and Sergei Eisenstein's films are a sequence of images, of which the essence is found, according to Barthes, in the staging of the "concise moment." The operative procedures used for this thus correlate with Diderot's theory of the tableau. Inspired by the immersive effect of the paintings by Jean-Baptiste Greuze, Diderot sought with his tableau vivant-like stagings—in keeping with the illusionist theater of the eighteenth century—to instructively move/touch the audience. With Eisenstein and Brecht, on the other hand, this intention was given a critical demonstration in the "social gesture."²⁴ The interlinking between painting, theater, and film outlined here takes a significant, if not to say "revolutionary" turn in Godard's *Passion*.

Because Isabelle is a worker, I had to look around in a factory. See the workers' gestures; didn't these gestures perhaps have something to do with the gestures of love, which were also supposed to come up? Didn't this have something to do with the workers? [...] Isabelle and love and the work and the work of love and the love of the work and the hatred of the work, the hatred of work, the hatred of cinema, the love of cinema and work.²⁵

Prefaced by the interest in the gesture (of work, of love), what is condensed in Godard's brief discourse on work and love in *Scénario*, and expanded by the dimension of cinema, is also the proximity to Diderot's concept of being-in-the-picture and Eisenstein's pathos structure—which the filmmaker generates starting from the dynamic principle or the ecstatic effect of El Greco's paintings.²⁶ It is therefore not a coincidence, as Joachim Paech explains, that

in the shot extensively prepared in the film—in which the gestures of work and of love find one another, become identical in pathos—Godard refers to a painting by El Greco. Significantly, he has El Greco's *Assumption of the Virgin* (1577–79) reenacted as a tableau vivant, tying it into the scene where Isabelle is deflowered by Jerzy.²⁷ The rotating upward movement of the camera along the ecstatic-convulsive dynamics of the tableau corresponds with the "Agnus Dei" from Fauré's *Requiem*, which Isabelle, sitting naked on the bed against the back light, slowly recites to herself.²⁸ In contrast to the scenes prior to this, El Greco's *Assumption of the Virgin*—in keeping with the pathos—is close to being the purest "tableau" in *Passion*, opening up in the direction of an indeterminate black (in the darkness of a cinema?). Unlike Diderot, Eisenstein, and Brecht, however, Godard withholds from the viewer the "concise moment" that is manifested in the complete tableau vivant. In relation to El Greco's *Assumption of the Virgin*, what the focusing search movement of the camera makes impossible is in other places the programmatic dissolution of the framing structure: for instance, in the juxtaposition of the strike in the factory and the four paintings by Goya (*The Third of May 1808*, *The Parasol*, *The Nude Maja*, *Charles IV of Spain and His Family*), where Godard dispenses with separating the tableaux from one another, but instead organizes them like a single picture in foreground, middle, and background using image mixing. In the opening tableau, on the other hand, which places the question of painterly light and the narrative as the fundamental conditions of cinema in the foreground, he draws the gradual creation of Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* (1642) in the studio into the filmic image. What Godard provides, in other words, is not an image as a "pure segment with clean edges," which Barthes claims to recognize with Diderot, Eisenstein, and Brecht. Instead, these are nervous images just being constructed, which in the (rehearsal-like) process of the in-the-making are in danger of falling apart again. These are images fraying at the edges, merging, overlapping (image mixing), and which never show themselves as images for exactly this reason, but rather as work on the image. The recurring question of "poetics and poesis of light"²⁹—as a crisis of transferring painted light to

21 Ibid.

22 Sabine Folie and Michael Glasmeier, "Atmende Bilder: Tableau vivant und Attitüde zwischen 'Wirklichkeit und Imagination,'" in *Tableaux Vivants: Lebende Bilder und Attitüden in Fotografie, Film und Video*, ed. Sabine Folie, Michael Glasmeier, and Gerald Matt (Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien, 2002), 18.

23 What is remarkable about this is that Bertold Brecht's epic theater was a counter-concept to the illusionist theater favored by Diderot. See my essay, "Behind the Fourth Wall," in *Behind the Fourth Wall*:

Fictitious Lives—Lived Fictions (Nuremberg: Verlag für Moderne Kunst Nürnberg, 2010), 127. See also Roland Barthes, "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein," in *ibid.*, 139–47; or Roland Barthes, "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein," trans. Stephen Heath, *Screen 15*, no. 2 (1974): 33–39.

24 See my essay "Behind the Fourth Wall," 127.

25 Godard, *Scénario du film Passion*.

26 See Paech, *Passion oder die Einbildungen des Jean-Luc Godard*, 30–38.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

the illumination of the scene, which already became virulent in the tableau vivant stagings of the eighteenth century—substantiates exactly this aspect. “It’s not working, the light is impossible, it comes from nowhere. [...] So let’s stop,”³⁰ says Jerzy, for instance, attempting to illuminate Goya’s *The Third of May 1808* in keeping with the original. Jerzy’s failure with the light implies at the same time a failure with Godard’s formula *voir le scénario*, or “work + image = story,” to the extent that “the possibilities of cinematographic image production or the possibilities of cinematographic narration,” as Sabeth Buchmann and Karin Gludowatz explain, seem to be “tied to the technical deployment and representability of light.”³¹ Godard’s meta-film significantly relies on the interlinking of “work + image,” as he connects the strike preparations in the factory through the adaptation of the means of painting (the use of back lighting and silhouette) with the Goya tableau. What works in *Scénario* by simply cross-fading the portrait of Isabelle over Goya’s painting, requires complex scenic work and light direction in the film. The essential aspect here, however, is Jerzy’s interruption of the work on the tableau, the unfinished status of the image, the fraying of its edges into the space of the studio, the space of work, and the space of the viewers. This provides the precondition and the possibility of producing Godard’s formula *voir le scénario* in a potentially endless multiplication of the “in-between” (of the images). Considered in this “light,” *voir le scénario, est du travail* proves also to be possible images and (framework) actions to be imagined by the viewers.³²

If “passion” as suffering and fervor “designates that which happens without our cooperation,” in other words, which places the affected person in the state of *potentia, dynamis*, and which is conducive to doing and cognition in a positive sense,³³ then Godard’s *Passion*—the realization of his formula—is, at the same time, a “suffering” that draws the viewers into the in-the-making: an offer, in other words, of active, (self-)reflective partaking. This is the reason for the pathos, the *passion in work*, which eludes the unlimited objectification of the image and thus also its law-abiding (re-)producibility.

“Ah, there are laws in film, Monsieur Courtard?”

“No, monsieur, there are no laws.”³⁴

There are indeed laws, as Godard could have added to the conversation between Jerzy and his cameraman, since his meta-film makes it clear that *voir le scénario*, as a screenplay realized in film, can only be achieved through reflection on the laws of film. This is exactly the reason why Godard’s formula is comparable with Mallarmé’s revolutionary poetry and his reflection on the revolution. In addition, this also addresses a rule that is constitutive for rehearsal; namely, that breaking the rule, or what is new, is only recognizable under the conditions of the rule. This kind of rule violation, as it is evident in the simultaneity of, or in the oscillation between processes of the “making-of”

and the “in-the-making,” first derails the economy or the calculability of a film (or an exhibition), but then immediately reflects them as a repressive regulation, as Godard laconically explains at the beginning in *Scénario*: “A bathing girl one hundred francs, a policeman fifty francs, a lover three dollars. And bit by bit this turns into: a policeman falls in love with a girl in a bathing suit, who is being pursued by her lover. [...] The screenplay comes from the accounting department.”³⁵ The absurdity of economies becomes apparent here on the side of the film (and the exhibition) also prompted Godard to provide a synopsis for the planned film with no screenplay, to rehearse some of the tableaux vivants, to conduct interviews with the actors, or to make a preselection for the music. This may change the perspective of the relationship of film and “after-film” (*scénario*), but what becomes apparent here are moments of rehearsal—at the level of images, language, and music—which were realized, as it became evident, in the film. This means that the making-of and in-the-making merge seamlessly, but without becoming identical—a characteristic that also proves to be the condition and the result of the Godardian formula: *voir le scénario*.

Postscript

Godard’s *Passion/Scénario du film Passion* stand for the beginning of a collective work, with the intention of realizing an exhibition as rehearsal. Against this background, the analysis above is not based on film theory, but rather on exhibition theory—as though it were not a matter of describing the film, but rather the model or the matrix of an exhibition: as afterimage and model image at once. Accordingly, the exhibition endeavors to relate works as an expression of temporary productions and production contexts to one another in such a way that they can always also be understood as (work-)rehearsals that allow the visitors to put themselves in the picture. The way an aspiration of this kind always results in difficulties, conflicts, and resistance, was something Godard played through extensively, but at the same time, he also showed that and how this could be given a positive turn in the process of in-the-making.

This kind of a concept of cinema could be placed alongside Jean-Paul Martinon’s text “Theses in the Philosophy of Curating,” in which the philosopher distinguishes between “curating” and “the curatorial.” On the basis of ten brief theses with such expressive titles as “Embodied Knowledge,” “The Other of

29 Buchmann and Gludowatz, “Farbe macht Arbeit,” 161.

30 Quoted in Paech, *Passion oder die Einbildungen*, 15.

31 Buchmann and Gludowatz, “Farbe macht Arbeit,” 161.

32 Pantenburg, *Film als Theorie*, 134.

33 Busch, *Passivität*, 42.

34 Paech, *Passion oder die Einbildungen*, 15.

35 Godard, *Scénario du film Passion*.

Narrative," "Mapping and Playing Chess," "Warrior of the Imaginary," and "The Ignorant Body"—to name only a few—he presents the curatorial as an "event of knowledge" that opens up with the viewers in a process of in-the-making. In contrast to curatorial work, this cannot be planned, has no definite place. It is something that interrupts when "a line is drawn, a fullness is reached or a horizon of understanding is acknowledged."³⁶ At the same time, this kind of interruption is to be understood as an intensification, which does not negate the given ("a drawn line, reached fullness, acknowledged horizon"), but instead underscores, emphasizes it, while newly inventing itself as an "ignorant body."³⁷

A definition of the curatorial like this raises a number of questions, of which perhaps the most urgent is that of curatorial practice. What if we give the curatorial (in-the-making) precedence over curatorial practice (the-making-of), which means mentally playing something through, which has, as Martinon says, no language (yet)? What would this actually mean for an exhibition as rehearsal?

Perhaps it is a bit venturesome to seek a common denominator between Martinon's curating/the curatorial and Jean-Luc Godard's *Passion/Scénario du Film Passion* that could contour an exhibition as rehearsal. What they prove to have in common, though, is the unfinished, the interrupted, the principle of doubling or multiplication that takes into consideration the share of the viewer in the "work" on the film, the exhibition; in other words: an oscillation between processes of in-the-making and the making of, as even the curatorial can only be envisioned in relation to and in distinction from curatorial practice. I would like to go a step further and maintain that the exhibition as rehearsal could invent itself as an ignorant body. It would thus be on the side of the equation opposite the simultaneity or interlinking of curating and the curatorial on the other. This seems just as plausible as "writing" the story of a film from and with images—and yet according to Martinon, it is by definition un-attainable. It is exactly here that Godard's *voir le scénario, est du travail* becomes interesting as a model or a matrix for the endeavor of conceiving an exhibition as rehearsal.

Translated from the German by Aileen Derieg

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36 Jean-Paul Martinon, "Theses in the Philosophy of Curating," in *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, ed Jean-Paul Martinon (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 29.

37 Ibid., 30.

Contingency and Plan Working in Theater

Annemarie Matzke



Fig. 1
Conception rehearsal for Heiner Müller's *The Scab*, 1987

A photograph shows a gathering in a rehearsal space; backdrop sections can be seen in the background. The mood is concentrated. Almost everyone is looking at a black box. The stage designer, to the far right, bends over it and looks inside with a serious face. The others are also watching closely, tensely. Only two are not captivated by the box, look at one another and the director at them: this is a document of a rehearsal as a staged constellation of gazes. This photograph shows a rehearsal concept meeting for the production of *Der Lohndrucker* (*The Scab*) directed by Heiner Müller in 1988, whose manner of rehearsing will be discussed later.¹

What is drawing the attention of the gazes? The picture segments do not allow the viewer of the photograph a glimpse into the box. One can only surmise what is shown: a model of the stage design, presented here by the stage

¹ Heiner Müller's *Der Lohndrucker*,
Deutsches Theater, Berlin, 1988.

designer and the director. The concept meeting is one of the first performances in the rehearsal process: the stage designer performs his design by playing through its possibilities. He turns the other participants into the first viewers of an imaginary staging process with the model. At the same time, it becomes clear who is doing the planning and who is the audience that observes the plan, that is being shown—who sets an artistic position and who has to deal with it. The hierarchies are thus clearly distributed in the concept meeting.

The photograph stages the working situation *rehearsal* in a particular way: it is not the model that is being observed, but the observers. The lacuna of the picture—what can be seen in the box but is not visible to the viewers—refers directly to the problem of the performance situation rehearsal. What is observed here is the layout of the space, into which the *mise-en-scène* is to be designed. From the perspective of performance, it is the “empty space.” What will take place here is not yet visible, but is what will be developed in the coming weeks and months. And yet what is evident in the gazes of the observers is the attempt to already see what could happen in the box. An insight is given into what could be: projections into a scenic future. Rehearsal as a practice in becoming.

Rehearsals stage specific working constellations that are characterized by specific options for action: Who watches from where? Who has access? Who shows what? Who may speak? Who may make judgments? Rehearsals are thus always also performances that stage observer situations. It is not only the actors who show and the director who watches, but the director also plays, shows, presents, while the actors watch. Unlike other art forms, the artistic practice is intersubjectively organized: the process also includes prompters, stage designers, technicians, and wardrobe supervisors. And (usually) unlike in fine art or literature, theater does not end with a product. Producer, process, and product cannot be clearly separated from one another.

The missing product also marks what is unavailable in artistic producing, which is constituted solely in doing. Yet this doing is a moment that always also implies the squandering of moments: something is engendered that only exists in the moment, which cannot be repeated, and for which there is no guarantee of success (in the moment of performance), even though the rehearsals navigate in the direction of a repeatable *mise-en-scène*. What distinguishes artistic practice in theater is thus not a revision or further development of something fixed, but rather that it is necessary to start over from the beginning again and again. There is no end to work on a theater production and it can fail at any time.

Yet rehearsals as stagings of working scenarios are also different from other artistic practices on another level as well. Unlike the concept of solitary artists,

who, through engagement with their singularity and unpredictability brings forth something apart from themselves, theater and the rehearsal as a collective art form requires similar structures in the production conditions, but different working contexts. In performative art, time for working together has to be planned if something shared is to be produced. The rehearsals for a *mise-en-scène* usually target a concrete performance and premiere date, but require making appointments for working times, are frequently organized around a detailed division of labor, and tied to a common rehearsal location. The participants are connected through contracts. Investments of time and money are needed, which create respective dependencies. To this extent, every rehearsal practice is always also working on the institutionalization of its own activity at the same time. If we look at the historical practices of theater rehearsal, we note that they have always been subject to permanent transformations, which tie artistic practices to general and cultural processes. In other words, the way rehearsals are conducted in the theater says something about the society in which this theater is made. The rehearsal thus always also engenders concepts of theater, art, and society.

Rehearsals should not be grasped solely as the production of a *mise-en-scène*, but should be understood as “processes of producing,” as organizational processes in which theater itself is constituted, but where the concomitant conditions are not fixed but transient, for the success of which there is no guarantee, permanently reorganizing and changing. Looking at the production of theater in this way first makes working in theater visible altogether: it withdraws the work from the private realm of the producer and performs the work itself. Querying working in theater always also means taking a closer look at the social dimension of the work—in the form of its “publication” in front of others.

The question is thus raised of the connection between the idea of an artistic practice beyond work—as a doing without time and place, characterized by openness and unpredictability, by singularity and individuality—and the forms of collective creativity that have to be organized in theater rehearsals. This is to be discussed in the examples of different concepts of rehearsal work, which are distinguished by a consciously contradictory relation to concepts of work: Bertolt Brecht’s theater work in the Berliner Ensemble of the 1940s and ’50s, Heiner Müller’s work in the late twentieth century, and a contemporary position, specifically the collaboration between the director Laurent Chétouane and the actor Fabian Hinrichs. To what extent does the artistic practice undermine and transgress the working context theater? Where does it transgress and undermine the organization of work, its regulations and controls?

Making What Is Hard Easy

In 1967 Carl Weber, one of Brecht's assistants and dramaturgs, described in a lecture his first rehearsal visit at the Berliner Ensemble. They were rehearsing *Urfaust* (1952/53):

I walked into the rehearsal and it was obvious that they were taking a break. Brecht was sitting in a chair smoking a cigar, the director of the production, Egon Monk, and two or three assistants were sitting with him, some of the actors were on stage and some were standing around Brecht, joking, making funny movements and laughing about them. Then one actor went up on the stage and tried about 30 ways of falling from a table. They talked a little about the *Urfaust*-scene "In Auerbachs Keller" [...]. Another actor tried the table, the results were compared, with a lot of laughing and a lot more of horse-play. This went on and on, and someone ate a sandwich, and I thought, my god this is a long break. So I sat naively and waited, and just before Monk said, "Well, now we are finished, let's go home," I realised that this was rehearsal."²

The rehearsal as break and the break as rehearsal. In the scene described above, laughter, conversations, the movement of the participants through the room, eating sandwiches, and smoking confuse the young guest. The openness of the situation seems to contradict the paradigms of producing oriented to the target of a premiere: the activity seems to be marked by randomness, arbitrariness, personal needs, and fun, not by planning and control. Expectations about a working situation—a special form of concentration, the separation between acting actors and the reflecting director team, instructions from the director and their execution by the actors—are undermined and simultaneously raise the question of the theater rehearsal as working time. How does the creative moment—linked with a concept of spontaneity—relate to the jointly agreed rehearsal time? Tying creative acts to a common rehearsal time is a difficult endeavor. An idea comes when it wants to, not when we want it to. This does not exclude the possibility that the artistic creativity of individual artists is also subject to a rigorous time regime. For the topos of spontaneity is also closely linked with the image of the artist as "incessantly creating," "restlessly" and "obsessively" devoted to doing—who is ready to be surprised at any time by an artistic idea. This time regime, however, is self-chosen and not negotiated with other participants. Theater practice requires giving up all autonomy over creative time and places theater-makers in a paradoxical situation: they have to agree on fixed working times and yet cannot guarantee that what they plan to do will take place within these working times. Rehearsal work under Brecht's direction was characterized by a conscious subversion of time economies. Rehearsal time was, first of all, time spent together, which was seemingly unlimited.

In the descriptions of Brecht's rehearsal practice, similar scenarios are repeatedly highlighted. A lack of discipline in the rehearsals, no training for the actors, and endless discussions are mentioned. If we look at the rehearsal conditions, there was certainly something lavish and immoderate about Brecht's rehearsal work, in terms of time and personnel as well as economic expense. The historical transformation of rehearsal work is also evident: whereas two rehearsals were sufficient in the late nineteenth century, with Brecht and Constantin Stanislavski there were over a hundred stage rehearsals and various technical rehearsals.

At first glance, Brecht's rehearsal work can thus be described as undermining standards of achievement. Instead of conscientiously working toward the date of the premiere, there is an indeterminacy of the rehearsal situation, which seems to attempt to evade the compulsion to produce. What is emphasized is the time spent together, which appears to be specifically not planned and controlled. The hierarchies of production—in the division of labor between director and actors, assistants, and dramatists—dissolve in the congeniality of the rehearsal. These seem to be friends interacting with one another, rather than colleagues working together.

Looking at the rehearsal as a lavish practice contradicts many of Brecht's ideas of a theater practice, which he defines as starting from craft and industrial labor. "Theater people simply carry out their trade in the theater, just as bakers carry out theirs in the bakery," he explains, repeatedly emphasizing that actors are employees like any others, who must be aware of their status.³ At the same time, his point of orientation was the standardization of scientific procedures, which he also called for in producing theater. The focal point of these comparisons is always a criticism of the obfuscation of production conditions in the theater. What Brecht demands from an "experimental theater" is to not only work on the procedures and methods, but to change the conditions of production. The aim is an artistic practice that not only reflects on its own conditions, but in its model character should also lead to changing social reality.

In addition to this demystification of artistic creativity, though, on another level Brecht was also interested in reformulating the concept of labor beyond the paradigm of production and usability: in searching for a lightness in producing, which is no longer defined by concepts such as compulsion or discipline. "And yet the most difficult thing about art is that it must conduct its

2 Carl Weber, "Brecht as Director," *TDR* 12, no. 1 (Fall 1967): 102–3 (emphasis mine).

3 Bertolt Brecht, "Über eine nichtaristotelische Dramatik" [On non-Aristotelian drama], in *Schriften zum*

Theater 1, vol. 15, *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), 254. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

transactions, even the most hopeless, with complete lightness," explains Brecht.⁴ If the working world is distinguished by limiting and rationalizing the production time, then rehearsal work should elude exactly these economies of time. "If you want to cope with something hard, you have to make it easy"⁵—this paradox determines the rehearsals. Moments when Brecht stopped the rehearsals because no solution was reached, Carl Weber's description of the openness of the rehearsals, the recordings of rehearsals documenting long conversations beyond the concrete rehearsal issues—all these examples stand for a certain concept of theater-work: the work should be liberated from every external compulsion and every effort. Only in this way could the openness emerge that would engender something other than the familiar logic. In this way, it becomes possible to imagine a model of artistic practice that eludes the compulsion to produce. As the various documentations of Brecht's rehearsals show, however, time was squandered within a clearly defined time frame.

During the rehearsals for the *Katzgraben* production directed by Brecht in 1954 at the Berliner Ensemble, the assistant directors measured the time of the performance in the final run-throughs before the premiere. The stopwatch enters into the realm of the theater: differences between single scenes were noted in seconds; the time for each scene change was registered. The stopped times were compared with the data from the previous run-throughs, and each change in timing was entered into a table. With each rehearsal run-through before the premiere, the performance time was shortened: the performance in the process of acceleration. Taking time as "stopping" time considers the process of producing as an increase—acceleration presumes a progress of the performance. This progress is documented with measured time and can be proved. The tables make it easy to forget that it is not a matter of piecework here, not a question of the settings of a machine, or of athletes wanting to beat their own records, but of the course of a performance following its own dramaturgy of time.

Yet this table not only marks a turning point within the rehearsals—from openly seeking to targeted producing—it also points out different conceptions of the rehearsal as artistic work. Two phases can be identified within the overall rehearsal process: the not strictly targeted seeking of the stage rehearsals, and the goal-oriented working toward the premiere. Two different economies of time are distinguished here: an exploring one marked by leaps, breaks, interruptions; and a linear one that aims, in relation to the performance, to "pull itself together," to "speed up" the process, as Brecht says. Thus, there is a shift from a form of nonwork, in the sense of squandering and the openness of the situation, to a targeted, disciplined working. Contingency and plan—openness and fixation—as two poles of rehearsal work, which gain a respectively different valuation within the process.

The rehearsal process as a lavish practice, on the other hand, can be read as a pre-view of the ideal of a different theater beyond the usability of the production paradigm, which Brecht, under the compulsion to produce a presentable performance, did not achieve. Doing theater not as targeted and frictionless labor. The aim was a different form of dramaturgy, as Heiner Müller interprets Brecht's theory: "Brecht thought epic theatre was impossible; it would only become possible if the perversion of turning a luxury into a profession were to cease—the constitution of theatre out of the division of stage and auditorium. Only if this is abolished, at least in tendency, does it become possible to make theatre with a minimum of dramaturgy, almost without dramaturgy. And that's what it's about now: to produce a theatre without effort."⁶

The utopia of a theater without effort envisions an artistic practice beyond the categories of the working world and economic effectivity. Without the separation between stage and audience space, process and product would also no longer be thought of as separate: doing theater envisioned as a producing that acknowledges the endlessness of its activity and at the same time points beyond its own boundaries.

Islands of Disorder (Heiner Müller)

Whereas with Brecht strategies of squandering and detouring continued to be legitimized by their productivity, Müller proposed a different model of theater beyond the world of work: "Theater is crisis. That is actually the definition of theater—or it should be. It can only function as crisis and in crisis, otherwise it has no relation at all to society outside the theater."⁷

Müller's proposal of a theater of crisis also applies to producing, rehearsals, preparations, and what happens backstage. He does not tie into the myth of an artistic crisis, which is ultimately supposed to be resolved in the genius artwork, but instead considers the crisis as a constitutive element of theater. The theater is declared as a lavish practice, which resists the logic of usability. Specifically because theater does not seem to function within an

4 Bertolt Brecht, "Zur Antigone des Sophokles" [Antigone of Sophocles], in *Schriften zum Theater 3*, vol. 17, *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), 1212.

5 Helene Weigel and Berliner Ensemble, eds., *Theaterarbeit* (Dresden: VVV Dresdner Verlag, 1952), 383.

6 Cited in Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen

Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006), 26.

7 "Theater ist Krise: Heiner Müller im Gespräch, 16. Oktober 1995," by Ute Scharfenberg, in *Manifeste europäischen Theaters: Grotowski bis Schleeff*, ed. Joachim Fiebach (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2003), 342.

economic thinking oriented to functionality and rationality but it assumes a resistive position—breaking out of the rational thinking of the labor society.

Whereas Brecht rejects any special position in society for being an artist, and declares theater-making a profession like any other, thus equating artists with all other workers, Müller is interested in calling the concept of the profession into question in general. “Director is not a profession. That’s not what I am anyway; I can only work with people who have ideas of their own,” he explained,⁸ criticizing the form of the division of labor in theater as an “industrial product of the nineteenth century.”⁹ The fact that this remark was formulated in an interview for the book *Regie: Heiner Müller* (Director: Heiner Müller) is not without a certain irony, because Müller worked within the structures of the city theater, which developed in the nineteenth century, and was credited as the “director” of his productions. His statements are to be read in the context of a program of artistic production based on not-knowing and not-being-able-to. Müller speaks of “working on the disappearance of the author” and seeks an exposition of the “production in the product.”¹⁰ This concept of artistic practice is framed in the metaphor of blindness: an artistic activity that eludes the control of the author in the overwriting, quoting, and shifting of material. Art as a “blind practice” can approach unused reserves: “As long as the power is blind, it is a power. As soon as it has a program, a perspective, it can be integrated and becomes a part.”¹¹ A concept of aesthetic practice is thus formulated, which consciously contradicts the concrete conditions of theater production, as is conventional in the theaters where Müller produced. The rehearsal form is traditionally oriented to the presence of a director and his or her verbal communications, to the corrective of the director’s gaze that is supposed to see everything. So how can the rehearsal practice of a director, who does not want to be a director and questions the theater itself as an institution, be described?

Müller’s rehearsal work for the production *Die Hamletmaschine* (*Hamletmachine*, 1977) has been extensively documented. Descriptions that include new crises, and contradictory positions are documented without offering a solution. What permeates the actors’ descriptions of the rehearsals is a criticism of the position of the director, who refuses to evaluate, to comment on what he has seen: “Heiner, you have to say something, we’ve gone as far as we can’—I want to see what you can come up with.”¹² In the rehearsal notes it says again and again: “Müller says nothing.” Furthermore, an actress berates the director team as “fat, reactionless lumps.” After two months of rehearsals, the director’s staff member Stephan Suschke draws the conclusion:

The main problem seems to be the different understandings of the state of the development of the production, resulting from the rehearsal method. Until this run-through Müller understood the rehearsals primarily

as gathering material. He refused to fix arrangements, was reserved about giving instructions for the scenes, let a tremendous amount of material be gained by playing through “helplessness.” [...] Since there is hardly any description of what is visible, what can be experienced, it is difficult for the actors to fix what they have achieved, which leads to insecurity. Gudzuhn: “I had seventy rehearsals and feel as though I have only had seven.”¹³

Müller’s “silence” resulted in insecurity. This insecurity is described by some actors as productive. Although Ulrich Mühe called the rehearsals “torture,” beyond any “safety net,” at the same time he also recognized them as a special challenge: Mühe would have to go beyond his position as an actor and be responsible for himself. Other actors literally became speechless in the face of the predominant perplexity: “Koerbl, anxious and nervous or perplexed, has no more text, has no voice,” according to the rehearsal notes by the director’s staff member. Müller refused to set a recognizable conception, provided few instructions, seemed to make no decisions, and gave no commentaries or explanation for long stretches. His refusal of a director position worked against the given production conditions and the director’s position of authority. Müller’s forbearance and laissez-faire approach to conflicts undermine the position of a conceptualizing and ordering artistic subject, constituting a “different” frame of rehearsing at the same time.

Even though Müller opened up the rehearsals as a possibility space, the position of the actors pushed into this kind of situation is substantially more precarious. As Müller consciously called his professional identity into question, theirs was questioned too. They were forced into an uncertain situation without knowing what was expected of them. Unlike Müller, however, they thus reacted to a frame that was given to them. Whereas Müller voluntarily and consciously exposed himself to this kind of practice, the actors were exposed to it. Their dependent position focuses the gaze on the production conditions,

8 Heiner Müller in conversation with Dieter Kranz. The quotations are taken from Stephan Suschkes documentation of the Müller production, which includes rehearsal notes, photographs, critiques, interviews with Müller; see Akademie der Künste Berlin, Archiv Darstellende Künste: Sammlung Inszenierungsdokumentationen Index ID 677 [Academy of Arts Berlin, Performing Arts Archive: Documentation on stage productions].

9 Martin Linzer/Peter Ullrich, *Regie: Heiner Müller* [Director: Heiner Müller] (Berlin: Theater der Zeit 1993), 9.

10 Heiner Müller, *Rotwelsch* (Berlin: Merve, 1982), 97.

11 *Ibid.*, 178.

12 Rehearsal note from October 13, 1989, Documentation of *Die Hamletmaschine*, Akademie der Künste Berlin, Archiv Darstellende Künste: Sammlung Inszenierungsdokumentationen Index ID 677.

13 *Ibid.*

which rarely give the actor a choice about which director to work with. At the same time, inherent to the concept of this kind of paradoxical rehearsal method is the idea of a change in theater production beyond a concrete program, which in turn obligates the actors to a concept already designed by the director. The rehearsals become a non-defined space, which in the worst case leads to paralysis. Yet it is this contradictory position that focuses the gaze for one's own theatrical practice: the rehearsals become negotiations of artistic practice—in their resistances and possibilities.

In their rehearsals, both Brecht and Müller designed scenarios of work and nonwork. Yet these scenarios are still also always within the context of theater production, the conditions of which engender specific contradictions to a concept of openness. Here, it is especially the forms of collectively producing and the relationship between director and actors that are thus challenged in a particular way. If working contexts also always engender intersubjective relations in their organization, then a different model of collectivity in doing is proposed that attempts (within externally set rules) to undermine the organization of production. Even if wasting time, crisis, and chaos turn into a goal-oriented staging in both rehearsal processes, the idea of a theater emerges in the forms of theater practice outlined here, which is supposed to be more than the work in theatre and breaks open the boundaries of rehearsals and *mise-en-scène*.

In conclusion, I would like to discuss what this can mean in today's theater practice on the basis of Eva Könnemann's documentary film *Die Tragöden aus der Stadt* (*The Tragedians of the City*, 2008), which shows the collaboration between the director Laurent Chétouane and the actor Fabian Hinrichs. Having retreated to the country, the director and the actor are rehearsing their production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

"Show me how you do it, so I can watch," demands the actor. The actor's demand is a provocation for the director. Before that, Chétouane had explained to him that one does not rehearse alone. It is the director's gaze that first turns what is happening into theater. According to Chétouane, "You have to look at yourself through me." Hinrichs finds himself in a crisis. He does not believe the gaze from the outside and demands a reversal of the gaze regime. Then he wants to assume the position of the director, the observing subject, to be able to reevaluate his object status as an observer. In a scene in the film, Chétouane, who clearly feels uncomfortable, enters into this demand. He takes the stage, sits down on a chair, all under Hinrichs's gaze. Hinrichs cannot bear this for long, however, and takes the stage again himself. In changing roles, both finally sit down next to one another. Hinrichs starts to imitate Chétouane and takes on his movements. Directing and acting present themselves here as roles that can be switched, and of which the options for agency are linked with

power, which is newly negotiated in the moment of crisis. As the director exposes himself to the gaze of the actor, the actor in turn gains subject status, which enables him to continue. Rehearsal practice can be described as a "practice in becoming." It is a practice that is aware of the positions of watching and showing, but their potentiality is first negotiated together.

In this sense, rehearsals can be understood as a staging of a constellation of work, but one that subverts the concept of producing. What is meant is more an idea of rehearsing as doing, which calls into question the conditions of working itself. This is not a matter of mystifying artistic practice as something mysterious or inexplicable, nor of a disclosure of production conditions. The artistic practice of making theatre is not simply to be envisioned as the opposite of the concept of work, but instead it marks a lacuna. Each of the rehearsal procedures aims for a new indeterminateness of doing, as a recognition of chaos, of shared not-knowing and planlessness. In the best case, this includes an acknowledgment of not knowing what will happen and yet believing that something happens in the time spent together: without purpose or goal.

Translated from the German by Aileen Derieg

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A Heavy Compression to Bring Out the Moments of Crisis

Eva Könnemann in Conversation
with Stefanie Diekmann and Ekkehard Knörer

Stefanie Diekmann: Looking over your filmography, one gets the impression that you've always been interested in processes of rehearsal, at least in an extended sense.

Eva Könnemann: The first film in which the theater rehearsal is the subject was *Die Tragöden aus der Stadt* (2007). But before that I'd made several films that explored artistic processes, primarily in music. My guiding question was always: How does a work of art—be it music, a text, or else a theatrical performance—come into being?

Ekkehard Knörer: Was this exploration of music already about collective processes?

EVK: There's a short film I made about a fictional band—it features actors playing the band's members, but they also composed music for the film and subsequently performed as that band.

SD: With a view to your later projects, it's interesting to note that the band actually had to play and perform. Might it be the crux of the rehearsal that, as a process, it can't be faked, that you can only observe it, and that the best times to observe it are moments of tension or strenuous negotiation, because it's only at those junctures that there's really something at stake?

EVK: Yes. I discovered this aspect while working on the short *Light Boy* (2003)—the title is also the band's name. At first it was about the characters and certain things that happen to them, such as the singer's disappearance. I was actually mostly keen on the plot. But then the band kind of went behind my back and wrote several songs. They knew I wanted to shoot a scene at Golden Pudel Club in Hamburg in which they would pretend to be giving a concert. On the night of the shoot, we set up the stage and lighting, did a sound check, and suddenly it turned out they'd written five songs and were giving an actual concert. Here the band was for real, something I'd never planned on. I liked that, and so I came back to it as a methodical device later on.

SD: However open the processes in the various films are, that moment of live performance, of going out there and facing the audience, always looms on the horizon. That made me wonder: To what extent does the prospect of this confrontation, of the moment when the performers must deliver, format the process or make it observable in the first place, by being the final destination that lends it structure? How, specifically, did you come to make *Die Tragöden aus der Stadt*?

EVK: The original plan was to make a film that would be set backstage during a performance—*Hinterbühne*, or “backstage,” was actually the project’s working title. I wanted to show all the entrances and exits, while staying in that space behind the stage, the place where the actors break character. Then I heard that Fabian Hinrichs and Laurent Chétouane were making plans for a production of *Hamlet*. Their initial idea was to produce two different versions: first a solo version starring Hinrichs, then an ensemble production. The latter would have been especially interesting to me with regard to the backstage scenario. Still, I decided to start by shooting during the rehearsals for the monologue version. The second production never came together. So I was left with eighty hours of footage from the rehearsal process. At first the material just sat there for a pretty long time, almost half a year, because I was frustrated that the ensemble production they’d envisioned never materialized.

SD: When did you realize what it was about the material that interested you—during the shoot, or only when you reviewed it later?

EVK: As I was shooting, it struck me that something was happening before my eyes: a genuine encounter, a very contentious engagement, a collision between two exceptionally strong personalities who were earnestly struggling to find common ground. The deal we’d made was that I would always be there for the rehearsals—I wasn’t just going to drop in and turn the camera on as I pleased. I remember Laurent saying that I had to become part of the landscape: the landscape in which the rehearsals took place.

EKK: Were you more than just the proverbial fly on the wall? Did people also approach you as a director or artist during the rehearsals? For example, did they ask you to resolve disputes?

EVK: Not on the scene. When I was there, I really was the fly on the wall and no one approached me in any way. They also didn’t feel the presence of the camera—that worked really well. Outside the rehearsal room, by contrast, both sides used me—to put it harshly—on a regular basis to talk about and work through what had occurred and to vent.

SD: That’s a partial answer to my next question: whether a backstage area within the backstage area took shape. So that, in a certain sense, it’s a making of and backstage film that takes the viewer, though not to the literal backstage area, into the creative process. But then there’s also a process behind the creative process, and that’s the plane of commentary, which in turn shifts into the film’s offscreen register. Perhaps that’s no longer backstage but the “real” offscreen action.

EVK: Well, the film doesn’t offer a commentary on anything, though it heavily compresses to bring out the moments of crisis. My purpose was not to paint the most objective and comprehensive picture possible of what happened. Crisis was in the air from the start of the rehearsals, so the film also conveys something that happened. Still, it represents a choice of focus—I might well have chosen to show more of the good moments, where something comes together and the mood is buoyant. It all concludes with a happy ending on the stage, but the rehearsal film ends just before the premiere, with the complete falling out between the two protagonists, their inability to understand each other. Those are obviously deliberate choices.

SD: The moments of crisis in *Die Tragöden* often revolve around something that’s also a major issue in the two subsequent films: the question of role allocation and role concepts, though not with regard to how a character is conceived, but rather: What’s the function in which I’m actually here, what do I have to deliver, what’s expected of me? There’s a moment where Hinrichs tells Chétouane, “Ok, so you go ahead and do it. You sit down there. I want to see right now how you do that.” And Chétouane replies, “No, I can’t do that, I’m the director.” That moment encapsulates a debate in which the very question of who does what is at stake. Would you also say that this questioning of each protagonist’s role echoes in the subsequent projects?

EVK: I do think that many of the films I’ve made examine questions of collaboration. How does collaboration function? It’s important to note that when multiple people work together, hierarchies will always emerge that can then be taken apart or called in question. In *Material Beton* (2013), we tried to dismantle these hierarchies as much as possible, but that revealed how problematic any such attempt is. At bottom it’s always also about relations of power.

EKK: In *ensemble* (2010), you personally arranged the constellation of these relations of power, these peculiar and not entirely perspicuous relations that are both somewhat hierarchical, with the figure of the director as the ultimate source of authority, and designed to foster collective creative processes. Was that a direct response to what you’d experienced during the rehearsals for *Die Tragöden*?

EVK: With *Die Tragöden*, there had been several instances of internal censorship—I’d striven to protect the two by not showing everything. I think that was what gave me the idea of making a second film about theater rehearsals in which no such safeguard was necessary. So I cast a theatrical ensemble and offered everyone to choose a pseudonym—they didn’t have to be themselves as they acted in this constellation, so that there was room

for a kind of freedom, a disassociation from the personal in their acting. Conversely, it gave me a freedom as well. I didn't have to try and faithfully represent these people. I paid all participants actors' wages, organized the rehearsal room, and selected Georg Büchner's play *Danton's Death*.

EKK: What did you tell them? That you were shooting an improvised feature film? Or a documentary with fictional elements? Or something else entirely?

EVK: I gave them a fairly businesslike description of the setup and explained that I wanted to make a film about a theater rehearsal, or more precisely, about a simulated theater rehearsal on the basis of an arranged situation. The film would be fictional but shot like a documentary. I also told them that the rehearsals would be for real and that there would be a performance.

SD: There's a certain subset of people in *ensemble* who have fairly defined roles, like the musicians and the assistants, who are pretty passive much of the time. Meanwhile, others—primarily the ones who have to go onstage and act before an audience—have to work with completely undefined roles. Somehow this situation affects the director's position as well. Was that mixture something you'd always planned on? Or did you hope that it would be an especially rich source of creative friction?

EVK: That wasn't something I planned—it just turned out that way. The musician was simply very good at what he did and extremely versatile. That sort of virtuoso skill breeds confidence. He also had a clearly defined assignment. With regard to the assistants, we'd decided to use clip-on and stationary microphones, but we didn't have boom arms. We also had to make do with a limited number of input channels on the mixing console, which is to say, we had only so many clip-on mikes, and the assistants, like the set and costume designers, usually didn't wear one. I gradually realized that was a major mistake. They were powerless to intervene, or when they did, the sound was so bad that the material was unusable. Not giving the actors clearly defined parts and assignments was the director's decision—he took a very open approach to the project. He refused to be cast in a role of authority. His background is in performance art and he usually works with a nonhierarchical group.

EKK: You said that it was to some extent up to the actors how much they would playact, to which extent they would understand their involvement as role-play or appear as themselves. Did the balance between those two approaches shift over time? My impression was that some of them started out with the intention to stick to their role but then ended up switching to the other side, the side of being themselves, as it were.

EVK: I think that pretty much everyone felt this shift in the course of the process because the stress of the rehearsals and the pressure of the impending premiere took their toll. In the end, the rehearsals went awry. Here was a group of improvisers who didn't interact well with each other. It's not like I didn't have a bad conscience—after all, I'd cast these people and brought them together. It felt like I'd assembled a band and recruited musicians not used to listening to each other, so naturally the result was a cacophony.

SD: And that wasn't your intention from the outset? I remember an open Q&A session where someone in the audience quickly brought up the Big Brother comparison. So the impression was obviously that this was an involuntary community of types chosen to be as heterogeneous, incompatible, and likely to run afoul of each other as often as possible.

EVK: The intention was definitely to show mainly the difficulties of communal action, but I overdid it. I underestimated the potential for conflict inherent in the group, and I had no idea that this particular constellation would make it impossible for people to get their act together and create a collaborative work. Of course everyone involved has his or her own skills and talents, but that's of little use when the group is dysfunctional as a group. I inadvertently put together an ensemble that was bound to fail.

SD: What I find very interesting about *ensemble* is the coexistence of different orders of space. On the one hand, there's the claustrophobic aspect—once you're inside, you are, for the time being, stuck inside; but then there are, within that inside, various zones and areas, each with its own rules. On the other hand, the rehearsal's boundaries in time are very fluid. It's not always easy to tell when a rehearsal starts or what's part of the rehearsal and what isn't: Are we now actually working on the play? Or is this still the kind of question that ought to be resolved outside of the rehearsal proper? In spatial terms, there's an identifiable boundary between off and on, but I felt like it's incredibly difficult to pinpoint the moments when the switch from off-time to on-time and vice versa takes place.

EVK: Those are exactly the moments I'm especially interested in—the half-private moments of irresolution, of sitting and waiting. One example in *ensemble* is a scene after a *Bierchen-Probe* (rehearsal over beers)—always an occasion when private life and work tend to blur into each other anyway because many people get pretty soused, so that even the professional actors' efforts to stick to their roles fall apart. There's a similar instant toward the end when two actors lie on the floor and wriggle out of their boots, you can tell they're genuinely exhausted, and they're slowly gliding out of the scene, a fade-out rather than a cut. More

generally, it's during the moments of getting dressed and getting undressed that people—lingering, as it were, in a transitional zone—talk about the rehearsal or maybe try out their delivery of a line their character has in *Danton's Death*. In other words, those are the moments where different registers overlap—they're still outside and simultaneously already inside the work.

SD: You'd given yourself—or the ensemble—more than six weeks for the rehearsals. Everyone knew about this schedule from the start, so here they are working on the production for a month and a half and then they have to go on stage. That struck me as a highly forcible construct, highlighting the way in which any theatrical performance is in some ways an authoritative fiat.

EVK: I'm very interested in processes, but no less in what it means to bring something to an end. One of the most problematic aspects of the theater, to my mind, is the format it imposes on time: two months, then the performance. When I make a film, I usually don't know when it'll be finished, I work without deadlines. The pressure exerted by the impending performance in the theater generates a peculiar kind of narrative. Like the miraculous turnaround toward the end of the rehearsal period: there's a crisis, and then, in the final days before the opening night, in the last week, everything suddenly comes together.

EKK: But a miracle that occurs routinely is not a miracle. And this suggests that the authoritative fiat is extremely important, because without it the whole thing wouldn't be serious. If you'd said, "You go rehearse and we'll see what happens," the outcome would probably have been a very different one. Without the idea of the performance scheduled for a given date, it would no longer be a rehearsal. It would be more like a kind of group therapy.

SD: Beyond the arbitrary authoritative decision and the miracle that's apparently only so dependable, there's a third aspect: the fact that theatrical productions remain works in progress even after the premiere—half a year later, the performance will run ten minutes longer than on the opening night, or it'll be eight minutes shorter. This corresponds to what you've said, that sense that there's never enough time. Hence the afterthoughts, the constant revision of what seemed to be final decisions.

EVK: That brings something else to my mind that has bearing on your questions. In *ensemble*, there's a sort of preview performance that triggers the culminating crisis. A week before the opening night, the theater's artistic director dropped in and watched the rehearsal, and as it happened, everything went wrong on that particular day. Everyone felt it. So Tom Stromberg, who plays the artistic director, was appalled, as

you can tell when you watch the film from the talk he has with the director. He says that the production in its current state isn't ready to go on stage. And, if I recall correctly, he adds: "So go ahead and try again, but it'd be a miracle if you can work it out on time." The director then speaks to the actors and proposes that the scheduled premiere should be relabeled as a kind of interim presentation of the results of the rehearsal process.

SD: It's an attempt to take this looming deadline, a definite point in time that's unavoidable simply because it's been set, and reinterpret it as fluid, which is to say, as not too unlike the ambiguous state that existed before. A study of the rehearsal as a genre is a pretty good way to grasp the dramatic significance that the scheduled endpoint has in a creative process, especially in the theater. This is perhaps a good moment to bring up your next project after *ensemble*, *Material Beton* (2013), which occupied you far longer than the two months you'd spent in Hamburg. This time the idea was to determine very little beforehand, to make as few authoritative choices early on as possible.

EVK: This, too, was a group project, but now I myself was a member of the group—the attempt to make a film as a group, to work as a non-hierarchical collective. It was important to me that the basic choices that defined the project weren't mine—I insisted that the group as a whole come together to make them. So I approached the people who joined me for the project in a spirit of freedom and openness. I really tried to specify as little as possible. There were six of us, and everyone had to take turns wielding the camera. More generally, everyone on this film had to do everything.

SD: That sounds a bit like really existing socialism: people are almost deliberately promoted to positions they have no training or little talent for—but it's a matter of principle, and so that's how it's done.

EVK: Once again, the motivation for the project grew out of an earlier film—in this instance, *ensemble*. I'd felt a certain unease—yes there were assigned roles, yes it was playacting, though the film was the product of collective creative action and not just the implementation of a script I'd written by myself. Still, in the end, it was my film, my view of what had transpired, and so it failed to capture the sense of communality that had emerged during the rehearsals and on the set and that was at the basis of the film.

EKK: *Ensemble* is a reflection on a rehearsal process and what happens in it. By contrast, it's not readily apparent what *Material Beton* is actually a reflection on—though the work of making a production, of setting it in motion, is certainly part of it. So it adumbrates yet another level of reflectivity. There

are always—and on several levels—numerous different issues that need to be negotiated at the same time. The stipulation that the process as such is supposed to be a collective one necessitates ongoing negotiations, and the negotiations are not staged but subject to constant reflection in the discussion. And the film treatment then reflects on this process from yet another angle. I always got the sense that it wasn't clear at all when you were actually done with anything. I constantly thought: Why don't you set stop rules for yourself. Just pick one person who gets the final say, and be it that he or she tosses a coin. But you didn't even have such a rudimentary internal structure.

EVK: You're right. It would have just gone on and on and on. Perhaps I should briefly explain the project's setup: the film is based on the fiction of a group of artists who build a concrete sculpture, a large collective sculpture. Then there's also a second group shooting a film about the first group and the genesis of the sculpture. Both groups consisted of the same people, so there was really just one ensemble. During the day, we always worked on the sculpture. Everyone was part of the group working on the sculpture, but we took turns operating the camera. In the evening, we turned into the second group—we called it the auteur group—making the film about the sculpture group, and whoever had been behind the camera during the day presented the footage to the others and then we talked about it. The discussions always lasted an hour, because we recorded and transcribed them to make these conversations the film's second layer. As we edited the film, we found ourselves debating many creative decisions, so we also recorded these discussions about the editing because they turned out to be the true locus of authorship. We edited the film to give it some form and bring the process to a conclusion, but kept producing more material because we recorded each new editing discussion, which gave rise to new contentions, and it all become ever more complex. At some point we realized: this is interminable. So the end really came because we were exhausted. One day we simply stopped recording the conversations. And the very last decision—the question was whether to include one image or not—was actually made by tossing a coin.

SD: My impression was that there were no templates for this kind of situation. With *ensemble*, you still had templates, and certainly with *Die Tragöden*, but not for *Material Beton*. It's obviously about collective creation, but that's not in itself a template. So there's nothing to rebel against, no authoritative fiat, and hence no stop rule. Instead, there's an absolutely serious attention to what decision-making implies. If you take decision-making seriously, it never ends, because any decision entails the next. Ultimately, the only possible resolution is a deliberate act of arbitrariness, like a coin toss.

The Rehearsal in Film

From the Focus on Results to a Space of Experience

Rainer Bellenbaum

The theatrical rehearsal, it is generally believed, is primarily defined by its dynamic in time. Its structure is informed by impending events: an opening night or rehearsal, a weekly rehearsal plan, a revival or return, a *répétition* or, at least virtually, a future *result*. By contrast, the spatial and local coordinates associated with a rehearsal are not generally part of how we think about theatrical practice. Even the term “rehearsal space” primarily brings temporal associations to mind—the decor is not yet finished, the setup is provisional, a rehearsal room is available only at certain times—the audience is unlikely to see any of these.

The spatial dimension of the rehearsal is more sharply contoured and dynamic in filmmaking, where the processes identifiable as the studying of parts, practice variants, or patterns of behavior are inextricably bound up with their concrete positions in space or in some instances the transformation or translocation of places. This locational dynamic brings the meanings associated with a particular chosen place and perspective into play. Unlike the “empty space of the stage” (Peter Brook), the scene of a film production is generally invested with significations that predate the shoot, especially when it is an authentic location. Films that thus combine an improvised and varied action presented for review with the procedure and perception of cinematographic spatial and locational displacement create opportunities for social and aesthetic experiences for those involved with a project. To flesh out and explain this hypothesis, I will discuss examples of three different filmic practices: one, the collaboration between Hollis Frampton and Joyce Wieland, as manifested in their joint avant-garde film *A and B in Ontario* (Canada, 1984); two, Lars von Trier’s approach to filmmaking in *The Idiots* (Denmark, 1998), a work of the “Dogme 95” movement; and three, the so-called Fontainhas films the Portuguese director Pedro Costa realized with immigrants from the Cape Verde islands (Portugal, 1996–2014).

A and B in Ontario

In *A and B in Ontario*, Wieland and Frampton film each other. They start in an apartment, focusing their cameras’ lenses on each other across a room or through doorways. At times, both artists stand side by side or one behind the other as they face a mirror; at other times, one walks, camera in hand, while the other shoots from a standing or seated position. They subsequently continue their mutual observation outdoors, in urban traffic, and then in a recreation area on the shore.

Such changes of location and the chosen cinematographic rule of filming each other aside, *A and B in Ontario* lacks the intrinsic logic of a plot to hold

the scenes together and to make sense of the action—a plot, say, of mounting tension, open conflict, and reconciliation, or of rivalry culminating in a decisive contest. As a consequence, additional aspects of an antagonistic relationship between Frampton and Wieland, be it a social, stylistic, or erotic one, is hinted at but never comes into focus. The competition between the two artists, which manifests solely in their filming of each other, is never spelled out. Instead of proposing a resolution, decision, or assessment, *A and B in Ontario* aims to realize new inventive ways of implementing the underlying rule: two filmmakers capture each other as they explore the possibilities of a variety of settings.

Each wields a Bolex 16 mm camera. Frampton's camera has a lens turret that allows him to alternate between three fixed focal lengths, whereas Wieland's camera is equipped with a zoom lens. Moreover, both artists attempt a variety of camera movements and alternate between conventionally lit and contre-jour shots. In the edit Wieland compiled many years later, the film alludes to classic narrative rhetorical devices such as getaway and pursuit, games of hide and seek, or gestures of rapprochement and divergence. But, and this is important, such elements of signification are never mediated, or fully made sense of, by a larger dramatic meaning. The elements of action in *A and B in Ontario* never find their place in overarching significative or motivic constructions. The film instead concatenates the gestures and actions recorded by the cameras in open sequences structured by patterns of repetition and variation. In other words, its mode of operation has much in common with a rehearsal.

The Rehearsal Status and Definiteness in Filmmaking

The fact that film editing involves the cutting and splicing together of pieces of footage indicates that the individual perspectives they aggregate must always be regarded as a preliminary selection—every abridgment of a shot or alternation between shots suggests as much. The provisional nature of any shot is even more manifest when, in a typical production, the same scene is recorded on location in multiple alternative versions involving different vanishing points, shot parameters, or emphases in the acting. On the other hand, the sort of conventional dramaturgy imposed in the editing studio aims to smooth over such differences and decide indeterminacies with a view to the final film to be created, or else to camouflage them or lend them meaning as tokens of the film's realism. Technological practices as well as rhetorical and representational techniques have evolved in the course of film history that allow directors to impose the desired continuity, harmony, and validity of a single perspective. A paradigmatic example is the point-of-view shot: meaning emerges in the complementary relation between a take showing a subject and a second shot revealing the object of that subject's perception.¹ Various

supporting techniques and representational principles can serve to corroborate such identification: adherence to certain rules concerning the angles in which the motifs are placed and from which they are shot as well correspondences between shot parameters, lighting conditions, motifs, and art direction elements. Conversely, films that deliberately undermine such continuity or our habitual sense of reality by contravening these rules have a rich field to mine.

Yet it is by no means only the production of optionality and discontinuity that manifests the provisional and rehearsal-like quality of film scenes. A film scene is like a rehearsal also in that it is a technologically preserved preliminary result presented for review as definitive. Unlike in theater where the public is usually excluded from rehearsals of which nothing eventually remains but is a result that has undergone, and continues to undergo, progressive transformation, film records at least selected definitive traces of a production in the trial stage. In that sense, a film is also like a (culinary or product) "sample" or an "extract" from a literary production: its mode is that of an immediate and (publicly) *testable* materialization.

Narrative Functions of the Rehearsal

One film that is not only a rehearsal in this fundamental sense but also explicitly reflects on its status is *A and B in Ontario*. It lays out all the functions I have mentioned: the proposal-like quality, which is to say, the optionality and discontinuity of instants of improvised compliance with and infringement of rules, as well as the review of provisional results preserved in the process. *A and B in Ontario* is most effective as a film when these recognizably different functions are brought together in constellations that highlight the tensions between them. Not only did Wieland, in editing the film, subject the accumulated footage to a review with the purpose of arranging the individual variants in a new and perhaps more compellingly narrative sequence. Both artist-filmmakers also worked, each by him- or herself and in a process of mutual observation, to sample their respective filmic options, latitudes for movement, and maneuvering rooms, always looking for adequate filmic reciprocations and correspondences as well as surprises.

1 On the function of the point-of-view shot in cinema, see Edward Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema: A Theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film* (Amsterdam: De Gruyter Mouton, 1984); Edward Branigan, "Formal Permutations of the Point-of-View Shot," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 54–64; Raymond Bellour,

"To Alternate/To Narrate (on *The Lonedale Operator*)," in Raymond Bellour, *The Analysis of Film*, ed. Constance Penley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 262–77; and Stephen Heath, "Notes on Suture," *Screen* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1977): 48–76.

When Wieland edited the aggregated footage, she retained the scenic connections between the various shooting locations, bringing out the different potential each holds with regard to the rule of the artists' filming of each other. In the cramped apartment, the two protagonists repeatedly meet, using the existing furniture, mirrors, doors to hide or to uncover the other; the wide-open landscapes of park and beach, by contrast, allow them to let not only gazes and encounters but also their reciprocations to drift apart. Nearby and distant elements of the environment insert themselves: a playground, the sea, the horizon, sailboats, walkways, and numerous passersby and local residents. A salient example is a scenic sequence that starts with Wieland filming Frampton as he, wielding his own camera, goes down a playground slide. The expected, dynamic countershot, showing Wieland from the point of view of a camera gliding downward, arrives surprisingly late, after several intercut scenes, and is perceptibly clipped. With such loosely staggered locations and scenic situations, the film presents an open-ended array of moments in an *open* as well as *intimate* and *embracing* as well as *deep* relationship between the author-protagonists. Beyond the (definitive) testimony to a specific juncture in this relationship offered by each individual shot, it is the film's renunciation of optimization or condensation that ties the mode and gesture of the trial run together with the serenity and promise of a seemingly inexhaustible realm of possibility.²

Acting as Rehearsal and Test

What Frampton and Wieland's avant-garde film thus suggests through the mutually reflective alternation between the perspectives of two cameras—the optional quality of perception, thinking, and action—is also a theme in more established art-house cinema. In particular, it is an important issue in films that construct their narrative as a reflection between different planes of fictionality. One widely used form is the play within the play: an action being staged is framed, and commented on, by a temporally and spatially separate meta-action performed by the same actors; this, too, may be regarded as dramatizing the interplay between option, improvisation, and review. A paradigmatic example of this sort of filmic rehearsal is Lars von Trier's film *The Idiots* (1998). On the first fictional plane, it features a series of rehearsal performances, positively theatrical histrionics, in which each of the protagonists tries to find his or her inner "idiot," almost like an actor getting into a character. On the one hand, the development of idiotic forms of expression and ways of engaging with others is meant to enable the cast to break free of the mechanisms of personal isolation; on the other hand, the group seeks to hold a critical mirror up to the "normal" outside world, highlighting the conventional hypocrisy with which it deals with people who do not fit the norm. To add to the complexity of this play within the play, meta-fictional scenes are inserted between the var-

ious role-development trial phases. In these mock interviews, several of the actors comment on the staged project's evolution and the group dynamics: looking back, reflecting, sometimes drawing conclusions or offering interpretations and assessments. Intercut between the rehearsal scenes, this commentary takes on other functions as well: it drives the action forward and stimulates the viewer's interest in each following rehearsal scene. The interviews lend rhythm and structure to the main action in which it gradually emerges that for one member of the group, Karen (Bodil Jørgensen), the role rehearsal is not just playacting but a form of therapy. Traumatized by the sudden death of her son, she is trying out potential strategies of coping with depression. Last but not least, the alternation between rehearsal scenes and interviews reflects the mode of cinematography as a mode of transition in that the performances of the actors on both planes correspond to each other. Although different in many ways, the scenes of both types are comparable: both are about a play with differences of opinion and the willingness to let oneself in for unfamiliar rules or questions. In the rehearsal scenes, it is primarily Stoffer (Jens Albinus) who prods his fellow members of the project cast to act more resolutely idiotic, while in the commentary, the offscreen voice of the interviewer (in the Danish original, Lars von Trier himself) demands greater resolve and more precise answers from his interlocutors. The same idiosyncratic gestures and attitudes of the actors appear on both representational planes. Moreover, all footage, including pan shots, was recorded using a handheld camera, heightening the film's air of spontaneity and improvisation.

Complying with Rules, Violating Rules

That last feature points to the set of rules several Danish movie directors imposed on themselves in the mid-1990s to promote their film productions: the manifesto "Dogme 95," which they also called, with a dose of irony, their "vow of chastity."³ If it committed them to stringent limitations, it was no less importantly also meant to articulate a critique of the illusionism, empty pathos, and gimmickry of the dominant blockbuster-style of moviemaking. Seeking to reforge the cinematic image's relation to reality, the filmmakers pledged and encouraged others to cut down radically on filmmaking technology: the "vow" banned camera tripods and anachronistic props or objects not found on location, and prohibited staging plots set at any other time than the present, adding music to the soundtrack after shooting, or crediting the director in the

2 For further information concerning *A and B in Ontario*, see R. Bruce Elder, "Notes After a Conversation between Hollis and Joyce," in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Toronto: Cinematheque Ontario, 1999), 183–94.

3 Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, "Dogme 95: The Vow of Chastity" (1995), in *The European Cinema Reader*, ed. Catherine Fowler (London: Routledge, 2002), 83–84.

opening or closing credits. In other words, “Dogme 95,” at least as originally conceived, sought to counter the movie industry’s “star cult” with the ambition to make “honest” movies—to devise a filmmaking practice that would do justice to the (intersubjective-collaborative) process and the (technical) materiality of the medium.

Von Trier’s film evidently conforms to several of these rules, especially with regard to the cinematography. But a closer examination also reveals several unmistakable violations of other explicit stipulations in the manifesto. *The Idiots* was obviously shot on video rather than the Academy 35 mm stock required by the manifesto’s ninth commandment. Moreover, the soundtrack includes music that, in contravention of the second commandment, does not originate in the respective scenes in any recognizable way, and rumor has it that *The Idiots* was edited using light filters, another practice strictly banned by “Dogme 95.”⁴ Questioned about such discrepancies, von Trier left no doubt about his serious commitment to the rules he had helped lay down three years earlier and the cinematic renewal he and his fellow dogmatists aspired to; on the other hand, his own transgressions indicate that his method of trial and error explicitly involves not only the making of rules and compliance with them, but also their violation. The latter was obviously the purpose of the rehearsal techniques he employed: they tellingly enabled him to experiment with programmatic inconsistency by activating the antagonism that is implicit in any mode of playacting, and, more fundamentally, originates in the mutually constitutive relation between the making of rules and an essentially contingent practice. The effect of this antagonism is especially manifest and powerful in *The Idiots* because the filmic narrative’s fictional content parses the permeable boundaries or the constitutive dialectic between the normal and the abnormal. The rehearsal process thus ranges across an entire complex of conflicting as well as interlocking sets of principles: on the one hand, the rules of the idiot game agreed upon by the characters within the fiction; on the other hand, the aesthetic rules and technical stipulations governing the process of fictionalization, which in turn clash with the unusual regulatory ambition of the “Dogme 95” manifesto.

Migration between the Scene of Rehearsal and the Space of Meaning

The ensemble in *The Idiots* practices in a variety of locations, each of which mediates a different relation to the conventional reality out there. The central scene of their rehearsals is the sheltered space of a vacant villa and garden in Søllerød (the Copenhagen suburb where von Trier himself grew up).⁵ The ensemble has exclusive use of the villa and grounds (where they are only briefly disturbed by outside visitors), and so the characters are largely free to look

for ways to express their “inner idiot” and evolve forms of behavior and interaction in keeping with their fiction, which is to say, the “normality” of their play. The challenges mount when the group takes its rehearsals to public places, combining them, for example, with visits to a swimming pool or a restaurant or a tour of a rock wool plant—paradigmatic situations in which the individuals involved in the experiment are exposed to the anxious and/or scrutinizing gazes of strangers. Two aspects are noteworthy: first, these public situations—some are more welcoming to disabled people, some less so—and the responses of outsiders ranging from irritation and insincere friendliness to intolerance provide incentives to embrace the role of the idiot more fully, to test variations of it, to overplay or, then again, undercut it. For example, after the group has toured the plant under the guidance of a PR officer oozing with affected sympathy, they shock their host by telling him that one of the idiots will steer their bus on the way home. Second aspect: such confrontation with others raises the bar for the performers’ resolve to stick to their role and see where they can take it. Authenticity, it emerges, is an effect generated by an increasingly expert performance. Even more than the experiment in the sheltered rehearsal space of the villa, interaction with the public becomes the litmus test—not unlike a stage production in which the actors, having completed their rehearsals, face a public audience.

These tensions grow even more challenging for the idiots when they take their play to scenes that “mean something” to them in their private or professional lives. One such existential place fraught with personal affective relationships and social obligations is the advertising agency where Axel (Knud Romer Jørgensen) works. Moving the rehearsal there sharpens our perspective on Axel’s readiness to deliver a provocative idiot performance without flinching in two ways. His fear of losing his job and hence his livelihood puts him on the defensive, and so when, in his role as an employee of the agency, he is tasked with outlining a baby food campaign, he has nothing to show to his boss but a small piece of paper with the words “baby food” on it. At the same time, the laconic brevity of this draft suggests an ironic analogy linking the experimental idiot show to the “creative” advertising executive’s professed affinity for “crazy ideas.”

But the dramatic culmination of *The Idiots* comes when Karen, who—in the (fictional) reality of the film—suffers from depression, is driven by her bad conscience to see her family, whom she had abandoned without saying goodbye after not having attended her son’s funeral. In the familial space of meaning, which, for Karen, is thickly laced with affective intensity as well as processes

⁴ See Andreas Jacke, *Krisen-Rezeption* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2014), 193.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.

of alienation, the performance (still within the film's fiction) suddenly ceases to be improvisational and takes on the tragic air of a consequential decision—an instant of freedom in which the future is blank, both undetermined and inconceivable. The fact that this moment of heightened conflict, this “performance test,” is the film's climax and end underscores the cathartic potential of the staged hybridization of documentation and fiction, of experimental and standardized production technique, of formal and social rules. Set in the third of a sequence of three emblematic places—the sheltered rehearsal space (the villa), the unprotected stage of an anonymous public sphere, and the private sphere of the family, which is now experienced as political—the climax is brought about in a conjunction of dramaturgy and topography, a device that brings the overarching social significance and explosive potential of the rehearsal into sharp relief.

Rehearsal as Dialogue between Author/Director and Performer

The Portuguese director Pedro Costa's collaboration with several Cape Verdean immigrants living near Lisbon turns out to be a filmic rehearsal process extending through an entire series of productions. Costa discovered the potential of filmic rehearsal work while shooting his film *Ossos* (1996), which is mostly set in the Fontainhas slum of Amadora, a suburb of Lisbon. For an earlier film, *Casa de Lava* (1994), he had worked on the Cape Verde islands, and the participants in that project had given him letters to their relatives who had left for Portugal. Volunteering to deliver their messages, he met the immigrants in Fontainhas; the initial contact grew into a bond of mutual trust. But when, a little later, Costa arrived in the squalid neighborhood with trucks full of filming equipment and tried to recruit the residents, some of whom were drug addicts, for the enactment of a prefabricated story with a clear moral, he encountered resistance. Most of the immigrants he hired as actors were incapable or unwilling to speak the lines he had written for them. They were much more cooperative when it came to unscripted test takes. Costa was eventually able to complete *Ossos* with this footage and a heavily pared-down version of the dialogue scenes. He had gone out on a limb, switching from a rigidly script-based form of moviemaking to an improvisational mode of production, and the experience recognizably informs his subsequent projects. His next film, *No Quarto da Vanda* (*In Vanda's Room*, 2000), was again shot in Fontainhas, but now he worked without a script in a predominantly documentary register, with a minimum of technology (essentially, a video camera), and, for much of the time, without technical support. For half a year, the filmmaker visited the community every day, camera in hand as though he were going to a rehearsal to record the daily life of two sisters in their home and neighborhood.⁶ The resulting filmic portrait is a moving testament to the synergy between Costa's cinematography—his

pictures recall painted tableaux—and the half-suppressed agitation with which the sisters, Vanda and Zita, who live and struggle with drug addiction, present themselves to the camera. The fact that, following a decree issued by the authorities, the neighborhood was gradually razed around them as he was shooting added to the dramatic quality of the daily recording sessions.

The interaction between Costa and the two sisters is thus defined by conditions and forms widely different from the “duet” between Wieland and Frampton described above. Still, both collaborative projects share a salient feature: the improvisational openness to the space, milieu, and scene of representation. Not coincidentally, in both cases, it was completely unclear at the time of the shooting when the projects might be completed. *A and B in Ontario* was not released until seventeen years later. Costa similarly worked for a long time without knowing when he might be able to finish the film, for which he had no budget.

When *No Quarto da Vanda* was eventually released—and garnered awards including the FIPRESCI Prize at the 2001 Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, Japan, and the France Culture Award for Foreign Cineaste of the Year at the 2002 Cannes Film Festival—that was not the end of the rehearsal process for Costa and his Cape Verdean immigrant collaborators. Asked why he conceived of his work with the residents of Fontainhas as a kind of rehearsal and what the objective of his method was, Costa replied that practice was necessary to move beyond the roughness and empty talk of everyday encounters and to create dialogue that cuts to the heart of something.⁷ His interest revived when the demolition of their slum left his protagonists without the support of a community that had grown over decades and forced them to abandon their accustomed way of life. The director's new project focused on the immigrants' lives in the outlying housing project to which they had been forcibly relocated. The picturesque poverty of Fontainhas was replaced by the sterile modernism of cheaply built housing blocks. The filmmaker and the residents faced the challenge of bringing this barren space to life with content—not unlike a theater ensemble looking to fill the empty rehearsal space with its imagination. Costa discovered together with immigrants who had lost their home away from home their personal and historical recollections of events such as the Portuguese Carnation Revolution and especially their memories of coming to Portugal

6 Pedro Costa in a talk on the occasion of his retrospective at Kino Arsenal, Berlin, September 25, 2015. See also Ohad Landesman, “Lying to Be Real: The Aesthetics of Ambiguity in Docufictions,” in *Contemporary Documentary*, ed. Daniel Marcus, Selmin Kara (New York: Routledge, 2016), 14.

7 Costa in an interview with the author on occasion of his retrospective at Kino Arsenal, Berlin, on September 25, 2015.

and the difficulties and setbacks they experienced trying to find their place in the country's society. The sterile architecture around them became a shared rehearsal space, and because it was associated with the loss of other specific places, the continual filmic encounters between Costa and selected former residents of Fontainhas also established a shared space of reflection and recollection. This evolving constellation is manifest, among other aspects, in the growing emancipation of the performers, who became coauthors of the filmic narrative. So it is not primarily the director who, in *Juventude em Marcha* (*Colossal Youth*, 2006) and *Cavalo Dinheiro* (*Horse Money*, 2014), arranges "his" protagonists' recollections. The films instead allow us to observe the reflective reappropriation of these memories by the individuals themselves, in an elaboration of the fluid boundaries between real and rehearsed representation in the sense of an inevitably fictionalizing reactivation of experience hardened into history. Examining the trauma of its main protagonist, Ventura, *Cavalo Dinheiro* enacts its origin in a knife fight in numerous variants, blending retelling, dream-play, and improvisation with different casts to illustrate how recollection is transformed into a knowledge available to the subjects themselves as a reflective and productive tool of their own making. The film productions of the Fontainhas cycle thus trace the arc of an extended rehearsal process that begins, in *Ossos*, with an interaction between director and performers defined by the resistance elicited by a perceived hierarchical social difference and eventually, in *Cavalo Dinheiro*, limns the possibility of (self-) empowerment.

Conclusion

Each of the three filmic practices I have discussed is characterized by a distinctive conjunction of playful, constructive, and documentary-observational approaches. Frampton and Wieland's *A and B in Ontario* exemplifies the tradition of avant-garde filmmaking that undertook an experimental exploration of the medium's technical and performative qualities as well as its instrumentalizing tendencies and affective potentials. Through such reflection on the specificity of the medium, the photographic moving image achieved a new playfulness: rather than abandoning itself to fictions, it acquired the ability to present alternative perspectives and attest to the spaces and conditions framing a particular action and production. After the cataclysm of World War II, it was widely felt that the cinema needed a fresh start, and even established art-house filmmaking, which largely relied on fictionalization, eventually remembered the medium's documentary potential, which became fundamental for the programmatic objectives of the renewal movements advertised as neorealism or *nouvelle vague*. In light of these historic developments, when the "Dogme 95" manifesto came out in the mid-1990s, it was actually a late ironic reflex, though it allowed its authors and their undogmatic improvisational practice—

retaining this, rejecting that—to take the transgressive potential implicit in the interplay between the documentary and fictional registers to another level. In *The Idiots*, however, fiction is clearly still predominant: the intercut interviews are feigned documents, no less staged than the main action.

By contrast, when Costa undertook his film projects to examine questions of immigration and postcolonial isolation, he worked with individuals and milieus directly affected by these issues. His protagonists do not only *reflect on* their memories of refugee migration, the economics of poverty, and their struggles with social exclusion, they eventually *improvise* their recollections. In this way, Costa's films, although they, too, fictionalize their material, maintain a high degree of documentary fidelity and bring memories to life. Not least importantly, a filmic practice of this kind ties in with the procedures of the avant-garde movement represented by *A and B in Ontario*: medium-specific reflection brings into focus not only the parameters of the cinematographic apparatus, but also its potential to build real and effective connections across boundaries, and to become a conduit for nonverbal communication.

Translated from the German by Gerrit Jackson

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The Rehearsal as Metaphor for *Metamorphosis* The Pictorial Dramaturgy in Velázquez's *The Spinners,* or *The Fable* of *Arachne*

Christine Lang



Fig. 2
Diego Rodríguez de Silva Velázquez,
Las hilanderas, o la fábula de Aracne, 1655–60

By thematizing rehearsal processes in performative works unfolding over time, it is possible to demonstrate and depict working on art itself and the conditions for producing it.¹ Revealing artistic processes and the work of construction is considered a means of critical aesthetics, where it is a matter of querying the criteria of the creation of an aesthetic formation. This essay will question which artistic procedures are possible, in analogy, in a static work. How can these critical ideas of rehearsal be reflected on as a topos in a painting?

¹ Cf. Annemarie Matzke, *Arbeit am Theater: Eine Diskursgeschichte der Probe* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2012), 13, 39–40.

In Velázquez's (1599–1660) *The Spinners, or The Fable of Arachne* (1655–60),² labor is staged as a scenic event and represented “as a form of value creation.”³ Beyond this explicit level of representation, Velázquez borrows from a theatrical aesthetics of effect and epically structured dramaturgy. He thus achieves a self-reflected, critical reflection on the arrangement of narration and visual representation at the dramaturgically implicit level of dramatic image plot as well.

The “Quasi Rehearsal” and the (Spider’s) Web of Narration

The painting *The Spinners, or The Fable of Arachne* consists of two layers of imagery. The background is divided again into the depicted space and the space represented in the tapestry hanging on the wall. One of the figures in this tapestry, Arachne, is standing next to the goddess Pallas Athena and seems to step out into the space. Velázquez painted the tapestry so that the picture is clearly separated from the space with a border on the upper edge, but toward the bottom of the tapestry, the picture directly meets the floor. The figure thus appears to move from one image level to the other—similar to the way a figure in a postmodern film can “step out of the screen” or switch to a different narrative level.

Due to the arrangement of the space and the ambiguity of the Arachne figure, the back of the space depicted in the painting has the effect of a stage, where the last act of the fable Arachne from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is just being rehearsed. The theatrical characteristic of the scenery in the back is emphasized by a viola da gamba leaning on a chair, which seems to represent “the instrumental music of the intervals,”⁴ or is intended to fill the back picture space with music.

Most of all, though, the effect of theatricality is evoked by the presence of multiple observers, who attend this theatrical, but apparently only moderately dramatic play, like casual viewers. The viewer standing on the right in the picture turns her gaze not to the play, but rather to the front and through the front picture level all the way to us—the viewers of the picture. Her gaze doubles and extends the dynamics of the figure stepping out of the picture, but her gaze can also be understood as an inviting gesture, which addresses the viewers as “seeing and being seen at the same time.”⁵ This gaze can thus be interpreted as instructing the viewers of the picture on the “self-consciousness” of the painting.⁶

Velázquez's accentuation of the theatrical and the indication of the “self-conscious” structure of the picture invites the viewer to analyze the narrative painting from aspects of dramaturgy, taking up the narrative threads laid out

in the scene in the back—and continuing them. The painting can indeed be interpreted as a theatrical or filmic staging conducted through figures; for similar work in theater and cinema, Velázquez adapted the myth of Arachne based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* for a dramatic “performance as a painting.”⁷

What is depicted on the tapestry is the moment of the Arachne myth, when the helmed goddess Pallas Athena raises her arm to transform the earthly artist Arachne, as punishment for her hubris, into a spider.⁸ In *Metamorphoses* it says that Arachne disrespectfully depicted diverse motifs from various amorous adventures of the gods in the tapestry, including the kidnapping of Europa by Zeus disguised as a bull. Velázquez chose this motif and realized the story-in-a-story construction from the *Metamorphoses* in a painterly picture-in-a-picture (in-a-picture-in-a-picture ...). At the same time, he expanded the intertextual play by quoting the painting *The Rape of Europa* (ca. 1559–62) by Titian (ca. 1488–1576), which had in turn already been faithfully copied by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640).⁹ By taking up the theme of replicating and “wandering motifs” (historically closely linked with tapestry art), and by quoting his teachers and predecessors and referencing them, Velázquez creates a commentary at the implicit level of the painting, which inverts the Arachne myth

2 The painting in detail on the Museo del Prado website: <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-spinners-or-the-fable-of-arachne/3d8e510d-2acf-4efb-af0c-8ffd665acd8d> (accessed May 1, 2016).

3 Matzke, *Arbeit am Theater*, 36.

4 Carl Justi, *Diego Velazquez und sein Jahrhundert* (Bonn: Cohen, 1888), 328. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by Aileen Derieg.

5 Cf. Victor I. Stoichita in reference to a different painting by Velázquez: *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (ca. 1619–20). Victor I. Stoichita, *Das selbstbewusste Bild: Vom Ursprung der Metamalerei* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1998), 27.

6 Victor I. Stoichita traces the beginning of the emergence of these kinds of “self-conscious” pictures, which turn the picture into a “theoretical object” in a picture-in-a-picture constellation, back to the first “doubled” picture *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (1552) by the Danish painter Pieter Aertsens. *Ibid.*, 15.

7 Both Aristotle and Friedrich Schiller consider the procedure of painting as being closer to presentist “drama” than to

the reporting “epic.” Ivan Nagel discusses the terminological history of drama and epic in art and aesthetics theory in detail in terms of painting in his book *Gemälde und Drama: Giotto, Masaccio, Leonardo* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009).

8 *The Spinners* has a long history of art-historical research. In 1888, in keeping with the thinking and the focus of his era, Carl Justi compared the scene in the foreground of the picture with a “snapshot photograph,” and called the painting one of the oldest “worker or factory pieces.” Justi, *Diego Velazquez und sein Jahrhundert*, 332. His student Aby Warburg pointed out in 1927, that the picture has less to do with an art-historical realism, but is much more an “allegorical glorification of weaving art.” Quoted in Martin Warnke, *Velázquez: Form und Reform* (Cologne: DuMont, 2005), 46.

9 On this, see also Svetlana Alpers, *The Vexations of Art: Velázquez and Others* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 168.

or Arachne's hubris. Through the creation of the painting, Velázquez thus developed a discourse on art production and its understanding of value.

"Raise the Curtain" for a Double Stage

With the doubled structure of the painting, Velázquez takes up a method that he had already developed in his early still lifes, or bodegones. As in *The Spinners*, in the bodegones there are two picture levels that are related to one another and narratively refer to one another. The foreground of *The Spinners* is defined by a profane motif with "characters taken from life,"¹⁰ while a religious-mythical motif is presented in the background in a kind of framed picture-in-a-picture.

At the same time, it is not only the back part of the space, but also the profane space in the foreground that is declared a theatrical stage space through the use of the artifice of a red curtain as an "iconographic motif in the picture."¹¹ It is because of the curtain that the scene in the workshop is connected to the background scene, thus also becoming a stage play. In addition, the curtain opens up "an interplay between depiction and self-consciousness" of the entire painting. The curtain expresses that viewers stand not only before a painting, but also before "the depiction of a painting."¹² Together with the direct gaze of the figure looking out from the picture, the curtain inscribes artistic self-reflection into the painting as a concrete sign. At the same time, the aesthetic means of this painterly self-reflection are related to those of contemporary art production oriented to the performative, in which rehearsal processes are exhibited or placed at the center. The rehearsal, as an activity from theater practice, designates the working practice that aims to develop a performative process through repetition.¹³ If rehearsal processes and the rehearsal itself become the theme and motif of a cultural production, this serves primarily to reveal the conditions of the process and to make visible the instructions and their conditions that otherwise remain hidden in normative works. This procedure that can be carried out in performing arts clearly has a corresponding procedure in painting; it is a resemblance of structure in drama and painting that enables *The Spinners* to use similar aesthetic means of distancing and alienation, like those immanent to the rehearsal as topos.¹⁴ As in the process of rehearsal, *The Spinners* also involves the appropriation of an existing text, while querying it at the same time.

The Appearance of the Figures and the Epic Dramaturgy

Almost in the middle of the picture, a female figure can be seen busying herself with bits of wool. Velázquez, as an acknowledged specialist for portraits and

the physiognomy of faces,¹⁵ demonstratively blurred the face of this figure turned toward the viewer. This can be regarded as indicating that the figures depicted in this picture are explicitly "not" arranged as specific, seemingly realistic persons, but rather as "central characters" and auxiliary figures who function at an almost equal level next to one another.¹⁶

The bright, detailed figure winding thread on the right-hand side of the picture most expressly draws the gaze of the viewer. Starting from this figure, there is a direct connection through a line of light to the figure in the tapestry. The white blouse and similar posture of the arms of both figures, implying defense, allows us to conclude that these two figures are different versions of the same mythical Arachne figure—or in film terminology this is a "split protagonist." And if the resemblance of the auxiliary figure holding the curtain aside on the left with the two previously described Arachnes is interpreted as intentional, she can also be seen as a further figure splitting of this kind that completes the narrative of the picture.

On the left front side of the picture, the light scarf and the shirt form an optical counter-weight calling for attention. This second central character at the spinning wheel is depicted in conversation with the auxiliary figure at the left edge and is characterized by several features. These, in particular, are her naked leg stretched in the direction of the Arachne working with wool, her raised hand as a gesture of admonition, and the ladder leaning against the wall behind the figure. In Ovid's Arachne myth it is said that Pallas assumes the form of an old woman—"and counterfeits gray hair around the temples"¹⁷—to admonish Arachne to remain modest despite her talent. Arachne, who does not recognize the goddess in this form, challenges her: "Why does she not come herself and avoid the deciding battle?" In response, Pallas reveals herself: "Laying aside the appearance of the crone, she presents the celestial one."¹⁸

Velázquez thus appears to have taken this transformation of the goddess as the point of reference for the painterly depictions of the figure transforming

10 Stoichita, *Das selbstbewusste Bild*, 23.

11 Ibid., 80.

12 Ibid., 81.

13 Matzke, *Arbeit am Theater*, 20.

14 Nagel, *Gemälde und Drama*, 21.

15 Alpers, *Vexations of Art*, 138.

16 The "central character of the drama" is a term introduced by Bertolt Brecht in epic theater as an equivalent to the term of "hero" or "protagonist." A central character is representative of a social

group. Bertolt Brecht, *Über Theater* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1966), 218. See also Kerstin Stutterheim, *Handbuch angewandter Dramaturgie: Vom Geheimnis des filmischen Erzählens; Film, TV und Games* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2015), 236.

17 Publius Ovidius Naso and Johann Heinrich Voss, *Ovids Verwandlungen* (Elberfeld: Loll, 1880), 272.

18 Ibid.



Fig. 3
Diego Rodríguez de Silva Velázquez,
Las hilanderas, o la fábula de Aracne, 1655–60 (expanded format)

within the picture. Similar to the Arachne figure in the tapestry picture, this figure is found in two different moments of the narration at the same time. On the left, she is wrapped in a gray scarf—described by Ovid as a “veiled Pallas”¹⁹—and is in dialogue with one of the Arachnes, who is from an earlier stage of the narrative of the myth. The figure on its right side, recognizable by the bare leg, develops into a presence as a “disrobing” goddess, who enters into competition in reaction to Arachne’s challenge.

The fact that this figure is a version of the goddess Pallas Athena is emphasized by Velázquez with a further symbol: the viewer’s gaze is led from the leg to the ladder leaning on the wall high above the body of the figure. This ladder can be interpreted as the biblical Jacob’s ladder leading out of the picture frame into heaven—a symbol for the status of the figure as a goddess descended.

In the version of the painting that was expanded in the eighteenth century following fire damage, emphasis was more on the space rather than the figures, and it was aesthetically conventionalized. The symbolic significance of the ladder leading out of the picture frame was lost, as was another effect intended in the original: imaginatively extended, the ladder meets the source of the light that illuminates the rear space. This light functions as sunlight in terms of the naturalist impression of the painting; it is “the sun itself” as she “points to it with her finger.”²⁰ At a metaphorical level, this additionally implies that this background stage space is a “playground of the goddess of arts,” illuminated by heavenly divine light. It is *her* drama that is performed on the stage. This tells, on the one hand, of the agency/omnipotence of the goddess, whereas, on the other hand, the temporal causative narrative connections are thus completed. Velázquez presents the “fable” of Arachne from Ovid using three selected episodes, arranged (as “plot,” so to speak²¹) on two image levels. An element from the first act of the drama can be recognized on the front left: the “triggering moment” that is the admonishment by the goddess. In the front picture on the right there is a situation from the second act: the competition. And then on the back level there is the “climax” of the third act: the punishment of Arachne for her hubris. Yet it was not the respectively most dramatic and spectacular moment chosen for the depiction, such as the competition at the loom and Arachne’s actual transformation into a spider. Unlike Rubens, for example, in his painting *Pallas and Arachne* (1636/37),²² Velázquez does not portray the goddess’ violent attack on Arachne, aiming for affect and engendering a dramatic effect; instead, he offers the story without pathos in a dramatically reduced form, thus preferring a gesture of showing rather than that of dramatic depiction. Moreover the same kind of narrative strategy already emerges in *The Spinners* as was practiced and theorized by Brecht in epic theater in the late twentieth century. Today, this can be found in fictional film with dramaturgically open, epic, or also postmodern structures,²³ as well as in artistic works that exhibit their rehearsal processes.

19 Justi, *Diego Velazquez*, 329.

20 *Ibid.*, 329.

21 The Russian formalists defined a difference between *fabula* and *sjuzet*, which can be translated as “course of action” and “entanglement,” “fable” and “intrigue” or, as is usually conventional today, as “story” and “plot.” Umberto Eco, *Im Wald der Fiktionen: Sechs Streifzüge durch die Literatur*, Harvard-Vorlesungen (Norton Lectures 1992–93) (Munich: Hanser, 1994), 47–48.

22 See Alpers, *Vexations of Art*, 151f.

23 In dramaturgically open and postmodern forms—in comparison with dramaturgically closed dramas aiming for immersion and “seduction”—it is a matter of establishing a distance between the spectator’s gaze and the dramatic events and inviting the viewers and spectators to reflect on their own, and to engage in an active and also critical reception.

Conclusion of Meaning and Narrative Threads

The rehearsal scene in the background, described in the beginning, which functions for the painting as a vanishing point—like “point of integration,”²⁴ and the ambiguity of this depiction allow us to distill the conclusion of meaning of the painting: it is the “process of transformation”²⁵ derived from the literary basis of the *Metamorphoses* and inherent to the topos of the rehearsal, and based on this also the adaptation of the figures, a motif that Velázquez plays with at the level of depiction and makes the central subject of his adaptation of the Arachne material. The central figures in the picture are undergoing a transformation—they are always simultaneously something other than what they initially are because these are double-coded metaphorical figures. In addition, two further transformation processes form concretely, fully narrated themes of the picture: the transformation of work into art and the adaptation of seemingly commonplace actors into mythical figures.

In the carefully composed design of his painting, Velázquez combines various painting techniques with one another, ranging from detailed development to sketch-like additions. There is a special emphasis on, among others, the woolen threads marked with strong white highlights that the Arachne figure in the front right of the picture is winding.²⁶ These white threads are a motif throughout all the picture levels, vertically, into the rear level, in the blue gown of one of the female figures. The concrete connection established here—the raw woolen thread will become the fine gown of the noblewoman—especially explains one aspect of the Arachne fable: it is the connection between craft and value, making visible the craft-work production process and the assessment of its value by hegemonic powers—whether they are gods as in the myth of Arachne or representatives of the nobility in the painting by Velázquez. Velázquez spans the discourse of art and work, of a value creation process, thematically and associatively, drawing it both vertically and horizontally through the picture at the same time. The motif is depicted in the horizontal dramaturgy of the picture in the “optical framing” as well as in the “frame-work plot” of the subject matter, whereas the auxiliary figure on the outside left enters into a dialogue with the spinner turned toward her as a “supplier of words,” in other words, something of symbolic value, the auxiliary figure on the right is a “supplier (or deliverer) of labor,” of wool as a thing of material value. The narrative thus implied is supplemented by the bales of wool hanging on the wall on the right, still untreated, waiting for utilization, and the pile of finished materials in the background on the left, indicating the results of the process of utilization. The rehearsal as metaphor is also reflected in this motif as an essentially inscribed motif: that of the transformation of the unformed into form.

What is primarily recounted about these connections in the picture, though, is that at the beginning of a chain of value creation there is labor, and also that art is the result of this labor. Velázquez thus not only grants the workers the largest playing area at the level of representation—the longest playing time, so to speak—in his dramatic performance, but he also applies “their theme,” “their story,” to the mythical fable of Arachne, therefore inscribing in it an emancipatory idea oriented to the profane, which is contained in the reference to social reality—similar to the way it happens in casting amateurs in theater or cinema. The result of Velázquez’s artistic procedure is, on the one hand, that the myth of Arachne is “rehearsed on the stage of what is currently human,”²⁷ but on the other hand, workers and labor, as well as artistic working processes, are raised on a pedestal here, imbuing motifs not exhibited in more normative works with universal validity.

Translated from the German by Aileen Derieg

24 The “conclusion of meaning” is “the vanishing point where various perspectives of the drama are coordinated.” Volker Klotz, *Geschlossene und offene Form im Drama* (Munich: Hanser, 1960), 112. Further: “The ‘point of integration’ in the sense of the vanishing point of the central perspective provides the single, relatively autonomous scenes and plot lines, of which the events are composed, with a connecting conclusion of meaning.” Stutterheim, *Handbuch angewandter Dramaturgie*, 226.

25 Matzke, *Arbeit am Theater*, 203.
26 Especially Tintoretto’s work, which Velázquez was able to study during his stay in Venice, seems to have inspired these white shadings. Cf. Giles Knox, *The Late Paintings of Velázquez: Theorizing Painterly Performance* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 77.
27 Nagel, *Gemälde und Drama*, 49.

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The Play's the Thing On the Politics of Rehearsal

José M. Bueso

The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.

—Hamlet¹

1. What the World Wants Today

No one is quite certain when it emerged. David Harvey, Naomi Klein, Philip Mirowski, and a host of others will give you different dates. For me in retrospect, though, one of its many beginnings will be forever tied up with a particular scene (and it is fitting that we examine what this scene is a rehearsal for, since that is our subject here) that I watched in early childhood. It keeps coming back to my mind, much in the same way as in Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962) in which the visage of a mysterious woman haunts the protagonist's memories and for commensurable, if not entirely similar reasons: because only many years later was I able to decode it, and close the temporal loop, and because it portended the end of one world and the beginning of another that would circumscribe my life, along with countless others.

It must have been late 1971 or early 1972. I wasn't old enough to go to school yet. But I recall clusters of names I used to hear on TV. Mekong Delta. Londonderry. Munich. Watergate. Allende. Curiously enough, I remember it all in color, though I'm sure we had a black-and-white set at that time. Anyway as the song begins the camera pulls away from a tight close-up of a young blonde woman, eyes clear blue; then another; then a young man. Then the shot pans across rows of young people of all races and nationalities singing to the rising sun. They're beautiful, pure, hippie-looking in their dashikis, their kimonos, their turtleneck sweaters, their garments from all over the world. Finally, an aerial view zooms out to reveal about two hundred singers in a fan-like formation on a green hilltop: they're the spirit of a revolutionary decade, distilled into the planet's first true global chorus. They're pristine. And they sing:

I'd like to buy the world a home
And furnish it with love
Grow apple trees and honey bees
And snow white turtle doves.

I'd like to teach the world to sing
In perfect harmony

¹ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 2, scene 2, lines 603-5.

I'd like to buy the world a Coke
And keep it company
That's the real thing.

What the world wants today
Coca-Cola
Is the real thing

It was all there. Globalization. Multiculturalism. The Live Aid concerts. The appeal to ethical immediacy and consensual sentimentality. Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*. "What if you held a protest and everyone came?" asks Mark Fisher. The hallmarks of what he calls "capitalist realism" are unmistakably there in the hilltop scene: politics suspended in the perfect harmony of a group of caring, loving individuals who can abolish the world's agonies without systemic reorganization, preserving the fantasy that Western consumerism, "far from being intrinsically implicated in [...] global inequalities, can itself solve them."²

Thanks to the finale of AMC's show *Mad Men* we know now that we owe the Coca-Cola hilltop commercial to none other than Don Draper himself, and with it a defining moment in the emergence of what Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello have theorized as "the new spirit of capitalism," whereby the language and values of the 1968 revolt are absorbed and mobilized into the discipline of a new phase of capitalist accumulation.³ And, indeed, it is precisely this process of recreation and renewal that we witness in the last season of *Mad Men*: after walking out of a drab, bureaucratic meeting at the New York HQ of McCann Erickson, Draper takes to the road, Kerouac-style, and traverses the entire North American continent, gradually shedding the trappings of his former self, and embracing flexibility, nomadism, and spontaneity instead—"the very hallmarks of management in a post-Fordist, control society," as Fisher points out⁴—until he reaches the Pacific shore where his encounter with West Coast counterculture also arguably symbolizes one of the founding moments of what, twenty years later, came to be called the "Californian Ideology,"⁵ with its hybridization of market doctrines and hippie artisanship from which some strands of 1990s dotcom neoliberalism emerged. Draper's allegoric journey of redemption and self-renewal ends in a New Age self-improvement retreat in the Big Sur coast, a place seemingly removed from the spirit of ambition or commerce (though the language of self-help was soon to reappear in the arsenal of the entrepreneurial self). The last scene shows Draper in a lotus position on a cliff top overlooking the ocean, chanting in harmony with his partners in Zen as the guru intones what to us now, forty-five years later, sounds like a perfect corporate mantra: "A new day. New ideas. A new you." Draper smiles. A meditation bell chimes. Cut to the Coca-Cola commercial.

For online commentator Alan Sepinwall, "to take this genuine moment and turn it into yet another commodity" constitutes a disappointingly dark and cynical finale to the series. "What Don has on that cliff is the real thing, baby, while the Coke ad is a slick and phony attempt to mass-produce that feeling for every soda-buying individual with a television set."⁶ Ironically, in real life, resistance to commodification was factored into—and thus overcome through—the very design of the Coca-Cola hilltop commercial itself. When Bill Backer, the actual McCann Erickson executive behind the TV spot, first explained the idea to his colleagues at the agency, it was received with skepticism:

Bill Backer noticed that Davis's initial reaction was not at all what he'd expected and asked him, "Billy, do you have a problem with this idea?" Davis slowly revealed his problem. "Well, if I could do something for everybody in the world, it would not be to buy them a Coke."

Backer responded, "What would you do?"

"I'd buy everyone a home first and share with them in peace and love," Davis said.

Backer said, "Okay, that sounds good. Let's write that and I'll show you how Coke fits right into the concept."⁷

Commodification, Boltanski and Chiapello explain, "is the simplest process through which capitalism can acknowledge the validity of a critique and make it its own, by incorporating it into its specific mechanisms."⁸ But it's not simply "perfect harmony," shelter, and peace—after a decade of war, crisis, and revolt—that the 1971 Coca-Cola campaign was commodifying: "What the world wants today" is "the real thing." It's the whole package visually represented by the pristine faces of the young hilltop singers (and the mirage pursued by Draper in his odyssey across North America)—a life of authenticity and freedom. "Freedom's just another word / for nothin' left to lose": David Harvey uses

2 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), 15. Originally published as *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* in 1999.
3 Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2004).
4 Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 28.
5 Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, "The Californian Ideology," in *Science as Culture* 6, no. 1 (1996): 44–72, http://www.alamut.com/subj/ideologies/pessimism/califideo_1.html.

6 Alan Sepinwall, "Series Finale Review: 'Mad Men'—'Person to Person': I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke?," *HitFix*, May 18, 2015, <http://www.hitfix.com/whats-alan-watching/series-finale-review-mad-men-person-to-person-id-like-to-buy-the-world-a-coke>.
7 Ted Ryan, "The Making of 'I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke,'" *Coca-Cola* website, January 1, 2012, <http://www.coca-cola-company.com/stories/coke-lore-hilltop-story>.
8 Boltanski and Chiapello, *New Spirit of Capitalism*, 441.

these lines from Kris Kristofferson's "Me and Bobby McGee" (popular worldwide after Janis Joplin's 1971 version) as the title for one of the chapters of his *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), but never thematizes the connection. Let's take a look: "From the Kentucky coalmines / to the California sun / Bobby shared the secrets of my heart." The protagonists of the song are drifters traversing the continent at about the same time and in the same direction as Draper in *Mad Men*. "Busted flat in Baton Rouge, waiting for the train / And I's feeling nearly as faded as my jeans / Bobby thumbed a diesel down just before it rained / It rode us all the way to New Orleans." Kristofferson admittedly drew his inspiration for these characters from the street entertainers in Federico Fellini's *La Strada* (1954). But two very different categories of roaming subjectivities are at play here. The itinerant performers in Fellini's film represent precapitalist figures who were never absorbed in Fordist/Keynesian biopolitical discipline (nor in any other for that matter), and as such embody the potent aura of what Boltanski and Chiapello call the "artistic critique" of capitalism, whereas Bobby McGee and his lover are running away from the dissolution of that discipline in a westward march toward a new form of seemingly unscripted existence that embraces risk and uncertainty, but is actually a new form of control based on mobility itself. "One day up near Salinas, Lord, I let him slip away / He's looking for that home and I hope he finds it."⁹ At the end of the road, we can imagine Bobby McGee looking for a home in 1980 when Reagan comes to power. By then, freedom and authenticity (and this is the context for the politics of rehearsal as we shall see below) had already been redefined as the main characteristics of the entrepreneurial subject. Do you want a life of freedom, of unlimited expression, unbound playfulness and aesthetic experimentation? An uncharted life, an unscripted life, a feast of perpetual improvisation, an open-ended rehearsal without the obligation of a play? There is only one way capitalism can fulfill this wish: through the market.

In 1865, in Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (which was beloved by twentieth-century Surrealists), Captain Nemo's proto-Deleuzian war cry was *Mobilis in Mobile*: "to be fluid, in a fluid element," and to be "no one," were guerrilla strategies in the fight against imperial navies and bourgeois subjectivity. In 2016 to be fluid is to be totally subsumed in precarity. If, as has often been observed, the discourse of liberal humanism masked actual inhumanity, today the neoliberal language games centered on freedom mask universal unfreedom. In a few simple steps, authenticity and unbound experimentation are translated into employment flexibility, which leads to no anchoring or grounding in any job stability, which is tantamount to no existential security, which means powerlessness, destitution, chronic anxiety, and fear. "To live in fear is to be a slave," Roy Batty said in *Blade Runner* (1982). The loop is closed; the kind of freedom we have embraced (and we can hardly conceive any other) is a willed slavery.

2. It's the Real Thing

It wasn't acting, it wasn't rehearsed, it was an actual moment. And that tension in this simulated environment makes you think about what it would be like to have it not be a consensual performance. What would it mean for an actual body to be experiencing this?

— Heather Cassils¹⁰

What are we talking about when we talk about "rehearsal"? To be sure, underneath the English term—or somewhere in the woodworks of our discursive edifice—there lurk all its cognates, equivalents, or translations into theory's *other* languages ("theory" being the designation of a worldwide knowledge industry comprising a body of discourses more or less normatively expected to be disseminated in an English version, regardless of their "original" language, i.e., if a text is not in English it's not yet, not quite, that global thing called theory). Thus beneath the Anglo-normativity of rehearsal, there lie the semantic fields afforded by other languages: rehearsal in French is translated as *répétition*, but in German the term is *Probe*. In Spanish the corresponding noun is *ensayo*, which also means "essay" (as in the literary form), "trial" (as in "learning by trial and error"—*ensayo y error*), "test" (as in "clinical test"—*ensayo clínico*), or "attempt" (as in "failed attempt"—*ensayo fallido*). Interestingly, the complementary of *ensayo* as "theatrical rehearsal"; that is, the actual staging of a show is called *representación*. So while the English term rehearsal resonates with theatricality, and considering it in isolation seems to confine us to that sphere—limiting our discourse—by contrast, taking the rehearsal/*répétition*/*Probe*/*ensayo* semantic constellation as an ensemble offers much more interesting possibilities. To begin with, a laboratory smell comes into the picture alongside the stage lights, with parliamentary politics in the wings. We are talking about both science and art in their modern form—as well as politics—and at least two polarities become immediately apparent: repetition (and closure) versus experimentation (and openness). At stake are knowledge protocols and the site and the performativity of truth. How and where is truth to be found, and enacted?

To complicate matters even further, rehearsal may enter into two different dichotomies that situate it on opposite sides of the repetition/experimentation divide: on the one hand, a "rehearsed" performance or behavior versus an

9 "Me and Bobby McGee," Roger Miller 1970, BNA.

10 Heather Cassils, "Cassils: Transgender Artist Goes to Extremes," by Stephen

Heyman, *New York Times*, November 18, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/19/arts/international/cassils-a-transgender-artist-goes-to-extremes.html>.

“unrehearsed” one (consider also lab tests in controlled conditions versus field tests in nonlinear settings) suggests a stilted, prescribed, or prescribed “phony” situation, as opposed to a spontaneous, unpredictable movement within a moving element—*mobilis in mobile*. But on the other hand, the rehearsal session (also: the draft, the drawing board, the prototype stage, the editing cut, etc.) as a domain of experimentation, trial, and error precisely evokes a liquid space of openness and plasticity as opposed to the frozen rigidity of something we are forced to designate by means of heavy-handed chrono-ontological language: the “final” staging, the “actual” play ... *the real thing*. Comparing rehearsals and psychotherapy, Lisa Baraitser and Simon Bayley emphasize “that the notion [...] requires the foreshadow of anticipated performance for it to make any sense at all,” but concede that it may offer “something more infinitely compelling than the performance—a period of time in which everyday life is held in abeyance, identity is deferred, old knots dissolved, and new ideas, emotions, behaviour can be played with”¹¹—which brings to mind Draper’s meditation retreat at Big Sur: “New ideas. A new you.” The metaphors in Susan Letzler Cole’s *Directors in Rehearsal: A Hidden World* (1992)—a “dance of creation,” a mountain climbing expedition, a “deep investigation,” and an “exploration”¹²—are directly coterminous with the neoliberal tropes of entrepreneurial creativity commonly found in self-help books. The central theme seems to be “heuristic motion: rehearsal moves towards something not wholly known, and toward something previously unexperienced. It seems deeply implicated in a sense of newness, and in a sense of authenticity.”¹³ Authenticity and freedom: *what the world wants today* ...

This whole conceptual field with all its binary sets is arguably internal to contemporary capitalism. The repetition-experimentation dichotomy is actually a recoding of the opposition between a (rigid) Fordist organization of mass production and a (flexible) neoliberal cognitive system. That commodification unifies all these oppositions is also born out by how easily they can be conceptually neutralized in the languages of contemporary theory. In a Baudrillardian or Deleuzian reframing, for instance, the rehearsal as opposed to the “actual play” is the copy that precedes the original in the logic of simulacra—but this may be reversed if the play is taken as the derivative *representation* and the rehearsal as the site of original *truth*. A deconstructive reading, in turn, may insist on the dynamics of deferral/deferment at work in the *differance* between rehearsal and final performance, highlighting how in terms of hauntology/ontology each is spectrally constituted by the other, shattering all illusions of presence. Finally, not much effort at dialectical thinking is required to see that any “final” or “definitive” performance of a play may be taken as the point of departure for a new one, thus retroactively becoming its rehearsal (just another test), and conversely if a series of rehearsals are interrupted, then the last one acquires a summative status that transmutes it into the final version of the work (think of Walter Benjamin’s

draft of the *Passagenwerk* that turned into a finalized opus because of his death). All these conceptual circularities attest to a system without transcendence, without an outside—the circulation of exchange value with no reference to any external use value. As Boltansky and Chiapello observe, contemporary capitalism both internalizes the demand for authenticity—through its commodification—and simultaneously discredits it through relentless cultural deconstruction.¹⁴ In the final analysis, “freedom” as total mobility, flexibility, and connectivity is not compatible with “authenticity” understood as being true to a self whose stability is obsolete or an obstacle.

It is not exceedingly difficult to fathom the kind of politics that all of these dead ends are translated into. The obsession with immediacy and authenticity—in temporal, spatial, and conceptual terms—is the distinctive feature of what Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams have called “folk politics”: the sort of “common sense” (or the implicit script we might say) behind most protest movements since the 1990s, from the Seattle riots to Occupy Wall Street (OWS).¹⁵ This is an antipolitics fueled by the decoupling of rehearsal from representation. The prominence of experimentation as an end in itself (the open-ended rehearsal without a play) materializes into *prefigurative politics* (“be the change that you want to see in the world”¹⁶), while the emphasis on the spontaneous and unmediated (the unscripted play without a prior rehearsal or structuration of any sort) becomes anarchist horizontalism tout court. Play without rehearsal, or rehearsal without a play; the result is an antipolitics that either by short-circuiting the dialectics that inextricably binds mobilization and insurgency to organization and hegemony, or by installing itself in an untenable illusion of permanent insurrectionary tension—as if riots or protest camps could last forever—ends up going through bipolar roller-coasters of exaltation and depression, and contributing to generalized impotence and depoliticization in each round.

11 Lisa Baraitser and Simon Bayley, “Now and Then: Psychoanalysis and the Rehearsal Process,” in *Psychoanalysis and Performance*, ed. Patrick Campbell and Adrian Kear (London: Routledge, 2001), 61–62.

12 Susan Letzler Cole, cited in Robert Baker-White, *The Text in Play: Representations of Rehearsal in Modern Drama* (London: Associated University Presses, 1999), 23.

13 Robert Baker-White, in *ibid.*

14 Boltanski and Chiapello, *New Spirit of Capitalism*, 451–57.

15 Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World without Work* (London: Verso, 2015), 5–25.

16 This slogan is an apocryphal countercultural

memé that began to circulate in the 1970s and '80s, and was later mistakenly attributed to Mahatma Gandhi. See *Wikiquote*, s.v. “Mahatma Gandhi,” last modified July 3, 2016, https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Mahatma_Gandhi.

3. Scripts We Live By

But is there even such a thing as “spontaneous” behavior—the unscripted life—in the first place? Not quite. According to cognitive script theory, first posited by researchers from the fields of computer science and psychology (and soon successfully exploited by the advertising industry), human social behavior is prestructured to a great extent by script-like formations learned through experience, interaction, and observation. In myriad different situations, from eating at a restaurant to chatting with coworkers to attending a funeral, whether the context is gender norms, net-surfing habits, or patterns of aggression, cognitive scripts stored in our memory provide instructions for how to behave, what is expected of us, and what to expect from others, once everyone has assumed their roles.¹⁷ These cognitive schemas vary in sophistication and flexibility across individuals, cultures, genders, social classes, and age groups, and they may be safely assumed to be imbricated with a society’s epochal common sense and hegemonic ideologies, along with the whole machineries of desire and affect governing the biopolitics of subjectivities at a deeper level.

Except perhaps for extreme situations, cognitively off-script behavior among functioning adults in modern societies may be very rare (consider an average commuter’s trajectory through an ordinary day), but on the other hand our scripts are relatively flexible and we never cease to rewrite them or acquire new ones through social learning. This is probably the key behind the proven effectiveness of some of the techniques employed in Augusto Boal’s “theater of the oppressed,”¹⁸ for instance, which may be interpreted as attempts at disrupting preexisting cognitive scripts (“invisible theater”) or rewriting them (“forum theater”) in order to activate social antagonism. In this regard, insofar as they possess agency, groups, collectives, and social movements, they may also be seen to follow their own (largely unacknowledged) cognitive blueprints (Srnicek and Williams’s folk politics is surely one such, as we saw above). Whether at the collective or the individual level, situations of societal upheaval may be expected to dislocate existing scripts and activate new ones. In words from Fernando Pessoa’s *Book of Disquiet*: “Some days are like whole philosophies in themselves that suggest to us new interpretations of life.”¹⁹

The political cycle opened up in Spain in recent years began with one such day in May 2011 and, at the time of writing this text, has not reached a conclusion yet. The movement of the squares in Spain gave us the antithetical image to the gathering at the hilltop in the Coca-Cola commercial. After four decades, at least two generations that had been playing by the neoliberal rule book, expecting to be furnished with the middle-class suburban *home with apple trees / and honey bees*, saw how, on the contrary, what sociologists would call their life courses (the “sequence of socially defined events and roles

that the individual enacts over time”²⁰) were blown to pieces by the worst crisis Spain had experienced since the 1930s. The dismantling of the middle class unleashed a major rewrite of cognitive scripts at all levels, including (and here lies the main difference with OWS, now largely vanished without having had an impact on US politics) those structuring the “common sense” of the Left across all sectors. Activists, not simply the plain ordinary folks, found themselves thinking the unthinkable, and were forced to change gears all the time. Unlike their OWS counterparts, enamoured of the purity and authenticity of their rehearsal-like spaces, they learned they had to “know things differently”²¹ and evolve beyond—without forgetting the lessons of—“assemblyism.” *Go beyond the tension between rehearsal and staging and rewrite the play itself.* The play’s the thing.

Owen Jones points out how Podemos, the new political party inspired by the 15-M movement, has deftly abandoned the traditional language and style of the old left,²² but the change goes much deeper than symbolic or iconographic editing. After decades of “capitalist realism,” the very term *podemos*, which is actually a verb tense and not a noun, and literally means “we can,” evokes the enactment of collective empowerment beyond the chronic defeatism of marginalized radical politics. Podemos is part of a much larger ecosystem where reformists, rupturists, and anarchists—those subspecies of the Left eternally at each other’s throats—are fast mutating into cooperative, cross-breeding symbionts. Reformists discovered radical democracy and online participation; staunch rupturists and grassroots militants discovered electoral politics as another battleground in the fight for hegemony; skeptic anarchists and community activists saw they could use town councils to replace the neoliberal networks of governance coordinating state and corporate players in cities like Madrid or Barcelona with public-communal partnerships. Long-time anti-eviction activist Ada Colau became mayor of Barcelona, and then quickly learned

17 See Derek M. Bolen, “Cognitive Script Theory,” in *The Encyclopedia of Gender in Media*, ed. Mary Kosut and Geoffrey J. Golson (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2014), 40–41; and Esther Calvete, “Cognitive Script Theory and the Dynamics of Cognitive Scripting,” in *Encyclopedia of Media Violence*, ed. Matthew S. Eastin (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), 77–81.

18 Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. McBride and Maria-Odilia Leal-McBride (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1979).

19 Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, trans. Margaret Jull Costa (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2010), 97.

20 Janet Z. Giele and Glen H. Elder, *Methods of Life Course Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1998).

21 Pablo Iglesias Turrión and Juan Carlos Monedero, *¡Qué no nos representan! El debate sobre el sistema electoral español* (Madrid: Editorial Popular, 2011), 92.

22 Owen Jones, “What I Learned from Podemos,” *Medium*, December 23, 2015, <https://medium.com/@OwenJones84/what-i-learned-from-podemos-bdb7245d2cbf#.qc0o5k9px>.

that local politics alone is insufficient, and threw her weight behind the Podemos campaign for the December 2015 general election. Podemos itself has rewritten its cognitive script several times, like a cyborg transformer shape-shifting back and forth from movement-form to party-form to citizens-platform-form to coalition-form, as the circumstances required. Through all this (and although it is true that, as Alberto Toscano has noted, the trajectory leading from the 15-M movement to the present conjuncture is far from linear²³—actually more like a recombinant cascade of events) no one has ever thought they had found the one single lever of change, or that institutions are anything but nodes of struggle within vast machineries where the shooting goes on, like the carcasses of giant enemy starships half-buried in the sands of a desert planet, from which we scavenge spare parts. And to our friends everywhere we might say: everything is open-ended, but it's no dry run. This play's the thing.

23 Alberto Toscano, "Portrait of the Leader as a Young Theorist," *Jacobin*, December 19, 2015, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/12/podemos-iglesias-europe-austerity-elections-spain-theory-laclau/>.

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Re-rehearsing the Test Drive

Avital Ronell in Conversation with Martin Jörg Schäfer*

Martin Jörg Schäfer: It has been more than ten years since your book *The Test Drive* was published in 2005.¹ Theoretical books that are also political interventions sometimes do not age well, no matter how “scholarly.” However, *The Test Drive* seems to have gained urgency: the very title of the book condenses a psychoanalytical notion (of the drive as the suture and breaking point of nature and culture) with a technological notion (of the drive as a purely mechanical setup). Testing as experimentation is not only a mode of knowledge production but testing has become embedded into the production of existence as such (as *The Test Drive* has it with Nietzsche). In the flexible working world, the amount of tests and “evaluations” life is continually subjected to has not only increased even more over the past decade. The test subject anticipates being tested and adopts a theatrical mode of constant self-presentation—always wooing a potential audience that might consider the subject worthy of a test yet to come. All the trials and tryouts on trash TV seem to relieve us from being tested ourselves and, simultaneously, offer examples on how to be tested and how to test others. At the very same time one is being judged, one quite often takes on the job of testing and judging others. One’s capacity of testing is put to the test so to speak. What’s your own reading of *The Test Drive* today? How would you situate its stakes in the cultural and political context of 2016?

Avital Ronell: Thank you for the question. It’s enormous and abundant and full of urgent implications. It is also very kind of you to indicate that this work might be of some importance. This work kind of broke my heart: I did not come to present it to my teacher, mentor, and friend Jacques Derrida. I had to make a choice. When I received the galley proofs in 2004, I really wanted to show it to him. But I feared that if I did he might know that I thought he might not make it to the publication of the book. I was living in his house and taking care of him. I had to summon my higher self and tell myself: I know, honey, you want to show this to your teacher. But you cannot take the risk of terrifying him. Therefore, I did not get his stamp of approval; I have to seek it in transcendental byways. That being said, I had to test myself and my capacity to renounce pleasure—or the masochistic pleasure of his disapproving me. That would have been devastating but at least something of a response that I always sought from him for my work. And he tested me a lot. He also rejected some of my efforts and my work—to come around later on and approve my work with great delay and affirmation. And I said to myself: Well, I’m glad I did not commit suicide over that. That was a testing of sorts as well.

* This interview was conducted on February 26, 2016, in New York City.

¹ Avital Ronell, *The Test Drive* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

What surprised me most recently was the following: I had the bright idea to go to France in November when there were the terror attacks. And like George W. Bush before him, François Hollande made his first statement in synchrony with the political utterance that Bush delivered on the eve of destruction that was 9/11: "Our nation is being tested." These attacks on sovereignty and soil, these terribly destructive events seem to be conceived as tests. That would be one point of relevance for the continued consideration in a political, ethical, and dramatic sphere and scene of disturbance to consider how nation-states and sovereignties consider themselves to be tested, and in both cases the answer to the test consisted of confused, exegetic codes of biblical readings and a more technological understanding of the *Geworfenheit* that testing implied. Rhetorically, one can show how both Hollande and Bush are confused. When you are put to the test, the outcome is in no way certain. The question may be in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and its replications as to why there is such a will to testing a demand that loyalty is tested, faith be tested, and so on. This became a big issue for Kant, by the way: according to which axioms can faith be put to the test. In many ways, the biblical route of testing is rich and complicated in itself. But Bush and (to a lesser degree) Hollande used it to claim that we were tested and we passed the test. And that is cheating. That is not being tested but to appropriate the rhetoric for a right-wing certitude and the removal of any doubt mechanisms that also belong to testing. One tests to failure and destruction. One cannot predict or control the test. In the test, there is a different relation to existence, being and time, and knowledge. A true test may, to the extent that it involves risk-taking, just disturb any grid or calculability to which you are beholden. To such an extent that it blows itself up—including your world and the charts of truth you might have wanted to preserve.

MJS: Since its publication, *The Test Drive* has been an important book for discussing various notions of "rehearsal." In a certain reading of the Brechtian tradition, rehearsal (beyond a solely theatrical context) can be understood as a tryout for a different and "better" future, thus opening up the possibilities inherent to seemingly immutable situations (and therefore the futurity of future itself). *The Test Drive* exposes the uncanny side of this: the constant and systematic testing imposed upon a twenty-first century "subject" (e.g., on the labor market) generates a flexible subject in (constant) rehearsal. This subject is told to feel creative and happy, always at the brink of self-fulfillment, always making new connections, always up to a fresh start. From a *Test Drive* perspective, rehearsal becomes the very labor by which the allegedly most "subjective" qualities can be extracted and included into the circulation of goods. Rehearsal seems to be one of the power technologies inherent to today's form of what Deleuze, in his 1990s reading of Foucault, called the

"societies of control."² But *The Test Drive* also sheds some light on the inner workings of such a subjectivity; that is, the subject bound to rehearse itself constantly rehearses its own hollowing out, so to speak. It also constantly has to interrupt the presence in the search for yet another potential future; the rehearsed/rehearsal subject is a subject in the mode of "breaking up" (to put it in the terms of the Nietzsche/Wagner chapter of *The Test Drive*).³ What connections, if any, would you make between notions of testing and notions of rehearsing and rehearsal?

AR: Testing is a mutation, another form of questioning: it probes, it pries, it gives all sorts of prods; something gets moved and shifted; there is mild trauma that can also escalate into major trauma for which the test is responsible. I want to urge us to keep in mind that what you still persist in calling a test "subject" is already artificialized, maybe a leftover of the subject of history, the Hegelian and other subject-formations that German idealism propped up for us, or Romanticism or Rousseau.⁴ There might be an effect of subjectivity prompted and rehearsed by testing and its various experiences and non-experiences. I think testing effects all sorts of major displacements that we want to be aware of, including a displacement of a relation to truth, to time, to what can hold. The testing temporality that we can be aware of is part of a provisional logic. It blows up; it changes. It cannot have the stamp of truth and eternity. But it can obsolesce; it can fail. And one of the strongest ways to test in technology and in the gym is to test failure. Failure becomes newly appointed as something that is released and emancipatory about testing. Nietzsche says that once the disposition of testing is on the table you are no longer bowing to his lordship because the day has not been productive or recognizable enough. Instead, when you are in a testing mode you can say: I have nothing to show for it. Everything blew up in my face today. And I have witnesses. Because testing and experiments were very innovative insofar as they took us out of the alchemist closet and other closets and took us to the light of colloquy, repeatability, witnesses. People had to see the thing work; it's no longer a secret formula or hocus-pocus. But now, with testing, we are in a different time of precarity. Everyone, as you pointed out, is tested, prodded, ready to do a pop up. Nietzsche, in his thinking on testing and experimental innovation, pointed out America as an exemplary site, because he saw that everyone is an actor. And he not only predicted the reign of actors like Reagan, Schwarzenegger, and celebrity types of insubstantial beings. It also meant that in America you could go with the flow; you have

2 Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (Winter 1992): 3-7.

3 See Ronell, *Test Drive*, 277-325.

4 *Ibid.*, 5-9.

all sorts of vanishing identities. Rescindability is a major offshoot of the sensibility and practice of testing. When you see that you are wrong, you just rescind, you take back, you retract—we have to rehearse that over again. And that comes without a sense that you have arrived. So there is a Derridean kind of “destinerring” that is at stake.⁵ And this is the point where testing and rehearsing are interconnected on a very basic level.

MJS: “Warrantors” or main points of references for other books of yours include Goethe, Heidegger, and Kafka. *The Test Drive* takes its starting point from texts by Edmund Husserl and above all Nietzsche, whom you just mentioned. Especially in *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* (*The Gay Science* or *The Joyous Wisdom*), Nietzsche describes, decries, and, on another level, celebrates the modern condition of self-experimentation. *The Test Drive* proposes an at least double reading of Nietzsche: there’s the mode of self-experimentation that relates to what Nietzsche (in a Kantian fashion) calls “the delight in the X”;⁶ that is, to the futurity of a future that is kept open for an arrival to come. To Nietzsche, the laughter and joy of knowledge consists in relating to this openness. And then (with a Husserlian twist) there is the resentful mode of experimentation that conquers “the great X” and hollows out the very life it examines. *The Test Drive* calls this, with Nietzsche, the “growing of the desert.”⁷ From this point of view, the current transformation of work and life into rehearsal seems especially perfidious—the continuous production of blueprints for a life yet to come is aligned with the great X of the future. Yet this future becomes economized (and sometimes monetized) by turning the joyfulness of experimentation into a compulsory element. Where do you see the stakes and possibilities of a Nietzschean critique today?

AR: Let me pick up right there. When Nietzsche switches on his “transvaluation” machine, there is at least a double track or a double valiance and a double take. That is to say that one object of contemplation or a phenomenon or a habit suddenly has a multiplicity of interpretative pressures on it. An example would be Nietzschean nomadism that Deleuze famously hitched a ride on and developed into celebrity status. There is the good nomadism as valorized by Deleuze, and then there is the hapless and lost and alienated nomadism that is part of a good and a bad homelessness that Nietzsche describes. To be homeless can be the absolute affirmation of the good nomadism: you’re free, you’re not rooted, you’re deracinated in a joyful way, you’re released and detached in an ecstatic openness to what might come or not come. But nonetheless, it is given altogether positive consideration. On the other hand, there is the dreary and dispiriting and shocking homelessness that unfortunately doesn’t need my descriptions to drive home the point. Therefore, in Nietzsche, there is also the good and bad wasteland: the growing desert around us you alluded to as well as a good desertification. But the question

I would map onto Nietzsche is why test sites are literally in the desert, destroying planetary abundance and fertility and hopefulness? Why does science have to be cold and barren and destructive? Or could there be a test site that I think the Nietzschean writing puts out a call for: a test site that promises what he calls “galaxies of joy” that is not glacialized, sterilized, and terrifyingly desecrated but actually opens up to all sorts of unanticipated delight? Why has science not signed up to that program? This may be, by the way, why we need art.

MJS: With the question of art, the problem of acting you brought up earlier comes into play again. Because of Plato’s notorious put down and Aristotle’s at least implicit devaluation, acting was not considered a proper form of art for a long time. And even when it achieved that status, great reservations or rejections remained. Acting also ties in neatly with the double track you laid out for Nietzsche’s transvaluation machine: There is the bad actor of the modern age, namely, Wagner who plays to our lowest instincts. And then there is the versatile actor as an agent of changes and things to come. Moreover, acting relates back to the relations between testing and rehearsing: when taken as rehearsal, testing becomes theatrical. In the theater one plays (rehearses) with others, yet also for others (the audience or an audience to come). One also rehearses for/in the name of an Other or of Others (the director, an idea, the law, etc.). In a similar fashion, one rehearses in the modern workplace to stand out from others. The notion of a (better) community to come through rehearsal work seems to be at odds with the (implicitly hierarchical) notion of self-presentation. How to disentangle all these others and Others, or to re-entangle them differently? Is there a way to rehearse the test drive (in the theater, in performance, other art forms, in life) that gains Nietzsche’s joyful relation to otherness without falling prey to the test drive’s pitfalls? You just indicated that, on a more general level, art might have something to do with this.

AR: One of the questions one could pose in terms of Nietzsche’s *Gay Science* is what is the scientificity of such a science. Nietzsche says that art prepares us. It is like a great immunity project for science. Without art we could not take, we could not endure the shock of non-truth. Art is what affirms fiction, shock, acting, and so on. This is something that Plato, in his fascistoid *Republic* served his eviction notice to. According

5 See Jacques Derrida, *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 411–95.

6 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom* (“*La Gaya Scienza*”), trans. Thomas Common (New York: MacMillan Company, 1924), 6–7.

7 “The desert grows. Woe him who harbors deserts!” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 252.

to him, we don't need poets, that is, those who will not seduce and drug everyone with those hallucinatory and powerful fictions because that seduces away from the truth and a lot of other state-bound (in many instances totalizing and totalitarian) values. Science in Nietzsche is prompted and propped up by art. What is outstanding in science for Nietzsche is that god has always used veto power against science. God cannot stand science because it is not beholden to his powers—also in terrifying ways as can be seen in the Oppenheimers and the Frankensteins. They build their monsters because they relentlessly pursue some sort of crazed vision that is not constrained by certain virtues and values. This is what Nietzsche, with his chronic ambivalence, deplors and adores. Eve was the first scientist. She was sassy and bit into that apple, which eventually became a computer. Eve needed to know—despite the censorship of The Man. She tried it out; she got her ass kicked, and she got us all in trouble and punished eternally. That need to know, when detached from god's injunction, has a feminine strain. Despite his misogyny, Nietzsche loves Eve; the woman in Nietzsche is Eve. He thinks she knocked down all sorts of restraining and gag orders. She was seduced as much as she is the seducer; hence, Nietzsche's play with the words *Versuch* (attempt, try out) and *Versuchung* (seduction). When you try out you are also tempted at the "tempt" and the attempt. There is temptation but also what we can call an "attemption" that drives the artistically attempted scientific disposition: you just have got to play this out!

My problem with rehearsal would be the teleological pull. It usually wants to be the foreplay, or an anticipatory stage, to a final product, whereas there is such an aspect to the test drive, of course, and there are certain types of testing that want product at the end, or a telos, or a goal to be achieved. But I would be interested in thinking a development of theater and presentation in terms of non-presence, in terms of nondelivery, in terms of a non-product or in terms of a permanent rehearsal and a permanent insurrection of what one would had hoped to hold and stop and say, "This is the way we want to do it." So there would be much more of a mutation involved, a dissatisfaction and destruction of the work if rehearsal became not only a lead-in, but a lead-in without termination for an apotheosis of a real deal in a true and final presentation. For the test drive implies a harassingly provisional logic that just breaks itself up at every moment.

MJS: And that would also go for and impact the many productions we have seen over the last decades that clearly present something that either documents the rehearsal process or gives emphasis to their extemporaneous character.

AR: On the other hand, a few weeks ago I was dragged around in New York when all of the new theater hopefuls show up and perform for you. And they kept on saying that this was only a "work in progress" or a "master rehearsal." And then, in most cases, it just wasn't good enough. So, there is something that rehearsal would have to bring back in terms of extreme rigor and in terms of an encounter with its own impossibility—a kind of becoming (to use Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche) that can only disturb itself but never can be satisfied with itself while still being very rigorous in every part of its process. The rehearsal would have to fail or fall short or let go of itself in a very rigorous way.

MJS: Would there be a certain *jouissance* to eternalized foreplay, so to speak (and to bring in Giulia Palladini's Lacanian reading of rehearsal)?⁸

AR: There would certainly be a relation to what never takes place. It would involve a kind of deconstruction of theatrical site or space as well as of representation. What does come into presence? What does refuse to show up? This may sound very minimalist and post-Beckettian and destructive of itself. But I would like to imagine that kind of edge that is, of course, bound up with the *jouissance* of its own encounter with its dissipation and death.

MJS: This also relates to a flip side of *The Test Drive* you developed in your previous 2003 book *Stupidity*.⁹ *Stupidity* has a lot of faces too: the stupidity of a self-assured knowledge that is certain to have conquered the world, the stupidity ascribed to one by others, the Nietzschean stupidity that is taken on as a mask, and so on. But the most important stupidity you depict at the very origin of thinking and existing alike: one can never quite seize the astonishment of being struck by thinking or thrown (*Geworfenheit*) into living; rather one has to acknowledge one's own stupidity in that respect and then build on that non-fundament (which is, of course, not a valid or constructive way of "building" in the first place). From this perspective, life and politics are modes of testing and rehearsing in a non-result-oriented fashion; it is a tryout. But how to rehearse stupidity rather than rehearse "not to be stupid anymore," that is, to have a performance or a result to show for? Or would you describe that as the very mode of impossibility one finds oneself in and has to deal with?

8 Cf. Giulia Palladini, "Towards an Idle Theatre the Politics and Poetics of Foreplay," in "Precarity and Performance," ed. Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider, special issue, *TDR* 56, no. 4 (Winter 2012), 95–103.

9 Avital Ronell, *Stupidity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).
10 Cf. *ibid.*, 278ff.

AR: In preparation for meeting you, I looked at certain sections in Kafka and Kant. And one thing that struck me this time was the question of “what shows up”: the appearance or disappearance involved in displays and exhibits and exhibitionisms of stupidity. And there is one thing that they say independently from one another. In Kafka, at one point in the *Nachlass*, a stupid student says, “I appeared dumber than I was.” And in Kant, there is a moment where he rants about pretending to be intelligent but not actually being intelligent.¹⁰ He says that until he met one particular person, he could not understand that one could pretend to be intelligent. What are the stakes of appearing smart or dumb? How can you appear to be more intelligent than you are? That must mean you really are more intelligent than you are. I do not think he talks about pretentious people, who put out something that was not there. But Kant is rather after the question of appearing or playing dumb or smart (like Bush did and Donald Trump does today). Here, we once more have the Nietzschean double track: stupid enthusiasm or the enthusiasm of an uninhibited intelligence that is not stupefied. So your question has also to do with a double-headed stupor, a phenomenology of mindlessness. This always has political implications for my work. The Third Reich was considered the most mindless violence without even pretending to have an ulterior appearance. Robert Musil was among those who found this takeover by strategic stupidity very weird, indeed. Today, in the United States and a lot of places in Europe, it is not as scandalous as it might have sounded fifty years ago: we have these really stupid parades of minimalist utterances. American electoral politics in the age of Trump seem like theatricalizations and strange alienated rehearsals of power plays. Something is being dumbed down here that still requires consideration. You are right in saying that testing and stupidity are twin projects. Stupidity also has a double or triple appearance. In Nietzsche, there also is a sacred ignorance that is open to another kind of calling. If it had been bulked up more cognitively, it would not even be available. Take Joan of Arc who is ignorant but ready to take the call because she was not overtly versed in knowledge. There is a notion of divine stupidity, and God (at least the god of the New Testament) seems to prefer the sheep, the followers, the ignorant. The word “silly” comes from the German *selig* (blessed or soulful). So in relation to the ignorance of dumbing down, there is a lot to consider in that area. But to bring it back to the rehearsing and the rehearsed subject, one might wonder what a condition of permanent rehearsal without some metaphysical grand and happy endings, which would culminate in a final product or finality, would imply for us and to what extent we are always rehearsing and—if we are rehearsing—we are rehearsing for the encounter with death. A notion and practice of rehearsal might be affirmed in a Nietzschean sense as that which lives by failure.

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Rehearsing Failure

Kathrin Busch

I. Portrait for a Lack of Anything Better to Do

René Pollesch made a film containing a reinterpretation of conventional rehearsal theories. It shows video recordings of rehearsals of the play *Tal der fliegenden Messer* (*The Valley of the Flying Knives*),¹ which is edited and set to music, with a voice-over in which Pollesch speaks a text; this is framed and interrupted by brief private shots. We see actors rehearsing, but without hearing the text they are reading and speaking, without knowing what the play is about. What Pollesch wants to show is obviously not the development of the play from the rehearsals. Instead, the film purports to show life. Theater is life and the rehearsal is presented as a mode of existence—specifically as one based on limitation: an ascetic way of living. The real use of the rehearsal (according to Pollesch’s quasi anthropological interpretation of the theatrical way the actors, which he calls his “neighbors,” live) consists in an asceticism through repetition. By doing the same thing over and over, the actors limit the possibilities of life, according to his observation. Rehearsal is asceticism, as the film asserts, because in repeating always the same thing, it negates other possibilities. It kills potentiality. The sense of possibility is not multiplied; it is constrained. Rehearsal is conventionally considered an experimental procedure that brackets reality to elude limitations and suspends the usual operations of life to gain new possibilities. This notion of rehearsal as playing through and inventing possibilities is contradicted by the film. Pollesch thus rejects today’s aesthetics in which art primarily reveals what is possible, and places the as-yet-unrealized alongside the already realized. These art theories consider reality not as necessary but as mutable, and they insist that it could all be different as well. They maintain that art bears witness to the unrealized that is to be found in the factually given, and work needs to be done to enable this or to recall that it has not yet been exhausted.

This is not the case with Pollesch. He interprets rehearsing as pure repetition and as that which exhausts what is possible. *Portrait aus Desinteresse* (Portrait for a lack of anything better to do), as the film is titled, considers the rehearsal as an interruption, which otherwise only takes place “when we die or run out of money.”² Pollesch thus significantly shifts the purpose of all rehearsing. It is not training for improvement and enhancement of performance that are crucial for him, but rather the resistance to these kinds of appeals. Pollesch depicts rehearsal as a technique of limitation. As pure duplication, without added value or transcendence, it stops time. “The lived life that withdraws

1 The play was performed in 2008 in Mülheim an der Ruhr and at the Volksbühne Berlin. See René Pollesch, “Tal der fliegenden Messer,” in *Liebe ist kälter als das Kapital*, ed. Corinna

Brocher and Aenne Quiñones (Reinbek: Rowohlt Verlag, 2009), 225–97.
2 Unless otherwise stated, all quotations in the text are taken from the film *Portrait aus Desinteresse*.

from a scene destabilizes reality by entering into it again." Since gestures are consciously repeated in the rehearsal, the involuntary repetition that determines everyday life is suspended. There seems to be no more interruptions in everyday life, just endless projects for which one is supposed to exhaust one's own capacity. Most of all, though, there are also no incisive experiences, but only "the oil slick of life," only "dreadful infinity," in which everything just slips away again in an involuntary repetition of the foreseeable, "as though there were no experiences to be gained in the labyrinth of fear and anxiety." Pollesch counters this with the rehearsal as a suspension of actions and an arrest of what is happening. In rehearsals, processes are repeatedly stopped so as "to be able to linger in them." Pollesch thus rejects the idea that rehearsals serve to perfect something, and formulates a denial of the false promises of self-transcendence: "We miss ourselves and our lives, if we aim for something that goes beyond us." The rehearsal, conversely, provides an experience of insistence, of the finite, and of embodiment, and it refers to what can specifically not be revised.

For the text that he speaks over the film, Pollesch recorded and modified ideas from Boris Groys, raising questions of possible forms of resistance in light of today's project-based forms of labor. In the last section of *The Communist Postscript (Pocket Communism)*, which is about what philosophy calls "metanoia," reversal, Groys writes: "The principle problem of a society that understands itself as an open society is that of limiting its projects, of bringing them to an end. In such a society it is well-nigh impossible to consider a project as finite."³ Pollesch suggests considering the rehearsal as a technique of this kind of metanoia, which creates the limitation lacking today. The rehearsal kills time through repetition. It limits life. Art creates no possibilities; it scraps them, thus, pointing out the instance of the impossible and the not-to-be-made-possible in lived life. From a perspective of refusal like this, art serves to counter the phantasm of feasibility and self-empowerment. The deactivating procedure of strict repetition and limitation are thus to be understood as forms of resistance for Pollesch.

By duplicating scenes and showing them several times, Pollesch constructs what happens in the rehearsal as being a wholly unproductive act. He asserts it as training intermittence, as insisting on limitation that functions as a critical objection to the compulsion to prove oneself. The actors limit themselves and therefore resist the demand for productivity and self-improvement. It is as though stopping paradoxically has to be learned today in an enhanced asceticism, as though what is really worth rehearsing is inactivity. The rehearsal does not serve "creation," but rather "de-creation," not the development of an oeuvre, but rather—to use a term from Maurice Blanchot—*désœuvrement*.⁴

II. The Impossible

Pollesch thus situates himself in a previously little noticed aesthetics of de-potentialization. A line of thinking impossibilities can be traced in art theory, ranging from Antonin Artaud through to Blanchot and all the way to Gilles Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben. The beginning of this strictly modernist-critical theory of artistic production can be dated with the year 1924, when the influential correspondence between Artaud and the publisher of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Jacques Rivière, was published.⁵ Artaud had sent the publisher poems, which the latter refused to publish. Artaud refused to accept this rejection and explained instead why the poems should be published despite obvious deficiencies. He asserted that they bore witness to an impotence that is essential to the artistic act. According to Artaud, awkwardness and inability are categories of artistic production, because they refer to what happens to the writer in the act of writing. Blanchot continued this idea and formulated that art for Artaud was obligated to an experience of "the impossible."⁶ The reason why Artaud's writing appears imperfect is that it is "in contact with something so grave,"⁷ that it should not be weakened by a skilled use of language. Blanchot continued to develop this insight and based his theory of art on artistic experience as a reduction of possibilities, relating art to procedures of erasure, indeterminacy, and un-working.⁸

Finally, Deleuze also pursued similar ideas in a text on Samuel Beckett. Under the title "The Exhausted" (1995), he emphasizes the difference between exhausting possibilities, which aims for potentialization, and exhausting possibilities that has a reduction as its object.⁹ His essay deals with Beckett's television plays—in other words, this is also "theater" that is filmically fractured,

3 Boris Groys, *The Communist Postscript (Pocket Communism)*, trans. Thomas Ford (London: Verso, 2010), 104.

4 This term, which is at the center of Blanchot's production aesthetics ideas, means not only idleness—in other words, a withdrawal from the conventional performance of tasks—but also worklessness or "un-working." Art, according to the implicit thesis, fuels nothing, creates, or affects nothing. Cf. Andreas Hiepko, "Möglichkeiten, das Wort *désœuvrement* zu übersetzen," in *Ökonomien der Zurückhaltung: Kulturelles Handeln zwischen Askese und Restriktion*, ed. Barbara Gronau and Alice Lagaay (Bielefeld: transcript, 2010), 27–38.

5 Antonin Artaud, "Correspondence with Jacques Rivière," in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, trans. Helen Weaver,

ed. Susan Sontag (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 29–49.

6 Maurice Blanchot, "Artaud," in *The Book to Come*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Meridian, 2002), 35.

7 Ibid.

8 Cf. Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).

9 Gilles Deleuze, "The Exhausted," trans. Anthony Uhlmann, *SubStance* 24, no. 3, issue 78 (1995): 3–28, http://pages.akbild.ac.at/kdm/_media/_pdf/Gilles%20Deleuze%20-%20The%20Exhausted.pdf.

or better: concentrated. The film space shows the essence of theatrical art as the art of strict de-potentialization through repetition. The possible is limited—without promise of anything else. What is performed is the absence of creation and inspiration. In his plays, Beckett also formulates a strict rejection of the creative, declaring art a place where imagination or inventiveness decompose. The work, according to Beckett, is confronted with the experience of the absence of inspiration, which shows that it has no agency. Art, therefore, holds the experience of the impossible and functions as a final instance devoted to the remembrance of incapacity.

Just like Pollesch's inverted rehearsal theory, Artaud's, Blanchot's, and Deleuze's aesthetics aim for a critique of the appeal for enablement and empowerment. Conversely, what they make visible is that in a society oriented to competence, all forms of incapacity, de-potentialization, and passivity are condemned. This social condemnation illuminates the form of power in today's society. As various authors following Michel Foucault have maintained, it consists less in domination and subjugation, is thus not based on repressive forms of power, but instead consists in activating and exercising capacity, in testing and increasing ability. The object of this form of power is the competence of the individual, which is to be proven. Self-testing and self-improvement, according to Foucault, are the normalization strategies of today. At the same time, everything becomes a question of possibility and ability. The authoritarian system of today's society of control no longer follows the categories "permitted/forbidden," but has instead "switched to the fundamental distinction can/cannot."¹⁰ It is not so much moral qualities that are assessed, but rather aptitudes—for the purpose of enhancing them.¹¹

This can be even more precisely formulated with Agamben, to the extent that he maintains that the alienation we are exposed to today is not an alienation from the products of our own labor, but rather an alienation from our own incapacity. Thus we are not cut off from our own ability, but rather from our own inability to the extent that we are called on to expand the scope of our own possibilities. In contrast to this, the aesthetics of incapacity indicate rejected inability. In artistic activity, one exposes oneself to incapacity in a special way. Artistic production includes the experience of non-mastery, which cannot be compensated with creative technique. It follows a different logic of activity in which the partial non-mastery of the realization of an idea, the possibility of deviation and being driven away from the original intention, makes up an essential momentum of the activity itself. Incapacity inscribes itself in this distance between the intention and its realization. It is not genius or talent, not practice and improvement, but rather a rejection of the possibility of mastering artistic activity, as these theories suggest, which makes up the essence of art. This is what gives the aesthetics of incapacity their potential for resistance.

In his early book on aesthetic theory, *The Man without Content* (1999), Agamben laments that in philosophical aesthetics, by transforming from a production aesthetic to a reception aesthetic, this law of a certain incapacity in capacity has become unrecognizable. A phantasm of ability predominates, which he describes elsewhere: "Separated from his impotentiality, deprived of the experience of what he can not do, today's man believes himself capable of everything [...] precisely when he should instead realize that he has been consigned in unheard of measure to forces and processes over which he has lost all control. He has become blind not to his capacities but to his incapacities, not to what he can do but to what he cannot, or can not, do."¹² Agamben says this estrangement from impotentiality makes us "impoverished and less free," because with this we lose the possibility of resistance at the same time.¹³

III. Experience as Something Impossible

Pollesch frames the recorded rehearsal scenes with shots from "lived life" beyond the space of the theater. Although they are treated equally in the film, they do not serve to contrast theater with the immediacy of a genuine experience. The question of the real is posed differently. What is meant is "lived life, not the story you tell yourself."¹⁴ In other words, what it is about lived life that cannot be dramatized or fictionalized—the chunk of fear or desire that remains. It is a matter of experience, not to the extent that it is possible, but rather to the extent that the impossible is insistent in it. Here it becomes clear what has been lost—for the subject—through the self-techniques of testing and correcting: the *pathos* of experience, the experience that confronts and affects. In the place of experience, which can be described following Martin Heidegger as "striking up against something and indeed something that strikes us; having to take in something that comes upon us and does something to us, 'affects' us, encounters us without our complicity."¹⁵ This form of experience is increasingly replaced with a testing and experimental way of dealing with the encountered,

10 Andreas Gelhard, *Kritik der Kompetenz* (Zürich: diaphanes, 2011), 147. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

11 These are also strategies of normalization that, in the course of the "psychologization of society," serve to expand the scope of agency, to make it utilizable as a resource. Cf. Ulrich Bröckling, *Das unternehmerische Selbst: Soziologie einer Subjektivierungsform* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007), 240.

12 Giorgio Agamben, *Nudities*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford:

Stanford University Press, 2011), 44.

13 Ibid., 45.

14 René Pollesch, "Lob des alten litauischen Regieassistenten im grauen Kittel," in *Kreation und Depression: Freiheit im gegenwärtigen Kapitalismus*, ed. Christoph Menke and Juliane Rebentisch (Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2012), 245.

15 Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, Studies in Continental Thought, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2012), 124.

as though everything experienced could be made the object of one's own design. Yet experience in the actual sense, as lived experience, is not *made*, but succumbed to. It is not a project, but instead literally subjectifies—it subjects the subject to a change. There are basically two forms of experience: the form that one is subjugated to, and the form that one recounts or constructs, as an experiment, trial, and rehearsal in more or less prescribed or improvising procedures.

For Pollesch, rehearsal is not about being-subject but about trying to overcome the adversities of life by practicing a role, turning oneself into an object of a projective development, or giving in to the necessity of self-improvement. By representing art as a procedure of de-potentialization, he calls to mind what is given no scope for possibility in life: the experiences that are not made or tested as events or something we strike up against, but which can only be repeated. Theater in this sense means becoming “an actor of one's own events.” Deleuze calls this a “counter-actualization”:¹⁶ realizing the impossible through repetition and “to become worthy of what happens to us, and thus to will and release the event.”¹⁷ This in turn means becoming the actor who plays his or her own life: “To know how to affirm chance is to know how to play.”¹⁸ For Pollesch, the rehearsal has exactly this affirmative form—instead of improving oneself, the event is incorporated. As Deleuze says: “Become the man of your misfortunes, learn to embody their perfection and brilliance.”¹⁹

Translated from the German by Aileen Derieg

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16 Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 150. Deleuze develops these ideas with reference to the work by Joë Bousquet.

17 *Ibid.*, 149.

18 Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 26.

19 Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 149.

Rehearsal without Performance

Richard Ibgby and Marilou Lemmens

What would it mean to perpetuate the framework of the rehearsal and suspend the moment of the performance? Can the rehearsal break the pressure to produce by interrupting the economic cycle of supply and demand? By deferring the rehearsal from any purpose other than itself, can we interrupt a labor regime in which only purposeful production and end results are valued and everything else is considered to be superfluous, wasteful, and even parasitical?

In this essay, we consider the possibility of emancipating the rehearsal from its function as a means toward an end. In so doing, we aim to explore whether its underlying characteristics can assert a different principle of human action and inaction. The question is not only how the human capacity for creativity, play, and engagement may be unharnessed from economic valorization, but what it might mean to put serious effort into something that has no finality.

Rehearsal usually refers to the act of refining and polishing actions in view of some future performance or public happening. By doing away with the performance, the rehearsal may also function as a shielded space for testing artistic, social, and political processes. This form of rehearsal is close to the idea of “practice” in the sense of an activity that has a temporal and spatial framework that participates in the stream of process, learning, or procedure. In this regard, Julia Bryan-Wilson has noted that Herbert Marcuse’s concept of a “political practice” comes to mind as an attempt “to forge new forms of experience that move both the political and the aesthetic realm away from the automatic and the engineered.”¹

Whereas performance can be thought of as a form of production that involves imposing a predetermined idea onto materials or actions, the rehearsal places the performer as a participant among a world of active elements, open to chance events and unplanned transformations. By suspending (and not necessarily removing) the expectation of production, the rehearsal can also establish a resistance to a social order in which productivity, competition, and an unlimited desire to work (including work on the self) have become the norm.

To challenge the centrality of production and performance (in the sense of work done successfully) as orientations of life, we need to understand the forces that make them such potent spaces of identification and self-realization. As has been widely discussed, the technological, social, and political changes associated with the transition from an industrial to a postindustrial economy have transformed working conditions and produced new forms of subjectification.

¹ Julia Bryan-Wilson, “Practicing *Trio A*,” *October* 140 (Spring 2012): 66.



Fig. 4
Richard Ibgby and Marilou Lemmens,
Real failure needs no excuse, 2012

In doing so, the valuation of efficiency, maximization, and success has transcended the work place and entered the private sphere, inciting us to make our lives—and not just our work—productive, and to adopt the model of the enterprise.²

The old discipline of industrial labor, intended to train bodies and shape minds through compulsion, has been replaced by a self-governing of individuals whose own subjectivity is involved in the very activity they are required to perform.³ Political theorist Kathi Weeks writes that “post-Taylorist work processes therefore tend to require more from immaterial laborers than their sacrifice and submission, seeking to enlist their creativity and their relational and affective capacities. It is not obedience that is prized, but commitment.”⁴ Margaret Thatcher puts it more succinctly: “Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul.”⁵

This commitment, which propels workers to work for the enterprise as if they were working for themselves, or to work on themselves as if they were an enterprise, is fuelled by the subject’s desire for self-realization, but also by the new conditions of labor: precarious and contingent work schemes along with the expansion of work in the service, information, and knowledge sectors of the economy. In the arts, the attitude toward high performance culture and

changing labor conditions takes on renewed significance as the distinctive forms of artistic production no longer appear as alternatives to alienated, productive work but instead seem to epitomize the very behavior promoted by the neo-managerial regimes of postindustrial labor. Artistic work today is subject to similar pressures of flexibility, mobility, and self-management as other forms of labor, while the desire for productivity and performance has expanded to include precisely those aspects of life—social relations, sex, leisure, education, and so on—that had until recently escaped such considerations.

Even experience, which used to be thought of as the ultimate realm of one’s interiority, has developed into a new economic sector. In *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theatre and Every Business Is a Stage* (1999), B. Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore were among the first to identify experience as a specific category of the economy that supplies products distinct from services and goods.⁶ This phenomenon is particularly relevant in light of the expansion of performance in the artistic sphere and its functioning within an economy of experience for both artists and viewers.⁷ These transformations pose important questions for artistic practices and their capacity to construct sites of tension, social debate, and liberation.

With respect to these changes, artists have adopted a variety of strategies of resistance to the neoliberal rationality, including an insubordination to the work ethic, a skepticism toward the virtues of self-discipline, an unwillingness to judge success and failure, a commitment to activities that are not meant to be profitable or resist turning into a product and the undertaking of actions that cannot be restricted to the finalities of any particular project—all of which

2 Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval define the model of the enterprise: “The new government of subjects in fact presupposes that the enterprise is not in the first instance a site of human flourishing, but an instrument and space of competition. Above all, it is ideally depicted as the site of all innovation, constant change, and continual adaptation to variations in market demand, the search for excellence, and ‘zero defects.’ The subject is therewith enjoined to conform internally to this image by constant self-work or self-improvement.” Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, “The New Way of the World, Part I: Manufacturing the Neoliberal Subject,” *e-flux journal*, no. 51 (January 2014), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-new-way-of-the-world-part-i-manufacturing-the-neoliberal-subject/>.

3 Ibid.

4 Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 69–70.

5 Cited in Ronald Butt, “Mrs. Thatcher: The First Two Years,” *Sunday Times*, May 3, 1981, <http://www.margarethatcher.org/document/104475>.

6 B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theatre and Every Business a Stage* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 1999).

7 This idea is developed in José Antonio Sánchez, “Act, Realize, Manifest,” in *Per/ Form: How to Do Things with[out] Words*, ed. Chantal Pontbriand (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), 88–117.

carry with them a new kind of subversive potential. Some artists have even questioned their status as artists by retreating from exhibiting art or literally dropping out of the art world. In past decades, such gestures of retreat or refusal have taken multiple forms, but these different gestures have a common ancestor in Marcel Duchamp's refusal of the role of artist and his more generalized refusal of work—be it artistic, domestic, or wage-earning.⁸

The proposition of the rehearsal without performance participates in this exploration of the options available to artists to confront the injunction to perform and be productive. Since the neoliberal rationality aims to conquer the interiority of subjects, the exploration of alternative motives for action and inaction is intimately connected to a work on the self as an activity of self-transformation. According to Weeks, the pursuit of alternative practices and relationships may serve as “a path of separation that creates the conditions for the construction of subjects whose needs and desires are no longer as consistent with the social mechanisms within which they are supposed to be mediated and contained.”⁹ Significantly, she goes on, this proposition marks the “passage from the negative moment of refusal to its constructive moment of exit and invention marks the shift from a reactive gesture of retreat to an active affirmation of social innovation.”¹⁰

As artists working at the intersection of visual and performative arts, many of our recent projects have involved resisting the notion of a performance—in both the sense of public presentation and of engaging in productive work—as a precondition for research and art making. Our projects focus instead on an engagement with action itself. Performed actions have become the means employed in the act of questioning and affirmation, and they are, in themselves, the locus and finality of the artistic practice. This is what Giorgio Agamben defines as pure means: “A praxis that, while firmly maintaining its nature as a means, is emancipated from its relationship to an end: it has joyously forgotten its goal and can now show itself as such, as a means without an end.”¹¹

Real Failure Needs No Excuse (2012)

During the spring of 2012, we rented a space in an unoccupied office building in Glasgow. We were the first occupants to move in and in each of the offices we could still find vestiges of the building's former function: desks and office chairs, filing cabinets, dividers, fax machines and printers, whiteboard markers, flipcharts, fluorescent lighting fixtures, and so on.

Without a predefined script, we entered each of the spaces and began to film ourselves engaging in a continuous flow of improvised actions. In these actions, dividers were ordered, piled-up, and assembled in various configura-

tions. Precariously balanced structures of wooden beams, venetian blinds, and free-standing fans, visible for only a short time, collapsed (because everything, eventually, collapses) to make way for new shapes and arrangements. These operations combined equal doses of gravity-defying setups and sudden breakdowns.

As the “office workers” who appear in the video, we are obviously performers. Yet our performance is for no one. Our actions are filmed yet they are not made *for the camera*, nor are they in preparation for an eventual presentation. The actions have no objective. They simply exist in the moment during which they happen. They move forward, but they could easily be moving backward. They have no beginning, nor do they have an end. They simply go on, from one thing to the next, to the next, to the next. None of the actions ever amount to anything, yet there is a constant stream of them.

As we explored the spatial and material possibilities of the different spaces, something began to happen to how we felt in our bodies and, by extension, our relationship to the materials with which we engaged. Thrust from the role of “critical thinkers” to “embodied souls,” it was like trying on an alternative research methodology, one that Donna Haraway has called “situated knowledge.”¹² We were discovering a new form of being, one that could not be learned through reading, thinking, or any other type of cognitive process. It was a practical form of knowledge that could only be gained through doing.

The state of being we were experiencing could best be described negatively as the opposite of that which typically governs the behavior of workers (and performers) with regard to futurity, development, and the anticipation of results. In the video, the rules of engagement have been radically changed from the work contract in which one is judged according to the efficacy and effectiveness in achieving one's objectives to a performer whose behavior is

8 See Helen Molesworth and Maurizio Lazzarato on Marcel Duchamp. Duchamp's refusal of work (both domestic and artistic) has been examined by Molesworth. She writes: “This refusal to clean was memorialized in *Dust Breeding* (1920), a section of the *Large Glass* photographed by Man Ray after it had accumulated several months' worth of dust. But nowhere is Duchamp's laziness more evident than in the readymades, where he produced art with the least effort possible—buying it already made.” Helen Molesworth, “Work Avoidance: The

Everyday Life of Marcel Duchamp's Readymades,” *Art Journal* 57, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 59. See also Maurizio Lazzarato, *Marcel Duchamp and the Refusal of Work* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014).

9 Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 100.

10 Ibid.

11 Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 86.

12 Donna J. Haraway, “Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 583.

irreverent of the types of actions the space allows and prohibits. If the neoliberal rationality infiltrates minds, its deactivation originates through the body.

Our actions can be characterized as “non-goal oriented” in that they have no definite objective. One of our interests in exploring such actions is in how they elude the designation of success or failure. Indeed, when the performer precariously leans planks of wood, poles, and chairs against the walls of a narrow corridor, the buildup may be suspenseful and nerve-racking to watch, but its eventual demise cannot be considered to be a failure. Rather, they often lead to second and third attempts to build something different—no better and no worse.¹³ In this context, the concept of success and failure becomes irrelevant as the “continuous action eliminates the moment of pause or conclusion wherein efforts can be judged as successful or not.”¹⁴

Rather than sustaining capitalism’s rational and efficient productive logic, it is a form of improvisation that commits itself to intuition, chance, and, significantly, the never-ending as a value in itself. In the words of Boris Groys, “Such an action is conceived from the beginning as having no specific ending—unlike an action that ends when its goal is achieved. Thus artistic action becomes infinitely continuable.” In other words, we have left the realm of usable time and the pressed time of optimization and results. “Here the lack of time is transformed into a surplus of time—in fact, an infinite surplus of time.”¹⁵

If we can think of this performer’s actions as a kind of labor, then it is one that postpones indefinitely an end result. In its constant stream of action, of moving things, stacking them, positioning them, balancing them, it remains forever in the realm of making where nothing is ever made; in the realm of production where nothing is ever produced. The performer responds to the call to action, yet disregards the objective to perform.

Until It Is Totally Destroyed, Unrecognizable (2012)

We enter a space in which planks of wood of different sizes and shapes, ropes, bricks, and tarps are leaning against the walls, spaced out in various structural configurations or simply laid out haphazardly all over the floor. Facing one another, we synchronize our audio players and then, as if turned on by a switch, we propel ourselves into action.

For approximately forty-five minutes, we move about at a frantic pace indiscriminately stacking objects, leaning them onto each other in precarious assemblages, or displacing them from place to place. Our actions are completely improvised as we alternate between working independently, assisting one another, and undoing whatever the other one has done. At times, the



Fig. 5
Richard Ibgby and Marilou Lemmens,
Until it is totally destroyed, unrecognizable, 2012

constructions are nothing less than spectacular, teetering on the verge of collapse. At other times, they actually do collapse, crashing down into a pile of debris. Never fazed by such sudden breakdowns, we build new structures out from the very rubble in which they disintegrated.

At some point in the performance we begin to alternate reciting a libretto. The words are being piped into our ears, and we repeat what we hear in detached voices. The libretto speaks poetically about an upcoming economic and ecological crisis in terms that are quasi apocalyptic, biblical. It links the political language of slogans and speeches with the mystical language of oracles and prophecies. The text predicts the down-spiraling movement of a civilization toward its immanent downfall. When the libretto ends, so does the performance.

13 In “Worstward Ho,” Samuel Beckett famously wrote: “All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.” Samuel Beckett, *Nohow On (Company, III Seen III Said, Worstward Ho)* (London: John Calder, 1989) 101.

14 Shannon Garden-Smith, “Ways Out from Inside: Towards the Un-productive in the

Work of Richard Ibgby and Marilou Lemmens,” *Breach 2* (September 2015), http://www.ibghylemmens.com/Shannon_G-Smith-Ways_Out_from_Inside_Breach_Sept_2015.pdf.

15 Boris Groys, “Under the Gaze of Theory,” *e-flux journal*, no. 35 (May 2012): 10; <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/under-the-gaze-of-theory/>.

We stop what we are doing and walk out of the space, leaving behind the planks of wood of different sizes and shapes, ropes, bricks, and tarps leaning against the walls, spaced out in various structural configurations or simply laid out haphazardly all over the floor.

In the weeks prior to the public performance, we execute the entire sequence of actions several times a day. Each iteration begins with the materials in the exact state in which they were left at the end of the previous rehearsal. We never clean or order the materials at any point. In this manner, there is absolutely no difference between our rehearsals and the public performance. One takes up where the other has left off. The exercise becomes infinitely repeatable in a process that once begun, never returns to its starting point, yet it always starts over—a loop that does not begin or end at the same place. It is a continuous process that gets nowhere. Different every time. Again and again.¹⁶

In addition to doing away with the problem of beginnings and endings, this routine enables us to deal with the problem of the presence of spectators and their expectations; namely, for us to do something—to perform. The challenge we face is to develop a way of sharing the practice of the rehearsal in a way that does not reduce it to a *process* in the making of an event or a spectacle. The question is how to conceive of specific ways to perform actions that problematize the solicitation to be productive.

Is There Anything Left to Be Done at All? (2014)

In 2014 we were invited to undertake a residency at Trinity Square Video in Toronto, which was to culminate into an exhibition.¹⁷ Because the residency was dedicated to art production, we asked ourselves if it was possible to embrace the nonproductive without depriving ourselves of the potential to act. As artistic practices are increasingly complicit with high-performance culture in contemporary labor regimes, we were interested in discovering what would remain of the desire to act if the compulsion to produce for the sake of productivity was suspended. After breaking the links that bind intention with realization, effort with reward, we wanted to see what—if anything—there was left to do.

To explore these questions, we invited four artists—Justine Chambers (dancer, choreographer), Kevin Rodgers (visual artist), Rodrigo Marti (community-engaged artist), and Ryan Tong (hardcore singer)—to workshop the generative potential of unproductive action and expenditure in creative labor. By suspending the expectation to produce something for someone or for something, we encouraged our collaborators to engage with the desires that drive their creative practice without being oriented toward any specific purpose.

One by one, each artist arrived with some ideas about how to spend their time and some materials to use as starting points. Often, a gesture (such as marking our positions in a room), a series of improvisations (even in the most basic sense of displacing objects or our bodies in space), or an activity (such as recording and listening to sounds or watching an interview of a philosopher in a foreign language) would be followed by a conversation during which we would discuss how a “productive” orientation, expectation, or intention might have infiltrated into what had just transpired. These discussions would often influence the parameters for the following explorations. In this manner, the time we spent with our collaborators varied widely from experiment to experiment, from day to day, and from artist to artist.

By liberating a space and a time dedicated to the unproductive, the situation we set up enabled us to workshop techniques to establish other relations to the self. The kind of relations we were interested in discovering can be called heteronormative in the sense that they explore desires and norms other than those that orient the dominant rationality. They require an effort of self-observation and self-transformation that takes into account our very ways of moving, of feeling, and of having a body.

As an example, on one occasion one of the artists, Chambers, was engaged in repeating a mundane series of movements very slowly with great intentionality. She reiterated her movements over and over again until at one point she stopped. When we asked her why she had stopped, she answered, quite simply, that she had stopped caring about what she was doing.

Working with improvised actions in this manner was a way of engaging with thinking as a process. We were not interested in dealing with fully resolved problems or developed theses. We wanted to be able to experience the movement of thought in uncertain circumstances. We were interested in exploring how thinking is inseparable from the material world and from our bodies, how freedom can emerge from such a process, and how it can be chaotic and never final.

By using improvisation to test the possibilities and limits of specific principles of action (such as nonproductive production or non-goal-oriented action) through practical experiments, the project functions as a critical tool to alter the perceptions of its participants as well as a way to build political awareness

¹⁶ This is a distinction made by Diedrich Diederichsen in his essay “Living in the Loop,” *Fillip 14* (Summer 2011). This essay is a shortened version of the first chapter of *Eigenblutdoping* (Cologne: KiWi Publishing, 2008).

¹⁷ The residency and the exhibition were organized by Trinity Square Video in collaboration with the 27th Images Festival in Toronto.

among its audience. Maurizio Lazzarato argues that although engaging subjectivity within production processes represents a moment of economic capture, as subjectivity is used to create value, there also remains what he calls “a space of radical autonomy” left open to potential intervention.¹⁸ If cognitive labor participates in the production of a particular kind of subjective normalization, it still allows for the possibility of independence.

Afterward, in the exhibition we presented traces of our activities in the form of an installation that included several video sequences as well as sculptural elements, which took their cues from the forms that emerged during the process. From the start, we were aware of the contradiction that existed between our original proposition—to be nonproductive—and the fact that the whole project would result in an exhibition. In other words, our productivity consisted not only of what transpired in the studio but also what occurred when our actions were put on display. If our engagement with nonproductive action opened up a time outside of measured productive time, then it also self-reflectively revealed the impossibility of our actions of being completely independent of the normative structures of art.

However, the point for us in exploring the nonproductive was not to do nothing but to engage with, valorize, and, especially, share other principles of action. We wanted people viewing the installation to feel the richness of what is possible while remaining unproductive—even if the sharing itself contradicted the intentions of the whole project. Ironically, then, the success of our experiment led to our failure to fully release action from productivity.

Is there anything left to be done at all? demonstrates how non-goal-oriented action can bring the work of art and its conditions of production and presentation into focus. The nonwork done in the studio and the ensuing exhibition offer examples of how actions radically different from work in their temporal, spatial, aesthetic, and operational logic may help artists generate a critique that highlights the contradictory labor situation in which they find themselves.

In all three works presented, we have defined rehearsal without performance as a form of “nonproductive production,” a mode of artistic engagement that deliberately detaches itself from actual performance. Such an approach enables artists to participate in the logic that governs the structures of art and culture, while at the same time confronting them to their rules. Rehearsal without performance is founded on the idea of interrupting the primacy of productivity to remove the creative process from a utilitarian and instrumental paradigm. By loosening the compulsion of high-performance culture, it enables artists to mobilize other desires, to replace the feeling that

“there is nothing left to be done” with a field of possibilities where “everything remains to be done.”



Fig. 6
Richard Ibghy and Marilou Lemmens,
Is there anything left to be done at all?, 2014

18 Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labour,” in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 139.

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Upheaval in the Despot's Wake Rehearsal and Drawing in the Work of Tamar Getter

Susanne Leeb

I. Process-Based Art

At first glance, the art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries seems to offer no basis for an inquiry into the conjunction of drawing and rehearsal. In earlier centuries, the preparatory drawing, the oil sketch, the test print, and similar forms occupied a well-established preliminary position vis-à-vis the finished work of art, but regarding such genres as mere precursor stages went out of style around the mid-twentieth century. Explicit confirmation of their ascent came in 1966, when Mel Bochner's exhibition "Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art" featured preliminary drawings, sketches, and diagrams as fully valid works of art; by the same token, it dismantled a notion of art fixated on mastery and originality. In the twentieth century, preliminariness, retrospective alteration, intermediate stages, and incompleteness became constitutive features of artistic praxis. For example, underdrawings function as a visible part of the work in contemporary approaches to painting, as in Thomas Eggerer's work (fig. 7). Amy Sillman, who used to document various stages of the genesis of her paintings in photographs, now creates painterly animated films on her mobile phone.

Moreover, the drawing is no longer evidence of the spiritual origin of form: in the twentieth century, it turned into a symptom of processes that are opaque to the artist herself or himself. Art historian Barbara Wittmann has noted that, starting around 1900, the cerebral tradition of *disegno* took on a new and distinctly physical cast. Since then, she writes, the drawing no longer represents the *idea* rendering the hand subservient to the mind. Instead, what matters is that which manifests itself *by virtue* of the hand. "In the blind spot of this 'not-knowing,' however," Wittmann adds, "the hand can now be conceived as an



Fig. 7
Thomas Eggerer,
Regatta, 2009

instrument that is capable of surprising the mind and [...] anticipates ideas."¹ This turnaround is one major reason for the pedagogical and artistic interest in "illiterate" scribbles around 1900.²

The art historian Hans Cürliis pioneered the shift of attention from graphic form to the process of drawing in the academic study of art. Starting in 1923, he made a cycle of short films titled *Schaffende Hände* (*Creative Hands*) for which he recorded numerous artists as they worked on drawings.³ Where Cürliis turned the spotlight on the hand, more recent artistic tendencies, especially since the 1950s, found their originating impulse in the tensions between body, ground, and material.⁴ Abandoning the ideal of the masterstroke, they attributed creative significance to accident, to lapses or bodily unknowing.⁵ So process-based drawing evinces features that Buchmann, Lafer, and Ruhm, taking their cue from Hans-Thies Lehmann, have identified as the characteristic traits of the post-dramatic: a performative aesthetic in which "the text is put in a particular relation to the material situation of the performance and the stage," a relation they specify as "variation, repetition, augmentation, nonfinality."⁶ This kind of focus on process is the opposite of what, for centuries, the drawing stood for: "Graphic contour, modeling, chiaroscuro—all varia of drawing's techniques—work against this model of process in consolidating form."⁷ In this context, preliminary solutions and intermediate stages as dissolutions of form represent distinctive temporal registers of the aesthetic or an analysis of mastership motivated by feminist and other critiques.

II. Un/Working

The expansive ensembles created by the Tel Aviv-based artist Tamar Getter (b. 1953) stand as a paradigmatic illustration of what it means to conceive of drawing as "rehearsal"—the term she has used to describe the specific painterly and graphic practice she has pursued since the 1970s.⁸ A central element in Getter's work is what is often called "body knowledge" (remembered and stored conventions and information) in its relation to unknowing, as when the body responds differently to certain materials depending on variations in its own condition as well as contingent circumstances. She trains herself to produce ideal compositional solutions she then performs, rather than executes, in the acts of painting and drawing—in works made in the studio as well as others she produces directly on the walls of exhibition spaces. As part of Bernardo Montet's play *Ma'Lov* at the Théâtre de la Bastille, in 1998, she and a troupe of dancers executed a live drawing performance on stage. Yet unlike practices that aim for a perfect reproduction of what the artist has trained him or herself to do—and here lies the difference between Getter's approach and similar memorization-based techniques⁹—hers is designed to engender deviations for which there exists no standard of rightness. Rehearsal, in her view,

serves not to improve or correct but to make room for the act of making, which must be initiated afresh from instant to instant. Getter's work is about the power of subjectivation inherent in ideal bodies, be they physical, artistic, geometric, or social, and of a resistance, remainder, or retraction that manifests itself in variance. What it thus brings into view are moments of "defiance" or disobedience to rules: in art as in other endeavors, the body refuses to be disciplined, down to the last fiber, in the pursuit of mastery.

Not coincidentally, bodies of all kinds are pivotal to Getter's work. In *Chalices and Corpses* (2010; fig. 8), for example, different views of bodies are arranged around a perfectly straight central line. It anchors the floating bodies in the pictorial space, without assigning them to a concrete location. The large-format cycle—executed on panels of cotton polyester, the drawings together measure twelve by eighty-five feet—iterates and varies two motifs: a male nude inspired by Andrea Mantegna's *Lamentation of Christ* (ca. 1480) as the embodiment of the art of perspective drawing, and a complex geometric body. The latter, too, is modeled on a masterpiece of perspective: a design drawing for a chalice by Paolo Uccello, from 1450. As Getter sees it, Uccello's study represents the "eternal dream of an intelligible, measurable, lucid, applicable and total order"¹⁰—an ideal she contrasts with her own "song of an idiot."¹¹

- 1 Barbara Wittmann, "Zeichnen, im Dunkeln: Psychophysiologie einer Kulturtechnik um 1900," in *Randgänge der Zeichnung*, ed. Werner Busch, Olivia Jehle, and Carolin Meister (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2007), 186. Unless otherwise noted, all translations by Gerrit Jackson.
- 2 See Christian Driesen et al., eds., *Über Kritzeln: Graphismen zwischen Schrift, Bild, Text und Zeichen* (Zurich: diaphanes, 2012).
- 3 See Toni Hildebrandt, "Die Zeichnung als Öffnung der Form," in *Suchen, Entwerfen, Stiften: Randgänge zum Entwurfsdenken Martin Heideggers*, ed. David Espinet and Toni Hildebrandt (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2014), 55–69. For a catalogue of extant films by Cürliis, see <http://www.filmblatt.de/index.php?filmdokument-20>.
- 4 See Wolfram Pichler and Ralph Ubl, "Vor dem ersten Strich: Dispositive der Zeichnung in der modernen und vormodernen Kunst," in Busch, Jehle, and Meister, *Randgänge der Zeichnung*, 231–55.
- 5 On the historiography of graphic practice since the 1950s, see the forthcoming book by Toni Hildebrandt, *Entwurf und Entgrenzung: Kontradispositive der*

Zeichnung 1955–1975 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2016).

- 6 See the introduction to the present volume, 10–20.
- 7 Pamela Lee, "Some Kind of Duration: The Temporality of Drawing as Process Art," in *Afterimage: Drawing through Process*, ed. Cornelia Butler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 27.
- 8 Two major exhibition catalogues raisonnés contain extensive documentation of Getter's cycles: *Tamar Getter: Can You Draw a Circle Freehand?* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2009) and *Tamar Getter Go2 / Works 1974–2010* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2010).
- 9 Consider, for example, the painter Karl Otto Götz, who studied very defined physical movements in order to lend them permanent form in a painterly act. Unlike Getter, Götz aimed for the accomplished work: he wanted to hit the mark of perfection.
- 10 Tamar Getter in "Sarah Breitberg-Semel Interviews Tamar Getter about Boulevard Central and the Asiatic Company Building Q3," in *Can You Draw a Circle Freehand?*, 59.
- 11 Tamar Getter, e-mail message to author, March 12, 2016.

She studied the original for weeks, drawing without aids and correcting her mistakes countless times over. She also worked with the architect Hagai Nagar to create a digital reconstruction of the chalice, transforming the drawing into a virtual object capable of being rotated and depicted from many different views. Besides Uccello's version, she selected one perspective—an almost dead-on top view—to use in her drawing installation. Now Getter embarked on the absurd quest—hence the quip “song of an idiot”—to reproduce two views of a geometric body not by means of perspective, using vanishing lines, but by memorizing the relative placement of hundreds of quadrilaterals. She then drew each of the views—Uccello's and her own—magnified several times over on the fabric panels in two different techniques. In one instance, the object is generated in purely mechanical fashion, using a projector and chalk line, while the other is an unaided freehand drawing.¹² Yet despite the precision of the chalk line, the weeks she spent studying Uccello's drawing, and the painstaking learning process in which she trained herself to recreate its structure, Getter ultimately failed to produce a flawless depiction of the chalice at this size. Each lapse entrained several more, as well as numerous efforts to remedy them, which have left smudged traces on the fabric. Her work of art, then, consists not in her command of the mathematical formula but in probing the limitations that her own body imposes on the mechanical emulation of an ideal and the variations it spawns. The iteration and variation of bodies in her work are not the marks of a serial approach; on the contrary, embracing the deviations that her own body authors gives rise to a singular outcome. “Each error,” she notes, “provides another ‘picture’ of singularity.”¹³ Such “overachievement,”¹⁴ the variation of the views, and more generally, the proposed appropriation of an ideal or masterwork and the errors left uncorrected



Fig. 8
Tamar Getter, *Chalices and Corpses*, 2010

deflate the metaphysics of the ideal solid, linked by metonymy to the artist's own body.

The “corpses” after Mantegna, meanwhile—captured in brisk freehand lines, in several stages of rotation around their own axis, they might serve to demonstrate the idiom of the virtuoso sketch artist—evinces a different difficulty. Though there are no errors, the contours of the figures are far from clear. This peculiarity is due, for one, to the fact that Getter set herself the challenge of drawing the body without lifting the pencil, which, given the fact that the pictures are larger than life by a factor of three, turned out to be beyond her physical ability, whence the frequent interruptions of the line. Moreover, as a consequence of this self-inflicted defeat, the ideal of the perfect continuous contour unmarred by graphic detours, by twists, circles, and loops, proved unattainable. Mantegna's divine figure forfeits its “beautiful” and spiritual contour.

Other works by Getter rely less on variation or rotation than on iterations of one and the same view. Her selection of motifs suggests that her interest is invariably in the moments of maximum tension; see, for instance, the rendition of Auguste Rodin's sculpture *Iris* in her *Blindfold Iris* (figs. 9, 10). Another striking example is *Horse's Tail* (2012; figs. 11, 12), a work on four walls that features the graphic depiction of a key moment in an acrobatic performance, among other elements. Two facing walls show an acrobat upside down in a shoulder stand on one side of a galloping horse. The third wall is taken up by an oversized depiction of the titular horse's tail, which, far from being an artfully undulating embellishment, is an outrageously extravagant creation of pure excess—at one point, the artist had to work with a broom to master its enormous size. The image of a thistle on the fourth wall is a construction composed of hundreds of straight lines for which the artist once more resorted to the chalk line. As in *Chalices and Corpses*, these disparate elements—the heterogeneity of their sensual appeal is matched by the diversity of techniques: chalk drawing, chalk line, sponges, broom—are connected by a single straight line to engender an “imaginary space where all ‘happens’ no matter the

12 The chalk line is a printing technique used in construction. A string coated with pigment is strung between two points, pulled tight, stretched, and released, leaving a perfectly straight line marked on the surface beneath it.

13 Getter, “Sarah Breitberg-Semel Interviews Tamar Getter,” 58.

14 On “overachievement” and exaggeration in Getter, see Jonathan Soen, “Towards a Second Creation: Footnotes to Tamar Getter,” in *Tamar Getter Go2*, 476–89.



Fig. 9
Tamar Getter, *Blindfold Iris*, 2000



Fig. 10
Tamar Getter, *Blindfold Iris*, 2000

different scale of things.”¹⁵ The line defines the space of the pictorial act, the artist's scope of action, and the arena of drawing and painting. As in other works, the preparatory drawings related to this drawing and painting installation witness to the artist's efforts to internalize a discipline. Numerous sketches show her trying to memorize the union of rider and horse evoked, in this instance, by the horseback-riding acrobat's artistry. To gather material for the action in the drawings, Getter studied YouTube videos of young male riders trying to show off their physical skills. In her work, however, this demonstration of virtuoso horsemanship takes on a confusing and grotesque aspect. In what the beholder can no longer make sense of as individualized form, Getter brings down the chalk for countless tentative dashes, repeating the figural ensemble in an interminable rehearsal until the wall is covered with marks. The methodical principle of excessive richness of detail reappears in a painting installation she is currently working on, *Heliotrop'*. (2016). Here, one of the three pictorial elements is an oversized horse rolling over. The drawing captures the precise



Fig. 11
Tamar Getter,
Horse's Tail, 2012

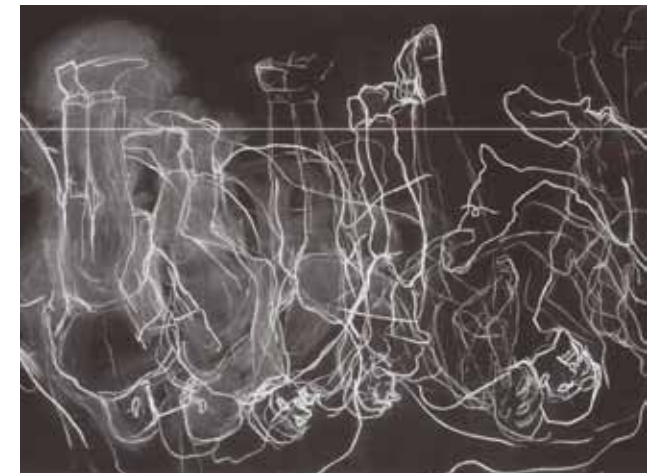


Fig. 12
Tamar Getter,
Horse's Tail (detail), 2012

15 Getter, e-mail to author, February 29, 2016.

moment at which the animal's vulnerability and ponderous mass are most apparent, contrasting with the power, beauty, and agility the horse has conventionally epitomized in old master paintings. Getter heightens the difficulty of depicting this precarious instant by magnifying the depiction to a size at which the contour of the otherwise noble animal disintegrates (fig. 13).

Getter's works stage the fascinating yet self-defeating pursuit of the ideal of perfection as a source of necessary frustration; they are creative acts that both appropriate and reject the idea of artistic genius embodied in the hand. Highly trained skill remains operative but is demystified. Virtuosity—be it Uccello's, be it that of the village lad performing stunts on horseback—is both put on display, highlighting the ambition to impress bound up with it, and dislodged. To see how this approach breaks with tropes of artistry, a brief comparison to drawings by Willem de Kooning is instructive. In their facture, Getter's works evince similarities to de Kooning's so-called *Twist* drawings (1966),¹⁶ a set of—mostly female—figures he drew with his eyes closed, producing irregular and errant contours. Getter, too, often has an assistant blindfold her before drawing models she has memorized in long periods of study; the lack of visual control inevitably yields the deviations, mistakes, and slips described above.¹⁷ De Kooning believed that this unusual technique would allow him to surprise his own eye;¹⁸ Getter, by contrast, dramatizes the reproduction



Fig. 13
Tamar Getter,
Heliotrop., 2016

of content committed to memory as an artistic trope. In the nineteenth century, Baudelaire argued that the ability to draw from memory was the hallmark of the "true artist": "In fact all true draughtsmen draw from the image imprinted in their brain and not from nature. [...] When a true artist has reached the stage of the final execution of his work, the model would be more of an embarrassment to him than a help."¹⁹ Instead, aiming for "true art" in the Baudelairean sense, Getter positively exorcises finality from her works.

In addition, the artist bids farewell not only to the perennial female model, but also to the conventional register of expression: her compositional formulations are demonstratively rehearsed. All that finds expression here are the body and the recalcitrance of the material, which refuse to be brought into line and bear responsibility for the inaccuracies and lapses. She also dismantles the myth of the artist's hand, which was essential to the art of drawing in particular, and invoked by graphic artists down to de Kooning. To this effect, Getter employs a wide-ranging arsenal of means of production, from spirographs, sponges, brooms, and strings dusted with pigment to the physical impediments she imposes on herself. The resulting aspects of incompleteness and fragmentation on the level of formal execution correspond to the grotesque creatures and poses on the level of motif.

Contradicting the twentieth-century discourses of liberation associated with the free or self-guided hand, Getter's lines are trammelled by the tension between freedom and discipline. Such discourses of liberation were proffered, for instance, by the theorists of "pure gestuality" (Giorgio Agamben),²⁰ "dancing typography" (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari),²¹ or the choreographic ideal of freely swaying bodies and lines (Loïe Fuller). Getter's works, by contrast, uncover the rules, conventions, and models that are inscribed in the nexus of bodies and artistic ideals, as is also suggested by her account of how she assimilated Rodin's *Iris*: "I studied the sculpture. I went to this museum and did round tour drawings (classical copies in different media; sanguine, pencils,

16 See Richard Schiff, "'Mit geschlossenen Augen': De Koonings 'Twist,'" in *Spuren erzeugen: Zeichnen und Schreiben als Verfahren der Selbstaufzeichnung*, ed. Barbara Wittmann (Zurich: diaphanes, 2009), 145–68.

17 "To work blindfolded, use scrapers, squeegees, chalk-line plumb, spirograph—all these tools enable the suspension that I seek. I create situations in which the 'know-how' aspect of traditional painting is made irrelevant, or rather—secondary." Getter in "Sarah Breitberg-Semel Interviews Tamar Getter," 39. For a more extensive discussion of the element of non-seeing in

Getter's work, see my essay, "Figuren der Blindheit in der Kunst von Javier Téllez, James Coleman und Tamar Getter," in *Anderes Wissen*, ed. Kathrin Busch (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2016), 206–40.

18 See Schiff, "'Mit geschlossenen Augen.'" 19 Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," in *Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, trans. Patrick Edward Charvet (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 407.

chalks, water-colors etc., just to understand Rodin better). After that, I continued with my regular schedules: only contours, only one-line, correcting only from former drawing, abandoning anatomy, abandoning all former drawings, closing my eyes to perform her blindfolded, once again, and then again and again, doing this or that aspect (angle) of the infinite angles, composing Iris in my hand, memory, and own body."²² This time-consuming and painstaking process, which privileges conscientious emulation over originality, exemplifies how Getter arrives at her compositional formulations, or in other words, the genesis of her repertoire. It is only on the basis of this assimilation-through-training that the subsequent "disappropriation" (Derrida) of the memorized form takes place.

III. The Physiology of Learning

Getter's practice not only reacts against an overpowering tradition of mostly masculinist myths and stereotypical ideas about the artist since the Renaissance. She also intervenes into the abovementioned historic transformation of graphic art in conjunction with the rise, around 1900, of a physiological conception of the optimizable body, which is to say, into the nexus between body and knowledge. For *Ma'Lov*, for instance, she combined the motif of the perfect circle of the Giotto legend, here drawn on the stage by the dancers in a live act of art making, with the reception of that legend in reform pedagogy (figs. 14, 15). The crucial object is the freehand drawing of a perfect circle that, according to Giorgio Vasari, was taken to prove that Giotto's genius was



Fig. 14
Tamar Getter, stage design and
live drawing for *Ma'Lov*, 1998

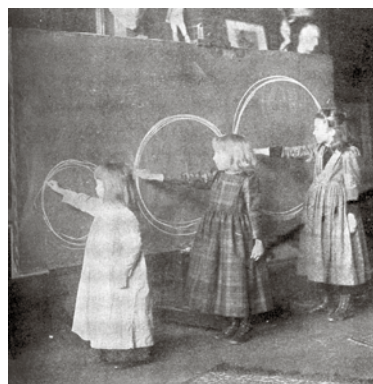


Fig. 15
James Liberty Tadd, *New Methods in
Education*, 1899

manifest already in childhood. The freehand drawing—sometimes executed with both hands—was an important element in the reform pedagogy of the American educator James Liberty Tadd, who believed that "practical development of the factors of the organism itself—the hand, the eye and the brain—by the acquisition of their conscious control" would help the child acquire "facility, balance, proportion, accuracy, magnitudes, fitness and grace."²³ The skilled imitation of the world ceases to be the primary objective of drawing, as Tadd's colleague Joseph Vaughan writes: "The end and aim is the training of hand and eye, and also of the brain, in conjunction with one another."²⁴ These arguments reflect the insight that there is no knowledge without the body; mental ability must be *trained into* the body, which becomes the scene in which practices of subjectification are enacted. In this light, it makes obvious sense to read Getter's critical engagement with ideal bodies in connection with (modern) techniques of subjectification.

Where reform pedagogy aimed to intertwine memory and the sensorimotor apparatus in order to achieve embodied knowledge, such knowledge, in Getter, emerges as a source of error—the body becomes the blind spot that is made to appear in the process of drawing. Getter says: "Painting radically attacks the status of our knowledge and memory as its foundation. In this sense, to draw blindfolded [...] always means to re-stumble, because construction by memory initially fails."²⁵ It is not perfection but the body's unknowing that here unlocks an artistic dimension.

Moreover, the pointed interest in drawing in reform pedagogy is embedded in two broader historic transformations. On the one hand, it is part of the "experimentalization of life,"²⁶ in which drawing and graphic recording emerge as major techniques of the registration of movement and vitality, making them amenable to both scientific inquiry and to optimization conformable to the increasing division of labor. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, organic motion came to be regarded as a crucial indication of life, which is to say, as

20 See Giorgio Agamben, "Notes on Gesture," in *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 49–60.

21 "'Graphie' is the term Deleuze/Guattari coined, with critical reference to Leroi-Gourhan and Worringer, to designate the quality of a writing that retains its intrinsic tactile, kinetic, and visual values, that still 'dances.'" Georg Witte, "Die Phänomenalität der Linie—graphisch und graphematisch," in Busch, Jehle, and Meister, *Randgänge der Zeichnung*, 31n5.

22 Getter, e-mail to author, January 22, 2012.

23 James Liberty Tadd, *New Methods in Education: Art, Real Manual Training, Nature Study* (New York: Judd, 1899), 4–5.

24 Joseph Vaughan, *Nelson's New Drawing Course* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1903), 12.

25 Getter, "Sarah Breitberg-Semel Interviews Tamar Getter," 41.

26 Michael Hagner and Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, eds., *Die Experimentalisierung des Lebens: Experimentalsysteme in den biologischen Wissenschaften 1850/1950* (Berlin: Akademie, 1993).

an object of biological and physiological knowledge.²⁷ “Whatever moves, whatever merely stirs, is registered, noted down, and recorded in writing without recourse to the symbolic order of the alphabet.”²⁸ By the same token, drawing was now understood in anthropological terms, as a universal human activity, and more particularly as a basal means man uses to apprehend his world. This physiological reconception of drawing and its discovery by anthropology promised to provide a diagnostic tool for the classification of psychological stages and the detection of subjective deviance—for example, drawing practice was used in psychiatry,²⁹ while (colonialist) scholars studied the graphic art of indigenous peoples to assess their “mental capacity.”³⁰

Getter's project thus interacts not only with art history, but also with traditions in social and cultural history, focusing on techniques of power and practices of the body associated with the disciplinary society and biopolitics. Her work highlights the extent to which art is itself pervaded by strategies and mechanisms of subjectivation. In this respect, Getter's interest in systemic forms of deviation also bears close relation to what Félix Guattari, in *Chaosmosis*, has called “refrain” (*ritournelle*).³¹ The term designates the “invention of novel catalytic foyers [...] capable of letting existence ramify.”³² “The aesthetic-processual model of art as producing or simulating worlds,” Stefan Hesper concludes, “becomes a model for all disciplines that envisage virtualities and chaos beyond the confines of finite and actual forms.”³³ Getter's approach reflects similar considerations by localizing upheaval and chaos in bodies and materials that defy disciplinary submission. The act of performance, in this regard, represents the possibility of “escaping from the serialized and standardized production of subjectivity”³⁴—a possibility that must forever be established a new, as Maurizio Lazzarato has emphasized in an essay on Guattari's and Deleuze's theory of machines. That is exactly what Getter does, constructing one of those (political, economic, and aesthetic) apparatuses in which, to quote Lazzarato again, “this existential transformation can be tested—a politics of experimentation, not representation.”³⁵ It might be argued that such a conception of aesthetics hews uncomfortably close to the experimentalization of life in the natural sciences sketched above;³⁶ yet the objective, in Getter as much as Guattari, is not purposive optimization but to chart a possible way to extract a segment of the real and deterritorialize it. That is why errors are articulated rather than effaced. Getter generates such procedures we may describe, with Guattari, as “agents of aesthetic partial enunciation” by demonstratively embracing bodily unknowing. In this manner, her art unfolds a space of (chaotic) excess that is apt to stage not the drama of the artist's hand but the comedy of variance.

Translated from the German by Gerrit Jackson

- 27 See the foundational study by Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock, 1970), especially chapter 10 titled “The Human Sciences.” Foucault writes: “It is upon the projected surface of biology that man appears as a being possessing *functions*—receiving stimuli (physiological ones, but also social, interhuman, and cultures ones), reacting to them” (p. 357).
- 28 Stephan Rieger, *Schall und Rauch: Eine Mediengeschichte der Kurve* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009), 9.
- 29 On the uses of drawing in psychiatry, see several of the contributions in Wittmann, *Spuren erzeugen*.
- 30 On “indigenous drawing,” see the chapter “Indigenes Zeichnen” in Joachim Rees, *Die verzeichnete Fremde: Formen und Funktionen des Zeichnens im Kontext europäischer Forschungsreisen 1770–1830* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2015).

- 31 See Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. Paul Baines and Julian Pefanis (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1995).
- 32 Stefan Hesper, *Schreiben ohne Text: Die prozessuale Ästhetik von Gilles Deleuze und Félix Guattari* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1994), 102.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Maurizio Lazzarato, “The Machine,” trans. Mary O'Neill, *eipcp*, December 2006, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1106/lazzarato/en>.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 See, for example, Herbert Molderings, *Duchamp and the Aesthetics of Chance: Art as Experiment*, trans. John Brogden (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

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The Common Reader

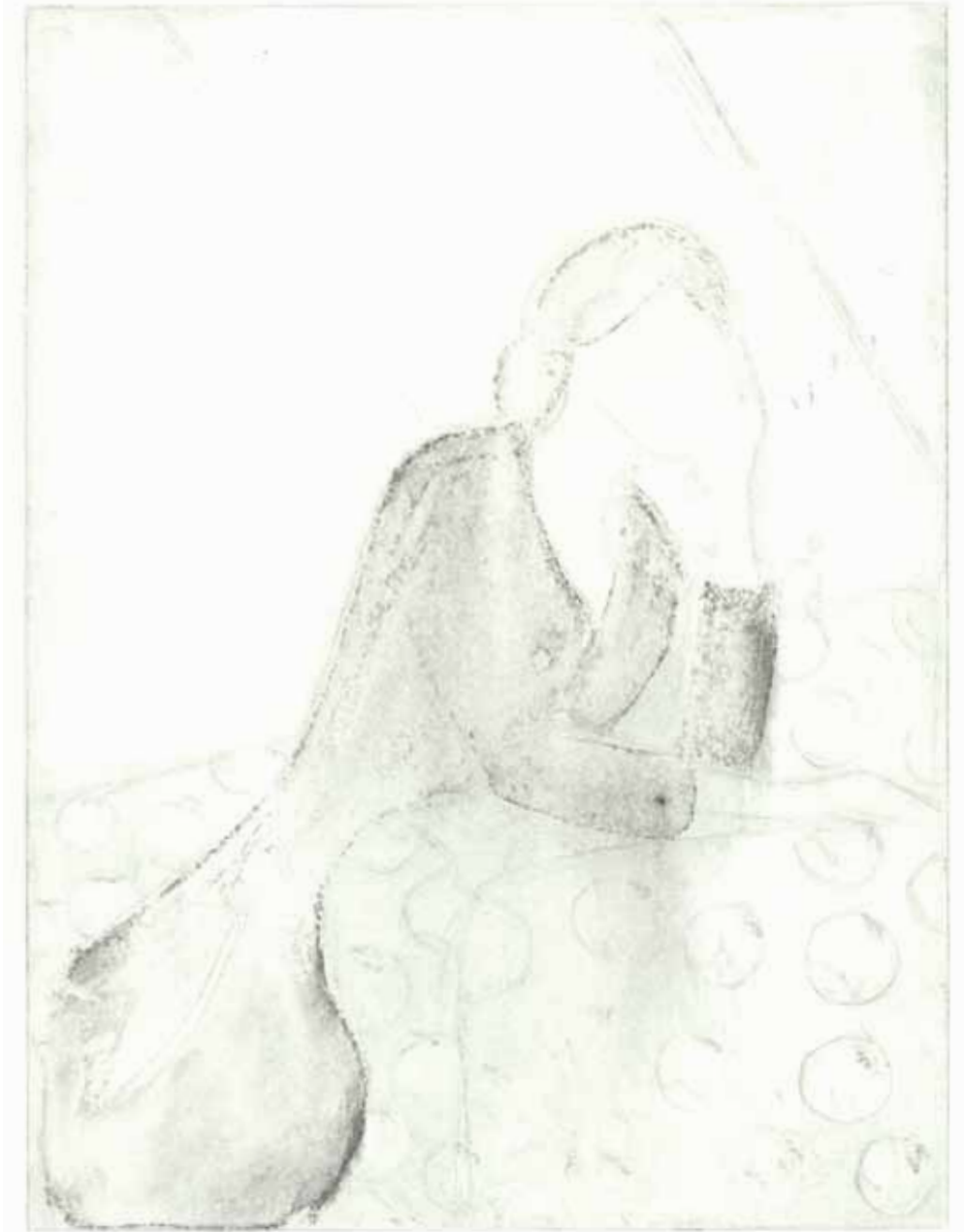
Limited edition of unique etchings, ink on paper, made on Captiva Island, Florida, 2015

Silke Otto-Knapp

The print motif in the series of etchings titled “The Common Reader” refers to a photograph of Virginia Woolf sitting in an armchair. She is posing for a photograph: she rests her head on her hand and looks away from the camera. Woolf has been photographed many times in similar poses, often holding a book or a cigarette. The wide armchair is upholstered with a bold graphic pattern, designed by the Omega workshop—a design enterprise operating between 1913 and 1919 in London, which was founded by members of the Bloomsbury group, and included Woolf’s sister, the painter Vanessa Bell.

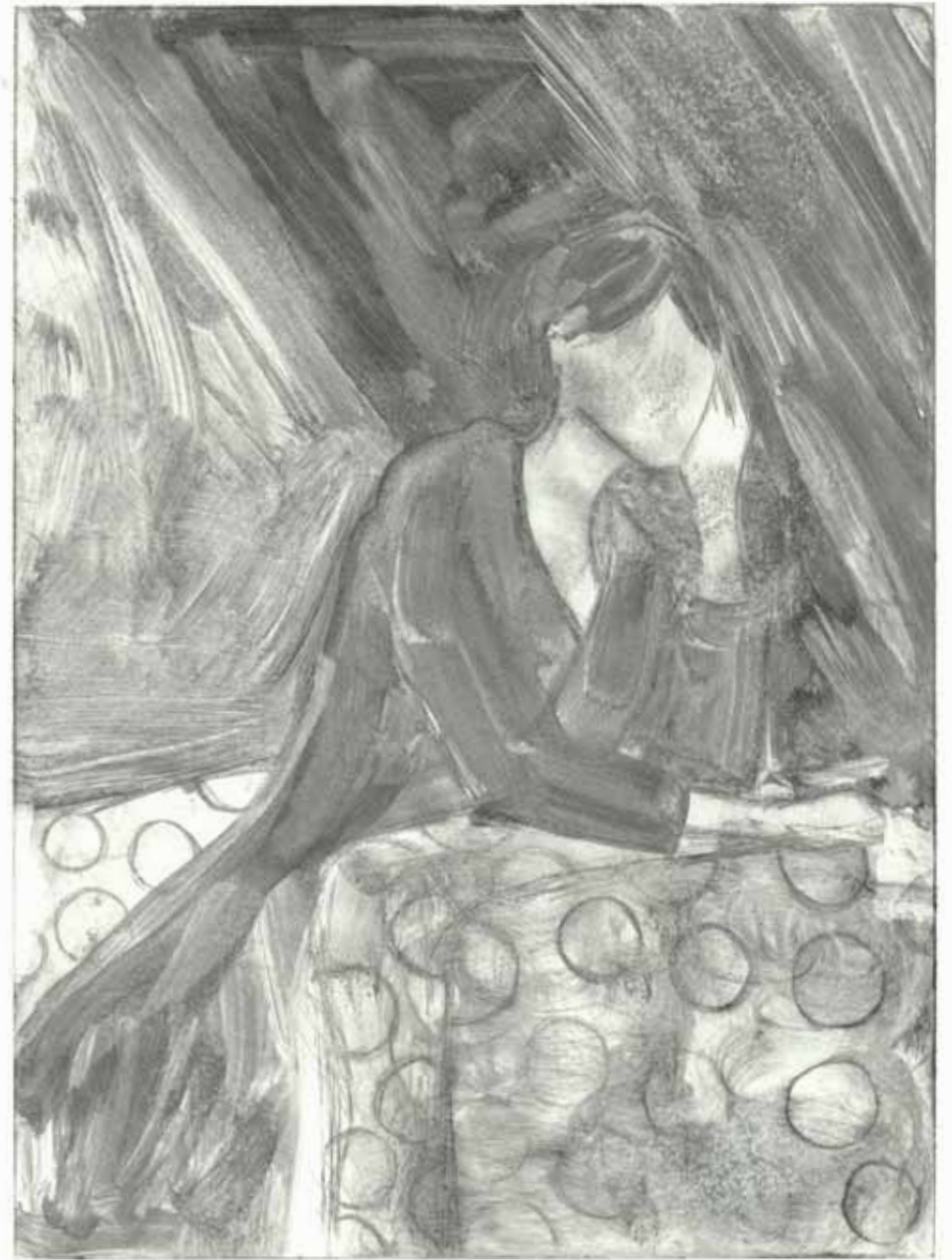
In the group of prints, this motif is adapted into a line drawing etched onto the plate that forms the constant element in a series that documents a process that is evolving and changing. During the printing process, the plate is inked up, wiped, and reworked with brushmarks, pours, washes, and wipes that change the image from print to print. Each print reacts to the one that was made before. The line drawing provides the text, and the printing process is used to test, change, and interpret it.

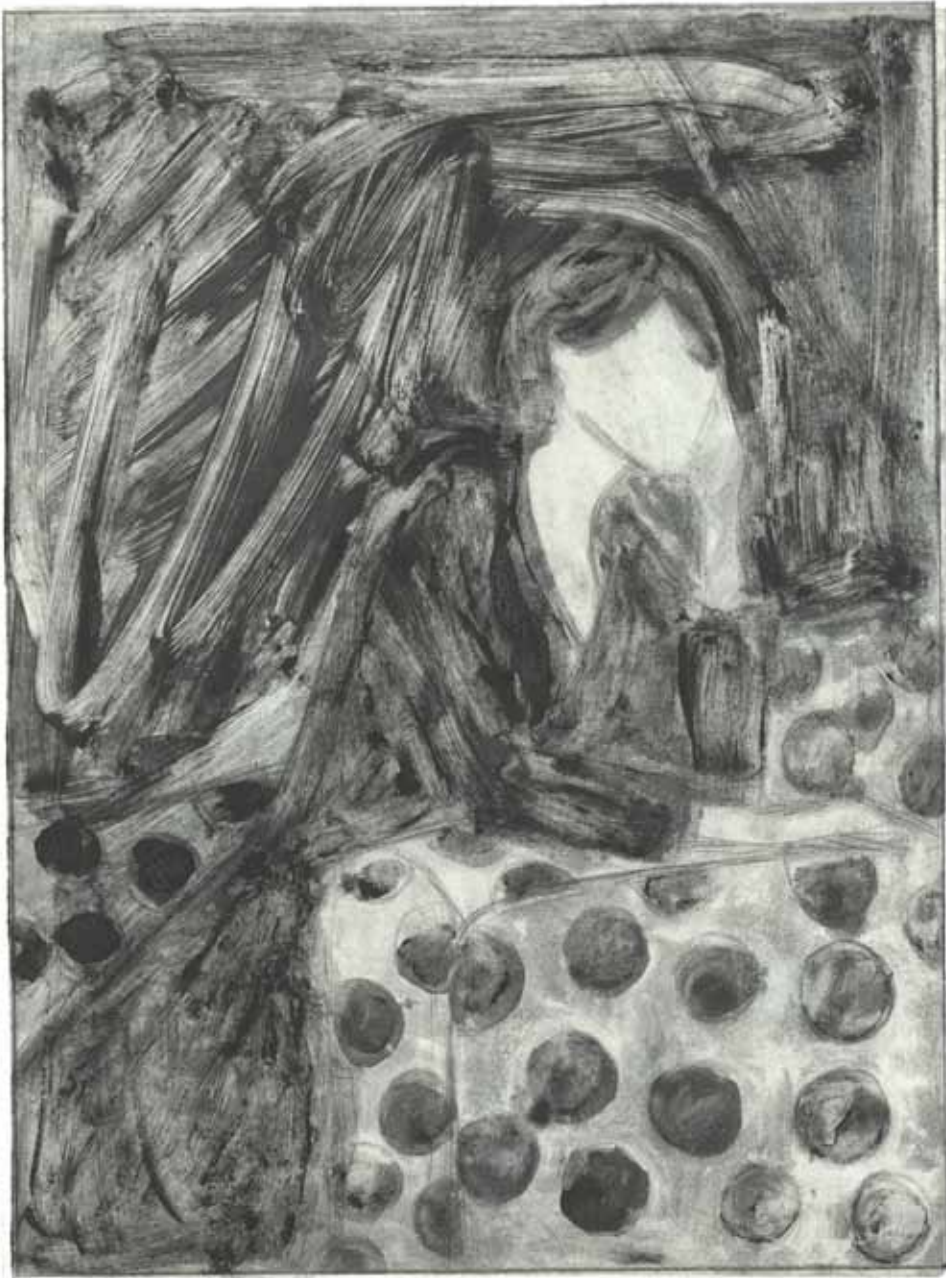
Instead of producing identical prints, the process of alteration and reaction—of rehearsal—is documented.

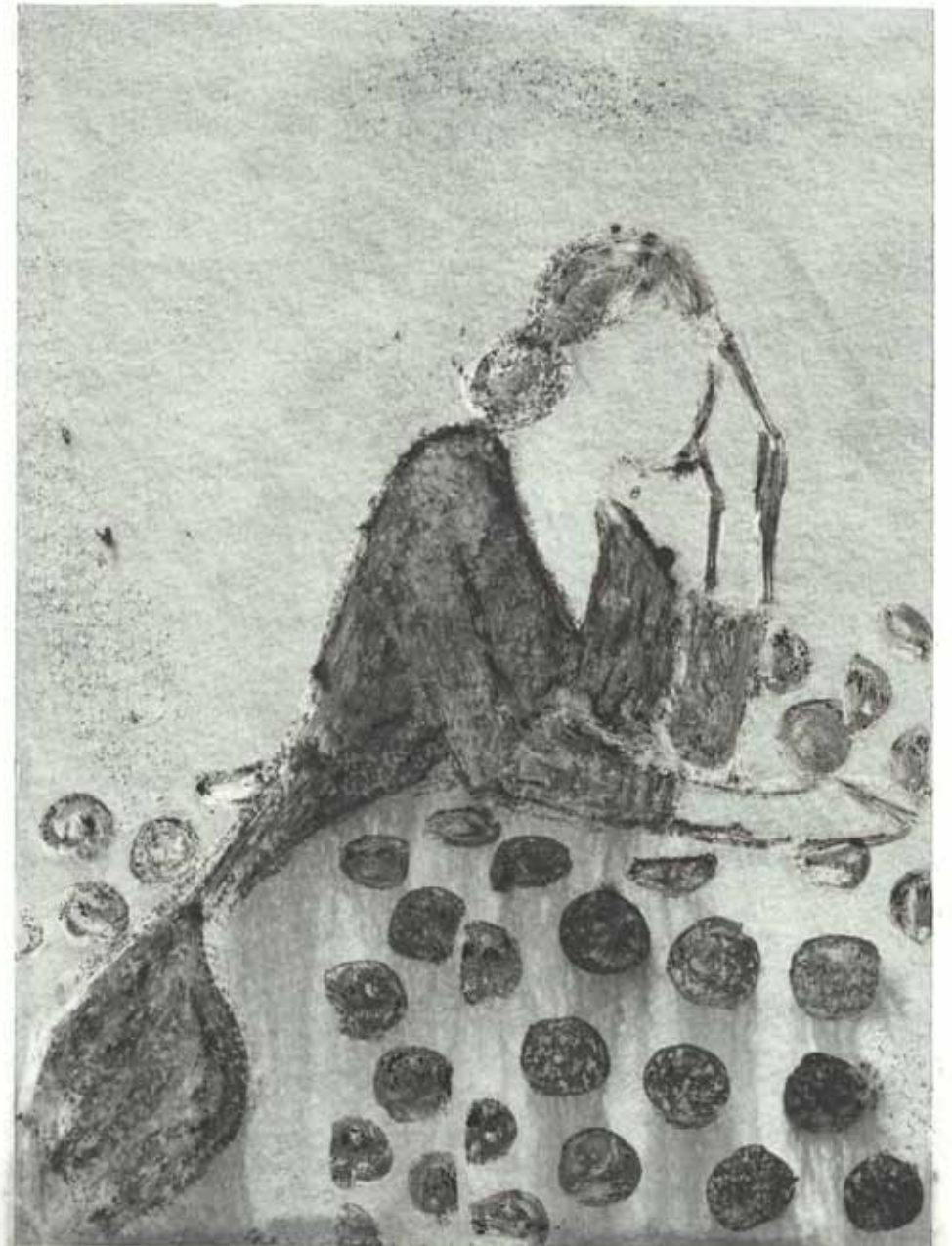


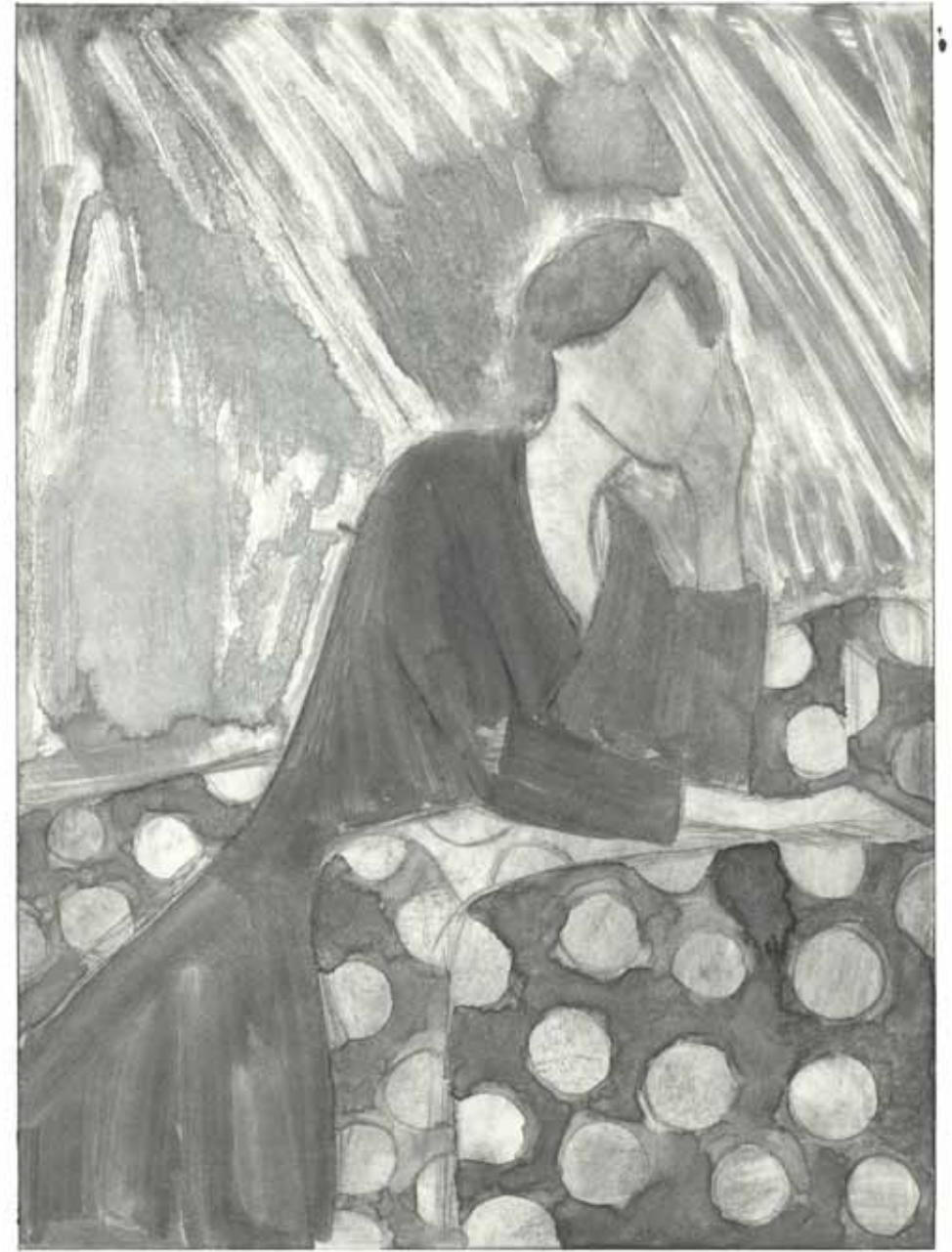
Figs. 16-26
Silke Otto-Knapp,
"The Common Reader," 2015











The Rehearsal as Form

An Essay on Yvonne Rainer's *Lives of Performers*

Jenny Nachtigall and Dorothea Walzer

To the crackling white noise of an old recording, *Lives of Performers* (1972) starts with rehearsal footage from *Walk, She Said* (1972). Then the voices set in: stage directions, though not synched to the images, introduce the kind of temporal dissonances that will define the film's syncopated structure. Unfolding through the minor form of the melodrama, the film shifts from the detemporalized mythical framework of classical drama to the private, mundane purview of emotions and sensations in the not so recent past; it shifts to a narrative of the performer's emotional entanglement during a rehearsal, and the inextricable relation between its reality and fictionalization. In the course of the film, the cliché plot of a heterosexual love triangle and its melodramatic form are progressively dissembled, thoroughly examined, and put to the test as it were.

If we assumed that "Rainer moved from dance to film in order to secure a space for reflection," to keep "emotive engulfment" at bay, wouldn't her return to choreography in 1999 appear as somewhat of a lapse? What if she actually never really left dance in the first place? If we depart from the proposition that the rehearsal does not only serve as the starting point of *Lives of Performers'* melodramatic narrative,² but functions as the work's *modus operandi*, Rainer's debut film could be seen in a different light: marking not so much her move from dance to film, but rather its displacement. In what follows, we want to suggest that the rehearsal operated as the medium of this displacement and that the film's narrative and structure have to be understood through it.³ Theodor W. Adorno's perspective in "The Essay as Form" will serve as a springboard for testing this hypothesis. By mediating the levels of epistemology and representation, it allows, on the one hand, to conceive Rainer's film-essay as a rehearsal form, an aesthetic and social mode of practice that has to be located within the transition between research and learning. On the other hand, reframing the rehearsal as an actualization of the essay will enable understanding it as a medium premised on the (re)production of art rather than the quasi-ontological formalism of Greenbergian descent, and thus as contemporary in a specific sense.

1 Noël Carroll, "Moving and Moving: From Minimalism to *Lives of Performers*," in *Engaging the Moving Image* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 351.

2 In this text we are using "rehearsal" as corresponding to the German word *Probe*, which does not only designate a theatrical practice of rehearsal, but, in a broader sense, a probing attitude. The rehearsal, thus, encompasses a spectrum of

meanings, ranging from probing, examining to working on, trying and testing something.

3 We are indebted to Sabeth Buchmann and Constanze Ruhm's framing of *Lives of Performers* in relation to the rehearsal. See their "Subject Put to the Test," *Texte zur Kunst* 90 (June 2013), <https://www.textezurkunst.de/90/buchmann-ruhm-subject-put-test/>.

Rehearsing: Learning without a Lesson

In 1970 Rainer disbanded her dance company and established the collective Grand Union to confront a problem of authority. The problem may well have grown out of her increasing popularity,⁴ but in principle is inherent to the operations of a dance company itself. A typical dance rehearsal is in fact based on a hierarchical relationship, on a disciplined recitation of gestures directed by instructions from the coach. With the newly formed collective, Rainer rehearsed the performance *Grand Union Dreams* the following year, which, as with all of her later performances, would no longer be produced independently from film. Indeed, the collective medium of film—based on the division of labor—becomes a tool for Rainer to examine, or probe, the theatrical format of rehearsal and its immanent power relations.

Lives of Performers singles out the directive character of the voice at the very beginning. We are provided with several minutes of silent, training bodies, allowing us to follow their movements before Rainer starts speaking and her direction takes over. Only then do we hear the instructions of the coach dictating the movements of the dance group. And again, a few minutes later. Cut: photographic documents. Description of a picture. A cinematic investigation is taking its course. The hierarchies at play in the events of the rehearsal are the first to be examined: the distribution of roles between director and performers—such as when one of the interviewed performers asks, “To whom is the director more sympathetic to?”—as well as the narrative codes of the melodrama that regulate the private sphere, this second-order backstage. Moreover, the investigation aims to make the methodological framing in dance and film become reflexive, disclosing the genre-specific regularities, the conventions of their formation and reception.

By selecting the essayistic form, Rainer counters the authoritarian stance with a questioning one. This recalls the essay as conceptualized by Adorno: as a tentative and fumbling, a searching and attempting, a questioning and exploring rehearsal form; a form that “probe[s]” or “test[s]” the fragility of its object in that it exposes it to a “small variation.”⁵ Rainer’s film demonstrates this movement in various ways: be it through the director’s somewhat maieutic questioning of the performers, in the course of which the directive voice of the coach increasingly begins to transform into a polyphonic concert of voices; be it the tentative movements of the camera following the outlines of its objects; or through the disintegration of the cinematic elements (sound, image, language) that enter into a relation of mutual commentary. Another scene to consider would be that which, with the meeting of all of the protagonists, should in principle portray the dramatic climax, the culmination of the drama of the decision between two women and a man. Instead of immediately precipitating the dramatic turn (in the standard melodramatic case, the woman

reinforces her own victim status with her decision), in this scene the linear and probable plot is disassembled piece by piece into its component parts. Played through again and again with minimal differences, the scene is rendered as varying sequence of possible plot progressions and gestures. It becomes an *act of a rehearsal*, as the decision is suspended and a delay, a wavering between different plot options, is thematized. Here, gestures become quotable, variable, refunctionable; in short, they become models of a practice of learning that cannot be exhausted through any degree of mastery (of having been *learned*).

In contrast to Bertolt Brecht, for Adorno the model for this type of essayistic testing is less so the Baconian empirical experiment, which he criticizes as the equivalent to a philosophical subjectivism. Instead, it is a non-doxological form of knowledge acquisition, an experience-based and context-sensitive type of learning. In Adorno’s words:

The way in which the essay appropriates concepts is most easily comparable to the behaviour of a man who is obliged, in a foreign country, to speak that country’s language instead of patching it together from its elements, as he did in school. He will read without a dictionary. If he has looked at the same word thirty times, in constantly changing contexts, he has a clearer grasp of it than he would if he looked up all the word’s meanings; meanings that are generally too narrow, considering they change depending on the context, and too vague in view of the nuances that the context establishes in every individual case.⁶

What Adorno conceives of here as learning without a lesson, rehearsing without instruction, is the work of orientation in changing environments. In this rehearsal scene (*Probenszene*), production and reception merge into each other. Reading without a dictionary necessitates a labor capacity that abstains from any reference to regulatory systems and definitions: a nonadditive, but rather genuine social and aesthetic capacity for synthesis or context formation. In the tactile and “tacit” mode of comparative sight⁷—at the same time descriptive and conceptual—a term is approached in its complexity in order to allow for its immanent emergence out of varying contexts. Adorno’s comparison indicates that the rehearsal confronts us with an epistemological problem that crystallizes at

4 On this argument see B. Ruby Rich and Noll Brinckmann, “Yvonne Rainer,” *Frauen und Film* 37, *Avantgarde and Experiment* (October 1984): 7.

5 Theodor W. Adorno, “The Essay as Form,” *New German Critique*, no. 32 (Spring—Summer 1984): 166.

6 *Ibid.*, 161.

7 On the notion of “tacit knowledge” see Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1966).

the transition between learning and researching. Rather than merely descriptively substantiating the features usually attributed to the essay—its openness, its playfulness, and suitability for situations of social juncture, and so on⁸—Adorno roots them in a concept of a nonspecialized, much more practical or experience-based acquisition of knowledge; a learning that allows for the tracing of a purely gradual, in no way qualitative difference between practicing and attempting, testing and inventing.⁹

Aesthetics of the Improbable

If we further pursue the problem of specialization, we find that the question of the transmission of knowledge and ability is most intimately connected to a methodological problem. The essay interrogates the division of culture into different sectors and realms that Adorno describes as the equivalent to the differentiation of social organization through the division of labor. An integral part of this is the distinction between science and art—the effect of an increasing demythologization. In this respect, the essay stands out against a characteristically Cartesian, scientific method that loses the particularity of articulation within the general law of procedure if it acquires its object—deductive or inductive—through the derivation of elements from the whole or, rather, the whole out of the element. Instead of framing its object and using a specific grammar, “reframing the frame of reason,” for the essay means questioning the scientific and the artistic discourses alike.¹⁰

The narrative process of *Lives of Performers* demonstrates how a firmly believed program can be transformed into an outstanding question. With a constant change of perspective, Rainer’s film confronts us with the necessity of reevaluating the status of the narrative again and again. After the cinematic representation of a rehearsal devolves rapidly into a dialogically unfolding commentary, we are subsequently forced to recognize that the performance of the rehearsal had in fact been an investigation of the rehearsal. Thus, the status of the film’s material must be reinterpreted as a *document*. In the course of the investigation, however, it becomes apparent that the conversation examining the rehearsal is in turn a *dramatic dialogue*: it is neither the rehearsal of a performance, nor its examination, but rather “the performance of a rehearsal.”¹¹ In this way, the essay establishes itself beyond a narrating subject as an unreliable narrative function that processes in two ways. On the one hand, we are presented with an effect of belatedness (*Nachträglichkeit*), which we are familiar with from any research and learning process: the effect of a sudden insight, based on a new configuration that requires us to reformulate our firmly believed coordinate system. On the other hand, the decisive judgment is suspended until the end, in favor of something that may be referred to as the “aesthetics of the improbable.”¹² There is no “either ... or” that regulates the relation between doc-

ument and fiction; the two are connected by an “as well as” or even more so: instead of leveling the difference between the two, the difference is dealt with repeatedly through the surprising shift from one into the other, and is hence brought to mind as the object of a decision-making problem.¹³ With this, Rainer’s film-essay demonstratively reveals what Harun Farocki asserts about the film-essay in general: “That narrating and discussing belong together, that discourses are a narrative form.”¹⁴ All content is thus bound to an aesthetic decision, dependent on the rules and conventions of the formation and reception of knowledge.¹⁵

Ultimately, what is at stake is the attempt to frame rehearsal as an undertaking that is not reducible to an authoritative program. Instead of moving forward methodologically toward a goal in the sense of the etymological meaning of *méthodos*,¹⁶ the essay embarks on improbable turns to proceed in a “methodologically unmethodological” way¹⁷—postponing, suspending, and problematizing the decision-making in science and art. In this way, disciplined observers can become learners: those who constantly translate between the genres, disciplines, and media in order to orient themselves in a space whose rules they do not master, but can only probe.

8 Cf. Fritz Martini, “Essay,” in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte: Erster Band. A-K*, ed. Werner Kohlschmidt and Wolfgang Mohr (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1958), 409.

9 Referring to the history of science, Annemarie Matzke describes the rehearsal as a double mode of production, of testing and finding/inventing ([Er]Finden) in her essay “Versuchsbällons und Testreihen: Wie auf Theaterproben Wissen hervorgebracht und standardisiert wird,” in *Chaos und Konzept: Proben und Probieren im Theater*, ed. Melanie Hinz and Jens Roselt (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2011), 134.

10 Cf. Ulricke Oudée Dünkelsbühler, *Reframing the Frame of Reason: Translation in and beyond Kant and Derrida* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2002).

11 Rich and Brinckmann, “Yvonne Rainer,” 9.

12 In contrast to Christoph Menke’s use of the expression “aesthetics of the improbable,” it is here not used in distinction from Adorno’s “aesthetics of negativity,” but rather as actualization of the (romantic) aesthetics of the improbable within the latter. Cf. Christoph Menke, *The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 57, 70.

13 On the indistinguishability of history and stories that is indicated in the German term *Geschichte(n)*, see Rüdiger Campe, *Spiel der Wahrscheinlichkeit: Literatur und Berechnung zwischen Pascal und Kleist* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2002).

14 Harun Farocki, “Obdachlose am Flughafen: Sprache und Film, Filmsprache; Der Filmemacher Harun Farocki im Gespräch mit Remberth Hüser,” *Jungle World* 46 (November 8, 2000), <http://jungle-world.com/artikel/2000/45/26804.html>. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are our own.

15 Joseph Vogl conceptualizes this state with term “poetology of knowledge.” See Joseph Vogl, “Poetologie des Wissens,” in *Einführung in die Kulturwissenschaft*, ed. Harun Maye and Leander Scholz (Munich: Wilhelm Fink and UTB, 2001), 54f.

16 “Gr. *méthodos* (actually ‘the way toward an aim’).” Cf. Friedrich Kluge, “Methode,” in *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, 25th ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 618.

17 Adorno, “Essay as Form,” 161 (translation modified).

Universality/Cliché, or Two Times “Pandora”

It is perhaps not a coincidence, then, that there is also a formal bracket that brings the diverging lines of Adorno’s essay and Rainer’s rehearsal into a constellation. Tellingly, it is myth, more specifically that of Pandora with which Adorno opens and Rainer closes.

A quote from Goethe’s adaptation of the Greek myth serves as the epigraph of “Essay as Form”: “Destined to see the illuminated, not the light.”¹⁸ It is an apt starting point for a mediation on the essay as a form of writing that does not want its object to “exemplify universal categories,” nor for them “to shine through—or at least render the particular transparent towards them.”¹⁹ The essay does not start, nor does it seek to arrive at them. It does not strive for a closed totality. As Adorno specified: “Its concepts receive their light from a *terminus ad quem* hidden to the essay itself, and not from an obvious *terminus a quo* [...]. It erects no scaffolding, no edifice. Through their own *movement* the elements crystallize into a configuration.”²⁰ Movement, light, configuration: it is as if Adorno describes a choreography, or perhaps rather a rehearsal. The essay is a shifting, ephemeral configuration that, to freely paraphrase Goethe, is “destined to see the illuminated, not the light.”

Rainer’s Pandora, in turn, is not only concept but also body. Reenacting scenes based on production shots of G. W. Pabst’s silent movie *Pandora’s Box* (1929), in the last scene of Rainer’s film performers freeze photographically into expressive gestures until muscles start to twitch, eyes start to blink—and they move offstage. Rainer, like Adorno, addresses the problem of universality, but she approaches it from the mundane and minor perspective of mass culture (e.g., melodrama as a genre whose universality is called cliché). Instead of simply showcasing the artificiality of the setting à la Brecht, however, *Lives of Performers* points to something that Adorno has described as the essay’s proper theme. He called it the “blind natural interconnectedness, myth [that] perpetuates itself in culture,” and “the interrelation of nature and culture,” which can be also taken to mean immediacy and mediation, object and representation.²¹ Adorno specified that under “the glance of the essay second nature becomes conscious of itself as first nature.”²² In Rainer’s last scene, this epistemological motif is given a material body to be felt (rather than read). It is precisely because of the hyper-mediated nature of the tableaux vivants’ objectification of melodramatic sentiment that sensuousness is allowed to emerge. As Carrie Lambert-Beatty has noted poignantly, through the performers’ physical effort to hold their poses “calibrated to our attentive struggle [to see them endure], something remarkable happens. [...] We feel for them.”²³ Her book ends with the argument that this mode of inversion defines the paradoxes and contradictions of Rainer’s investigation of spectatorship, of “the body as offered to the eye” (meaning not least the camera eye).²⁴ If the

momentum of Rainer’s dance was “the body being, and being watched,” *Lives of Performers* displaced it into film: ²⁵ film being and film being watched then—and the medium of this displacement was the rehearsal.

Lives of Performers organizing principle might be indeed cliché (and its probing deconstruction), culminating in the film’s last scene. But couldn’t Pandora’s box also be taken as an allegory for film itself, for the proverbial black box that here is put to the test too? Approaching *Lives of Performers* through the rehearsal implies a different model of what a medium is, what it does, and Adorno’s concept of the essay offers a tool to grasp it.

Starting From the Bad New Things The Rehearsal as a Medium of Contingency

It is no secret that Adorno, like Clement Greenberg and Rosalind Krauss, was also an ardent advocate of art’s autonomy and medium specificity. Yet for him they did not serve as ends in themselves but were historically conditioned by the social division of labor in society that could not simply be abandoned by fiat.²⁶ In contrast to the formalism of Greenberg and Krauss, Adorno’s was historically and philosophically coded and thus, potentially at least, open to change (Juliane Rebentisch speaks of a “second-order formalism”).²⁷

Although this promise was not redeemed in his *Aesthetic Theory*, where art’s position is so fraught with historical-philosophical weight that it is left paralyzed vis-à-vis any mode of agency other than melancholic critique, his earlier conception of the essay allows for a different perspective. Not least, of course, because the essay does not figure as a form of art proper, but as one that is located in the tension between science and art, between intuition and rationality, autonomy and heteronomy—boundaries that, for Adorno, were ineluctable on historical grounds.²⁸ With the development of contemporary art since the 1960s, however, these clear demarcations have foundered, for art too entered into the general economy, shedding its modernist exceptionalism regarding rationality’s grinding wheels.²⁹ Distinctions previously operative, that

18 Goethe, quoted in *ibid.*, 151.

19 *Ibid.*, 151–52 (translation modified).

20 *Ibid.*, 161 (emphasis ours).

21 *Ibid.*, 167.

22 *Ibid.*, 168.

23 Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 267.

24 *Ibid.*, 4.

25 *Ibid.*, 6.

26 See, for instance, Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search for Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (1952; repr. London, New York: Verso, 2005).

27 See Juliane Rebentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 129.

28 Adorno, “Essay as Form,” 154, 157.

is, the essay from art “through its conceptual character” was waning (and Rainer’s work might well serve as a case in point).³⁰ In other words, the position of the essay changes at the moment in which art shifts too: when art’s (re)production runs simultaneously to that of society, the essay’s open form can serve as a more adequate matrix for thinking contemporary art’s autonomy and the function of the medium therein than that of their modernist circumscription allows.

What is most productive about Adorno’s rendering of the essay is that in contrast to Krauss’s understanding of (modernist) art, its medium is not memory but contingency. Operating contingent on the subject matter that it addresses, it is a form that has to constitute itself each time anew in relation to the multiple registers of its “support”; its mode of signification is not geared toward any goal, nor does it follow any pre-given rules. Hence the essay’s method is to have none. There is no finality for the essay, as noted above, because it proceeds methodologically unmethodologically. Arguably Krauss’s medium proceeds in reverse, because for her the medium is the memory (i.e., of art’s modernist autonomy); it prescribes art’s method.³¹ To preserve autonomy, artists have to reinvent new mediums that “signify in the way older mediums had done”—art’s modernist autonomy is both the sine qua non of art and its “goal.”³² Insofar as—other than in Greenberg’s frame—the procedure of realizing autonomy is not tied to the materiality of any given genre, but can encompass all kinds of “supports” (mass-cultural artifacts, theories, etc.), it could be understood as unmethodological. Artists just need to “reclaim the specific from the deadening embrace of the general,”³³ and to wrest art’s autonomy from mass culture—categories that tend to appear as historically immutable.

For Adorno, however, the “essay seeks truth contents as being historical in themselves,” hence the contingency of its procedure, its open form.³⁴ Although *Lives of Performers* summons its epistemological thrust, it also retains the bodily, sensuous signature of the rehearsal. It is as if the probing, repetitive gestures of a body that learns a movement were displaced into film—into the searching movement of Babette Mangolte’s camera work, but also into the temporal complexity of the film’s structure. After all, the essay has to unfold its negotiation of concept and intuition, mediation and immediacy through the discursive medium of language, which also means consecutively. *Lives of Performers*, in turn, thanks to art’s mode of “sensuous evidence,” can make it palpable in a “flash of intuition” (and it certainly does as we have argued in the film’s last scene).³⁵

A crucial concern of Rainer’s dance is that sensuousness, or rather physicality, is bound to specific temporalities. For instance, her signature work *Trio A* (1966), which consisted of ordinary movement, replaced the ordered time of choreography with “the real movement of time” of a body that goes

through a motion.³⁶ Rainer thus wanted to achieve a radical horizontality, a de-hierarchisation between dance and dancer, who as “neutral doer” was stripped of psychological depth and rendered a physical *body*. Rereading *Trio A* through an expanded notion of Krauss’s medium, Julia Bryan-Wilson has recently suggested that for Rainer the dance, too, functioned as a medium, one that thrives on the “muscle memory” of the body as a living archive, that is, the memory of movements previously learned.³⁷ Bryan-Wilson convincingly highlights that the body, too, is a storage device, and that time also has and is a body. Yet in *Lives of Performers* this body is not only that of the dancer but also that of film. It operates less through learned gestures than through the open, contingent structure of the rehearsal, in which the movements of the body and those of the apparatus emerge through one another. Hence, if we reframe the medium of *Lives of Performers* not as dance, or film, but as the rehearsal, we can shift focus from the mnemonic registers of representation to those of (re)production; to the aesthetic as well as social conditions, forms and materials of art, and to the contingencies and possibilities of a practice that does not simply follow prescribed rules, but *works* on them, tests them, in order to develop different ones.

In contrast to Adorno’s insistence on grounding such openness in the essay’s anachronism (melancholically reaching for utopia), however, its actualization as rehearsal acts from *within* the contradictions of the present. Sabeth Buchmann and Constanze Ruhm have recently pointed out that what began in *Lives of Performers* as putting something to the test, now resonates with the neoliberal ideology of lifelong learning and continuous work on the self.³⁸ And it is precisely because of this economic identification, rather than despite it, that the rehearsal can serve as a point of departure for an art that is contemporary not in the broad sense (i.e., being of its time) but in a specific one: in the sense that it does not start “from the good old things,” from the premises

29 On this argument see Kerstin Stakemeier, “Verfransung und Digitalität. Medienspezifika in der Krise,” in *Das Versprechen der Kunst: Aktuelle Zugänge zu Adornos ästhetischer Theorie*, ed. Marcus Quent and Eckardt Lindner (Vienna: Verlag Turia + Kant, 2014), 141–55.

30 Adorno, “Essay as Form,” 153.

31 Rosalind E. Krauss, *Under Blue Cup* (London: Phaidon Press, 2011), 3.

32 *Ibid.*, 76.

33 Rosalind E. Krauss, “Reinventing the Medium,” *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 2 (1999): 305.

34 Adorno, “Essay as Form,” 158–59.

35 Peter Gorsen, “Subjektlose Kunst,” in

Transformierte Alltäglichkeit oder Transzendenz der Kunst. Reflexionen zur Entästhetisierung (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1981), 57.

36 Yvonne Rainer, quoted in Annette Michelson, “Yvonne Rainer, Part 1: The Dancer and the Dance,” *Artforum* 12, no. 5 (January 1974): 59.

37 Julia Bryan-Wilson, “Practicing *Trio A*,” *October* 140 (Spring 2012): 70.

38 Buchmann and Ruhm, “Subject Put to the Test.”

and promises of modernism as “a classical as well as critical past,”³⁹ but from “the bad new ones”⁴⁰—rehearsing to move and to move *differently* within the tangled, crisis-ridden space of the present.

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39 David Geers, “Neo-Modern,” *October* 139 (Winter 2012): 11.

40 Walter Benjamin tellingly quotes the Brechtian maxim: “Don’t start from the good old things but the bad new ones” in his *Versuche über Brecht*, the title of which was translated not as “essays on Brecht” but as “understanding Brecht.” Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London, New York: Verso, 1998), 121.

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In Abeyance It Is Perhaps Now Time to Leave, Once More, the Clinic ...

Vincent Bonin

In an essay entitled “The Poor Man’s Couch,” published in 1975, Félix Guattari suggests, somewhat ironically, that “cinematic performance” for the poor and “psychoanalytic performance” (“the analytical act”) for the rich, could be spoken about in symmetry:

For too long, belle époque psychoanalysis has persuaded us it was liberating the instincts by giving them a language; in fact, it never intended loosening the vice of the dominant discourse, except insofar as it reckoned on achieving even greater success than ordinary repression had ever done: to control, to discipline, to adapt people to the norms of a certain type of society. In the end, the discourse that is proffered in the analytical session is no more “liberated” than served up in movies theaters. The so-called liberty of free-association is only an illusion that masks a certain program, a secret modelization of statements (*énoncés*). As on the film screen, it is understood in analysis that no semiotic production of desire should have any effect on reality. The little playhouse of analysis and the mass analysis of film both proscribe the passage to action, to “acting out.”

While Guattari mentions “Mr. Goldwyn’s proposition to Freud: \$100,000 to put the famous loves on screen,”² he seems to have left aside the representation of the act itself: the countless scenes in which a patient undergoes therapy, and in a shot-reverse-shot editing the viewer has to either share the point of view of the analyst or, alternatively, that of the analysand. These scenes are often used as narrative devices to interlace a plane of experiences that could not coexist otherwise in the linear diegesis because of their diachronic temporality. The set then represents a bourgeois interior from where the libidinal story of the liberal individual can depart. Film is also formally free for a short moment, until it has to come back to the site it left after the free association, a parenthesis of sorts, ends. Beside the many shortcomings of Guattari’s coupling of conceptual frameworks, we could mention its neglect of the feminist discourse about film and psychoanalysis that was articulated at the same time in the United Kingdom, within the pages of *Screen* magazine. Writing this essay, however, I was inspired by Guattari’s “unorthodox” method, and attempted to compare the contingency of the analytical act, especially transference, to an ontology and politics of rehearsal. In French, the word *répétition* in its broadest meaning is an antonym of “rehearsal,” and although both terms have to be distinguished according to the context of their use, the confusion

1 Félix Guattari, “The Poor Man’s Couch,” in *Chaosophy: Texts and Interviews 1972–1977*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 258. The essay was originally published in the French under

the title “Le divan du pauvre,” *Communications* 23 (May 1975): 96–103. This issue of *Communications* was devoted to psychoanalysis and cinema.
2 *Ibid.*, 257.

sometimes generates interesting frictions between, for instance, intentional gestures and automatic, unconscious bodily enactments of the performer. Related to the later occurrence of the term, the concept of repetition in psychoanalysis has a singular path from Sigmund Freud to various strains of trauma theory, which escapes the scope of this essay.³ I rather want to compare rehearsal and the analytical act on an epistemological level.

In order to transmit the knowledge gained through practice, analysts have to convert residues of their listening—notes more or less systematically taken—into a readable “report,” but they are also asked to protect the identity of their patients. The recorded events thus have to be clouded by fiction, and traces of identity (naming names) redacted out. Given to other analysts as twice removed discourse, that of the analyst and of the analysand, which were once together in the same room, this derivative material becomes, as André Green once stated, a “transcription of an unknown origin.”⁴ Rehearsal also needs to be “written” to a certain extent, and after the fact, so that the activity of generating seemingly un-recordable and un-repeatable manifestations of virtuosity while repeating the score (or changing it), can become a form of transmittable knowledge for another performer. In both cases, it remains difficult to “contain” this representation of contingency by establishing its spatial and temporal limits; thus, the transcribed, fictionalized narratives of rehearsal and of transference are most often bordering on acts of transgression. The architectural enclosure of the rehearsal room also shares many characteristics with the designated safe space where this analytical act can take place, or, in what Donald W. Winnicott terms “the holding environment.”⁵ In one case, trial and error is allowed, and in the other a chain of signifiers unfolds beyond communication. In both, the repetition of contingency is a contradiction in terms. To situate the performer in a parenthesis of learning the score, with the possibility of failing, and to set the right conditions for the transfer to happen, a site of intersubjectivity must be protected.

It would have been possible to isolate a sample of works in which the analytical act remains more abstract, or isn’t literally perceivable through “characterization.” However, by sticking to the dyad of the analyst and the analysand, I hoped to show how the appearance of this framework at particular moments within some artists’ trajectories corresponded precisely to a period of rehearsal toward other types of “acting out” or “enactments.” The following case studies will unfold more or less chronologically. This order is meant to bring to the fore a discursive trajectory that starts with the assimilation and criticism of Lacanian psychoanalysis in feminist discourse, and seemingly ends with the so-called affective turn. Within this trajectory there are some blatant omissions in which the staging of rehearsal plays a lesser role. These works and texts could be commented on in an expanded discussion about the relationship between contemporary art and psychoanalysis, which rarely happens.

Among a larger sample, I thus choose to focus on some of the more exemplary cases that fit into the present discussion laid out by the editors of this book.

In 1979 the Jay Street Film Project collective (Anthony McCall, Claire Pajaczkowska, Andrew Tyndall, Ivan Ward, and Jane Weinstock) directed *Sigmund Freud’s Dora: A Case of Mistaken Identity*, which reappraised the first case study published by Freud in 1905, “Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria.”⁶ The film was one of the outcomes of a reading group in which this text, and its subsequent commentaries, were analyzed. Besides the fact that the case study was chosen because it was an initial rough attempt by Freud to migrate his clinical experience toward a narrative form, the group invested it as a “discursive site” that was at the intersection of several other debates.⁷ As stated in a document handed to the audience before the screening of the film: “The psychoanalytical method itself is a process of reading the language and symptoms of the patient; Freud’s case history is a reading of that reading, which we, in turn, read.”⁸

Freud recounts that Dora’s parents consulted him after they found a suicide note in her room, and also because she intermittently stopped speaking. Later on during the session, Dora confided to Freud that a friend of her father, K., kissed her at the age of fourteen, while the father had a secret affair with K.’s wife. By interlocking these concomitant facts and because of Dora’s own resistance to say more, Freud concluded that her hysterical symptoms—one of which was speechlessness—were a consequence of her repressed desires toward K. Freud then tried to explain the break of transference and, consequently, to elucidate why Dora left therapy by her own will. In a text read by members of the Jay Street Film Project, theorist Jacqueline Rose confers agency to

3 Within this vast theoretical body see, for instance, Sigmund Freud, “Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psychoanalysis),” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1954–74), 147–57; Jacques Lacan, “Tuché and Automaton,” in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1979), 53–56; and later on, Judith Butler, “The Pleasure of Repetition,” in *Pleasure beyond the Pleasure Principle*, ed. Robert A Glick and Stanley Bone (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 259–76.

4 André Green, “Transcription d’origine inconnue: L’écriture du psychanalyste:

Critique du témoignage,” *Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse* 16 (Autumn 1977): 27–64.

5 See Donald W. Winnicott, *Holding and Interpretation: Fragment of an Analysis* (London: Hogarth Press, 1986).

6 Sigmund Freud, “Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria” (1905), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 7, ed. and trans. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1954–74), 1–122.

7 To consult the script of the film, and for a statement summarizing the intentions of the group, written by member Claire Pajaczkowska, see Jay Street Collective, “Dora Script,” *Framework* (Summer 1981): 75–80.

8 Jay Street Collective, quoted in Felicity Oppé, “Exhibiting Dora,” *Screen* 22, no. 2 (July 1981): 82.

Dora “escaping” the clinic, but she also recognizes the political valence of psychoanalysis for feminism. Rose poses that in this particular case study, Freud did not address the effect of his own countertransference during the analysis.⁹ He rather entrenched Dora’s symptoms into a strict Oedipean grid. His attempt to impose Dora’s repressed desires toward K. as an explanation was one way to bring about narrative closure. At the same time, he also obliterated any possibility of female sexuality outside of a circuit of symbolic exchange and bourgeois ideology—in effect, sealing Dora’s case.

Following Rose’s text, the members of the Jay Street Film Collective decided to reopen, once more, this case. They redistributed its content and its subsequent reinterpretations in a script that comprises three sections. The first section shows one take of a close up of an anonymous woman’s lips (Suzanne Fletcher), reporting a conversation in which she bears in the first person. This scene is overlaid by frames displaying entries of a chronology of Dora’s case, and of events related to the constitution of the psychoanalytic institution itself. The timeline is supplemented by fragmentary factual information excerpted from other “grand revolutionary narratives” of the end of nineteenth century and early twentieth century (the emergence of the feminist and suffragettes movements, the birth of linguistics, the biographies of communist theorists, etc.). The second section unfolds as a fictitious dialogue between Freud and Dora, distilled from the content of the case study and its afferent literature. It alternates between shots and countershots of the two protagonists interrupting each other. Rather than conveying affect in their reading, the nonactors, artist Silvia Kolbowski (Dora) and author Joel Kovel (Freud), repeat the text as if it was simply read; thus, they make it clear to the viewer that it is impossible to “reenact” the original dialogue whose context is lost. Interpolated in the editing of the shots and countershots are advertisements for throat medicine (echoing Dora’s alleged symptom of aphasia), re-filmed from a television screen, showed in full, and then interspersed with excerpts of pornographic films. At the end of the section, Dora has already left the scene, and the camera captures only the bookcases behind her, showing the particular theoretical literature (*Screen* magazines, Freud’s *Standard Edition*, Marx’s *Capital*, etc.) that might have been consulted by the Jay Street Film Collective as research material. Finally, in the third sequence, which could be described as an epilogue, Anne Hegira plays Dora’s mother who reads missives on postcards sent by her daughter. The recto of these postcards displays stills of scenes that were seen in the previous part. As the elided subject in Freud’s recounting of the case, the mother now becomes one of the filmic text’s main protagonist and addressee.

One question articulated by the members of the group was how psychoanalysis became a state apparatus by entrenching female sexuality to lack and social reproduction. The film also emerged from a larger debate unfolding in

the pages of *Screen* and *m/f* magazines, in which the filmic apparatus was deconstructed according to gendered positions of subjects within the dominant ideology of Hollywood industry, rather than described on an abstract semiological level. Thus, following these various trajectories, the members of the group and their peers did not want to confine psychoanalysis to the sole establishment and enforcement of norms (as Gilles Deleuze and Guattari did in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1972], and later Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* [1976]), but they rather hoped to produce another critical text alongside the process of reappraising Freud’s foundational case study.

In an essay entitled “Exhibiting ‘Dora,’” Felicity Oppé recounts her experience of projecting the film to various audiences beyond the constituency of theorists, artists, and experimental filmmakers that triggered its making. This over-consciousness of context—that of the time preceding and succeeding the screening—was built on the hope that potential viewers would somewhat occupy the place of the filmmakers, and that the psychoanalytical institution itself would be revealed through this circulation of subject positions. In this treatment of a case whose currency reappeared because of a particular way of reading it at the end of the seventies, the film thus became a collective analytical act, like a rehearsal, to set forward another possibility of political intervention. As Claire Pajackowska explicitly states, speaking on behalf of the group: “We all maintain that the function of this project, like any other political project, is to make itself redundant, to change the relations of power that necessitated its presence.”¹⁰

Yvonne Rainer’s shift from dance to film should also be understood within the framework of a reappraisal of psychoanalytic theory informed by feminism led by various factions of theorists, filmmakers, and artists in the seventies. During the research period that led to their exhibition, Sabeth Buchmann and Constanze Ruhm isolated emblematic works that exacerbated the tension between what could be defined as the contingency of the rehearsal proper, and an attempt to shift its temporality to the plane of representation (an impossible project that failure, however, produces complex results). Among these works they discussed the opening scene from Rainer’s *Lives of Performers*, made in 1972, just after the choreographer abandoned dance to devote herself to filmmaking. During this scene, Babette Mangolte’s sinuous camera movements follow the bodies of dancers rehearsing, while they themselves are driven by the choreographer’s instructions heard offscreen. In fact, rather than imposing a subjective point of view, Mangolte’s body and her camera are lodged into the vacancies of the choreography as it is enacted, and therefore

9 Jacqueline Rose, “Dora: Fragment of an Analysis,” *m/f* 2 (1978): 5–21.

10 Pajackowska, “Dora Script,” 75.

she doesn't disturb the fragile exchange between the performers moving "together." Then, as if we are witnessing the announcement of Rainer's shift from one medium to the other within this scene, a break occurs between the opening segment and the rest of the film. After, a series of theatrical vignettes unfold, these dancers pose nearly still and silent, while a voice-over recounts the details of their flirtatious or amorous relationships offstage. At first it seems that Rainer, the other dancers, and the larger community of artists forming the audience are meant to be the recipients of these melodramatic confessions, but later their polyamorous discourse sounds like it had been spoken out loud for another subject, absent from the scene/diegesis. Or rather, the viewer is installed at a place where this invisible subject, the analyst, could sit as well. Rainer did not construct such a position narratively as she would do later in other films. But, since the script was opening the gap between the "lives" of the dancers and the actual performances they were asked to enact, Rainer seemed to have transitioned here from the experimental arena of rehearsal as choreography (deferring the spectacle of dance in task-like activity) to the particular setup of an analytic act, which would occupy center stage in her upcoming work.

In her film *Journeys from Berlin/1971* (1980), produced a few years after *Lives of Performers*, Rainer found a setting that would enable her to put to the test the way the analytical act and transference are usually configured in cinematic forms by demonstrating the productive impossibility of adequately representing this act. The film is composed of several narratives that enmesh current and historical events with the biography of a subject borrowing from Rainer's life (as she mentions herself in her autobiographical book *Feelings Are Facts*, written in 1971, in the title was an obscure reference to the year of her suicide attempt).¹¹ Parts of these threads find their origins from Rainer's sojourn in Berlin, between 1976 and 1977, which coincided with the trials of the Baader-Meinhof clan members.¹² Edited alternating scenes show the bedroom/living room of filmmakers Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, the street in a square, a kitchen, and, finally, a dislocated space, which stands for the office of a psychoanalyst. Film theorist and historian Annette Michelson appears in the film playing the patient, and Ilona Halberstadt, another public intellectual, takes on the role of the analyst.¹³ Instead of alternating her editing between shots and countershots (as done in *Dora*), Rainer installs the camera behind the back of the analyst, and sits the patient at a desk on which there is also a telephone ringing intermittently (emitting obscene speech when it is picked up). Moreover, during Michelson's stream of association, a woman, a child, or a dog are sometimes used as a substitute for Halberstadt. This recirculation of subject positions suggests that rather than being entrenched to transference in the spoken chain of signifiers, one image event replaces the other. Cutting the synchronic content of the voice-over presented in other parts of the film, these diachronic segments present Michelson, a "subject supposed to know,"

as temporarily dispossessed of authority, now an ally of Rainer in the chaos of self-analysis.

Just like Jean-Marie Straub, Danièle Huillet, and Jean-Luc Godard, Rainer often asks performers in her films to utter lines of a script made up of quotes from various chosen texts in a disaffected tone verging on the neutral. This strategy became the epitome of a post-dramatic approach, which was meant to circumvent the viewer's identifications to characters and the fetishism of the image in Hollywood hegemonic narrative structures. Although Rainer's work has been identified with the counter-cinematic genre of the "new talkies," or neo-Brechtian documentary informed by psychoanalytically inclined feminism, her films could not fit under either of these rubrics. While she partook in discussions with many of her peers in the seventies and eighties interested in the reappraisal of Lacan, Rainer always expressed ambivalence toward the way a set of shared theoretical references most often coalesced in a rigid ideological project.¹⁴ Rainer's next film, *The Man Who Envied Women* (1985), embodies her complex relationship with a certain intellectual milieu using psychoanalysis jargon among other vocabularies as a way once more to split off affective life from "proper" academic parlance. This time the viewer follows the conflicted path of Jack Deller as he manages to balance the contradiction of the handling of his love affairs (one of which is the end of a romance with Trisha, the invisible narrator), with the way he endorses feminist discourse in the lecture hall. Being caught in-between shifting from his male "hysteric discourse," and the university discourse, he constantly monitors occurrences of slips within a rhetorical performance, and Rainer shows several comedic moments when he fails at the task. In the prologue of the film, Deller appears on a proscenium of a cinema theater. However, rather than giving a lecture, he is seemingly at the wrong place, "pants down," and engages in a flow of free associations addressed to his hypothetical analyst. On the screen nearby we see corresponding snippets of classic Hollywood melodramas, horror films, and an excerpt of the infamous eye-cutting scene of Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (1929). In her detailed analysis of *The Men Who Envied Women*, theorist Bérénice Reynaud has stated eloquently how, in this opening segment, Rainer changes the parameters of the setup she has devised for representing the scene of transference in *Journey from Berlin/1971*: "The analyst disappears, swallowed by the off-screen space (which means that he/she ends up literally

11 Yvonne Rainer, *Feelings Are Facts: A Life* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 453.

12 For a commentary on *Journey from Berlin/1971*, see B. Ruby Rich, "Yvonne Rainer: An Introduction," in *The Films of Yvonne Rainer* (Bloomington: Indianapolis University Press, 1989), 1-23.

13 Rainer, *Feelings Are Facts*, 453.

14 On Rainer's vexed relationship to psychoanalytically inflected film theory, see Yvonne Rainer, "Some Ruminations Around Cinematic Antitodes to the Oedipal Net(tles) while Playing With De Lauraedipus Mulvey or, He May Be Off-Screen, but ...," *Independent* 9, no. 3 (April 1986): 22-25.

on the spectator's lap, unless it is the spectator who has become the analyst—i.e., the idiot who does not know anything but whose ignorance assumes all possible knowledges).¹⁵

Like Rainer's use of quotes in *Journey from Berlin/1971* or *The Men Who Envied Women*, Andrea Fraser's first performed works are based on the montage of textual fragments pulled from various incommensurate sources that are uttered by one "performer" through a continuous flow of speech. Through most often site-specific "enactments," Fraser attempts to show how the art field consolidates its discursive boundaries by the inclusion and the exclusion of certain statements. Her use of reflexive sociology influenced by Pierre Bourdieu, however, always integrated the working of the unconscious and the facts of her own psychic life. At the beginning of a 1992 text aptly entitled "An Artist's Statement," she describes this particular investment into psychoanalysis as method and praxis in and around her work:

Freud ended a paper called "The Dynamics of the Transference" with this statement: "In the last resort no one can be slain *in absentia* or *in effigie*." My investment in site specificity is motivated by this idea. My engagement in institutional critique follows from the fact that, as an artist and a writer, to the extent that I write, art and academic institutions are the sites where my activity is located. Psychoanalysis largely determines my conception of those sites as sets of relations, although I think of those relations as social and economic as well as subjective. And psychoanalysis also defines, largely, what is for me both a practical and an ethical imperative to work site specifically.¹⁶

Although Fraser's video installation *Projection* (2008) does not represent the latest stage of her ongoing relationship with psychoanalysis both as a discourse and as a practice, this work brings it to the fore in the material limits of the exhibition space.¹⁷ Fraser went through "proper" analysis herself for several years. In this piece she decided to put to the test another therapeutic model: that of "intensive short-term dynamic psychotherapy," employing video feedback as a projection tool. Instead of the slow path of analysis in which speech (or "acting out") cannot be forced, the interpolated video image is used here to produce a semblance of transference. In principle, during these sessions the patient has to confront a represented situation through which he or she can see his or her gestures, and way of speaking, as *shameful symptoms*. The impotence of not being able to act out, to cope with frustrations or to change accordingly, becomes a trigger for him or her to adopt available behaviors or a particular habitus instead of exploring more thoroughly his or her object relations. After parsing through fifteen hours of these video sessions, Fraser isolated moments where she acknowledged the limits of her taking an ambivalent position toward institutions, and the guilt that this

bad consciousness, overall, generates. She enacted transcribed fragments of her own speech during these intensive meetings, while the recordings, which could be described as rehearsals for these scenes, remained out of sight. In the twelve sections of her final script, Fraser shifts from the polar extremes of discourse, alternately taking the positions of analyst and that of the analysand. In the installation, the viewer is located in-between her two life-sized projections. Being always within the interval, the viewer cannot rally him- or herself with either of these characters as they appear and disappear. In moments of silence, he or she sits still, waiting to turn around, as Fraser will show up again on either side. When Fraser reenacts short-term dynamic psychotherapy, playing all of the roles, she seems to ask the viewer to be at the place of the "other" silent and invisible analyst, the one that, at last, has to bear the transmission of affects, and the deferred task of critique (of the self and of the institution). The work finds its particular strength in the way it repeats a normative scenario through the transgression of the boundaries of disclosure, and the words of Fraser herself, without offering any resolution, thus not ending or distorting the "proper" analysis.

In a 2014 text, Fraser stated that the term "performative" became misused by actors in the art field to describe the wish to act in a context or do certain things, rather than to describe a specific category of linguistic statements that have an effect in a real situation. She advocated the replacement of the word performative, emptied out of its content, by the concept of enactment:

In psychoanalytic theory, the concept of enactment emerged through a reconciliation of the notions of transference and acting out. One of the premises of psychoanalytic practice is that you can't change something over there—by talking about it, interpreting it, representing it, reflecting on it. You can only work on what is made "immediate and manifest" (as Freud put it) in the "here and now" of the analytic situation. This principle has been central to my thinking about performance, critical practice, and site-specificity since the mid-1980s.¹⁸

Recently, British psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion's 1960s work on group dynamics has influenced Fraser's methods of teaching, in which she uses a technique called "enactment analysis." This approach takes into account the constituency

¹⁵ Bérénice Reynaud, "Impossible Projections," *Screen*, 28, no. 4 (1987): 40.

¹⁶ Andrea Fraser, "An Artist's Statement," in *Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser*, ed. Alexander Alberro (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 3. This text was originally presented at the symposium "Place Position Presentation

Public," at the Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht, in April 1992.

¹⁷ Andrea Fraser, "Projection, 2008," in *Andrea Fraser: Texte, Skripte, Transkripte / Texts, Scripts, Transcripts*, ed. Carla Guini (Cologne: Buchhandlung Walther König, 2013), 110–23.

of her students as a collective entity, but then enables each of them to assess their investments in the group.¹⁹

Like Fraser, Melanie Gilligan wrote texts and produced works in which she has put to the test the limits of the performative as a linguistic category, and also challenges its misuse in art discourse. In a 2007 essay, she mentions, for instance, the compulsion to repeat (in the broadest sense, of “reenacting” past events) that precipitated the canonization of performance as a genre of visual arts, and even compared it to “objecthood” in the market.²⁰ Although the end result of her working process is most of the time a well-produced video, Gilligan embraces contingency as an object of scrutiny of her practice on a formal and political level. To do so, she often collaborates closely with actors in long sessions, sometimes accessible to the public, in which the divides between rehearsal and acting, as well as scripted and improvised, become blurred.

Her video series *Self-Capital: ICA* (2009) exemplifies her use of these post-dramatic techniques to produce particular bodily movements of her actors that can be compared to acting out, in a therapeutic context. In 2009 Gilligan was invited to take part in the exhibition “Talk Show” at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London. During a one-week residency at the ICA, Gilligan wrote the script, rehearsed the scenes with actress Penelope McGhie, and shot the video in the upper galleries under the observational gaze of the audience. *Self-Capital* depicts a woman at the end of her forties who, after a severe meltdown, is referred by a psychiatrist to a therapist using methods of bodily acting out of affects. Just like Fraser in *Projection*, the same actress, McGhie, is playing all of the roles. The viewers witness the interaction of a client with a cashier at the ICA bookstore, the psychiatrist talking with the therapist on the phone while referring her patient, and finally the unfolding of the therapy sessions. From the beginning of her video, Gilligan establishes clearly that the enmeshed lives of all her characters are echoing the pathologies and normativity of the global economy. The fact that this patient is capitalism itself plays off at another level of irony: the comparison between the tools to activate stock market speculation (rather than regulate them), and the techniques of emotional release provides a strange hybrid subject, both embodied and disembodied.²¹ The title extends this metaphor by superimposing three modes of subjectivity. The first mode refers to “ordinary” self-shaping and fashioning. The second mode points toward the actual symbolic and real capital one has to accumulate to be able to survive in the social world. On a third level, this title poses the necessity of abstractions to *have a self*, to be embodied and anthropomorphized. In fact, the complexity of this going back and forth between various subject positions, each representing a specific “place” on an economical level, poses the more general question of “ownership” of emotions and affects. Does this patient have an “inner life” or

even access to an unconscious, or is her brain only the prey of the algorithms of a global economy? The predicted failure of the cure—early on the psychiatrist mentions to the therapist she has little hope of recovery—is almost the prefiguration of capitalism’s success at integrating one more crisis.

Unlike the extended self-exploration of psychoanalysis, which end is predicated on the will of the analysand to close the cure, the techniques used in *Self-Capital* are aimed at providing quick results, and to end with the patient being restored to her increased productivity. It could thus be said that in the framework of a culture of risk management and reinsurance, therapy has become a form of retraining or rehearsal. Gilligan defines her character as a middle-class white woman who could work at the ICA in an administrative or curatorial position, and alternatively, who might be a viewer of the exhibition. However, accidents (and other contingencies like ecological disaster) can now break the boundaries of class division, which, in the past, made provisionally immune subjects of this middle and upper class. *Self-Capital* and other work by Gilligan thus provide narratives where crisis strikes anytime, anywhere, and through this contingency necessitates the redefinition of the concept of victimhood. If, as Lauren Berlant and others are suggesting, we now collectively share a bundle of affects rather than a world, and that the former totalizing paradigms (i.e., the concept of social class) cannot describe adequately the phenomena of contingency irrupting within our existences, is the model of psychoanalytical intersubjectivity definitely obsolete?

The way the analytic act is doubted within Fraser’s and Gilligan’s work, as well as a number of other artists’ practices, seems to indicate the latter—that the Lacanian model of subject positions reread through feminist methodologies has been relinquished for a more pliable affective turn and its incoming neuroplasticity. However, these artists still hold on to transference as the structure of an installation, sometimes site-specific, in the space and time of the exhibition, as well as the casting of the analyst and the analysand as characters. Now it seems that this persistent metaphor, or allegorical setup, mainly deploys itself in scenario of catastrophic flexibility that requires the atomized individ-

18 Andrea Fraser, “Performance or Enactment,” in *Performing the Sentence: Research and Teaching in Performative Fine Arts*, ed. Carola Dertnig and Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), 125.

19 On this particular recent development in Fraser’s work, see Sven Lütticken, “Andrea Fraser: Institutional Analysis,” in *Andrea Fraser*, ed. Sabine Breitwieser (Salzburg: Museum der Moderne, 2015), 31–42.

20 On this issue, see Melanie Gilligan, “The Beggar’s Pantomime,” *Artforum* 54, no. 10 (Summer 2007): 426–33.

21 On the relationship between affect, subjectivity, and economical crisis, see Melanie Gilligan and Marina Vishmidt, “Economic Subjectivities in Crisis,” in *and Materials and Money and Crisis* (Vienna: mumok/Buchhandlung Walther König, 2013), 95–105.

ual (in the words of Deleuze, the “dividual”) to artificially absorb the social responsibilities of crisis, which in the end exceeds and destroys him or her. Therefore, recognizing that adaptive therapy generally fails (for good or bad reasons), and that emancipation is put in abeyance, could it also mean that a particular form of rehearsal as social reproduction can be arrested in its course? To yield political results on that matter it is perhaps now time to leave, once more, the interiority of “places” designated by psychoanalysis interlocked discourses, the clinic, and to think again about an irreducible outside.

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Our Attempt/ Notre Tentative

Achim Lengerer

Il écoute
aucun animal n'écoute comme ça
pour rien
le bruit qui vient
du plus profond de l'eau

He listens
no animal listens this way
for nothing
to the sound coming
from the depths of the water

— Fernand Deligny¹

The listener here is Janmari, a boy of about fifteen, filmed by the French filmmaker Renaud Victor (1946–91) for the movie *Ce gamin, là* (This boy here), which was released in 1975. Shot over a period of several years, *Ce gamin, là* documents the attempt—*la tentative*—of the social worker and writer Fernand Deligny (1913–96) to live, together with a rotating group of young adults, with autistic children in the south of France.

Deligny, who began working with “delinquent” and “difficult” children in the 1940s, launched his first *tentative en cure libre* (attempt at liberated treatment) at the end of that decade, following it with a wide variety of projects in the 1950s. In the mid-1960s, he briefly ran the drawing and painting studio at Jean Oury’s La Borde, one of the most famous clinics devoted to the practice of *psychothérapie institutionnelle*.² There he met the mute, autistic Janmari, who would be at the heart of Deligny’s thinking throughout his last tentative, initiated in 1967.

That tentative, which took place in the Cévennes, in various small groups on farms scattered around the little village of Monoblet, was deliberately conceived as an existence outside all institutional frameworks. Deligny’s young collaborators had no professional training; they were neither educators nor therapists. The most striking aspect of this tentative, however, was that these young adults never addressed Janmari and the other nonspeaking autistic

¹ Fernand Deligny (in voice-over) in *Ce gamin, là*. Translated by Caroline Hancock, Patrick Hubenthal, and the author.

² A French movement of the 1960s and 1970s calling for the fundamental reform (or, in the case of the antipsychiatry movement, the abolition) of psychiatric institutions.

children with or through language. Janmari's speechlessness thus became the basis for seeking other forms of communal life. The tentative was an attempt outside language, outside the spoken word.

My involvement with Deligny began with translating the text of his *voix-off* in *Ce gamin, là* into German in collaboration with the visual artist Dominique Hurth.³ We approached the film as (amateur) translators; that is, by spending a great deal of time watching and, above all—this is inscribed in the process of translation—listening. So the circumstances and methods of listening to sounds and tones were my entry into thinking about the tentative. In this text, therefore, I would like to focus on the sonic space of the tentative: the sounds present in the Cévennes and their audio documentation on the soundtrack of the film *Ce gamin, là*.

What characterizes the soundtrack of *Ce gamin, là*? What sounds and tones are there in the tentative? What is the role of the production and perception of sounds in attempts to create a communal space? What is the function of recording in relation to the identity of a model community outside language?

1.

Audio

Dry grass is being burned in a field. Close by stands a boy, almost motionless. His body leans slightly forward, as if he were bracing himself against the waves of sound and smoke that blow directly into his face. From a bit farther away, we hear the tinkling bells of a flock of grazing sheep.

In his essay *Listening (À l'écoute)*, Jean-Luc Nancy circles around two different French verbs for hearing: *entendre* and *écouter*. *Entendre* means hearing in the sense of understanding and can be literally translated as "to hear" or "to understand." *Écouter*, on the other hand, stands for a kind of hearing, of listening, that "is listening to something other than sense in its signifying sense."⁴ In Nancy's text, this pair of terms does not operate as an immovable, oppositional either-or; rather, Nancy also thinks of *écouter*/listening as "straining toward a possible meaning, and consequently one that is not immediately accessible."⁵ The ears are pricked: "To listen [*écouter*] is *tendre l'oreille*—literally, to stretch the ear."⁶ The word *tendre* (to stretch, extend, hold out, strive) contains a specifically spatial extension. Unlike the eyes, the ears perceive in all directions; they perceive spatiality.

The basic condition of our binaural spatial hearing is, on one hand, the differences in volume produced by a sound's proximity to or distance from the

right or left ear, and on the other, the slight time difference in the reception of an auditory signal.⁷ A sensitivity to proximity and distance is thus inherent in the physical and physiological nature of the way we hear; the slight delay between the first pricked ear and the second, this span and spread, allows our brain to perceive the finest nuances of space. In contrast to the other senses, such as touch and taste, this ability to differentiate operates both in extreme proximity and at great distances. Nancy calls this, metaphorically, the "singular mobility, among the sensory apparatuses, of the pinna of the ear."⁸

Questions of proximity and distance, of the mobility of the pinna of the ear, are of central importance to the tentative. The nuances of spatial perception allow for a balancing and a sounding of our shared living space. Deligny captures this in the word-image *présence proche* (close presence). The editor of Deligny's collected writings, Sandra Álvarez de Toledo, notes that *proche*, in *présence proche*, should not be simply interpreted as another word for *près*, that is, "very near" or "not very far."⁹ Rather, close presence must be a being-present at a close distance or in distanced closeness. And hearing is one of our instruments for perceiving this.

2.

Audio

A young man is sitting on a rock playing a Jew's harp. Children stand around; no one speaks. There is a bustle of wooden bowls, cutlery, pots, food. Whenever the objects are in motion, sounds and tones are produced. Toward the end of the sequence, the young man claps twice with his arms extended, as though they were the two halves of the clapperboard used to synchronize a film's audio and visual tracks.

3 *Voix-off* is the French term for voice-over (in German, *Off-Stimme*). I am currently working on a text in which I deal extensively with the unique characteristics of the *voix-off* in *Ce gamin, là*.

4 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 32.

5 *Ibid.*, 6.

6 *Ibid.*, 5.

7 For an overview (in German) of this process, see Nina van Ackern and Markus Lindenbergh, "Räumliches Hören," University of Mannheim School of Social

Sciences, <http://irtel.uni-mannheim.de/lehre/seminararbeiten/w96/Hoeren1/Hoeren1.html>.

8 Nancy, *Listening*, 5.

9 "'Close' is not 'near' the child nor is it 'for' him." Sandra Álvarez de Toledo, "Introduction et glossaire," in *Cartes et lignes d'erre / Maps and Wander Lines: Traces du réseau de Fernand Deligny 1969–1979*, ed. Sandra Álvarez de Toledo (Paris: L'Arachnéen, 2013), 12.

Ce gamin, là consists of 16 mm sound and picture tracks synchronized after the fact on the cutting table. Untypically for a film belonging to the documentary genre in its broadest sense, the film is silent for a third of its running time. The soundtrack is also unusual for another reason: a roughly twenty-five-minute voix-off is distributed over the film's ninety minutes. The film was originally intended to include no commentary, and the first rough cut was edited accordingly. The voix-off was recorded afterward in response to pressure from the lead producer, François Truffaut.

Deligny evades the task of providing explanatory commentary: he says yes to speaking on the soundtrack (as the financing of the film hinges on this), but his way of speaking articulates a no. It is an act of resistance to the format of voice-over commentary, expressed not as a flat refusal, but by saying things differently, by "speaking in other images." Deligny's text arranges itself around the film's images, comparable to the notion of the writer developed by Gilles Deleuze with reference to Marcel Proust, according to which the writer invents "a kind of foreign language within language" and causes language to be "seized by a delirium, which forces it out of its usual furrows."¹⁰

In a sense, then, *Ce gamin, là* is a film that switches its soundtrack on and off. Sometimes we hear the original audio, synchronized with the picture; other times there are just projected images or Deligny's voice in voix-off. In this way, the film unfolds its potential as a sound film—or, perhaps better, a "film with sound"—particularly when it is shown in the theater, for it is precisely the parts without sound that allow us, as watchers and listeners, to imagine a sound, in much the same way that the voix-off reechoes within us during the parts without speech. During the mute passages, we prick up our ears for the absent sound of the image on the screen.

3.

Audio

A little girl runs to the sound man and wraps herself, dancing, in the microphone cable. The resulting feedback overloads and distorts the recording—then the sound breaks off. In the silence of the soundtrack, the child goes on happily dancing.

Ten years after Deligny's death, the French sociologist and political scientist Anne Querrien wrote the essay "Fernand Deligny, imager le commun" (Fernand Deligny, imaging the common) based on her detailed knowledge of the tentative and of Deligny's word-images.¹¹ Her text revolves around the verbs *imager* (to image, to visualize) and *fabriquer* (to fabricate); in it, she conceptualizes

imaging (in media such as maps and films) as part of an attempt at creating communality. In the dictionary one finds the French adjective *commun(e)* translated as "common" and the noun *le commun* as "community"—as something shared by many.

The communal space of the tentative, unlike those in many sociological models, is not one of linguistic negotiations and arrangements (since the non-speaking children would not be able to participate in them), but rather "un lieu de vie en recherche":¹² a place of life in research, evolving through process and inventing itself through experimentation, with no family, party, or group affiliation (its exteriority to institutions is one of its constitutive features). In the tentative, there is no delineated and demarcated space for an isolate(d) individual because it is only through language, in turn, that an individual would be defined, determined, demarcated. Deligny's conception of uniqueness, of "singularity," is critical here. He writes that "most of the children here are not 'singular' if we allow ourselves to hear that word in the sense of 'alone,' 'individual,' 'distinct from the others.'"¹³

4.

Audio

A young man is shaping a log with powerful blows of a hammer. A little girl stands beside him, beating out a second rhythm with another hammer. She pauses to give the blade of a knife a thorough going-over with her tongue (here the contemporary viewer is taken aback every time) and then returns to her polyrhythmic pounding on the log, now with two hammers. She hums softly to herself, imitating the rhythm of the blows.

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, "Literature and Life," trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 2 (Winter 1997): 229.

¹¹ Anne Querrien, "Fernand Deligny, imager le commun," *Multitudes* 24 (Spring 2006), <http://www.multitudes.net/Fernand-Deligny-imager-le-commun>. Querrien is coeditor of *Multitudes* and was secretary-general of CERFI (Centre d'études, de recherches et de formation institutionnelles), an organization founded by Félix Guattari. A loose association of sociologists, urbanists, educators, and psychologists, this independent,

decidedly left-wing research group was active from 1967 to 1987 and published many of Deligny's writings in its journal, *Recherche*, including the voix-off from *Ce gamin, là* in 1975.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "La plupart des enfants là ne sont pas singuliers si nous laissons ce mot-là résonner du sens de seul, individuel, qui se distingue des autres." Fernand Deligny, *Singulière ethnologie: Nature et pouvoir et nature du pouvoir* (Paris: Hachette, 1980), 21 (translated by Patrick Hubenthal).

What do the sounds and tones in the tentative do? They form the communal space outside language: we hear the voices of children who do not speak but do express themselves vocally. Humming, throat clearing, swallowing, rhythmic imitations, the sounds of the environment, seemingly endless repeated sequences of vowels and consonants: a complexity of vocal utterances that remains wordless. Silent is not quiet, writes Querrien: "To be silent like Janmari is not to be quiet, it isn't a reaction; it is a posture, an attitude, a way of living, a set of gestures that withhold speech."¹⁴ Among these gestures are the children's vocal sounds. The children contribute gestures of vocal presence to the community, a multitude of tiny gestures in a wordless space.¹⁵ This not-speaking is accompanied by a not-looking, not-gazing. We hardly ever see the children making eye contact. "Never the shadow of another in his field of vision" is how Deligny puts it in his *voix-off*.¹⁶

5.

Audio

A young man strides to a semicircle of stacked stone objects. He claps twice with his arms extended and then drags a piece of firewood across the uneven surface of one of the stones. The wood bounces four times. He drags it across the surface again, ending the action with a double tap on the stone. A second young man repeats the exact same sequence. Then the two of them place baskets, washtubs, pots, saws, and other objects on the stones in the background. They underscore their walking and carrying by drumming their fingers and knocking the objects against each other.

At last a boy appears among the stones, standing in the exact center of the semicircle. Barely moving (it is the same boy who was standing in the smoke in the field), he dips his head and torso slightly to the right, then to the left.

In the film we can see and hear that the young adults who live with the autistic children produce nonlinguistic sounds as well. What can they do while "intentionally" denying themselves their most powerful instrument, language? To keep the power of language from jumping its track, they do not use their voices; instead, they produce sounds and tones in many other ways, such as clapping their hands, striking a metal ring, and rhythmically rolling a rock back and forth in a basin. They also use a wide variety of instruments, such as Jew's harps, flutes, and tambourines. "To listen," Nancy writes, "is to enter that spatiality by which, *at the same time*, I am penetrated, for it opens up in me as well as around me, and from me as well as toward me."¹⁷ This sonic space is an intangible, ungraspable spatiality that nonetheless forms a virtual internal and external boundary around the tentative: "The strange cries of

the children, the sounds of drums being beaten and bells being struck [...] keep all outsiders away."¹⁸ These immaterial boundaries are easily traced in some of the scenes from the film. About two-thirds of the way through, there is a slow pan across some of the buildings and outdoor spaces of the tentative: carried on the wind, a flute melody unfurls in and over this landscape. Through sounds like these, the tentative is enduringly embedded in a sonic space, forming a sphere of life that the children never leave. This sphere, it seems to me, corresponds to the range of their hearing.

Intermission: *You don't even look at each other, says Britta*

What was the name of that piece from 2011? *Spurious Emissions*. For years now, I've been collaborating with my friend and fellow artist Dani Gal on a musical performance project called *voiceoverhead*, which builds on Dani's extensive collection of documentary audio, sounds, and political speeches on record. The core of the piece is approximately fifty minutes of playing records, drawn from a limited subset of the collection. Our process is dialogical: one of us puts on a record, the other responds with a second or third. There is no written composition. During our performances, we stand some distance apart so the audience can experience us as two separate sources of sound; as a result, it is impossible for us to communicate by speaking during the performance. What always astounds me is our ability to "play" with each other, even in moments of personal differences. In sharing the audio material, in listening (with the tension between the sensory qualities of the sound and the signifying qualities of the speeches documented on the records), there is a wordless interchange. You don't even look at each other, says Britta in amazement after a performance at the Hessischer Rundfunk studio in Frankfurt. Why would we, we can hear each other, I reply, glossing over my uncertainty.

14 "Silencer comme Janmari n'est pas se taire, n'est pas une réaction; c'est une posture, une attitude, un style de vie, un ensemble de gestes qui tiennent la parole forclosé." Querrien, "Fernand Deligny" (translated by Caroline Hancock and the author).

15 *Le moindre geste* (The slightest gesture) is the title of the first film released under Deligny's name, in 1971.

16 "Pas l'ombre de l'autre jamais dans le champ de son regard." *Ce gamin, là* (translated by Caroline Hancock, Patrick Hubenthal, and the author).

17 Nancy, *Listening*, 14 (emphasis in the original).

18 "Die seltsamen Schreie der Kinder, der Klang von geschlagenen Trommeln und von den angestoßenen Glocken [...] das hält jeden Fremden [...] fern." Jacques Lin, *Das Leben mit dem Floß*, trans. Ronald Voullié (Ostheim, Rhön: Peter Engstler, 2004), 35 (translated by Patrick Hubenthal).

No Intermission

In summer 2014 I am working on an exhibition project about Deligny, taking motifs from *Ce gamin, là* as my starting point. Since the French word tentative comes from the Latin *tentatum*, which means “attempt” or “temptation,” but also a “prologue” or “rehearsal” in the theater context, I call the exhibition “Entretien sonore avec Fernand Deligny / Proben für eine Tonspur” (A sonic conversation with Fernand Deligny / Rehearsals for a soundtrack). One of the two exhibition spaces contains archival materials from Deligny relating to *Ce gamin, là*. The other is supposed to be a public workshop and rehearsal space for praxis-based encounters between the public and Deligny’s archive. Speaking is not allowed in this room. During the rehearsals, the sounds and movements are recorded with a ball-head microphone, which is particularly suited to recording sound in greater spatial depth. More often than not, the workshops fail; they almost never become “our” shared rehearsals. Why can’t we try out an attempt of our own? Today, the most important difference between a rehearsal and the tentative is clear to me: rehearsals have a beginning and an end, but the tentative does not; it knows no stopping, no interruptions. The attempt of the tentative has no intermission.

6.

Deligny and his collaborators are constantly documenting the tentative in various media in order to be able to perceive the communal space in extralinguistic (or, in the case of Deligny’s word-images, allolinguistic) ways: “imager le commun.”¹⁹ Image, imager, representation, illustration, visualization: along with the films, Deligny and his collaborators mainly use hand-drawn maps, with which they document the children’s daily movements and their own. Here Deligny distinguishes between *dessiner*, meaning “to draw” a picture, and *tracer*, meaning “to draw” a line, “to record” in a sketch, “to trace” a path. Thus a map does not have the status of a drawing (*dessin*); it is a *trace*, the visual track of the space in which the communal is negotiated, and the soundtrack of *Ce gamin, là* is its sonic equivalent.

Querrien calls the maps and the film *artifices moteurs*, propulsive tricks or ruses that expand the communal space of the tentative through media. They become cognitive tools and references for daily living in close presence. Only by means of these media can communality establish itself; without them it cannot be imagined (imager) or produced (fabriquer). Communality arises from the interchange between documentation and world (the actual tentative). The connections are created by communally drawing, studying, and discussing the maps, by working on films (and, later, videos as well). Thus fabrication and imaging/imagining shape one another: “The common space is the trace of one within the other.”²⁰

7.

Audio

Stone circle, second shot: a long lens shrinks the field of view. The boy has moved since the last sequence and is now standing behind the rearmost stone, facing in exactly the same direction as before. Again we hear the wood bouncing across the stone and the two handclaps, then one of the young men picks up the objects from the rear stone and takes them out of the circle. Seemingly without prelude, the boy picks up a basket and follows. Arriving at the center of the circle (where he had been standing before), he turns in a complete circle before vanishing in the cut.

Virtually motionless, ramrod straight: this is how the boy stands in the circle at first. He doesn’t even turn his head to see what is going on behind him. Without watching. He stands still: posture, pose. Without listening? Does he hear? Or is he, rather, *à l’écoute*, all ears, in receive mode? The boy is in receive mode, without intentionality (which is why he doesn’t need to turn around to monitor what is going on behind him to corroborate his accurate understanding). He is not listening; he’s receiving the sounds and tones that surround him. Yet within receive mode lies the germ of a potential action, *un agir*.²¹ Without warning, the boy picks up the basket.

In the *voix-off*, Deligny comes up with a word-image for the children’s receptive state. Janmari is listening to a sound, water flowing from a spring, “and here he vibrates through and through, like a dowsing rod.”²² His body is all resonance; he is fully and completely his own resonating body, but also completely the resonant space of his surroundings, of the spring. Janmari, it is important to emphasize, is not some language-based figure of thought (as in Nancy’s text), but a *resonating body* that listens, and that listens to itself, in real life. Janmari, the resonating body of the tentative’s communality.

19 All the projects in the tentative involved a large number of participants, but two who deserve special mention are Jacques Lin and Gisèle Durand, who still live in Monoblet today.

20 “L’espace commun est la trace de l’un dans l’autre.” Querrien, “Fernand Deligny” (translated by Caroline Hancock and the author).

21 A key concept in Delignian thought is the distinction between *agir* (behavior, action without intention) and *faire* (intentional doing or making): “Nous, nous faisons quelque chose, c’est l’intention ça, c’est le

langage: on fait la soupe, on fait la vaisselle, on fait je ne sais pas quoi. Un gamin autiste ne fait rien: c’est de l’agir.” (Us, we do something; that’s intention, that’s language: we make [*faire*] soup, we do [*faire*] the dishes, we do whatever. An autistic kid doesn’t do anything: it’s all behavior [*agir*].) Fernand Deligny, “Ce qui ne se voit pas,” *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 428 (1990): 50–51 (translated by Patrick Hubenthal).

22 “Et là il vibre jusqu’à la moelle comme une baguette de sourcier.” *Ce gamin, là* (translated by Patrick Hubenthal).

Audio

Janmari is lying stretched out beside a spring. He brings his face so close to the water that his nose almost touches its surface. He is covering his ears with his hands and his whole body is trembling. Then he turns his head, laughs—facing directly toward the camera.

Translated from the German by Patrick Hubenthal

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Castingagentur Casting as Agency

Constanze Ruhm

Rehearsal: Plan and Contingency / Art and Labor

The format of “rehearsal” as a possibility to integrate potentially dysfunctional methodologies into the filmic narrative appears as an apt technique to challenge the conventions of the respective genre. Rendering visible the “rehearsing” of new rules is challenging the all too virtuosic, and artistic production appears as the performance of a structurally open-ended learning process in front of a recording camera. It is, among other things, this blending of private and public production spheres where precisely such moments that are usually eliminated from the final product become visible: moments of reluctance and observation, of indecisiveness and awkwardness, of doubt and search, of making mistakes and failure, of hesitation and repetition. Procedures and mechanisms become visible that depend on deviating repetitions to constitute rules, while at the same time also putting these to the test. This also involves a fundamental notion of *the work on art*, where shifting power relations manifest themselves, not least regarding the aim to render visible processes of artistic decision-making as a procedure oscillating between plan and contingency.¹

Casting: Subject Put to the Test

The specific constellation of the *casting* appears as a precondition of rehearsal: not unlike the genre of the making of in other respects, “casting” as narrative motive as well as a technique of staging presents itself as a subgenre, while at the same time becoming a more radical version of rehearsal, where the relation of direction and acting, of the sovereignty of interpretation and representation comes to a head on the basis of the question of power relations and self-enfranchisement, dominance, and submission, not least at times also touching upon sexualized aspects. The constellation of casting exacerbates this question by the fact that the transition between life and art, person and character takes place via a performance under the conditions of a subjective evaluation of the skills, the “type,” and the flexibility of the performers who are tested on whether they will meet the requirements of the role.² Within the constellations of rehearsal and casting, the question is posed as to what kind of work it is precisely that is being invested into and represented

1 In the framework of a screening and lecture series titled “Rehearsals Put to the Test,” realized in collaboration with the art historian and author Sabeth Buchmann (2013 Cinema of the Museum of Modern Art Vienna; series of courses at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna), various

manifestations of the format of rehearsal were investigated in the context of (neo-narrative) art film, as well as within other artistic practices.

2 This is aptly exemplified, for example, in the film *Salaam Cinema* (Iran, 1995) by Mohsen Makhmalbaf.

by artistic production.³ But what is more, within the casting it is exactly the relation of art and life, of performance and staging that is at stake. In the casting, the oscillation between reality and fiction emerges from the single body (and being) of a performer, thus something liminal adheres to it. It appears (if it is possible to phrase it that way) as an even “more existential” mode of self-representation and self-exploitation as *self-performance* regarding the procedures taking place within the conventions of rehearsal.

Finally, it is nothing less but the weight of one’s own self that, within the casting, has to be thrown into the balance. Thus, the casting appears as a radical form of “rehearsal before the rehearsal” that—if at all—will provide the possibility of participation in the forthcoming rehearsal. At this point it is not yet about rehearsing a character, a text, a position or an attitude; it is life itself that is put to the test.

The subject finds itself on the test stand of a yet unknown (directorial) power (in the Foucauldian sense), transforming itself into an allegory of the term “subject put to the test” in a life that has only been rented. And even more than in the methodology of rehearsal, it is within the casting as a means of representation, where an image of the production of fiction crystallizes—and therefore not least of the fiction of a precarious identity. While the ontological status of the actor-subjects within the classical film or theater rehearsal can be considered to be more or less “safe” (at least temporarily in the framework of their roles that they have been assigned), the casting is primarily about *casting* the most suitable actor or actress, meaning to literally “cast” them into their role, as if they were material that will take on a form only later, in the casting mold. Jean-Luc Godard, who is not interested in stories but in ideas (and following this logic also does not cast actors for roles within narratives, but is rather interested in the question of the representation of history/ies that, within his oeuvre, are permanently questioned regarding their contingency), turns the conditions upside down in a typical Godardian gesture: in one of the first scenes of his film *Éloge d’amour* (titled *De l’amour*),⁴ it is not the actress who is cast in a role but it is the story itself that finds its form, if at all, *only in the character itself*: “Did you understand that it is not about the history of Eglantine, but that it is a moment of history [...] of the profound history that passes through Eglantine? The moment of youth.”⁵ This document of a casting that appears within a fiction is being short-circuited with its own performance in a similar vein as the actress with the character that appears only *by way of (hi)story*, a (hi)story that can be activated only by passing through the body of the character/the actress. Thus, the fault line between reality and fiction finally becomes evident as symbolic marker. Here, Godard designs a blueprint of a casting constellation from the traces of a staging that by becoming visible represents a surplus for the viewer: an excess, a spillover of production, where character and person appear as incongruent, but—filtered through the

instance of direction—are still searching for one another; the story that passes through the bodies of the actors spills through the gaps and over the borders of these instable corpor(e)alities.

In her short film *Sternheim* (2011), Austrian artist and filmmaker Marlies Pöschl deals with the question of identity and growing up from another perspective: here, the coming-of-age genre is paraphrased and abstracted in the framework of a casting situation. *Sternheim* is a juxtaposition of historic and contemporary narratives on (self-)formation. On the one hand, the film relates to the bildungsroman *Die Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*,⁶ and, on the other hand, to the format of the TV casting show, which nowadays seems to be a contemporary substitute of the bildungsroman. Pöschl stages the story of twelve teenagers who team up in a secluded space to develop a play in the framework of a workshop, together with theater pedagogues Frauke and Eva. At the same time, scriptwriter Sophie and director Christoph hold a casting for their next film. This constellation represents two conflicting ideals of education that exist in parallel and contradict each other: there is the functionalist ideal of the casting, and on the other hand the ideal of a workshop aiming at a free, liberated process. Through their joint work, the teenagers explore an interstitial space, having to invent their own roles within this setting as well as in real life. *Sternheim* engages with the narrative logics of both formats of bildungsroman and casting show to query and radicalize them. Therefore the film drafts a *Bildungsgeschichte* (history of education) of the contemporary moment where identity becomes an unstable and contested factor. Pöschl employs conventions and clichés of documentary formats, while increasingly blending these with staged sequences, thereby creating a complex interlacing of various levels of reality and identity: acting rehearsal and documentary plot, history and present, the fiction of narration and reality, characters and actors begin to overlap. Thus the film becomes a maze, which at any given moment seems to be almost impossible to exit, even for the director herself.

3 Annemarie Matzke, *Arbeit am Theater: Eine Diskursgeschichte der Probe* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2012).

4 Jean-Luc Godard, *Éloge d’amour* (France, 2001). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

5 “Alors bon, est-ce que vous faites une différence. [...] Est-ce que vous avez

comprise que ce n’est pas l’histoire de Eglantine mais un moment de l’histoire [...] la grand histoire qui passe à travers d’Eglantine? Le moment de la jeunesse.” Ibid.

6 Sophie von La Roche, *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1986). Originally published in 1771.

Casting as Agency

Over the course of the past two decades, the notion of *agency*—borrowed from social sciences and social anthropology (Pierre Bourdieu, Alfred Gell, Anthony Giddens, Piotr Sztompka)—made a career in the framework of theoretical debates. Here, this notion will serve as conceptual optics, through which the gaze on the methodology of casting will be focused more sharply, as it allows to precisely address the question of the power of agency (*Handlungsmacht*) and self-enfranchisement of the actors (“actor” here as well in the sociological sense) or subjects. Even though in the framework of this essay it is impossible to fathom the complexity of this notion, I would still like to trace some of its prominent features.

In the text “Von Akteuren und agency: Eine sozialtheoretische Einordnung der structure/agency—Debatte,” social scientist Eberhard Raithelhuber writes: “If we consider humans as actors, we thereby often mean that individuals more or less consciously and reflexively are able to influence themselves and their environment. We assume that they possess a faculty, a capability or a power (Mächtigkeit) to act. [...] When [the notion of agency] is translated into German, it is usually and according to the context, rendered as Handlungsmächtigkeit, Handlungsbefähigung or -fähigkeit, described as transformative agency or it is simply equated with ‘acting.’”⁷ Against the background of this notion of agency, the methodology of casting could be understood to provide a model situation, within which precisely such tensions between structure (conventions and rules of casting) and individual actions (of actors as well as of directors) can be made accessible and acted out at the same time, this always with regard to the contingency of the situation *that an individual could have always acted differently*.

This consideration will be illustrated with a scene from Mohsen Makhmalbaf’s film *Salaam Cinema (Hello Cinema)* from the year 1995, its plot being exclusively structured around a casting situation. The intra-diegetic director—played by Makhmalbaf himself—forces two girls who absolutely want to become actresses to make a choice between “being humane” (agency) and “being an actress” (structure), by not least re-delegating the power of agency away from his position as the “casting director” and toward the two candidates, and by also offering the (supposed) choice between being an artist and being human: “If you had to choose, would you rather be an artist or a humane person? [...] The one who wants to be an artist can stay. The one who wants to be more humane should go and not turn round.”

In Rashid Masharawi’s short film *Waiting* from 2002 it is precisely this question of the subject’s agency that is being taken into account, while at the same time being reversed into its opposite—powerlessness: staged as a moment of

deadlock that symbolically represents the status quo of the Palestinian condition. The Palestinian actors and actresses who take part in a casting for an unnamed film are being instructed by their director (played by Masharawi himself) not to “perform” the condition of waiting, but simply to “wait”—an instruction aimed at the doomed attempt to stage a moment of inactivity in front of a recording camera. Like the play by Beckett, no one explains to the actors for what, with which attitude, or how long they should wait. The casting studio turns into an image of life in the refugee camps, and *Waiting* itself becomes an example of the de-differentiation of art and life. In such a way, the film is a metaphorical reflection on the condition of political deadlock as well as a form of transition that has become a permanent condition, which is the very living condition of the Palestinians.

Insofar as the filmic fiction is canceled out by the reality of Palestinian living conditions, Masharawi’s *Waiting* appears as a metonymy of a political-artistic project, where it is worthwhile to rehearse for its realization. A commissioned work for Fared Armaly’s documenta 11 (2002) contribution *From/To*,⁸ *Waiting* was shot as apparent documentation of a casting for Masharawi’s then planned feature film of the same title (which was realized later on), where various actors and actresses from Ramallah should have taken part. Owing to the usual political tensions in the region, the director was unable to return in time for the scheduled casting in Ramallah; therefore, the casting took place in Jordan, where Masharawi was staying at that time. The question being raised by this filmic study of the interrelation of (self-)perception and being perceived as a condition for the possibility of (inter-)action and participation, here, becomes an allegory of institutional and societal power structures. With the division of actor and role, the split in the subject becomes manifest. This split subject would need the fiction of a community to put itself to the test, while Palestine as a nation is caught in the condition of an ongoing casting.

7 Eberhard Raithelhuber, “Von Akteuren und Agency: Eine sozialtheoretische Einordnung der structure/Agency—Debatte,” in *Vom Adressaten zum Akteur: Soziale Arbeit und Agency*, ed. Hans Günther Homfeldt, Wolfgang Schröder, and Cornelia Schweppe (Opladen: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2008), 19.

8 *From/To* was exhibited for the first time in Witte de With in Rotterdam in 1999. The project is a research-based, collaborative installation that charts Palestine not as topography but as contemporary topology. For documenta 11, which was curated by Okwui Enwezor, *From/To* was actualized by tracing notions of identity along connecting lines between idealistic and essentialistic positions, within which art production was put in relation with orientalist discourses.

Primal Scene, Casting Couch, and Screen Test

As the *primal scene* of the filmic *mise-en-scène*, the methodology of casting as a performative and narrative device becomes itself a means to narrate transition and ambivalence. It brings to light the passage from actor/actress to character and back again, and the production of representation, as well as the representation of production: moments of failure, of endings, of repetition, of resumption. If one therefore interprets the trope of the casting as an *Urszene*, a primal scene of cinema, Roland Tavel and Andy Warhol's *Screen Test #2* can be understood to be its most radical and relentless *mise-en-scène*. In the text "Mario Montez: For Shame," author Douglas Crimp writes:

Ostensibly just what its title says it is, *Screen Test No. 2* is the second of Warhol's screen-test films of early 1965 in which Tavel, novelist, founding playwright of ridiculous theater, and Warhol's scenarist from 1964 to 1966, interviews a superstar for a new part (*Screen Test No. 1* stars Philip Fagan, Warhol's lover of the moment, who shared the screen with Mario Montez in *Harlot*, Warhol's first sound film and the first in which Tavel participated). In the case of *Screen Test No. 2*, Mario is ostensibly being tested for the role of Esmeralda in a remake of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. He is shown throughout in a slightly out-of-focus close-up on his face, wearing (and often nervously brushing) a cheap, ratty dark wig. He also wears dangling oversize earrings and long white evening gloves. For a long time at the film's beginning, he ties a long silk scarf into his wig, using, it seems, the camera's lens as his mirror. After speaking the credits from off-screen, where he remains throughout the film, Tavel begins to intone, insinuate, cajole, prod, demand: "Now, Miss Montez, just relax ... you're a lady of leisure, a grande dame. Please describe to me what you feel like right now." "I feel," Mario begins his reply—and there follows rather too long a pause as he figures out what to say—"I feel like I'm in another world now, a fantasy ... like a kingdom meant to be ruled by me, like I could give orders and suggest ideas."

Poor Mario. *This* kingdom is ruled by Ronald Tavel.⁹

Not unlike George Kuchar's short film *I, an Actress* (1977), the methodology of casting as artistic medium in Warhol's experimental setup becomes a pretext for making movies without having to make "movies." With regard to the filmic economy, this strategy becomes a ploy, a cheap trick, a cheat. *Screen Test #2* stages moments of mutual seduction that gain momentum mainly from the variable distances between character and actor/actress, prismatically refracted and multiplied by the self-staging of Mario as Maria Montez. At the same time, scenarios of exploitation and humiliation that manifest themselves in this game of deception, disappointment, withdrawal/denial and

seduction, submission and insult—in terms of their motives—thoroughly touch upon sadomasochistic, sexually charged phantasmagorias. From here it's not a far cry toward pornographic genres, also considering Warhol's own predilection for prostitutes, drug addicts, hustlers, and porn stars as actors/actresses for his movies: it comes as no surprise that the motive of the casting is favored by the porn film industry.

When one, for example, googles "casting and porn," the hits are countless (naturally including invitations for actual castings). A pivotal link between the subject of casting and the pornographic genre is the question of economy: the basic motto being to get the most out of the production conditions with the most basic means, using cheap equipment, without money, with non- or semiprofessional actors or actresses, and without any concern for questions of filmic dramaturgy and aesthetics, of course, not least so as to produce those moments of alleged authenticity, or "real life," that are so popular in the porn genre.

Therefore, porn merely responds to the desire of the camera and to the scopophilia of the audience—to the key paradigm of cinema, so to speak, that goes back not least to Dziga Vertov's *Kinoglaz* (1924). The main issue is that the cast is right, and their suitability is being put to the test in the framework of the pornographic casting fantasy. The relations are less than subtle, and the role cannot be created because there is no such thing like a role. One does things only to show that things can be done; the goal is the money shot. It is here where bare actions, stripped of any further elaboration, are being performed, and perhaps it is this that is sometimes so moving, similar to Mario Montez's gruesomely touching performance of himself in *Screen Test #2*. In porn, theatrical performance turns into sexual performance.

If one considers the porn film industry as a kind of degraded cousin of Hollywood cinema, or—to put it a bit more elegantly—as Hollywood's dark mirror, one could claim that these parallel worlds are certainly linked by a number of motives, a central subject here being the notorious casting couch. While in porn, the couch as functional furniture is mostly visible in the frame, in Hollywood cinema, it remains as a profilmic off-space. It was Warhol who illustrated this aptly in *Couch* (1964)—a film that was shot in the Factory with chance visitors over the course of some months. A big old couch is the center stage, where the actors and actresses indulge in various social, verbal, and sexual activities.

⁹ Douglas Crimp, "Our Kind of Movie": *The Films of Andy Warhol* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 26.

In porn, one could say, the tropes of cinematic desire are cannibalized: like the projector from the cinema auditorium, the foreplay (the repressed of the filmic logic) is excluded here to give way for *hardcore*, for the *hard kernel* of the real, namely, as porn. Pornographic representation disintegrates the conventions of cinema—the production following the logic of capital closely, as it is directed toward and capitalizing on the moment of the so-called money shot. Thus, one could say that the casting is not just a pre-form, or the foreplay of rehearsal, but it is also a pre-pornographic form, which at times sketches an even more brutal representation of a symbolic interaction than porn film—a symbolic interaction that in the film itself must never become evident.

Casting Agency

The documentary film *Exhibition* by Jean-François Davy from the year 1975 is a portrait of a porn actress, a so-called *hardeuse* named Claudine Beccarie. It is shot in the style of cinema vérité; like in some of Jean Rouch's films, one can see the protagonist sitting at the editing table commenting on scenes from the film and on her performance. Later, we see her in front of the entrance of a Parisian cinema, where films titled *Les joyeuses*, *La chatte sans pudeur*, or *Chaleurs danoises* are screened that feature her as principal actress, and where she interviews mainly male passers-by on their relation to pornographic movies, on their self-perception as viewers, on questions of identification and seduction, and finally also with regard to the possibility of becoming an actor in one of her future productions.

Claudine asks a visibly tantalized and at the same time flattered stranger if he could imagine shooting a movie together with her? "Peut-être, pourquoi pas? Ça pourrait être très agréable," he replies, while his facial expression moves through conflicting emotions. If he could imagine being undressed in front of a camera, Claudine continues her enquiry—here, the porn actress becomes the casting director herself. In the end, her question remains unanswered, and it seems reasonable to presume that the potential casting candidate has flunked the casting.

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Alive Supreme On Rehearsal as Film

Stephan Geene

Rehearsal as film is a subdomain of a more general genre. It denotes the inclusion of circumstances of production into the product. This might make one file the phenomenon of rehearsal as film with other modes of critical reflection on power relations pertinent to a production, modes of (self-)enlightenment, or with claims to unveil the technological, economical, or ideological conditions of media production. But, as I would suggest, the tendency to conflate the frame with the image, the offscreen with the on-screen, should rather be considered as a form of “bigger *in* life” (as opposed to “bigger *than* life”), or as a means to get hold of film’s immanent conditions of vivification and mortification: as an attempt to get a grip on the ontological implications of the fact of film; and this fact of film is a fact within the world after World War II: the global breakthrough of visual production and consumption as correlate of a specific kind of survival. Or, as Avital Ronell puts it, in taking television as the acme of visual production: “In a decisive way it depends on the enigma of survival [...] it attenuates survival’s shocking incomprehensibility” and “considers the being-live or survival as the critical riddles of our time.”¹

While, traditionally, media self-reflexivity is considered a remedy against any confusion of film and reality, rehearsal as film, in this context, locates the ontological aspects of the “world viewed” exactly here, inside media production, or, more precisely, the capturing of the captured between its taking place and the filmic confirmation that it actually did take place.

Rehearsal

Rehearsal *in* film is, first of all, people being filmed while doing their work—which, in this case, happens to be the work of rehearsing. Darren Aronofsky’s film *Black Swan* (2010) is one such standardized example: dancers are filmed while rehearsing for a ballet. The film’s plot of a young woman under (mental) pressure in an elitist, competitive world of dance is clearly distinct from the ballet being rehearsed, *Swan Lake*. But in other films, in which the filmed rehearsal is less separate from the film, when it affects the film in a more ephemeral way, an additional thing occurs. In that case, the filmed rehearsal is something different from any other type of work being filmed, like, for example, the tasks of a police squad that make it into so many examples of visual entertainment. The filmed work of rehearsal is capable in its quality of “testing” (Ronell), its *rehearsability*, of taking over the status of its respective film. A

1 Avital Ronell, “Trauma TV: Twelve Steps beyond the Pleasure Principle,” in *The ÜberReader: Selected Works of Avital Ronell*, ed. Diane Davis (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 63–88. Stanley Cavell historicizes television in a similar

fashion, and specifically names “the discovery of the concentration camps and the atomic bomb.” Stanley Cavell, “The Fact of Television,” *Daedalus* 111, no. 4, *Print Culture and Video Culture* (Fall 1982): 75–96.

captured rehearsal can become the film itself. The profoundly diachronic relation implicit in any rehearsal—here the rehearsal, there, projected into some future, the rehearsed object (the final performance)—gets disrupted when rehearsal and rehearsed become one thing (or film).

A film like Cathérine Breillat's *Sex Is Comedy* (2002) belongs to the masterpieces of that genre in which the rehearsal is more than just one activity among others, in which it is not only *in* the film but comes as film.² In *Sex Is Comedy*, the film-project-under-construction (which is intra-diegetically *another* film whose title we do not know) is intricately related to *Sex Is Comedy's* "narration": a film director trying to do a pornographic film, which seems to consist of an encounter between a young woman and a young man. She rehearses, tests costumes and props (e.g., a dildo for the male lead, which supplants his own genital). In the process of doing so, the film unfolds a story of the director's difficulties to cope with the sulking male protagonist and to (over-)identify with the female lead. Here, as in so many other cases of that genre, the two (story-)lines are not completely identical, some last remains of what the film to be constructed could eventually look like, what it could be about. But this "remain" is rather a function of the primary film, a subterfuge for the deployment of the film's (anti-)narration.

While the existent and the nonexistent film may be closely interconnected, the respective share of the unaccomplished film (that we will not see, or will only catch a glimpse of) in the actually accomplished film (which we see in its entirety) can differ. The whole genre of "film-in-film" films could be differentiated along the line of their specific shares.³ Off-takes, internal discussions, fights, interviews, and rehearsal sequences blur the distinction between production and product. The irony that this often engenders is a romantic one,⁴ to the extent that it translates Friedrich Schlegel's postulations concerning literature into film.⁵ Though in most cases we are not dealing with the full scope of the uncanniness of a *mise en abyme*,⁶ some uncanniness remains if the film we are witnessing to be unfinished, to be rehearsed, ends up being exactly what we actually see. Which is, in a strict sense, impossible, because rehearsal and rehearsed have to remain separate if the notions of "rehearsal" and "performance" are to still make sense: no presence can be its own anteriority.

This impossibility or antinomy is interesting insofar as it is, in a limited sense, characteristic of film in general, as film—in its sheer ability to capture chronic *Lebenswelt*, streets, horizons, landscapes, people—implies openness or chance encounters, and, immediately, by having once captured it, annuls all of it. The unfinishedness of any rehearsal, the deferral of a postponed accomplishment, that is the final representation, the rehearsal as makeshift, all that is enclosed and negated inside the film once the rehearsal is captured.

The filming procedure is therefore doomed to do exactly what any rehearsal needs to avoid; namely, seclusion and finishedness. The doing-it-not-for-real (rehearsing), then, becomes the only kind of real that remains. Rehearsal as film is a film that juxtaposes the attestation of people doing things in a visible way (not linguistically), and the denial of its accomplishment.

Rehearsal as film, therefore, as an inclusion of the *off* in the *on*, and vice versa, an inclusion of a not-taking-place in a taking-place, ends up being nothing else but a well-established if not commonplace element of the theory of film. But why is there the ambiguity in the oscillation of presence and absence, why is this cultural trope still of interest, and why does it "survive"? We could pose these questions to Lee Edelman who asks, in a similar way, why Shakespeare's *Hamlet* with its famous phrase "to be or not to be" has survived as a "foundational text of Western culture" and as "modernity's ideology of cultural survival"? For Edelman, this ideology consists in the "promise of secular temporal closure intended to restore an imaginary past in a future endlessly deferred."

Edelman draws his argument from Jacques Derrida's seminal philosophical position of a presence-absence dichotomy. For Derrida, as he stressed in one of his last public conversations, survival is a state beyond this specific dichotomy between present and nonpresent, and furthermore, between alive and dead. Derrida considers survival to be a personal condition of "millions of living—humans or not—who are deprived of the most elementary things, but also of 'human rights,'" which means, first of all, "to be deprived of the right of a life worth being lived."⁸

For Derrida, the meaning of survival is due to a "structural dimension," the meaning of which is not to be "added to live or to die. It is originary: life is

2 We might add Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Warnung vor einer heiligen Nutte* (1971), Yvonne Rainer's *Lives of Performers* (1972), Jean-Luc Godard's *Passion* (1982), Olivier Assayas's *Irma Vep* (1996), and Bertrand Bonello's *Le Pornographe* (2002).

3 Early examples are Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.* (1924), Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), and Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly's *Singin' in the Rain* (1952). More recent examples include Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris* (1963), François Truffaut's *La nuit américaine* (1973), or Tom DiCillo's *Living in Oblivion* (1995).

4 DiCillo's *Living in Oblivion* is a comedy, but, as a rather different example, Fassbinder's *Warnung vor einer Heiligen Nutte* is not less funny.

5 "Das Produzierende mit dem Produkt darstelle, [...] und in jeder Darstellung sich selbst mit darstellen, und überall zugleich Poesie und Poesie der Poesie sein," Friedrich von Schlegel, *Athenäums-Fragmente* (Leipzig, 2005), 105.

6 As in David Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1997).

7 Lee Edelman, "Against Survival: Queerness in a Time That's Out of Joint," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62, no. 2, (Summer 2011): 148.

8 Jacques Derrida, "Apprendre à vivre enfin: Entretien avec Jean Birnbaum," *Le Monde* (supplement), October 12, 2004 (my translation).

survival. In common language, 'to survive' means 'to go on living,' but also, 'to live on after one's death.' Walter Benjamin, when he talks about translation, underlines the distinction between *überleben* on the one hand (to survive death, as a book might survive its author's death or a child its parent's) and *fortleben* on the other hand, which means to go on to live, living on, to continue to live.⁹

Derrida argues that the state beyond life and death translates as an "unconditional affirmation of life." He considers it to be "not simply that which remains, but life's most possible intense form," like "happiness." And, interestingly, he affirms the same "even to the unhappy moments in his life."¹⁰ Derrida's conversation has been explicitly connected to one of his most important books, *The Spectres of Marx* (1993); by musing about its motto *apprendre à vivre enfin* (learning, finally, how to live) and addressing the book's most central intention, to make a coming form of justice thinkable. Derrida is extremely close to Giorgio Agamben who states, in a related project, *The Coming Community* (1993), that the sheer taking place of things is what the coming politics has to face, where some messianic act is taking place. One of his arguments consists in his observation that love is not love if it is not arbitrary, that is, if it is not for any reason.¹¹ The most radical realization of this idea might be Marguerite Duras's film *Le camion* (1977). Duras detaches the film's narration—a woman leaving her hometown after hitchhiking on a truck—of a documentary-style filming of a truck that passes through an average French industrial zone in the countryside for the duration of the whole film. The narration of the woman and a truck driver, enclosed in the truck driver's cabin is never visualized; the truck is only filmed from the outside. The narration is only represented by Duras herself, who is seen sitting next to Gérard Depardieu in a kind of studio, as they are both reading the scenario. But Duras's most peculiar decision consists in her use of a strict linguistic past conditional tense for writing (and reading) the scenario: "It would have been a street close to the sea. She would have been crossing a big, empty plateau. A truck would have been arriving," and so on.¹²

It is the use of this conditional mode that makes it possible for Duras to love the film's characters and, we could add, the whole scenario of a devastated postwar French landscape and its destroyed inhabitants. A love, anticipating Agamben's "quodlibet" and its privileging of "libet" (as in *ad libitum*) over arbitrariness; a love that doesn't mean to contradict this world's gloominess, its unseemliness, its unloveability—it is part of it.

In the Cut // Existential Matter and Film

One of the films that focus on the rehearsal-as-film principle in the most concentrated way, where rehearsal and rehearsed are interlocked or even (if that is possible), where the rehearsal and the final state of the rehearsed coincide completely, is a film that is—by its subject—far removed from any kind of *ad libitum* it seems: *H Story* (2001) by Japanese filmmaker Nobuhiro Suwa, a film that tackles the events of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

H Story is, at first sight, a film composed of footage, sometimes of even rushes, taken from the making of a remake of Alain Resnais and Marguerite Duras's film *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959). In *H Story* we see the (real—intradiegetic equals extradiegetic) director, Suwa, directing his actress and actor. What could be considered as a making of, as it is common for DVD extras, is actually something completely different: the film, of which the making of would be the prequel, does not exist outside this making of. It is itself the film, and not by means of its failure, but just as the (only) way to achieve the film's alleged intentions: to relate to what *Hiroshima mon amour* meant in the past and could do now. Suwa constructs his film in a threefold manner: he films people while rehearsing, he relates this rehearsal explicitly to a given film (*Hiroshima mon amour*), and he presupposes his reference to one of the most furious existentially, politically loaded films in the history of the genre. It is maybe the historical film that tries to define the condition of surviving this man-made disaster—the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

H Story follows *Hiroshima mon amour* in as far as it takes as its departing point a situation that is quite remote from the description of the catastrophe, a situation as extremely commonplace as it is emblematic: a heterosexual couple in bed. Any film may start like that. The situation implies, intradiegetically, that both of them are alone with each other, in an intimacy that could be considered as just the type of intimacy modern societies paradigmatically offer.¹³ A banal situation, but also a pillar in the construction of the liberal (economically as much as in regard to sexual morals) Western societies of the post-World War II period: autonomous subjects free to make use of their sexuality. This sexual option, more generally, is widely considered as being the epitome

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

12 Marguerite Duras, *Le camion* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1977), 7.

13 Patrice Chéreau's film *Intimacy* (2001) presents a kind of literal procedure for

analyzing this situation. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* characterized the film as the "drama of an a-personal love affair." Evelyn Schielke, "Drama einer unpersönlichen Liebe," in *FAZ*, June 6, 2001 (my translation).

of fulfilled time, as an antidote or simply a counterpart to the threatening, empty, or homogenous time of the capitalist *condition*—the empty time. But it is, and was, not less connected to the ennui of postwar societies, their emptiness, their generalization of commodity culture into the private realm—as “the sickness of eros” (Antonioni).

Suwa eliminates erotic passion. His opening scene, with two people in bed, is immediately linked to their acting work. By choosing well-known actors or actresses for his film, such as Béatrice Dalle for “she” (role name) and Hiroaki Umano, not less recognizable for connoisseurs of Japanese film, Suwa not only references the film amid claims of critical art-house culture, he adds another level to the film’s tension of actor versus role: here we have a close-up of people in a supposedly nonpublic moment (two people in bed; both actor and actress exhibiting their acting capabilities). This diremption or divisiveness, as it is given in any film, between role and actor, overstated here through implementation of the making of into the film, is fortified as an exemplary scene, realized through the bodies and personae of Dalle and Umano.

The actors, out of character, might be “really” themselves, now, in their failure to act but, of course, this might as well be a *mise-en-scène* twist—they might be acting as nonacting, and this remains in a purposefully constructed sphere of indecisiveness. What remains definitive: it is them, these actors, defined by the record of their appearance in the given moment in time and the given bodily and personal conditions; it is right now, and charged with a drama expressed in their faces, or present as a surrogate in them.

And it is exactly this point that Suwa translates from Duras’s original screenplay into his film: the drama of an actress, as shown in her face. Dalle, the “she”—quite emblematic and characteristic of a male perspective it is the woman who is carrier of the existential drama—is unable to remember her lines. She reveals a profound problem to do her work here: to rehearse. The project in its total seems to make her suffer. This suffering might be due to the project’s subject (Hiroshima) or to the complicated structure of Suwa’s film, but it could also stem from Dalle’s own personal, or individual crisis.

Suwa tantalizes her. He “cuts” her—in the sense of editing her in a jumpy way, in maximizing the heterogeneity with which she is shown, but also by interrupting her, capturing her in overlong takes, observing her while sleeping, forcing her to repeat herself, to do the same gestures over and over again. He “nails” her down with a sewing machine (the editing device) that attaches her breath in an ornament of stitches. He is cruel to her, maybe not the real her, but rather to her exteriority: her being as being exterior. So maybe he constitutes an ulterior exteriority. He adapts to her being exterior.

How does Suwa relate to the original movie, and what is *Hiroshima mon amour*? Resnais and Duras’s film is, in a sometimes documentary and material mode, a testimony to an eradicated city. The fact that this catastrophe took place and became a symbol of the structural atrocities of technological modernity is at the film’s core. The catastrophe is central to the film’s premise, as seen in the infinite circling of the figure of *she*—here: Emmanuelle Riva, who is an actress that “plays” an actress, since the intradiegetic figure, too, is an actress in search of an understanding of the events—her visits to the museum, her repeated questions addressed to her lover, whether he was in Hiroshima at the time or not, and so on. The actress plays—intradiegetically—only a minor role in a film on Hiroshima, which has figures representing nurses, injured people, and *hibakusha*, victims of the fallout. When she is not used on the set, she drifts through the destroyed city. She does this in the state of detachment that might be characteristic to her as a person, but also as it is the usual boredom of being part of a film shoot. *Hiroshima mon amour* juxtaposes this detachment or casual, temporary alienation to the historical concatenation of a most destructive world war, that she, the she-figure, too, cannot forget. Memories of what she experienced in Nevers, France, during the war flash back to her all the time. Maybe it is the very involuntariness of these memories that gives her the feeling of not being master of her memories: they enter when you do not want them; they fade when you try to keep hold of them.

The drama of the Hiroshima bomb is so extreme that remembering/surviving and forgetting/dying seem precariously alike, and also seem to be happening at the same time, or what remains of an adequate idea of time. The extent of the catastrophe is measured by this equilibrium. The question as to how survival can be possible after that and what memory means is being relegated to the question of what type of thin time she is experiencing now, the time of these disturbing forty-eight hours of erotic passion and intensity. It is a remnant of time, since it is so evident that it is a time without future and without any past: the lovers will not meet again. And in this constellation of a foreclosed *post-ness*, what kind of time is there that rests?

For Cathy Caruth, the film is dealing with an “unclaimed experience,” or an “unclaimable” one. Caruth locates the film in the interspace between “history and *the body*,” or the “exploration of their relation.”¹⁴ Memory, owing to trauma, disrupted narrative, and, as we can observe in particular for the female figure, involuntary flashbacks, is in danger of being “erased.” In *Hiroshima mon amour* the repetition drive is installed, as Caruth argues, in the parallel of a repeatedly uttered dialogue (He: “You saw nothing in Hiroshima. Nothing.” She: “I

14 Cathy Caruth, *Experience, Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 26.

saw *everything, everything.*”) and a filmic montage of dead body parts (of victims) and not less fragmented body parts of the lovers. The “betrayal of sight,” Caruth says, is induced by the man’s denial of her, the character, being able to see anything that “the act of seeing, by the very establishing of a bodily referent, erases, like an empty grammar, the reality of an event.”¹⁵ The actress who is taking part in the film’s intradiegetical reenactment of historical events in Hiroshima is to reenact something she originally did not participate in. Under the pressure of the catastrophe, she cracks up, starts to distrust her (future) memorability. Will she be able to remember her actual form of happiness? She anticipates her future forgetting by losing the memory of her actual lover already, while he is still present. At the same time she is haunted by involuntary memories of an anterior lover, a German “enemy” soldier. Is he, who died some time ago, already dead when she has to live through his slow dying—in which she assisted with for about as long as she lives together with her actual lover—over and over again? It is as if she still sits beside the corpse that was once her lover.

Ronell explicitly refers to Caruth’s reading of trauma and memory, and links the condition of contemporary modes of seeing to this historical juncture. This survival is, indeed, beyond life and death, but it does not entail an *Aufhebung* in an “affirmation” of life, as Derrida was claiming. Edelman’s “against survival,” as the title of his essay announces, objects against the very ideological fiction of a “future reproductivism,” which delegates the unfinished, we could say, everything that is not yet “something,” that is not yet “one” (which would be nothing) as long it is not accomplished in some deferred future. The unfinished, the “zero,” is relegated to the position of death.

The lovers in *Hiroshima mon amour* remain unfinished, in a complete way, in spite of all the intensity they were able to achieve. *H Story* incorporates this very unrest, somewhat diminished, as the basis of the mode the film has been manufactured in. Its condition of *rehearsal as film* is this unrest.

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**Contingency and Plan: Working in Theater
Annemarie Matzke**

Fig. 1

Conception rehearsal for Heiner Müller's *The Scab* under the direction of the author, Deutsches Theater Berlin, 1987. "Konzeptionsprobe: Harry Pietzsch, Horst Weinheimer, Margit Bendokat, Jan Josef Liefers, Horst Hiemer, Petra Segtrop, Wolfgang Utzt, Heiner Müller, Erich Wonder" in Stephan Suschke, *Müller Macht Theater* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2003), 95. Photo: Grischa Meyer. Courtesy of Grischa Meyer and Theater der Zeit.

**The Rehearsal as Metaphor for Metamorphosis
The Pictorial Dramaturgy in Velázquez's *The Spinners, or The Fable of Arachne***

Christine Lang

Fig. 2

Diego Rodríguez de Silva Velázquez, *Las hilanderas, o la fábula de Aracne (The Spinners, or the Fable of Arachne)*, 1655–60. Oil on canvas, 167 x 252 cm. © Museo Nacional del Prado.

Fig. 3

Diego Rodríguez de Silva Velázquez, *Las hilanderas, o la fábula de Aracne (The Spinners, or The Fable of Arachne)*, 1655–60. Oil on canvas, 220 x 289 cm (expanded format). © Museo Nacional del Prado.

Rehearsal without Performance

Richard Ibghy and Marilou Lemmens

Fig. 4

Richard Ibghy and Marilou Lemmens, still from *Real failure needs no excuse*, 2012. Single-channel video. Courtesy of the artists.

Fig. 5

Richard Ibghy and Marilou Lemmens, *Until it is totally destroyed, unrecognizable*, 2012. Performance. Visual documentation of the performance at Monte Vista Projects, Los Angeles. Courtesy of the artists.

Fig. 6

Richard Ibghy and Marilou Lemmens, still from *Is there anything left to be done at all?*, 2014. Courtesy of the artists.

Upheaval in the Despot's Wake: Rehearsal and Drawing in the Work of Tamar Getter

Susanne Leeb

Fig. 7

Thomas Eggerer, *Regatta*, 2009. Acrylic

on canvas, 153 x 218.5 cm. Courtesy of Galerie Daniel Buchholz.

Fig. 8

Tamar Getter, *Chalices and Corpses*, 2010. Charcoal and pigment on cotton polyester, 4 parts, each 155 x 1300 cm. Tel Aviv Museum of Modern Art, exhibition view. Photo: Avi Hay. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 9

Tamar Getter, from the GO drawing series: "Blindfold Iris," 2000. Series "No. 14" (12 sheets in two rows), no. 6. Oil tempera and chalk on paper, each 34 x 24 cm. In the artist's possession. Scan: Schechter. © Tamar Getter. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 10

Tamar Getter, from the GO drawing series: "Blindfold Iris," 2000. Series "No. 14" (12 sheets in two rows), no. 10. Oil tempera and chalk on paper, each 34 x 24 cm. In the artist's possession. Scan: Schechter. © Tamar Getter. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 11

Tamar Getter, *Horse's Tail*, 2012. Chalk and pigment on canvas, 773 x 800 cm. Exhibition space at Oranim Academic College of Education, Tivon, Israel, installation view. Photo: Ron Amir. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 12

Tamar Getter, *Horse's Tail*, 2012 (detail). Chalk, pigment on canvas, 773 x 800 cm. Exhibition space of the Oranim College of Education, installation view. Photo: Ron Amir. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 13

Tamar Getter, *Heliotrop'*, 2016. Work in progress, Studio Efal 18. Oil tempera, dry pigment on canvas, six panels, each 330 x 730 cm. Photo: Tamar Getter. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 14

Tamar Getter, stage design and live drawing for *Ma'Lov*, Théâtre de la Bastille, Paris, 1998. Photo: Belami. © Tamar Getter. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 15

James Liberty Tadd, *New Methods in Education: Art, Real Manual Training, Nature Study; Explaining Processes Whereby Hand, Eye and Mind Are Educated by Means That Conserve Vitality and Develop a Union of Thought and Action* (New York, 1899). Photograph, fig. 46.

The Common Reader

Silke Otto-Knapp

Figs. 16-26

Silke Otto-Knapp, "The Common Reader,"
2015. Limited edition of unique etchings,
ink on paper, made on Captiva Island,
Florida. Courtesy of the artist.

Rainer Bellenbaum is a writer, filmmaker, critic, and lecturer who lives and works in Berlin. He has been producing documentary and experimental films since the 1980s. Several of his works have been shown in many festivals, including the 2013 International Short Film Festival in Oberhausen. From 1993–99 he worked as a broadcast television writer for ZDF and Deutsche Welle TV. Since 2004 he has written on film and contemporary art for a number of magazines, such as *Texte zur Kunst* and *Camera Austria*, among others. He has curated film programs at Kino Arsenal, Berlin, and at mumok, Vienna. His most recent book is *Kinematografisches Handeln: Von den Filmavantgarden zum Ausstellungsfilm* (b_books, 2013).

Vincent Bonin is a writer and curator who lives and works in Montreal. One of his notable curatorial projects “Documentary Protocols (1967–1975),” presented at Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery-Concordia University, comprised two exhibitions (2007–8) and a publication (2010). He served as cocurator (with Grant Arnold, Catherine Crowston, Barbara Fischer, Michèle Thériault, and Jayne Wark) of “Traffic: Conceptual Art in Canada (1965–1980),” which traveled throughout Canada between 2010 and 2013. In collaboration with curator Catherine J. Morris, he organized “Materializing ‘Six Years’: Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art,” which was presented in 2012–13 at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum, New York. In 2013–14, he conceived the two-installment exhibition “D’un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant / Actors, Networks, Theories,” held at the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery and at the artist-run center Dazibao, Montreal (the book-length essay following this exhibition will be published by Black Dog, in the fall of 2016).

Sabeth Buchmann is an art historian and art critic who lives in Berlin and Vienna. She is Professor of the History of Modern and Postmodern Art at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Coeditor of the publication series *PoLyPen*, b_books, Berlin (with Helmut Draxler, Clemens Krümmel, and Susanne Leeb). Recent publications include *art works: Ästhetik des*

Postfordismus (edited with Netzwerk Kunst und Arbeit; b_books, 2015), *Textile Theorien der Moderne: Alois Riegl in der Kunstkritik* (edited with Rike Frank; b_books, 2014), *Hélio Oiticica, Neville D’Almeida and Others: Block-Experiments in Cosmococa* (coauthored with Max J. Hinderer Cruz; MIT Press, 2013). She organized the film and lecture program “Proben aufs Exempel / Putting Rehearsals to the Test” (2013), at mumok and Academy of Fine Arts Vienna (with Constanze Ruhm). Buchmann cocurated the exhibition “Putting Rehearsals to the Test” (2016) at the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery—University of Concordia; VOX—Centre de l’image contemporaine; SBC Galerie d’art contemporain; Goethe Institute; and Cinémathèque québécoise, Montreal (with I. Lafer and C. Ruhm).

José M. Bueso holds a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Alcalá, Spain. He currently lives in Madrid, working as a translator and independent researcher in the field of cultural theory. His main areas of interest include science fiction, critical geography, the politics of new social media, and decolonial studies. He is also a member of the Madrid-based collective Magnetic Declination, a multidisciplinary research and production group formed by artists, curators, and theorists who are currently engaged in several projects focused on Europe’s colonial past and repressive present. Bueso is a Podemos grassroots militant.

Kathrin Busch is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Arts, Berlin. Her main research areas include aesthetics, cultural analysis, and French philosophy. She works in the philosophy of art and epistemology. Current fields of interest are artistic research and theories of passivity. Her recent publications include *Anderes Wissen: Kunstformen der Theorie* (editor; Wilhelm Fink, 2016), *Theorien der Passivität* (edited with Helmut Draxler; Wilhelm Fink, 2013), *P—Passivität* (Textem, 2012), and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Researcher* (edited with Dieter Lesage; AS 179, 2007). Since 2016 she has been a board member of Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (nGbK), Berlin. She is a professor of philosophy at the University of Arts, Berlin.

Stefanie Diekmann is Chair of the Media and Theater Studies Institute at Hildesheim University, Germany. Her research has long been focused on the theory and aesthetics of intermedia: film and theater, film and photography, image and text, graphic novels, and staged photography. Her more recent work is focused on documentary cinema and the aesthetics of the interview. She also writes a column on comic books and graphic novels for *Cargo* magazine and film and art reviews for magazines such as *Texte zur Kunst*. Her recent publications include *Die andere Szene: Theaterarbeit und Theaterproben im Dokumentarfilm* (Theater der Zeit, 2014), *Six Feet Under* (Berlin: Diaphanes, 2014), and *Backstage: Konstellationen von Theater und Kino* (Kadmos, 2013).

Kai van Eikels combines philosophy, theater, and literary studies in his work. He is currently teaching at the Free University of Berlin, and is conducting a research project on "synchronization and choreography," with Gabriele Brandstetter. His research topics include: dispersed, self-organizing forms of collectivity, such as "swarms" and "smart mobs"; art and labor; and politics of participation. His publications include *art works: Ästhetik des Postfordismus* (with Netzwerk Kunst & Arbeit; b_books, 2015); *Die Kunst des Kollektiven: Performance zwischen Theater, Politik und Sozioökonomie* (Wilhelm Fink, 2013); and *Performance Research 16:3 "On Participation and Synchronization"* (edited with Bettina Brandl-Risi; Routledge, 2011). Van Eikels's theory blog: kunstdeskollektiven.wordpress.com.

Stephan Geene is a writer and an artist and is based in Berlin. Following *after effect* (2007) and *for nothing* (2014), he is currently preparing his third feature-length film, *wilfully, Shayne*, on the conditions of singer Ricky Shayne's pop career in the 1970s. His main focus in theory is on biopolitics, political theory, and television. He has recently translated Jacques Rancière's *La Fable cinématographique* and Paul B. Preciado's *Testo Junkie* for the Berlin-based publishing collective b_books, of which he is a part.

Richard Ibgby and Marilou Lemmens work at the intersection of visual and performance art. Spanning across multiple media, their practice explores the material, affective, and sensory dimensions of experience that cannot be fully translated into signs or systems. This investigation is fuelled by a critique of the rationale on which economic actions are described and represented, and how the logic of economy has come to infiltrate the most intimate aspects of life. Their work has been shown at the 14th Istanbul Biennial (2015), La Biennale de Montréal (2014), 27th Images Festival, Toronto (2014), Manif d'art 7: Quebec City Biennial (2014), La Filature—Scène Nationale, France (2013–14), Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Høvikodden, Norway (2013), Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow (2012), and the 10th Sharjah Biennial (2011). They have had recent solo exhibitions at Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery, Montreal (2016), VOX, Montreal (2014), Trinity Square Video, Toronto (2014), and Monte Vista Projects, Los Angeles (2012).

Eva Könnemann is a filmmaker who lives in Berlin. She studied at Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg and has since received the following grants: Working Grant for Fine Arts, Senate Chancellery for Cultural Affairs, Berlin (2014); Grant of the Graduate School, University of the Arts, Berlin (2011–13); Funding for women artists of the Senate Chancellery for Cultural Affairs, Berlin (2006); Cité des Arts Grant, Paris (2004); and Franco-German Cultural Council Grant (2002). Selected film works: *Das offenbare Geheimnis*, 2015 (German Short Film Award in Gold, Zonta Award, International Short Film Festival, Oberhausen); *Material Beton*, 2014 (with Babak Behrouz, Nick Kopenhagen, Marco Kunz, Katja Lell, and Laura Nitsch); *ensemble*, 2010; *Die Tragöden aus der Stadt*, 2008 (Best Film in German competition, International Short Film Festival, Oberhausen); and *with you*, 2006 (Honorable mention, International Short Film Festival, Oberhausen).

Ekkehard Knörer is a cultural scientist, film critic, and a cultural journalist. After studying English and German literature, philosophy, and cultural sciences, he has published the column "dvdesk" for the

daily newspaper *Die Tageszeitung*, and served as editor of the film and critique web magazine *Jump Cut* (1998–2008). From 2000 he has contributed to the web-based cultural news digest *Perlentaucher*, and since 2008 he has been coeditor of the film, media, and culture magazine *Cargo*. Since 2011, he has been editor in chief of *Merkur*, a monthly periodical on culture and cultural politics.

Ilse Lafer is a curator and teaches curatorial studies at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. Coeditor of *Ulrike Grossarth: Were I Made of Matter, I Would Color* (Sternberg Press / Generali Foundation, 2014), *A Book about Collecting and Exhibiting Conceptual Art after Conceptual Art* (Buchhandlung Walther König / Generali Foundation, 2013), *Counter-Production* (online publication, 2012), and *unExhibit* (Verlag für Moderne Kunst / Generali Foundation, 2011). She has curated a number of exhibitions including "Putting Rehearsals to the Test" (2016), Galerie Leonard & Bina Ellen—Université Concordia, VOX—Centre de l'image contemporaine, SBC Galerie d'art contemporain, Goethe Institute, and Cinémathèque québécoise, Montreal (with Sabeth Buchmann and Constanze Ruhm); "Be a Place: Place an Image, Imagine a Poem—Ree Morton, a Retrospective" (2015), Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid; "Ulrike Grossarth: Were I Made of Matter, I Would Color" (2014), Generali Foundation, Vienna.

Christine Lang works as a cultural scientist in theory and artistic practice, and as a filmmaker and dramatic adviser. She currently teaches as a lecturer in the field of media aesthetics and dramaturgy at Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF, where she worked between 2009 and 2015 as an artistic-scientific assistant professor. Her film works have been shown internationally in film festivals and have received numerous awards. In 2013 her feature film *Kalte Probe* (produced with Constanze Ruhm) premiered at the Berlinale as part of the Forum Expanded Program. Her recent film *As if we were somebody else* (2015) premiered at the 49th Hof International Film Festival. Selected publications include *Breaking Down Breaking Bad: Ästhetik und Dramaturgie einer Fernsehserie* (with

Christoph Dreher; Wilhelm Fink, 2013), and *Come and Play with Us: Dramaturgie und Ästhetik im Postmodernen Kino* (edited with Kerstin Stutterheim; Schüren, 2013). In preparation (PhD thesis): "Das Ästhetische Sehen: Filmdramaturgie in Praxis und Theorie." www.christinelang.eu

Susanne Leeb is an art historian who teaches contemporary art at Leuphana University of Lüneburg. She is member of the advisory board of *Texte zur Kunst* and coeditor of the publication series PolyPeN, b_books, Berlin (with Sabeth Buchmann, Helmut Draxler, and Clemens Krümmel). Her recent publications include *Die Kunst der Anderen: "Weltkunst" und die anthropologische Konfiguration der Moderne* (b_books, 2015) and *Materialität der Diagramme: Kunst und Theorie* (editor; b_books, 2012). She has published several articles on drawing, including "A Line with Variable Direction, which Traces No Contour, and Delimits No Form (Deleuze/Guattari)," in *Drawing: "Weltkünstler,"* edited by Nikolaus Gansterer (De Gruyter, 2011), and "Randgänge der Aufzeichnung: Morgan O'Haras Live Transmissions zwischen Kunst und Wissenschaft," in *Notationen und choreographisches Denken*, edited by Gabriele Brandstetter, Franck Hofmann, and Kirsten Maar (Rombach, 2010).

Achim Lengerer is an artist who works on political questions of speech and language that he thematizes in his performances and radio plays, or spatializes within installations and publications. Lengerer has founded different collaborative projects such as *freitagsküche* in Frankfurt am Main and *voiceoverhead*, with artist colleague Dani Gal. Since 2009 Lengerer has run the Berlin-based showroom and publishing house Scriptings. Artists, writers, graphic designers, performers as well as publishers are invited—all of which are working with the formats of script and text within their processes of production. Recent exhibitions and projects include: "Reading the Word, Reading the World. On display: The Aesthetics of Resistance" (2016, with Claudia Firth, Birkbeck and Goldsmiths, University of London); "Proben zu Peter Weiss/The Trotsky Rehearsals," Temporary Gallery, Cologne,

2016; "Entretien avec Fernand Deligny" (2014–15), Kolumba, Cologne, and FLACC; "The Trotsky Rehearsals" (2013), Gasworks, London; and "Cord" (2011, with Dani Gal), Berlinale Forum Expanded, Arsenal, Berlin. www.scriptings.net.

Annemarie Matzke is Professor for Experimental Forms of Contemporary Theatre at the University of Hildesheim, as well as a founding member of the German performance collective She She Pop. Her publications include the recent monograph *Arbeit am Theater: Eine Diskursgeschichte der Probe* (transcript, 2012), as well as a number of coedited collections of essays, such as *Das Buch der Angewandten Theaterwissenschaft* (Alexander Verlag, 2011).

Jenny Nachtigall is a writer and art historian based in Berlin and Munich. She works in the Aesthetics and Philosophy Department of the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich, and is currently completing a PhD in the History of Art Department at the University College London (UCL). Previously, she has taught at UCL, Lüneburg University, and at the Humboldt University of Berlin. Her work focuses on the aesthetic, political, and media discourses of art and (re)production from modernism to the present. Since 2014 she has been working on the collaborative project "art and (re)production" (with Dorothea Walzer). Her writing has been published in *Artforum*, *art-agenda*, *frieze* *d/e*, and *Texte zur Kunst*.

Silke Otto-Knapp completed a degree in cultural studies at the University of Hildesheim, Germany, and received her MA in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Arts, London. From 2006 to 2008, she taught painting at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Until 2013, Otto-Knapp lived and worked in London. In 2014 she relocated to Los Angeles where she is Associate Professor for Painting and Drawing at UCLA. Recent solo exhibitions include "Land lies in water" (2015), Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; "Monday or Tuesday" (2014), Camden Arts Center, London; "Questions of Travel" (2014), Kunsthalle Vienna; and "Geography and Plays" (2013), Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Denmark.

In her work and teaching, Avital Ronell has relentlessly enfolded "Germanistik" in deconstructive reading practices, frequently taking the off-ramp into media theory, of which she is one of the founding fathers. She taught an annual course with Derrida for a decade at New York University. In 2009, Avital gave nine performance lectures at Centre Pompidou, beginning with a conversation and film premiere of/with Werner Herzog and including a dance, video and discussion with Judith Butler. She also wrote and performed a critical autothanatography at HAU in Berlin, *What Was I Thinking? A Spectral Colloquy* (2010), about the one night stand between hermeneutics and deconstruction—of which she claims to have been the illegitimate result. Most recently she offered a lecture at the Théâtre de l'Odéon with Pierre Alferi on the disappearance of authority (Arendt, Kojève, Marcuse, Luther, et al). Recent works include *Loser Sons: Politics and Authority* (2012), *The ÜberReader* (2010), *Fighting Theory* (2007), and *The Test Drive* (2005). She is University Professor of the Humanities at New York University and Jacques Derrida Professor of Philosophy and media at The European Graduate School in Switzerland.

Constanze Ruhm is an artist, filmmaker, and author based in Vienna and Berlin, and professor for Art and Media at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Curatorial projects include "Fate of Alien Modes" (2003), Secession, Vienna, as well as projects at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart (with Fareed Armaly) between 2000–3. Most recent projects include "For the Birds" (2014), Kunsthalle Vienna; and "Putting Rehearsals to the Test" (with Sabeth Buchmann, 2013), mumok cinema. She has organized international exhibitions, film festivals, projects in public spaces, publications, and symposia, including "Putting Rehearsals to the Test" (with Sabeth Buchmann, 2013), Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and mumok, and "Utopia of Sound" (with Diedrich Diederichsen, 2008), Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Her artistic practice focuses on the relation of cinema, new media, and theatrical forms, and investigates issues of female identity and representation. Her productions

emerge at the intersection of installation, film, video, web-based projects, and publications. Ruhm cocurated the exhibition "Putting Rehearsals to the Test" (2016) at the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery – University of Concordia, VOX–Centre de l'image contemporaine, SBC Galerie d'art contemporain, Goethe Institute; and Cinémathèque québécoise Montreal, (with I. Lafer and S. Buchmann).

Martin Jörg Schäfer is a professor of Modern German Literature and Performance Studies at Hamburg University. He received his PhD there before holding research and teaching positions at Paderborn University, New York University, University of Erfurt (where he received his habilitation), the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, and University of Siegen. His areas of research include: literature, theater, and theory; narratives of rupture and crisis, labor and nonlabor, (un-) translatabilities, and political imaginary and its production. His books include: *Das Theater der Erziehung* (transcript, 2016), *art works: Ästhetik des Postfordismus* (b_books, 2015, as a part of the research network Kunst & Arbeit), *Die Gewalt der Muße: Wechselverhältnisse von Arbeit, Nichtarbeit, Ästhetik* (diaphanes, 2013), *Szenischer Materialismus: Dionysische Theatralität zwischen Hölderlin und Hegel* (Passagen Verlag, 2003), and *Schmerz zum Mitsein: Zur Relektüre Celans und Heideggers durch Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe und Jean-Luc Nancy* (Verlag Königshausen & Neumann, 2003).

Dorothea Walzer is a literature scholar based in Berlin and Bochum. She finished her PhD on the anthropology of work in Alexander Kluge at Humboldt University of Berlin in 2015. After teaching at the Free University of Berlin and Humboldt University, and editing the journal *Archiv für Mediengeschichte*, she is currently working in the German Literature Department of Ruhr University Bochum. Her research focuses on media practices of documentation and the nexus of literature and history. Since 2014 she has worked on the collaborative project "art and (re)production" (with Jenny Nachtigall). Her postdoctoral project examines the interview in literature and film.

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