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Archive Fever : Performance Art

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ARCHIVE FEVER : PERFORMANCE ART

by

Anastasia Proshutinskaya

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A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
ABSTRACT	i
CHAPTERS	
CHAPTER 1 – Introductory Considerations	2
CHAPTER 2 – Threats of the Archive	7
CHAPTER 3 – Conclusion	42
BIBLIOGRAPHY	44
VITA	48

The issues of the documentation and archivization of performance art have been ardently discussed by curators and art historians for the last several years: How can live art be recorded and preserved? What are the most adequate forms of its exhibition? Can the documentation of performance art be considered art? etc. This essay, however, will not contribute to the discussion of the difficulties that the ephemeral nature of performance art causes for the business of documentation and archivization. The purpose of this essay, rather, is to examine what trouble archivization may cause for live performance art practices and for the very idea of what performance art is.

In order to accomplish this task, I explore the substance of archivization in hand with Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of the archive. From his book *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, I derive three key concepts: residence, trace, and fever. I examine how each of them functions within the current semantics and pragmatics of performance art. In this analysis, the influential discourse of art historian RoseLee Goldberg and opinions of leading curators and art critics are juxtaposed to artists' reflections on documentation in performance art.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTORY CONSIDERATIONS

Before I come to the analysis, let me first present some context of the archival issue in performance art, which reveals the importance of the topic as well as its complexity. I also explain here for what reason and how philosophy is going to be employed to address this issue.

The Performance Art World is Urge to Archive

Everybody's got the fever
That is something you all know
Fever isn't such a new thing
Fever started long ago. (Cooley)

The fever for documentation in the contemporary art world started about a decade ago and quickly became part and parcel of current art discourse. The discussion of documentation, both as a way to preserve art and as a new kind of art, now seems to have a perpetual place among those involved in the production, commission, preservation, promotion, criticism, and sale of art. In this discussion no other art provokes as many controversies and as much feverish excitement as Live Art, the art that broadly embraces ephemeral and time-based events, the art that relies on live presence and direct contact between the artist and the audience.

Performance art—a form of Live Art, along with happenings and action art—for the first time came to the attention of leading contemporary art museums in 1994, when Ludwig Contemporary Art Museum in Cologne, Germany acquired the first performance piece for their permanent collection. It was *The Perfect Smile* by James Lee Byars; the performance took place at the Ludwig Museum and consisted of a very subtle movement

of his mouth to indicate the briefest smile possible, before it vanished from his face.

Byars donated his work under the condition that it was treated as any other work in the collection and re-enacted, loaned, etc. (Calonje). The museum movement that pioneered in Europe has now reached the US with recent acquisitions of performance artworks by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York; in 2008, *The Kiss* by Tino Sehgal became their first non-object-based artwork. Sehgal has sold his “constructed situation” with no tangible object involved in the transaction; the exchange of the work was purely oral instruction (“It’s History”).

This acknowledgement of the previously marginal art form, however, did not happen instantly; it was facilitated by preceding intense discussions among the leading art historians, theorists, and curators. Numerous panel discussions—such as *After the Act*, in the Museum of Modern Art in Wien, Austria in 2005, and *You Didn't Have to Be There*, organized by performance art historian RoseLee Goldberg in New York City in 2007—were intended to overcome the resistance of the ephemeral performance art to any consistent documentation. Ephemerality is sometimes considered the gist of the performance art form—by artists, as well as by some performance scholars, Peggy Phelan in particular. She argues that “performance in a strict ontological sense is nonreproductive” (Phelan 148). The ability of performance art to elude representation consequently troubles its documentation, curation, and exhibition, posing a challenge to art-world practitioners. Since the middle of the current decade, artists and other practitioners began to address this challenge with notable enthusiasm.

At the same time, performance art was getting promoted to a broader audience. In 2005, the first ever *Performa* biennial, in the words of its founder, RoseLee Goldberg,

“was an enormous critical and popular success and set a new standard for the positioning of live performance in the international contemporary art world. Over 25,000 people attended the sold-out and filled-to-capacity events at more than 20 venues across the city, truly activating and animating all of New York” (Goldberg, *Performa*).

The urge to preserve live art has in recent years also become more explicit among performance artists. For example, in 2005, at the Guggenheim Museum, New York City, the renowned performance artist Marina Abramovic reenacted five seminal performance works by her peers and two of her own, dating from the 1960s and 70s. As she explained, her project, *Seven Easy Pieces*, “confronted the fact that little documentation exists from this critical early period and one often has to rely upon testimony from witnesses or photographs that show only portions of any given performance” (Abramovic, *Seven Easy Pieces*).

As the feverish impulse to document becomes evident in the performance art world, we may find it interesting to reflect on several reasons for its emergence in this particular time. Chrissie Iles, the curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, attributes it to the fact that the significant artists of the 60s and 70s are now getting older. Curators and art historians have a *now-or-never* opportunity to complete the missing parts of existing documentation, doing so in accordance with new understandings of what this documentation should be like (“It’s History”). Boris Groys, art theoretician and curator, believes that this recent increasing shift of the art world’s interest away from the artwork and toward art documentation is “particularly symptomatic of a broader transformation that art is undergoing today, and for that reason it deserves a detailed analysis” (53). Finally, one can account this rising interest in performance art documentation for the

essence of the art world being a creative industry. Functioning as any other industry, it has to generate new offers constantly and let them circulate in its economic structures; it seems that performance art became this new offer.

Most probably, the current urge for the archiving and institutionalization of performance art, which I see in Derrida's terms as *archive fever*, is caused by the combination of reasons mentioned above. What I would like to explore, though, is the kind of archive that this fever shifts the performance art toward.

Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction of Archive

This feverish discussion of the archive in relation to ephemera of live art made me wonder, what is in the core of the concept of "archive" that makes it so problematic and so desirable? Meanwhile, the issue of archivization became a knot of arguments and counter-arguments, of endless binary oppositions: art–not art, transgressive–institutionalized, outside–inside the museum, documented–forgotten, etc. Struggling with these binaries, I eventually turned to the philosophy of deconstruction, to Jacques Derrida's book *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Originally, it was a lecture about the concept of the archive, given in 1994. In this work Derrida analyses the relation between memory and remembrance; he focuses his attention on desire and the discursive technology for capturing.

There have been many and quite various readings of this book since its publication. Usually, scholars first conduct an analysis of Derrida's text and derive some key concepts, singling out certain themes; then they often turn to application of these concepts to their own project, to their own investigation in a sphere of their interest. That is, for example, what Carolyn Steedman did; she confronted Derrida's vision of archive fever with her own insights about archival fever in an epidemiological sense.

Dragan Kujundzic focused on the theme of collective traumatic memories and then applied it to the Sarajevo conflict in 1999.

In my reading of Derrida's text, I was interested in the philosophical foundations of the archive *per se*, the key conceptual elements of it. And so, arguably, I found three of them: the residence, the trace, and the drive. Derrida never addressed his book to performance art and that's what makes it especially insightful for my project, as it allows us to consider the current discussion from the meta-stance of more universal terms.

Not only are readings of Derrida's book various, even the translations of its title, *Mal d'archive*, from French vary. *Mal* has several meanings: trouble, pain, illness, lack, harm, as well as evil, in philosophical and religious terms. Carolyn Steedman, who studied Derrida's text extensively, supposes that the *fever* of English translation is misleading (1-14). Whereas Steedman makes the case for "archives of evil" (10) to be the proper translation, it also can be a "malice in archive" (Rapaport 69) or a "trouble with archives" (Velody 1). It seems that not only the French language, but also Derrida himself leave the book's title inspirationally open for interpretations.

Although I found the concept of "fever" quite productive, especially when it came to psychoanalysis, the overall pathos of my project suggests that the translation also could be "the threat of the archive." Throughout my analysis, I am pointing to the threats that the burning desire for performance art documentation, embodied in and imposed by art institutions, poses for performance art practices.

CHAPTER 2

THREATS OF THE ARCHIVE

In order to make the best use of Derrida's understanding of the archive, I will follow a structure of consecutive application of his three concepts, interrelated but still quite self-sufficient themes. Thus, this main section is divided in three parts: 1) the *residence* and the institutionalization of performance art, 2) the *trace* and the discussion about the medium and mediation of performance art, and 3) the *drive* and the ideology of the performance art world.

Residence / Institutionalization

In this part, I analyze the first Derridian concept, the residence, and then employ it as a lens to reveal the potentially threatening features of the process of performance art institutionalization and its influence on performance art practices.

Residence of the Archive According to Jacques Derrida

Following the logic of the Derrida's book, I will start from the question of *residence*, which in a context of latter curatorial discussions can be also named *institutionalization*. Derrida, like many post-modern philosophers, often employed Greek language in his philosophical constructions. Thus, to get to an understanding of what the archive is, he traces the word *archive* to a couple of Greek words: *arkhe* and *arkheion* (1-7). *Arche* in Greek has two meanings: commencement and commandment.

Commencement is the beginning, natural or historical. The archive traces something from the very start and so on throughout its history; that is something we expect an archive to do. However, there is another meaning of the same word, which is commandment. With the act of commandment the law is being intentionally established; the archive draws attention or priority to particular content and distinguishes this content from anything that

is left outside. Thus, two principles -- ontological and nomological -- meet in this one word, *Arche*. Following Derrida's line of thought, the same two principles constitute the duality of the concept of the archive: it is simultaneously historical and political, natural and constructed. The nomological aspect of the archive is emphasized in the meaning of another Greek word, *Arkheion*, that Derrida employs for his ontological prospecting. In Ancient Greece, the *Arkheion* was the house where juridical documents were stored. This house was not a mere impersonal storage unit but a private space, a *residence* of the *Archon*. Keeping the documents of regulative power, the *Archon*, a noble and well-educated man, represented the law for other citizens. And as he was himself the law, he was authorized not only to ensure the physical security of the substrate, but also to interpret it and, eventually, to make it. In total, these functions resulted in *Archon's* power of *consignation*: he gathered signs together and unified, identified, and classified them in order to coordinate a single synchronic system, a unity, an ideal homogeneous and legitimate configuration. An authorized person was making the common law in the private setting of his house.

Derrida emphasizes this uncertain boundary between public and private in the archive, which reveals itself in the above-described duality of *Arkheion* as a place and even more so in the duality of *Archon's* function. It should be noticed that this boundary becomes even blurrier in the case of a *first archivist*, the one who institutes and establishes the archive; apparently, before he exhibits and preserves the document he has to establish it (55). Thus, there are three elements of the archive that make it an institution: the place, the person, and the law of the archive (which is the theory of institutionalization, the politics of the archive). In his analysis, Derrida reveals several

binary oppositions inherent to the archive: it is both historical and political, public and private (59). These oppositions generate the potential threats of the archive—falsification and exclusion.

Institutionalization: Performance Art Moves towards the Residence of the Archive

The institutionalization process of performance art now can be questioned with the lens of this first Derridian concept of archive, the *residence*: Where does the *law* of performance art reside? Who can be identified as an *Archon* of performance art? How does the public/private duality of the *residence* influence the art practices? According to Derrida, *the Archon* has to embody the commencement and commandment of the archive; s/he should be authorized for both ontological and nomological dictums. Speaking in terms of the performance art world, it should be a historian who is also actively involved in trend-setting as a curator or an art director. On the basis of these considerations, I found the figure of RoseLee Goldberg, both a renowned art historian and an energetic art curator, significantly relevant to my project.

In 2004, RoseLee Goldberg established a non-profit interdisciplinary arts organization, *Performa*. The mission of *Performa* is quite explicit about the nomological project of its founder: it includes commissioning new performance works, curating a large-scale and elucidative performance art biennial, and offering an ongoing educational platform for expanding the knowledge and understanding of what performance is, both in art and in the context of more general cultural history (*Performa*).

Still, RoseLee Goldberg is recognized first of all as a leading performance art historian. Her book on the history of performance art, first published in 1979, pioneered a whole new branch in contemporary art history. Since then, there have been several

revised and expanded editions of the book (in 1988 and 2000), which were both updates and reminders of her discourse on performance art. Each edition traced performance art history up to “the present”; consequently, every decade content was being added to this history without notable revisions of previously published material. However, significant revisions can be found in the forewords. It is in the foreword where Goldberg establishes performance art and outlines her ontological assumptions as explicitly as her nomological project. In Derrida’s terms, the forewords set up her true *residence*. As we compare these texts from 1979, 1988, and from 2000, we may observe Goldberg refining the notion of performance art as she gradually writes its *law*.

In 1979 Goldberg introduced performance art as “live art by artists” (Goldberg, “Performance” 6). She provided no stricter definition, for it would negate the possibility of performance as an all-inclusive art. For the “medium of artistic expression in its own right” (Goldberg, “Performance” 6), read as an *autonomous art form*, this definition was indeed quite loose. In order to write a history of this new medium Goldberg had to specify it further. So, she wrote:

This book is a record of those artists who use performance in trying to live, and who create work which takes life as its subject. It is also a record of the effort to assimilate more and more the realm of play and pleasure in art which observes less and less the traditional limitations of making art objects It is, finally, about the desire of many artists to take art out of the strict confines of museums and galleries. (Goldberg, “Performance 1979” 7)

Thus, quite in Allan Kaprow's vein of thought, at this point Goldberg viewed performance art as a borderline phenomenon, located between art and life and transcending the art object and institution as its necessary conditions for existence.

In 1988, Goldberg added a following paragraph, which was aimed to specify what "live art by artists" might possibly be, and which implicitly disclaimed some of her previous criteria:

The work may be presented solo or with a group, with lighting, music or visuals made by the performance artist him or herself, or in collaboration, and performed in places ranging from an art gallery or museum to an "alternative space", a theater, café, bar or street cornerThe performance might be a series of intimate gestures or large-scale visual theater, lasting from a few minutes to many hours; it might be performed only once or repeated several times, with or without a prepared script, spontaneously improvised, or rehearsed over many months. (Goldberg, "Performance 1988" 9)

According to this later description, performance art can function within "the confines" of art institutions and include all elements of elaborated theater production.

Performance art now transgresses the multiple "limitations of more established art forms" (Goldberg, "Performance 1988" 9). Goldberg's later emphasis on the synthetic multimedia nature of performance art classifies it as *definitely art* rather than a between-art-and-life phenomenon. It possesses certain aesthetic, cultural, and even political worth. Being promoted as valuable and expedient in many respects, performance art cannot remain a hard-edged provocation, which it proved itself to be in the 70s. The presence of the artist in society, depending on the nature of the performance, "can be esoteric,

shamanistic, instructive, provocative, and entertaining” (“Performance 1988” 8). As we see, *provocative* is not at the top of this list.

In 2000, Goldberg assigns additional social value to performance art as she relates it to academic context: “academia has focused on performance art as an important reference in cultural studies—whether in philosophy, architecture or anthropology—and has developed a theoretical language to critically examine its impact on intellectual history” (“Performance 2000” 9). Consequently, the institutionalization now follows performance art wherever it emerges; whatever it happens to be, the performance can be analyzed, theorized and appreciated.

Writing the history, Goldberg at the same time establishes the law; like a Derridian *Archon*, she operates with both commencement and commandment. The *residence* of the archive that she creates – as any other archive – inevitably contains the potential threats of falsification and of exclusion. Whereas the above-outlined shifting of definitions illustrates the first threat, the threat of exclusion still requires at least some commentary.

Goldberg frankly states that her historical work “does not pretend to be a record of every performer in twentieth century. Rather it pursues the development of a sensibility” (“Performance 1988” 9). Nevertheless, critics still find it necessary to ask, “why the discourse, which is so clearly and ambitiously attempting to be as inclusive as possible, still avoids some significant and even well-known artists” (Erickson 101). For example, while endurance art is frequently mentioned, there is no trace of Tehching Hsieh, who is famous for his one-year endurance pieces, or Orlan’s extensive use of cosmetic surgery. The theater section, while it includes Richard Schechner’s Performance Group, mentions

neither Living Theater nor Ann Bogart. Every random or personal choice within a project of writing an archive becomes a part of the *law*, and the readers of the archive address these choices accordingly.

Selection is also a gist of Goldberg's curating practice that, thus, re-enforces her historical discourse. The space of this paper does not allow me to analyze the programming of, by now, three *Performa* festivals. At this point, I will only adduce Goldberg's own words from another of her forewords, the one that introduced the book documenting *Performa 07* festival:

[M]any of the artistic highpoints of the past hundred years prove that performance by visual artists is central, not peripheral, to the history of art as we know it. *Performa 05*, announced as the first biennial dedicated to performance by visual artists, succeeded in getting this message across. *Performa 07* built on this momentum, opening the door to other disciplines (dance for example) . . . ,revived the conversation across the disciplines that had been so critical to the art of the 1970s. ("Performa 07" 15)

Goldberg deliberately links her choices as festival art director (e.g., whether to invite visual artists or dancers) to the *history of performance art* as given; the history that she wrote is to be "revived" in festival programming and artists are expected to get her message across.

This reverberatory movement between Goldberg's historical discourse and curatorial practice becomes even more evident at her exhibition, *100 Years*, which she dedicated to the history of performance art. The historical exposition of the recent decade contained solely artworks which previously participated in the *Performabiennial*. In a

framework of general art historical discourse, these works presented the artists that Goldberg had once selected and the trends that she had once established (*100 Years*).

In conclusion, I state that Goldberg's project of institutionalization of performance art illustrates the Derridian concept of archival *residence*—in the whole complexity of its functional mechanisms and its potential threats. However, the ultimate judgments about the actual influence of institutionalization on art practices can only be drawn from the art practitioners themselves.

Performance Art Practices under the Influence of Institutionalization

Institutionalization of performance art impacts art practices: the way in which performance art is defined and promoted by institutions influences the choices that artists make in their work. It orients emerging generations of artists to move a certain direction, and it makes even renowned artists revise their previous standpoints about performance art ontology.

Institutionalization limits the possible; it mediates the experience of artist and onlooker, and levels the potential of performance art to contravene and rebel. These three threats of the institutionalization of live performance art practice were mentioned by Martha Rosler at the panel discussion *Not for Sale: It Is History Now*. Rosler belongs to the early generation of New York performance artists who began to work actively in the 60-70s and were primarily focused on the intervention into the politics of everyday life. Her piece *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975), in which she dramatically transgresses the routine and confinement of suburban housekeeping, is a milestone of feminist art. In her other projects, she appeals to numerous sensitive issues such as international politics, public space, human rights, pollution, etc. Talking from her experience as an artist,

Martha Rosler shared passionately her concerns about the institutionalization of performance art with curators and RoseLee Goldberg, the moderator of the discussion.

First of all, Rosler views institutions as major taste-makers that produce, re-produce and preserve normative structures and repetitive patterns and thus precludes the invention in art. “Taste drives newly-born canonical performance art and establishes the limits of the possible,”—she argues (“It’s History”). In her resistance to this trend-setting she is close to the stance of Marcel Duchamp, whom she quotes with full agreement: “Good taste, bad taste, uninteresting taste. Taste is the enemy of art.” The rise of the curatorship as a self-sufficient art discipline re-enforces the focus on selection and refinement as major institutional operations.

Studio Visits, a performance piece by Clifford Owens, is a witty example of this tendency. Owens planned a series of “intimate performances for one,” inviting RoseLee Goldberg to his studio for one of the sessions. “Owen’s original concept was to recline nude under a chair, on which Goldberg would sit while perusing books about performance art and writing about her experience of the studio visit in the books’ margins” (Rosati 155). Supposedly, that was his idea of the relations between the institution and the artist, the relations of limitation if not suppression. Goldberg accepted his invitation; however, she refused to participate in the protocol Owens had planned for her and suggested that they both sit on the floor instead, thus shifting the rules of engagement. “It seemed unbelievably rude to sit on top of the artist, essentially ignoring him while delving into the world of the mind, which is too often what ‘the critic’ is most criticized for. So, I sat next to him, as a way of respecting his ideas rather than squashing

them”—Goldberg says (qtd. in Rosati 155). Thus, she intervened into the piece, changed its very intention, and actually did what she refused to symbolize.

Another reason for performance artists to bypass the institution, according to Rosler, is the direct, unmediated contact with the audience that performance art essentially requires. Considered as an art of evocation and provocation, performance doesn't function in a setting where an audience can no longer be taken by surprise. Any strong instant reaction—being stunned, shocked, staggered—is hardly possible when the experience is already located and interpreted for a spectator when its value is already guaranteed by the very fact of its display in a museum or a gallery.

Within the institution, therefore, a performance piece becomes a non-functional shell of itself, *a copy without an aura* in Walter Benjamin's terms (254). Thus, it comes out that the distinction between original and copy is merely topological, it is only a matter of place. Boris Groys puts it this way: “Today's consumer of art prefers art to be brought–delivered. Such a consumer does not want to go off, travel to another place, and be placed in another context, in order to experience the original as original. Rather, he or she wants the original to come to him or her—as in fact it does, but only as a copy” (63). It is noteworthy, though, that artists themselves may pander to this move of deterritorialization: sometimes production can be aimed towards export, rather than trying to function first in its context of fabrication, whether it is local or national context; sometimes it can be purposefully shaped in easy-to-exhibit ways.

Finally, Rosler, like many of her peers, views performance art as an act of resistance and tool for change in a context broader than merely individual one. Hence, she fairly asks what the point of institutionalization and preserving performance art is if the very

essence of what performance art is disappears in this process. “Because of the institutional embrace”—Rosler reflects—“performance became professionalized. In many cases it is leading to re-privatization of the experience, rather than re-energizing of a public or collectivity” (“It’s History”). She illustrates her argument with an example of civil war re-enactments, whose primary goal is to move the audience not in the interest of individual self-cultivation, but rather collectively and politically, as citizens and participants. In the same way, Martha Rosler expects performance art to question general social issues and to gain a collective resonance; apparently, museums and archives are not the places for rebellion.

Her last argument can be well illustrated with performance art practices of the recent decade. The *rebellious* performance pieces, which circulate in upper streams of the art world—in the *Performa* Biennale, for example—often expose a certain sense of doubt and irony in relation to the very possibility of rebelling. Being institutionalized, performance art resembles a kind of court jester who is expected to execute subversion and who knows the reasonable limits of it. In her piece called *Consuming 1.956 Inches Each Day For 41 Days*, 2005, Emily Katrencik gradually ate out a hole in a wall of one of Chelsea galleries. Being a commentary on a role of art in an economical system in Katrencik's own life, this performance was an art *munchie* timed to the gallery’s opening (Fineman).

Sharon Hayes performed a series of fictional acts of protest, collectively called *in the near future*, 2005, in various locations of historic significance in New York City. “Hayes was standing at each site for one hour, holding aloft a handmade placard [with slogans drawn from documentation of historic events], while several collaborators orbited

around her, photographing and videotaping her performance” (Cuy 123). Their conspicuous actions called attention to the artist herself, who otherwise would hardly be noticed in the busy street, and who “emphasized how protests (like performance) depend on their documentation to communicate messages beyond a particular time and place” (Cuy 123). However, these actions may equally well comment on how the protests may wear out with time, or how the documentation *saves the game* of a live event. This performance may equally well support Rosler’s last argument about institution that encourages a certain mediated self-reflective aesthetic and thus eventually takes the edge off performance art transgression.

Let me briefly summarize this section. The Derridian concept of the residence reveals several essential elements of the archive: the place, the person and the law. Residence is at the same time public and private and this core duality generates the potential threats of the archive—falsification and exclusion. The analysis of Goldberg’s historical discourse and curatorial practice points to both of these threats. It resonates with Rosler’s concerns about institutionalization that threatens free inventions in performance art, artists’ unmediated contact with audience, and performance’s capacity as an act of resistance and tool for social change.

Trace / Documentation

In this part, I will explore what Derrida encapsulates in the concept of trace. In hand with this concept, I will examine the current practices of the documentation, employed by curators as well as proposed by artists themselves.

Trace of the Archive According to Jacques Derrida

The issue of the representation of history in archival materials, the *how*-question, is not the central concern in Derrida's text under study; however, we still may refer to his concept of the *trace* in search for some relevant insights. *Trace* is one of the key concepts of Derridian deconstruction; it was explained extensively in his earlier books: *Writing and Difference*, *Of Grammatology*, *Positions*, etc. Derrida brings up the notion of the *trace* again, in relation to the archive, but he doesn't really elaborate on it in detail, relying on his existing arguments. Instead, he illustrates the concept with a story, a novel about Gradiva, which he converts into a parable of the documentation.

The German writer Wilhelm Jensen wrote a story, *Pompeian Fancy*, in 1903. It is about a young archaeologist who is obsessed with a woman depicted in an ancient bas-relief that he once saw in an archaeological museum in Rome. Later he dreams that he has been transported back in time, to the day of the Vesuvius eruption in 79 AD, to meet the girl and to warn her of her fate. He imagines her walking on the stepping-stones that cross the roads in Pompei while the hot ashes of Vesuvius subsume the city in. He tries to talk to her in Latin and Greek, but Gradiva asks him to speak German (Freud, "Delusion and Dream" 3-118).

Gradiva, for Derrida, is the metaphor for a trace: like her, the trace also gracefully escapes the burning ashes of total forgetfulness and is dreamlike by nature. Locating the trace within the binary opposition of objective and subjective, Derrida chooses the dreamlike *in between*: the trace is "at once memory and the reminder. Neither present nor absent, neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met" (84). And when he describes it as *phantomic*, it makes perfect sense.

The story of Gradiva reveals another fundamental feature of the trace—the importance of its language; the language of the trace, the one in which the archive is written, in which later the archive will be read, is not a matter of random choice. Derrida explains: “Gradiva, the *mid-day ghost* appears for us in an experience of readingThe language cannot be abstracted away to leave purely perceptive hallucinationPhantom can be sensitive to idiom. Welcoming to this one, allergic to that one. One does not address it in just any language. It is a law of economy, of the transaction of signs and values” (86). We can even speculate further about a kind of language that this novel implies. Apparently, the protagonist expected phantomic Gradiva to speak the language of the girl who was on that ancient bas-relief, Latin or Greek; he expected her to talk as a copy of the original. However, the phantom is not able to talk unless it *is* the original; it *becomes* the original when it speaks the language of the archeologist, of the reader.

Derrida concludes that under certain conditions the trace no longer distinguishes itself from its substrate; he is in full agreement with Michel Foucault and Walter Benjamin on this issue. The question that the concept of trace actually poses is not: “How do we distinguish the original from the copy.” The question is rather: “Under what conditions does the copy function as an original, become an original, become present?”

The extent to which the present moment influences the sense-making of the past has been discussed in philosophy before Derrida, by Oakshott, Dilthey, and others (Jay 216-60). What Derrida contributes to this discussion is the idea that the relations between the present and the documentation of the past are relations of an influence that is mutual. The ways in which we process memories of the past influence the ways we process our

perceptions. "What is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way"—Derrida argues (18).

This statement brings us to the conclusion of potential threats of the archive related to the issues of documentation: Present and future reality may be influenced by the practice of documenting the past. Also, if the language of the trace, of the documentation, was chosen incorrectly, the reality of the past may stay mute and dead. Finally, the phantomic essence of the trace also implies that it should not be mistaken for alive.

Tracing Performance Art: Means of Documentation

As we turn to the performance art world, we may apply Derrida's understanding of what *atrace* is and what it does, to revise the most frequently used means of performance documentation (e.g., photography, video, writings, objects, and re-enactments). This theme was comprehensively discussed among performance art scholars (Auslander; Jones; O'Dell); however, in this section I will rather emphasize responses by art-world practitioners: What documentation media do they choose to work with? How do they justify their choices? For the purpose of consistency, I start again with the practice of RoseLee Goldberg as a book editor and curator. Later in this section, I will also introduce performance art collectors and museum workers.

In the 70s, when Goldberg first published her book, photography was the predominant form of performance art documentation. Since then—she argues in her article precisely on documentation—art historians have learned how

to read performance photographs, to nail down certain facts, including the place and time, the dominant ethos and aesthetics of a period, as well as artist's individual iconography Whether in black and white or color, in

situ or staged, performance photographs freeze a broad swath of information about a particular moment into a tight photographic frame. (Goldberg, *Be My Mirror*)

Here Goldberg describes photographic documentation in positivist terms: there are certain ways to read photography, and if they read properly the performance itself also can be read. However, later in the same article we find her partly contradicting herself. As she compares photographs and video of Joseph Beuys' piece *I like America and America likes me*, 1974, Goldberg admits that: "the elegance and stark eloquence of the still photograph are lost in the documentary footage of the event," which is not as "deeply poetic, even iconic" as the still image (*Be My Mirror*).

Although she acknowledges both major approaches to photography in performance, the documentary and the theatrical, identified by Auslander, her own practice reveals her preference for theatricality and even spectacularity of still images. In 2004, she published the book *Performance: Live Art since the 60s*, which was taken by critics as a "coffee-table book" (Erikson; Klein): visually impressive, it consisted mainly of photographs, accompanied by captions and small blocks of text. Goldberg herself named her project an "art-historical story-board," and expressed the aim of the pictures that she selected for it: "for some, [they are] triggers of memories . . . , and for those who were not there, the photographs vigorously stir the imagination" ("Since the 60s" 34-35).

For Goldberg, these photographs are the portals to the original experience. Each one is a visual work to be appreciated for itself; often it provides exciting angles of vision or "zooms" that nobody from the audience could have. She could represent these performances through the sequences of images; she could publish existing photographs of

performing space and audience. Instead, Goldberg selects one iconic image to represent one performance; and the viewer is left to assume that this picture encapsulates, presents rather than represents, the experience of the event.

Video documentation of performance art has an even bigger potential to create this illusion of total representation, of a complete capture. However, Goldberg hesitates to acknowledge video entirely for it may “drain the still photographs of their iconic impact” (*Be My Mirror*). At its best, video reinforces them, revealing the duration and sound which are otherwise inaccessible. The previously mentioned exhibition on history of the performance art, *100 Years*, which Goldberg mainly composed of performance videos, provides a notable example for her approach to this documentation medium. In a gallery, tightrows of TV-monitors were shimmering with images, all at once in silence. At will, a viewer could wear headphones and watch performances in real time (they could be several minutes or an hour); only, it was hard to catch the starting point in the video loop, and there was not a single chair to have a sit while watching. Thus, for many impatient museum-goers these motion images remained as silent and momentary as photographs.

Both video and photography, when employed by Goldberg, notably miss the description of the context as well as interpretative analysis to accompany them (Klein 96). Text is another means of the documentation in itself; it can be drawn from various resources: scripts, artist’s statements, interviews with artists, descriptions from onlookers, or critical reviews. Goldberg recognizes this on-going storytelling, especially the conversations with artists, as a historian’s responsibility (“Performa 07” 343); her book on Laurie Anderson and her contribution to the book on Zhang Huandemonstrate her interest in these one-to-one conversations.

Expanding the role of text in documentation, IritRogoff, curator and professor at Goldsmith, University of London, has suggested that “it is not enough to simply describe: the critic or historian has to enact the performance through writing. Journals like *Performance Research* and books such as *ReMembering the Body* try to embrace the new ideas” (qtd. in Sweeney 71). Performance art is largely about the body, and so it can never be put adequately into words; conversely, the very absence of visual content in textual documentation has a potential to free and foster the imagination, for vision and imagination can often compete, as they are of the same psychic nature, and documentary photographs can preclude thereby, the imagination and freedom artists like Rosler hope to induce.

Photographs, videos and texts nowadays can be digitalized and, thus, are relatively accessible and easy to handle. But when we consider means of documentation that imply actual objects or even live human actions; we enter the field of collectors and museum conservators who have the necessary resources to deal with it.

Teresa Calonje, a Switzerland-based art historian and curator, in 2009 initiated a *Collecting Live Art* project exploring issues and opportunities for collecting, preserving and re-producing live artworks in order to ensure a legacy for ephemeral works in public and private art collections. She pointed to another documentation medium, which is the original object: “Live Art and performance works feature in collections as props and residues—for example Chris Burden’s nails from *Transfix*, CaroleeSchneemann’s scroll from *Interior Scroll* or Joseph Beuys’s blackboards” (Calonje). However, Calonje expressed her concern that these objects, cut off from their original context—similarly to African masks and drums in Western collections—might lose their meaning, destined to

everlasting silence. “I believe performance art must be reconnected to the live, through constant production, through re-enactment”—she passionately claims.

Apparently, the curators of eminent contemporary art museums share her enthusiasm about re-enactment as an emerging medium of documentation. In 2005, Nancy Spector curated Abramovic’s *Seven Easy Pieces* series in Whitney Museum. It gave the tune for the following *crescendo* of re-performance in museum settings (in MoMA and Guggenheim Museum), which embraced the idea of performance art being analogous to music: namely, that performance pieces can be interpreted and re-performed as if they were musical scores (*Seven Easy Pieces*).

And yet, some curators remain skeptical about the accuracy of re-enactment as a mean for documentation. Chrissie Iles, for example, points to several essential alterations Abramovic did in her performance revivals (“It’s History”). For scholars, re-enactment in art also imposes questions that need further theoretical and philosophical reflection. Andre Lepecki introduces his term *will to archive* that refers to current artists’ capacity to identify in a past work still non-exhaustive creative fields of possibilities (31). Lepecki poetically describes these possibilities as an “excorporating cloud travelling across time, across space, across genders, across historical periods, across legal copy-right barriers, and bursting through the supposed fixity of the past into a transgressive revelation of its powerful actualization” (42). Consequently, he questions the concepts of authorship, of the context’s value, of time linearity, and of the core motivation that lies in artist’s interest to the past works.

However, what is important to mention here, in relation to the current theme of archivization, is that the re-enactment never exists as a primary document; it always relies

on other sources—texts or images—while animating or distorting them. Thus, not even the re-enactment *per se* should be of main concern, but rather the “package” of initial information that it requires for being executed.

Gathering and preserving this information became the tasks for conservators at MoMA’s media and performance department, since the museum has acquired several performance art pieces for its permanent collection with the ultimate purpose to re-perform them in future. One of the conservators, Glenn Wharton, described the newly created procedure for performance art preservation at the previously mentioned panel discussion, *It’s History Now: Performance Art and the Museum*. There are contracts to be signed, forms and questionnaires to be filled. There is a logic similar to one of documenting dance and attempts to apply some conventional language of description to it, Laban notation, for example. However, as Wharton admits, the main means of documentation are the structured, detailed interviews with artists on “what can it be in the future?” and the videos of re-performing training sessions lead by the creators of works.

Thus, as we may see, there is a vast variety of documentation means; none of them is without controversy. Given the initial paradox of the task to objectify non-object-based performance art, curators and collectors negotiate it differently. Whatever choice they make, it can always be questioned: Does the past really speak to us through certain media? Is it still a document or is it pretending to be the art itself? How does the institution’s interest in particular documentation media influence the choices artists make to produce their works? These major questions mirror the ones that the Derridian concept of *thetrace* pose to the practitioners of archivization.

Documentation as a Part of Performance Art Practice

Among performance artists, there is no complete agreement on how performances should be documented. This brief review aims to show three quite different perspectives.

Joan Jonas, one of the New York-based pioneers of performance and video art, is known for her distinctive performance vocabulary of ritualized gestures and symbolic objects: masks, mirrors, and costuming. She is also known for her convinced standpoint about documentation: although she often revisits her performance works, in order to exhibit or to preserve them, she usually translates performances into another medium or form. Jonas makes videos and installs them along with the objects once used in a piece (Jonas; Kino). These videos and objects—as she insists—become something other than the performance; they are the artworks based on the live event but fairly emancipated from it. Since there is no way to repeat the original piece, the artist can at least utilize ideas and objects left from it.

Of course, Jonas documents her performances. She might put on a special session, just for documentation, and have a hired photographer take images that she pinpointed in advance; she video-tapes her every work; but she doesn't expect these documents to repeat the original experience for the one who might ever encounter them (Jonas 59).

But what if an artist believes that a performance piece may have an afterlife? In recent years, Marina Abramovic became deeply devoted to the idea of performance art's legacy. Being a groundbreaking and prolific performance artist who always comprehensively explored the possibilities of the mind and the limits of the body, Abramovic now seems to be preoccupied with the possibilities and limits of performance art documentation (Orrell).

From this perspective, Abramovic responded to Goldberg's comparison of still and motion images of Joseph Beuys's *I like America* by saying:

It bothers me that most art historians talking about performance only use slides and never film or video. Even bad video material is better than slides because it presents the actual idea of the performance. I don't care if the video of Beuys looks bad, because that's reality. I have seen so many bad performance pieces that actually had great photographs afterwards.

("Performa 07" 341)

Abramovic prefers video documentation for it has fluidity and action; and because of the sound, which is of great importance for her. However, she doesn't dismiss photography entirely; still images often represent her durational performances of endurance. "An image of the intensity of not moving, or of some kind of expanded time in space, becomes a still image that can haunt you. A photograph can really capture those three, four, five hours, at least in my experience"—Abramovic says ("Performa 07" 341).

The most controversial medium she employs is a re-enactment. For example, the previously mentioned *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005) can be disqualified as documents of the artworks for several major reasons: the interference of Abramovic's well-known persona into the meaning of the pieces, some significant alterations in original performances that she made ("It's History"), and the overall setting as *evening-length-show* at the performance art festival.

Abramovic employed re-enactments again in her later retrospective exhibition at MoMA in 2010. Numerous prepared volunteers, mainly her students, re-performed several Abramovic's well-known pieces that were also present in photographs and

videos. When not acting, volunteers wore white smocks as if they wanted to keep sterile the artworks archived in their bodies. Designed as veritable documents, these re-enactments, to my mind, eventually succeeded but in a paradoxical way. As they re-performed famous iconic images, the experience of them was merged with the experience that viewers already had from looking at the Abramovic's photographs and videos. These black and white recordings of true personalities, emotions, and stories turned out to be the animated originals in relation to these rather flat and anonymous live re-performances.

Whether through photographs, video, or re-enactments, Abramovic relies on documentation in order to reproduce the experience of the piece. Another remarkable performance artist, Francis Alys, shares her belief in the longevity of performance experience but he is quite skeptical about the possibilities of its mediation.

In 2000 Alys performed his piece called *Re-enactments*. Being filmed, he bought a gun and start walking down the streets of Mexico City waiting for something to happen; eventually, he was arrested. The next day the exact same action was filmed again, with everybody warned and everything pre-arranged, even the police played themselves. The idea was to juxtapose two films—the documentary of real event and its fictional re-creation. Alys explains the intentions of his work:

I wanted to question the rapport we have today with performance and the ways in which it has become so mediated, particularly by film and photo, and how media can distort and dramatize the immediate reality of the moment, how they can affect both the planning and the subsequent reading of a performance. What is supposed to be so unique about performance is its

underlying condition of immediacy, the immanent sense of risk and failure.

(qtd. in Fergusson 42)

Thus, he recognizes the immediacy and the sense of risk as essential performance features. His own approach to production and documentation of art follows from these underpinnings and can be in short described as making freely circulating myths. “I always try to keep the plot simple enough so that these actions can be imagined without an obligatory reference or access to visuals . . . something short, so round and simple that it can be repeated as an anecdote, something that can be stolen and, in the best-case scenario, enter that land of minor urban myths or fables”—Alys says (qtd. in Fergusson 26). Indeed, many performance pieces, such as Chris Burden's *Shoot*, 1973 or Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*, 1964, can effectively live on through rumors and stories. These stories and rumors can be a perfect *phantomicarchive* as long as they keep on being told, interweaving in live conversations.

Phantom quality is the core quality of the archival trace, according to Derrida. And so, to sum this section up, trace imposes several challenges to any project of archivization: it is sensitive to language of archivization, it influences the archived reality, and it can be easily mistaken for reality itself. Curators and collectors negotiate these challenges differently as they choose certain means to trace live performance art events, e.g. images, texts, objects, and re-enactments. Performance artists – Jonas, Abramovic, and Alys – also demonstrate quite different approaches to documentation in their practice.

Drive / Ideology

In this last part, the notion of archival *drive* will be addressed: first, as a Derridian concept. Later it will be observed as a part of ideology, functioning on the institutional level of the performance art world. Finally, *drive* to the archivization will also be considered as an influential factor in art-making process.

The Drive of the Archive According to Jacques Derrida.

Throughout *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Derrida constantly refers to psychoanalysis; therefore, this research could have been amplified in depth and volume with psychoanalytic interpretations. For the sake of brevity, they were omitted in the previous two parts; however, when it comes to the concept of *drive*, Sigmund Freud inevitably comes into the spotlight. Freud understands a drive as “the constant force originating in the interior of the body and transmitted to the mental apparatus” (Freud, “Beyond” 18). The subject cannot get rid of it, for the drive is inherent within human psyche; s/he cannot avoid it for it is impossible even to become aware of the drive. The only form of its presentation is the direction to which this physical energy presses the subject; according to Freud, there are two major opposing directions. One is *Eros*, *libidinal energy*, which moves an individual toward creativity, harmony, sexual connection, production, and aids self-preservation. Another force, the *death drive*, pushes toward compulsion, repetition and self-destruction; its task is “to lead organic life back into the inanimate state” (Freud, “Beyond” 44).

For the purpose of further analysis, it is important to understand that in Freudian terms *drive* itself has neither negative nor positive connotation; it is just an innate part of all humans. However, his topographical model of the psyche describes how drives (along

with other unconscious contents of *Id*) are regulated by *Ego* (the rationality) and *Super-Ego* (the conscience). When something goes wrong in this system, then drives become dense and feverish; then they trouble the subject's functioning within society (Freud, "Ego and Id").

Derrida refers to Freud's understanding of *drive* and elaborates on it in terms of the archivization. He exposes the death and the libidinal drive of the archive and then observes them clashing between each other in a binary opposition.

In a context of the archive, the death drive is the forgetfulness that "deletes memory, burns it without any chance to recall it in anamnesis"; it is the "muteness" of memory (Derrida 19-20). The death drive, therefore, might be considered as archive-destroying and threatening the preservation project of the *Eros*. However, Derrida quotes Freud's elucidation, "[i]f there is no archive without consignment in the external place which assures the possibility of memorization, of repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpression, then we must also remember that repetition itself, the logic of repetition, remains indissociable from the death drive" (12). This controversy is exactly why the desire of the archive is none of these two drives, but rather something that is in-between, another resulting drive.

Located between preservation and forgetfulness, this "archival drive" (Derrida 19), consequently finds itself between the future and the past. Derrida explains that, although the archive contains the records of the past, it is as much about the past as it is about the present and the future; it produces as much as it records. It influences the actual events that are happening in the present (Derrida 17). The future, in turn, is the meaning of

archival accumulation; the future will question the value of the archive as much as the archive should call the future into question (Derrida 36).

As he proceeds, Derrida points to numerous archive-related binary oppositions, including the relations among living and dead, between preservation and destruction, registration and erasure, between ordering and chaos, ultimate authority and law, authenticity and fakeness, truth and fantasies, and between natural (biological) and artificial (technological or meditative) (Brothman 189). There is no wonder that such a complicated system is hard to regulate; so, the drive of archive has an inherent potential threat to turn into an archive fever:

Archive fever is something else than to suffer from sickness. It is to burn with passion. It is never to rest from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there's too much of it, right where something in it anarchives itself. It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement. (Derrida 91)

Thus, the question that the archival drive poses is not about the ways to battle it. In Freudian and Derridian terms, it rather requires regulation with reason and conscience; it calls upon to utilize the enthusiasm and concern of libidinal energy and the groundbreaking fantasies that, still, belong to the death drive. Thus, the real question of the archival drive is rather: How do we prevent the feverish passion for remembrance from burning the memories to ashes?

Ideology of the Performance Art World under the Influence of Archive Fever

The archival drive, as follows from the previous considerations, is a force that can be presented to analysis only by the direction toward which it presses *the Archon*, by his convictions. In terms of institutionalized performance art world, it means that we have to examine its ideological underpinnings, which are otherwise taken for granted.

Again, I appeal to RoseLee Goldberg and *The 100 Years* exhibition, for it provides an apt example of functioning ideology. Her claim that the exhibition “was intended to be an archive for scholars, students and enthusiasts of performance art” (Goldberg, *100 Years*) by itself reveals the archival drive. Next, I analyze how the exhibition’s archive-inspired setting points to certain assumptions of the performance art discourse. I describe five particular choices that Goldberg is making and juxtapose each of them with relevant opinions of prominent art critics. Critics are another essential part of an art world; given their broad knowledge of the field and their mission to observe and evaluate objectively, critics are probably the most responsible to reflect on meta-level of ideology.

Goldberg chooses to present most of the performances in video; she only provides text or photograph when video is not accessible; her comments, placed next to each TV-monitor, are short and rather poetic than predominantly factual. The setting of Goldberg’s exhibition implies at least three assumptions:

First, it implies that to learn about the history of performance it is sufficient just to watch the video documents. It creates “the illusion of such exact correspondence between the signifier and signified that it appears to be the perfect instance of Barthes’s message without a code (Auslander 1). The illusion that reality is accessible has a potential threat: when the video seems to speak for itself the other materials might seem to be less

important, and something actually important can be missed. “Does performance art require an [aesthetic] experience to exist within the history [the document] of art, or does it hold some other archival criterion?” – Robert C. Morgan asks (2). Indeed, the eye-catching video of performance seems to become “more than documentation. It becomes another piece in itself” (Goldberg, “You didn’t” 339). However, it follows that when documentation becomes an art object of its own, we don’t have documentation anymore. It doesn’t make us think of the real documented event that once had happened in a particular time and place; but rather affects direct emotional and intellectual responses to it.

Second, the setting of the exhibition also implies that since video became widely available (in a period of a good half of the century from now), not a single performance went un-recorded visually and yet was significant enough to be presented in some other form of documentation. It implies that performance counts only if it was “properly” documented. Indeed, for Philip Auslander “[i]t is not the initial presence of an audience that makes an event a work of performance art: it is its framing as performance through the performative act of documenting it as such” (Auslander 7). So, if the “proper” documentation of the performance piece was inaccessible or was dismissed for some reason, does it mean that there is no place for such a performance in a history?

Third, Goldberg’s design of the exhibition implies that, using the title of one of *Performa* panel discussions, “you didn’t have to be there.” The present moment doesn’t matter if something is preserved for the future. “The utopian ambition, the desire to turn belatedness into becomingness,” is what Hal Foster considers one of the key features of the archive (21). The authenticity also doesn’t matter as long as the document works for

the viewer. Auslander suggests: “Perhaps the authenticity of the performance document resides in its relationship to its beholder rather than to an ostensibly originary event: perhaps its authority is phenomenological rather than ontological” (9).

Another noteworthy choice was to exhibit the videos side by side in a gallery without a single chair to sit down and actually watch the performances. This choice implies that museum-goers hardly watched each and everyone of the presented videos; it implies that they were not even expected to do so. Apropos of this, Boris Groys notes that obviously the society of spectacle, in which we find ourselves, according to Guy Debord, has plenty of spectacles, but lacks viewers (Groys 61). Sharing the same concern, Morgan questions the whole project of art documentation: “Do we really need to save all the objects, actions and documents so they can be instantly programmed for re-performance in the future? This is, of course, within the realm of possibility. But the question still remains whether anyone would care enough to retrieve them” (15).

Finally, Goldberg chooses to structure the material, to order her “archive” by assigning performances to the themes, to the tendencies of a certain time period. Even when not articulated these themes can be easily derived. For the performances Goldberg selected for each *Performa* biennials, these themes become the trend to follow: “the historical reconstruction,” “the peaceful protest,” “performing another culture,” etc.

The very idea of categorization of performance art is what should be questioned in this case. By the establishment of certain trends, movements or styles in performance Goldberg, contradicts her major claim as an art historian: “a radical stance has made performance a catalyst in the history of twentieth-century art; whenever a certain school, be it Cubism, Minimalism or conceptual art, seemed to have reached an impasse, artists

have turned to performance as a way of breaking down categories and indicating new directions” (“Performance Art” 7). According to Goldberg, performance art used to be a way for the artists to express, without any limitations, whatever they had in mind. As free as surrealists’ “free writing exercise,” that kind of performance proved itself to be productive for the further development of artistic practices and art movements in general. Being pre-categorized, performance art of today loses its capability/purpose for furthering art history.

This brief analysis of one particular institutional practice of archivization exposed several ideological underpinnings in relation to documentation. It illustrated how the desires of the archival drive—the desires to have, to conserve, to repeat, to reproduce, to stop and to fix—reveal themselves in certain documentation-related choices. If we will agree that the outlined threats caused by these desires are significant, then we are in the right to state that at this point in history, the archival drive has turned into an archive fever.

Performance Art Practices under the Influence of Archive Fever

When Auslander says that for the framing of the event as a performance the presence of an audience matters less than the fact of documentation (Auslander 7), he talks as a person who probably never performed himself. What artists feel in a performance while documenting it is rarely taken into consideration; their testimonies are rarely adduced in considerable length. In this part, I will include long quotes by two performance artists, for these quotes are the only access to artists’ phenomenology, which is now under study. They reveal the influence of archival drive that these artists

experience in their practice; while facing the demands of market, history, and technology; and while negotiating their ideals.

Vanessa Beecroft is an Italian contemporary artist living in Los Angeles. Her large-scale performances—which usually involve live female models (often nude)—establish complex relationship between viewers, models and the particular location, and thematize the politics of voyeurism. Beecroft was invited to speak at the *Performa* panel discussion on performance art documentation.

She retells her conversation with artists Kaprow and McCarthy outlining their approaches to documentation as well as her own, which all appeared to be quite different:

First Allan Kaprow said that he did performances just for the importance of them, without recording anything, so he never had any documentation. Then Paul McCarthy said that when he did his first performance, which was throwing himself out of a window, he didn't think of taking pictures, so nobody really believed what he did. So he decided from then on to take pictures. Then there was me, the worst, because since the beginning I had a photographer there, so the image was premediated, and it was already less innocent. ("You didn't" 338-39)

Later in her speech, Beecroft admits that she feels "guilty" when she documents and names Kaprow the "hero" out of them all, because "he did the performance for its own sake, without wanting to gain anything—not even documentation" ("You didn't" 339).

In full agreement with Kaprow's stand, Beecroft still makes concessions in her own art practice:

The process of photography came necessarily, because dealers and journalists wanted to see what happened. I didn't have anything against it but I realized that the photographic self did not contain the same patterns or empathy as in performanceThere is a vulgarity in producing an artwork that for me disappeared when performance ended. In religious terms, it's like when you see an apparition—a miracle. Then it's gone, and you can go home without any baggage. (“You didn't” 337)

She recognizes logically the role of the market in her art, its necessity as well as the compromises that it requires.

However, the negotiation with her ideals is not the only distracting factor of the documentation for Beecroft. The technological aspect of it also bothers her:

I gravitate around the performance and shoot snapshots, which are kind of like reportageOften the camera falls, or I forget to focus, and maybe one or two shots in ten are good. But I don't have any attachment to the camera. If tomorrow they invented an extra eye that you click to take pictures with, I would be very happy, because I find the equipment itself to be a distraction from what I am trying to do. (“You didn't” 338)

Her somewhat coy avowal actually points to the fact that visual documentation, photography or filming, is a whole other activity, a complex of skills that the performer him/herself might not have. Any implicit or explicit requirement to have this kind of document forces performer to hire someone professional and starts up the whole business of a production.

Some of the above-mentioned concerns are echoed in the text of Richard Layzell, published in Tate's book called *Dead History, Live Art?* Richard Layzell is a British artist and performer. He focuses on the difference that the presence of the camera makes for him as a performer on spot (Layzell 51-69). His extremely elucidative testimony is hard to quote; he puts it as a free flowing conversation with his performer *alter ego*, Ivan Curtin, in a process of documenting his *International Cleaning* piece, 2001. For the sake of brevity, I will present it with ellipses:

Richard Layzell: So both the dimensions [live actions and documentation] of this very simple event are equally important.

Ivan Curtin: Then why do I feel marginalized? . . . I am focusing on the actions that we discussed, on getting in a physical and mental state to carry out the "cleaning" as an act of non-performance that will resonate around this environment and its occupants. Why not leave camera out of it now and again? It seems to be in control of everything, more than you and me.

RL: Well, then there'd be no record of your actions...

IC: And what difference would that make? . . . [The bigger impact] on whom? Is this about money? This fixation on documentation, the evidence. So one day these remote scrappy images might be marketable? Performers don't have this obsession with evidence. The event is enough. Or is this how you justify it as 'art'? There has to be some kind of visual statement or accompaniment. Is it a way of clinging on to a visual language when in fact these actions are just that, no more no less?" (Layzell 54-56).

Layzell shows how the idea of documentation might be accepted as given (by discourse, then), without artist's necessary critical reflection. He shows how this partly unconscious idea literally splits the artist into two personalities who are having dramatically different phenomenology and whose interests eventually come into conflict with each other.

Both artists, Beecroft and Layzell, experience this split caused by the urge to document, the drive of archivization. This drive might be perceived as imposed by the institution or as internal. In either case, as soon as they feel uncomfortable with this split in their artistic practice the drive of the archive turns into the archival fever.

Derrida, in hand with Freudian psychoanalysis, explains how the drive to save memories differs from the feverish desire to have the event of the past and how easily one can become another. This section applied his insights to the analysis of Goldberg's archivization practice; the losses in discourse complexity caused by the desire to fix a proper archive became evident. Personal reflections of two artists, Beecroft and Layzell, also pointed to the losses in their processes of art-making caused by the constant split of their "self" between being artists and taking care of valid documentation.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSION

The various threats of the archivization of performance art were at the focus of analysis throughout this essay. This research started with my interest in the multi-layered and intricate discussion currently happening in the performance art world around documentation and my rather intuitive concern about the consequences of this discussion for performance art at large as well as for live art practices. Derrida's deconstruction of the archive and the analysis of its core concepts allowed me to identify the key themes and principle controversies in talking about archive: the concept of residence embraces all the issues related to institutionalization and ensuing from it; the concept of trace establishes the relation between the original and the copy; finally, the concept of archival drive and its destructive feverish form of display points to overall ideology of documentation and its final aims. The multiple threats that Derrida identifies in any archival project gradually become evident on various levels of the performance art world practice under study. Art historians, curators, critics, and artists constantly deal with these threats whether they are aware of them or not; the awareness is actually what keeps the drive to archive from becoming the archive fever.

As I arrive at a final conclusion, I am far from viewing the archive fever or the current discourse of the performance art world as an ultimate "evil" that needs to be battled against. The described state of things, which I indeed consider threatening, in a broader sense can be understood as a turning point in the on-going process and progress of performance art. Eventually burnt in the fever of the archive, it will rise like a Phoenix from its ashes: taking Goldberg's historical discourse on trust, performance is eternal in

art history. It will probably invent a new name for itself and under this new name of “something-something art” it will continue its free flight.

In this other, better, performance art world, artists will never document themselves. They will just live and create performance art to their fullest potential, being documented by enthusiastic and thoughtful historians who will make sure that the documents are not the living dead, but the phantoms that speak.

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