

## ***Performing Archives/Archives of Performance* edited by Gundhild Borggreen and Rune Gade**

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In *Performing Archives/Archives of Performance*, editors Gunhild Borggreen and Rune Gade present 25 essays that each consider the *archive* in the context of performance studies. This anthology grew in part out of the 2008 Performance Studies International (Psi) conference, entitled *Interregnum*, hosted by Borggreen and Gade at the University of Copenhagen. The conference's title, which means "in-betweenness," functions as the frame for theorizing the space in between a particular event or moment and its reproduction. The scope of the project extends beyond the archiving of performances to include the archiving of art objects, as well as events that are not typically considered to be in the realm of "art" at all, each of which is examined through the lens of various performance studies theories. Contributors include artists, critics, curators, and a variety of scholars in performance studies, film, history, communications, and cultural studies, representing an array of geographical locations. The array and breadth of perspective attests to the comprehensive significance of the subject addressed in this book.

To orient readers Borggreen and Gade reference Peggy Phelan's influential claim that performance is definitively ephemeral, becoming itself only "through its disappearance" (14). Their introduction begins with the ontological proposition that positions the ephemerality of performance in opposition to the permanence of the archive. They add to this a sampling of critical responses that have complicated this dichotomy, suggesting the complexity of a topic that is just beginning to be unearthed. By highlighting the creative and performative dimensions

of archival practices, raising issues of new technologies of mediatization, and interrogating notions of temporality, live-ness, and permanence, the editors envision multiple, expansive possibilities for understanding archives. The implications extend beyond issues of preservation, power, and history to include in the broadest sense the process of meaning-making in which humans engage through archival process.

The subsequent essays are organized into three thematic sections, varied in content and methodology. The first, titled *Ontologies*, extends existing discourses concerned with defining and reconceiving the relationships of performances to archives (16-17). The second, *Archives of Performances*, addresses art projects that “question and challenge the archive from within” (21), either bringing performance into the archive or exploring spaces in which performance and archive cross. The third section, *Performing Archives*, attends to instances when the “archive is transformed into a dynamic and self-reflective medium that intervenes in and challenges its own ontology” (25-26). Here various subject positions converge—namely, audience becomes archive, scholar becomes artist, place becomes performer.

The essays directly or implicitly reference and contrast Phelan’s ontology to contribute new ways of understanding whether and how performance might be documented and to what effect. Maintaining a common point of orientation, many of the authors also draw on work by Dwight Conquergood, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Richard Schechner, and Rebecca Schneider, to bring attention to the fact that performance and archive are necessarily, even definitively enmeshed with agency and power. Some of the essays configure the archive as agent of transformation, rather than preservation, by focusing our attention away from the performance itself and toward the potential interactions, discourses, practices and performances that archives make possible and promote (Solveig Gade, Heike Romm). Doing so highlights the multiplicity of experience and prioritizes the question, “For whom?”

Another theme raised in this text is the social economies implied in the discourse around archive and performance (Amelia Jones, Malene Vest Hansen). In *Unpredictable Temporalities: The Body and Performance in (Art) History*, Jones highlights how performance studies “throw into question structures of history, predictability, commodification, and static objects” (53). Performance tends to run counter to capitalist sensibilities that drive historicization and “final meanings” (54), even if they are not completely free of the hermeneutic tug toward interpretation. Here Jones elucidates how artist-activists mobilize art spaces through interaction, to protest the containing function that museums, theaters, archives and the notion of fine art itself institutionalize.

Responding to the idea that performance by definition embodies impermanence, several authors locate the archive in the body. Martha Wilson’s *Staging the Self* and Rivka Syd Eisner’s *Living Archives as Interventions in Ea Sola’s Forgotten Fields* ask what knowledge is best preserved through bodily practices, giving grounds from which to extend the ethical

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discourses surrounding archives.

The common lens that both unifies this compendium of essays and ignites its critical heat is the intersection of performance and archive. The spaces in-between performance and archive are what illuminate their complicity, rendering them inseparable—and at times even indistinguishable—and concretizing abstract notions about the nature of reality. As such, the text can be conceived as a handbook for cultural study in general. Referencing Marvin Carlson’s observations, performance invoked as a metaphor for culture shifts the question of culture as “what” to culture as “how” (12-13). This has been a central concern in cultural studies and anthropology, in particular. The essays presented in this text offer clear and methodologically consistent suggestions for combining and deconstructing research practices and products. This may be the most potent contribution of this publication.

This collection of essays does more than challenge the distinction between performances and archives. Archive is constituted as a practice, a performance that is as unfixed and ephemeral as any other kind of performance. The discourse around archive, history, and power becomes less an interesting conceptual exercise, and more an existential reality. Consequently this book functions as a call to action, or perhaps simply requires it. Engaging in its discourse, the readers, audiences, and participants engage in performing archiving, dispelling a progressive temporal linearity, and thereby negating the notion of permanence. We become accomplices, and our perspectives are already a political stance.

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