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Performance and Repetition – Foreword

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Performance and Repetition – Foreword

The themed section „Performance and repetition” is devoted to contemporary changes in performative practices and critical revisions of the prevalent theory of performance art. According to this theory, the specific feature of performance art is its “unrepeatability”. The impossibility of repetition is perceived in four different ways. Firstly, performance art is not a reproduction but a live creation – not a repetition of a readymade script but the surging forth of a creative process during the event itself. Secondly, a performance, as an improvised live action, and cannot as such be repeated. Thirdly, the documentation of a performance, in other words a form of repetition that remains once the performance has past, should not – if one were to stick to the rule of the ephemeral – exist at all; when it comes into being, it is only as a relic which is not capable of representing what once took place and became irreversibly lodged in the past. Finally, performance art should not repeat itself in its essence and definition, in subsequent performances: each performance should be an individual transgression and a new self-definition of performance art.

The texts that are gathered here aim not only to depart from this traditional theory of performance but also to reflect on the fact that more and more strategies of repetition have been widening the field of performative practices. Tomasz Załuski outlines a changing approach to the problem of repetition in performance art since the sixties and seventies until the present day, as well as highlights “the critical discourse on performance art” that is developing as a result of the changes. He comments upon the concepts, interpretation strategies and themes of the discourse that have the greatest analytical, critical and cultural potential. Ewa Wójtowicz presents the contemporary forms of performance art in existence in the networked culture. She analyses some ways of reusing the documentation of ephemeral actions, the new relationships between performance and documentation, and practices that are specific to the networked culture, such as a “code performance” or the creating of one’s identity in the world of Second Life and social networking websites. In this way, performance becomes one of the post-production re-practices that becomes inscribed into contemporary remix culture. Katarzyna Bojarska applies the psychoanalytical theory of repetition and the subject of traumatic memory to *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising* by Miron Białoszewski. This work is interpreted as having an element of memory performance: as a multifaceted process, continually replayed anew whilst working-through the author’s memories of the uprising. The literary work becomes a documentation of this memory performance.

Editor of the section Tomasz Załuski

Repetition and the Critical Discourse on Performance Art

Tomasz Załuski

In the heroic decades of the sixties and seventies of twentieth century, performance art was defined as a form of anti-repetition art. Later, in the eighties and nineties, there was a move away from this anti-repetition ideology towards an ever-growing interest in documentation, re-performances and re-enactments. A configuration of factors: historical, cultural, artistic, technological, institutional, economical, socio-political and educational played a decisive part in this process. Together with it came a change in the theory and historical narration of performance art: since the late nineties there has been developing what the author of the article terms „the critical discourse on performance art”. Its aim is to re-examine the conditions, the possibility of existence and the functioning of performance in cultural and social spaces. The key is to rethink the relationship between performance art and repetition, most importantly in the form of documentation and re-enactment. The article presents some major themes that appear in the texts of various proponents of this discourse. It analyses, at times also in a critical fashion, the new approaches to performance art offered, indicates their possible

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