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## 'Political-Timing-Specific' Performance Art in the Realm of the Museum

**The Potential of Reenactment as Practice of Memorialization**

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**ABSTRACT:** Can reenactments be a way to create counter-narratives in and for the museum? Through the analysis of political performance (or what the artist Tania Bruguera calls 'political-timing-specific' artworks), this essay discusses the potential of reenactment as both a practice of materializing memories and narratives of oppression and of rethinking museum policies in terms of preservation and display. Its main argument is that, while the archive can be regarded as a form of materializing the memory of these works, reenactment is more than a way of recovering the past; it is also a device for reconstructing memories of activism and oppression. This essay further suggests that reenactments of political-timing-specific works demand a change in accessioning, conservation, and presentation practices, which might be inclined to erase decentralized art-historical and material narratives.

**KEYWORDS:** reenactment; museum; activism; political-timing-specific art; memory

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# ‘Political-Timing-Specific’ Performance Art in the Realm of the Museum

## The Potential of Reenactment as Practice of Memorialization

HÉLIA MARÇAL AND DANIELA SALAZAR

### INTRODUCTION

Can reenactments be a way to create counter-narratives in and for the museum? This paper will explore the potential of reenactment as a practice of resistance in the museum. We will first interrogate the possibilities for the future of performance art, diving into the cases of artworks for which the potential for activating politics is particular in time and space — in brief, ‘political-timing-specific’. We will then reflect on how those artworks unfold in the museum through various practices, referring to reenactments as sites of political action that multiply realities in time and space. This discussion will be illustrated by case studies from the Portuguese contexts that, by their mere existence, reframe and contest both the institution and its practices and the bodies in performance as *loci* of political activism. In doing so, we are intertwining perspectives on bodies-in-action, reenactment, politics of representation, and the preservation of this genre, bridging, in the process, understanding conservation, the archive, and the curation of performative actions — those that are yet to disappear.

The first question that emerges from this inquiry is related to the performative possibilities of performance art after the event has taken place. The possible futures of performance art, or the mere possibility of it having a future, is one of the most widely debated topics emerging from Performance Studies over the past few years.<sup>1</sup> The recent trend toward incorporating performance art in museum collections can attest to how the growing interest in performance art preservation has repercussions for the practice itself.<sup>2</sup> Despite the outstanding advances of scholarly work on the possible transmission of performance art pieces for future generations, there is an evident knowledge gap regarding the conservation of highly contextual performance-based artworks, such as politically-driven works created under dictatorships, in revolutionary or (post)colonial contexts.

The Cuban artist Tania Bruguera refers to these artworks as 'political-timing-specific', a term that makes clear their positioning in time and space, and how that time and space are built into the political. In an essay in *Artforum*, Bruguera defines 'political-timing-specific' artworks as part of a genre that 'not only confronts power with its own tools but creates a temporary juncture where those in power do not know how to respond to others' defining what is 'political.'<sup>3</sup> The artist defines this type of art as a form of political resistance that can only occur in the liminal space between a crisis and the adoption of mainstream power moves. She states:

The window opens and closes very quickly: You have to enter with precision, during a brief moment when political decisions are not yet fixed, implemented, or culturally accepted. Political-timing-specific artworks happen in the space between the imaginary of a new political reality and politicians' existing control of that imaginary. Political-timing-specific art exists within the time it takes for those in power to react.<sup>4</sup>

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1 See Matthew Reason, *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

2 Britta B. Wheeler, 'The Institutionalization of an American Avant-Garde: Performance Art as Democratic Culture, 1970–2000', *Sociological Perspectives*, 46.4 (2003), pp. 491–512 <<https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2003.46.4.491>>.

3 Tania Bruguera, 'Notes on Political Timing Specificity', *Artforum*, 57.9 (May 2019), n.p. <<https://www.artforum.com/print/201905/notes-on-political-timing-specificity-79513>> [accessed 12 February 2020].

4 Ibid.

For the art historian and critic Claire Bishop, the notion of ‘political-timing-specificity’ seems to resonate particularly in Bruguera’s early works such as *Homenaje a Ana Mendieta* (Tribute to Ana Mendieta) (1985 to 1996), created after the death of Mendieta,<sup>5</sup> or *Memoria de la postguerra* (Postwar Memory) (I in 1993 and II in 1994), where Bruguera juxtaposed the period of crisis that led many artists and intellectuals to leave the country during *el periodo especial* (1989 to the end of the 1990s) with post-war trauma.<sup>6</sup> Works by other artists also clearly refer to the space between a crisis and the process of assimilation that follows, such as Cildo Meireles’s *Insertions into Ideological Circuits — Project Banknote* (1970), in which the artist stamped political messages (i.e., ‘Quem matou o Herzog?’ [Who killed Herzog?]) onto banknotes only to return them to circulation and, therefore, create an underground network for the proliferation of political statements that would only make sense within their contemporary context.<sup>7</sup> In an interview, Meireles talked about the relation of this work to time, stating that ‘the work only exists in the present continuous, when it is circulating’, making evident the relationship between art and politics by means of aesthetic operations that are, indeed, timing specific.<sup>8</sup> The artist revisited this work in a 2019 display, questioning the suspicious death of Marielle Franco in 2018.<sup>9</sup> In this case, Meireles created a direct iteration of the question ‘Who killed Herzog?’ replacing the name with that of Franco. A stamp featuring Franco’s picture was also put side-

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5 According to Bishop, Bruguera also reenacted works by Ana Mendieta years after Mendieta’s death, actively inscribing her works in art history. Claire Bishop, ‘Rise to the Occasion’, *Artforum*, 57.9 (May 2019), n.p. <<https://www.artforum.com/print/201905/claire-bishop-on-the-art-of-political-timing-79512>> [accessed 12 February 2020].

6 Ibid.

7 In her essay, Bishop identifies ‘political-timing-specific’ art as being characteristic of Latin American actions created during the recent periods of dictatorship. She provides examples such as Brazilian collective 3Nós3, the Chilean group Colectivo Acciones de Arte, or the Cuban collective Arte Calle. Ibid.

8 See Clara Balbi, ‘Em nova exposição, Cildo Meireles questiona morte de Marielle’, *GZH*, 29 September 2019 <<https://gauchazh.clicrbs.com.br/cultura-e-lazer/noticia/2019/09/em-nova-exposicao-cildo-meireles-questiona-morte-de-marielle-ck0zgmjkd00oh01mtlaq1b9mm.html>> [accessed 12 February 2020] (our translation).

9 Marielle Franco was a politician, activist, and outspoken critic of police brutality. She was murdered by two individuals, who shot her and her driver multiple times in the middle of a traffic jam. Ibid.

by-side with a woman's profile symbolizing the republic, juxtaposing ideals of activism, struggle, and democracy itself.<sup>10</sup>

In the Portuguese context, it is also worth mentioning works by Manoel Barbosa — *Identificacion* (1975) — and E. M. de Melo e Castro — *Musica Negativa* (1965) — which created explicit political tensions during the Colonial War (1961 to 1975) and the Portuguese Dictatorship (1928 to 1974), respectively, as well as recent works by a new generation of artists who have been dealing with issues surrounding (de)colonization and social (in)justice. These artists include Vasco Araújo, Ana Borralho and João Galante, and many others.<sup>11</sup>

In this paper, we argue that 'political-timing-specific' works, such as the ones referred to above, demand new methods of adequately preserving their performative practice. Part of preserving them involves accounting for the ways in which the artworks change over time and accept that their materiality needs to convey a moment in time and a situation that keeps challenging any type of normativity. To give an example, Cildo Meireles's banknotes that ask 'Who killed Herzog?' provide a glimpse into a past political action, functioning almost as historical documentation of a practice that no longer exists. The banknotes that ask 'Who killed Marielle Franco?' on the other hand, are sites of political statement and protest, which gain ever-increasing relevance in the current context. In keeping with the form but reframing temporality in the actual object, Meireles brings the artwork to a site of ongoing political action, activating it once more. Bruguera also reflects on this dichotomy in her *Artforum* article. In her own words:

Form is defined in political-timing-specific art by the political sensibility of the time and place for which it is made.

10 For more on this see Daniela Salazar and Hélia Marçal, 'Performance after Performance: On the Material Legacies and their Possibilities for Transmission', to be published in the proceedings of the online conference 'Artist's Legacies: Preservation, Study, Dissemination, Institutionalisation', 20–21 May 2021, organized by FASVS (Fundação Arpad Szenes – Vieira da Silva) in collaboration with the Instituto de História da Arte and others.

11 As an example of Vasco Araújo's work, see *Theme Park* (2016), a video work which contests the existence of a Portuguese theme park full of symbols of the country's colonization, videorecording, 9:48 min, artist website <<http://www.vascoaraujo.org/ParqueTematico>> [accessed 12 February 2020]. As an example of Borralho and João Galante's work, see the recording of their performance *Art Piss (On Money and Politics)* (2012), online videorecording, 8:00 min, Vimeo, 3 June 2014 <<https://vimeo.com/97219167>> [accessed 11 March 2021].

Thus, political consequences become the artwork's meaning and content. Form and content are interdependent, linked to the specificity of a political moment. Any political change requires a reevaluation of the form used to produce political art.<sup>12</sup>

We already see how art institutions sometimes struggle to acknowledge a work that needs to have its materiality revitalized and updated by the means of its production. When these artworks are incorporated in museum collections, with few exceptions, they are usually transformed into fixed and institutionalized entities, which do not always respect the conditions of 'liveness' of the original context of creation.<sup>13</sup> This is the case both when they are incorporated as installations and when performance is presented as documentation.<sup>14</sup> In both instances, decisions are often made *a priori*, without even considering reenactments as means for transmission due to their association with concepts of fakeness or appropriation.<sup>15</sup> Whenever they are indeed acquired and shown as performance, issues relating to where and how the artwork can be activated, and what the consequences of its activism/activation are, become even more significant. These works, as mentioned by Claire Bishop,<sup>16</sup> function differently in different contexts and times, and some of the things that they ought to activate simply do not exist in some parts of the world:

There is a certain awkwardness to translating political timing specificity to our own milieu. It seems obvious that such interventions will look very different in Cuba, China, and Russia than in so-called liberal democracies, where culture is less micromanaged and dissent has (at least until recently) been viewed as healthy. This difference is manifest in the respective terminologies by which we label opposition: The dissident in authoritarian regimes is referred to here as an activist. Political timing specificity sits between these positions, dissident

12 Cf. Bruguera, 'Notes on Political Timing Specificity'.

13 See, for example, Cláudia Madeira, Daniela Salazar, and Hélia Marçal, 'Performance Art Temporalities: Relationships Between Museum, University, and Theatre', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 33.1 (2018), pp. 79–95 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2017.1419828>>.

14 Ibid.

15 See André Lepecki, *Singularities: Dance in the Age of Performance* (London: Routledge, 2016).

16 Bishop, 'Rise to the Occasion'.

and activist, yet differs from both, because it seeks to expose contradiction rather than to express indignation or propose solutions.<sup>17</sup>

The question of what to acquire and in which ways then comes to the fore. Is it the province of museums to acquire artworks that are meant to be shown in places where they still work in that liminal space between protest and dissent? Would this mean that the works can only be put on display in contexts where they maintain that practice? What happens to these works when they cease to activate some sort of political action? And who is to decide whether the context is right, and whether the artwork worked or as a political device or didn't? These questions directly affect how the artwork is managed as part of a collection, the conditions for lending the work, and the possibilities for its many futures. Conservation is therefore called to the task of maintaining the artwork and its function and, in this case, implies much more than simply stabilizing a given object or documenting a performance. The museum and its conservators are thus compelled to interrogate the ways in which we can create possibilities for artworks to change as part of their own survival. In trying to reflect on how we can go back in time and still keep these artworks relevant in their political context — allowing them to continue to activate this context and participate in activist forms of artistic practice — we are exploring the notion of reenactment in the context of performance studies.

#### ON REENACTMENTS

Performance art reenactments consist of informed materializations of a performance artwork after the initial event. Theorists in the field of performance studies, such as Amelia Jones, consider reenactments as 'an activity that preserves heritage through ritualized behavior [sic]', adding fruitful contributions to history as long as they are not based on a premise of 'retrievable original meaning and artistic intentionality'.<sup>18</sup>

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17 Ibid.

18 Amelia Jones, 'The Now and the Has Been: Paradoxes of Live Art in History', in *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, ed. by Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2012), pp. 9–25 (p. 16).

Rebecca Schneider, one of the main authors who developed the concept within the field of Performance Studies, refers to reenactment as a return and, in that sense, as an ‘act of survival’.<sup>19</sup> Although the idea of reenactment as a way to pursue the survival of this genre is particularly relevant for the current discussion about performance art conservation, it is essential to understand how it differs from documentation. While documents tend to follow what is considered to be the traditional logic of ‘the archive’, the inscriptional forms of reenactments are less tangible and, for that reason, often considered more transient and subjective.<sup>20</sup> Like documents, performance art reenactments can be seen as another partial text — having the original event as referent — that needs to be confirmed by an act of reception. Similarly, if documents exist as material remains of the performance artwork, from photos and videos to narratives, technical, or legal documents, reenactments can be considered embodied versions of the work. They can be considered the only way to restore the *practice* of the performance art event, which is only recovered and iterated through what André Lepecki, drawing on Deleuze’s terminology, calls *actualization*.<sup>21</sup> Referring to reenactments of Tino Sehgal’s ‘constructed situations’, Sydney Briggs, Associate Registrar at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, explains the importance of embodied knowledge in the preservation or transmission of performance art as follows: if ‘a dancer works less, if you cannot actually dance and repeat a choreography, you will forget it.’<sup>22</sup> This way of *actualizing* practice — making it current and consolidating the embodied knowledge that emerges from it — is also something that emerges in the performing arts, such as music and dance. While stopping practice of an instrument makes one less able to play it, the fact that one has been practicing it for years creates embodied memories that cannot be disregarded.

19 Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 7.

20 See in particular the second chapter dedicated to ‘Archives’ in Reason, *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance*, pp. 31–40.

21 André Lepecki, ‘The Body as Archive: Will to Re-enact and the Afterlives of Dance’, *Dance Research Journal*, 42.2 (Winter 2010), pp. 28–48 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767700001029>>.

22 Quoted in Vivian van Saaze, ‘In the Absence of Documentation: Remembering Tino Sehgal’s Constructed Situations’, *Revista de História da Arte*, 4 (2015), pp. 55–63 (p. 61) <<http://revistaharte.fcsh.unl.pt/rhaw4/RHAW4.pdf>> [accessed 13 November 2019].



Performance art is likewise transmitted through practice, as there is no way to communicate a particular gesture, or an aesthetic gaze, in any inscriptional form. In this sense, as documents cannot capture what is not written, not said, or not seen, embodied knowledge is a complement to the archive, which is made of all the inscriptional forms that can be captured and stored. This embodied knowledge has been called 'repertoire'. Diana Taylor, performance studies theorist and founder of The Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, coined the term 'repertoire' in opposition to the notion of the archive — broadly understood as 'stable' inscriptional form of memory:

The repertoire [...] enacts embodied memory-performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing — in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non-reproducible knowledge. The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there', being a part of the transmission. As opposed to the supposedly stable objects in the archive, the actions that are the repertoire do not remain the same. The repertoire both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning.<sup>23</sup>

If one considers these conceptual demarcations, reenactments can be seen as a way to transmit the unstable and precarious repertoire of performance-based artworks. While documents tend to express the colonial views of the power systems they represent, reenactment also serves as a means to recover alternative and suppressed narratives, which are often concealed by archives more concerned with amplifying their own (official) version of history.

Reenactments thus influence not only the way performance art is preserved or historicized but also demand a sense of perspective regarding official and neoliberal uses of history. To use Lepecki's words, reenactments work as 'chronopolitical operations', essential in opposing the 'neoliberal impetus to never look back, as if any longing for the past was a mere expression of infantile, regressive, or naïf nostalgia.'<sup>24</sup> In this sense, more than providing a glimpse of the past, reenactments act as sites of critical study of our past interactions in a local and global

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23 Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 20.

24 Lepecki, *Singularities*, p. 21.

perspective, as instruments to resist (or counter-resist) official and normative narratives. Such is the case of the choreographer Vânia Rovisco's rendition of the performance *Identificación* (created by Manoel Barbosa in 1975), which was reenacted in the context of her project *Reacting to Time, Portugueses na Performance*.

#### REACTING TO TIME: PORTUGUESE IN PERFORMANCE

*Identificación* is a performance artwork conceived by the Portuguese artist Manoel Barbosa during the 'Portuguese revolutionary process' (April 1974 to November 1975) and created following his participation in the Portuguese Colonial War (1961 to 1974). Barbosa showed *Identificación* in Barcelona in 1975, as a gesture of identification with the Catalan people, still under Franco's rule. The artwork consisted of an action by himself along with two other male and two female performers, aimed at suggesting an atmosphere of oppression and aggression that lingered throughout most of the performance. It ended with a cathartic expression of liberation, enacted through a disruption in time and space, which resonated with the one expressed by the Portuguese dictatorship period and the Colonial War and subsequently the revolutionary process and the liberation wars in Africa. More than forty years after its presentation, the context that led Barbosa to create *Identificación* no longer exists in today's Iberia.

When interviewed about the conservation of his work, Barbosa was not opposed to its documentation or its future reenactment. Indeed, he was the first artist to collaborate with Rovisco on *Reacting to Time*, tasked with transmitting Portuguese performance works to the future. According to Rovisco:

*REACTING TO TIME — the Portuguese in performance art*, wants to update the specific bodily memory of those [Portuguese performance art's, H.M., D.S.] early experiments. Access the source of that information, update it, pass it on by direct experience and present it publicly: these are the goals of this project. It's about building a living archive embodied in the present.<sup>25</sup>

25 Vânia Rovisco, 'Reacting to Time: The Portuguese in Performance Art', workshop conducted 19–24 January 2014, online description on the website of the CAAA Centro

Drawing on Lepecki's notion of 'body as archive' to some extent, Rovisco considers that people have an embodied knowledge, and that ignoring such a source, 'which comes from a relation of accumulated reflexive cultural actions [...] is a flaw in the recognition of a heritage that belongs to all of us'.<sup>26</sup> Rovisco recovers artists' memories embedded in their words and in their performative practices (i.e., their bodies) to transmit them through her own body. She argues that she does this by 'transferring' this corporeal knowledge to an undetermined number of week-long workshop participants. The participants, who do not need any previous knowledge or dance practice, engage with this transmission by embodying the score and gestures so that they can present the performance work at a given venue by the end of the week.

This process not only activates and transports memories of the original artwork into a contemporary context through its *actualization*, but, together with the work's presentation, it purports to engage in a conversation between the artist's generation and present and future generations.

Since 2015, *Identificación* has been 'transmitted' five times in five different locations, including museums and art centres, and with five different sets of workshop participants. Besides these transmissions, Rovisco, together with her colleagues, has produced a large volume of photographic and video documentation for present and future generations. In this sense, it is possible to consider that the various bodies involved (Rovisco, the participants, and the various audiences) function as repositories of memories.<sup>27</sup>

Rovisco's interpretation of *Identificación* can thus be seen as a versioning of the 1975 original event, which at the same time brings about unexpected repercussions. Her participants are not only the vehicles conveying a particular moment of artistic expression but also bring their own perspectives to the work's history and, somehow,

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para os Assuntos da Arte e Arquitectura, Guimarães <<https://www.centroaaa.org/index.php/arquivo-2015-jan-fev-mar/reacting-to-time-workshop-transmissao-ii>> [accessed 11 March 2021].

26 Ibid.

27 For more on the process undertaken by Vânia Rovisco, see Hélia Pereira Marçal, 'Conservation in an Era of Participation', *Journal of the Institute of Conservation*, 40.2 (2017), pp. 97–104 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/19455224.2017.1319872>>.

presentation in the public sphere. However, as the work's creative authority is divided between Barbosa and Rovisco — and arguably the workshop's participants — how can such a fragile work, devoid of substantive materiality, be preserved or transmitted in a museum context? What are the consequences of this practice for museums?

#### PERFORMANCE ART AND THE MUSEUM IN THE AGE OF REENACTMENT

The museum is arguably where artistic practices are recognized as worthy of being transmitted to future generations. Taking into account the characteristics of the processes involved in the creation of performance art, it is of utmost importance to ask: what place does the museum occupy in the memorialization of performing arts practices, and those in particular that are political timing specific? On the other hand, how can museums account for the memorialization of those practices?

We have seen various efforts emerging from Portuguese institutions in the last few years. 'Projecto P!' (São Luiz Theatre and other places in Lisbon, April/2017) and 'Museum as Performance' (Serralves Museum, Porto, since 2015) are two examples that make visible the relevance and urgency of rethinking the place of the museum in relation to performance and reenactment. 'Projecto P!' was a three-day public, artistic, and cultural programme put on in Lisbon in 2017. Rehearsed as a celebration of the centenary of the 'Futurist Conference' designed and executed by the Portuguese artist Almada Negreiros in 1917, this curatorial programme conjoined artists and scholars in rethinking performance in the public sphere. The 'Futurist Conference' was in itself both an artistic and political manifesto, with Negreiros looking to articulate artistic forms akin to acts of dissent. The political-timing-specific nature of the piece is undeniable, and yet, 'Projecto P!' brought in new perspectives on that specific moment, showing some of the ways performance reenactment can actualize these works both in content and form.

The curator, Ana Pais, created a place for discussing the function and roles of public and artistic institutions in the preservation of memories of performance and the connections between their legacy and contemporary performance practices. Some of the most relevant

moments include the artistic projects presented at MNAC — Museu do Chiado, such as the works of Kata Kóvacs and Tom O'Doherty, and, again, the project *Reacting to Time*. Rovisco, in collaboration with Bruno Humberto, presented, in this context, a reenactment of Fernando Aguiar's *Expresiones y Interaccion* (1997).<sup>28</sup> Rovisco's project of transmission once again brought a performance work that lacked historical inscription, both in bodies and documents, into the public sphere. The inclusion of the project into an overarching curatorial programme aiming to discuss the place of performance artworks and their memories in the institutional context additionally rendered a new instantiation of a moment in time that was somewhat forgotten. Still, in the context of 'Projecto P!' it is worth mentioning a new rendition of the 'Futurist Conference', which was reframed by the former artist collective Homeoestéticos as a reinvention of the pivotal event held one hundred years previously (*Zuturismo [or the Penultimatum Zuturista]* — *Ex-Homeoestéticos Zuturistas* — *Reinvenções*).<sup>29</sup> In actualizing the performance, to use Lepecki's words, his loose form of reenactment brought the seminal moment of the 'Futurist Conference' back to the present, recontextualizing it and making the theatre a place for memory transmission, political action, and, indeed, chronopolitical operations.<sup>30</sup> As will become clear, the programme 'Museum as Performance' also reestablishes the museum as a place of memory transmission of and in performance.

Presented as a joint curatorial programme by Cristina Grande, Ricardo Nicolau, and Pedro Rocha, curators at the Serralves Foundation/Museum, 'Museum as Performance' has been taking place over the course of a weekend every year, starting in September 2015. Artists are invited to occupy not only the galleries but also the outdoor space, Parque Serralves. This programme has brought together artistic col-

28 *Transmission X, Reacting to Time* — *Portuguese in Performance*, performance, Vânia Rovisco with Fernando Aguiar in collaboration with Bruno Humberto, MNAC (Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea), 12 April 2017. Participants: Mário Afonso, Pedro Castella, Bruno Humberto, Tiago Vieira.

29 Manuel João Vieira, Pedro Portugal, and Pedro Proença, *Reinvenções* — *100 anos da Conferência Futurista de Almada Negreiros*, performance, São Luiz Teatro Municipal, 14 April 2017, online videorecording, 16:31 min, Youtube, 27 September 2018 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hz4l8AeoLZQ>> [accessed 12 February 2020].

30 See in particular chapter 4, 'The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances', in Lepecki, *Singularities*, pp. 115–42.

lectives and individual Portuguese and international artists dedicated to the practice of performance. The programme was intended to restore a programmatic, curatorial, and artistic memory related to the institution's founding moments and its historical connection to practice and performance presentation. Therefore, the aim is linked to the continuity of this programmatic cycle, which started in the 1990s. The bodily memory of the institution, which was founded on the possibilities for the museum as a place of performance, is therefore brought together through this programme; more than trying to recover the memories of specific works, 'Museum as Performance' tries to restore the memories of the institution itself.<sup>31</sup>

We cannot ignore the attempts in recent years to engage in international dialogue, with museums such as Tate Modern (London), the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam), and the MoMA (New York) developing curatorial and conservation projects particularly dedicated to performance.

Those practices of memorialization indeed express some of the possibilities that emerge from the process of going back and yet always remaining in the present. There are, however, other aspects of museum practice that are not quite so explicit, and that create structures of fixation that hamper the possibilities for these artworks to change. In the Foucaultian and Agambenian perspectives, the museum is both an institutional and confining device, responsible for the selection, control, organization, and hierarchization of history and knowledge through the collection of its memories. In the case of modern and contemporary art museums, colonial practices leading to the legitimization of hegemonic narratives have been progressively questioned. Indeed, the incorporation of installations, video art, or other performance-like artworks attests to a discrepancy between these variable artistic practices and the museum, which is inherently a static and permanent space.

In this sense, museums and reenactments suffer from an inherent anachronistic nature, existing in a liminal space between the past and the future. In both the museum and in reenactment practices,

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31 This intention was revealed during an interview conducted by Daniela Salazar with the curators of 'Museum as Performance' — Cristina Grande, Ricardo Nicolau, and Pedro Rocha — on 13 November 2015 at Serralves Museum.

the intrinsic liminality contests both the confinement identified by Foucault and the idea of the museum as a repository. The museum is now considered a place of experience, with the concept of performativity being applied in several departments, such as the curatorial department or the department dedicated to public programmes and educational services.<sup>32</sup> For this reason, art historian Dorothea von Hantelmann considers 'the art museum the model of progress [that] is realized performatively'. She adds, 'Within the museum's performative dimension, aimed at the self-formation of the individual (as a politically mature citizen), lies a historical and cultural achievement that not only includes viewer participation but is even exclusively oriented towards it.'<sup>33</sup>

Public participation is, therefore, one of the ways counter-historical narratives endure throughout history in the form of reenactment. Rovisco's participatory practices, rather than centralizing the artwork in the museum structure, or even in the artist's figure, diffract authority in the bodies of all the workshop's participants. Drawing on Lepecki's notion of 'chronopolitics',<sup>34</sup> Rovisco's reenactments advance counter-narratives in the context of the museum. By promoting immediacy and transmission of affects along with the many other interpretations of what has been collected by archives, reenactments function as loci of historical resistance. But how does this affect the preservation of the artistic manifestation? Can Rovisco's process effectively contribute to creating what is usually called 'performance art's afterlives'?

According to the performance studies theorist Louis van den Hengel, the afterlife of performance art can be seen as memory devices that

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32 If it is true that the practice of reenactment evokes other ways of thinking about museum practices by questioning the museum's temporalities, or its crystallized knowledge and histories, then reenactment is also responsible for reinforcing this tendency of a place of experiences that is growing in the museum institution, not just as a living place, but a place of this new 'experience economy'. This topic falls beyond this essay's scope. For more on this, see Dorothea von Hantelmann, 'The Experiential Turn', in *Living Collections Catalogue*, 4 vols to date (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2014–), 1: *On Performativity*, ed. by Elizabeth Carpenter (2014) <<http://walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/experiential-turn/>> [accessed 13 July 2021].

33 Dorothea von Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art: What Performativity Means in Art* (Zurich: JRP Ringier; Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2010), p. 99.

34 See Lepecki, *Singularities*, chapter 4, pp. 115–42.

can be expressed ‘through particular bodies and individuals’ and yet ‘cannot be contained in any single place but rather operates by way of affective interconnections or creative encounters.’ In this sense, as Van Den Hengel puts it, memory itself ‘works as a performative practice.’<sup>35</sup>

It is therefore possible to think of reenactment as the potential to develop the ‘still non-exhausted creative fields of “impalpable possibilities”’ of past performance artworks.<sup>36</sup> In the case of Rovisco’s workshop, the ‘impalpable possibilities’ of reenactment are materialized through the bodies of all participants — both of those who perform and of those who witness the performance. Thus, all agencies appear as instruments to materialize that potentiality of activation. Bodies then become an (an)archive of practices, as changeable as the repertoire itself, since the body is not stable and can neither be contained nor stored. It subsequently becomes a body archive.

The embodied memories of the participants, which constitute the archive in a broad sense, are thus successively constructed, conditioned, and framed, as many times as the archive is either performed or thought.

## CONCLUSIONS

This essay has explored the potential of reenactment for recovering counter-narratives of performance art in museums, which are usually seen as contained and static spaces. Political-timing specific artwork is a form of artistic practice that necessarily reframes museum procedures, which are very much programmed to limit the possibilities for change. Artistic projects such as *Reacting to Time, Portugueses na Performance* challenge institutional normativity both because they aim at reenacting political-timing-specific performance artworks in museums, and because they do so through participatory practices that diffract authorial control.

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35 Louis van den Hengel, ‘Archives of Affect: Performance, Reenactment, and the Becoming of Memory’, in *Materializing Memory in Art and Popular Culture*, ed. by Laszlo Muntean, Liedeke Plate, and Anneke Smelik (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 125–42 (p. 127).

36 Lepecki, ‘The Body as Archive’, p. 31.



Lepecki's notion of performance being constituted by 'impalpable possibilities', along with his idea of the 'body as archive', has ramifications for what constitutes the archive and, more specifically, for the preservation of performance art. Performance art memory then works through reenactment, especially when bodies embody practices and transmit them to future generations. The project *Reacting to Time* has shown how reenactments can indeed bring new contexts of political activism and practice to the museum and activate the space politically in different ways.

Reenactments appear as memory practices, which, rather than repeating (oppressive male- and Western-centric) historical narratives, diffract history in different bodies, perspectives, and memories. In this sense, reenactments are forms of preservation that recall embodied and inscriptional archives, often resulting in interchanging spaces between conservation and curatorial practices. They are forms of contestation in themselves; therefore, they remember both the liminality and in-subordinate nature nurtured in the original event and multiply the instances of political dissent, adapting the form of the performance to acknowledge various political circumstances. This is what the original event becomes: a point of origin of multiple instantiations, the start of a life full of expected and unexpected transformations, of turning points that lead to unstable and successive acts of recreation.

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