RE.ACT. FEMINISM

A PERFORMING ARCHIVE

Bettina Knaup and Beatrice Ellen Stammer (Editors)

re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive

Live Art
Development
Agency

VERLAG *für* MODERNE KUNST

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Oreet Ashery, *Hairoism*, 2009 – 2011, performance, photograph from a series of 5, courtesy Oreet Ashery

INTRODUCTION

The title *re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive* raises several questions. The prefix *re-* (latin for back and again) implies a look back, or repetition, while *act* (latin actus for activity, drift) refers to an action in the present and future. It thus locates feminism within an ambiguous relationship with temporality. The subheading is also not completely clear, for it not only implies an archive containing documents about performance art, but also an archive that performs. It thus seems difficult to locate a centre, a core. On top of that, there is also the version number, implying both a previous version and a possible continuation. Both the project and its title thus generate an area of tension to keep feminism, the archive and performance in motion.

re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive is a continually expanding, temporary and living performance archive that travelled through six European countries from 2011 to 2013. The heart of the project is a mobile archive and workstation with a growing collection of video, film and photographic documents of feminist, gender-critical and queer performance art.[1] It is a transcultural and cross-generational project that presents works from not only the 1960s to the early 1980s, but also contemporary artistic positions from Eastern and Western Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, the USA and several countries in Latin America. On its journey through Europe – starting in Spain and continuing through Croatia, Poland, Estonia, Denmark and ending in Germany – this temporary archive continued to expand through local research and scholarly collaboration. It was also 'activated' by local exhibitions, screenings, performances and discussions along the way, all of which contributed to continuous changes in the archive.

re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive is part of a long-term project. In 2008, we began engaging with feminist-inspired, gender-critical and queer performance art from the 1960s to the early 1980s as well as the 'return' of this artistic practice in the form of re-enactments, re-formulations and archival projects.[2]

The project is also part of the growing interest in performance art in recent years. The abundance of exhibitions, publications and events all testify to this interest, especially on the part of institutions and artists, in the history of performance and its representation.[3] Artists in particular are critically addressing the history of performance using the most diverse methods and formats, while also exploring its current potential for resistance and subversion in continually new and experimental ways. In this way, they gave the most important impulse for the *re.act.feminism* project.

Since the 1960s and 1970s, performance developed into an independent form of expression that firmly established both the artists' body and actions, and those of the audiences involved as a medium of art. In a time of global upheaval – strongly influenced by the student protests in the West, revolts in Eastern Europe, resistance movements in the South and in Latin America, as well as the international women's, civil rights, peace, gay and lesbian movements – artists tested the limits of artistic expression and rebelled against art based on formalism and the art object. Performance that is experimental,

process-oriented and spans across all genres escapes clear definitions and categorisations – which for many authors, such as Martha Wilson, is regarded as the true mark of performance.

Thanks to its form and content, performance can be considered the paradigmatic medium for a gender-critical, feminist artistic production. By linking art with life, and private with public – by focusing on the creative, acting and knowing body and by appropriating the new medium of video – women artists changed positions from the objects of art to the creators of art. Their radical works exposed and subverted oppressive identity categories, dramatised social as well as physical experiences of violence and appropriated the pleasurable body. As a new 'art form' that could be practised outside of traditional art spaces and the logics of economic exploitation, performance was also a medium for collective and political intervention in public spaces.

Despite its recent popularity, the feminist, gender-critical and queer performance practice that has set the tone for this medium from the beginning has seldom been subject to thorough scrutiny in all its international diversity. Against the backdrop of the current trend of institutionalising and historicising performance art, the goal of this project has therefore been to explore feminist, gender-critical and queer artistic positions that have played a key role in the development of performance. In this endeavour, we strive to look beyond the (primarily Western) canon by focusing on less established artists and stressing the diversity of performance strategies and practices internationally. Our objective has been to make documentation and archive materials, which are scattered internationally and often difficult to access, available to a broader audience, even if only for a short time. It was essential to us not to locate feminist and queer performance art in the past but rather to reflect its cross-generational and transnational dimensions, encouraging a dialogue, communication and referencing across borders of time and space. Finally, the project reflects the complex relationship between live performances, their traces/documents and their reception, and the more general issue of archiving ephemeral and subversive artistic practices.

Settings in Time and Space

Within this overall process, we made a number of conceptual decisions. At first, we concentrated predominantly on the 1960s to the 1980s and on contemporary positions. Periodisation is always disputed because it suggests universally valid, distinct periods, while specific spatial and political developments are often generalised. Developments that diverge from this pattern are regarded as either being 'too late', as 'catching up' or as irrelevant in relation to normative temporality and are therefore overlooked. Based on a linear model of time, real spatial and geopolitical differences are interpreted as temporal. The notion of the 1960s and 1970s as a phase of upheaval in art and as the beginning of an explicitly feminist art production is, as a rule, oriented towards a Western genealogy.[4] However, apart from the pragmatic necessity of restriction, there were several other reasons why, nevertheless, we decided to work with at least a loose form of time frame. As mentioned earlier, there has been a clear trend in recent years towards re-visiting, re-examining, re-exhibiting and re-historicising avant-garde art movements of the last century – especially performance, happenings and action art. Many artists refer to this specific history in their work. Also in the last few years there has been a growing interest for

feminism to reflect the multifarious feminist and queer positions from the 1960s to the 1980s, which have otherwise become clichés or are seen as obsolete. It is precisely these cross-generational references, dialogues and desires that *re.act.feminism* strives to investigate and in which we ultimately want to intervene. We therefore explore two time periods – seemingly fraying in different directions but at the same time folded into each other – in which feminist, queer and gender-oriented practices are condensed and brought into a dialogue with one another.

Another of our aims has been to locate feminist and queer performance practices in a transnational context and, at least to some extent, to internationally expand an exhibition and publication practice that has often been oriented towards the West. Thanks to a network of collaborations with curators, scholars and institutions, we were able to generate several exemplary research focuses – in Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Mediterranean and the Middle East – which are also reflected in the contributions to this book. Not all of the artworks that are represented in this project are feminist in a strict sense,[5] and not all of the artists see themselves as feminists. However, all works can be located within an associative relational field of feminism, gender, queer theory and art. This makes possible different perspectives on power relations inscribed onto 0the body, the body's potential for resistance and pleasure as well as its singular subjectivities and the connections between life and art.

Instead of developing a chronological, geographical or historical narration of origin, development, influence and delimitation, we instead applied the concept of thematic cartography, as used by Marsha Meskimmon.[6] The several exhibitions curated for the project along with the project's website and the images shown in this book have been organised according to the different thematic fields which we considered relevant in the context of the feminist avant-gardes of the 1960s to the 1980s as well as today that highlight the connections, references and diversities across borders of time and space.

A Performing Archive

re.act.feminism is perhaps not an archive in a strict sense;[7] it is rather a temporary, growing collection of documentary materials that travelled through Europe for two years during which it was activated by and activated others. 'Collection archive' is neither a trademark, nor does it claim to be systematic and complete. In cultural studies, according to Michel Foucault, the archive generally signifies the storage of knowledge. Collecting and exhibiting is regulated by subjective decisions. It is not bound to rules, but can rather be understood as an act or gesture conveying cultural knowledge. Nonetheless, the aim of collections should be apparent, because when they make something visible that was previously remote or overlooked, they also become sites of political decisions. The visibility of the collection is thus linked to its accessibility, stressing its emancipatory potential when in conversation with users.

Even if we were to refer to *re.act.feminism* as a collection in this sense, we have rather appropriated the term of 'archive' as a kind of aspiration and a claim, especially in the context of performance art. We refer to the extensive discussion about the relationship between ephemeral performance art and archives – a discussion in which Peggy Phelan's well-known description of performance as a medium

of disappearance is a part,[8] as is Rebecca Schneider's oft-cited insistence of performance to remain.[9] In this context we do not see the document as the 'other' of live performance. Rather, it is produced deliberately for a future audience – for an anticipated future 'encounter'. It continues to stir the imagination, to call for action and to invite people to create their own reproductions or re-performances. *re.act.feminism* is interested in these encounters – the use, the recycling, appropriation and reinterpretation of documents – in embodied moments of reception. In short, we are invested in the 'productivity' of the document. What does the document do? What does it achieve in the moment of its reception? What relationship does it create between past and future, between author and recipient? What multiplicity of references and interpretations are offered by the archive?

In this sense, *re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive* stresses the vitality and liveness of the archive, which we indeed regard as a kind of performer. First of all the archive was exhibited – in some venues it was even put on stage literally, turning its users and attendants into performers performing the archive. In doing so we reproduced, on the one hand, elements of a traditional archive, including restricted viewing that was limited to each location of the presentation, the strict ordering and cataloguing of the objects, and their attendance by 'archivists'. On the other hand, other aspects of archives were subverted – for example, through the archive's playful character of a mobile, makeshift architecture, consisting of increasingly battered looking freight boxes, and the activation of performance documents in workshops, activity rooms and in all kinds of curated and self-organised events. Secondly, the archive was on the road for almost two years, and our partner institutions were not only the hosts of this travelling exhibition, they essentially became co-curators. They chose how to present the exhibition at their institutions, and they contributed materials to the archive. Thus, within this collaborative network, the archive grew to include works by more than 180 artists and continued to invite countless visitors and users to be touched, affected and inspired by queer and feminist gestures.

The Book

This book offers an insight into this extensive project with exemplary texts and image essays and an appendix with artist biographies and works of all the participating artists.

We asked several scholars and partners to reflect on their (regional) research projects. Eleonora Fabião and Kathrin Becker describe the methodology and main themes in their novel research into performance art in Latin America and gender-oriented performance art in the MENASA region. They focus on questions of periodisation, (postcolonial) definitions of feminism as well as performativity. Angelika Richter provides an in-depth discussion of a theme that was already in focus in the first edition of *re.act.feminism*. She investigates the internationally lesser-known multimedia action art by women artists in former East Germany who stood up against the paternalism and surveillance by the state. The curators and artists Laima Kreivytė, Mare Tralla and Oxana Sarkisyan talk with the curator Reet Varblane, who organised *re.act.feminism* in the Tallinna Kunstihoone (Tallinn Art Hall), examining the relationship between performance art and public spaces in certain post-Soviet societies. Bettina Knaup addresses the role of feminist and queer re-performances which she regards as an alternative way of writing history, while Rebecca Schneider explores the 'riddle' of feminist re-mimesis in the context of recent feminist 'mega-exhibitions'. Methods, concepts and displays of the exhibition *re.act.feminism* are reflected on from the very different perspectives of two stages on the two-year tour. First, in his contribution based on his doctoral thesis, scholar Mathias Danbolt analyses the first presentation of *re.act.feminism* in the Centro Cultural Montehermoso within the context of an ambivalent queer and feminist desire for an archive. Second, Laurence Rassel and Linda Valdés describe the curatorial methods behind the presentation of *re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive* in the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona.

The extensive selection of images is organised according to seven thematic fields, each of which points to connections and references across temporal and geopolitical borders. In the sense already described, they draw a thematic cartography and provide subjective glimpses into the archive. Another image essay shows the stations of the mobile archive over the last two years: the Centro Cultural Montehermoso in Vitoria-Gasteiz, the Instytut Sztuki Wyspa in Gdansk, the Galerija Miroslav Kraljević in Zagreb, the Museet for Samtidskunst in Roskilde, the Tallinna Kunstihoone in Tallinn, the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona and the Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

This anthology is intended to complement the project's website, which includes an extensive collection of images and detailed information about all the participating artists.

The Future of the Past

re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive was designed as a temporary exhibition archive. As such, it has been primarily an experimental, temporary space for research and encounters. At the same time, it also represents an aspiration, a desire and a potential both for further research and for a permanent archive – a home to feminist and queer performance in all its diversity and de-normalising, subversive rebelliousness. While this may still be a utopia today, we hope that the tension we described at the beginning between feminism, the archive and performance will continue to keep things in motion and continue to be exposed to further re-performances.

Thus, all that remains is for us to offer our heartfelt thanks to everyone involved in the project: the supporters and sponsors, all our partner institutions and their teams, the cooperating scholars and, most of all, the artists, lenders, galleries, trustees of estates and all the individuals who made it possible for us to grant public access to this extensive collection and all its treasures. We also want to thank our fantastic team and all the authors, editors and translators who contributed to this book, as well as the Verlag für moderne Kunst Nürnberg and the Live Art Development Agency London. Without their tireless efforts, their trust and their support, this project would not have been possible.

1 The mobile archive consisted of a set of five foldable freight boxes with a document cabinet and four work stations for visitors to study the materials, which predominantly included video and film documentation. Works that for different reasons were not documented on film were integrated into the archive in the form of documentary photographs. Each station included a handbook written in the local language. This included all the works with short descriptions and artist biographies and provided visitors with an overview of the entire selection. After two years, the archive consisted of more than 260 works by more than 180 artists.

2 *re.act.feminism – performancekunst der 1960er und 70er jahre heute*, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, 13 December 2008 – 8 February 2009; International Festival of Contemporary Arts – City of Women, Ljubljana, 10 – 29 March 2009; Kunsthaus Erfurt 19 April – 10 May 2009.

3 See, for example: Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (eds.), *Perform, Repeat, Record. Live Art in History*, Bristol / Chicago 2012.

4 See: Marsha Meskimmon, Chronology through Cartography: Mapping 1970s Feminist Art Globally. In: Cornelia Butler and Lisa Gabrielle Mark (eds.), *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, Los Angeles 2007, pp. 322-35, especially pp 323-325.

5 See in this context also Bojana Pejićs concept of "protofeminism" and Amelia Jones' concept of "parafeminism". Bojana Pejić (ed.), *Gender Check Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe,* Vienna 2009; Amelia Jones, The Televisual Architecture of the Dream Body. In: Heike Munder (ed.), *It's Time for Action (There's No Option). About Feminism*, Zürich 2007, pp. 262-93.

6 See: Meskimmon, Chronology.

7 See for instance the use of the term 'archive' in Laurence Rassel and Linda Valdés' text in this volume.

8 See: Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked. The Politics of Performance*, London / New York 1996, p. 146.

9 See: Rebecca Schneider, "Performance Remains", *Performance Research: A Journal of Performing Arts*, Vol.6 2001 No.2, pp. 100–108, and many other authors such as Adrian Heathfield: Then Again, in: Jones & Heathfield, *Perform, Repeat, Record,* pp. 27-35.



Views from a Travelling Archive





re.act.feminism –
performance art of the 1960s and 70s today
13 December 2008 – 8 February 2009
Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Germany

^ < Exhibition view with *Aktive Poesie*, 1971 by Ewa Partum and *Meine Macht ist meine Ohnmacht*, 1978 by Ulrike Rosenbach

^ Exhibition view with *Touching*, 2008 by Babette Mangolte and *The Performing Archive* by Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz

v Exhibition view with archive

✳ Photographs Andreas Süß, courtesy cross links e.V.



re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive
7 October 2011 – 15 January 2012
Centro Cultural Montehermoso Kulturunea
Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain

^ Exhibition view with the archive modules, photograph and © Centro Cultural Montehermoso / Adrián Ruíz de Hierro



v Installation view with *Emmascarats*, 1976 by Fina Miralles
Photograph and © Centro Cultural Montehermoso / Erre de Hierro



v *Irrintzi Repetition Delay*, 2011, performance by Itziar Okariz
Photograph and © Centro Cultural Montehermoso / Erre de Hierro





re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive
24 March - 22 April 2012
Instytut Sztuki Wyspa
Gdańsk, Poland



^ < Exhibition with Aneta Szyłak, director of the Instytut Sztuki Wyspa

^ v Exhibition views

✳ Photographs 8485, courtesy Instytut Sztuki Wyspa, Gdańsk





re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive
6 May 2012 – 26 May 2012
Galerija Miroslav Kraljević
Zagreb, Croatia



^ < Introduction and book presentation with Kaj Dorte Osteroth and Gabriele Stötzer

^ Panel discussion *Historicizing, re-enacting, and archiving – performance research in the local context*

✳ Photographs Miran Kramar, courtesy Galerija Miroslav Kraljević



re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive
17 June 2012 – 19 August 2012
Museet for Samtidskunst
Roskilde, Denmark

< *Instant*, performance by Yingmei Duan, photograph Beatrice E. Stammer

v Director Sanne Kofod Olsen introduces the archive to participants of the workshop *Animating a performing archive* led by Mary Coble and Judith Schwarzbart, courtesy Museet for Samtidskunst





re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive
28 August 2012 – 30 September 2012
Tallinna Kunstihoone
Tallinn, Estonia

^ Exhibition opening

> *Fat kid, pretty kid*, performance by Mare Tralla

v Curator Reet Varblane introduces the seminar *Mapping feminist performances in the Baltic countries and in Russia*

✳ Photographs Anna-Stina Treumund, courtesy Tallinna Kunstihoone







re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive
16 November 2012 – 17 February 2013
Fundació Antoni Tàpies
Barcelona, Spain

^ *Mallarmé revisé / Malarmat revisat*, 2012, performance by Esther Ferrer

✳ Photographs Linda Valdés, © Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2012/2013, available under a CC BY-NC-SA license

v Workshop *Taller a càrrec de RapedTwins* as part of the project *La Família Drag*, 2013



v Workshop with Itziar Okariz at the Graner, Barcelona, 2013, initiated by Secció Irregular – Mercat de les Flors, photograph Quim Pujol







re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive
22 June 2013 – 18 August 2013
Akademie der Künste, Berlin
Berlin, Germany

^ < Exhibition finissage ^ Archive module in use



^ Working table within the exhibition space



^ *Ni 'mamita' Ni 'mulatita'*, Performance Lecture by Teresa María Díaz Nerio, photograph Nora Spiekermann, courtesy cross links e.V

v Table with artists manifestos and documents of previous stations, photograph Angela Anderson, courtesy cross links e.V.

vv *Lygia Clark: breaking frames*, Lecture by Eleonora Fabião, photograph Nora Spiekermann, courtesy cross links e.V.

v Public workshop with the artist collective Les Salonnières, re.act.feminism – open space

vv *Re:Volt Feminism*, sound performance with students of European Media Studies, University and University of Applied Sciences Potsdam, under the direction of Anne Quirynen and Simon Vincent

v Exhibition view with archive modules

✳ Photographs if not otherwise mentioned Anne Quirynen
Photograph page 16–17 Peter Knaup











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www.reactfeminism.org

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