

DISCOURSE IN MOTION

Barbara Clausen

An Annotated Bibliography In Real Time: Performance Art in Quebec and Canada is a research project dedicated to an extensive bibliographic survey of performance-based practices in Quebec and Canada since the early 20th century. The project began with a desire to understand this history through the impact of its writings and bibliographical sources, and is rooted in my longstanding interest in performance's interdisciplinary nature and its ongoing engagement with documentary and conceptual practices.

Over the last five years the student research team and I have examined how the history of performance art is written and read. With the help and support of artists and authors, we researched, read and annotated a vast collection of writings, producing a comprehensive overview of the wide variety of existing publications written by performers, theorists, writers, critics, artists, and curators on performance in Canada, Quebec, and beyond. The ambition was to create a bibliography based research platform dedicated to the culture of writing and reading on performance art dating from the early 20th century to today. The results of our research includes this publication, an open access database, the ongoing series *Readings on Performance* and the documentation of all our curatorial projects and public programming produced in collaboration with colleagues at Artexte and the Bibliothèque des arts at the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM).

The collected writings and recordings in this publication reflect, reiterate and conserve the creative forces of performance-based practices and are fundamental to the establishment of the symbiotic relationship between experience and knowledge. Each citation brings with it performance art's moving history(ies) over the decades and exists as an integral part of its ongoing discourses and practices. *An Annotated Bibliography in Real Time* follows individual efforts and collective spirits, shedding light on various circumstances and modes of production as well as the ongoing reception of performance art, and bringing attention to both the performer and the spectator on the threshold of their own given time.

The goal was to compile a comprehensive survey of publications, texts and text-based resources on performance throughout Canada since the early 1900s and to develop formats of knowledge transfer that would render the bibliographical research and its complexities, as well as our process, visible. This led to the development of a series of keywords and cross-referential criteria that functioned as guidelines for establishing a Zotero database framework that corresponds to and with the contingency of performance based practices. The bibliography not only lists the widest possible range of existing written and recorded materials, but also becomes a record in and of itself, continuously responding to its own growth and development. This -is crucial for underscoring the factors that both unite and differentiate the range of inter-disciplinary practices of performance art. The parallel reflection and cross-categorization of the found texts and documentary materials is an essential part of the epistemological evaluation and writing of both the annotated bibliography and the essays in this publication, and extends to our web-presence at Artexte and the Bibliothèque des arts at UQAM.

Curatorial initiatives, public programming and accessibility are important to not only present our work but also to activate our research in real time. The three exhibitions and talks at Artexte in the Fall of 2015 and 2017 and an evening of performances at the Darling Foundry in the Summer of 2019, are accompanied by the interview series *Readings on Performance*. Maps, murals, research displays, exhibition displays, poster collections of manifestos and screenings offered insight into how the diversity of sources, writings and text-based materials is fundamental to the production of performance art. These projects are vital generators for the growth and depth of the bibliography and are reflective of our onsite visits within public and private collections, archives, research centres and university libraries in Quebec and Ontario, as well as our online research in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the Maritimes.

This led us to examine how the culture of writing about performance art and the use of written text as a tool and medium within performance (Anna Banana, Intermedia, General Idea) — particularly in light of the vast distances that define Canada in geopolitical as well as cultural terms — both challenge concepts of authenticity and the idea of immediacy in the arts. Researching artistic practices that engage with the notion of immediacy, presence, performativity, movement and social relations is an infinite undertaking that transcends the binary dialectics of the live and the mediated.

We wanted to investigate how the act of writing, as an inherently performative act, can expose the instability of the archive as a site of representational politics. In other words, constructing an expanded notion of the bibliographical as a site to highlight positions of agency and resistance as much as negotiation and production of knowledge. This undertaking questions genealogical ontologies so as to not risk losing sight of the plurality of lineages and traditions. It has meant producing a resource for curatorial thinking as much as discussion — one that has the capacity to articulate performance's myriad forms of engaging with presence (past and present) as a point of encounter to read and reflect on events and people, not as singular entities but in relation to each other.

We want to enable future users, whether using the bibliography, researching the database or watching the interviews, to become aware of and contextualize the various roles and complex networks that constitute the correlative relationship between the intent of the artist and the history of the works' (re)presentation and reception. We were less interested in the collection and categorization of documentary or staged images, and the creation of an archive dedicated to the traces and objects related to a given performance. Rather, we chose to look at performance's relationship to language, text and dialogue as a semiotic methodology, shuttling between the archive and the event.

A History of Writings on Performance

Performance art in Quebec and Canada, like elsewhere in the last two decades, has stepped out of the shadow of its history and fully recognized its potential as an interdisciplinary art form¹. At the helm of art histories' avant-gardes and tightly woven into a network of cultural and historical practices and emancipatory movements, performance oscillates between visual arts, dance and theatre in its explorations of space, time and movement. Over the decades performance has enjoyed waves of attention as well as disregard. Its latest "rediscovery" at the turn of the millennium has allowed performance art to reinvent itself once again. As a consequence, it has expanded its focus on the authenticity of the body, one it fostered until the late 1990s, to a current understanding of itself as a hybrid medium and discursive practice (Clausen, 2018; Jones, 2012; Wood, 2018), as much dependent on its archival afterlives as its immanent presence within the media landscape.

Both performance art's history and its resurgence are linked to how cultural memory becomes visible and operates within the correlative relationship between experience and knowledge (Foucault, 1969; Giannachi, 2016; Scott, 1992). This project is part of an ongoing investigation into the relevance of performance art's histories' investment in both notions of the archive and 'liveness'. (Auslander, 1999; Enwezor, 2008; Ernst, 2018) Simply put, this implies demonstrating how the past deeply reflects the present as well as the future (Benjamin, 1934; Bourriaud, 2013; Foster, 2010).

Performance's unrelenting drive and presence in contemporary art is reflected in the diversity of performance-based practices existing in the Quebec and Canadian contexts. While they strongly overlap, one could discern them through a range of interests and approaches: relational aesthetics and situationist actions such as *le manœuvre* (Richard Martel, Alain-Martin Richard, Doyon/Demers, Sylvie Tourangeau), pioneering video performances and new media art works (Gathie Falk, Vera Frenkel, Vincent Trasov, Paul Wong), conceptual approaches (Elizabeth Chitty, Bruce Barber, General Idea, Suzy Lake, Luis Jacob, David Tomas, Tim Clark, Adam Kinner), as well as art practices that challenge categories of gender, identity and power (Michelle Lacombe, Kent Monkman, Tanya Mars, Colin Campbell) as a critical means to address and decolonize the institutionalised racism and the politics of exclusion inherent to ongoing settler colonial histories and policies (Rebecca Belmore, Dana Danger, Dana Michel, Adrian Stimson, Skeena Reece, Paul Wong). This multitude of practices have strong ties to the choreographic and theatrical field (Public Recordings, Images Festival, Onishka, Red Sky Performance, Dana Michel, Françoise Sullivan, Marie Claire Forté, Dempsey and Millan, Praxis Theater, Phenomena) and is echoed in the majority of writings published in Quebec and Canada since the late 1960s (Pontbriand, 2014; Riley, 2009).

Written and produced by artists and writers, most publications are distributed through a network of artist-run centres, festivals and journals, ranging from academia to fanzines. Of particular note is the balance and tension between regional - at times isolated - specificities on the one hand and, on the other, far reaching and cross generational collaborations between artists, writers and researchers. The continuously growing interest in the historiography of live art practices within research and creation is matched by the current increase in work by writers and performers. This is not due to the disinterest of critics and art historians (quite the contrary, as the bibliography demonstrates) but to the fact that the act of writing, much like that of research and reflection, is an integral part of the history, present and future of performance-based practice. And yet — despite the range of published materials — a comprehensive bibliographical overview of these various histories, trajectories and current movements within performance art (specifically moving away from an overarching Quebecois and Canadian perspective) had, when we started in 2014, yet to be established.

Our research suggests that the existing literature can be thematically classified into three categories. First, emancipatory and political movements ranging from women's and LGBTQ rights (Arbour, 1982; Davis, 2017; Jones & Silver, 2016; Mars & Householder, 2004 and 2016; St-Gelais, 2013; Wark, 2008) to activist indigenous practices (Alteen, 2003; Claxton & Willard, 2012; Nanibush, 2012). Second, regional practices and geopolitical interests (Barber, 2007; Bull, 2015; Martel, 2005), at times specifically focused on provinces and bracketed time periods (Alteen, 2001; Babin, 1990; ; Courcey, 2009; Robertson & Richard, 1990). Thirdly, investigations of performance's relationship to time based media (Bronson & Gale 1979; Lacerte, 2012; Poissant, 2013; Salter, 2012). These streams are interwoven and diverged through an increasing interest in specific tendencies and practices related to performance art such as anthologies on re-enactments and curating performance art (Bénichou, 2012; Davida, 2018), relational and furtive practices (Fraser, 2012; Loubier & Ninacs, 2008; Martel, 2012) or the revival of institutional critique and conceptual art (Arnold, 2012; Bonin, 2011; Pontbriand, 2013).

The challenges and ideological complexities of trying to define geopolitical specificities when establishing a bibliographical database were apparent from the outset of the project. A consideration of the politics of inclusion and exclusion in relation to archival and bibliographical research evoked a series of questions and topics that became decisive factors that shaped our public events and discussions. For example, how can the bibliography be used to question and expand historical canons shaped by provincial divides while acknowledging the agency of site-specificity? Or, how can we critically unpack the gender normative and settler colonial structures of power and categorization embedded in some of the existing bibliographical collections and archives we are drawing from while paying respect to and acknowledging the unceded ancestral territories we operate in? The awareness we developed

1 This project carefully considers the shifts, coexistence, use, differences and overlapping understanding between the terms performance, performance art and performance based art practices. Performance, as a cultural term, encompasses a broad range of live practices which includes, dance, theatre and visual arts. The term Performance art first appeared in the late 60s and early 70s, as an amalgam of art practices that embrace the authenticity of the live and the immediacy of the presence of the performer's body as its key elements. This notion has expanded since the late 1970s through new media and installation based experiments that involved the idea and image politics of the body, rather than the authenticity of its presence. This was further developed through conceptual approaches that included language and speech acts as part of their vocabulary and that culminated in an expanded notion of the performative as a hybrid practice and methodology rather than a genre.

with regard to these questions influenced our choice to highlight publications, reviews, manifestos and texts through our events, giving equal attention to established organizations as well as new networks of intersectional and intergenerational initiatives that question politics of power. The main question at heart was how performance based practices move their environments as well as their own states of being.

This led us to ask performers and authors to recommend and talk about writings on performance based practices and events that have influenced them and their understanding of performance. These personal bibliographies, which are available in the *Readings on Performance* video series at artexte.ca, are not only insightful anachronistic portraits; they also question well-trodden assumptions about sameness and difference in the history of Quebec and Canadian performance art. We searched for bibliographical sources and texts that looked at a performance as a practice that can transcend the historical circumstances of its creation, exploring a way of thinking before, during and after the act.

We followed written traces and text based documents of performance based practices which, through their interdisciplinary openness and reflexivity, used various cultural techniques of recording, reproduction and distribution. Examples of the symbiotic relationship between publishing and new technological devices range from the first recordings of Pauline Johnson's lecture performances in the early 1910s to Françoise Sullivan's infamous text *La danse et l'espoir* (1948) and its translation into her infamous *Danse dans la neige* and the photographs of Maurice Perron the same year, to the various manifestos of festivals and magazines that started to appear in the early 1960s (Marcil, 2019). Given the rich landscape of publications, one can clearly see how the first layer of performance art's history in Canada emerged in periodicals such as *FILE* (1972-1989), *Parachute* (1975-2007), *Inter* (1978 -), *C-magazine* (1984 -), *Esse* (1987), and *Brunt* (2005-2009) and many more. This rich culture of periodicals is reflected from the late 1970s onward in the conceptual work of artists such as Tim Clark, Margaret Dragu, or Raymond Gervais as well as N.E.thing Co, as well as the beginning of the vivid festival scene that emerged at that time in Québec and throughout Canada. Writing about performance was an essential part of performance. This ongoing investment is also echoed in the wide range of self-made publications, zines, blogs and social media that, as a format for critical intervention, is at the core of the work of artists such as Sarah Chouinard-Poirier's durational reading performances, Lindsay Nixon's writings or Tanya Lukin Linklater's use of critical theory for her lecture performances and collaborations with choreographers. The expansion towards more complex and historically layered approaches are central to Laura Levin's research on Performance Studies in Canada (2012 & 2014) and Heather Davis' anthology *Desire and Change* (2018). These projects attest to how bibliographies can function as interfaces that allow for long forgotten practices to (re)appear, shifting official genealogies as much as shedding insight into the politics of performance's institutionalisation and reception. They enable readers to think about the work and career of artists such as Françoise Sullivan, Rebecca Belmore or Ana Banana not simply in terms of their initial or late recognition but, rather, as decades-spanning practices dedicated to the power of the live.

Live art practices operate as shape-shifters, moving between their many modes of visual expression, material existence and physical (re)appearances. Our argument is that writing on performance not only reflects and documents the agency and power of performance; it also shapes, and most importantly changes, how we experience and think about performance based art practices. A description, an anthology or a review of a performance will inherently offer its readers a chance to look beyond the frame of the image or the intensity of the encounter. It allows them to imagine their own narrative of the live, neither undiluted by the aesthetics of the documentary recording nor weighed down by claims of immediacy.

With this we hope that our readers find their own chronological and thematic pathways within the immense field of publishing activities that have collided and expanded as a large map of networks and relationships throughout the history of Quebec and Canadian performance art and whose effects go beyond the parameters of the near and far.