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This book brings together scholars and curators from the visual arts and dance studies to investigate the methodological and theoretical issues related to the act of reenacting impermanent or unfinished artworks, pivotal or unrealized exhibitions, choreographies and gestures, and inaccessible, noninclusive or forgotten archives, which are to be put into question in the present. In addition to having become an effective and widespread contemporary artistic strategy, reenactment is taking shape as a new anti-positivist approach to the history of dance and art, which undermines the notion of linear time, suggesting new temporal encounters between past, present and future.

As such, reenactment has contributed to a move towards different forms of historical thinking and understanding that embrace cultural studies – especially intertwining gender, postcolonial, and environmental issues – in the redefinition of knowledge, historical discourses and memory. Acting in the present, reenactment brings to the fore the multiple temporalities involved in the relationship with the past and introduces immersive (personal and/or collective) experiences of previous “events” as a counter-practice which unsettles predetermined representations of

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history. By reactivating and representing the past in the present, history becomes meaningful again.

The essays (*solos*) and conversations (*duets*) collected in this book are the outcome of the two-day online conference held at Ca' Foscari University of Venice (19-20 November 2020), which was organised in the frame of the international research project Mnemedance – “Memory in Motion. Re-Membering Dance History”. Starting from the idea that memory is always active in dance and that dance is *not* a form of ephemeral and non-reproducible knowledge, Mnemedance investigates the (dancing) body as a tool for remembering and archiving experiences, cultures and movements, and as a strategy for preserving and transforming meaning. This approach to dance and its histories also involves questioning canons and genealogies by destabilising authorship and challenging both institutional and direct forms of transmission. Reenactment is a central practice in this respect, as it engages artists and scholars in reconsidering how dance can have a central role in reevaluating invisible legacies, marginal repertoires, and, more generally, the kinaesthetic dimensions of cultural heritage. For these reasons, it has also contributed to making dance studies an inspiring reference for adjacent areas of the arts and humanities.

The structure of the book, which playfully recalls that of a theatrical performance, is designed to provide space for a series of theoretical and practice-based insights – the *solos* – and conversations – the *duets* – by artists, scholars, critics and curators, who have dealt in various manners with reenactment in the performing and visual arts. The *duets* are preceded by a *prelude* in which Stefano Mudu presents each conversation and traces the theoretical framework of the different perspectives examined, together with the issues they raise for future research work. In *Under the Sign of Reenactment*, he also questions the notion of reenactment by suggesting a terminological shift from “reenactment” to “enactment” studies. The suppression (and consequent interchangeability) of the prefix “re-” gives rise to a whole set of new meanings.

The *solos* open with an essay in which Gabriella Giannachi explores the use of reenactments and the role of the audience as a strategy for preservation, taking as a

case-study Dan Graham's seminal work *Audience/Performer/Mirror* (1977). She carries out her analysis by referencing the work's reenactments that took place in 2020 in the context of UNFOLD, a research project and collaborative, international research network of the platform for media art LIMA, based in Amsterdam. In *UNFOLD: Dan Graham's 'Audience/Performer/Mirror' Reenacted*, Giannachi explains how, by looking at a work through its reenactments, it is possible to both identify different qualities in the "original" and make the work future-proof, to preserve it for posterity. Her study also shows the extent to which performances and artworks can build meaning over time thanks to their ontological and epistemological qualities and relational capacities.

The second *solo* by Timmy De Laet expresses the need for dance scholars to take advantage of reenactment as a quintessentially collaborative mode of bringing history into practice. In *(Re)Making Dance History Together: Working Towards a Collaborative Historiography of Dance*, De Laet considers which forms of collaborative research can be successfully adopted within dance studies and how they can be applied to dance historiography. This is a crucial point, since dance historiography is currently undergoing a shift towards transnational or global approaches. This development puts pressure on the traditional assumption that historical research is a largely solitary endeavour. As De Laet suggests, choreographic reenactment shows how collaboration can be used as a methodological principle that might expand not only the scope of dance history but also its impact and forms of output.

With Susanne Foellmer's contribution, the attention moves again to a specific case-study. In *Watching Dances from the Past: Considering Performance Analysis in the Realm of Reenactments*, Foellmer focuses on *New*, a dance piece by the Berlin-based collective Lupita Pulpo, which consists exclusively of multilayered references to contemporary dance deriving from the performance memories of its three interpreters. The dense web of references in the reenacted piece complicates the relationship with the audience members, who do not always have the knowledge necessary to immediately recognize and make sense of the layers of gestures that the performers' bodies reevoke. Raising both

methodological and interpretative questions and discussing the limits of an analysis based on semiotics and phenomenology, Foellmer proposes a different approach in which performance methodology takes a cue from reenactment and its questioning of diachronic historical relations.

Likewise, Aurore Després takes as a starting point for her argument a dance piece, namely *Sacre#2* (2014), which constitutes the reenactment by Dominique Brun of Vaslav Nijinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (1913). In her essay *Five Conceptual Actions for a Sensible Archaeology of the Gesture in Dominique Brun's 'Sacre #2'*, Després explores Julie Salgues's interpretation of *The Chosen One* and questions to what extent the dichotomy between reconstruction and reinvention can be productive. From her point of view, gestures generated in the present make the past and the future swirl together to such an extent that they end up reconstituting and renewing themselves. Consequently, she emphasises the primacy of gestures over memory images and archival documentation, and posits reinvention as a collective, situated and multitemporal action.

XII With her essay *The Matter of Reenactment: A Materialist Inquiry into Cambodia's Contemporary Monumental Practices*, Stéphanie Benzaquen-Gautier also proposes a methodological shift in reenactment studies. Through exploring a set of performances, artworks, movies and projects she questions the open-ended dimension of the act of reenacting, the apparatuses through which reenactment appears, the transcorporeal practices it engages and the relations it produces, focusing on Cambodia, a country that for decades has been shaped by war, genocide, and social injustice. By asking herself if one can speak of a "Cambodian reenactment", she aims to contribute to laying the foundations for a "new materialist" approach to reenactment outside the (Western) theoretical frameworks of representation and mediation. Benzaquen-Gautier's non-canonical, non-normative, even non-human rereading of "Cambodia's Arts of Memory", through the lens of New Materialism, explicitly brings to the fore the political aspect of reenactment.

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Benzaquen-Gautier's analysis confirms that every reenactment intended as a revisiting process, that is, every repetition seen as an improvement of the past *in* the present

for the future, is beyond doubt a political gesture, never a neutral one, whether it is the reactivation of an archive or the restaging of an artwork, an exhibition or a choreography. Three example images – a small and non-exhaustive selection – from the conference resonate with this.

The first image is a still from Rabih Mroué’s short video *Old House* (2006), which is evoked by Matteo Lucchetti in his conversation with Gabi Ngcobo. The image shows a bombed house in Lebanon that seems to be falling apart. Yet, instead of crashing to the ground, it keeps getting back on its feet, over and over again, reconstructing/reenacting itself. This is a metaphor for the complex and often traumatic relationship between remembering and forgetting, between the tension of looking both backward and forward in time. Mroué uses it to reflect on how memory works. People, facts, and gestures that one remembers are de facto the result of an elaboration, of a translation, that implies a constant “working-through” process – or rather a reinvention of what one has actually forgotten.

The second example also belongs to the moving image. In his film *Sandlines. The Story of History* (2018-2020), Francis Alÿs uses reenactment as a way to reinterpret the past by conceiving parallel histories that rehabilitate “the absent ones”, namely, those that have been left out of History. The film’s protagonists are a group of children of a mountain village in Iraq, who reenact a century of history of their country. In so doing, they revisit their past to understand their present, inducing the viewer to reflect on the relationship between History and storytelling. As the film starts, one of the children tells the viewer: “Once upon a time, history existed as a series of stories that people would pass on from generation to generation. The stories would often contradict one another but there was always some truth in each story. There was no inside and no outside, no beginning and no ending, until the day oil came out of the Land”. At the very moment when power meets history, Alÿs brings to light a fundamental question: which history or truth, and especially for whom, has to be told? When referring to a story, or to a work of art, an exhibition, a gesture or a dance movement which is being reenacted, the intricate and often misleading notions of an origin and of an “original” have to be carefully considered.

The third and final image is Marzia Migliora's *Stilleven* (2015), which was chosen as the conference cover image. It is an installation view of the mise-en-scène that Migliora presented in the Italian pavilion at the 2015 Venice Biennale as a reenactment of a photograph she took almost twenty years before. In showing an expanse of corn cobs, with the artist's body curled up at the centre reflected in the mirrored surface of a wardrobe, the work refers to the visual memory of the Italian rural world; that is, Migliora's familiar background and cultural heritage. As such, it is a remediation that addresses the practice of reenactment as reembodiment, where the human body becomes the key medium in reactivating the past and representing the present.

Artistic reenactment as a strategy of appropriation, circulation, translation, and transmission contributes to understanding history both in its perpetual becoming and as a process of reinvention, renarration and resignification from an interdisciplinary perspective. *On Reenactment: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools* is intended to be a contribution in this direction.