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The Slippages of the Present and the Stage Presence in the Long-durational Performance – A Deconstructivist Perspective in the Context of Post-theory

Abstract. The present paper proposes a questioning of the ways in which, in the long-durational performance, there occurs an overestimation of the temporal regime of the present, to which a “stage” presence of the performer corresponds, understood as a “live”, *in corpore*, unmediated presence.

Starting from the practice of artists such as Marina Abramović, Marlyn Arsem or Tehching Hsieh, but especially from the curatorial/institutional discourse, which legitimizes their performances, this study initiates a critical evaluation of the “mystification” of presence in the long-durational performance, but also of the hyperbolization of the regime of the present. In the conditions in which these performances are using remembering/archiving/ recording instruments, a “fetishization” of the present/presence is a paradox. In this paper, I bring up the topic of the manifestations of the performer’s presence, either as an auratic presence, a literal presence or a co-presence – aspects which sometimes end up being mutually contaminated.

Thus, I analyze the long-durational performance using Jacques Derrida’s theory of *traceability*, but also the understanding of the *duration* as a “constitutive piece” for this typology of performance, as analyzed by Gilles Deleuze, starting with Henri Bergson. I therefore argue, in their wake, that the present works as an “impure” regime of time, in juxtaposition

with the past and the future, thereby cancelling a present-oriented ontology of performance art. At this time of post-criticism and post-theory, I assert the vitality of the two theorists’ thinking, but especially the discrepancy, the antithesis between the theoretical discourse on performance (especially that developed by Philip Auslander) and the purist practice of the long-durational performance, anchored, in fact, in a “nostalgia” for the present.

Keywords: long-durational performance, temporal turn, presence/absence, trace, repetition, critical theory, defetishization.

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EKPHRASIS, 1/2018

AFTERMATHS OF CRITICAL THEORY
pp. 81-96

**Durational performance.
Progressing towards a critical mode
by reassuring the vitality of deconstruction**

The essential characteristic of the long durational performance is the fact that this typology of performance brings into attention a the non-linear perspective regarding time, in opposition to the fictional, representational function of time, as it was explored since the Aristotelian drama. The long durational performance belongs to the category of time-based arts, artistic practices that use, misshape and “make abuse” of time. Understood as a *tool*, a *medium* of expression, time might alter not only the artistic material, but also (under the imperative of *endurance*) the previous identity of the performer.

Christine Ross talks about the manifestation of a temporal turn occurring in postmodern art, of an opposing reaction that art has gained towards the historical/optimistic understanding of time, as assimilated by Western culture/philosophy during modernity. By contrast, durational artistic practices would articulate a time experienced as duration, a fractured time, produced from within, skeptical of the idea of evolution (Ross 2012, 18-22).

Regarding the typology of this performance and the temporal regime of the present, this regime is approached in the durational performance, being closely linked to the presence of the performer, to the unmediated, *in corpore* encounters between the performer and the public. Thus, the present paper will analyse three performances – Marina Abramović’s *A house with an ocean view*, Marlyn Arsem’s *100 ways to consider time* and Tehching Hsieh’s *Punch time clock piece, documentation as performance*.

One of the major points that I would like to emphasize is that, as long as this typology of performance is concerned, there is a theoretical and critical lacunae, if no references that take it into consideration. There is almost no theoretical debate even on what “*durational*” might mean (except for the fact that these performances are presented as performances that develop on...expanded periods of time).

Long-durational performance involves a hybridization of the three temporal regimes (past, present and future). The performative acts analyzed, but, especially the artistic and curatorial discourse built around them, favor, almost fetishizing the regime of the present. Thus, a mystification of the “imperative” condition which should be assumed by the performer occurs, the condition of stage “presence”. Artists, but, also curators expose these performances making use of a presentist and a restrictive discourse. This discourse is not in accordance with the past theoretical debates¹ on presence in performance studies but, more importantly, it is not in accordance with ... the mediated temporalities that we are encountering!

This paper presents an analysis that defetishizes the ways in which the temporal regime of the present is affirmed and magnified by the long-durational performance. In order for such an analysis I propose (paradoxically) a deconstructivist approach, in the recent context of the *post-theoretical*, and *post-critical* condition, models of criticism

that call into question the use of high theory (from the '70 s) as a hegemonic discourse. These models of criticism affirm that in order for a critical approach to maintain a reflexive attitude, it has "to situate itself against the *doxa* of received wisdom" (Butt 2005, 5), of the overused theoretical frameworks, that stand in the place of critical thinking, in the place of producing new conceptual tools of practice and research.

Thus, it is important to consider a surpassing of the theoretical discourses from the postmodern perspective of French Theory (established by J. Derrida, G. Deleuze and M. Foucault) taking into account the potential of a *post-critical* (Foster, 2015, ch. 5), and *post-theoretical* paradigm of welcoming different artistic practices.

In this regard, J. Rancière and B. Latour are questioned by Hal Foster in *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency* (Foster, 2015, ch. 5). Both of them are vocal figures that make a point against the antifetishistic, clichéd trap of critique that works as an instauration of a discourse of power (which wants to activate, pedagogically a passive spectator, in the terms of J. Rancière, which wants to "lift the rugs from under the feet of naïve believers", in the terms of B. Latour).

Still, Hal Foster asserts the need of a reaffirming critique, especially in the context of the ossification and institutionalization of the high theory of the '70s. This situation ends paradoxically, in no real engagement with critical dialogue, the result being that of a "debilitating relativism" (Foster, 2015, ch.5, para. 1) cultivated both by curators or academics, as long as they are protected by various institutional facilities.

Proposing a reading on the durational performance that is trying to demystify presence, opposes B. Latour's point of view regarding the indulgence of the critics of using defetishization as a redundant mechanism of "dominating the naïve believers" – a tool that is based, mainly on the easiest principle of likelihood (Latour 2004, 241). In contrast, I understand a deconstructive critique, particularly as a playful resistance towards a dominant theory/method or preconceived interpretation. This is a critique that can actually function not from a point of sovereignty, of negative criticism, that is entertained from the power to "demystify, destabilize, denaturalize" artistic practices (Felski 2015, ch.1.). It is, of course, a way of "reading" that stands in opposition with a "compassionate" critique, a critique that reconstructs and "assembles" (Latour 2004, 246) but, that is not done from the point of annihilating radically the possibility of presence in the performance. The regime of the present and the presence of the performer is articulated, affirmed instead, in its own plural form.

A deconstructive perspective might function in the name of a joyful, vitalist analysis of performance. In this regard, Christian Haines, in *Eaten alive, or, why the death of theory is not antitheory* (2018) offers a perspective on critical theory understood as a resurrection, a celebration of the contradictions that a text might gather. He suggests a revitalization of the text, that is questioned to take the risk of running from a "modest", conciliatory option for interpretation, from a *post-critical* condition that is in the situation of degenerating to "no interpretation", to "a fantastic realm in which texts read themselves" (Haines 2018, 10). Theory functions in Haines's terms

as a ritual of an energetic “cutting through” the text. Theory “occurs by writing one’s way through the text”, criticism marks the text’s “non-identity within itself, the potentiality that haunts the words on the page” (Haines 2018, 10).

The critique that Haines asserts functions as a dionysiac critique. Taking into discussion durational performance, this critique might function as a ludic fragmentation of the text that is not seduced by fixing the “slippages” of the performance from Presence and Present. Thus, the discourse of the performance becomes open for a “spectator” who can define his own present, his own “unique” moment, in his own subjective terms.

The most obvious argument in support of analysing durational performance from this critical perspective is, obviously, provided by the fact that deconstruction doubts one of the most important aspects, regarding the performative experience – that of the presence of the performer. The discourse of performance theory had already been influenced by a deconstructivist perspective, regarding, especially the questioning of the ontology of performance. In this regard, Philip Auslander (Auslander 2008, ch. 2) and Elinor Fuchs (Fuchs, 1985, 163-173) are the most symptomatic figures that stand for a deconstructivist critique against the supposed “uniqueness” of performance, guaranteed by the *hic et nunc* of the stage.

Adopting this perspective might constitute as a fertile point of departure for laying the foundation for a critical engagement with the durational performance, for entering slowly into ... a critical mode. In this regard, it is important to consider that the vitality, and the challenge of critique, of a “co-critique” might stand in a mode of theorising that is still “philosophically rich” (Turnbull 2003, 17), but at the same time it is constitutive as an accessible tool for the public. Considering the recent rejection of the stiffness of theoretical discourse, the “sin” of defetishizing can be indulged only by relating to the presence of the performer in a non-hegemonic, vitalist way of analysis. This means opening the performance to what it already is, namely ... an experiment, a questioning of the presence seen as... *possibility*.

The fictionalized, the auratic, the literal presence. **Variations through *duration* and *traceability***

Power Cormac, in the wake of J. Derrida, carries out an articulated critique of the presence, enumerating three fundamental meanings at the intersection of the theatrical discourse and that of the visual arts – by which he understands this concept (Cormac 2006, 2-14). Thus, he brings to light a typology of a fictionalized presence, an auratic presence and a “literal” type of presence. To these correspond three ways of putting the present “into practice”: “to make present”, “to have presence” and “to be present”.

The first one is articulated by matching the time of the fictional action with the time of the staging. This encounter generates the time shared by both actors and spectators. The second way of manifesting presence, achievable by “having presence”, is identifiable by the auratic projection which surrounds the actor’s personality. Finally,

the last way of putting the present “into action”, the “literal” one, is “to be present”. “To be present” means to abandon the claim of a single creative consciousness and to place the emphasis equally on a spectator-oriented perspective. Moreover, Power Cormac’s typologies of presence can work, as we will see, even within the same performance.

Examining critically the temporal regime of the present in the durational performance means, as already stated, understanding the regime of present and the presence of the performer in a schizoid form. The performer can no longer remain “stabilized” in a stage presence (understood as a supposed “live” and *embodied* presence), since archiving media are used in these performances or the performances have an anticipated, theatricalized structure.

I will appeal in this regard to Henri Bergson’s theory on the concept of *duration*, but also on Gilles Deleuze’s use of this concept. For G. Deleuze the present can no longer be understood as “becoming past after a new present has come to replace it” (Cull 2012, 189). Likewise, “nor can the past be thought of as being constituted after it has ceased to be present (...), it is not that past has been present and then passes, but rather that the present is constituted as past at the same time that it is constituted as present” (Cull 2012, 189).

Deleuze’s presence is articulated as *becoming*, as a dynamic transformation, which operates on the performer’s consciousness and corporality, involved in a process of endurance. Keeping the performer in *duration*, in a time produced from within, implies a *becoming*, which doesn’t mean a radical transformation of his identity, but a continuous negotiation between his *in corpore* presence and the multiple occurrences of the mediated presence. Modulations of presence are thus being born out of this negotiation, which go beyond the two dichotomies – “live”, *in corpore* and recorded presence.

Under the influence of H.Bergson’s thinking, for G.Deleuze, the regime of the present doesn’t work singularly as a “*hic et nunc*”, but through “several different and self-differing realities” (Cull 2012, 182). Thus, in the terms used by Laura Cull, “Deleuze’s philosophy of time refuses any such concept of a self-same present. When we think about time, we tend to start by thinking in terms of ‘things’ or ‘selves’ that *then* go through time, to put it before *becoming*. But for Deleuze, *becoming* (time) comes before any *being*” (Cull 2012, 185).

The regime of the present works as a time which is permanently under assault, deformed between the past and the future. In consequence, a system of thought which hierarchizes the presence/the present is replaced by a system of *trace*, in J. Derrida’s words as “the absent part of the sign’s presence”². Performance theorists such as R. Schechner, P. Auslander, P. Cormac and others have been critical, as already stated, of a “mythologization” of the present, but also of a “pure presence” in performance. Their perspectives were clearly influenced by J. Derrida, who was identified by Elinor Fuchs as the one who triggered the “slippages” of the concept of presence (also) in theater (Fuchs 1985, 163-173).

By taking into consideration Derrida's perspective on *trace*, we can analyze the fractures that occur in the durational performance, from the over-valorized performative "now". The supposed "uniqueness" of the performative present is thus infiltrated by a mark, a memory of the past. However, the *trace* should not be understood exclusively as an affirmation, as an "action" of memory (on the present), but as a continuous mechanism of negotiation between past, present and future. This mechanism contains within itself the ability to displace, to act as a "tool" within time, through a pulverization, which "in presenting itself, it becomes effaced" (Derrida, qtd.in Rivkin and Ryan 1998, 403).

Obviously, the way the *trace* operates doesn't mean opposing the *presence* with the *absence*. The *trace* manifests itself in the play (Braga de Andrade 2015), in the fluctuations of temporalities born at the intersection of archiving with the performative "moment".

J. Derrida stands against the comprehension of writing as a secondary form of "constructing" meaning, as an impure form, detached from the directness of the *presence* of speech. As he demonstrates, speaking (dependent on the context in which it occurs) also contains the ability to undermine a pure, unique present meaning, built in direct relationship between the transmitter and the receiver (Cormac 2006, 120).

Extrapolating his thinking in the performance theory, "reclaiming" writing as a manifestation of meaning also determines a form of trust in the "other lives" that performance art can have, except its supposedly "live", immediate character. In this regard, Christopher Norris's remark on the correlation of speech with authenticity, in opposition to the writing, is also significant: "Voice becomes a metaphor of truth and authenticity, a source of self-present living speech as opposed to the secondary lifeless emanations of writing" (Norris qtd. in Cormac 2006, 120).

Therefore, when a photographic/video language is introduced in the performance, or the performance itself has a dramaturgical structure built on premeditated, *rehearsed* elements (in the theatrical sense of the term), the regime of the present, but also the desired pure presence of the performer, become fractured.

A house with an ocean view – the emphatic present and the presence as representation

In *A house with an ocean view*³ as a reaction to the terrorist attacks of September 11, Marina Abramović suggested a scenario resembling a vipassana meditation. For 12 days she went through some day to day rituals like washing, drinking a glass of water, and so on, in front of the New York public. *A house with an ocean view* was carried out in 3 minimalist lodges/ suspended rooms. They blocked public access because there was a ladder in front of each one, with knives as rungs. By associating this performance with *The artist is present*, I claim that Abramović's *presence*, linked to her ability to keep her consciousness anchored in a present moment, works through a *representation* of presence itself. In her performances, Abramović uses both the

means of reproduction and, as we shall see, dramaturgical strategies of building an “authentic” regime of present. Abramović privileges her understanding of exploring time in performance (as a present regime) comparing to a dramatic time. Her statements, such as “All that matters is to be there, in a real time, you cannot repeat the same performance twice” are already famous for according a superior position to the *present*, in contrast with a fictional, *represented* time.⁴

The performer artist easily juggles with concepts such as *presence*, *present*, *mindfulness*, and so on: “I don’t want an audience to spend time with me looking at my work; I want them to be with me and forget about time. Open up the space and just that moment of here and now, of nothing, there is no future and there is no past. It is about being present.” (Abramović and Biesenbach 2012, 212).

Or, when talking about suspending a narrative time in her performances, Abramović asserts: “There is no beginning, development, and end. It’s just presence, pure presence” (Abramović and Biesenbach 2012, 212). She suggests a quality of presence that functions as a mechanism of comparison – between one presence and another. But, taking into account the media context in which she displays her performances, her discursive manner of presenting her practice, should find a less exclusive view of the regime of present as a unique time.

First of all, because her performances are in most part documented, recorded. HBO created a movie based on *The artist is present*, that accurately captured the emotionally charged moments that the audience experienced. It is questionable how a *feedback loop* of presence, of a dialogue between the performer and the public works (Fischer-Lichte 2004, 154) when the performance is (also) built under the spotlights and under the eyes of hundreds of people waiting to become participants...

Secondly, this exacerbation of the need to grasp a “pure present” functions as a decontextualization of the Buddhist spiritual practices (in the case of *A house with an ocean view*, the vipassana meditation). I haven’t found any reference in which she discusses the decontextualization of a cultural pattern of relating to temporality.

Originally, Buddhism worked precisely through an update of the past, of the memory, in order to gain a lucid awareness of the present (Purser, Forbes eds. 2016, 416). It is obvious that I do not advocate the dissolution of a rather uncontrollable intercultural process, but spending 15 minutes (“of fame”) with her, in *The artist is present*, sounds like a mechanism of immediate gratification, similar to ... “reaching enlightenment in a few steps”.

Vipassana meditations are practiced either alone or together with a group of participants, usually in some proximity to each other. M. Abramović is in a liminal state between the two, in *A house with an ocean view* – given that the audience cannot reach her because of the knife rungs. Of course, the idea is not to create a performance that practically copies a vipassana meditation. But what is questionable is that she attempts to replace the performer-spectator co-presence through a telescope, through which they could follow the transformation of her body (after 12 days of

concentration, in the absence of food). Moreover, according to some testimonies, M. Abramović established mostly an indirect visual contact with the audience – rather by looking at that telescope, than looking at the participants... (Wescott 2003, 130).

What she proposes is, thus an essentialist view of time, which comes into conflict with the durational understanding of temporality. With all the enthusiasm of accessing a performative present against *mimesis* and theatricality, *A house with an ocean view* remains, after all, (also) an aestheticized, anticipated artistic construction.

A certain dramaturgy of repetition is specific to the durational performance. Abramović understands repetition by its dynamic character, as *becoming* (in G. Deleuze's terms), as producing presence. However, I suggest that in the case of *A house with an ocean view*, repetition functions as an internal mechanism of theatricalization, of *representing* presence. Perhaps the use of the repetition places the performer in a "plateau state" or on "autopilot mode". Following precise daily rituals, starting the metronome when it stops, gazing at the public are actions that can easily be detached from a consciousness anchored in a *here and now* state.

What is more, if we read her performance in terms of repetition as *becoming*, then each repetitive action intersects with both the action that preceded it and the one that follows it.

G. Deleuze, in the wake of the phenomenological discourse, understands the present as being suspended between a *retention* process – of the past moment, which leaves its mark on the present – and a prospective, *protentional* process, of the "not yet".⁵ Thus, the process of *retention* manifests differently from recalling, as a manifestation, as taking a real past moment from the consciousness. *Retention* articulates itself as a moment of consciousness which, although just passed, thus *still present*, continues to manifest itself as an intrusion, as a breaking impulse of a consciousness engaged in the present. This manifests in *A house with an ocean view* through the possible determination of each repetitive action by the *trace* of the previous action.

So, besides discussing this performance as a narrative of the endurance of keeping consciousness in the present (which M. Abramović asserts), *A house with an ocean view* should be analyzed above all in terms of suspending consciousness between the *already-past* experience and a prospective extension of consciousness, an extension that goes beyond the (immediate) present moment.

As far as the presence is concerned, M. Abramović overexploits an auratic presence, a presence of the *persona* in her performances. The so-called *in corpore* presence (which is actually mediated) is used as a "mercantile tool" (which would facilitate a "transformative" encounter with the participants), as a way to build a purist, present-oriented meta-discourse. The artist's discourse functions according to the purist logic that Peggy Phelan uses in theorising performance, by making the presence dependable on the so called "live" corporality of the performer. Abramović, though takes on (indirectly) Phelan's perspective, seems rather relaxed in making use of recording media in her practice.

But, what does this presence mean for those who are watching only the HBO movie of *The artist is present* and, implicitly, the artist's digital image? How is her presence built when performances that she made in her youth are reinterpreted by other performers? (In addition to the famous durational encounter between M. Abramović and the public, *The artist is present* also involved the reenactment of famous performative proposals from the artist's past). All these questions problematize the present, bringing it close to a time of remembrance, to a process of *retention* in the case of *A house with an ocean view*, to a time of documentation with respect to *The artist is present*.

The fact that *A house with an ocean view* and *The artist is present* occurred in the context in which the "real present" of performances combined with their virtual documentation, but also with iterative dramaturgic strategies, a reading of these performances through the ontology of difference, through what J. Derrida calls hauntology,⁶ it is still relevant. Understanding performance through hauntology, through a hauntological critique, can be an open reply to the value of the mnemonic character of the (performative) experience, to the recovery, the cognisance! of the (immediate) past. A hauntological reading, which stalks the constant "assault" of the past on the present, opposes a "fall into indulgence" towards a desired present time that seeks to be constantly accessed in our everyday, compulsive practice of archiving.

***100 ways to consider time –
between ostracizing the "remaining presence"
and the impossibility of a "pure present" in improvisation***

The performance of the American artist Marlyn Arsem also stays in contrast with a long tradition of the fictional time, of the time as *representation* in performing arts. For 100 days, 6 hours a day, M. Arsem created different scenarios from one day to the next in the performance *100 ways to consider time*, in order to explore how temporality can be experienced.

Some of the scenarios she puts forward are: the only action of the first day of performance is entering (in slow motion) in a gallery. The next day Marlyn Arsem is counting continuously for 6 hours, in another day she watches a chunk of ice melting, in another day she sits at a table staring at an empty glass, etc. This doesn't make her performance turn into a "lesson" of exclusive access to a regime of the present. Arsem follows a plural present, an "open" present, she has a pluriperspectivist view on temporality.

However, M. Arsem is focused on hyperbolizing the "live" presence of the performer, that (a)"liveness" and the preservation of an identity, even an ontology (according to Peggy Phelan) of performance in the present time. In this regard, Marlyn Arsem created a manifesto, *THIS is performance art*, in which she discusses some elements of performance identity. In her opinion, performance can only exist under the regime of "now", performance is built only in a *live* manner and in a present

time, since any reenactment of a performance corresponds, in fact to the identity of theater.⁷

Arsem finds it is imperative to use improvisation in the process of creating this performance, precisely because, in her view, it is a constitutive mechanism for remaining in a “fixed present”, for achieving an immediate reaction, rejecting premeditation in the performer-public dialogue. The way she relates to improvisation is articulated in terms of spontaneity, unforeseen, as a celebration of a “unique” scenic moment of the present.

By contrast, I argue that improvisation in *100 ways to consider time*, in order to prepare this “effervescence of immediacy”, is built precisely on the structure of premeditation, which also facilitates the manifestation of the moments of “unpredictable”. Improvisation does not manifest itself as being born out of a singular unique point of present, but rather operates on a “structure” of the *trace*, of the immersion of the past in the present, of a “simulacrum of presence, that has no site, and the erasure belongs to its structure” (Derrida 1982, 24).

An argument that highlights the absence of spontaneous improvisation is offered by the way in which M. Arsem uses the objects in improvisation. To each object corresponds a different day, a different “dramatization” of time. Thus, she works with various “temporal symbols” such as: hourglasses, electronic clocks, salt/dirt mounds, which she then invests with a dramaturgical function in the gallery.

When the performer uses in an improvisation an object taken from the “civil” space into the performative space, this object is, semiotically interpreted by the spectator. Consequently, in this case, there can be no spontaneous improvisation, starting from an “instantaneous” point.

Another argument for which Marlyn Arsem’s improvisation cannot be constitutive for creating a “pure present time” is related to the iterative character of improvisation, determined directly by the space of performance. The repetition in *100 ways to consider time* is an integral part of the improvisation – but explored differently from that of M. Abramović. The improvisation itself is here a *repetition*, it is iterative, bearing in it the mark of premeditation, manifested as a *trace* in the performance. In *100 ways to consider time*, the performance took place in a gallery that M. Arsem left every day, after the 6 hours of performing. M. Arsem returned to daily life, to a “civilian” space. It is here that the premeditation of what was *to become* improvisation occurred. Consequently, the anticipatory character of improvisation in *100 ways to consider time* eliminates the possibility of experiencing the present as a “unique temporal point”.

In *100 ways to consider time*, it is relevant to follow how the dialogue between the so-called (a)“live” presence and the recorded presence of the artist M. Arsem takes shape. It’s what I have called “presence as a residue”, or “the presence that abides”.

M. Arsem uses a literal presence in her practice, a way of performing through interaction, through *co-presence*. At the end of each day of performing, M. Arsem

made an audio recording, a synthesis of that day, which was then installed in the gallery. The recording was played both in the absence of the artist and in the absence of an audience. By comparing the time spent in the gallery by M. Arsem as an *in corpore* presence with the time spent in the gallery as a recorded presence, we find that the time of the *in corpore* presence is exceeded by the time of the mediated one.

Although she claims to favor a purist identity of performance, in contrast to a time of documentation, Marlyn Arsem uses certain dramaturgical mechanisms, functional according to a structure of the *trace*. The recorded presence of the artist is not built as a correlative surplus to the *in corpore* presence, but is articulated through a necessary contact point, indispensable to the maintenance of the *incorpore* presence. The two types of presence are complementing each other, based on a “hautological path”.

Marlyn Arsem proposes a performative act in which the presence in ruins, the “presence as a residue” can be understood (apparently) as the necessary and constitutive piece of the presence manifested *in corpore*. Paradoxically, M. Arsem doesn’t give “the presence that abides” the “chance” of a public which would confirm it. In the absence of the public, of the other’s gaze, I consider that she cannot assert the very identity she wants to prove – that this is (also) a form of ... life, of (a) “live” presence. In *100 ways to consider time*, the recorded presence, “the presence that abides” is a sterile presence that “works” gratuitously for itself.

Thus, in this performance M. Arsem doesn’t carry out a direct mystification of the present and the presence (but, she does, as I have shown, in her theoretical discourse). In her practice, the performance manifests through archiving and repetition, but she limits the contact between what I have called the archived “presence that abides”... and the public.

100 ways to consider time remains a performance in which improvisation is not only asserted in the realm of spontaneity, but works according to a structure of *duration*. “Improvisation is the product of an intervallic network that ties coming now of the nearest possible anticipation of the future and the nearest possible interaction of the past (Lewis, Piekut 2016, 147). In terms of a deconstructivist reading, improvisation in performance is carried out as a continual readjustment of temporality, which carries either a *trace* of the past or is experienced in a proleptic way.

*Punch Time Clock Piece –
the decisive present between the oriented presence,
the presence as an act and the “effect” of the mediated presence*

For a year, between 1980-1981, Tehching Hsieh, a Taiwanese artist who immigrated to New York, made the experiment of staying in solitude in a room and stopping the alarm of a clock every hour. Each time he managed to stop the clock alarm, he immediately took a picture to document the “moment”. Tehching Hsieh’s experiment was made in the absence of any audience, which had access only to the documented part of the performance, more precisely to a *documentation (as) performance*.

In his practice and discourse of theorizing the performance, Hsieh doesn't explicitly focus on a purist, present-oriented absolutism. However, I argue that *Punch Time Clock Piece*, as an installation-*documentation as performance*, is exclusively a presentation and *representation* of the regime of the present.

In his documentation, Tehching Hsieh presents only the successful moments when he managed to stop the alarm of the clock. The (re)presentation of this regime of the present brings together an *oriented presence* and a *presence as an act*, explored in the *in corpore* performance, to which the audience didn't have access. An «effect» of the mediated presence, manifested in the installation of the performance documentation, is added to these forms of presence.

Tehching Hsieh's *oriented presence* is quantifiable in the time passed until the clock alarm stops, is the presence in which temporality occurs and is related to the openness, availability and responsibility of "capturing" a near future, but also depending on a projection of a future – as a result. The *oriented presence* is the "state" of preparing the *presence as act* – a triggering of the present climax point, of a *decisive present*.

As a typology, long-durational performance refuses to be organized by causality, by an articulation meant to lead to a final point. This causality occurs, however, at T. Hsieh, by exposing certain points that I would call of *decisive present* (based on H. Cartier-Bresson's "decisive moment" theory). The *decisive present* is a form of the present open to the regime of an urgent temporality, to the regime of an expectation, of an emergency. Although T. Hsieh states that "the process itself of time passing is what motivates the performance itself,"⁸ while documenting is just an archiving of the performance, he seems to hierarchize the documentation – a "narration of accomplishment" – restoring the logic of a chronology in the *documentation as performance*.

Hsieh creates a hierarchy of the regime of the present and, what I have called a *presence as an act*. In this manifestation of presence, the present articulates by being singled out in a linear unfolding. Hsieh seems to propose a "return" to a linear reception of time, contrary to his durative perspective on temporality.

As for the *documentation as performance*, the photographs are installed based on a chronology and a limited exposure to some "impermeable points of present". Given that T. Hsieh doesn't insert in his *documentation as performance* the moments of failure, in which he declined to stop the alarm of the clock, I find that this performance works based on a "matrix" of discontinuity, on an "assault" of the *trace*. Although the failures to anchor consciousness in the present are not included in the documentation, they follow a "hauntological path", they are "recovered" in the documentation, even if they only appear as ellipses.

An *effect of the mediated presence* is added to the two types of the presence of the "actual" performance (*presence as an act* and *oriented presence*) in the *documentation as performance*. In this regard, Josette Féral speaks about *effet du présence*, a dramaturgical tool which, despite the embodied absence of the performer, leaves the spectator with the perception that the "reality" (of photography, of *documentation*, in this case) which

is shown to him is part of a scenic *hic et nunc*. More than just a presence revealed *in corpore*, the disciplined corporality of the performer gains an aura through an *effect of the mediated presence*, through photography.

In the *documentation as a performance* of *Punch Time Clock Piece*, an *in corpore effect of presence* is created by strategies where the viewer of the documentation perceives himself in the proximity of the performer. Hsieh's action can thus be understood/theorized by what Philip Auslander calls the *performativity of documentation*.

The theatricalization of the documentation is based on the fact that T. Hsieh shaves his hair before the performance and the passing of time thus leaves a mark on his corporality. Power Cormac discusses the auratic presence as being – among other things – determined by the relation of proximity between the performer and the public. In the case of *Punch Time Clock Piece* this “effect of proximity” is created by the performative character of the documentation, which is put into practice by the direction that Tehching Hsieh uses to create a *representation* of the presence.

The differences between the repetitions from one day to the next determines the durability of the performance, which Tehching Hsieh asserts⁹. These actions articulate themselves in a dynamic form, they assert themselves in a “masked” form of subtle differences that emerge between repetitions (Deleuze 1995, 45).

However, in the *documentation as performance* – the part of the performance that is open to the public – he attempts to create an instant reception of the “points” of the present.

Although Tehching Hsieh doesn't necessarily have a rigid view on the use of the regime of the present in the performance, it is worth questioning the fact that he only opens for the public a documentation presenting the successful “points” of capturing a present moment. In his artistic practice, he uses a selective narrative, composed of fragments of an “instant present”. *Punch Time Clock Piece, as installation of documentation*, is – more than an attempt to preserve the “original” performance – an idealized presentation of it!

The documentation of installation version means avoiding the intrusion of failure moments, so that, “unable to hold performance continually in the present it must be translated into something more enduring, if less splendid form, it must be represented” (Reason 2006, 22). Looking at this performative act from the perspective of a deconstructivist critique may actually be useful in emphasizing the belief that when the performer uses tools to integrate a mediated presence, the “spectator” can be seduced rather by this blurring of presences than by the *in corpore*, one-to-one dialogue with the performer. However, this seduction occurs, as we have seen, based on mechanisms of representation...

Conclusions

Topics such as the temporal regime of the present and the stage presence of the performer need to be more extensively discussed within the theory devoted to durational performance.

A deconstructivist reading of this performance typology functions as a lucid alternative to the curatorial and artistic practice and discourse that clings to an image of the performer seen as a “tool of endurance”, of measuring time, of anchoring in a present moment. I have analysed the incongruencies that appear in the presentist diagnosis of durational performance, using J. Derrida’s theory of *traceability*, but also G. Deleuze’s concepts of *becoming* and *repetition*, in order to assert that these durational performances function under the regime of an iterative present.

The purpose of the paper was to make use of deconstructivist criticism in such a way so as to open up to a forthcoming *restorative, affirmative*, reading. (Felski, ch. 5, par. 2). This reading can actually be complementary with an antifetishistic perspective.

I have understood deconstruction, mainly through its affirmative potential, as an affirmation born from reflexivity and exit from a self-congratulatory attitude that some performers have towards their presence. This reception based on reflexivity, on a hermeneutic level, on a *meaning effect* is complementary to a reception provoked by some *presence effects*, “moments of intensity”, of what H. Ulrich Gumbrecht would call “aesthetic epiphanies” in his book, *Production of Presence: What meaning cannot convey* (2003). These effects of art asserted by Gumbrecht might not function simultaneously, but they can enhance each other. Obviously, there is a modulation and interdependence between an interpretation of a performance that is provoked by a conceptual analysis and the emotional, immediate audience-response to the performance.

In this regard, the conceptual tools of deconstruction can function on the reception of durational performance. Sensing the “transformative” repetitions in Abramović’s performances is an experience that can, actually be augmented by trying to understand the dynamic character of G. Deleuze’s *repetition*. As long as the rigidity of various “theoretical fetishes” has transformed into a more fluid utilisation of this concepts, even an audience that have never had an interest in a deconstructivist discourse, might get some curiosity of searching in this direction.

J. Derrida himself has reacted against an instrumentalization of his concepts by the academic discourse, in his *Letter to a Japanese friend* (1983). Much more than this happened, a more or less successful illustration, a “putting into artistic flesh” of his concepts, but, also of M. Foucault, G. Deleuze and others, was experimented. In consequence, deconstruction can no longer be perceived as a “commanding tool”, in a fighting relation with other models of reception that are more focused on the aesthetical, sensorial, embodied response of the audience.

Still, considering the fact that there is a theoretical lacunae, there are no debates as far as long durational performance is concerned, it is useful to recycle some theoretical frames, not in the name of an adulation for this concepts, but in the name of establishing a critical ground regarding this typology of performance. This recycling might determine, obviously an openness between the practice of the performance and the ways in which this practice can (still) be enriched by the theoretical one.

As far as the “sin” of defetishizing is concerned – through the paradoxical use of concepts as fetishes –, this practice should be approached in a more tolerant manner, as long as almost any vigorous concept contains in itself the potential of entering in the cycle of being overused.

Notes

- 1 See, Philip Auslander’s questions regarding the concept of *liveness* in performance, in the study *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, London and New York: Routledge 1999, and Elinor Fuch’s discussion on the deconstruction of presence in theatre, in the article “Presence and the revenge of writing, Re-thinking theatre after Derrida”, in *PAJ, A Journal of Performance and Art*, vol. 9, no. 2/3, 1985.
- 2 See, an additional explanation of the concept of *trace* Jayant Prasad, available online at: <https://newderrida.wordpress.com/2007/11/19/some-key-terms/>, consulted on 2 April 2018.
- 3 See, a short video presentation of the performance *A house with an ocean view*, available at: <https://vimeo.com/72468884>
- 4 See, a Ted talk of Marina Abramović, available online at: https://www.ted.com/talks/marina_abramovic_an_art_made_of_trhttps://www.ted.com/talks/marina_abramovic_an_art_made_of_trust_vulnerability_and_connection/transcriptust_vulnerability_and_connection/transcript
- 5 See, for a discussion about the processes of *retention/protection*, the chapter *The Body in Time/ Time in the Body* of Lanei M. Rodemeyer, in Stuart Grant, Jodie McNeilley (eds.) *Performance and temporalization, Time happens*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- 6 See, for a discussion about the concept of *hauntology*, *French Studies*, vol. 59, Issue 3, 2005, available online at <https://academic.oup.com/fs/article/59/3/373/638>.
- 7 See, in this respect the manifesto written by Marlyn Arsem, *THIS is performance art*, <http://totalartjournal.com/archives/4298/this-is-performance-art/>, consulted on 3 April 2018.
- 8 See, the interview with Tehching Hsieh: Karlyn de Jongh, *Tehchig Hsieh, Restriction, Time and liberation*, http://www.gaafoundation.org/var/cat_file_Tehching_Hsieh-2.pdf, consulted on 10 April 2018.
- 9 Ibid.

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