

## **Book Review: *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* by Rebecca Schneider**

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In this response paper, I provide further reflections on Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire* by putting it in conversation with Rebecca Schneider's *Performing Remains*. Here, Schneider examines debates within performance, feminist and queer studies concerning, among other things, present versus past, live versus the documented, and authentic versus mimetic insisting that this binarization might not be productive. I focus on Chapter Three of her book in which she provides a close reading of works including from Jose Munoz, and Diana Taylor (who in her own book relied on Schneider's discussion of the archive/performance divide) to trouble further the assumption that performance disappears.

In my original reflection on Taylor's book, I posited that she did not position the archive and the repertoire as oppositional or sequential, that the repertoire was not the antihegemonic challenge to the hegemonic power constituting the traditional archive, that they are were not binary. I read Taylor's project as foregrounding that the disappearance that constitutes the performatic is - even if a paradox- about presence and not loss/absence/erasure- that ephemerality- again ironically- calls attention to how what Schneider calls the *patriarchic habits of nomination* (107) disappears the lives of those without power. Taylor and Schneider seemingly agree that *disappearance is not antithetical to remains* (102).

But Schneider in a (re)performance of her 2001 essay *Performance Remains* engages with Taylor, not to discount how her work has moved the conversation forward but to

productively layout how failure to carefully attend to what is meant by “loss” might reinforce the “logic of the archive” and reinscribe the binary. Schneider writes: *If we think of performance as the antithesis of preservation, do we limit ourselves to an understanding of performance predetermined by a cultural habituation to the patrilineal, West-Identified (arguably White-cultural) logic of the archive (97)?* This question, made me think about the question of preservation posed in our seminar when we discussed *The Archive and the Repertoire*. There I asked: what do we mean when we use the language of preservation, does preservation require documentation/recording and if so does that not delimit the body as an illegitimate mode of transmission, privileging the archive and those who are able or chose to record? As Taylor suggests we ought to remember that *tucked inside the word [archive] itself is the house of he who was “considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law” and to uphold, as Michael Foucault has written, the “system of its enunciability” (97. Original emphasis hers).*

Schneider argues that Taylor’s observation and recording of the relationship between the Archive and the repertoire as *too readily fall[ing] into a binary with the written and the archival constituting hegemonic power and the repertoire providing the antihegemonic challenge* (Taylor cited in Schneider, 107) reinforces the binary by positioning the archive as working across distance and over time while the repertoire requires presence & by insisting that we shift from the written to embodied culture from the non-discursive to the performatic (107). This presupposes *a linear trajectory: as if writing were not an embodied act, nor an embodied encounter across time, and as if performance were not discursive (nor discourse performative or “performatic”). The parsing of discourse as belonging to the archive on the one hand and nondiscursive as the realm of performance on the other replicated the very gnarled bind Taylor*

*books simultaneously works, so very productive, to trouble (107).* Schneider pushes Taylor to grapple with the archive itself being part of the embodied repertoire that offers “live encounters with privileged remains” (108). Though laid out much earlier in this chapter, a useful example that is to the heart of this point is Schneider’s discussion of Hamlet where his father’s murder was recorded only by the testimony of a phantom. To quote Schneider at length:

*The problem of the record in relation to the live here slips away from tidy distinction. Add to this the vexed situation that in theatre...the live act succeeds, surrogates, or comes after the precedent textual script. That is, in the dramatic theatre the live is not first or not only first. The live act does not necessarily, or does not only, precede that which has been set down, recorded. In the dramatic theatre, the live is a troubling trace of a precedent text and so (herein lies the double trouble) comes afterward, even arguably remains afterward, as a record of the text set in play...to consider the live a record of precedent material flips on its head the supposition that the live is that which requires recording to remain. But drama is not the only example where the “live” is understood to take place in the future of that which has been “set down”. The same could be said for liturgy, or any inscribed set of performatives written to require repetition where repetition is both reiteration of precedent and the performance of something occurring “again for the first time” (89-90. Original Emphasis her’s)*

The idea of temporal drag, archival drag, temporal lag (with queer and black genealogies) is helpful for working through what Schneider stages as the inseparability of live/liveness from remains/recorded/archived. *Queer time, the jump of affect, and temporal drag are all phrases employed in this book at regular intervals. So is “again and again” (18. Emphasis her’s).* These references are mobilized to show how the presentness of performance which requires presence is always already inflected with the past - that is what time brings as it returns- as it drags - the *temporal leaks (10).*

Schneider’s text demonstrates this temporal drag and what she also discusses as syncopated time. Her arguments follow no linear or clear path and require careful reading to make sense of how errors and revisions that necessarily constitute reenactment teach us about the

past and the future; false distinctions between citations and originals; how the afterlife of the written word is not dissimilar from the promiscuous tracks of actorly acts (88) and that *remains do not have to be isolated to the document, to the object, to bone versus flesh* (101). The text is meant to be and is deeply eruptive - its performance will absolutely remain.