BOOK AND PERFORMANCE/ EXHIBITION REVIEWS

Folkerts, Hendrik & Julia Born, eds. *Alexandra Bachzetsis: Show Time Book / Book Time Show*. **Amsterdam: Roma Publications.**
Reviewed by Bryce Wilner

Figure 1: Michel Auder's photo essay in Alexandra Bachzetsis: Show Time Book / Book Time Show. *Auder took these photos during performances of* Massacre: Variations on a Theme *(MoMA, NY, 2017),* Escape Act *(Pioneer Works, NY, 2019), and in rehearsals of 2020:* Obscene *(Zürich, 2022). Pictured performers: Alexandra Bachzetsis, Owen Ridley-DeMonick, and Tamar Kisch.*

Some years ago, an artist friend told me about an essay he had long been meaning to write about the role an audience plays in making performances. He explained: the audience assembles as a mass of supportive colleagues, friends, contemporaries, and strangers. They might pay an admission fee, which could be absorbed by the venue or forwarded to the artist and crew. They receive the piece; they applaud its attempt. They interpret it, and then, in conversation, images, or critical writing, they circulate their interpretation. The performance is not only *for* them; its ideas cannot exist *without* them, and, in this way, they co-produce the

work. It is a simple notion that stays with me, not least because I often feel that, although I am an art worker and educator, my greatest cultural contribution is made when I attend lectures, readings, screenings, and performances.

If I entertain this thesis for a while, that the live audience makes the work, I recognize that much of what survives of the performance—photography, audio/video recording, or writing—is largely made by the audience. This is the secret smudge in documenting and re-presenting live, time-based art: you have to construct it out of figments that cannot possibly contain what happened.

Surely, some aspect of these concerns was discussed in the making of *Show Time Book / Book Time Show*, the first comprehensive monograph on the Greek-Swiss artist and choreographer Alexandra Bachzetsis. Published by Amsterdam-based Roma Publications on the occasion of the artist's 2023 exhibition at Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen, *Show Time Book* presents two decades of work, with contributions by curators, artists, and performance studies scholars. Bachzetsis, an artist who is fascinated by popular, physical gestures ("Can gestures be invented?"), has a history of working between three formats: the art gallery, the theater, and the live online event. She has rearranged live works for visual art contexts, or specifically re-staged a performance for a live broadcast on YouTube. In a 2014 interview, Bachzetsis stated that the online performance felt oddly more intimate than an in-person event because of its inherent voyeurism. The usual energetic exchange between live audience and performer disappears; the attention can only go one way. Here, the work's mediation becomes confused with its documentation, further complicating the question of how it might be edited into a book.

To address this, *Show Time Book* co-editors, Dutch curator Hendrik Folkerts and Swiss designer Julia Born, have put together an impressive specimen of photomontage that is distributed around the usual and unusual trappings of an art catalog. A cursory skim shows us a procession of overlapping figures, fast text, slow text, fashion images, performance sets, and graphic scores. Slowing down, we notice that a number of these image sequences constitute the contributions themselves.

Consider the twenty pages that the American-French filmmaker Michel Auder contributed to the project. He took a series of digital snapshots of three Bachzetsis performances, and arranged them as if they were open image files moved around on a computer desktop. The ubiquitous Apple Preview image frame tells us where one fragment ends and another begins, with drop-shadows included to suggest the topographic depth we expect from a MacBook Pro. We have all tried out this crude photomontage method by opening one JPEG on top of another. It is something else to see it arrested in print. A female shoulder meets a male torso, a collapsed woman lies on top of herself, a person appears twice in the same room, a shin extends the wrong way out of a knee, a woman is bisected by the same person who stands just behind her. Some of the images' process inks have been swapped with fluorescents such that they glow, fuzz, and vibrate.

In another section, the Dutch artist Joke Robaard presents some of her formidable collection of loose pages from fashion magazines, introduced by an excerpt from Roland Barthes's writing on the various ways that articles of clothing relate to one another. Rather than the large, full-color images we have come to expect

in this book, Robaard's magazine pages are arranged in a grid on a plywood studio floor, photographed by someone standing on a table, and printed in grayscale. We see the photographer pan the floor to capture each magazine page, while small inserts of Bachzetsis's performance and press photos interrupt our view. Gestures from the fashion images seem to reappear in the Bachzetsis photos.

These imaging devices surely would not work as well as they do were it not for *Show Time Book's* designer and co-editor Julia Born. In the early 2000s, Born began helping with the printing and production of Bachzetis's dance notation. Over the years, these have ended up as gallery takeaways, publications, video accompaniment, sets, and photographs, many of which are reproduced in fragments in *Show Time Book*. These are "scores" in an expanded sense: they suggest improvisation with a few words rather than diagram precise movements. And they show real trust between collaborators who long ago transgressed the boundary between designer and client. It is this transgression that makes Bachzetsis's monograph so exciting to move through, and that finesses all the different image types together into one coherent volume.

One of *Show Time Book's* most visually memorable contributions comes from the Spanish writer and filmmaker Paul B. Preciado. His poem "Love is a Drone" is an alphabetized list of what might reasonably be thought of as a collection of PornHub search entries: "My Slut Wife / My Step Mom / My Step Sister / My Stigma / My Swinger Wife. . ." The poem's hundreds of lines accompanied Bachzetsis's 2018 performance *Escape Act* and are typeset here in big, rounded letters over the same chroma key green that we see on the book's cover. Organized in four full-up columns, the lines read like the notes of someone bent on analyzing the world through exhaustive permutations of sex words. What once was soundtrack is here a kind of text-image.

Hendrik Folkerts, who has collaborated with Bachzetsis as a researcher and curator, provides an essay on the various iterations the artist's dance piece *Perfect* has been through since she first performed it in 2001. Folkerts attended a number of Bachzetsis's rehearsals and has seen her draw out choreography, test it herself, and then give it to another performer to be improvised, observed, changed, and made new. He notes that, even in the group's official performances, a given dancer seems to always stop to watch the other performer as they leave the stage. Bachzetsis observes her dancers' movements to literally "incorporate" them in future iterations of the work. We do not quite see these observations captured in the photo documentation of *Perfect*, but close readers will come away from this monograph with a sense of an artist who is trying to understand her work through accounts given by her collaborators. In this way, the editorial decisions in the monograph tell us something about her method. Folkerts necessarily revives only some of what was lost between the live performance and the documentation. With *Show Time Book / Book Time Show*, he, Born, and the other contributors, in images and writings about live events that the reader probably did not witness firsthand, have co-produced a vivid re-presentation of the work.

Bryce Wilner is a graphic designer, writer, and educator based in Brooklyn, New York.