



Image courtesy of Georgia Wall

Georgia Wall, *And So I Left*

Hilary Goldsmith

And So I Left from *Unseen Performances*. Written and Performed by Georgia Wall. Skylight Projects (551 West 21st Street, 4th Floor). New York, New York. September 1, 2011.

“I perform for you and you provide an account of what you saw”

Each of Georgia Wall’s *Unseen Performances*, an ongoing series, employ the same structure: the artist sends out an online call for participants and those selected are contacted via email with brief instructions -- the forthcoming event left intentionally opaque. Participants report to a specific site at a designated time to watch a performance by Wall alone. Following the performances, which range from three to forty minutes, participant-viewers (or voyeurs) are asked, via instructions on an index card, to recount what they saw on a camera set up in an otherwise empty room. This material is then viewed, edited, and reconstructed by Wall into a video, often narrative in nature, and exhibited as the final work—the only existing documentation of the unseen performance. *And*

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So / Left, less than 11 minutes in length, is the result of hours of footage. The element of time compression in the final video works to define Wall's process as archival: she multiplies mediation and turns it back on herself, further abstracting the final result from the original act.



Image courtesy of Georgia Wall

For viewers of the completed works, the artist is physically absent. Wall, per her instructions, is only referred to as “She” in the participant-viewer accounts, adding another layer of opacity to the already limited video material. However, she maintains her presence in the gallery space via the imagination of the original performance by her audience. In this case, the element of exclusivity, associated with the idea of an unseen performance, works to her favor: who is “She”? What did “She” do? What was seen? The act of viewing becomes a game of telephone and any attempt to recreate the once present body in its absence works to reveal the individual projection that occurs even when a body is present. Wall successfully creates a simulacra of her original performance in which the documentation provides an artificial memory. Archives exist as physical collections of documents, photographs, or records providing information about a place, institution, or group of people. The moving images exhibited, cut, and edited no longer refer to reality, but instead refer to themselves and appropriate reality for their own ends (Baudrillard and Cholodenko 1994). By weaving together individual accounts of the performance, Wall highlights the inherent subjectivity of experience and, as a result, the documentation and organization of the experience, or the archive.

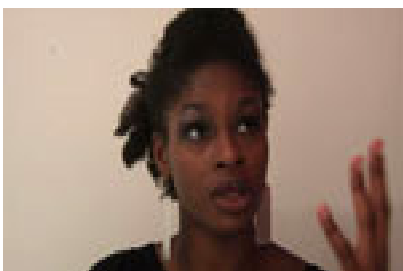


Image courtesy of Georgia Wall

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In *The Archival Impulse* Hal Foster writes: “The work...is archival since it not only draws on informal archives, but produces them as well and does so in a way that underscores the natural of all archival materials as found, yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private” (Foster 2004). In *And So I Left* the exhibited video archives exploit these opposing forces or dialectics. Wall neutralizes her own body, through re-enactment and the use of the frame, to expose individual projection: “What is ‘she’ doing?” always leads back to “What am ‘I’ doing?” This tension is materialized in the varied accounts of the unseen performance, despite each participant viewing (almost) the same set of actions. The words “feel” and “seem” seep into video exhibited, despite Wall’s instructions to recall exactly what one saw. Wall works to expose how our own experiences inform how we see and this is reified through the exhibition of the video material and the subsequent attempts to decipher what inspired the accounts. The original performance fades away, the accounts subsume reality, and the archival materials become the performance.

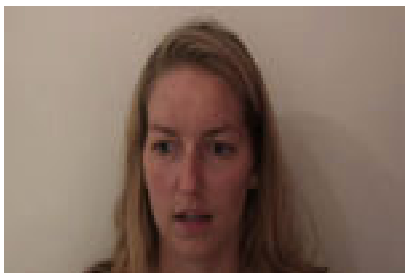


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The almost mechanical drive toward reconstruction incited by Wall’s *Unseen Performances* highlights the exhibited materials existence as an archive. As an artist, Wall is interested in re-enactment, mediation, and translation and her work explores the ways in which she can initiate these processes. Recent performances in the series engage the representation of females in film; for example, *I, You, He, She*, uses Chantal Akerman’s 1976 film of the same title as a point of departure. In this work, the liminal space constructed by the frame in film is expanded by its translation through her body into a live event. The frame, however, remains: in *I, You, He, She* the performance is viewed through a doorframe and in *And So I Left* through a window. These frames create distance, emphasizing that the viewer is always a viewer, despite a call for an exchange in both the event and exhibition. This imposed distance enables Wall to highlight how we experience the world as always already mediated. Rather than experience a performance with a group, the participant-viewer is alone. While

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watching the performance, one is forced to look inward; participant-viewers become hyper-aware of the act of watching and their own performances emerge. It is in this way that Wall successfully transfers responsibility onto her audience. The participant is asked again to perform on video and the viewers in the gallery space are forced to perform via reconstruction. It is their only entry into the events recorded by the archival traces that constitute the exhibited video.

The reconstruction of the event in the exhibited *Unseen Performances* reflects the reconstruction of experience that occurs through the processing of our everyday lives. The linked accounts—although at times discordant—express a general drive to create some sort of linear progression despite its inexistence, mirrored in the creation of an archive. Wall's edited videos express the complication of absolute truths. Rather than recalling the original event, the accounts become the event in exhibition and viewers' subsequent understanding, or lack thereof, of what happened is as varied as the ones watched. The multiple levels of mediation and translation in Wall's final videos intentionally abstract her performance. However, they also illuminate the significance of the individual lens and the drive to connect through communication.

Hilary Goldsmith lives in New York, where she is a freelance writer and curator; she also works for a private art dealer on the Upper East Side. She received her M.A. in Modern Art History, Criticism, and Theory from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and specializes in work from the 1970s and 80s.