A Meditation on Stillness
Ann Carlson’s *Picture Jasper Ridge*

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*The Mechanics of Picture Jasper Ridge*

*Picture Jasper Ridge* was a site-specific project conceived by choreographer Ann Carlson. The work was staged in March 2012 at Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve, a large natural territory owned by Stanford University since 1976 as a site for scientific research. The Preserve is open to visitors under strict restrictions. Its mission is “to contribute to the understanding of the Earth’s natural systems through research, education, and protection of the Preserve’s resources” (JRBP 2004). Yet, before becoming a gated and highly regulated preserve, the place

1. Most researchers of Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve are affiliated with Stanford University, but a third come from a dozen other institutions. The Stanford schools involved are Humanities and Sciences, Earth Sciences, and Engineering. The Carnegie Institution of Washington’s departments of Global Ecology and Plant Biology also conduct research programs at Jasper Ridge. Current topics of research range from environmental and biotic change to the structure of ecological communities, geology and geophysics, and direct human influences.
saw distinct transformations. With the arrival of Spanish missionaries and soldiers, the Native American Muwekma-Ohlone who had previously inhabited the area of the preserve were dispersed. Later, for a short amount of time between the 1850s and '60s, the village of Searsville was built for people working in nearby sawmills during the quick boom of the wood industry, and was definitively dismantled when a large dam was built for the Spring Valley Water Company in 1891 to create a water reservoir. The area around the water reservoir was then used from 1922 until 1976 as a recreational site, known as Searsville Park, with a bar and a beach on the lake. When Stanford bought the territory, Jasper Ridge became a gated site for biological and archeological research, currently administrated in the Sun Field Station. Very few traces of this history are left today. Apart from the dam, a few Muwekma-Ohlone artifacts, archival photographs, and a cabin from the old lab and the recreational center, almost no other

2. A high-density community, the Native American Muwekma-Ohlone settled in the San Francisco Bay more than 5,000 years ago, with permanent villages in the Jasper Ridge territory dated between 600 and 2,000 years ago. Before European contact occurred through missions and soldiers, this society supported itself with an economy based on harvesting shellfish, collecting plant foods and livestock, fishing, hunting, handcrafting, and trading through the bay. When the US annexation of California in 1846 led to the closing of mission properties, the remaining descendants of the Muwekma-Ohlone community at Jasper Ridge were dispersed into isolated “Rancheria” settlements. Since the founding of the university in the 1890s, Stanford archaeologists have pursued collaboration with Muwekma-Ohlone descendants. “The Muwekma-Ohlone Tribe,” recites the preserve’s website, “continues to participate in educational activities at Stanford University and JRBP” (JRBP 1998–2016).

3. As quickly as Searsville developed—featuring two hotels, a church, a school, several saloons, and a blacksmith shop—when the lumbering activity moved to a different area, the village declined just as rapidly into a small farming community in the 1870s. Finally, the remaining residents moved to the Redwood City area when the Spring Valley Water Company bought up their properties to build a dam in 1891. For more information, see Dorothy F. Regnery’s History of Jasper Ridge (1991); and the Trees of Stanford website (Trees of Stanford 2005).
tangible objects remain of Jasper Ridge’s history. Most of the buildings were dismantled and nature was left to grow unimpeded.

*picture* Jasper Ridge was the first artistic event Stanford sponsored at Jasper Ridge. Carlson premised it as re-created tableaux vivants drawn from a set of nine historic photographs, which she found in the Stanford University Archives. Different and often unknown photographers took these photos at Jasper Ridge over the course of many decades, ranging from the late 19th century through the 1970s. When possible to grasp them from the image, Carlson identified the specific places in which the photos were taken and set her performers in those locations to re-create the pictures live. These nine pictures include portraits of visitors and people living at Jasper Ridge, a few snapshots of groups, and a postcard. The set of photos that Carlson chose reveals a vision of history that emphasizes the everyday in place of historical events: by restaging photographs of common people captured in their daily environments, Carlson gave room to cultural history.

Carlson conceived of *picture* Jasper Ridge as a “performance hike” (Stanford Arts Institute 2012). Following silent guides performed by docents who led visitors through the preserve, the audience was taken on a long hike. Divided into groups and given maps, the spectators followed different itineraries that changed the order in which the tableaux came into view. They moved through the natural preserve and stopped at the sites where the tableaux vivants were staged. At each site, spectators could see and hold in their hands a copy of the original photograph and compare it with the tableau.

The spectators saw still performers wearing distressed period costumes in neutral tones. Although most photographs were in black and white, Carlson decided to use colors for the costumes of the performance. The pale, worn appearance of the costumes accentuated the mysterious presence of the still performers, who seemed to be suspended between life and death. Performers were frozen in place without mutating their facial expressions for periods of about 30 minutes, as each wave of spectators ambled by. As spectators wandered around the tableaux, they engaged in a silent performance hike in nature. No comment or explanation was provided about the subjects of the photographs. Just as silence was required of performers and docents, it was also requested of the audience to facilitate a meditative experience of the installation. The work became an immersion in nature with performance and photography, as tableaux vivants effectively appeared as part of the landscape.

In *picture* Jasper Ridge, spectators experienced a strategically paced and guided walk. As space was deliberately framed, so time was staged. The ambulatory performance was built as an arc over time and space, shaped by crescendos, pauses, and repetitions: *picture* Jasper Ridge was experienced as a score of emotions, visual associations, and memories. Tableaux vivants stood in the space at different distances and perspectives, emphasizing a sense of rhythmical and spatial composition. Carlson allowed spectators to access the tableaux from distinct directions, inviting them to go beyond the front-side standard viewpoint. Following the path assigned to their group, spectators saw each tableau from a distinct perspective, which in turn impacted their reception of the corresponding photo. Thanks to such precise framing of the images in the space, Carlson recaptured the old photos as if she were a photographer who took them anew. This structure and the effective silence enabled the participants to immerse themselves in the performance. As they walked silently, the sounds of the natural landscape popped out. Immersed in this soundscape, which fostered an effort of listening, the performance released a slower time

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4. The chosen photographs include the following subjects: men building the Spring Valley Water Company dam (late 19th century); three adults and two children on a street with a store (late 19th century); an old man who lived as a hermit in the preserve (end of 19th–early 20th century); a young woman swimmer (1920s); postcard of people on the dock of the beach (1930s); a young woman working as a ticket agent (1940s); two boys on their bikes (1950s); a man and a woman walking up one of Jasper Ridge’s hills (1960s); a science class from Stanford (1970s).
pace. Blurring different historical ages throughout the same location, the performance evoked a temporal collision in the juxtaposition of archival images—revealing histories told and untold; feelings of today and those of long ago.

At each tableau, the performance offered what Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* calls *studium* and *punctum* ([1980] 1981). If *studium* makes the viewer’s experience sharable, *punctum* makes it individual and unique. *Punctum* is the emotional call to the individual viewer that the photograph provokes, beyond the viewer’s cultural background that comprises the *studium* of the image. Barthes writes: “The second element [punctum] will break (or punctuate) the studium. This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the studium with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” (26). Punctum has the mesmerizing power of plunging the viewer into the world of the picture as if in a theatre of memory.

In Carlson’s tableaux, the still restaging of photos allowed spectators to scrutinize each photograph. Each one of Carlson’s re-creations raised questions about identity, archive, and history, which spectators could address according to their individual backgrounds. This part of the performance belongs to the territory of studium, whereas the way in which each tableau called upon the spectators’ emotional and subjective responses to the image connects the performance with the punctum. By reenacting the photograph in stillness, the performance displayed at each site a double punctum: one from the picture and one from the tableau. The spectators’ emotions were amplified by an almost somatic relationship between spectators and subjects photographed, due to the affective impact of the life-sized tableaux in contemplation over a long period of time. The tableau vivant format provided the performance with a different effect of presence than a staging of the subject would have allowed. Still reenactments make the photograph a performance; yet they maintain the image within the limits of the object, avoiding the development of narratives. Each tableau vivant created an ambiguous play of impersonation and alienation among subjects photographed, performers, and spectators, raising ontological questions.6

**Frames**

Conceived by Carlson as a site-specific performance, *Picture Jasper Ridge* engaged a multilayered reading of the space, the photos taken in that space, and the performative re-creation of these photos. Suggesting a porous reading of site-specific performance, Miwon Kwon writes: “The site is [...] structured (inter)textually rather than spatially, and its model is not a map but an itinerary, a fragmentary sequence of events and actions through spaces, that is, a nomadic narrative whose path is articulated by the passage of the artist” (2002:29). *Picture Jasper Ridge* was not a map; it did not presume to exhaust the information regarding the territory and its history. It was, figuratively and literally, a path that performers marked and spectators traversed, unfolding sensations, critical thinking, and stories in their bodies and minds.

*Picture Jasper Ridge* addressed issues of archive politics, space ideology, and photographic and performative apparatuses. If the cultural identity of Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve is oriented

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5. In *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*, Bert O. States comments on such distinction, quoting Barthes’ *Camera Lucida*: “The *punctum* is what elevates the picture above its *studium*, above being simply what we expect. [...] In some such way all images, to one degree or another, erupt delightfully and claim their presence as a site of disclosure, putting us ‘somewhere else than we usually tend to be.’ Without this character as site, there is no delight, only the passage of information” (1985:11–12).

6. Examining the ontological implications of the act of observing photographs, Geoffrey Batchen notices that “according to Barthes, then, the reality offered by the photograph is not that of truth-to-appearance but rather of truth-to-presence, a matter of being (of something’s irrefutable place in space/time) rather than resemblance” (1997:193).
to scientific research and educational projects, during Picture Jasper Ridge the preserve shifted its production of culture toward performance and historiography, engaging the politics of the archive. The scenarios of the pictures reveal issues of gender, race, and class to a contemporary gaze, to the contemporary viewer who notices the absence of minorities—most images in the archive portray white people—and socially prescribed roles in the representations of cultural history that the images present. Lingering on the live re-creation of archival photographs facilitated for the spectators of Picture Jasper Ridge the application of a set of analytic tools to a past in which these tools were not yet established as systems of critical thought. In these reenactments, Carlson stated both the similarity and the difference between the reenactment and the original, the gazes from the present and the past.

Whereas nature slowly and inexorably changes and photography bares trace of its modifications over time, tableaux vivants, pursuing the reenactment of archival photos in an age different from the moment captured in the photo, seem to pretend that time has stopped, arresting for their duration the problematic of temporal collisions. Yet Carlson’s tableaux vivants were a special kind of reenactment. Reenactments usually repeat facts from the past, such as historical battles, artistic performances, architectural works, travels, rituals, or gestural expressions. In considering the various subjects of reenactments, Rebecca Schneider notices that reenactments raise questions on the methodologies and the perspectives chosen in terms of accuracy and interpretation: “‘Reenactment,’ then, is not one thing in relation to the past, but exists in a contested field of investment across sometimes wildly divergent affiliations to the question of what constitutes fact” (2011:56). Choosing what should be studied (and lived) as historical fact is an uncertain and delicate terrain. Despite problematic critical interpretations and the mythic sense of authenticity they can convey, many types of reenactment generically aim to reconstruct a fact that happened in the past. Instead, Carlson’s tableaux vivants took reenactments elsewhere.

Although Carlson’s work engaged the past and its transmission, her way of problematizing historiography did not focus on the analysis of the (historical) fact. More than raising questions such as “Is it theatre? Is it art? Is it history? Is it religion? Sport? Hobby? Pastime? Education? Heritage? Commemoration?” (56)—which Schneider lists as questions necessary to address reenactments—in Picture Jasper Ridge Carlson pointedly made explicit the mechanics of the performance itself as reenactment. Picture Jasper Ridge presented a specific type of reenactment that complicated a teleological conception of temporality, as well as bypassed the pretense to stop time and re-create an original moment. Carlson’s tableaux emphasized difference over similarity. Requiring from her performers an extended exposure to stillness (as previously mentioned, the poses were repeated in close cycles of 30 minutes on average), Carlson sought not the momentary effect necessary for the image to be recognizable in relation to the photo, but rather the longue durée tempo that affects both the performer and the spectator, creating a performative space-time: a place in which it is possible to dwell and reflect on and through the repetition of the same icon. With her type of tableaux, Carlson used repetition as an instrument of critique, revealing difference.

In choosing the format of tableaux for her reenactments, Carlson did not re-create the facts caught in the archive: she did not develop the moment caught in the photograph into stories (histories). Her performers repeated the poses in the photographs; she did not provide any other information on the pictures. Her use of the past was literal and evocative: it remained limited to the gesture portrayed in the photos. Refusing to interpret the facts behind the portraits in the pictures, Carlson emphasized the archival image and its historical value, the transformation of the space over time, and the mediums of photography and performance, as well as the experience of stillness that triggered such reflections.

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7. All the photos in the performance reflect this absence, with the exception of one black-and-white image (Recreational Scene from a Postcard, 1930s), which seems to portray one African American female servant close to a white woman and a white man.
Rebecca Schneider elaborates on the concept of *interinanimation* by using the word with parentheticals: *inter(in)animation*. She draws her phrase from “interinanimates” by John Donne and “inter-inanimate” by Fred Moten, who used them, respectively, in “The Exstasie” and in several of Moten’s writings, such as *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* and “Black Mo’nin.” As Schneider specifies, she uses “the phrase with parentheticals as ‘inter(in)animate’ to highlight the syncopation of interanimate and interinanimate” (2011:189).

The ways in which stillness can be aesthetically used and functionally deployed are multiple. Different contexts provoke different analyses of the phenomenon. For example, while Carlson uses stillness as both a filter to read socio-cultural difference and archival politics, and as an occasion for cultivating awareness about the experience of performing, in *Embodying Black Experience*, Harvey Young examines the role of stillness in accounting for the black body during the Black Diaspora, specifically in the daguerreotypes of seven black slaves that Joseph T. Zealy realized in 1850. To Young, the enforced stillness, endured by the slaves for a few minutes in different pre-established positions to create the photographs, reproduced an image that accounted not only for the daguerreotypes’ functions, but also for the history of their subjects. He writes: the daguerreotypes “remind us that the bodies, occasionally densely packed as cargo and often shackled, were rendered immobile even as they moved across an ocean. They reveal that stillness, like movement and the body, is an integral and defining part of the Black Diaspora” (2010:42).

Carlson’s work solicits a phenomenology of performing stillness. As Schneider suggests in her analysis of the term *inter(in)animation*, performing stillness emphasizes the relationship between still and living, art object and theatre performance — “the photographic still” and “the theatrical live” (2011:167). Stillness is the tool that Carlson used to build a connection across time, inter(in)animating its temporal venues and subjects, without aiming at reproducing them. Rather, she used stillness as repetition, opening to the ruptures and variations that repetitions imply. More than being interested in the degree of resemblance between image and performer, Carlson emphasized the process of this realization, inviting performers and spectators to linger upon the thoughts and the transformative experience that the double operation of reenactment and stillness provokes in the performer and, as a reflection, in the spectator. Based on stillness as a radical act of performing, *Picture Jasper Ridge* enriched its archival materials with a somatic quality that imbued its spectators while passing through its performers. Stillness is a fundamental element of the performance, and it allows us to detect the work’s complexity.

Stillness, lending clarity to the performers’ gestures, invites both the performer and the spectator to reflect deeply on the act of performing itself. How did *Picture Jasper Ridge* performers enact this phenomenon of stillness, and how did performers and spectators perceive it? The production of space in a natural research environment, the tension between photographic and performative apparatuses, and the critique of the archive constitute the critical lenses through which I am viewing this work. Yet what makes these themes emerge is its aesthetic structure and Carlson’s use of stillness. Stillness in this context enabled a specific type of critical operation that departs from judgment and fosters observation as synesthetic listening, and such listening as a transformative process of analysis of the experience of being.

A description of *Picture Jasper Ridge* reveals how stillness in the performance unfolds a silenced type of thinking, which I read through Martin Heidegger’s concept of *meditative*
thinking. Although in his works Heidegger does not analyze performance, *Picture Jasper Ridge* is a particularly apt opportunity to extend Heidegger’s thought to the domain of performance. *Picture Jasper Ridge* suspends chronology and plot and emphasizes presence versus representation, a logic of oppositions on which Heidegger builds his ontology. His concepts of *artwork* and *set up* ([1950] 2001:135), as well as *space*, *building*, and *dwelling* ([1954] 2001), illuminate my understanding of the act of performing stillness as a unique experience appropriate for both producing thoughts about being and somatically experiencing it.

As I draw on Heidegger’s terminology to describe the phenomenology of Carlson’s performance and the ontological grasp that this performance “sets up,” I am not after a general definition of being. I seek in the performance the nonutilitarian aesthetic conditions of being that help to disclose what Heidegger seeks to reveal as the sense of being. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes: “The aim of the following treatise is to work out the question of the meaning of ‘being’ [‘Sein’] and to do so concretely” ([1927] 2010:xxix). Finding previous accounts of ontology insufficient to answer such a question, he seeks the sense of being by starting from the basic interrogation of the words that decline being: “But already when we ask, ‘What is being [Sein]?’ we stand in an understanding of the ‘is’ without being able to determine conceptually what the ‘is’ means” (5). Emphasizing the verb in the word “being,” he brings attention to its process, to the *how* of being as a phenomenon. Drawing on Heidegger’s philosophy, I aim on the one hand to define how “being” can be understood through the specific condition of reenactment and stillness in which Carlson’s performers were placed. On the other hand by focusing on Heidegger’s works written after *die Kehre*, I aim to detect what strategies in the performance enabled performer and spectator to grasp the phenomenon of being as an enhancement of the perception and understanding of *being there*, of performing—ultimately, of the sense of *performing being*. As I delineate a personal phenomenology of the performance, I will increasingly draw on my double role as a performer and spectator in the work.

Inspired by Heidegger’s concept of the work of art, I have come to understand this piece as an experiment in awareness of the phenomenon of being. *Picture Jasper Ridge* set up a repertoire of still gestures that formed a scenario for the performance. Rather than analyzing the scenario derived from the archival photographs “as a paradigm for understanding social structures and behaviors” as Diana Taylor suggests (2003:29), I see the scenario that Carlson built out of the archive as the preparation for an ontological experience accomplished through performing. In this context, by ontological experience I mean the understanding of the experience of being while performing (and spectating) stillness. In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger writes: “Now the work, as work, *sets up*, i.e., breaks the world open, and brings the opened to stand”
13. In *Terpsichore in Sneakers* Sally Banes used Heidegger’s idea of the origin of the work of art to talk about Yvonne Rainer’s *Trio A*, emphasizing the extraordinary found in ordinary postmodern dance gestures when recon-textualized as art. To Heidegger, the artwork reveals truth through its own medium. Using Heidegger’s concept of the artwork to read Rainer’s dance, Banes explains: “The work shows itself to have been created, and by this workly aspect provides a framework for the thingly nature of its material […] It lets the ‘unconcealedness,’ the truth of beings, shine forth, at the same time that it protects the self-contained nature of its material” (1987:50). “Unconcealedness, or unconcealment” is a difficult term to define, as Heidegger is not explicit about it. Suggesting that its manifestation occurs through the artwork, he links it to the function of the artwork and to the ideas of being and truth as *aletheia*. Banes reads the term with a generic “truth of being”; in this context I identify the object of unconcealment with the enhancement of being that performances of stillness allow.

14. “Picture Jasper Ridge: Memory and History” was a class that Carlson taught at Stanford in Fall 2011.

15. The “sit-spotting” activity was offered to spectators only during the preview of the performance.
Slowly the path leads you through the old streets of a small village, with a school, a store. But they are gone—only two signs remain to indicate their place. Close to the invisible store, you encounter from a distance a few figures: two women and a man, from the late 1800s. Farther down two children sit on a fence. (Figs. 3 & 4)

The photograph shows you their faces, although you approach them from behind. This device asks you to become an interactive spectator, granting you the illusion of an actor’s agency. But no, they don’t move, they won’t remember you. You can only pass by and witness the sensorial, emotional, memorial power of a still figure emerging from the past. Now it is they who will see your back. And they are gone. It is harder to leave five people behind than only one.

Your guide continues to the dam, built in 1892, one of the few surviving traces of the original preserve. The landscape opens: beyond the dam, a beautiful lake. From the dam, looking back into the green, you try to identify the territory you have covered so far. When you reach the top of the dam, you experience another epiphany. A swimmer, in a bathing suit from the 1920s, balances on the edge of the dam, some 30 feet above the water; she is ready to dive. She leans into the wind, keeping her balance. The precariousness of her position is unbearable and sublime. In the previous encounters, it was difficult, even painful, to move on. Here, you rush away, delicately, taking care not to bump the frozen swimmer into the abyss. (Figs. 5 & 6)

You and your fellow hikers go on, further and further into nature. From time to time, among new tableaux, you meet other groups of spectators who come from a different path. Your silent guide shows you small details: a spider’s nest, the nest of dusky-footed woodrat, a sign encroached upon by the bark of a tree, some moss. (Figs. 7–10)

Going up and down the hills, you pass over open and constricted landscapes. When you stop again, it is to watch an old man next to his bike. You look at the photograph: two children riding their bikes. (Figs. 11 & 12) Who is this old man who does not match the photo? Why does this tableau break the general rule of visual resemblance between the performer and the person in the photograph? A thought starts circling in your mind: perhaps he is one of those two children? You start counting years...but your group moves on. You feel a part of it, and you don’t want to stay...
alone in this haunted place. You won't miss future revelations... nor will you want to evoke some that are unplanned. And so you move. The walk must end soon; an hour and 15 minutes have already passed. You start seeing the main road again, a few parked cars, and the research center: the Sun Field Station; you feel you’re arriving at your destination. You try remembering the series of tableaux and realize that you’ll be allowed to speak again soon. Instead, at a small corner, people stop once more. Beyond that tree there must be one more picture, you think. So you look... and you hold your breath. (Figs. 13 & 14)

On the shore of the lake fifteen people re-create the last tableau vivant, a recreational scene from a postcard, dated circa 1930s. The grand finale. Small groups of people appear on the dock, some standing, others seated, some crouched; while four rest on a bench, three relax in a boat. Of course, all of them are frozen in place. The wind blows, imperceptibly moving the boat in which two people hold oars, still.

You have arrived. The performance ends here. You think that you again will hear people talking soon. You don’t know if you like the idea. What to say? You want to keep this miraculous moment within yourself. Luckily, the artist seems to know this. Your guide brings you to some benches and tables. There, each of you finds one lunch-bag. You sit close, side by side with your group-mates. Quietly, naturally, you start sharing emotions, thoughts, memories.

Finding themselves in the semi-live situation of tableaux vivants and representing people from the past, the ghostlike performers of Picture Jasper Ridge hovered between life and death. The audience witnessed the ontological implication of this uncanny event in which images became humans and actors resembled artifacts.

Performing Stillness in Picture Jasper Ridge

While attending Picture Jasper Ridge as an observer, I realized that my experience as a performer in the preview of this work gave me a privileged position in my perception of the event, and I began to trace connections between the two points of view. While watching other performers enact the tableaux vivants, the spectator in me could not forget the sensations of the performer I was in the preview show, restoring the feelings, physical sensations, and thoughts I had while performing still.

I believe that physical stillness deepens one’s sense of being. Enacting stillness extends the performer’s perception beyond role, psychological position, and place, and brings the focus on the act of staying still: breathing, perceiving, thinking; in other words, being in the present.

André Lepecki notices that stillness brings dance out of kinetics. Prolonged stillness makes the
performance aesthetic anti-
dramatic: it shows no action in time but an extended repetition of the same gesture, as the performer indulges in the same pose. He writes: “Movement is not only a question of kinetics, but also one of intensities, of generating an intensive field of micropercep-
tions” (2006:57). By focusing on the still act, he emphasizes the persistence of the performer’s micromovements and the spectator’s perception of said movements. Stillness allows both the performer and the spectator to enhance their perceptions of being not through identification with a story or character, but through the attention paid to the instant and its expansion. Starting from the performer, stillness expands to take in the entire scene in a kind of still frame, until it includes the spectator. “Stillness is a powerful practice in its contagiousness,” Carlson has claimed (2014a). In the process of encountering the restaged photographs, the spectator, beholding the bodies of the still performers as an inclusive composition, finds herself descending into a state of calm and immobi-
ity, digging into the milieu of the performance: natural, historical, and ultimately personal.

By leading us away from a conception of time as evolution, Carlson guided us beyond the idea of coincidence between subject, body, and subjectivity. The presence of the figures in the pictures was not represented in the tableaux; rather, it was evoked, cited, embodied, and unmarked. The performers made unmarked the subjectivities of the subjects in the images. Peggy Phelan writes:

In writing the unmarked I mark it, inevitably. In seeing it I am marked by it. But because what I do not see and do not write is so much more vast than what I do it is impossible to “ruin” the unmarked. The unmarked is not the newest landscape vulnerable to tourists. The unmarked is not spatial; nor is it temporal; it is not metaphorical; nor is it literal. It is a configuration of subjectivity which exceeds, even while informing, both the gaze and language. (1993:27)

By duplicating the image through the temporal performance of stillness, Carlson partly released the subject from the photographer’s mark. Carlson’s performers encountered the subjects in the photographs by enacting their poses through still embodiment. Their embodiment only alluded to the possible stories inscribed in the pictures, without attempting to exhaustively explain those stories.

Replicating a photograph in the form of a tableau vivant exceeds the form of the portrait, bringing the subjectivity of the photographed subject back, as the performer breathes through the image. Through the repetition of the photographed forms, the presences evoked in the tableaux became multiple and porous, filters of and for other subjectivities — the performer’s, the spectator’s: “The appearing body must be seen less as solid form and rather as sliding along lines of intensities” (Lepecki 2006:63). Through stillness, subjectivity escapes the definitive reading demanded by the psychological interpretation of role and plot. Re-created with life yet without movement, the images of Picture Jasper Ridge disrupt representation. Lepecki finds in
stillness “a way of decelerating the blind and totalitarian impetus of the kinetic-representational machine” (58) upon which history relies and through which the Western conception of choreography is shaped. If we accept the idea that stillness can be used as a tool to contrast the tradition of representation that holds onto the dramatic text and the libretto, we can then understand performing still as an opportunity to directly experience the being of performing: performing the act of performing itself rather than unfolding its narrative by means of a structured plot. Limited to one pose, stillness allows us to rest on that pose and meditate, fostering through an act of self-knowledge a meditative reflection on our being(s).

When I performed in the final tableau vivant of the performance preview, I was a child sitting on the dock, leaning against an older child. Knowing in my bodymind the image that I had to reproduce, I was staring at the landscape in front of me: a lake with birds flying and singing, and wind blowing. While feeling and continuously adjusting to the body enacting the other child on my left side, I was also very close to another actor, standing just in front of me. He is a good friend of mine, yet that day I learned something more about him. Without any linguistic or physical contact, a sensorial understanding occurred exclusively through the proximity of my gaze, which became tactile; without a direct touch, my gaze touched him.

Immobilized in my pose for a long time, my agency was restricted and was yet revelatory: I could see the skin of his neck, I could breathe close to his hair, follow the shape of his white shirt. I also had a partial view of the lake beyond. I was not allowed to move my body, but I was allowed to see, and my gaze strove to catch the two extreme points permitted by my still pose: my friend’s neck and the lake. It was similar to what you do when looking at unknown images, when you try to grasp relations among particulars. I spent time identifying how distinct points connected with each other within the framework of my sight. Slowly, the process went beyond what I could
In “Eye and Mind” Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes the experience of vision as total perception, nullifying the distinction between subject and object. To him, there is neither privileged position nor possibility for an external gaze. Space and depth, for example, are subjective experiences, defined according to my position and movement, to how I perceive them in my body. Space asks for dwelling: “I live it from within,” he writes ([1964] 2004:42). My position is always central, dismantling the conventional ideas of center or periphery. Space is all around me, and I am inside of it. Likewise, in the performer’s experience of becoming a still object in front of moving spectators, Carlson tried to dismantle hierarchy and power relations that depend upon a qualitative distinction between myself and the other, the human and the thing. Actors and spectators joined to create a milieu: together, we opened a relational space with each photograph: our thing.

As the perception of subject and object blurred, actor and spectator created a shared space. Such a different way of perceiving yourself within reality did not occur only because of physical proximity, but more significantly because of what stillness and duration brought to the performer in her experience of inhabiting the form of the photograph.

Stillness, lending clarity to the performers’ gestures, invites us to reflect deeply on the act of performing. When Carlson taught her performers to stay still, she guided them toward conquering an active type of stillness that is not a command (“freeze like a statue”) but an inner ability that each performer learned and made her own:

16. In “Eye and Mind” Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes the experience of vision as total perception, nullifying the distinction between subject and object. To him, there is neither privileged position nor possibility for an external gaze. Space and depth, for example, are subjective experiences, defined according to my position and movement, to how I perceive them in my body. Space asks for dwelling: “I live it from within,” he writes ([1964] 2004:42). My position is always central, dismantling the conventional ideas of center or periphery. Space is all around me, and I am inside of it. Likewise, in the performer’s experience of becoming a still object in front of moving spectators, Carlson tried to dismantle hierarchy and power relations that depend upon a qualitative distinction between myself and the other, the human and the thing. Actors and spectators joined to create a milieu: together, we opened a relational space with each photograph: our thing.
It is about perceiving oneself as a container. That’s where stillness invites us to consider the vast stillness that’s within us, that vast space inside, literally in the interior of the body, where you touch spirit, where you touch your connections with objects, where you both become one so you get to feel life flowing through you. And I think that’s the power of looking at stillness, of life being at stillness, capturing everybody’s attention. I think this is because you are reminded of your own container and the life you feel inside of it. (2014b)

In a kind of meditation, stillness and duration open up our ability of perception, within and outside ourselves. We experience other, silent ways of interacting with the real, the archival photograph, and our imagination.

(I continue to shift between the pronouns I and you, sometimes blurring them into a comprehensive we, sometimes addressing the spectator with a you, as if she were the performer, sometimes calling to the reader. This not only helps me to build a more direct, almost somatic, contact with my reader as I guide her imagination through the analysis of the work, but also confirms the very nature of this performance, where the you and the I are framed in proximity in its shared still space.)

By settling the performer midway between life and object, stillness complicates the performativity of the portrait and the archive. On one level, it is you-the-performer and the other performers. Stillness makes you feel as if you are plastic statues in a group. A quality of sensorial yet nonphysical touch allows the members of the group to connect. On another level, it is you and the person that you embody. You embody someone who enacted that pose some time ago. Your mind moves to her. Two identities overlap. Stillness allows you to contemplate with an embodied mind the quality of the gesture that you have captured. Your mind wanders around the representation of this extraneous body to which your own adapts, and ends up wandering about another time, another (hi)story. The ontology of this uncanny event, in which images become immobile humans and actors turn into half-objects, is ambiguous. While you bring an archival object back to life through your presence, your stillness draws you closer to the object’s extinction. For a period of moments, you become archived.

Figure 13. “Recreational Scene from a Postcard,” postcard, 1930s. (Courtesy of the Stanford University Archives)
Ann Carlson’s Picture Jasper Ridge set the photographs in a ritual milieu that enabled us to experience time at a rare pace. Carlson explained:

Stillness allows spectators and performers to perceive the surrounding environment as a series of moments that instead of proceeding chronologically are folded into the present. My process of studying and creating in and with stillness arises from a desire to stop that trajectory. This shift in thinking and perceiving changes the atmosphere of one’s surrounding. (2014a)

Carlson’s project encouraged the participants — spectators and performers — to reflect on the coexistence of different times. While we observed tableaux vivants, time inter(in)animated our perception: where performers transformed the present into the past and vice versa, spectators crossed past and present. With the shift during the event from a diachronic, historical narration of time to a synchronic, present-based perception of history, Picture Jasper Ridge materialized the concepts of *chronos* and *aion* that Gilles Deleuze theorizes in *The Logic of Sense*. Deleuze opposes actor and god because they enact two different versions of time: *aion* is the actor’s time; *chronos* is god’s time. Where chronos dwells in the present, aion bypasses it: “The actor is not like a god, but is rather like an ‘anti-god’ (*contre-dieu*). God and actor are opposed in their readings of time. What men grasp as past and future, God lives it in its eternal present” ([1969] 1990:150).17 Deleuze thinks of the actor’s extraordinary act, which depends on her intervention in time, as an alternative to both the representation of god’s power and the human being’s ordi-

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17. “[T]he actor maintains himself in the instant in order to act out something perpetually anticipated and delayed, hoped for and recalled. [...] The God is Chronos: the divine present is the circle in its entirety, whereas past and future are dimensions relative to a particular segment of the circle which leaves the rest outside. The actors’ present, on the contrary, is the most narrow, the most contracted, the most instantaneous, and the most punctual. It is the point on a straight-line which divides the line endlessly, and is itself divided into past-future. The actor belongs to the Aion” (150).
nary actions. With her act, the actor changes ordinary chronological perception into a typology of time that, escaping the present but also evoking past and future, lives in the instant. The actor’s work consists in catching the gesture, even that of stillness; in isolating the action from its end to concentrate on the process, as in Carlson’s performance. Deleuze’s insistence on the actor’s act as event and counteraction emphasizes the performative act as the tool of the performer’s peculiar process of doing as critical thinking.

Chronos and aion both were at play in Picture Jasper Ridge. Chronos dominated the performance: the past was made present, because it was a “present-ed past” (Paris 2012:20). Present-ed: offered without being explained; made present. Yet aion sustained the aesthetic of the performance: playing with stillness, future and past were forever co-present and fighting one another, nullifying the action as both present and presence. Because they came from the past, the images taken from the photos were not fully in the present; because performers could not move, their presence was limited. Through this blurred temporal condition, Carlson’s work made spectators and performers perceive a convergence of identities and temporalities, encountering lost memories, landscapes, and physicalities through other bodies in a landscape transformed by time. The performance allowed a reappropriation that occurred through other subjects in another time, relying on their remains; the work expropriated and transformed the archive, with an oxymoronic feeling of alienation and identification.

In Carlson’s performance hike, spectators moved and actors remained still. To a certain extent, the audience made the choreography, and the performers watched it. At some phases, spectators embodied a slower pace and arrived at watching while being still, and performers in turn watched the spectators’ activity slowing down. The stillness was contagious; spectators slowly partook in stillness, entering the performers’ space and extending it, as both spectators and performers, very gradually, arrived at mirroring one another. To see a tableau from different points of view or to move on, spectators had to consciously break out of stillness, each time interrupting the enchantment of the moment of mirroring and the sense of connection derived from their still co-presence.

The quality of the immersion into the time(s) and space(s) of Picture Jasper Ridge amplified the spectators’ and the performers’ consciousness of their acts of being. Their ontological experiences depended upon their ability to fully and unreservedly inhabit a place and produce its space. These attempts to amplify our perception through making a qualitative space while dwelling side by side engendered, for all participants, a sense of freedom. In Building, Dwelling, Thinking Heidegger describes dwelling and building as acts that liberate and protect presence. Learning to build and dwell enables us to “set something free into its presencing” ([1954] 2001:150). Following this, if the goal of freedom consists in allowing us to be by preserving a space for presence, then the function of this type of freedom is not ideological but aesthetic, as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe observes in Heidegger, Art, and Politics, referring to Heidegger’s “aestheticization of politics” (1990:62–76). Here, freedom aims at a somatic and imaginative perception, to enhance the act of being. In other words, I experience freedom in the moment that allows me you us to indulge through my body in the perception of my act of being. To Heidegger, freedom is a meditative process inherently integrated into the idea of making space: “spacing means clearing out [rodem], making free, setting free into a free area, an open” ([1964] 1996:13; and Mitchell 2010:43).18 In Carlson’s piece, participants set free their presence and the photographs as remains, preserving their being in and across the time(s) and space(s) of the performance.

18. I found the essay “Bemerkungen zu Kunst — Plastik — Raum” (Remarks on Art, Sculpture, Space) cited exclusively in its Swiss publication from 1996. Therefore, I used Andrew Mitchell’s translation of some excerpts from this work in Heidegger Among the Sculptors: Body, Space, and the Art of Dwelling, which is close to the Italian translation I originally used to read the work (Corpo e Spazio: Osservazioni su Arte — Scultura — Spazio).
Meditative Paths

Performing makes you dwell—I find myself speculating. The emphasis on presence that Carlson’s work set forth through stillness invites performers to ponder the process of their creative acts. According to Heidegger, “In art, truth occurs as the disclosure of beings” ([1931–32?] 2009:143). By this I understand him to mean that art is a way to access ontology, and vice versa. Opening the condition of being to its essence—to allow it to be—belongs to a certain type of performing integral to Picture Jasper Ridge. One that does not represent but instead makes presence; a nonfunctional performing in the sense that it is not functional to a plot, or a symbol, but that rests in its being, or that simply is.

Like the artwork, Picture Jasper Ridge offered a paradigm for cultivating our perception of being beyond our ordinary disregard of the issue. As Heidegger says with respect to the artwork: “And what is more commonplace than this, that a being is? In a work, by contrast, this fact, that it is as a work, is just what is unusual” ([1950] 2001:64). By accentuating the functionalist side of our existence, we disregard the faculty of being and its value, whereas artworks increase our perception while being, and enhance our ability to be beyond functionalist actions. In Picture Jasper Ridge, performers held onto the photographs’ subjects by waiting in their poses for a long time. By dwelling in those poses, performers enacted a disclosure of the meaning of their still activity as presence. The photographs, which elsewhere could be considered as the artwork, in this context are in fact objects of memory: the artwork here is constituted by the performance, which evokes the image and situates it as an aesthetic event. The possibility of indulging in the perception of the pictures’ poses for a long time fosters in the performer and the spectator a meditative type of thinking.

In Discourse on Thinking, Heidegger speculates on meditative thinking as the type of mental process that reflects the essence of the human being, as opposed to calculative thinking, which depends on technology. In the second part of the essay, titled “Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking,” Heidegger values the ancient Greek practice of thinking while walking (peripateticus learning). A teacher, a scientist, and a student hike into nature while reflecting on these two types of thought formation. Calculative thinking and representation, working through objectification, split subject and object and set them into a hierarchical relation. They are “grounded in the relation of man as ego to the thing as object” ([1959] 1966:79). Meditative thinking escapes representational models and invites human beings to adopt an attitude of openness that counterbalances the utilitarian relationship between subject and thing. To Heidegger, the act and process of meditative thinking are determinant of human beings’ ability to interact with our surroundings in a nonutilitarian way, enabling us to sense our existence.

Carlson’s performance hike welcomed a disposition to meditative thinking similar to that described by Heidegger on his country path. Fostering a meditative process of thought, the performative walk at Jasper Ridge developed a capacity for listening with the whole body. Encouraged by the request for silence, this condition of listening—emphasized during the few minutes that spectators spent “sit-spotting” at the beginning of the performance—suggested lis-

19. The publication path of “The Origin of the Work of Art” is complex and mingles a series of conferences on the theme of art, held between 1935–36, with different written drafts. Three versions of this work are usually considered by scholars, as explained in “Supplement 3: Sources for the Present Volume,” in The Heidegger Reader, at pages 341–42. By my understanding, they date: 1935 (version from a first conference in Freiburg); 1936 (version revised for publication in 1950 from other conferences held in Frankfurt on the same themes); and 1931–32 (first draft, unpublished). In this article I am using both the first version (left as an unpublished manuscript by Heidegger and appearing in The Heidegger Reader under the title “On the Origin of the Work of Art”) and the version that Heidegger originally published with the collection Holzwege (Off the Beaten Track) in 1950, which I found in the 2001 edition, Poetry, Language, Thought under the title “The Origin of the Work of Art” (Perennial Classics). I chose to do so because the two versions present different nuances on the idea of being and its relation to the concept of art.
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tening as a deep multisensorial awareness; as care, self-care, and openness. Instead of words, Carlson offered gestures; instead of arguing through dialogue, her protagonists entered and exited the opposite conditions of stillness and movement. Performers indirectly taught spectators how to dwell still, inviting them to think through stillness. Performers thought through it themselves.

Stillness does not necessarily imply inertia; it can provoke a condition that enables in the spectator what Heidegger calls “moving into nearness,” an attitude that creates proximity. Such an attitude is allowed by the performer’s ability to practice a quality of waiting that we could define, with Heidegger’s words, as a “releasement [Gelassenheit] toward things”: a passive attitude of waiting ([1959] 1966:55). He specifies: “Releasement lies—if we may use the word lie—beyond the distinction between activity and passivity” (61). Passivity is not to be held to its negative connotation as a lack of agency, but rather as an open attitude of attentive patience that allows for an event of unconcealment—in this context, the enhancement of being that still performance enables on the level of awareness and perception. In Carlson’s tableaux, performers played a passive state between life and death, letting go of their egocentric perspectives and allowing themselves to be close to the state of the thing. Releasement toward the things, in this case nature and the photographs, was sparked by waiting in stillness, “so that,” continues Heidegger, “things which appear in that-which-regions no longer have the character of objects” (67). Heidegger uses the concept of thing to subtract the object from its functional use. The community of things and humans—and of performers as things—that gathered in Picture Jasper Ridge formed a milieu for disclosures preserved by meditative thinking.

Meditative thinking requires learning to wait. It is a matter of waiting instead of awaiting, writes Heidegger. The Teacher in Discourse on Thinking says: “Waiting, all right; but never awaiting, for awaiting already links itself with re-presenting and what is re-presented” (68). It is waiting as such, without object or expectation. Similarly, in Carlson’s performance, spectators came with questions for which there were no precise answers: performers and photographs were there, providing no other discourse than themselves. Because of the lack of information regarding the photographs, the hermeneutic circuit was left open; perception, imagination, and feeling contributed to determine the spectators’ understanding of the event. Progressively, instead of expecting the question-and-answer dynamic typical of dialectic representation, spectators set their ideas in circulation, let them sediment, and attuned their thoughts to what they perceived; they might have imagined shaping their ideas together with those, invisible and inaudible, coming from the performers.

In Carlson’s performance, meditative thinking depended on stillness, which taught the performers to be patient: staying still in the poses of the pictures, they built a form-based connection between their bodies and the photographs, and waited for the spectators to disclose it. Ultimately, in Carlson’s tableaux vivants, stillness marked a cultural, temporal, and spatial gap between the subjects of the performance: between the performers and the people photographed. Yet the stillness allowed this gap to flourish as a dynamic event that invited closeness and exchange. Using once more Heidegger’s terminology, we can think of “gap” as distance and of Carlson’s performance as region: “That-which-regions itself would be the nearness of distance, and the distance of nearness” (86). The performance built proximity. By talking of distance in close relation to nearness, Heidegger emphasizes the process of getting near rather than aiming at a coincidental point. In reading the term Ἄγχιβασίη as “moving-into-nearness” instead of “going toward,” Heidegger seeks a concept that is not inconsistent with the act of waiting—an act that is fundamental for performers who perform still. Moving-into-nearness suggests rather an expansion than a direction.

In spite of and through the distance from the photographs, performers and spectators remained together in proximity within the milieu that Picture Jasper Ridge, as a region, provoked. It was a performance that, moving-into-nearness, valued time as presence and space as proximity. Its meditation on being, absence, and waiting provided an experience of silence. The quality of this experience depended upon the audience’s ability to attune to what was opening up during the performance while respecting what remained concealed. It also depended upon
their acceptance of the inevitability of transformation and the loss of solutions to (and from) the past. In Carlson’s work, restaged photos did not provide answers about the past, but made space for the unattended; the reenactments opened a site for an event of ontological proximity in the present.

While the space in Jasper Ridge keeps its multiple histories hidden in the (preserved) wild, Picture Jasper Ridge transformed the gated landscape of the preserve into an intimate territory to walk, detecting signs from its history; a difficult quest, since nature has modified the site over time.20 Carlson’s tableaux vivants were elements of a composition of loss and endurance; with their presence, they referred to what is missing in their space. “Picture Jasper Ridge is a play of a double death and of a double preservation,” Carlson told me (2014a). Re-embodying in stillness people who are no longer living, the performers edged closer to an experience of death. Yet, in performing their gestures they also ensured the continued existence of these persons. Maintaining for a long time the pose, gesture, and facial expression that the photographed person provided the performer not simply with a conceptual identification, but also with a somatic identification. Jasper Ridge is itself a natural preserve, and indeed, the act of restaging photographs preserves biographies and portions of histories, and rescues them from oblivion.

There is a poietic quality in such identification, which makes space for thinking. Poietic—formative and poetic—because performers found in stillness a means of thinking about performing while performing and about the enhancement of being that such awareness fostered. And once more poietic—creative—because such identification frees subjectivities instead of reproducing them. As performers breathed through the images, beings hovered.

Jasper Ridge and the act of performing are events that close their gates behind. So, spectator, like Orpheus, you proceed. You walk, you stop, you go. Sometimes at your pace, sometimes you adapt to your space. You may want to remain, dwelling there. But your own clock, insistent, calls you back. Don’t turn. In your canto, you’ll sing that secret tempo of stillness that you now know in your body. Once again, you pass through the gate.

References


20. Like slowness and stillness, silence also qualitatively contributes to an analysis of the remains of a place. “How might archeology illuminate such visitation?” Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks ask: “First perhaps, by doing nothing. By leaving it as it is, providing access, saying nothing, letting the remains speak for themselves, letting the visitor address them in her own way” (2001:158).


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