



PROJECT MUSE®

Edited Time: The Temporal Investigations of Scott Billings
and Raqs Media Collective

Ariane Noël de Tilly

ASAP/Journal, Volume 4, Number 3, September 2019, pp. 533-551 (Article)



Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/asa.2019.0038>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/746543>

Ariane Noël de Tilly

EDITED TIME:

THE TEMPORAL INVESTIGATIONS OF SCOTT BILLINGS AND RAQS MEDIA COLLECTIVE

Two distinct and nonrelated events that were recorded in the first half of the twentieth century by a filmmaker and a photographer, respectively, have prompted new works by contemporary artists based in Vancouver and New Delhi. In 1918, Russian filmmaker DZIGA VERTOV performed a risky jump, which he described in his own writings as either a leap across rooftops or a one-and-a-half-story-high jump from the balcony of a summer house.¹ VERTOV's cameraman recorded the action with a high-speed camera and followed a specific instruction: he had to film the jump in such a way that the filmmaker's facial expressions and his different thoughts could eventually be scrutinized when the take was projected in slow motion.² Years later, VERTOV wrote in his notebook that when he saw the footage of that risky jump projected onto a screen, he did not recognize his own face, but he was able to read the thoughts from the expressions it appeared to register: "irresolution, vacillation, and firmness (a struggle within myself), and, again, the joy of

victory."³ This ability of the camera to record what the naked eye cannot see in lived, phenomenological time, which VERTOV called the "Kino-Eye," is essential to his cinema. Not quite a century later, inspired by both theoretical texts on slow motion and

//

ARIANE NOËL DE TILLY is Professor of Art History at the Savannah College of Art and Design. She holds a doctorate from the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (University of Amsterdam) and was a Postdoctoral Research and Teaching Fellow at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, from 2011 to 2013. Her research focuses on the exhibition and preservation challenges of contemporary art, on the exhibition history of video art, and on socially engaged art.

different written recollections of the 1918 experiment conducted by the Russian filmmaker, Vancouver-based artist SCOTT BILLINGS set out to make his own risky jump in his studio on September 28, 2014. The resulting video loop is not a reprise of Vertov's own jump; rather, it is a work that seeks to further investigate the scientific and artistic process that is cinema.



Figure 1.

Scott Billings, *A Risky Jump* (2015). Video installation, 7:29 minutes, 13 feet. Exhibition view at Wil Aballe Art Projects (WAAP), Vancouver, 2015. Image courtesy of the artist.

Whereas Billings's *A Risky Jump* was inspired by written texts reflecting on a cinematic technique and the results of an experiment, Raqs Media Collective's *Re-Run* was created in an entirely different geopolitical context, and was prompted by a photograph taken in the mid-twentieth century. In late November 1948, after a year spent taking photographs in India (a nation that had gained sovereignty in 1947), French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson received an urgent cable from the Magnum New York office, the agency he

had co-founded the previous year. The agency pressed him to travel to China to report visually on the arrival of the People's Liberation Army in various cities across the country. At the beginning of December 1948, Cartier-Bresson spent ten days in Beijing and took the last plane out as the People's Liberation Army started occupying the city.⁴ One of the best-known photographs that Cartier-Bresson took during his subsequent visit to Shanghai depicts a run on the national bank.

Seeing that the value of paper money was sinking, the Kuomintang government resolved to distribute forty grams of gold per person, which resulted in a financial panic. The official title of Cartier-Bresson's photograph is quite long, yet it offers an important contextualization of the political climate to which the image bears witness:

CHINA. Shanghai. December 1948–January 1949. As the value of the paper money sank, the Kuomintang decided to distribute 40 grams of gold per person. With the gold rush, in December, thousands came out and waited in line for hours. The police, equipped with the remnants of the armies of the International Concession, made only a gesture toward maintaining order. Ten people were crushed to death.⁵



Figure 2.

Henri Cartier-Bresson, China, Shanghai. Kuomintang Gold Distribution Line (1948). Image courtesy of Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos.

The photograph Cartier-Bresson took of this bank run shows a dense crowd composed of men and women of different generations, in a complete state of panic, pressing against one another, even piling up. The tight framing by Cartier-Bresson effectively conveys the intensity of the scene during these times of revolutionary upheaval. In June 2013 at the Shanghai Film Park, two months before the opening of their exhibition *Extra Time* at the Chronus Art Center in Shanghai, the New Delhi-based Raqs Media Collective shot a video reenacting the bank run photographed by Cartier-Bresson in 1948. In their reprise of Cartier-Bresson image, Raqs sought both to specifically refer to a past event and reflect on the historical charge it figures, as an index of Chinese modernity. The resulting video installation, *Re-Run*, features an edited and layered video of the recreated scene played in slow motion.

The temporal investigations featuring a fall in Scott Billings's *A Risky Jump* and a bank run in Raqs Media Collective's *Re-Run* (each of which employ slow motion and the loop) call for a reflection on historical thinking and on how artists connect past events, images, and writings to the complexity of the present. Due to their protracted temporalities, these works can be associated with *slow art*, an aesthetic approach that has been explored in a number of compelling publications, and most recently by Arden Reed in *Slow Art: The Experience of Looking, Sacred Images to James Turrell*. Reed states that slow art "names social, time-bound experiences," and further specifies that it is "not a thing but an



Figure 3.
Raqs Media Collective, Re-Run (2013). Looped video. Image courtesy of the artists.

experience, an ongoing conversation between artwork and spectator.”⁶ As characterized by Reed, slow art is both experiential and participatory and heightens the viewers’ awareness. In this article, I discuss how Scott Billings and Raqs Media Collective have used cinematic techniques—slow motion and the loop—for remediating history. Whereas Billings’s *A Risky Jump* draws from and builds on different moments of the history of cinema and video art, Raqs’s *Re-Run* deals specifically with revolutionary upheavals and unstable financial and political contexts, both past and present. In what follows, I argue that, by altering the state of perceptions of the viewers, Billings and Raqs have triggered an awareness of the movement of time and call the audience’s attention to what its deceleration enables them to better see. Therefore, the artists have produced not only aesthetic experiences, but scientific ones as well. In particular, they open up a space to study individual or crowd behaviors in response to moments of great intensity.

FROM A RISKY JUMP TO A HIGHLY STAGED FALL

Scott Billings’s *A Risky Jump* presents a slowed-down version of the thirteen-foot fall that the artist staged in his studio. The video was prompted by theoretical readings on slow motion—including Annette Michelson’s introduction to *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*—and a desire to further explore cinematic and electronic temporality. The work also emerged out of an interest in studying sleep transitions.⁷ The video loop begins with a view of a man (Billings) huddled on the floor in front of a window, seemingly asleep. As the projection slides down the wall, the scene reveals the sleeper resting on a trapdoor that then opens up, resulting in his fall.

The fall wakes up the artist, and his facial expression changes. Starting out as restful and peaceful, Billings’s look becomes one of great surprise tinged with fear.



Figure 4. Scott Billings, *A Risky Jump* (2015). Still image from video installation (7:29 minutes). Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 5.

Scott Billings, A Risky Jump (2015). Still image from video installation (7:29 minutes). Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 6.

Scott Billings, A Risky Jump (2015). Video installation, 7:29 minutes, 13 feet. Exhibition view at Wil Aballe Art Projects (WAAP), Vancouver, 2015. Image courtesy of the artist.

His thirteen-foot plummet ends when he lands on a crash pad. And as if nothing had just happened, the artist curls back into his initial position and falls back asleep.

In this video, the very action of falling asleep takes on a double meaning: first, as generally used, the artist is seen transitioning from a state of consciousness to unconsciousness; second, he physically falls from a platform thirteen feet high to achieve the state of transition from consciousness to unconsciousness. In real-time, the fall recorded by the artist lasted only one second, with his landing and

repositioning lasting only a few seconds more. Slowed down, this event lasts over seven minutes.⁸

At the end of the loop of *A Risky Jump*, which is projected at floor level, the image turns black and the projector climbs back to the top of the I-beam from which it is suspended. Then the projection starts anew, as if the artist was doomed to fall endlessly. *A Risky Jump* is not uniquely about the theatricality of a fall; it is also an invitation to ponder upon the mechanisms required to achieve a successful take. In addition to slowing down the footage of his fall—like Vertov had done about a century earlier—Billings lays bare in the exhibition space the mechanisms employed during the shooting. He intends to make evident that the time of the shooting (a few seconds) is directly opposed to the time of viewing (7:29 minutes). The final decision on the duration of the loop was based on spectatorship. As the artist explains:

I wanted the threshold between stillness and motion at the beginning of the fall to be imperceptible. And I wanted viewers walking into the installation to initially perceive my body as levitating in the space, not falling, within the duration of immediate perception, i.e. the specious present.⁹

The extended duration enables the viewers to witness the details of this highly staged fall, as well as to give them an opportunity to explore the geographies of the face and body of the artist, and to further study the vertical trajectory of the artist. This very examination would have been impossible in real-time, as the viewers would have barely had the time to realize the artist was falling before seeing him land on the crash pad. In juxtaposition to Vertov, who staged a conscious jump, Billings played with the idea of falling asleep (an unconscious action) and falling through a trapdoor. Billings was interested in scrutinizing these states of transition between consciousness and sleep. As he remarked:

I earnestly devised the apparatus and its method of closely observing duration, which is to say that I believed in its objectivity, its attempt toward a scientific determination, its vernacular of truth telling. But at the same time I understood my pursuit to be entirely spurious. The notion that someone is asleep in one frame and awake in next reminds us that filmic causality is false, merely a trick on our rudimentary perceptual faculties. The moving image apparatus—static permanent singular frames—inherently belies the phenomena it promises to study: movement, change, plurality.¹⁰

“

Whereas Vertov thought of the camera as an object capable [. . .] of scrutinizing the affective geographies of his face, Billings aimed to create the scientific conditions for examining the transition—the exact threshold—between the moments when he is sleeping and wakes up.

”

Whereas Vertov thought of the camera as an object capable of revealing the truth and, in the case of his 1918 experiment discussed here, of scrutinizing the affective geographies of his face, Billings aimed to create the scientific conditions for examining the transition—the exact threshold—between the moments when he is sleeping and wakes up, and when he is conscious and falls unconscious again. The artist believed in the objectivity offered by the camera to be able to identify the exact moment of transition between sleep and awakening. Consequently, *A Risky Jump* isn't a reprise of Vertov's 1918 experiment using modern technologies. As explained above, Billings does not jump; he falls. He was also concerned with matters other than jumping and the range of emotions one goes through during such actions and how the camera can document such an experiment. Yet the contemporary work refers to Vertov's experiment in at least three ways: through its very title, the use of slow motion, and the intention of filming in a scientific matter—the vertical trajectory of the artist's body in time and space.

A Risky Jump isn't the first video work in which Billings explores the movement of the body (and more often than not, his own)—through time and space. In earlier work, including *The Wolfman* (2012) and *Black Maria* (2012), he had considered these elements. For the video installation *The Wolfman*, Billings was inspired by both the early film and video performances of Bruce Nauman's recorded wanderings in his studio and by a supporting character named Count Frightenstein (Billy Van) in the Canadian children's television series *The Hilarious House of Frightenstein* (1971). Billings first filmed himself walking in a way similar to Nauman in his studio, but instead of using the studio space as an empty background, Billings is seen walking across the television monitor, in front of a psychedelic background, a background similar to the one in front of which a disk jockey, modeled on Wolfman Jack (also played by Billy Van who played all

the supporting characters in the show), was featured dancing.¹¹ In *Black Maria*, with the help of a custom-made device that Billings used both for shooting and exhibiting the piece, the crawling image of the artist is projected on the lower walls of the gallery space. The work was inspired by proto-cinematic devices of the late eighteenth century, early cinema, and war films. The title of the work refers to the nickname given by the employees of Edison's first film studio to the studio itself, a rather small, tight, and uncomfortable space that made them think of a "Black Maria" (i.e., a police van). Here, the artist is seen crawling through the gallery space, like soldiers crawl through tunnels in war films. What these two examples highlight is how Billings's work explicitly refers to the work of previous artists without ever reprising them directly, and how, like filmmakers such as Dziga Vertov and László Moholy-Nagy, he is interested in exploring both the aesthetic and scientific features of cinema.¹²

A Risky Jump, created a few years after *The Wolfman* and *Black Maria*, experiments with a different temporality, namely a protracted temporality. In the video installation, time has been stretched to the edge of stillness. What this near stillness allows, in addition to bringing an awareness of the movement of time and what its deceleration enables the audience to see in greater detail, is an illusion of levitation, especially if the audience enters when the trapdoor opens and the artist is seen falling. The near stillness reinforces the impression that the artist is hovering in the air. The very idea of levitation can be linked to the fascination by other artists with this state, including Yves Klein and his 1960 photomontage entitled *Saut dans le vide* (*Leap into the Void*), a work that appears to be a single photograph but that was made with cut negatives of shots taken by Janos Kender and Harry Shunk.¹³ Klein's jump, like the one of Billings, was highly staged, yet the work reveals a single moment of his jump—the moment he is hovering—and the canvas held by his judoka friends on which he landed has been removed from the final image. Billings doesn't hide all the tricks he used to create *A Risky Jump* and, even if the work is made of tensions—between stillness and motion, between different states of consciousness—he did not try to defy gravity. This aspect is highlighted by the very *dispositif* he uses to project the video loop of *A Risky Jump*, which is the same one that he had used during the shooting.

For the purposes of the projection, Billings mounted the projector to a stainless steel rail that ran along an aluminum I-beam. That same custom-made apparatus



Figure 7.
Scott Billings, *A Risky Jump* Production. Photograph by Michael Love
(2014). Image courtesy of the artist.

was employed for the shooting of *A Risky Jump*, although a Phantom camera (filming at 7500 frames per second) had previously occupied the place of the projector.¹⁴ During the shooting, the camera had to be in perfect sync with the vertical trajectory of the artist's fall. Its failing to be in sync would have resulted in shots in which the artist's body was either absent, cut off, or higher or lower than the visual field. The original filmed sequence, before being slowed down, might have lasted just a few seconds, but to end up with a take that followed the trajectory of his fall as he had imagined it, Billings had to shoot the scene more than twenty times.¹⁵

Finally, the protracted temporality of *A Risky Jump* invites the audience to pay close attention, in a scientific manner, to variations in the sleep cycles of the filmed figure. Whereas the staged fall makes the work enter in dialogue with an early experi-

ment with slow motion, the study of a sleeping individual relates the work to a group of films and videos released since the 1960s, including Andy Warhol's *Sleep* (1963), Bill Viola's *Sleepers* (1992), Rodney Graham's *Halcion Sleep* (1994), and Sam Taylor-Wood's (now Taylor-Johnson) *David* (2004). The majority of these works use fixed single takes and employ a real time temporarily or a slightly slowed down time. They also do not involve much action. The man's sleep filmed in Billings's *A Risky Jump* follows a narrative arc that is much more eventful and dramatic. The sleep cycles that he goes through also parallel the cycle of the projection: like a sleeper falls asleep, goes through a number of sleep patterns, and finally wakes up, the video projection starts at the top of the wall,

slides down, ends, and then the projector travels back up the beam and the loop starts again. Formally, the artists employed the loop in order to echo the sleep patterns. The awareness of movement leads to an awareness of the movement of time, to its passage, and to the very time that the audience spends watching this work. By opposing the protracted temporality of the fall and the lived, phenomenological temporality of the audience, Billings also highlights how time experience in dreams does not correspond to real time. Ultimately, his temporal investigation deals with these two main experiences of time, in contrast to the work of Raqs Media Collective, which proceeds through dialogues between past and present.

REENACTING A BANK RUN

In 2013, the Chronus Art Center in Shanghai asked the New Delhi-based Raqs Media Collective to create works specifically for a Chinese audience.¹⁶ In the years leading up to the exhibition, Raqs had traveled to Shanghai several times to work on different projects with West Heavens, a cross-cultural exchange programme. West Heavens, through a broad variety of projects, events, exhibitions, and publications, aims at examining and comparing the different paths of modernity taken by China and India.¹⁷ The photograph of Henri Cartier-Bresson proved to be a fruitful starting point for such a reflection. Historical inquiry and philosophical speculation, as well as questions relating to time and temporality, are at the core of several projects, artworks, and exhibitions conceived by the collective since its foundation in 1992. Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula, and Shuddhabrata Sengupta met while they were students at the AJK Mass Communication Research Centre at the Jamia Millia Islamia University, training in documentary filmmaking. Since the group's creation, the members have taken on multiple roles, including those of artists, theorists, filmmakers, curators, writers, and critics.¹⁸ The name "Raqs" is an acronym of "rarely asked questions," but it is also a Persian, Urdu, and Arabic word that means "dance." More specifically, the word refers to a state that dervishes enter when they whirl. In a 2013 interview, Shuddhabrata Sengupta explained that, unlike other artists who work with oils or other media, their medium was time.¹⁹

Re-Run can be thought of as a reenactment, an artistic strategy that has been the focus of a number of exhibitions and publications in the field of contemporary art in recent decades.²⁰ As stated by curator Marianne Torp,

A re-enactment is not simply a repetition of a given historical event; it also involves a reassessment and renewed topicality of the historical event in question as contemporary actors carry out improvisation based on historical facts, interpreting them in their performance.²¹

Besides, as curator Inke Arns argues, “artistic re-enactments are not an affirmative confirmation of the past; rather, they are *questionings of the present* through reaching back to historical events that have etched themselves indelibly into the collective memory.”²² This dialogue between past and present, but more so, a reprise to rethink the present (and this era of economic crisis in particular), is precisely what Raqs has accomplished with *Re-Run*. Reenactments have also been used in films since the very beginning of cinema.²³ Writing specifically on documentary reenactment, Jonathan Kahana contends that the latter can be seen “as a way of posing the question, ‘what now?’—a question whose meaning changes depending on how it is performed, and one that it might now and again be more important for documentary to ask than to answer.”²⁴ Whereas *Re-Run* isn’t a documentary reenactment but an artistic one, it is certainly a work that does raise the very question “what now?” Moreover, as in all the works created by Raqs, questions are raised rather than answered, and several of the questions put forth by this video loop deal with time.

Re-Run places two main temporalities in opposition: the race against time commemorated by Cartier-Bresson and the protracted sequence of the

reenacted by Raqs. The moment depicted has been slowed down to such a point that it gives at first an illusion of stillness so that the viewers can think at first glance that they are standing in front of a photograph projected onto a screen or a wall. However, when the projection is scrutinized, the extremely slow movement of the crowd in the



Figure 8.

Raqs Media Collective, photo documenting the shooting of *Re-Run* at the Shanghai Film Park (2013). Image courtesy of the artists.

foreground becomes noticeable. After shooting the scene at the Shanghai Film Park, Raqs edited and layered the video.

The result created tensions between stillness and motion. Indeed, whereas some of the actors reenacting the scenes are moving, others—the ones standing in the background—remain completely still. This experience reinforces the initial illusion that one is looking at a still image. The motion of the alarmed crowd is especially noticeable in the front row, where we see people clinging on each other's clothes.

While the Raqs Media Collective work cites the Cartier-Bresson photograph, one of the most noticeable differences between the two lies in the direction of the gazes from the people in the crowd, which changes during the loop. In the 1948 image, the members of the crowd are looking in all directions; some are demonstrating stronger survival instincts by actively trying to push their way through this mass of people, while others are looking up or looking in the direction of where the photographer would have stood when capturing the scene. In the Raqs work, a segment presents most of the crowd looking to the right toward the direction of the bank building out of the frame. But, during the loop, one man in the middle of the front row turns his head very slowly until eventually his gaze meets that of the spectator watching the video.



Figure 9.

Raqs Media Collective, Re-Run (2013). Looped video. Image courtesy of the artists.

Whereas at first the crowd is completely immersed, the turning of the gaze toward the audience contributes to remove the distance between the people seen and the people watching. What the reenactment orchestrated by Raqs achieves above all is a vivification of the experience of this specific crowd in 1948, as one witnesses its despair and determination; but more importantly, the reenactment inscribes this unruly crowd within a broader history of manifestation of crowds. Ultimately, *Re-Run* reminds the audience that economic crises are still looming large, like the crash of 2008 testifies.

In running under four minutes with no credits or title cards, it is absolutely impossible to know when the loop of *Re-Run* starts and when it ends.²⁵ The very slow, and almost imperceptible, back-and-forth movement lasts throughout the loop, which also seems to indicate that the video duration could have been shorter or longer. The movement of the crowd is similar to that of a metronome or pendulum; unless we stop the motion, it could continue eternally. As curator Lorna Brown argues, “To stretch Cartier-Bresson’s decisive moment into a durational loop is to challenge the idea that such a moment is gone,” and by “slowing it down and adding time to it,” it gives more time to the viewers to consider the uncertainty of that moment.”²⁶ By reenacting this event, Raqs suggests that such vacillating historical moments are still happening throughout the world and that scenes of panicked crowds are a fact of the present and the future too. Shuddhabrata Sengupta stated that *Re-Run* reenacts the 1948 bank run, but it “is as much about today” since it also refers to the recent global economic crisis.²⁷ He added, commenting on the collective’s creation process, “[t]he way we produce work is always to create these kinds of encounters between something that looks backwards, something that looks at the present and something that looks ahead.”²⁸ *Re-Run* is a work that enters into dialogue with the modern

history of China and the history of photography. The reenactment staged by Raqs does not intend to bring us back to the past or to restage the moment of panic documented by Cartier-Bresson. On the contrary, it calls attention to that frozen moment, and it also relates it to the present and projects it into the future as well. It is no longer about China’s transition from one government to another and the instability of this transitional period, but is instead more

“
[Raqs Media Collective’s] Re-Run [...] enters into dialogue with the modern history of China and the history of photography.
”

broadly about responses to different types of crises. It is also about how time affects our interpretation of these events, and how, to a certain extent, history seems to repeat itself.

Another aspect that Cartier-Bresson's image highlights, and one that is also key to the interpretation of Raqs's reenactment of the bank run, is the erratic behavior of the crowd.²⁹ As Gustave Le Bon wrote in his 1895 book *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*: "A crowd is at the mercy of all external exciting causes, and reflects their incessant variations. It is the slave of the impulses which it receives."³⁰ As depicted in Cartier-Bresson's photograph, the intensity of the moment and the urgency to get a hold of gold in order to be able to face the uncertain financial future led the inhabitants of Shanghai to put their own interests first and to disregard courtesy or respect for social order. Cartier-Bresson defines what he refers to as "the decisive moment" as the moment that reveals the larger truth of a situation. In this case, what his photograph reveals is the behavior of a panicked crowd. The 1948 image was taken during a moment of great instability—namely, a civil war—and the photographer was pressed for time. Cartier-Bresson's image is also a revealing one due to the fact that it depicts a crowd. As Tie Xiao writes in *Revolutionary Waves: The Crowd in Modern China*, "[t]he advent of the crowd is one of the most dramatic stories in China's crisis-ridden transition from dynastic empire to nation-state."³¹ In 2013, when Raqs was invited to make a work for the Chinese audience, China had become a global economic powerhouse. Yet *Re-Run* was created just a few years after the 2008 economic crisis and in the context in which the Chinese economy kept rising. Therefore, the slowed-down reenacted bank run acts as both a warning and an invitation to think about economic growth in China.

While *Re-Run* is a video installation that was created at the demand of curators Chang Tsong-zung and Li Zhenhua for a specific audience, it is nevertheless a work that can be exhibited in very different contexts due to its subject and the fundamental questions that it raises. For instance, it was shown in the *To refuse/ To wait/ To sleep* exhibition (2017) organized by the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery in Vancouver, Canada. This exhibition explored belief and prediction in economic models as well as the question of precarious labor and the existence of illicit and marginalized markets. The specific *framing* of the exhibition invited the viewers to consider *Re-Run* in an international context of economic crises.³² In the spring and summer of 2018, the video installation was featured in the

major solo exhibition presented at K21 in Düsseldorf, Germany. A number of questions relating to time, such as “What is time?,” “What does it mean to measure time?,” and “How does time relate to space and history?,” served as the starting point of the exhibition. In this exhibition, *Re-Run* was presented alongside works in which the collective approached temporality differently. For instance, the double projection *Strikes at Time* is a work that explores the passage of time, its measure, and how it is occupied by workers during the day and at night. All the works included in the K21 exhibition followed the collective’s self-declared imperative of “kinetic contemplation” and were demonstrations of the different ways that Raqs proceeds to sculpt in time.³³ By animating the Cartier-Bresson’s photograph and by slowing down the motion of the erratic crowd, Raqs opened up a space of contemplation. By witnessing the passage of time, by becoming aware of its own temporariness, the audience is invited to reflect on the connections between past and present in order to look into the future.

CONCLUSION: OF EXTENDED DURATIONS AND LOOPED SCENES

As art historian Christine Ross has argued, video is a practice that has “articulated itself along a split between defenders of extendedness and eventfulness, duration and immediacy.”³⁴ *Re-Run* and *A Risky Jump* can be situated on the side of extendedness and duration. The protracted temporalities of these two works enable the spectators to explore the parameters of the frame, to focus on different elements. By exploring the possibilities of what slow motion and looping have to offer, both Billings and Raqs invite the viewers to scrutinize the projected images in a way that would be impossible if seen in real time. As Lutz Koepnick reminds us, slow-motion images can “serve the purpose of intensifying the viewer’s viewing, not simply in the sense of sharpening our awareness for things normally left unnoticed, but of allowing us to explore the indeterminate space between represented time and the real time of our viewing.”³⁵ This indeterminate space is precisely what *A Risky Jump* and *Re-Run* invite us to identify, ponder, and appreciate.

Re-Run and *A Risky Jump* belong to a group of video- and film-based artworks and made by contemporary artists that employ slow motion. The propositions put forth by Raqs Media Collective and Scott Billings are, in principle, possible

to experience in their entirety, considering that both works have a duration of a few minutes; yet the looping of *Re-Run* and the absence of indication of when the sequence starts and when it ends turn it into a work of an endless duration. The artists' intentions do not lie in the possibility of experiencing the work according to its duration, but rather they are to explore the parameters of the frames, to scrutinize the facial expressions, the movements of the bodies, and to notice the back-and-forth motion of the crowd in order to feel and connect all these elements to the present. Ultimately, with *A Risky Jump* and *Re-Run*, what the audience is being presented with are microscopic views of human behaviors as well as questions on how history and memories are documented, written, interpreted, and edited.

/ **Notes** /

¹ See Dziga Vertov, "Early Thoughts," in *Film Culture Reader*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (1970; New York: Cooper Square, 2000), 363; and *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, Annette Michelson, ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xviii–xx, 40–41, and 123–24.

² Dziga Vertov, "Three Songs for Lenin and Kino-Eye" (1934), in Vertov, *Kino-Eye*, 123.

³ Dziga Vertov, "Early Thoughts," 363.

⁴ See Peter Galassi, "Old Worlds, Modern Times," in *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century*, ed. Peter Galassi (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 13–14. The People's Republic of China was declared in 1949.

⁵ These captions were added to the photograph by Cartier-Bresson and are the ones that Magnum Photos uses when granting permission to reproduce the image. See also Cornell Capa, ed., *Behind the Great Wall of China: Photographs from 1870 to the Present* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1972).

⁶ Arden Reed, *Slow Art: The Experience of Looking, Sacred Images to James Turrell* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 19; 36.

⁷ Scott Billings, e-mail message to author, October 30, 2018.

⁸ A part of my description of this work was initially published in my review of Billings's exhibition *A Risky Jump* (Wil Aballe Art Projects, Vancouver, 19 March–18 April 2015). See Ariane Noël de Tilly, "Altered States of Perception in the Work of Scott Billings," *Whitehot Magazine*, June 2015, <http://whitehotmagazine.com/articles/scott-billings-risky-jump/3217>.

⁹ Scott Billings, e-mail message to author, May 11, 2018.

¹⁰ Scott Billings, e-mail message to author, May 30, 2019.

¹¹ For *The Wolfman*, Billings used a CRT television monitor and a rare earth magnet placed at the center of the screen. The magnet enhances the psychedelic effect and also distorts the shape of the artist's body, therefore playing with our perception of movement. This specific work draws from different moments of the history of video, performance, and television, including the early experiments of Nam June Paik with television monitors and magnets, the performances of Bruce Nauman in his studio, and television entertainment for children during the 1970s.

¹² See the compelling analysis by Annette Michelson of Vertov and Moholy-Nagy's cinema as both a scientific and aesthetic process. Annette Michelson, introduction to Vertov, *Kino-Eye*, xv–lxi.

¹³ For more information on the staging of *Leap into the Void*, see Remi Parcollet, "Les archives Harry Shunk-Janos Kender. Une histoire visuelle de l'art contemporain," *Les Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, no. 146 (Winter 2018–19): 52–53.

¹⁴ Of note, prior to obtaining a B.F.A. from the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design and an M.F.A. from the University of British Columbia, Billings studied mechanical engineering at the University of Waterloo. Custom-made apparatuses are often used in his projects.

¹⁵ Scott Billings, conversation with the author, June 2015.

¹⁶ "Extra Time—Raqs Media Collective," *Chronus Art Center, Shanghai*, http://www.chronusartcenter.org/en/extra_time/.

¹⁷ For more information on the diversity of projects instigated by West Heavens, see the program's website: <http://westheavens.net/en>.

¹⁸ Since the early 2000s, Raqs Media Collective has exhibited extensively around the world, edited several publications, and curated exhibitions, notably the INSERT2014 (New Delhi, 2014) and *Why Not Ask Again* (Shanghai Biennale 2016). For an insightful discussion of Raqs Media Collective's creative and collaborative approach, see Melissa Karmen Lee, Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula, and Shuddhabrata Sengupta, "Protest as Polyphony: An Interview with Raqs Media Collective," *ASAP/Journal* 3, no. 2 (May 2018): 187–202.

¹⁹ See Sun Shuangjie, "Extra Time," *Global Times*, August 28, 2013, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/807018.shtml>.

²⁰ The topic of reenactment has been the focus of such exhibitions (and their related catalogues) as *Life, Once More: Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art* (Witte de With, Rotterdam, 2005), *History Will Repeat Itself: Strategies of Re-enactment in Contemporary (Media) Art and Performance* (Hartware MedienKunstVerein, Dortmund, and KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 2007–2008), and *Reality Check* (Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, 2008–2009), as well as in the publication *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, ed. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2012). Additionally, the art magazine *ESSE Arts + Opinions* released a thematic issue on "Re-enactment" in the fall of 2013.

²¹ Marianne Torp, "Reality Re-checked: Docufication, Re-enactment, and the Recontextualisation of the Object in Recent Art," in *Reality Check*, ed. Sven Bjerkhof (Copenhagen: Statens Museum for Kunst, 2008), 22.

²² Inke Arns, "History Will Repeat Itself," in *History Will Repeat Itself: Strategies of Re-enactment in Contemporary (Media) Art and Performance*, ed. Inke Arns and Gabrielle Horn (Frankfurt, Germany: Revolver, 2007), 43; original emphasis.

²³ As scholar Bill Nichols has pointed out, documentaries since the 1980s have again started to play a significant role. See Bill Nichols, "Documentary Reenactment and the Fantasmatic Subject," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 1 (Autumn 2008): 72. The year after Nichols published his article, the journal *Framework* published a dossier on reenactment in contemporary film, video, and performance.

²⁴ Jonathan Kahana, "Introduction: What Now? Presenting Reenactment," in "Reenactment Dossier and Cinephilia Dossier," spec. issue, Jonathan Kahana, *Framework* 50, nos. 1–2 (Spring/Fall 2009): 58.

²⁵ The duration of the video isn't usually specified when *Re-Run* is exhibited, but it was communicated to the author per e-mail. Shuddhabrata Sengupta (for Raqs Media Collective), e-mail message to author, August 20, 2018.

²⁶ Lorna Brown, "One More Time," in *To refuse/To wait/To sleep* (Vancouver, BC: Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery, 2017), 32.

²⁷ Quoted in Shuangjie, "Extra Time."

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Authors who have studied the psychology of masses and crowds, including Gabriel Tarde, Gustave Le Bon, and Sigmund Freud, argue that humans in crowds have a tendency of regressing to primal impulses.

³⁰ Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895; Kitchener, ON: Batoche, 2001), 21.

³¹ Tie Xiao, *Revolutionary Waves: The Crowd in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2017), 2.

³² The term "framing" is used here in the sense given to it by Mieke Bal who prefers the use of "framed" to "contextualized." Bal argues that "[c]ontext is primarily a noun that refers to something static," whereas the "act of framing . . . produces an event." See Mieke Bal, "Framing," in *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 135.

³³ Raqs Media Collective, "About," *Raqs Media Collective*, <https://www.raqsmediacollective.net/>.

³⁴ Christine Ross, "The Temporalities of Video: Extendedness Revisited," *Art Journal* 65, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 84.

³⁵ Lutz Koepnick, *On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 190.