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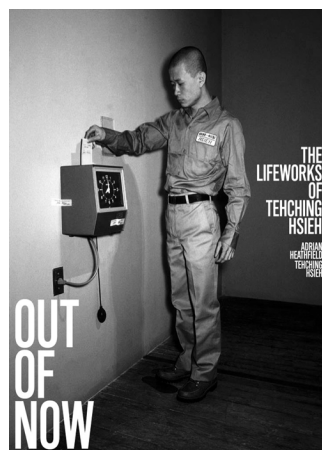
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Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh.

By Adrian Heathfield and Tehching Hsieh. London and Cambridge, MA: Live Art Development Agency and MIT Press, 2009; 384 pp.; Illustrated. \$49.95 cloth.

Between 1978 and 1986, the Taiwanese American artist Tehching Hsieh carried out a series of extraordinary durational performances. Over the course of these performances, each of which lasted one year, Hsieh moved from remaining locked in a cell in his studio without any communication with the outside world, to punching a time clock on the hour every hour, to living outdoors in New York City without ever entering any shelter, to being tied together at the waist with the artist Linda Montano. For his final yearlong performance, Hsieh took a vow of abstinence from all art-related activities, stating that he would “not do art, not talk art, not see art...” for the duration. Hsieh followed this with an even more prolonged act of removal from the art world: a 13-year piece stretching from 31 December 1986 to 31 December 1999 in which he vowed to make art but not show it publicly.

Taken together, Hsieh’s five yearlong pieces and one 13-year-long performance form a body of work that is unique in its use of extended duration and its exploration of the boundaries between art and life. But Hsieh’s oeuvre has received little critical attention, in no small part because his performances have largely involved his own removal from public view. *Out of Now:*



The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh, jointly authored by Adrian Heathfield and Hsieh, is the first publication to give sustained attention to this impressive body of work.

An aesthetic object in itself, *Out of Now* is a unique contribution to the field that blurs distinctions between theory and practice and offers a compelling exploration of the relationship between performance and the act of writing about performance. In addition to making available for the first time in book form the documentation of Hsieh's "lifeworks" (Heathfield's term), this beautifully produced volume includes six chapters and an introduction by Heathfield, an edited transcription of an extended conversation between Heathfield and Hsieh (which includes discussion and documentation of some of Hsieh's earlier, lesser-known works), and a series of brief artistic and critical responses by Peggy Phelan, Marina Abramović, Tim Etchells, Santiago Sierra, and Carol Becker. Reinventing the monograph as "a provisional dialogue of numerous distinct voices and forms" (12), the book actively investigates the forms and methods through which we present and represent artistic practice, speak and write about it, and experience and understand it. By placing artistic work that could appear to have been largely solitary in nature in dialogue with many voices and refusing to give ultimate authority to any of those voices to tell the "truth" of Hsieh's lifeworks, *Out of Now* manifests the contingency of all acts, including acts of interpretation, and reminds us that even apparently isolated acts—whether the work of the artist or of the one who interprets his or her work—are always performed in relation.

Although the book begins with Heathfield's evocative writing, many readers will not start this story, as Heathfield calls it, at the beginning, but rather will plunge headlong into the more than 250 pages of images that form the book's core before returning to the opening pages where dense columns of print promise to provide a language for what one has seen. Mesmerizing to behold, the documentation of Hsieh's work is simultaneously minimalist and profuse, and *Out of Now* does an excellent job of presenting it in the fullness of its quotidian logic. Daily photos of Hsieh, captured in the same position, in the same outfit, with the same blank stare; single frames of film shot hourly; and images of daily time cards, daily maps, and daily signed and sealed cassette tapes accumulate over pages. These are punctuated by images of the typed statements with which Hsieh inaugurated each of his pieces, the posters he used to announce the work, and signed affidavits by others confirming that Hsieh abided by the strict conditions he set for himself.

When one turns to the chapters that make up the first section of the book, "Impress of Time," one finds that Heathfield offers far more than an introduction to Hsieh's art. He renders a careful and considered tracing of Hsieh's oeuvre, staging his own encounter with it and locating it within a larger conversation about art and life, temporality and materiality, freedom and constraint. In the process, Heathfield places Hsieh's work in dialogue with that of numerous artists, from those we might expect (Bas Jan Ader, On Kawara, Ulay and Abramović) to some delightfully surprising (Harry Houdini, Philippe Petit). He also skillfully negotiates the intermedial nature of Hsieh's practice, transitioning fluently between considerations of performance, photography, and film. Attending closely to the form and movement of Hsieh's work, as well as to the ethical implications of his durational performances, Heathfield opens up an understanding of the aesthetics of duration that is sensitive and compelling. Whether one is interested in Tehching Hsieh's work specifically, or in durational art more generally, Heathfield's voice is certainly one to pay attention to.

It is also a voice that invites dialogue, as the choice to conclude the book with the words of others demonstrates. The penultimate section of the book comprises a series of "Letters" to Hsieh written specifically for this volume, along with documentation of others written to Hsieh over the course of his lifeworks (including notes from artists such as Jackson Mac Low and Ray Johnson). In this section, one finds a series of lovely missives written by Peggy Phelan about her first encounters with Hsieh during his outdoor performance, before she knew who he was. In a manner that is personal and poetic, Phelan writes of the hope and faith that fill the gaps

between those events and her writing about them. Marina Abramović reflects on some of the similarities and differences between Hsieh's practice and her own and considers how it is that artists earn their spectators' trust. Tim Etchells writes honestly about his reactions to the documentation of Hsieh's work and contemplates productively the fear the work induces in him. And Santiago Sierra offers not so much a letter as a rejoinder to Hsieh's oeuvre with 106 proposals for "One Year Works" of his own. The book concludes with "After Thoughts" by Carol Becker, who offers her own take on Hsieh's work, which she describes as seeking "a confrontation with the void and a stilling of the world" (368).

Reflecting on the book as a whole, Becker writes "an intentional community has been formed around this fundamentally solitary project of Hsieh's life and work" (369). It is a credit to Heathfield that he has opened up the often solitary project of writing about art to this gathering of voices. With *Out of Now*, Heathfield has initiated an important conversation that, like the lifeworks around which it revolves, will reverberate for a long time to come.

—Lara Shalson

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Tehching Hsieh: One Year Performance: Art Documents 1978–1999. DVD-ROM-PC/MAC.

By Tehching Hsieh, with accompanying text by Steven Shaviro. 2000. £18.00.

No one could possibly watch the hunger artist continuously, day and night, and so no one could produce first-hand evidence that the fast had really been rigorous and continuous; only the artist himself could know that, he was therefore bound to be the sole completely satisfied spectator of his own fast.

—Franz Kafka, "The Hunger Artist"
([1971] 1983:269–70)



Tehching Hsieh's DVD-ROM, *Tehching Hsieh: One Year Performance: Art Documents 1978–1999*, begins with a misspelling of the artist's name: *Theching Hsieh*. This momentary editorial slip, renaming, again, an artist who renamed himself in his earliest *One Year Performances* from "Tehching" to "Sam," becomes a moment of visual slippage as well, reminding the viewer that this digitized compendium to and of Hsieh's work is, like the work itself, at least partially predicated upon the fact of something being missed. This isn't entirely inappropriate, dependent as Hsieh's works are on a mutual trust assumed between artist and intermittent spectator. For Hsieh's first *One Year Performance*, colloquially known as "Cage Piece" (1978/79), he allowed visitors to only 19 of the 365 days it entailed; for the second, "Time Clock Piece" (1980/81), only 14; and, for the third, "Outdoor Piece" (1981/82), only one, on 20 March 1982.

While the DVD-ROM allows a viewer seemingly unlimited access to what in its introduction Steven Shaviro refers to as a "body of evidence," the experience becomes as guided by that