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Page 2: Wang Guangyi, *Great Criticism—Coca-Cola*,
1993 (detail of fig. 5.11).

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12.19 Barbara Campbell
The Challenge of Healing.
 Writing prompt for
 performance #1 of *1001
 Nights Cast*. Watercolor
 on paper, 3 1/8 x 4 1/8 in
 (8 x 10.5 cm), 21 June
 2005. *At the End of the
 Day*. Writing prompt
 for performance #1001
 of *1001 Nights Cast*.
 Watercolor on paper,
 3 1/8 x 4 1/8 in (8 x 10.5 cm),
 17 March 2008.
 Courtesy of the artist.

the challenge of healing

At the end of the day,

before a practice mirror and barre in his New York dance studio, changing position slightly when Trevor Carlson, the director of Cunningham's dance company, consulting a stopwatch, signaled each of the three movements dividing time within 4'33". Using 16mm film, Dean recorded what took place in six takes. Only ambient sounds are heard. For the installation at the Dia:Beacon, New York, in 2008, the films were projected simultaneously on six hanging screens in the basement galleries. The whirring of the projectors and the sounds occurring while watching add to the near-silence. But the focus is on a dancer who confines himself as closely as possible to stillness—a state as unachievable as absolute silence. Instead, stasis results, and is what we see.

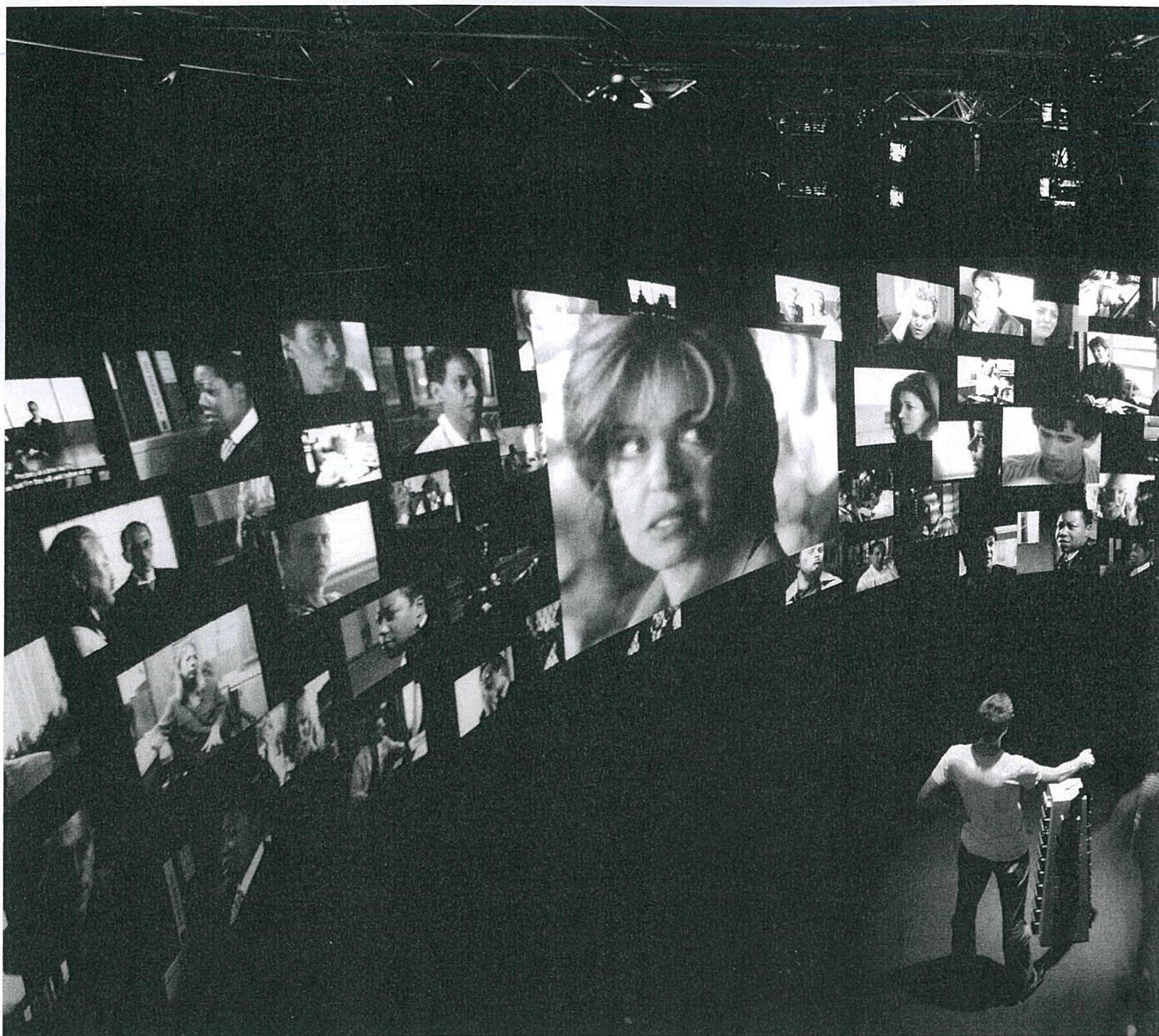
Or, at least, so it seems. We are, after all, watching a performer enact "stillness." And we are watching six distinct films of what may or may not be the same "performance." Ambiguities such as these are at the heart of Dean's work, as they were at that of Cage and Cunningham. *New York Times* critic Holland Cotter summed it up: "Mr. Cunningham's choreography has always had an existential dimension. 'Stillness' is about duration and change, which are the same, and are also the substance of life and history. Ms. Dean's film of Mr. Cunningham's performance is about the sound and motion of history in action: the personal history of one man's fidelity to the memory of another; the cultural history of a living artist transmitting and rejuvenating the creative essence of one who has died; the contemporary history of a younger artist preserving and honoring all this, and the two men (the piece is above all a portrait of Mr. Cunningham) in her art."³³ Merce Cunningham died in July 2009.

Connectivity across time and space, but above all between people, is a preoccupation of the current generation of emerging artists. Brazilian artist Rivane Neuenschwander's participatory installation *I Wish Your Wish* (Fig. 12.18) was suggested by pilgrimage practice at the church of Nosso Senhor do Bonfim, Salvador, where visitors are offered ribbons that they tie to their wrists and knot when they make a wish. Tradition has it that the wish will come true when the band falls off. Neuenschwander began with a group of friends writing short statements expressing their fondest wishes, which she then silkscreened onto brightly colored ribbons, creating a mural-length array of ribbons hanging in

dense rows from small holes drilled into the gallery wall. At each installation, visitors are invited to take the ribbon that comes closest to expressing a wish of their own, attach it to their wrist, and wear it until the ribbon disintegrates. They may also write a wish on a blank strip of paper, to be passed on to the artist, screened onto a ribbon, and added to the next installation. First shown at the Museu de Arte Moderna Aluisio Magalhaes, Recife, Brazil, in 2003, the installations have proven popular elsewhere, including at the Carnegie International, Pittsburgh (2008).

There is a desire here to share personal experiences—even deeply affecting ones—with many others, not only friends and acquaintances, but also strangers, as if the spreading of feeling might lighten the original bearer's burden, and the stresses of contemporary life might be more readily faced. Organizing time, inventing a "ritual," however temporarily, is a common strategy in this process. Australian artist Barbara Campbell's *1001 Nights Cast* (Fig. 12.19), a "durational performance" undertaken between 2005 and 2008, was inspired by the classic Arabian tale *The 1001 Nights*, in which the virgin bride Scheherazade staves off execution by telling a vengeful king a series of stories both beguiling and unfinished. As is well known, Scheherazade eventually succeeds in wearing down his homicidal rage at being wronged by an unfaithful wife, thereby saving herself—and, by implication, 1,000 others. Triggered by the accidental death of her husband, sculptor and performance artist Neil Roberts, Campbell's *1001 Nights Cast* enacts a process of mourning on the part of Campbell herself and, in ways specific to them, the 1,000 other participants. Both Scheherazade and Campbell use storytelling to stave off death: in Campbell's case, the all-consuming memory of death's arbitrariness, and the death that threatens within endless, unconsumed mourning. The following poem sets the tone of the project:

In a faraway land a gentle man dies.
 His bride is bereft. She travels across continents
 looking for a reason to keep living.
 Every night at sunset she is greeted by
 a stranger who gives her a story to
 heal her heart and continue with her journey.
 She does so for 1001 nights.



1001 Nights Cast has dimensions that reach beyond one person's grief. It uses a clear temporal framework derived from early Conceptualism to connect the mutually unknowable subjectivity that we all share. It also uses the Internet, contemporary medium *par excellence* for connecting widely dispersed, isolated subjectivities. Each day from June 21, 2005 to March 17, 2008, Campbell read newspaper accounts of events in the Middle East, from which she then chose a short phrase that she painted in watercolor and, at sunset, posted on a website devoted to the project.³⁴ Viewers were invited to respond by writing, during the subsequent 24 hours, a story of no more than 1,000 words that could take any form and address any subject that the quotation suggested to the author. These were then posted on the site.

More than mere occasional participation in the currents of everyday life, artists working in these ways seek a profound integration with them, an immersion in duration that, by slow yet irreversible paradox, becomes atemporal. It is as if absolute contemporaneity with life as it is being lived all around us becomes a gateway to the

suddenly capacious, perhaps infinite, spatiality of time. This is not a spiritual quest, as no delivery from the world is expected. We are going nowhere: it is coming here. We have arrived at the ground zero of the ways in which many contemporary artists are responding to the disjunctive strangeness that seems to typify our experience of the present.

Yet this state of being is also, paradoxically, an imagining of the future. In 1952, Guy Debord, leader of the Situationists, predicted: "The art of the future will entail the shattering of situations, or nothing."³⁵ To this avant-garde absolutist, there were only two, quite antithetical options: total transformation of reality, or utter oblivion for all. This is a belated, cultural version of modernity's early credo: "Revolution or death!" Recent futurism, however ironic about its actual prospects, is inspired by a more expansive yet inclusive sense of the world's flux—not least that our being is dispersed through time, space, and the lives of others, and that what used to be understood as nothingness is, in fact, a richly generative froth, full of wonders. In a spirit now gaining