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Undefined genre, or, A study into work reliant on visual art mediums to transform the protagonist function of the human body in performance

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Undefined Genre

or

**A study into work reliant on visual art
mediums to transform the protagonist function
of the human body in performance**



Image 1

Thesis

Tony Currie

2012 Bachelor of Arts Honours (Dance)

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study into performance art, specifically examples of work in which the artist engages with a physical object or visual arts medium to create a work of art in the presence of an audience. The subsequent work of art created can vary from works on paper, to living structures, or any other physical and tangible structure. I have addressed the audience demographic of performance art, the genre's conceptual genesis, its ephemeral nature, and its commoditisation to analyse its relevance to the current artistic climate. During my study, an importance has been placed on live performance, not on dance or visual arts specifically, but where the divide between the two is blurred.

I have established a historical timeline of performance art relevant to the genre of performance I am discussing and made reference to various artists, arts movements and institutions that have influenced the development of performance art from the late 19th century to present. These artists and movements include Futurism, Dada, the Bauhaus, Oskar Schlemmer, Yves Klein, Joseph Beuys, the Judson Dance Group, Inhobodress, the Experimental Art Foundation, and Marina Abramović.

Generally my findings conclude that performance art and work of this genre resists finite definition and, furthermore, that doing such would not be useful for any purpose. I have recognised, however, that this study presents important questions in relation to the sustainability of performance art practice and that the commoditisation of this undefined genre could lead to greater wealth within the performance art community.

In the initial outset of this study, I proposed to carry out my own work of performance art and collect qualitative data in correspondence. It has proved more valuable for this stage of my research to base my findings on the work of others, as without this foundation of knowledge and analysis the research has provided, the personal generation of art for the purpose of research would be unwise and somewhat naive. A future deeper study into this genre and the sustainability of performance art through a Masters Degree or higher would be an appropriate platform for such data collection.

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INTRODUCTION

Within Live Art and Performance Art there is one very specific form of performance that is thus far undefined as a discrete medium. This thesis will explore this genre that is, work that is dependent on visual arts and live performance to occur, or work that through live performance transforms the function of the physical human body in space and time in some way by use of a visual arts' medium. Note – in this thesis the term *medium* will be used in reference to a tangible material or device used by an artist to create work.

The basic principles of *Live Art* and *Performance Art* can be defined as an attempt to classify what occurs when a performer *is* the artist or a performance takes place in the name of art as its cause, often under the auspices of a specific school (Futurism, Minimalism, or Postmodernism for example).

Although 'by its very nature, performance defies precise or easy definition beyond the simple declaration that it is live art by artists' (Goldberg, R. 2001), it is my aim to grant this undefined genre such a definition (if not by a name then by pertaining to a collection of ideas) through the investigation of its principal ideologies and its exclusion of that which does not serve its purposes.

By means of research, I will endeavour to answer and discuss the following: What is Live Art? What is Performance Art? What restrictions are required for work to be considered dependent on visual arts and live performance to occur? What are the conceptual influences for the creation of this kind of work? Or why is this work created? Is said work an ephemeral or enduring/tangible art form and can it hence be sold or exchanged as a commodity? What is the typical audience demographic for said work? Could this work be given a term separate to Live Art, Performance Art or Happening?

The thesis will also examine and discuss the attitudes towards this art form from the perspectives of *trained* (having performance or artistic knowledge) audiences and practicing artists to illustrate and consider its value within current artistic and social climates.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE AND CONTEXT

This thesis begins by establishing a historical timeline of Performance Art and Live Art, referring to the works of arts' academics, choreographers, and artists to establish the context in which this genre of work has developed and where it stands currently. Note that this historical timeline in many instances will include work that does not find itself specifically in the category of work that I intend to discuss in detail, though it contributes to the basis from which it has been formed. Furthermore, this timeline will not include all elements of the arts movements discussed, for a general focus has been placed on work that gives evidence of conceptual or contextual contributions to the expansion of the topic of this thesis.

Performance Art has been the subject of various literary and practical studies, many of which include Live Art as its umbrella term though no journal, book or dissertation found through my research thus far has been written with the sole purpose of exploring and defining work that is dependent on visual art and live performance to successfully occur. This inattention by no means gives warrant to disregard or undervalue the validity of this form; rather it presents an opportunity for me to bridge this void.

'The term performance art is relatively new; it is probable that the American artist Vito Acconci first used it in an essay titled 'Vito Acconci on Activity and Performance' published in *Art and Artists* in May 1970.' (Marsh, A. 1992)

It must be said that RoseLee Goldberg (USA) is the author of most published literature on the historical context of Performance Art and I will refer to her studies on numerous occasions throughout this study. Another prominent researcher in performance and body art, Amelia Jones, refers to Goldberg as an 'important source who has quantified, defined and historicized what she calls performance art in a series of books that have been published' (Jones, A. As interviewed by Harris, J. 2007). Therefore the use of the term *Performance Art* within this thesis is in reference to Goldberg's (by no means finite) definition. [See her book: *Performance Art: From Futurism to Present* (2001)].

The development of Performance Art in the 20th century has been linked to various major arts movements and educational institutions including Futurism, Dada, the Bauhaus, Minimalism, Black Mountain College and the New School for Social Research (New York). This development can then also be divided into lesser arts movements including Live Art, Happenings, and Body Art.

Futurism

'Early Futurist performance was more manifesto than practice, more propaganda than actual production' (Goldberg, R. 2001). Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1896) is considered to be the first Futurist performance, in which the lead character frequently spoke the word 'Merde'. At this time the word was



Image 2

absolutely taboo in any circumstance and hence audience members responded in uproar, the orchestra broke out in fistfights and those who chose to endure the performance constantly whistled and applauded in delight (Goldberg, R. 2001). Until this instance a performance had not been created for the purpose of generating such a reaction. This work also brought together artists including Pierre Bonnard, Jean-Édouard Vuillard, Toulouse-Lautrec, Paul Sérusier and Filippo Tommaso. Marinetti's *Roi Bombance* (1909), a 'satire of

revolution and democracy' (Goldberg, R. 2001) created a similar response.

Self proclaimed Futurists then inaugurated Futurist Evenings in 1910 in a small café in Austria where artists 'raged against the cult of tradition and

commercialization of art, singing the praises of patriotic militarism and war.’ (Goldberg, R. 2001). The café artists then took their art to the streets wearing outrageous attires including vegetables and cooking spoons, which were later established as trademark outfits. (Goldberg, R. 2001). The core values of Futurism had developed to focus on incorporating the energy and dynamism of modern technology into art. ‘[Umberto] Boccioni for example had written ‘that painting was no longer an exterior scene, [but] the setting of a theatrical spectacle.’ (Goldberg, R. 2001).

Futurists refused to conform to the use of a single form to portray their art works, which is a notion that has been carried forward (whether intentionally or not) through the entirety of Performance Art history.

Dada

The infamous arts movement, Dada, grew its roots in Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, opened by artists Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings in 1916, to which artists brought paintings and photographs to hang on the walls and where a vast array of performances took place including dances by Rudolf von Laban and Ball himself.

During a poetry reading at Cabaret Voltaire in 1916, Ball



Image 3

wore a high, blue-and-white-striped witch doctor’s hat; his legs were covered in blue cardboard tubes which came up to his hips so that he looked like an obelisk; and he wore a huge cardboard collar, scarlet inside and gold outside, which he raised and lowered like wings (Goldberg, R. 2001)

as he moved from side to side to read his papers. This could be one of the earliest performances in which a visual arts medium (cardboard costume) transforms

the function of the physical human body in space. Ball's body became a human statue.



Image 4

It was at the Cabaret that Dada artists gave passionate, offensive presentations protesting against political climates in the name of art. Much like the Futurists, Dadas walked the streets in absurd attire, though in these cases with a far more shocking or aggressive nature such as George Grosz's *Death Dada* which made appearances throughout 1918. (Goldberg, R. 2001).

'To [the artists], Dada represented the destruction of established order, which was acceptable. What was unacceptable, however, was the fact that that they saw no new value arising from the ashes of past values.' (Goldberg, R. 2001). The evidence stated does show that the concepts of Dada did in fact stem almost directly from those of its precursor, Futurism.

The Bauhaus

'The development of performance in the twenties in Germany was due largely to the pioneering work of Oskar Schlemmer in the Bauhaus.' (Goldberg, R. (2001).

Almost in complete opposition to the Futurists and Dadas, members of the Bauhaus in Weimar, Germany, sought to create unification across all of the arts.

Oskar Schlemmer

A prominent figure in my research of early performance art is Oskar Schlemmer who before his invitation in 1921 to supervise the Stage Workshop at the Bauhaus had generated a sound reputation as a painter and sculptor in Stuttgart.

Schlemmer's work focused on the basic elements of art and design being space, form, colour, light, and movement and, although much of his earlier work does not relate to this study, a considerable amount of his later work does quite

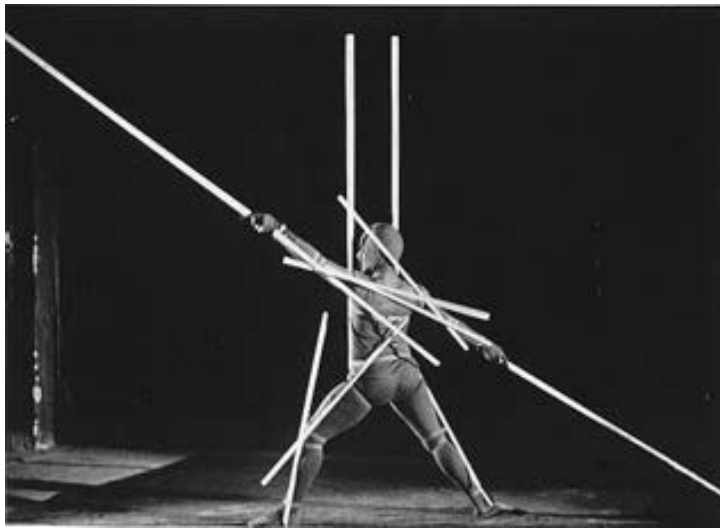


Image 5

directly. In his *Slat Dance* (1927) for example 'the actions of lifting and bending the limbs of the body could be seen only in the movements of the long, thin slats projecting from the body of the dancer.' (Goldberg, R. 2001). This performance is an ideal example of work

that is entirely dependent on visual art and live performance as, without the dancer, the slats would not be given the freedom of movement and therefore be useless as a medium.

'*Glass Dance* (1929), executed by Carla Grosch wearing a hooped skirt of glass rods, head covered in a glass globe and carrying glass spheres, equally restricted the dancer's movements.' (Goldberg, R. 2001). This work, like *Slat Dance*, demonstrates the use of both visual art and performance mediums to create a work unified as a whole.

'Schlemmer emphasized the 'object' quality of the dancers and each performance achieved his desired 'mechanical effect', not unlike that of puppets.' (Goldberg, R. 2001). Before the Bauhaus, the notion of the body as an *object* had not been established. Much like the Futurist notion of utilizing multiple mediums, this concept of objectifying the body has been prominent throughout the further development of this genre of performance and is still currently used.

One of Schlemmer's most acclaimed works, *Triadic Ballet* (1922), draws heavily on colour and spatial theory, with the use of everyday movement for choreography. This work is quite often brought up in discussion of Performance

Art, as similarly to *Slat Dance*, the costumes and set were designed by the artist; the dancers set the shapes and colour in motion, hence creating kinetic art.

Metal Dance 'was reported in the Basler National Zeitung, on 30 April 1927: 'The curtain rises. Black backdrop and black stage floor. Deep down stage, a cave lights up, not much larger than a door. The cave is made of highly reflecting corrugated tin plate set on edge. A female figure steps out from inside. She is wearing white tights. Head and hands are enclosed by shiny, silvery spheres. Metallically crisp, smooth and shining music sets the figure to performing crisp movements...the whole thing is very brief, fading away like an apparition.' (Goldberg, R. 2001). In this instance, Schlemmer uses the dancer in a similar way to that of *Slat Dance* and



Image 6

Glass Dance though shifts her function as the protagonist performer to become part of a greater visual display, including the set and lighting design.

Xanti Schawinsky

Another prominent Bauhaus figure, Xanti Schawinsky, created *Circus* (1924), which similarly to Schlemmer's works utilized elaborate costume to create a visual display. *Circus* featured a performer dressed almost like a wooden doll with a greatly restricted range of movement having one leg almost completely unmovable. The costume expressed 'essentially a formal and pictorial concept. It was visual theatre, a realisation of paintings and constructions in motion, ideas in colour, form and space and their dramatic inter-action' (Goldberg, R. 2001). This work reflected the Bauhaus Theatre Workshop's aim to '[emphasize] performance as a means to create equivalents in real painting or sculpture,

investigating the relationship between sound, movement, space, and light.’ (Goldberg, R. 2012).

It is important to state that work emerging from the Bauhaus

was never intentionally provocative or overtly political as the Futurists, Dadas or Surrealists had been. Nevertheless, like them, the Bauhaus reinforced the importance of performance as a medium in its own right. (Goldberg, R. 2001).

Live Art

A major influence in the direction my research has taken is Joshua Sofaer’s mostly concise definition of Live Art. He defines it as ‘when an artist chooses to make work directly in front of the audience in space and time’ and states that it ‘comes in to being at the actual moment of encounter between artists and spectator.’ (Sofaer, J. 2002). He believes the term Live Art was ‘born out of frustration by arts professionals to account for art practices that expanded or escaped the classifications in use.’ And that it is ‘founded in a conceptual framework where the performer, the director, the ‘doer’, is the artist.’ He also states that ‘at least part of the definition of Live Art has to be its resistance to definition.’ (Sofaer, J. 2002). Even though this may seem to quite succinctly describe what it is I am studying, implying a body present in an ‘art’ work, it still leaves a broad opening of the definition and does not mention the work being dependent on both mediums.

Black Mountain College, North Carolina

In the wake of World War II, many Bauhaus artists travelled to America (Black Mountain College in particular) to continue their practice and, as such, the initial principles of the College were similar to those of the Bauhaus.

John Cage and Merce Cunningham both studied at Black Mountain College and although their influence on minimalism and contemporary dance was great, their influence on the particular genre I am studying was little. They did however

collaborate with various artists including Robert Rauschenberg on *Untitled Event* in 1952, which would become the precursor for Happenings. *Untitled Event* was a collage of unrelated events in one performance. These included music (usually by Cage), paintings (by Rauschenberg), projections moving across walls, four boys dressed in white serving coffee to the audience members who had each been presented with a white cup that had been placed on their chair, a dog, a step-ladder, and babies screaming. (Goldberg, R. 2001). What interests me most about this work is the use of *seemingly* random objects and actions put together to generate a work of art and, although this concept does not entirely relate to my study, the coincidence of objects and activities do become a common thread in the works that do.

Happenings

'Happenings asserted an in-the-moment ephemerality, contesting the commodity condition of the work of art.' (Robinson, J. 2012). For artists this form of presenting allowed them to create work that could evade the strangle-hold of the galleries and the subsequent investment trading of art works beyond their own influence and recompense. Autonomous tenure for performance artists was paramount .

At the New School for Social Research in New York, various artists were 'experimenting on the edges of numerous disciplines.' (Goldberg, R. 2012). Allan

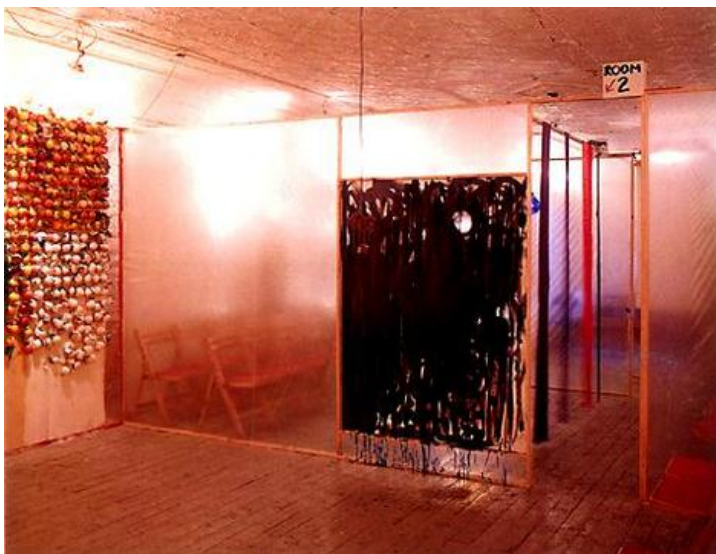


Image 7

Kaprow for example presented the work *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* in 1959 at The Rueben Gallery, to which for the first time since the Futurists performances, the general public was invited. Previously, works mentioned had been exclusively performed for

other artists (with the exception for purposefully public displays). The gallery loft was divided into sections in one of which 'a woman stood still for ten seconds, left arm raised, forearm pointing to the floor. Slides were shown in an adjacent room. Then two performers read from hand-held placards. Flute, ukulele and violin were played, painters painted on unprimed canvas set into the walls, gramophones were rolled in on trolleys, and finally, after ninety minutes of eighteen simultaneous happenings, four nine-foot scrolls toppled off a horizontal bar between the male and female performers reciting mono-syllabic words.' (Goldberg, R. 2001).

18 Happenings in 6 Parts draws on the common idea of Performance Art of a performer being a work of art, though it does however allow audiences to view an artist creating tangible art in space and time when the artists painted on the canvas. This notion of the artist's body in the work as I have mentioned is central the type of work I am studying.

Jim Dine, another prominent figure in New York City Happenings created *The Smiling Workman* in 1960 in which he was 'dressed in a red smock, with hands and head painted red, and a large black mouth. [He] drank from jars of paint while painting 'I love what I'm...' on a large canvas.' (Goldberg, R. 2001). At the end of the work, Dine threw himself through the canvas on which he had painted. Dine, like Kaprow had experimented with the medium of paint and canvas in live performance, which would soon become common practice for artists creating works of the style I am studying. For Dine's 1959 performance *The House*, a gallery space was transformed in to an abstract living environment in which the artist interacted with various seemingly regular household objects. The remains of a selection of these objects have since been



Image 8

exhibited as works of art. *Household Piece* was exhibited (the remains of a ravaged spring mattress frame from the performance) at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York. (Schimmel, P. 1998).

Yam Festival

The Yam Festival in New York lasted an entire year, from May 1962 to May 1963, during which time various Happenings by Al Hansen, Alison Knowles, and Wolf Vostell occurred.

Michael Kirby's *The First and Second Wilderness, a Civil War Game* featured an 'infantry of two-foot-high cardboard soldiers [waging] battle' (Goldberg, R. 2001) whilst performers acted out a football game-like situation with the soldiers, including a scoreboard paired with a girl on a ladder in a bikini progressively marking the score of the game.

Wolf Vostell

In April 1964, Wolf Vostell presented *You*, 'which took place in and around a swimming pool, tennis court and orchard, scattered with four hundred pounds of beef bones. A narrow path, so narrow that only one person can pass at a time,

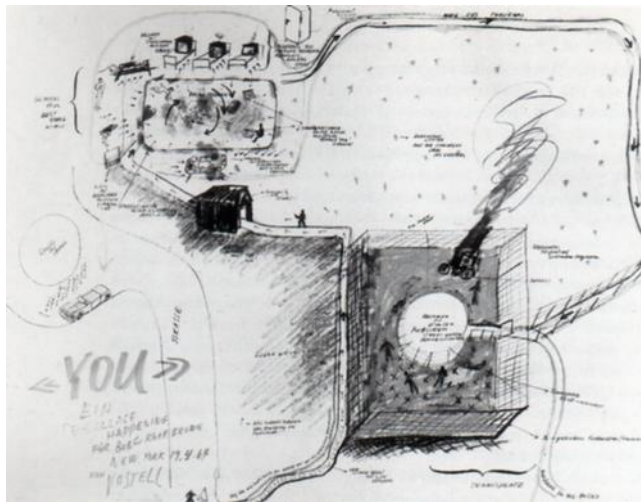


Image 9

littered with coloured advertisements from *Life* Magazine and punctuated by loudspeakers greeting each passer-by with 'You, You, You!', wound between the three main locations of activity.' (Goldberg, R. 2001). In addition to this there was a requirement for audience participation with

water pistols filled with coloured inks, televisions on hospital beds, and gas masks for audience members to put on 'when the T.V. burns' (Goldberg, R. 2001). In this work it could be considered that audience members actually became the performers performing to other audience members. If one imagines that audience members are in a room where at least one other audience member is

present engaging in an activity set up by an artist, there is no reason that audience member could not to be considered a performer, unless a limitation for the definition of performer is that the person in question must be aware of this title for it to be valid.

That aside; in *You*, Vostell intended to 'bring the public 'face to face, in satire, with the unreasonable demands of life in the form of chaos', confronting them with the most 'absurd and repugnant scenes of horror to awaken consciousness... What is important is what the public itself takes away as a result of [Vostell's] images and the Happening.'" (Goldberg, R. 2001).

Site Specific Work

In New York during the 1960s, the notion of place became integral to the work and hence artists began working in various places including Central Park, 69th Street Armoury, a car park, a Dallas farmhouse, a swimming pool, a cinema, and a skating rink which is where Rauschenberg presented his *Pelican* in 1963. Although being site specific is not a restricting factor of the work that I am studying, it bears a similarity to ideas of *randomness* in becoming a common tool used by artists who engage in the genre. (Goldberg, R. 2001).

Dancers' Workshop Company & Judson Dance Group

The Dancers' Workshop Company formed not far from San Francisco in 1955 in which Ann Halprin collaborated with dancers including Simone Forti, Trisha



Image 10

Brown, Yvonne Rainer, Warner Jepson as well as architects, painters, and sculptors. It was these dancers with the additions of Lucinda Childs, Sally Gross, and Carolee Schneemann who

would later go on to form the Judson Dance Group of New York in 1962. Halprin's *'Five-Legged Stool'* (1962), *Esposizione* (1963) and *Parades and Changes* (1964) all revolved around task orientated movements, such as carrying forty bottles onto the stage, pouring water from one can into another, changing clothes.' (Goldberg, R. 2001) Concepts were taken from Futurist and Dada manifestos such as a 'view of dance as a way of life, that uses everyday activities such as walking, eating, bathing and touching.' (Goldberg, R. 2001). In these works, Halprin utilized everyday objects as mediums to transform the function of the dancers on stage.

Minimalism

'Minimalism [focused] on the spectator's movement within and around the work.' (Marsh, A. 1992). Minimalism was an arts movement which focused mainly on design, works on paper, and music, however, my research into

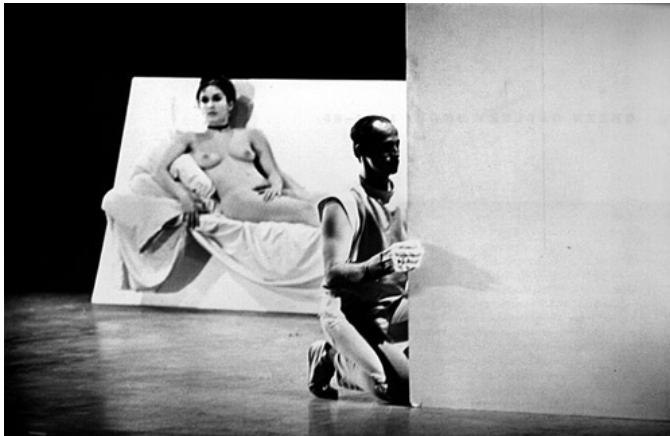


Image 11

minimalist performance art has brought me to the work of Robert Morris, in particular his *Site* (1965) (with Carolee Schneemann), which concerns the body in motion. The space is 'reduced to context... riveting it to maximum frontality'.

(Goldberg, R. 2001). In this work a series of white panels are moved around the space to create various formations, revealing a naked woman on a couch in the pose of Manet's *Olympia*. At no point did the performer (Morris) acknowledge the presence of the naked figure. The relation of this work to the subject of my thesis is not the portrayal of the Manet painting, but the use of the bodies and white panels as mediums to create form in space and time.

Yves Klein

Yves Klein was 'throughout his life determined to find a vessel for a spiritual pictorial space. And it was this that led him eventually to live actions. He

experimented with the body as a tool for the creation of enduring art through *Anthropometries of the Blue Period* (1960) in which 'Nude models, their bodies dripping in blue paint, writhed on canvas' (Goldberg, R. 2001). This presents the question of whether this work could be sold in its state of creation (a live performance) or post



Image 12

creation as works of art in their own right. In 1964 Carolee Schneemann made similar work in *Meat Joy* in which the blood and meat of carcasses was used instead of paint to cover the performers' bodies.

Klein sold his 'immaterial pictorial sensitivity' in 1962 for gold leaf, which was then publicly scattered in the Seine in Paris. The buyer was required to burn the receipt of purchase immediately. Klein questioned the monetary value of something that theoretically cannot or could not be bought and by doing so made a statement on the value of art, fiscal or otherwise.

Piero Manzoni

Piero Manzoni – the Italian equivalent to Klein, 'eliminated the canvas altogether, making 'living masterpiece' by signing a person or presenting them with a document that declared them a work of art'. (Goldberg, R. 2010). Much of Manzoni's work, like that of Klein's dealt with the monetary value of unobtainable work.

Joseph Beuys

Joseph Beuys' work examines objects and materials as metaphorical antagonists. His work is almost entirely politically or socially driven and often voices his disdain for society. In 1965 with his head covered in honey and gold leaf, Beuys took a dead hare in his arms and quietly carried it around an exhibition of his drawings and paintings, 'letting it touch the pictures with its paws'. (Goldberg, R. 2001) He then sat on a stool in a dimly lit corner and proceeded to explain the

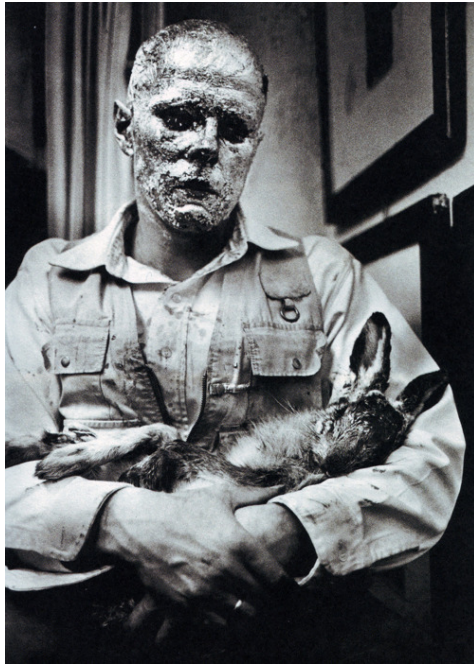


Image 13

meaning of the works to the dead animal. In the same year, he presented *Twenty-four Hours*. The entirety of the work lasted twenty-four hours and consisted of Beuys laying in a small box, only moving to collect objects scattered around him. *Eurasia* (1966) featured once again, a dead hare, though on this occasion it was paired with a cross symbol, white powder that was scattered around, a thermometer that was shoved in its mouth, and a metal plate that Beuys kicked around the space. In a much later, 1974 work at the Réne Block Gallery

in New York, Beuys wrapped himself in felt and shared a space with a wild Coyote for seven days, during which time he conversed privately with the animal. Other objects were introduced into the space including a walking stick and fifty copies of the *Wall Street Journal*, on which the Coyote urinated.

Beuys' work 'represented a transformation of ideology into the idea of freedom.' (Goldberg, R. 2001) and initiated an era of artists overcoming great feats of endurance in the name of their work.

Remnants of Beuys' performance works are exhibited internationally, though most is housed at the Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart (Museum for Contemporary Art), Berlin.

Yoko Ono

Ono's *Cut Piece* (1964) required audience members to enter the stage and cut a piece of her clothing whilst she sat in stillness. This feminist work (a movement which Futurists and the Dada often promoted) uses the fabric of her clothing as a medium while the audience members who chose to cut the fabric share an equal role with Ono in the making of *Cut Piece* as a work of art. (Concannon, K. 2012).

Cut Piece is an example of work that relies on audience engagement in an activity (cutting the clothing) set up by an artist (Ono) to be successful conceptually and as a performance.

Ono created several other works of Performance Art, most of which focused mainly on *instruction* and less on visual art mediums.

Ti Parks

Ti Parks' *Virginias* (Tolarno Gallery, 1969)

presented [participants] with an analysis of painting in the form of an installation that comprised a hollow stretcher canvas through which the spectator walked. Thus the viewers became the content of the imagined painting as they walked through the gallery. This was a moving, perhaps even speaking, image which was not captured on a two dimensional surface. (Marsh, A. 1992).

This work shows the artist using the audience as a medium for performance. Their participation transforms the static structure into a performance where Parks only created the stage.

Media Generation

From what RoseLee Goldberg defines as the *Media Generation* came a proliferation of Body Art, which was concerned mainly with the body itself being a work of art, generally without an additional physical medium.

Body art, which must be seen as a particular genre of performance art, exhibited the body of the artist and performed actions on that body. These events sometimes involved self-inflicted pain, which was justified by artists as a kind of trial or initiation rite... [It] presented an important moment in the history of performance art because it often expressed individual psychological disturbances. (Marsh, A. 1992).

This emphasis on the 'self' was conceptually a new idea in the history of Performance Art. Previously artists protested against social or political issues, or the art industry itself.

Klaus Rinke

Klaus Rinke 'translated three-dimensional properties of sculpture into actual space in a series of *Primary Demonstrations* begun in 1970: These were 'static sculptures' created with his partner Monika Baumgartl: together they made geometric configurations, moving slowly from one position to the next, usually for several hours at a time.' (Goldberg, R. 2001).

Exploration of space and time were ideas central to the work of Rinke, as were they to the artists in the Bauhaus only a decade earlier; the focus of this style of work had shifted from one of simple artistic theories, to complex social and political dialogues and back again.

According to Rinke 'these works contained the same theoretical premises as stone sculpture in space, but the additional elements of time and movement altered the viewer's understanding of those premises: they could actually see the *process* of making sculpture.' (Goldberg, R. 2001,).

The notion of work being a process of making art in front of an audience has frequently appeared in this study and although temporality may be one of the contributing factors to the definition of the style, a definition remains incomplete in regard to the limitation of a *dependence* on both visual art and performance mediums.

Other artists of the 1970s

'Activist performance in the 1970s and the happenings in the late 1960s often claimed to be 'democratising' art by breaking down its hierarchical structure' (Marsh, A. 1992).

Works then tended to become autobiographical like that of Adrian Piper's *Some Reflected Surfaces* (1976). Her own voice told the story of the time she spent as a disco dancer in a bar while the song *Respect* played. A male voice constantly

criticized her movements (Goldberg, R. 2001), which essentially established an emotional rapport with audiences. Like Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, these autobiographical works allowed for the appreciation of somewhat less *trained* audiences because of their narrative-like connotations.

The collective of artists called General Idea (Jorge Zontal, A. A. Bronson, and Felix Partz) based in Toronto from 1968 had intentions to be 'rich – glamorous – and artists' (Goldberg, R. 2001). *Six Venetian Blinds* (1975) consisted of models wearing triangular cone like costumes, parading around department stores, city sites and ski slopes as a representations of a new building. The intentions for General Idea's works were far less intellectual, or politically or socially driven; they seemed to show off simply for their own amusement. (Goldberg, R. 2001).

Many artists believed that the increasing number of those departing from the canvas was cause for concern over the credibility and sustainability of practice.

Arts writer, Graeme Sturgeon 'found the 'dematerialisation' of the art object problematic, arguing that it left the artist with two alternatives: either to do something, which led to quasi-theatrical productions... legitimised by being carried out in an art context, or to do nothing, which produced what might be described as an investigation in to the semantics of art terminology.' (Marsh, A. 1992).

Imants Tiller's performance *Enclosure* (1973) was held on a beach in Sydney where two tents were placed on the perimeter of a circle. Tiller 'proceeded to dig out the mirror-image of one tent (producing a tent shaped hole in the ground inside the structure) and fill the other tent on the opposite side of the circle with the sand extracted from the first. The performance/action was documented, showing the physical fatigue of the artist. The same structure was recreated for the Mildura Sculpture Triennial with the presence of the artist only evident through photographs placed at intervals around the perimeter of the circle' (Marsh, A. 1992). In the 1970s, artists began documenting their performances for the purpose of exhibiting it in a structured gallery setting (possibly in an attempt for greater public recognition and subsequent financial support). Many preceding artists would likely have disagreed completely with the notion of

preserving performance art arguing that the ephemerality of the form was its most vital characteristic.

Inhibodress

Marsh, A (1992) Has noted that alternative art spaces such as Inhibodress were important for performance artists during the 1970s, providing supportive venues in which works could be shown. However, such spaces, run by artists, tended to be short-lived because they could not attract enough funding to sustain their activities Founded in late 1970 in Woolloomooloo, Sydney, by Mike Parr, Peter Kennedy and Tim Johnson, Inhibodress presented Australian artists with a space for research in experimental performance and was the first of its kind. Throughout 1971, Inhibodress also showed exhibitions of performance art documentation from North America and Europe.

Johnson presented his *Disclosures* (1971) at Inhibodress, which involved 'swinging illuminated light globes around the room and smashing them violently against the wall.' (Marsh, A. 1992). The



Image 14

performance was ended prematurely due to the dangers of electrocution and fire.

Most artists who presented at Inhibodress were generally unsuccessful with the few exceptions of those who were already established prior to support by Inhibodress (for example, Tim Johnson and Peter Kennedy). The work shown did not receive critical acclaim and most of the establishment's stated motives and intentions were continually self-contradictory (Milliss, I. 1972). However, 'the efforts of artists at Inhibodress to gain recognition for Australian experimental work and the forthcoming support of particular critics and curators helped to create a fertile environment within which Australian

performance art could flourish' (Marsh, A. 1992). Inhibodress essentially laid the foundations for proceeding experimental arts establishments in Australia (such as the Experimental Arts Foundation, Adelaide).

After the demise of Inhibodress in 1973, the National Gallery of Victoria interpreted the new modes of art being produced in an exhibition. [It] presented various forms of informal sculpture and documentation of events all of which challenged the conventional paradigms of painting and sculpture. The exhibition represented the first public, art-world acceptance of the new modes" (Marsh, A. 1992,).

Experimental Art Foundation (EAF)

EAF was established in 1974 by Donald Brook with a purpose similar to that of Inhibodress. For Brook, 'EAF provided a kind of theoretical laboratory within which he could test out his theory of experimental art' (Marsh, A. 1992) and was in its prime during the late 1970s and early 1980s. During this time, Brook established four points to create the philosophy of EAF:

1. Our apprehension of the world is active, not passive, and art displays an emergent apprehension.
2. Art is only incidentally and not essentially aesthetic. Art is concerned with every kind of value and not particularly with beauty.
3. Art interrogates the status quo; it is essentially, and not incidentally, radical.
4. Art is experimental action: it models possible forms of life and makes them available to public criticism

It seemed at first that many artists, although eager, did not fully understand Brooke's ideas and manifesto. It wasn't until 1979 that Ian North (at that time Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia) noted that the younger artists were becoming more familiar and relaxed with Brooke's concepts (Britton, S. 1984).

Once again I must state here that, although EAF did not function solely with the purpose of incubating art of the genre singled out in my study, it is important to acknowledge the changing artistic attitudes of the time and motives behind the creation and presentation of art. The conceptual drive of Performance Art had, in a sense, come around a full circle once more, as it was again driven by aggressive protests against the commercial world, though in the late 1970s the diversity of work was immense and, from this point onwards it becomes more apparent that each artist or small group of artists began to follow their own conceptual pathway.

In 1975, Stuart Brisley performed an untitled durational performance in the basement of EAF lasting 24 hours. 'He used the making of lines, or drawing as a vehicle. He roped off a square between 4 columns and covered the floor in white powder in which he drew arcs with his body in various ways, including lying on and hanging off the ropes. His white ghost figure was videoed... The end was particularly memorable; Brisley cut his clothing while talking rapidly round and round the 'ring' and finally had a bucket of black paint flung over him.' (Britton, S. 1984). In this work, Brisley questioned and manipulated masculine images of the time, perhaps centred on the sensational media surrounding the Ali and Fraizer fights and the cultural fear of black power.

Unlike Inhibodress, The Experimental Art Foundation (now Australian Experimental Arts Foundation, AEAF) in Adelaide was and still is hugely successful comparatively to other artists' forums like Inhibodress.

Living Art Festival, London 1986

Performance Art in the 1980s shifted its focus to more theatrical displays (even if there was very little generated), with the exception of the Living Arts Festival in 1986. Works in the festival included Stephen Taylor Woodrow's *The Living Paintings*, which was quite literally three people painted in shades of grey suspended from a wall like a painting. This work presents to me a challenge in the definition of the style of work I am studying. Does *Living Paintings* rely on visual art mediums to transform the protagonist function of the human body in performance? If the figures were not painted, would the answer to this question

remain the same? I suggest that if the bodies were not painted, then indeed the work of art would not fall in to the genre I am studying, though this would not



Image 15

alter the artistic integrity or merit of the work, but only exclude its particular form of representation from my thesis.

Another contribution to the festival, Miranda Payne's *Saint Gargoyles* acted out a painting of gargoyles whilst standing on a pedestal holding various objects.

The festival featured 'active painters and action paintings; these works were explicit in their exploration of paintings as live, visual objects' (Goldberg, R. 2001).

Jackson Pollock & Action Painting

As mentioned, 'there was a lull in performance art in the late 1980s, most likely due to the 'return to painting', but much of that practice re-inscribed expressionist modes and was therefore not so distant from some of the radical impetus for performance. Indeed, Amelia Jones and others see Jackson Pollock as a precursor of the performative turn.' (Marsh, A. 2013)

Pollock is best known for his abstract expressionist paintings, though he 'is one of the spiritual fathers of performance painting, according to the curator of a major new show at Tate Modern, but it is not what he would have wanted'

(Clark, N. 2012). The actions his body made whilst flicking paint over canvas on the floor granted this style the term “Action Painting” which has since classified the work of various other painters including Willem de Kooning. For work to be considered part of this genre, the physical action of painting must be the cause of a product.



Image 16

‘The Hans Namuth photographs of Pollock painting capture a performative element which led to the influence of Pollock and abstract expressionism throughout Europe and Asia.’ (Marsh, A.

2013) though “the photographs that emerged of him at work caused him huge self-doubt about his methods” (Clark, N. 2012,). It seemed that Pollock considered his work a private affair (before meeting Namuth, Pollock was a cranky social recluse), and the creative process of painting was not in his eyes a performance, rather a simple gesture, creating a painting.

The Tate Modern, London, exhibited much of Pollock and Kooning’s work in *A Bigger Splash: Painting After Performance* (2013).

The relevance of Pollock in this thesis will be discussed later in regard to the ephemerality of the art form and its place in commoditised society.

1990s to present

‘In the western world in the 1990s, even sophisticated performance art became part of the cultural mainstream: performance art as a complete art form gained admittance into art museums and became a museal topic’ (Targ Brill, M. 2009). It ‘was so pervasive, and its political impact so indisputable, that even academics began to appropriate its cultural efficacy’ (Nelson, R. S and Shiff, R. 2003).

Many works in the 1990s and early 2000s challenged oppression, power, poverty, and the AIDS crisis. Tim Miller's work focused mainly on homosexuality as did that of Holly Hughes, both of whom are still working. Some work, however, had a scientific genesis; a concept new to performance art.

Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr are artists, researchers and curators who co-founded The Tissue Culture & Art Project in 1996. Pushing the boundaries of what is considered performance art, the project was set to explore the use of human tissue growth technologies as a medium for artistic expression. '[They] investigated [their] relationships with the different gradients of life through the construction/growth of a new class of object/being - that of the Semi-Living.' (Catts, O. 2004)



Image 17

Works produced by The Tissue Culture & Art Project include:

The Semi-Living Worry Dolls (2000). These seven dolls were the first tissue engineered sculptures to be presented alive in a gallery context. Each doll was given an alphabetical name from A

– H, representing a different worry or concern:

'Doll A = stands for the worry from Absolute truths, and of the people who think they hold them.

Doll B = represents the worry of Biotechnology, and the forces that drive it. (See doll C)

Doll C = stands for Capitalism, Corporations

Doll D = stands for Demagogy, and possible Destruction.

Doll E = stands for Eugenics and the people who think that they are superior enough to practice it.

Doll F = is the fear of Fear itself.

G = is not a doll as the Genes are present in all semi-living dolls.

Doll H = symbolizes our fear of Hope...'

(Catts, O. 2004)

Extra Ear (2003) – featured a collaboration with Stelarc, in which Catts and Zurr grew a living ear in an incubator allowing for three-dimensional growth. *NoArk* (2007 – 2008) creates a vessel designed to maintain and grow a mass of living cells.

Although this is considered 'live art', my question now lies in whether its appeal simply depends on its novelty? It would be unwise for me to criticize the work purely because it is out-of-the-ordinary, as avant-garde thinking birthed performance art in all of its forms, Futurism, Dada, Body Art, and so on. This brings to me the question of what the future holds for performance art.

In Tania Bruguera's *Untitled*, made for the 2000 Havana Biennial, 'she filled a dark, tunnel-like space in a former military prison with a layer of rotting bagazo, or sugarcane husks. Visitors struggled over the pungent-smelling stalks, drawn



Image 18

towards a light at the end of the tunnel, which revealed itself to be a video playing footage of speeches by Castro. Only when turning back towards the entrance did they notice a number of naked male figures in the darkness, repeating gestures such as bowing, rubbing or slapping parts of their bodies.' (Griffin, J. 2008).

Fiona McGregor and AñA Wojak presented *Arterial* (2005) as a 'three-channel video and then live performances in Poland in 2006 and at the Australian Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, in 2008. It shows two women dressed in quite burqa-like shrouds walking slowly towards one another on a white scroll

of photographic paper; each had a cannula inserted into her wrist and drips blood onto the surface.’ (Marsh, A. 2013)

In Catherine Bell’s *Felt is the Past Tense to Feel* (2006), a woman is ‘dressed in a pink felt suit – a replica of her dead father’s Sunday best and a homage to Joseph Beuys – sits on a mound of forty dead squid and slowly sucks out their black ink, squirting it over her body so that she literally fades to black.’ (Marsh, A. 2013)

These visually clear and often blatantly aggressive or provocative images within performance art are common



Image 19

throughout its entire history, proving that concept and intention reign over aesthetic or complex imagery.

Romeo Castellucci comes from a theatre discipline and his highly trained in performance and hence his work is often highly theatrical (a some-what



Image 20

common trend in Performance Art from the 1980s onwards) though the difference of Castellucci’s work comparatively to that of visual artists lies in the answer to ‘why’ the artist performs. Visual artists

creating conceptual work most often *need* to express their opinion of a matter and those I am discussing in this thesis do it through performance, where as Castellucci creates conceptual performance as an experience for audience

members. *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God* (2010) was not well received by critics who claimed the performance '[changed] nothing, and that, through the use of Christ's image, [the work assumed] a grandeur it hasn't earned,' describing it as 'pseudo-religious performance art' (Billington, M. 2011). However, this was from the perspective of it being Performance Art. This Castellucci work brings our attention to religion within Performance Art for the first time. Looming over the stage was the face of Jesus from a painting by Antonello de Messina. In the final quarter of the performance, Castellucci kissed the portrait's lips and with that, the giant canvas began to shake and billow until it was torn apart by dark figures wielding knives and blowtorches. As the face is destroyed, huge letters reading 'You Are Not My Shepherd' replaced it, until finally the word 'Not' disappeared and was replaced by another image of Jesus, with excrement streaming from his right eye. (Billington, M. 2011). Here, Castellucci slanders the church and makes a mockery of the famous verses '*The Lord is my shepherd*' and '*Jesus wept*'.

In line with this religious trend, performance artist Lyndal Jones' *Rehearsing Catastrophe: The Ark in Sydney* (2012) featured at the 18th Biennale of Sydney, involved dozens of people who gathered daily wearing animal headdresses to enter a small wooden ark. The work also makes a statement of the *modern day disciple* though far less aggressively than Castellucci.

The trend from the 1970s to document Performance Art work continued through the 1990s, though with digital development artists began using feeds of past performance within live performance. 'Nasim Nasr, an Iranian-born artist living in Australia, presented *Erase* (2010) as a live performance and then as a two-channel video installation. In the performance Nasr inscribes a poem, written by the late Iranian feminist poet, Frough Farrokhzad, onto a black chador stretched across the wall, while the video version shows another woman's hand erasing the text.' (Marsh, A. 2013). Documenting performance for later gallery showing has become a common method for performance artists to increase notoriety and receive further income than they would had if they presented a performance alone.

The pop-culture rock band/artist collective Chicks on Speed also utilise the fruit of the digital-age with every-day objects being modified to act as 'Sonic Objekts' (also referred to as OBJEKT INSTRUMENTS) (French, B. 2013), such as sewing machines and cigar-boxes. Chicks on Speed have also produced highly desirable headaddress 'self-contained amplification devices' (or self-contained entertainment systems for information) for performance, as well as 'super-suits,' costumes incorporating the images and shapes of instruments and wired with sensor pads that trigger the sounds of the particular instrument when worn and 'played' live. (French, B. 2013). These objects and costumes have been the interest of fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld who has commissioned various photographic sessions with the group. With the commercialisation of Performance Art and artists such as Chicks on Speed working with mainstream fashion designers, financial sources increase, as is the nature for commercialisation to bring with it commoditisation and commerce.

Brian Catling presented the *Antix* (2005), a durational performance in which he inhabited a space filled with various placed objects and interacted with them from 6pm to midnight for 16 nights. The objects included 'a hinged dunce's cap, a wooden overcoat, the lower half of a jawbone, a bowl-shaped incense burner, a golden silk headscarf, the frame and a mechanized ivory rib-cage' (Fox, D. 2006). During the performance, Catling

Snatched a young woman from the audience, covered her head with the fabric and led her to the middle of the dais. After a few moments, he opened a panel in the wooden desk, bundled her inside and slammed the door – an extreme gesture with horrific implications of abduction, identity-theft and borderline misogyny. (Fox, D. 2006)

The work presented nothing overly innovative, perhaps a homage to earlier performance artists such as Kaprow or Beuys, though it is important to note the constant within an ever-changing art-world, and respect for the past.

Sisters and Collaborators, Alison & Bridget Currie, exhibited temporality in *Three Ways to Hold* (2010). The work consisted of a series of four performances over



Image 21

four weeks, using canvas sheets, foam blocks and buckets. The objects were moved in the space for the duration of each performance and then left as a residual installation open to viewers in the gallery during the week between performances. (Kemp, J. 2010).

Hayley Newman's *Drawing Dadao* (2004) is drawn from a collaboration with Yang Zhichao to produce a set of drawings documenting a three-day performance in Beijing. Throughout the performance, Newman and Zhichao created drawings of themselves and other artists in a live context, and later exhibited these drawings in a gallery setting.



Image 22

There are countless works of performance art, body art, live art, and happenings that could be mentioned for their products remaining post performance but it would be senseless for me to do so in this thesis (for it is not my goal). There are other writers who have documented such processes in more depth prior to my studies beginning (Brett, G; Klocker, H; Osaki, S; Schimmel, P; Stiles, K. 1998). It is my goal to summarise their writings in correspondence to my set limitations.

CONCEPTUAL INFLUENCES OF PERFORMANCE ART

'Performance in the late eighties and early nineties was frequently used as a form of social protest, but it was the influx of artists from former Communist countries to the West that made it evident that performance art had functioned almost exclusively in the East as a form of political opposition in the years of repression.' (Goldberg, R. 2001)

The conceptual influences or the reasons for which artists create work of this style have (as exemplified in the historical timeline) followed three main pathways since the early Futurists.

First. Dissatisfaction with current social, political or artistic conditions or opinions. This includes but is not limited to issues related to feminism, masculinity, black power, whiteness, homosexuality, students' rights, anti-political, and anti-war movements.

Second. Exploration into art and design theories including that of space, form, colour, light, and movement.

Later since the Media Generation and the 1970s, a third conceptual influence arose – the self, subjectivity and the psyche.

'Artists are not easily categorised, individual works shift and slide between dominant themes, and one is left with a fractured picture where a both/and rather than an either/or thesis exists in various shades of grey.' (Marsh, A. 1992) Performance art is consistently developing and moulding to suit artists' desires and social/ontological structures, which is the significance of this art form. It is changing always and the reason for its creation is a sense of constant flux.

AUDIENCE POPULATION

'Performance artists present a plurality of approaches for their audiences and many insist that art should become more democratic, that it should reach a wider audience ' (Marsh, A. 1992).

As the timeline states; after Futurism, generally only members of the art world itself viewed works of Performance Art until the beginnings of Happenings in the late 1950s. It was not until the 1970s that the general public began appreciating this art form and its acceptance into the general art world grew stronger (though it was and still is in many ways considered unconventional and experimental).

'In 1980s art discourse... performance art in its more theatrical manifestations continued to generate intellectual support and broad audiences (often outside of the parameters of the art world)' (Jones, A. 1998). Performance Art was at this time at its peak, it would have been almost impossible to not know of its existence and its popularity grew because of this.

With each individual artist comes new audience popularity. Some, more shocking artists have a more specific group of followers and some, like Marina Abramović, draw audiences from all sectors of the general public, from children to the elderly, many of whom are simply curious. Her performance, *The Artist is Present* (2010), drew 750,000 visitors over its three-month duration in MOMA. (*Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present*. 2012). However, Abramović and nearly all artists I have cited started their performance careers as provocateurs who were not accepted in conventional galleries. What is interesting and what excites me about this form of art is the question of how these rebellions became mainstream. The answer may lie in the underestimation of an audience's support for the 'underdog'. Parallel to constant political shifts are the shifts within the arts, and these art movements will, without fail, gain support from the political and artistic activists/opposition. Some artists have had the power to inform a way of thought (Beuys, Schlemmer, Klein, Abramović) and these are the artists who have entered the 'hall of fame'. In other words, their work has remained challenging or inspiring and withstood the critique of time.

EPHEMERALITY OF THE ART FORM AND ITS COMMODITISED VALUE

This genre of performance, as established, is an ephemeral art form and the products of the genre and performances can in their own right be considered enduring works of art (whether the artist intended it to be or not), though the

performance itself in the genre I am studying cannot be considered enduring as it relies on live performer-audience engagement.

"Performance Art" meant that it was live, and it was art, not theatre. Performance Art also meant that it was art that could not be bought, sold or traded as a commodity. (Goldberg, R. 2010). Fundamentally, Goldberg agrees with many of the early performance artists that performance art was and should be an entirely ephemeral art form, though with this I must address the problem of the development of this genre as being unsustainable. Performance Art is most often limited to a particular time or space, and is not tangible. When the concept of selling an art form that could not be bought or sold emerged it 'became the ideal vehicle for a generation intent on developing an entirely new aesthetic in art as well as a method of exhibiting that was independent of the commercial-gallery system.' (Goldberg, R. 2011). However, the financial stability of this was unsound.

Some artists, notably Marina Abramović have dedicated much of their career to the revival and restoration of performance art.

Abramović, commonly known as 'the Grandmother of performance art' (it is unknown who first gave her this title) was in the peak of her career in the 1970s, creating works of performance and body art using knives, bones, crystals, ropes and many other works with her partner Ulay. As her colloquial title suggests, she



Image 23

has been a figure of great prominence since this time and continues to be still. I did not feature her in the historical timeline, as I prefer to now highlight her role in promoting the sustainability of performance art.

'Abramović has courted a different kind of controversy, this time within the still small world of performance art, by her decision to

re-enact works by other performance artists, including Beuys, Klein, Bruce Nauman and Vito Acconci. She stretches the original, often relatively long works to sometimes absurd lengths to tap into their transformative power. This has drawn ire from the purists, including Ulay... He recently told the New Yorker: "I don't believe in these performance revivals. They don't have the ring of truth about them." ' (O'Hagan, S. 2010). Although 'performative works' when transferred to galleries can lose their original purpose, they do not lose their history. They can be exhibited as a replica, so indeed, with a difference purpose, though I believe this purpose is beneficial to the recognition and sustainability of the art form.

Abramović is adamant that

Performance Art has to live and survive. It cannot be put on walls. If we do not perform and recreate it, the art f***ers and the theatre f***ers and the dance f***ers will rip us off without credit even more than they do anyway. I am sick and tired of the mistreatment of performance art. Even the pop-video f***ers steal from it. I want to bring young people in afresh so they can experience the beautiful work of Beuys and Acconci. The best way to do that is to bring those works alive, to perform them. (O'Hagan, S. 2010)

Due to open in 2014, The Marina Abramović Institute, New York, will serve as a performance and education centre, the capital of long-duration performance art, and home to The Abramović Method.

Abramović's recent retrospective exhibition at the MOMA (2010), New York, employed thirty young artists to perform five of her historical pieces, while she performed a new work, sharing the title of the exhibition itself, *The Artist is Present*. In the documentary film of the exhibition, Abramović's gallerist Sean Kelly states: 'Obviously performance is, by its very nature ephemeral so ... we very carefully selected one photograph to represent each performance and then we made those into editions and we sold them [c. 1990] ... for between \$2000 and \$5000 each. And now they're very sought after and if you could find them

they would be between \$25000 and \$50000 each. The model that we created for Marina and the way that we created the market for her has become something of a standard that other people have looked at.” (*Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present*. 2012)

Marsh, A. (2013) believes that photography and video has become a common method for younger artists to remediate their performance work. This allows them to exhibit representations of their work in multiple settings and hence gain

There are various photographic editions of Abramović’s work that are for sale via collector websites (<http://www.artnet.com>), though to view prices, you must register as a collector and contact the owner gallery.

Although these methods are ideal for the preservation of performance art, the ‘cross-disciplinary nature of the medium makes it difficult to categorise and assess and impossible to sell as a lasting object. This means that it cannot be collected except as documentation of an event in the past by photograph, text, video, or film.’ (Marsh, A. 1992). It is my hope that the undefined genre I am studying will allow for a tangible item to be sold as a product of performance.



Image 24

Joel Gailer and Michael Menghetti’s *Performprint* held at Fremantle Arts Centre, Perth, 22 September 2012, was ‘a ten hour epic in which signifiers of masculinity and print process meshed in absurdist theatre’ (Weston, G. 2013). The performance consisted of the artists proclaiming masculinity by reading poetry atop a

stack of Brillo Boxes (a homage to Warhol), tirelessly producing messy monoprints bearing the phrase ‘the male ego’, and among other activities, including self-branding with hot metal and riding a bicycle-like contraption while dressed as a masked figure. The single wheel of the bicycle had been etched with the phrase ‘GO SAY AGAIN’ so that it would print this as it rolled

down a ramp, into a pool of white paint before proceeding onto a large tarmac of black card.

Following the performance, products and remnants from the processes involved were exhibited in the gallery and were available for public purchase.

In regard to evidence of actually selling the products of performance there is little to be found.



Image 25

Another example is demonstrated in *The Joe Bonomo Story* (performance art festival) held at Watters Gallery, Sydney (1972), which ‘celebrated the life of a Hollywood Stuntman and body-builder. Paul Graham and his team of muscle-men opened the show, followed by the physical transformation of Alex Tzannes, whose long hair was cut and auctioned to the audience as he became the image of the Hollywood star.’ (Marsh, A. 1992)

An extreme commercial instance was initiated by the previously mentioned, Piero Manzoni who presented the works, *Artists Breath* (1960) and *Artists Shit* (1961), during which he ‘respectively transformed an exhalation and an excretion into a work of art. The latter, canned in thirty-gram tins, was sold by the gram at a price fixed to that of gold.’ (Schimmel, P. 1998).

At the Daimaru Department Store, Osaka in 1957, Georges Mathieu ‘created large-scale paintings in public performances yet he was and continues to be known almost exclusively in relation to these ‘organized pictures’ (while [Yves] Klein is most notorious for the performances, known through their photographic documentation)’ (Jones, A. 1998).

Although I can find no evidence of these works being sold, I can make a confident inference that if they were to be found, a substantial monetary value would be placed on them, as it is the nature of our consumer driven, materialistic society

to desire ownership of objects of rarity or intrinsic value. It seems as though the product of these performances only become a commodity after the fact. The artist must reach or already have attained a certain level of critical acclaim or the work must withstand the critique of time for it to be sold, unless like Manzoni, the selling of the art was the art itself.

Like the work of Mathieu, it is known that the 'action painting' works by Jackson Pollock have been sold and are exhibited in numerous galleries internationally. Although Pollock's works were not created in the presence of a live audience, as mentioned, the performative nature of his method of painting is a contributing factor to the success of his works on paper. Pollock could have invited audiences to watch these paintings being made. The subsequent effects his decision attributed to his acclaim and notoriety are impossible to infer.

'Happenings and performance art...aimed to break down the heroic position of the artist as unique individual, and to create a democratic art in which numerous people could be involved.' (Marsh, A. 1992,) Giving audiences a chance to own a piece of art made in this genre could be an ideal way of sharing performance.

Valid products of performance may be sold or advertised as commoditised products though what is possibly more important than the actual monetary amount in this matter is the sustainability of the art form. I must agree with Abramović that preserving and remediating works of this genre is vital to nurture and develop the performance art genre. If a product of performance is, indeed, able to be sold, then there is cause to give credit to the artist for developing work that is sustainable and which retains degrees of both ephemerality and temporal duration in its performance and in the aftermath of that performance. Many artists would disagree with this proposition, such as those who worked at Inhibodress.

CONCLUSION

Through the historical timeline presented in this thesis, I have established broad parameters of the sub-strata of performance art in which I am interested and, by doing so, I have come to establish a set of limitations and restrictions which are required to analyse a work.

These limitations are:

- The work in question must be performed in front of an audience in space and time which excludes projections or recordings of a live performance.
- The work must rely on human presence for its occurrence, in that if the performer were not present, the work would not come in to existence. An unknowing audience member engaging in an activity set up by an artist can also be considered a human presence or *performer* in the context of this genre.
- The work must also rely on the presence of visual art mediums. A medium is considered to be (as stated in the introduction) any tangible object, material or device with the exclusion of another human body. An animal, alive or dead, and bodily excretions are also considered mediums.
- The performer must engage with the medium in some way either through speech or touch. This includes the performer eating or digesting the medium, or excreting the medium. If the performer only observes the medium and does not engage with it, the work is not considered to be of this genre, as both elements could stand alone as works of art or performance. This exclusion includes the notion of *negative space*, for the performer could repeat any action preformed around an object even if it were not there, therefore demonstrating non-dependence on the object's presence.
- The work must come in to existence at the moment the performer engages with the medium. Hence the work as a whole is considered the action of a performer engaging with an object to create an artistic form inclusive of both performer and object as being one.

- What the performer leaves behind after the duration of the performance is considered the product of the genre and can then be assessed as a work of art in its own right.
- **The work must demonstrate all of the above characteristics.** A work that restricts itself to only one or part of the above is not considered a work which, through live performance, transforms the function of the physical human body in space and time by the use of a visual arts' medium. It could however be considered under the broader perspectives of Performance Art or Live Art.

There are trends of which to be aware that art makers have followed in the creation of this style of performance, though these notions do not affect the outcome of a work's definition as this genre:

- Works being durational, or lasting an extensive period. This includes works that require a great feat of endurance by the artist (Beuys' *Twenty-four Hours* 1965).
- Work that is site specific, meaning its performance is restricted to one specific area or place, time, or setting (Vostell's *You* 1964); or opposing this, work that can be performed in any place, time, or setting (Ono's *Cut Piece* 1964).
- Work that is considered to be an *installation*. Work of this description only refers to its location, typically a gallery (Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* 1959).
- Work that features a seemingly random set of occurrences, whether improvised or designed by the artist (Cage, Cunningham, and Rauschenberg's *Untitled Event* (1952).

It would be unwise for me to attempt to neatly fit all work categorised under these set limitations into one finite genre. Each work individually could generally be categorised in to this genre, though it would likely fall into multiple practices

of performance art. This is even more so the case for works made in the current decade.

As I have made evident at numerous points in this thesis, performance art fundamentally avoids structure and definition, so an attempt to define this genre by name would also be unwise.

My research has brought to my attention questions on the sustainability of the performance art world, which are seemingly more relevant to current art climates than the questions asked at the outset of my research. These questions of sustainability present a possibly more useful discussion for research and hence the conclusion of this thesis is not a self-gratifying attempt to define a method of performance art that needs no definition, but an acknowledgement of the importance of sustainable practices and the value of documenting, remediating and commoditising performance art.

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