

On the Afterlife of Performance

Hanna Hölling | January 2010

When I received the invitation from de Appel arts centre to take part in a two-day conference on “The Manifold (after) Lives of Performance”, I was not really aware of what complexity would unfold within two days of intensive presentations.¹ To me, witnessing the entirety of the event meant, in the first instance, posing the difficult question of how manifold the afterlife of performance actually is – a genre that was thought to have moved to the margins of disciplines, and whose difficulty to archive and document lies in the very nature of its time-bound moment. Performance can be described as the moment a particular artist performs an action – however, the moment offers only a very vague definition of its existence in the *here and now*. The present moment we perceive can be only perceived as something that has already happened; or putting it in the form of a frequently asked question: how contemporary is contemporary? The act of performance begins to live its afterlife immediately, during the very moment of its creation. What is left after the spectacle, which often has a spontaneous character and is usually based on nothing more than improvisation? What can be shown again if there are no strict instructions on how to handle recordings of performances? Do those recordings live the independent life of works of art as well, or do they deserve an extraordinary classification in terms of a separate genre of artistic documentation? And, last but not least, can we legitimize retaining the immediate “now”, keeping performance alive, presenting it over and over again, commodifying, re-contextualizing or simply activating it, knowing that this genre was originally thought to act against precisely these mechanisms of the art world?

In the present essay I will demonstrate, primarily by giving examples based on the themes of the de Appel conference, the fragile areas in which we seem to end up talking about the (after) lives, documentation and even re-execution or re-enactment of performances. This article merely attempts to enlighten the manifold character of the performative spectacles, and is not meant to be an evaluation of the various forms of the performance or its remnants in view of documentation. However, owing to my field of expertise, I will place additional emphasis on preservation and conservation issues as well as on how, and whether, conservation principles can be applied to performance art.

The conference that was crucial to the creation of this paper was organized by de Appel arts centre in two different locations: one of them was STUK Kunstencentrum, a museum for

¹ “The Manifold (after) Lives of Performance”, 13–15 November 2009, STUK Kunstencentrum, Leuven (Belgium) and Frascati (Nes 63, Amsterdam); a co-production of de Appel and STUK Kunstencentrum.

contemporary art in Leuven, Belgium, and the other was the theatre Frascati, in the heart of the city of Amsterdam. The two-day programme included various discussions as well as live performances, which will not be addressed here for certain reasons.²

Immediate experience and the lapse of time

While attending a spontaneous theatre evening last weekend in Zurich, I did not expect to have an impressive encounter with the visually intense event I ended up participating in. Christoph Schlingensiefel's play *Sterben Lernen* ["Learning How to Die"] was thought of as a contemporary but classical spectacle, taking place on the stage of Theater Neumarkt.³ Yet, what I did not expect was the improvised moment when Christoph decided to change the stage and move to another theatre, staging a short performative intermezzo that ended up as a procession towards the Kunsthaus Zürich.

The audience was fascinated, following the artist on the cold Zurich evening and participating willingly in the vivid walk between the two venues. What was left in the minds of the spectators – or rather, participants – was the impression of not only having seen the play, but also having engaged in it physically, having played an important role through their participation. When recommending the event to my friends, I mentioned the future venues where, supposedly, the play will take place again.

Surely I won't be saying anything new if I assume that, in its immediacy, performance is the most direct way to experience art. What constitutes performance as an act is the individual action of an artist or a group in a given place and at a given time, as well as the relationship between the audience and the actors. Performance, by means of its ubiquitous activation of the senses, achieves instantaneous presence. It is led by the accidentality of its action and setting. It is separated from predictability; the viewer can be elevated to a condition of participation (historically adequate in the happenings of the 1960s, though increasingly present in contemporary performances as well).

Due to the rediscovery of the appeal of the immediate experience, numerous institutions and festivals incorporate *new action art* and performance into their programmes as a response to an increasing demand among both art connoisseurs and laypeople.⁴ The omnipresence of

² The brochure published by de Appel provides essential information on the programme as well as the participants in *The Manifold* (after) *Lives of Performance*; <http://www.deappel.nl/pdf/exhibitions/46/publieksboekjethemanifolddigitaal.pdf>, accessed on 1 December 2009.

³ Christoph Schlingensiefel, *Sterben Lernen (Herr Andersen stirbt in 60 Minuten)*, 8 December 2009, Theater Neumarkt (Neumarkt 5, CH 8001 Zurich), in cooperation with René Pollesch's *Calvinismus Klein*; <http://www.schlingensiefel.com/weblog/index.php?p=436>, accessed on 10 December 2009.

⁴ Elke Buhr, "Das Blut, der Schweiss und all die Tränen", *Monopol*, October 2009, pp. 55–70.

performance in the media seems to prove the fact that its revival is taking place at this very moment.⁵

Performance has a relatively short history; its roots reach down into the Futurist and Dadaist movements of the beginning of the last century. It arrived at its most notable period in the 1950s with the activities of the Gutai group⁶ (which received little attention) and during the Fluxus era in the 1960s that involved artists like Yves Klein, Vito Acconci, Hermann Nitsch, Chris Burden, Carolee Schneemann, Yoko Ono, Joseph Beuys, Nam June Paik, Wolf Vostell and Allan Kaprow. Performance art is ostensibly designated as body art and was originally articulated in 1970 by Willoughby Sharp in *Body Works*.⁷ In its common form, it uses the body of an artist or other actors as material.⁸ In the 1970s, one of the most active and attractive centres of performance became de Appel arts centre in Amsterdam.⁹

Consequently, over the course of time, the performances of the 1960s and 1970s turned into flashbacks of the past and also, from the beginning of the 2000s, into new productions – the re-enactment of performances seems to have become one of the focal points of artistic and public interest. These re-enactments take place frequently all over the globe, including the event titled *Re-enact* by Mediamatic Foundation and Casco Foundation at the Amsterdam's Post CS hotspot in 2004, which resulted in the eponymous exhibition at Witte de With in Rotterdam just one month later, or *Seven Easy Pieces* by Marina Abramović in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York in 2005.

As Marga van Mechelen aptly pointed out, however, repeating a piece of history or re-enacting a performance is a complex and difficult issue.¹⁰ It raises problematic questions of authenticity and originality in today's production of artwork. According to Dutch art magazines, performance no longer claims exclusive rights to authentic experience and, moreover, its uniqueness has turned out to be a myth. "The idea of here and now, with all its

⁵ A variety of articles have been published in art and other newspapers and magazines, such as *Monopol*, *The New York Times* and various online resources such as *Artforum* and *artnet*.

⁶ 具体, meaning "embodiment" (occasionally spelled "Gutai" or "Gutaj"), was an artistic movement and association of artists founded, according to most sources, by Jiro Yoshihara in Japan in 1954.

⁷ Willoughby Sharp, *Body Works, Avalanche I*, Fall 1970, pp. 14–17. Cited in David Hopkins, *After Modern Art 1945–2000* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁸ Performance art utilizing robots and machines will occur over the course of the twenty-first century as a result of technical progress.

⁹ For specific information, see the website for publications: <http://www.deappel.nl/publications/p/4/>, *de Appel: performances, installations, video, projects 1975–83*, by Marga van Mechelen & Michael Gibbs.

¹⁰ Marga van Mechelen, *de Appel: performances, installations, video, projects 1975–83* (Amsterdam: de Appel Foundation 2006), pp. 9–16.

suggestion of authenticity and originality, in line with life itself, does not exist.”¹¹ The mediated view of the history of performance, enriched by anecdotes and in a certain way romanticized, coincides only fragmentarily with the term *historical truth*.¹²

Though, in respect to its vicinity to theatre as a mainstream activity in terms of performative arts, performance tends to be repeated both by the artist himself, and by his descendants. A question arises, however, as to whether artists themselves are interested in authenticity while re-enacting historical performances. In his research focused on the practice of re-enactments in contemporary dance, Timmy de Laet maintained that historical authenticity in today’s re-enactments seems to play a secondary role. In the paper “Re-enactment at the Intersection of Preservation and Provocation”, he argues: “Artists who are currently looking back on the history of their discipline, do not seek to re/present a presumably truthful account of an irrecoverable past. Rather, these re-enactments are deliberately staged as particular moments of individual and collective memory work.”¹³ This is again confirmed by John Berger, who stated that “[t]he past is never there waiting to be discovered, to be recognized for exactly what it is”.¹⁴

In planning his subsequent spectacles at various locations, Schlingensiefel expressed the necessity of their repetitions in order to present the created piece to a potentially wider audience. The repetition of Fluxus pieces is much more problematic, as I aim to show in the following paragraphs.

As time passes by, the performance commences to reinvent itself. The former prerogatives of spontaneity and self-display are replaced by more prudent attitudes. Artists begin to use scripts, scenarios and actors, and they consciously deal with traces and relics left over from their own performances or from those of others. Terms such as the previously mentioned *re-enactment*, as well as *restaging*, *re-speaking*, *recreation* and *reconstructing*, enter the vocabulary of performance art. It would seem that performance tends to leave behind the canonical structures of the past and starts to rearticulate itself anew. New dimensions of time and endurance have been introduced to the art world, for example, Tehching “Sam” Hsieh’s

¹¹ Domeniek Ruiters, *doe iets: Metropolis M4*, 2004, pp. 69–72. Cited in Van Mechelen, *ibid*.

¹² Although *historical truth* is a strongly discursive term due to its ambiguous nature and the subjectivity it implies, it is often applied in respect to art objects that are being conserved back to their “original” form. This discussion is set out in an interesting way in the book by Salvador Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation* (Oxford: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, 2005).

¹³ Presented on the occasion of the Re:Move Colloquium! “Re-enacting the Dance: Reconstruction or Critical Intervention?” on 12 February 2010 at the Kaaitheater in Brussels.

¹⁴ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), quotation from the above-mentioned unpublished conference paper by Timmy de Laet.

One Year Performance (Cage Piece 1978–1979),¹⁵ in which he committed himself to live for twelve months in a 2.5 x 3.75 metre cell inside the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, exposing himself to the audience and not speaking to anyone for the duration. To give another example, during the *One Year Performance (Time Clock Piece 1980–1981)*, Hsieh kept himself awake for a period of one year, controlling the intervals by punching a time clock every hour.¹⁶ The radicalism and brutality of these performances seem to surpass all imaginable boundaries of human stamina. The performance was shown in the form of photographic documentation (one shot every hour) at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York¹⁷ and Art Basel, both in 2009.¹⁸

The question that must be asked is whether documenting or re-executing performance has the power to resist the forces of the passage of time. Can reconstruction in performance art be legitimized? Is there another possible approach for keeping the spirit of the performance alive?

¹⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tehching_Hsieh, accessed on 12 December 2009.

¹⁶ Adriano Sack, “My Private Guantanamo: Porträt Tehching Hsieh”, *Monopol*, October 2009.

¹⁷ *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia: 1860–1989*.

¹⁸ Tehching Hsieh, Performance Works, <http://www.theartnewspaper.tv/content.php?vid=554>, accessed on 20 November 2009.

The relics of the time

In his exhibition *Not to Play with Dead Things*,¹⁹ Eric Mangion examined an alternative approach to presenting performance art. He perceived performance as a genre that has always refused a standard aesthetic form, one that has seemingly been built on the same set of elements: audience-oriented actions, transience, body movements and speech.

Nevertheless, the documentation, the installation, the object and the performance's leftovers may be quite relevant in contemporary practices. The exhibition presented numerous materials that remained during the course of the actions conducted and sought to examine the status of the pertinence of these objects. The products of artists such as Richard Jackson, Paul McCarthy, Roman Signer, Mike Kelley, Franz West, Jim Shaw and Guy de Cointet as well as John Bock, Spartacus Chetwynd, Catherine Sullivan and Erwin Wurm constituted the display curated by Mangion and de Brugerolle in Villa Arson, Nice, in the autumn of 2008. The challenge of the show was to present artefacts that were used in artistic performance even though the performance itself did not take place at this location. Although important because of their transformation from common artefacts to display objects, taken out of their original context they seemed to be decontextualized, devitalized and isolated. The tendency to consider these objects as new totems of the art world is linked to the increasing popularity of performance and its leftovers in art centres and galleries and at festivals. It is also likened to the fact that since the beginning of the 1970s and the almost "religious conservation" of Beuys's performance objects, the artists themselves have been trying to think about these artefacts in a much more formal way.

Unsurprisingly, contemporary artists Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelley play an important role in the mutation of an object into an artwork. As soon as objects interfere with their action, they achieve an exceptional status. *Performance-related objects* become sculptures as soon as they are enunciated to the audience and loaded with a *performative experience*.²⁰

The Nice exhibition *Not to Play with Dead Things* opened up a debate on whether leftover objects achieve an aesthetic status, or whether they are nothing more than *meaningless ghosts*. The gesture, immediacy and character of performance enunciated at a given moment and within a given context become a contradictory argument to the presentation,

¹⁹ The title of the exhibition refers to writings by Mike Kelley "Playing with Dead Things", which recalls his psychoanalytical relationships to his childhood fetishes (catalogue of the exhibition *The Uncanny*, curated by Mike Kelley).

²⁰ Eric Mangion, *Not to Play with Dead Things*, exhibition catalogue (Zurich: JRP|Rignier, 2009), pp. 19–20.

proving the impossibility of reactivating the authenticity of the initial action.²¹ On the other hand, the exhibition may be comprehended as an extensive overview of documentation materials, the testimony of a time that has passed away.

A kind of revival

At the conference, Eva Meyer-Hermann, an independent curator based in Cologne and a former curator at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven in the Netherlands, focused on documenting performance and making it accessible to contemporary recipients in the form of display arrangements. The exhibition Allan Kaprow – Art as Life (2006/2007), which took place at the Van Abbemuseum and the Haus der Kunst in Munich, sought to present Kaprow's legacy in both a documentative and a reconstructive way, even leaving a place for the audience's own "creative" and "contributive" actions. The show consisted of various drawings, paintings, sculptures, assemblages, objects and collages, texts in the form of correspondence, and documentation as well as videos. Some reconstructions and reinventions of Kaprow's environments were also shown, and the audience was able to actively take part in them.

During his lifetime, Kaprow, who died in 2006, welcomed the recreation of his works by others. It was a legitimization for the reinvention of the environment *Yard*, such as the one by William Pope.L. *Yard*, a site-specific environment and performance in one, was originally created in 1961 in the walled-in backyard of the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York. It consisted of a large number of tyres and objects wrapped in black tarpaper. Visitors were invited to enter the yard and climb on the tyres. Pope.L's reinvention was animated by lights and mirrors, as well as by black body bags. The re-contextualization was achieved by *a voice evoking the cadences of Barack Obama reading a poetic and politically inflected text that re-contextualizes Kaprow's own instructions to "rearrange the tires"*.²²

The reconstruction for the Meyer-Hermann exhibition Allan Kaprow – Art as Life in Eindhoven showed the plain, semicircular courtyard of a modern museum building. The bare impression was endorsed by the lack of wrapping material and other objects.²³

Both these reconstructions raise intriguing philosophical questions as to whether the reinventions relate to Kaprow's legacy. Kaprow regarded his ephemeral productions as

²¹ *Not to Play with Dead Things*, exhibition catalogue (with texts by Eric Mangion, Marie de Brugerolle, Arnaud Labelle-Rojoux, Patricia Brignone, Gérard Wajcman, Catherine Wood and Julien Bismuth, and interviews with Paul McCarthy and Richard Jackson) (Zurich: JRP|Rignier, 2009).

²² Ken Johnson, "Changing Un-Art's Tires", *The New York Times*, 9 September 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/13/arts/design/13johnson.html>, accessed on 14 November 2009.

²³ http://www.cakesmeyer.de/HTML/kaprow_eindhoven.html, accessed on 10 November 2009.

musical compositions that might be performed repeatedly by different interpreters.²⁴ He allowed them to add their own improvisations and accepted them as enriching his own work. *Yard* has been reproduced several times on a number of occasions.

As Ken Johnson pointed out, there is yet another aspect of the re-enactment and reinstallation of artworks, one that an artist would surely not condone. Kaprow's name was used to announce an opening at Hauser & Wirth in New York. One of the greatest purveyors of contemporary art, the gallery simply used Pope.L's reinvention of Kaprow's *Yard* as an advertisement.²⁵ This approach was contradictory to the artist's wish to avoid publicity and keep a safe distance from popular culture, which both "happening" and "performance" came close to becoming in the 1970s.

The question that should be asked, however, is whether descendants can ethically dispose of an artist's legacy after he is no longer present and when he is unable to deliver his approval of these interpretations, and, moreover, to what extent we are allowed to change the artwork as the artist did, and with the same bravura.

Re-enactment as falsification and artist documentation

During the de Appel conference, Paris-based artists Marie Cool and Fabio Balducci took a strong position against re-enactments. They do not welcome recordings of their performances. Due to this fact, their work is rarely documented. Performances conducted by this duo are known only from oral accounts, such as the one presented in Frascati on the second day of the conference. The artists read the text of a performance they originally acted directly from the script. Because the reading achieved the character of a short, impassioned lecture, this approach evoked some confusion among the audience.

An article by Claire Bishop in the November edition of *Artforum* clearly shows the difficulty of documenting performance art with various mediums and methods: "[Omer Fast's] performance will, I suspect, end up as a video, as the whole thing was being filmed from multiple angles. Breitz's was also filmed, but it will take some magic in the editing suite to salvage substance from that event. Gonzalez-Foerster and Meyers's remains indefinitely unrepresentable: a lace of interlocking narratives from eighteen K's, a fragmented orchestra, and a terminally divided audience. For most of November, it felt as if the only question going was 'Have you seen anything good at Performa?' but finally I can say yes. This was the

²⁴ This wholly innovative issue will be discussed in the section on conservation.

²⁵ Hauser & Wirth, *Yard (To Harrow)*, 1961/2009, William Pope.L, Hauser & Wirth, 23 September–24 October 2009, <http://www.hauserwirth.com/exhibitions/425/allan-kaprow-yard/view/>, accessed on 10 November 2009.

biennial at its experimental best: pushing artists and audiences to new engagements with the medium.”²⁶

In a similar way, Marina Abramović also takes on the issue of making video recordings of her own staging.

The Abramović case: turning performance art into history

The assertiveness of performance art in view of “historical re-staging” led to entirely new presentations by means of re-enactments in the early 2000s, when artists such as Marina Abramović launched the re-performance of several well-known performance pieces, which resulted in a week-long staging at the Guggenheim in New York (November 2005).²⁷ The popularity and level of social recognition were crucial to the process of selecting the artworks. Along with five other performances, Abramović executed two earlier pieces as well.²⁸

The project confronted the fact that there was little documentation of this critical early period, and that one often had to rely upon testimony: witness accounts and photographs that mainly show fragments of recorded pieces in a very subjective, taste-biased way.

Interestingly enough, in respect to the documentation of performance art, Abramović discussed the possible forms of documenting live art in a number of forums. In order to complement my earlier remarks on documentation, I would like to recall here an article in the November 2009 issue of *Monopol*.²⁹ There she postulates the creation of specialized performance documentation that should be objective, and designated to fulfil the requirements of this demanding art form. However, confronting the documentation of *Seven Easy Pieces*, one must admit that a film created in accordance with the explicit wishes of the artist is not objective documentation. “The film attempts to reveal the mechanisms of this transcendental experience by just showing the performer’s body living the events inscribed in each piece with details that outline the body’s fragility, versatility, tenacity and unlimited endurance. The fascination comes from the revelation of the physical transformation of

²⁶ Clair Bishop, “Trial and Error”, *Artforum*, New York, 27 November 2009, <http://artforum.com/diary/id=24268>, accessed on 14 December 2009 (restricted access).

²⁷ For *Seven Easy Pieces*, Marina Abramović re-enacted five ostensibly seminal performance works by her peers (dating from the 1960s and 1970s) and two of her own. The interpretation was based on the principle of interpreting a musical score. While reviewing this paper in March 2010, a series of performances entitled *The Artist Is Present*, live re-enactments by Marina Abramović, had just commenced at MoMA, New York (14 March–31 May 2010).

²⁸ Marina Abramović, *Entering the Other Side, Lips of Thomas*, 1975.

²⁹ Jenny Schlenzka, “Performance wird zum Mainstream gehören”, *Monopol*, November 2009, pp. 42–47. This article was written on the occasion of *Performa 09*, New York (<http://www.performa-arts.org>).

Marina Abramović's exposed body due to the rigorous discipline of being there on display each day for seven hours without any restrictive boundaries. [...] the film, by focusing on Marina's minute changes and strains along the long seven hours of each piece, explores in a systematic way a body without limit and increases the awareness of how participatory body art is."³⁰ Obviously, the film created by Babette Mangolte, being recorded and received by a third person (also an artist), introduces another dimension of performance. It is seen from the perspective of someone perceiving the behaviour of the artist as well as the audience in his own subjective way.

Storytelling and performance

Sophie Delpoux's "Racontar la performance" studied the possibilities of the perception and recounting of the performance by different recipients. Focusing on oral traditions, in her research project she invited a number of participants to talk about a performance they experienced personally. It is remarkable that the accounts seemed to be strikingly distinctive, not only with regard to the type of account, but also in terms of the subject's personal engagement. The very personal and direct character of some of the narratives was contrasted by the distant and reserved character of others. A few of the participants implemented anecdotes while others used very poetic or literary language. The engagement even increased to such a degree that the performance seemed to be taking place during the storytelling rather than being part of a recounted story.

During the conference, these literary narratives were contrasted by the proposal of Scott deLahunta and Bertha Bermudez, whose original concept of documenting performances lies in the discipline of documenting modern dance movements.

Performance and contemporary dance

The tracing of motion and analysis of gesture is one of the main purposes of contemporary dance documentation. This scientific approach, launched by dance company Emio Greco / PC³¹ and developed into the interdisciplinary Inside Movement Project (IMK) (2008–2010), faces numerous questions with regard to how to preserve, document and transmit the knowledge it records, and how to transmit and present the experience. The project also touches on issues of how to redo or reconstruct dance and contemporary choreography. It addresses questions such as what exactly should be looked at, how to document it, who the recipient of the transmitted knowledge is, and what constitutes the exchange of knowledge

³⁰ <http://www.seveneasypieces.com/>, accessed on 14 December 2009.

³¹ <http://insidemovementknowledge.net/>, accessed on 12 December 2009.

under the given conditions. Another significant issue examined by the IMK is the way in which artists transmit the knowledge and consequently, how the creative process has to be defined and qualify to achieve this purpose. It is interesting to note that this project's approach demonstrates many parallels with the approach to the conservation of media installations, and so is linked with Netherlands Media Art Institute, which promotes the development and distribution of and reflection on new technologies in the visual arts.

Conservation principles and the afterlife of performance

Over the past two decades, extensive debate on contemporary artworks challenging traditional principles of conservation has led to the development of an increasingly flexible approach, particularly in respect to the contingency of an art object. This development has been necessary due to the fact that contemporary art no longer allows for the classifications and archiving that were routine in centuries past. Artworks began to exist for a short period of time and then disappear in their physical state. What remains are leftovers: undefined and imprecise documentation of various manners and styles. The flexible approach has been implemented by conservators and conservation researchers in different disciplines, referring to site-specific objects (Tatja Scholte, "The Impact of Conservation on Site-Specific Works of Art"³²), objects from the crossover disciplines of technology and nature ("Between Organic Media and Technology: Unstable Materials and Contemporary Conservation" by this author), time-based media art installations (Pip Laurenson, "Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations"³³) and others.

It can be argued that performance art is dealing with a similar interrogation in terms of the attachment to a given time and the connection with a given location as media art installation. Performance not only unfolds within a certain time, it is usually acted by the artist himself, using the body as a medium. The authenticity, in respect to the original artwork – a performance – rests only in the fact of the artist's presence, interchanging emotions and having the intermediate experience of performed narrative. Or, to use the artist's words: "[it] is about the performing body and how it affects viscerally the people who confront it, look at it and participate in the transcendental experience that is its primary affect."³⁴ Peggy Phelan

³² "New Strategies in Conservation of Contemporary Art", PhD project description, <http://www.newstrategiesinconservation.org/projects/>, accessed on 28 November 2009.

³³ *Tate Papers*, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/06autumn/laurenson.htm>, accessed on 10 September 2009.

³⁴ Marina Abramović, *Seven Easy Pieces*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 9–15 November 2005, 5 p.m.–12 a.m., <http://www.seveneasypieces.com/>, accessed on 13 December 2009.

claims that performance “becomes itself through disappearance”.³⁵ The ephemeral character of performance as enactments that do not endure over time implies the variety of forms of its representations. This phenomenon may evoke questions of authenticity. However, if one considers the continuation of artistic enactments to be a part of an ongoing creative process, the concept of what is perceived as an original, authentic and singular artwork may shift diametrically.³⁶

In the field of technology- and time-based media conservation, an attempt has been made to implement a musicological approach to reinstalling and recreating the media installation. The above-mentioned approach seeks to define the role of an interpreter in the re-enactment of a piece. Following philosopher Nelson Goodman’s idea concerning the division of art into “autographic” and “allographic”, Pip Laurenson states: “Autographic arts are things like paintings and sculpture and allographic arts are things like musical or theatrical works that are performed. I would suggest that the concept of authenticity operating in the traditional conceptual framework of conservation is appropriate for a framework in which the objects of conservation are the autographic arts but inadequate for works which are not.”³⁷

Laurenson continues: “In the tradition of Western music, works have a score and for the philosopher Stephen Davies, this is ontologically significant: ‘a performance of a given work is authentic if it faithfully instances the work, which is done by following the composer’s work-determinative instructions as these are publicly recorded in its score.’ ... Performances can occur in different times and different places with different performers and still be authentic instances of that performance. In the performance of a musical work it is recognized that there is a gap between a work as represented as a score and its performance. This allows us to speak of good and bad performances while still being able to say that a work is the same work even if badly performed. There is room for interpretation.”³⁸

Terms such as emulation (transferring the media artwork to another medium while trying to be wary of its authentic appearance by imitation) or migration (transferring the media artwork to completely new equipment) used in the conservation of media art may correspond to the reinterpretations or re-enactments of performance art as well. Emulation might be

³⁵ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (Routledge, 1993).

³⁶ Daisy Abbott, panel paper (AHDS Performing Arts, University of Glasgow, 2007).

³⁷ Pip Laurenson, “Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations”, *Tate Papers*, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/06autumn/laurenson.htm>, accessed on 10 September 2009.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

implemented in terms of a re-enactment of the performance by the artist himself, while migration might be applied when a different actor performs the given piece.

In the case of reinstallations of media artworks, in his article “Death by Wall Label”, Jon Ippolito proposed accepting the variable character of new media and retaining its transient character in documentation that is technically and historically accurate.³⁹

Consequently, why not allow the re-enactments to exist as clearly declared remakes of old performances?

Conclusion

At the beginning of the millennium, Abramović initiated what became a strong tendency for re-performing in a most expressive way. She introduced the historical approach to performance as an art genre placed in the past. Among other things, the fact that the repetitions of performances lasted for seven hours and that there was little detailed documented historical evidence to go on meant that improvisation played an important role. Many artistic works cannot be re-performed, though, or even reconstructed. Only a few people can imagine the performances by Yves Klein as re-invented – his actions will always be present in his imprints on the white sheets. When I interviewed the Swiss duo Com&Com in December 2009, they stated that a re-execution of the performance should never claim to be authentic. The comparison with their conceptual projects, such as “Mocmoc” – a statue that was erected in 2003 at the Bahnhofplatz in the Swiss town of Romanshorn because of an invented legend – shows that although the artefacts created in addition to the artistic action live a separate life, they will never represent the action itself, nor should they claim the originality that belongs solely to the concept.

Thinking back to November 2009, when a retrospective exhibition of the work of Swiss artist Roman Signer was shown in Kunsthaus Zug⁴⁰ (likewise, a few of his documentary videos were presented in an exhibition at the Helmhaus in Zurich in December 2008⁴¹), there is always a certain habituation or even acquiescence with which the audience perceives the numerous videos and projections of the artist’s actions. In addition, Signer’s exhibitions involve a few leftovers; the (explosive) performances, however, are presented in the obvious form of video documentation. As far as I know, there have been no attempts to recreate Signer’s artworks for any of those venues.

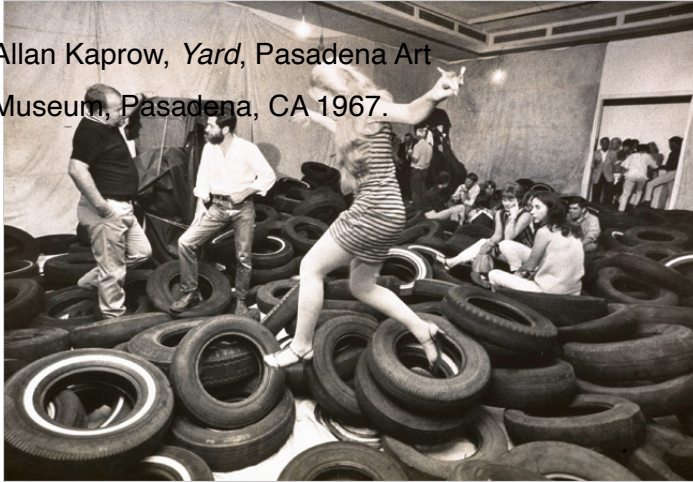
³⁹ Jon Ippolito, “Death by Wall Label”, <http://thoughtmesh.net/publish/11.php>, accessed on 13 December 2009.

⁴⁰ Roman Signer, Werke 1975–2007, donation of Christine and Peter Kamm, Kunsthaus Zug, Switzerland, 30 September–22 November 2009.

⁴¹ Roman Signer, Projektionen, Helmhaus Zürich, December 2008.

It could be argued that, as one of the many representations of performance, reconstructing authorized performances is a problematic and ethically difficult matter. The desire to participate in an event that took place at a certain time in the past cannot be fulfilled as long as notions of authenticity and originality prevail. However, an interpretation can be conducted as soon as there is a clear declaration of reinterpretation of the original piece. It is up to the spectator to decide whether the form corresponds with his desires and expectations.

Allan Kaprow, *Yard*, Pasadena Art Museum, Pasadena, CA 1967.



Reconstruction of Allan Kaprow, *Yard*, Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2007.



References

Abbott, Daisy. Panel paper. AHDS (Arts and Humanities Data Service) Performing Arts, University of Glasgow, 2007. <http://ahds.ac.uk/performingarts/>, accessed on 13 December

2009.

Abramović, Marina. *Entering the Other Side; Lips of Thomas*. Performances at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1975. <http://www.hotreview.org/articles/marinaabram.htm>, accessed on 13 December 2009.

Abramović, Marina. *Seven Easy Pieces*. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 9–15 November 2005, 5 p.m.–12 a.m. <http://www.seveneasypieces.com/>, accessed on 13 December 2009.

Bishop, Clair. “Trial and Error”. *Artforum*, New York, 27 November 2009. www.artforum.com%20:%20scene%20&%20herd.webarchive, accessed on 14 December 2009 (restricted access).

Buhr, Elke. “Das Blut, der Schweiss und all die Tränen”. *Monopol*, October 2009, pp. 55–70.

Hölling, Hanna. “Organic Art. Unstable Materials and Contemporary Conservation” (an earlier version of “Between Organic Media and Technology: Unstable Materials and Contemporary Conservation”). <http://www.newstrategiesinconservation.org/>, accessed on 10 December 2009.

Hsieh, Tehching. *Performance Works*. <http://www.theartnewspaper.tv/content.php?vid=554>, accessed on 20 November 2009.

deLahunta, Scott, and Bertha Bermudez. Conference presentation at *The Manifold* (after *Lives of Performance*, 13–15 November 2009, STUK Kunstencentrum, Leuven (Belgium) and Frascati (Nes 63, Amsterdam)). Co-production of de Appel and STUK Kunstencentrum.

Ippolito, Jon. “Death by Wall Label”. <http://thoughtmesh.net/publish/11.php>, accessed on 13 December 2009.

Laurenson, Pip. “Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations”. *Tate Papers*, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/06autumn/laurenson.htm>, accessed on 10 September 2009.

Laet, Tommy de. “Re-enactment at the Intersection of Preservation and Provocation”.

Conference paper presented on the occasion of the Re:Move Colloquium! “Re-enacting the Dance: Reconstruction or Critical Intervention?”, 12 February 2010, Kaaaitheater, Brussels.

Mechelen, Marga van.& Michael Gibbs, *de Appel: performances, installations, video, projects 1975–83*. Amsterdam: de Appel Foundation, 2006, pp. 9–16.

Muñoz Viñas, Salvador. *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*. Oxford: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, 2005.

Not to Play with Dead Things, exhibition catalogue (Eric Mangion, Marie de Brugerolle, Arnaud Labelle-Rojoux, Patricia Brignone, Gérard Wajcman, Catherine Wood and Julien Bismuth, and interviews with Paul McCarthy and Richard Jackson). Zurich: JRPI Rignier, 2009.

Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance*, Routledge, 1993.

Ruiters, Domeniek. *doe iets: Metropolis M4*. 2004, pp. 69–72; cited in Van Mechelen, Amsterdam: de Appel Foundation, 2006, *ibid*.

Sack, Adriano, “My Private Guantanamo: Porträt Tehching Hsieh”. *Monopol*, October 2009.

Schlenzka, Jenny. “Performance wird zum Mainstream gehören”. *Monopol*, November 2009, pp. 42–47.

Schlingensief, Christoph. *Sterben Lernen (Herr Andersen stirbt in 60 Minuten)*. 8 December 2009, Theater Neumarkt (Neumarkt 5, CH 8001 Zurich), in cooperation with René Pollesch’s *Calvinismus Klein*; <http://www.schlingensief.com/weblog/index.php?p=436>, accessed on 10 December 2009.

Scholte, Tatja. “The Impact of Conservation on Site-Specific Works of Art”. <http://www.newstrategiesinconservation.org/projects/>, accessed on 10 December 2009.

The Manifold (after) Lives of Performance. 13–15 November 2009, STUK Kunstencentrum, Leuven (Belgium) and Frascati (Nes 63, Amsterdam). Co-production of de Appel and STUK Kunstencentrum (Leuven); brochure, 2009.

Sharp, Willoughby. *Body Works, Avalanche I*, Fall 1970, pp. 14–17. Cited in David Hopkins, *After Modern Art 1945–2000*, Oxford University Press, 2000.