

Performance Art and the Seduction of Theatricality

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Born of the America of 1960s, performance art comes along as a celebration of presentation rather than re-presentation, as a display form of art, and an art form that does not admit of duplication. This paper presents a reading of the seductive power of performance art as rooted in our theatrical nature. I will address performance art as an emancipated form of the theatrical, where by “theatrical” I mean a specific mode of presentation and a specific mode of perception: the mode of presentation of the self to the social and the mode of perception of the self through the social. Performance art, I will argue, is hardly an anomaly of our time. Rather, its source of disturbance and fascination lies in the natural, though excessive manifestation of our theatrical nature. By its appeal to the shocking, the perilous, or the mundane even, this form of art confirms what Paul Woodruff has addressed as “the necessity of watching and being watched.” Performance art shows us the danger of self-presentation, the recognition of the other gaze as the self’s greatest need and greatest fear. It needs no words. Mere action is more seductive than speech and does not accept speech in return. Once it has been performed, it is no longer. In Nietzsche’s words, it celebrates the fleeting moment’s “greatest weight.” As Samuel Beckett used to tell his actors, performance artists seem to tell their spectators: “Go on failing. Go on. Only next time, try to fail better.”

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Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better (Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho*).

1. Theatricality: Its Historical Background

The notion of theatricality has gained so much in popularity in recent times that it has almost become an empty concept. Various adopted and adapted, it is not always clear what it stands for and what it conveys. “One thing, but perhaps only one, is obvious,” Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait alert their readers of *Theatricality*, “the idea of theatricality has achieved an extraordinary range of meanings, making it everything from an act to an attitude, a style to a semiotic system, a medium to a message. It is sign empty of meaning; it is the meaning of all signs” (2003, 1 f). Born of the theater, theatricality has inherited from the stage a Protean flexibility that makes it appealing and suitable to many different disciplines—from the arts, humanities, and social sciences, to economics, business, and politics. Of course, if anything can become an example of the theatrical, the theatrical gets so common as to be almost transparent. Besides, as Anne-Britt Gran notices, given that the English language lacks a distinction between the “theater-like” and the “theatrical,” “one finds both a love of the theatrical and condemnation of that which is false and exaggerated, in one and the same word” (2002, 253).

I shall begin with a few observations on the theatrical we seem to condemn. “[W]ith infrequent exceptions,

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terms borrowed from the theater—*theatrical*, *operatic*, *melodramatic*, *stagey*, etc.—tend to be hostile or belittling.” Jonas Barish starts off his report on what he famously calls the “anti-theatrical prejudice.” “And so do,” Barish continues, “a wide range of expressions drawn from theatrical activity expressly to convey disapproval: *acting*, *play acting*, *playing up to*, *putting on an act*, *putting on a performance*, *making a scene*, *making a spectacle of oneself*, *playing to the gallery*, and so forth” (1981, 1).¹ The theatrical one should be wary of reaches far back in history, so far back as the two classic ideas of *mimesis* and *theatrum mundi*. Indeed, the Greek idea of *mimesis* (commonly and loosely translated as imitation) colors our commonsense acquaintance with theatricality and, more often than not, nowadays forms of anti-theatrical prejudice are heir to the old Platonic diatribe between the real and its image. Of that battle, the theater, the copy of the image, “three times removed” from reality (*Republic* 597e), has come out defeated. It has proven unworthy—metaphysically, epistemologically, and ethically. The theater, it has been said, has an inherent deficiency, emptiness, a void of reality. That which is shown on stage is a copy, a pale imitation of the real. But, paradoxically, the opposite is also the case and the theater has been found guilty of a surplus of reality. As if making up for its ontological lack, the theater engages in the excessive, the showy, and the artificial. Space of a blameful spectacle, of appearance disguised as reality, the stage has been ever since banned as the epitome of the “illusory, deceptive, exaggerated, artificial, or affected” (Davis and Postlewait 2003, 4). Its actors have been portrayed as skilled masters of deception. They have been persecuted for the longest time as those “rogues and vagabonds” who have made an art of “deceit, irreverent mimicry and the power to arouse in others passions and emotions normally controlled” (Davis and Postlewait 2003, 4).

On the other hand, within the Latin meaning of *theatrum mundi*, a likeness is claimed between the stage and the world. *Totus mundus agit histrionem*—all the world plays the actor, in Petronius’ version of the metaphor: somehow (and each “how” defines the variations in the metaphor) the world makes each of us an actor. Like the popular medieval imagery of the Wheel of Fortune and the Ship of Fools, the *theatrum mundi* of the Renaissance becomes a common literary device to unmask the futility of man’s roles and ambitions, played upon a too worldly stage. The metaphor is beautifully epitomized by the soliloquy of Shakespeare’s Jacques:

All the world’s a stage,
 And all the men and women merely players:
 They have their exits and their entrances;
 And one man in his time plays many parts,
 His acts being seven ages. (Shakespeare 2004, 2.7 139-43)

There is something inherently theatrical about life, the metaphor says, and, although this does not make life into a theater, the prejudice against men’s ability to take on many changeable roles on the stage of the world—as actors do in the theater—remains.

I will use the term “theatricality” stipulatively as a specific mode of presentation and a specific mode of perception: the mode of presentation of the self to the social and the mode of perception of the self through the social. A philosophical discourse on the theatricality of the self becomes a *sua specie* way of thinking about man and human nature within the world of society. Theatricality is an invitation to *watch* the show of humanity on the stage of the world (the *theatrum mundi*) and to take into account the histrionic tendencies in man’s behavior (*mimesis*). The stage of the world hosting our per-formative nature is, like any other stage, the space of the gaze. Josette Féral puts it simply: “Theatricality cannot be, it must be for someone. In other words, it is for the Other” (1982, 178). Theatricality is a relation, a “process,” Féral says, which is set going by a

“gaze”—either the actor’s (acting for an audience or in the awareness of one) or the spectator’s (watching the actor).² Theatricality happens in the inter-relational space created by a gaze, before and beyond any theatricality enacted on the stage. This pre-artistic theatricality is a way of looking at the law of supply and demand in the world of human relations, on the secular stage of self-presentation. No transcendent eye is called to witness the encounter among the selves. The gaze of the other is the self’s greatest need and greatest fear. Theatricality becomes a way of understanding human nature in the space opened up by the presence of the other (as far as, metaphorically speaking, the gaze of the other can reach). Performance art, to which I will now turn, can be understood in terms of this fundamental, pre-artistic kind of theatricality, as a specific way of engaging in our theatrical nature.

2. Performance Art: A Contemporary Response to Theatricality

Contemporary art is living through what I would like to address as an abuse in theatricality. As an abuse, it is an excess, and as an excess I read it as a symptom. It is a symptom, as I will suggest, of a contemporary malady, a lack of balance, if you will, in the relationship between the self and its theatrical nature. Performance art speaks quite eloquently of such excess in the manifestations of the theatrical nature of our selves.

As traditionally understood, the term “performance” denotes a theatrical representation in front of an audience. And, usually, it is applied to the class of the performing arts, comprised of theater, dance, music, and, to a certain extent, film. The performer’s actions—movements, gestures, sounds—are carried out (*par-fornir*) in front of an audience and within an understood set of conventions. In the America of 1960s, some other kind of art comes along to disrupt the relationship between the performing arts and their performances. Both an outcome of and a re-action to the performing arts, this relatively newborn genre is simply, and deceptively so, called *performance art*. All those sets of conventions from traditional theater—rules, guidelines, rehearsals, seasons, market-planning—have run their course. The anarchical practices of performance art erase the time-honored psychical distance that traditionally obtains between spectator and spectacle. This new art form wants to be live and wants to be free—free from rules, free from expectations, free even from time and space:³

Performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance’s being ... becomes itself through disappearance. (Phelan 1993, 146)⁴

To perform her *Balkan Baroque* piece, Marina Abramović spent four days in a basement at the 1997 Venice Biennale cleaning bloody cow bones, while singing folksongs and weeping.⁵ She recently ended (and I mean, literally ended) her solo at *The Artist is Present* retrospective: 716 hours and 30 minutes at a table in front of an empty chair, on which visitors of the MoMA could sit silently for a duration of their choosing.⁶ That which was necessary yet not sufficient for something to be identified as a *performance*—the use of one’s own body, gestures, and voice as a medium for some kind of result to be produced in front of an audience—is still necessary, but also a sufficient condition for something to qualify as a case of performance art. This art is the free, personal act of the artist or artists and, often, it asks for the (relatively) free participation of its audience.⁷

Performance art is, one could say, a *display* form of art. It is a celebration of presentation rather than re-presentation. In performance art, the actions of an individual or a group *are* the work. The work just happens and then it ends. The piece literally works toward its own consummation. In the critic and art curator Roselee Goldberg’s words:

Unlike theatre, the performer is the artist, seldom a character like an actor, and the content rarely follows a traditional plot or narrative. The performance might be a series of intimate gestures or large-scale visual, lasting from a few minutes to many hours; it might be performed only once or repeated several times, with or without a prepared script, spontaneously improvised, or rehearsed over many months. (1988, 8)

All differences aside (number of artists, duration, setting, etc.), performance art breaks the divide between art and life. This form of “theater-without-a-theater” is real. Chris Burden, after he had himself shot with a 22 caliber bullet in *Shoot* (1971), had himself crucified onto the back of a Volkswagen in *Transfixed* (1974). In his *Leap into the Void* (1960), Yves Klein attempts flying out of a window, whereas in his *Seedbad* (1971), Vito Acconci performs his masturbations and voices into a loudspeaker his fantasies about the visitors at the Sonnabend Gallery. Here—in its metaphysical cry for the ephemeral to become memorable—one finds both the greatness and the fragility of performance art.⁸ This new art form is not imitation. Performance art does not “look like” life. It is real, as life is, and, as life, it does not admit of repetition. It unfolds in the “unbearable lightness” of its being, against the weight of traditional theater, with its productions, its directors, and its seasons. I am not making the claim that performance art is or can be successful in its attempt to offer a pedestal to the ephemeral. What I believe to be philosophically intriguing, what I will question within the space of this paper is *la raison d’être* of such art. Why performance art?⁹

3. A Theatrical Malady?

If you pause and think about it, this art that comes about defining itself by what it is not, as a denial of the institution of the theater, is an *emancipated* form of the theatrical. It frees theatricality of rules and conventions from within and from above. The theater puts constraints—yet there can be performance (and theatricality) without theater. The opening of Peter Brook’s *The Empty Space* comes to mind: “I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged” (1968, 9).

Theater is back to its essence. A bare stage is the place for the bare performance. Performance art needs to reject the theater and its rigid world of conventions so that it can get back to the theatrical. My claim is that this type of art is hardly an anomaly of our times: its source of disturbance and fascination lies in its forceful, sometimes excessive and disturbing manifestation of our theatrical nature. It is the crying out of a very natural desire of ours: the desire to look and being looked at, the desire to direct the gaze toward the other and feel the other’s gaze turned toward our own selves.¹⁰

In his recent book on *The Necessity of Theater*, Paul Woodruff speaks of watching and being watched as an art. In Woodruff’s definition, theater is “the art by which human beings make human action worth watching, in a measured time and space” (2008, 39). “Theater is something we human beings do”—Woodruff explains—“when all of us who are involved are alive and present, and at least some are paying attention to others, for a measured time and in a measured space” (2008, 38). Performance art reaches at the roots of the art of watching and being watched. It has no patience for cheap and easy compromise. Performance art aims at the shocking: as if extreme scenarios alone could guarantee the ephemeral to become memorable; as if extreme scenarios alone could guarantee the presence (and the look) of a public free of coming or going.¹¹ The extreme may come in various forms: the performance artist may choose to be transgressive, or perilous, or just mundane, or amusing even. The shocking trait of performance art may lie in the most simple, almost banal, seemingly uneventful act of the artist. Pure silence can be among the most shocking and displeasing experiences we may encounter as spectators.

What do I mean by the “shock” of performance art? The use of shock as artistic strategy is nothing new per se. Shock has been a recurrent trait in art since Dada and the Fluxus movement and gave birth to an art genre of its own, the “genre shock.” Whereas the “genre shock” aims at the arousal of negative emotions (disgust, repulsion, anger, fear, and the like), the shock of performance art, as I read it, is the shock of displacement, the shock of the loss of one’s points of reference.¹² What makes the even most banal gesture memorable is its ability of pushing us—the presumed innocent onlookers—out of our comfort zone.¹³ And here it is one among the most philosophically puzzling pieces of the show: the response that performance art gets from its public. We may be disturbed, even nauseated by some performance art, yet, we go, we *look*, perhaps we *watch*. Why? Performance artists, I claim, know how to play with the theatrical nature of the self. They urge the *necessity* of theater without a theater and we fall into it—naturally.

Think about it. We are in front of happenings on a stage with no walls, where something we cannot anticipate waits to be enacted, in a time that can expand, in a space that also can expand. We lack the safety of the programmed, calculated, ordered event. If the theater has been thought since its oldest time as a gymnasium for our emotional life, where we “imaginatively live life to the full, but we risk nothing” (Lear 1992, 334),¹⁴ in performance art we lack the “relief of ‘releasing’ ... emotions in a safe environment,” since this is nothing like a traditional *as if* situation (Lear 1992, 334). The open stage of performance art is a place of exposure for artists and spectators alike. Spectators are no longer sheer spectators, for the simple fact that the object of the spectacle is real (versus fictional) and the space of spectacle is ever changing, unpredictable; it can take you in, or you may fall into it. Actors, on the other hand, are not hiding behind the masks of their characters, they cannot play within the magic of the fourth wall: their audience will not vanish into the great illusion of the “there is nobody out there.”

4. A Sublime Interlude

Yet, are we ready for this? Clearly, in defense of our reactions to performance art (if we need one), one could say that, because of our proximity to the happenings of performance art and because of the nature of an art-genre that eludes a closed definition, we can hardly be its best judges. As Goldberg puts it: “By its very nature, performance defies any precise or easy definition beyond the simple declaration that it is live art by artists. Any stricter definition would immediately negate the possibility of performance itself” (1988, 9).

“Being ‘live art by artists’ is,” as David Davies rightly points out, “at best a necessary condition for being performance art in the accepted sense” (2009, 463). And, under the umbrella of its name, one can find happenings as diverse as instructions, questions, body art, ritual, costume performance, and others.¹⁵ Thus, it is far from surprising that we spectators may be caught unprepared in the midst of such a variety and unpredictability of languages, intentions, and even expectations of performance artists. Think again of the retrospective exhibition of *la grande dame* of performance art Marina Abramović: *The Artist is Present*: a (literal) re-embodiment of the work of a life time, 50 works leave or take, spanning over four decades. Among the most discussed pieces: the remakes of *Imponderabilia* (1977), two naked performers, facing each other at a doorway; and *Luminosity* (1997), a naked woman sitting spread-legged on a bicycle seat mounted on a wall. It is worth reading what the creator Abramović said of *Imponderabilia* at the time of its 1977 performance: “We are standing naked in the main entrance of the museum, facing each other. The public entering the museum have to pass sideways through the small space between us. Each person passing has the choice which one of us has to face” (available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QgeF7tOks4s>).¹⁶

At the 2010 retrospective hosted by the MoMA, nudity caught some visitors unprepared, while it offended others; some people felt nauseated by the works; some others responded to nudity with (unrequested) nudity.¹⁷ Are we going too far with what art can or may ask from its public? Or is the blame, in fact, on us—immature spectators?

Allow me in a short interlude to indicate what I believe may help us in the appreciation of the kinds of challenges raised by performance art. What is “shocking” in the specific case of *Imponderabilia* is not nudity per se, but nudity in a space that traditionally does not host (or it is not expected to be hosting) nude live performers. The spectacle gets overwhelming. Why? Because of the unfamiliarity, the discomfort, and the dense presence of otherness. How does all this get accomplished? By the most basic idea of the theatrical: otherness looks at you and asks you to look back.

In its choice for the extreme gesture, performance art is not capricious. There is no room here for aesthetic concerns, for what may please the eye or the ear.¹⁸ There is no room for the soothing, or the reassuring, or the predictable. Abramović is especially very clear about the physical and psychological commitment she has always been asking from herself, her artists, and her public. At her solo in *The Artist is Present*, the simplest gesture of sustaining a continuous gaze—the gesture, in fact, of theatricality—required an extremely diligent six-month rehearsal.¹⁹ Then, in its apparent simplicity, the motionless act unveils its shocking power: the silent, powerful act of the artist just being there, the uncertainty of one’s gaze being returned, and the weight of holding onto it.²⁰ Simplicity and provocation go together in the elementary gesture of purely being there—watching.²¹

What I would like to suggest here is the inherent sublimity of performance art. This art disdains the beautiful and reaches out for the sublime, making its spectacle an ambivalent source of pleasure and pain: the repulsion and the discomfort one feels may become, in fact, the very source of attraction toward the spectacle. In his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Edmund Burke writes as follows: “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime” (1833, 44). That pain in fact, Burke explains, can become “delightful” if excited “at certain distances and with certain modifications” (1833, 45). Performance artists are not distant from that danger; we, the audience, are. The artist is dramatically involved in her piece, yet she makes the sublime experience available for her public. The artist presents to his public the analogue to what Burke calls “terrible” objects. Any kind of privation is, according to Burke, a “terrible” object or “conversant about terrible objects”: be it “*vacuity, darkness, solitude, and silence*” (1833, 81). Extreme light, then, resembles darkness for its “overcoming the organs of sight.” Sounds also hold “a great power” in generating the sublime: it may be loud sounds, sudden beginnings, sudden interruptions, or even not clearly attributable sounds.²² As Burke writes, “[s]ome low, confused, uncertain sounds leave us in the same fearful anxiety concerning their causes, that no light, or an uncertain light, does concerning the objects that surround us” (1833, 86). Silence is the kind of privation Abramović privileges in most of her pieces. Other artists experiment with loud sounds, sudden beginnings, sudden interruptions, or even not clearly attributable sounds, as Burke describes them.²³ Situations “conversant about terrible objects” are those ones we experience as overwhelming, threatening our own secured spot. Can we expect our senses to get pleasure out of those experiences? Our senses can be at the most “delighted,” as Burke puts it.²⁴ What they will experience is not a “positive” pleasure, but a “relative” one: a pleasure that results from the cessation of pain.²⁵ Performance artists do not dispense beauty; they do not cradle desires for order or comfort or predictability. They speak of life in its fleeting and unpredictable appearances; of our bodies and their vulnerability in exposure; of mental and

physical endurance; of public display of our (metaphorically or not) naked bodies; of recognition and rejection. In Nietzsche's terms, they tell the moment's "greatest weight." And what does beauty have to do with it?

5. Conclusion

One may suggest that performance art brings back—violently—the old Romantic need for the artist's sincerity and that it does so through amusement, irony, shock, or even horror. Performance art cries out for authenticity—and what it puts on stage is, in fact, our theatrical nature. Theatricality is somehow reduced to the sheer act of asking for recognition and, maybe, obtaining some. With a face bare of a mask, the artist brings forward a presentation rather than a representation. There is no imitation or *mimesis* and, accordingly, there is no room for the deceptive, the illusory, the copy of the real of Platonic tradition. Performance art is the attempt to affirm its presence as worth watching. Sincerity here is about the basic needs and the demands of our theatrical nature.

As presentation of the self, performance art is like a mirror held to nature—our own. As a mirror, it enlarges our theatricality and brings it to its extreme postures. We are no longer speaking in metaphors here, as we did with the *theatrum mundi*: this time, life *is* theater. Performance art reminds us of the danger of self-presentation—the recognition of the gaze of the other as the self's greatest need and greatest fear. Performance art plays with danger. It is an exacerbation of the peril of the exposure in our daily exchanges. Yet, like the more traditional portrait, it is a *trompe l'œil*. It deceives its spectators in believing that the peril they are watching is someone else's, whereas the peril is intrinsic to any new, creative, and entertaining attempt to show one's self in front of an audience.

In this paper, I suggested the idea of a relationship between the seductive power of performance art and our theatrical nature. Performance art defines itself by what it is not—the conventional theater—and rejects any commitment to what is "expected" within the art world.²⁶ Like the owl of Minerva, theatricality, in Hegel's turn of phrase, "spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk." With performance art, art and life are brought together. With performance art, life and our ability to cope with it are at stake. Performance art is about the constant risk of falling and never being able to recover. It is both exposure and vulnerability. As Beckett used to tell his actors, performance artists seem to tell their spectators: "Go on failing. Go on. Only next time, try to fail better."

Notes

1. In the 1649 edition of the *Oxford Dictionary*, the theatrical is that which "simulates, or is simulated; artificial, affected, assumed"; in the 1709 one, theatrical is the "extravagantly or irrelevantly histrionic; 'stagy'; showy, spectacular."

2. Feral's main concern is with the "stage-related theatricality." So, for her, theatricality "seems to be a *process* that has to do with a 'gaze' that postulates and creates a distinct, virtual space belonging to the other, from which fiction can emerge" (Féral and Bermingham 2002, 96).

3. What I call freedom from time and space is a freedom from traditional expectations with regard to the time and space of performance. Performance art tries to break free from the "safety" that comes from having an assigned space of performance (the theater, the music hall, etc.), an established duration of the piece, a (bourgeois) practice of intermissions, a well-ordered season, etc..

4. On the live character of performance art, see also Golberg, 1998. Performance art can exist only in the present. It may exist in future time in the audience's memory of it—someone's memory being a form of "recording" or "saving"—yet as something ontologically distinct.

5. Abramović's *Balkan Baroque* was awarded the Leone D'oro (Golden Lion Award for Best Artist) at the Venice Biennale XLVII. Today, the installation from *Balkan Baroque* is available at the MoMA.

6. *Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present*. Performance retrospective, MoMA, 14 Mar.-31 May 2010.

7. See, for instance, Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959). The artist "decided that it was time to 'increase the responsibility of the observer'" and his invitation to the show included the statement "you will become a part of the happenings; you will simultaneously experience them" (Golberg 1988, 128).

8. It is a cry for its remaining in future time as memory. It is metaphysical, for its attempt to become real in someone's memory. And here lies the fragility, along with the excess of performance art: fragility, because of its desire to become what it cannot be; excess, for the ways in which it attempts to be "worth watching."

9. I am not asking the why in terms of purpose of performance art (which one may, I believe quite unarguably, locate in the displacement of the spectator and her ideas about what art is or may be). I am asking the why in the sense of the origin of this art form, the reason that lies behind even its very purpose.

10. One may ask what then distinguishes performance art from sheer exhibitionism. Perceptually, they may "look" indistinguishable. It is the act of reflection, within the artistic act, that marks the boundaries between art and exhibitionism. However, it is worth noting the original meaning of "exhibitionist," as "one who takes part in an exhibition" (*Online Etymology Dictionary* 1821).

11. Of course, the public of a traditional performance of the performing arts is also free to leave their seat and go. Yet, there are significant differences. The performance artist has the task of gaining the attention of a public that may be just "passing by." In this sense, performance artists may remind us of the street artists of the *Commedia dell'Arte* (Comedy of Art).

12. The intention behind the act is, in the end, what differentiates the shock of performance art from the kinds of shock we may encounter in ordinary life.

13. This "out-of-comfort" zone is similar to what Arthur C. Danto has addressed as the power of "disturbational art." In contrast with "art which is disturbing in the traditional sense ... namely, through representing disturbing things even in disturbing ways" (1986, 119), "disturbational art" does not put disturbing realities at a distance: "reality must in some way then be an actual component of" it (1986, 121).

14. The reference here is to Aristotle's *Poetics*.

15. On the numerous forms performance art may assume, see Goldberg's *Performance Art* (1988) and *Performance: Live Art since 1960* (1998).

16. <<http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/audios/190/1994>>.

17. See the article on the *New York Times* "Some at MoMA Show Forget 'Look, but Don't Touch.'" <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/16/arts/design/16public.html>>.

18. See Abramović's ironic piece *Art must be Beautiful* at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOuzzltSOA>>.

19. What follows is from an interview with Abramović for the MoMA: "To do this piece I had to go through really strict training and it took me a long time. Six months before, I became vegetarian. I eat at certain times because of digestion. I never went to the bathroom, and Jerry Saltz (art critic for *New York Magazine*) made all this effort to find out how I pee. After the second day of the performance, [I realized] it will never happen. I take the last pee at 8 in the morning. In the evening when I sleep, this was really difficult to train. I have to take water every 45 minutes and sleep, and 45 minutes and sleep, because not to dehydrate during the night. But then during the day I didn't [have to pee]. And then I had this very strict diet with very light food and only eating in the morning very certain things and in the evening. I didn't engage in any social events. I didn't talk to my friends, except the curator and the doctor and [a few other] people. I had problems with my eyes. I went to the eye doctor because it was a real problem and I explained to him what I was doing and he said, 'Yes, but why are you doing this?' So he could not help." <http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2010/06/03/marina-abramovic-the-artist-speaks/>.

20. Abramović explains: "... this piece, I think it's the most difficult task I've ever done. These three months it was a huge commitment mentally and physically, and I believe now that long durational work has absolutely the biggest potential to change you mentally and physically—the performer who performs, and also the audience who take task and give themselves time to be changed with the piece itself. So it works in both ways, not just me but the audience also, because the long durational work has this potential, it's a kind of life energy extension." <http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2010/06/03/marina-abramovic-the-artist-speaks/>.

21. What I am saying about Abramović's work may be as well extended to other pieces of performance art, which I cannot discuss within the space of this paper. What I would like to stress is that the shocking, destabilizing character of this art can be found even in the minimal, apparently innocent gesture or, in fact, the lack of gesture from the artist.

22. See Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, Part II, Sections XVII-XX.

23. See, for instance, Pina Bausch and her use of, primarily, body sounds. Wim Wenders' recently released film *Pina* (2011) is a marvelous tribute to the choreographer.

24. "When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience" (Burke 1833, 45).

25. As Burke writes: "Whenever I have occasion to speak of this species of relative pleasure, I call it *Delight*.... As I make use of the word *Delight* to express the sensation which accompanies the removal of pain or danger; so when I speak of positive pleasure, I shall for the most part call it simply *Pleasure*" (1833, 41).

26. And what is the response performance art gets from the institution? I will quote Danto's comment with regard to disturbational art: "[T]he spontaneous response to disturbational art [but we can read performance art here] is to disarm it by cooptation, incorporating it instantaneously into the cool institutions of the artworld, where it will be rendered harmless and distant from forms of life it meant to explode" (1986, 119).

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