

# [Conventionally, is not one, that which exceeds the](https://assignbuster.com/conventionally-is-not-one-that-which-exceeds-the/)

Conventionally, performance artis formed through the physical actions of an artist, whether this remains live ortransferred into recorded documentation. The definition of performance art isconstantly being challenged and redefined. Some artists continue to indulge inthe fluidity of this expressive medium whereas other artists attempt to definethe artistic genre as a singular practice. For Peggy Phelan, performance artonly exists in the present thus meaning that she dismisses the idea that performancecan be accessed through secondary documentation. Phelan proposes that thedocumentation of live performance is not a performance but belongs in adifferent category of art. I will be exploring the validity of Phelan’sargument by looking at different instances of artists who have presented theirwork through live or documented performance, whilst maintaining the title of aperformance artist.

Additionally, I will discuss how the relationship betweenthe artist and viewer contributes to the validity of the performance and withinthe definition of what a performance is. Therefore, I will be questioningwhether live performance exists as an entity that cannot be replicated in anyway through recording or documentation and assessing whether it is true that “ performanceis the art form that is not one, that which exceeds the photograph, that whichevades the video, and so on. Performance is a raw immediacy” (Westermann, 2015). MarinaAbramovic was a leading force for the development of Performance Art within thesecond upsurge of feminism in the 1970’s. Working towards a new age ofmultidisciplinary styles of art, Fluxus was used to describe the fundamentaldeviations within art; challenging societies surplus values, with artists likeAbromovic, who attempted to develop Performance Art and push the public’s boundariestowards inequality. Questioning the” Here and Now” (Orrell, 2010). Imponderabilia, 1977 was performed in the Galleria Comunale d’Arte Moderna, Bologna. Attemptingto address boundaries in regards to personal space, Abramovic describes theartist’s body to be the ‘ door’ of the museum.

Abromovic and Ulay stood naked inclose proximity to one another, meaning audience members of the gallery wererequired to walk through the tight space between the pair, using a physicalaction and often creating an uncomfortable experience. In regards to thecontextual situation of this performance, the piece was considered radical, consideringthe concept of ‘ here and now’ when recreating this piece in 2010, for the MOMAshow, New York. Abramovic altered her work in some significant ways; usingtrained performers instead of herself and having a wider gap between them dueto the dimensions of the doorway. Despite the alteration of the performance, Abramovic suggests how the preservation of Performance Art is unsuccessful andhow concluded, situational and periodical differences the concept of ‘ here andnow’ is apparent. Henceforth, when Abramovic recreated this work it was anattempt for it to be live again and withhold the connotations of the pastimages. The viewer of either the documentation or the recreation in 2010 willnever see the original performance and the intentions Abramovic had back then. The artist herself concludes that “ the nature of performance is about thepresent” (Abramovic) thus supporting Phelan’s statement that dismisses theconcept of a performances documentation being valid as Performance Art. Withthe intention of recreating the piece in a live setting the originalperformance is lost.

“ Isthe live practice of today dead tomorrow? And does it need to be dead, likemeat, in order to be consumed?” (Orrell, 2010). The concept of ephemerality, ofthings being transitory and only existing briefly are fundamentally the keyconcepts behind Phelan’s argument. This ideological position of a performancebeing made to last for a temporary period to gain validity “ becomes itselfthrough disappearance” (Phelan, 1993).

However, this would be questioned bymany in the art world. It has been said that “ documentation should be aformative part of, rather than secondary practice of performance, documentationcan be the end goal of performance” (Auslander, 2006) thus suggesting that thereare now ways of documenting and recording, live performance which make it closerto being a live experience, due to the increased ability of technologicalrecording techniques; such as higher resolution film quality, virtual realityand the accessibility of live streaming on social media platforms for example. Thisview states, Phelan’s rather closed-minded way of thinking is outdated withinour mediatized society.

Chris Burden’s ThroughThe Night Softly, 1973, Is a performance piece in which the artist crawledon glass within a parking lot. He attempted to explore the idea ofre-sensitizing views of violence. Performed for the purpose to showing thedocumentation, he attempted to push the bounds of what is consideredPerformance Art. The life of this work was made for that purpose, thereforeonly having a life in the past. Remaining with the concept of ephemerality, Burden’sperformance was not just presented in a gallery space but was aired on TVthrough an advertising slot bought by Burden. Only showing the clip for 10seconds, the piece was televised though the homes of the nation, with the intentionof creating an imprint of shock and feeling when transcribed outside of agallery space. Transcribing this outside of the traditional liveness or space ofa performance, Auslander suggests that it is not the audience, gallery space orliveness that makes the action performance art but is the repercussions of theartist’s actions.

If a performance is documented with the purpose to be shownin that form, it is a direct reflection of the artist, implying that as long asthe artist intends for the documentation of the performance to be an integralpart of it, it does not subtract from their initial concept. Consequently, Burden’s piecetranscends the definition of performance and can push the artist’s conceptionslikewise that of live Performance Art. It has been claimed that “ depends ofdocumentation to attain symbolic status within the realm of culture” (Jones1998). Therefore, Amelia Jones would suggest that documented art is more ‘ neutralised’allowing the viewer to consider the piece outside of the present of performanceart.

The accessibility of documentation is necessary for performance to keep itwithin the circulation of relevance and context within society, if not the workbecomes a myth and no longer has a place in modern society. Juxtaposing Phelan’sontology of performance, the concept of ephemerality doesn’t just concern thelive act, but that of a documentation. Contesting Phelan’s statement, unlikeAbramovic, Burden is a clear example of how a momentary performance can havethe same repercussions and representations within the circulation of society, to stick in the memory of the audience is to that have the same intentions aslive performers, thus challenging traditional conceptions of performance artand the classification it lies within. It seems that, to argue thatdocumentation is ultimately classified as something other than performance, completely disregards the idea that the artist can have control over the endrecording of it. The use of documentation as a tool accordingly lends itself totheir original performance and their overall practice. Theidea of a ‘ one-time event’ where the artist uses the spectator to create asingle moment of relevance for live performance art, could be contrasted withBurden’s view of preservation through the document.

For example, the work ofFranko B, a performance artist whom explores his body using pain, theuntouchable and beauty to evoke a condition of painful intimacy and emotionalinvolvement for both himself and the spectators. In his performance I Miss You! 2003, Franko B uses theaesthetic of a catwalk show to parade his naked, white painted body whilstwalking up and down the runway, simultaneously bleeding from both arms. We perceivethe ultimate ‘ truth’ when performance art is watched live, stimulating all oursenses and not just our limited sight and hearing we get from a documentation, forexample; the sound of blood dripping directly in front of the audience remainedan essential part of the performance which cannot be emulated throughalternative medium. Franko B is a clear example of how when performance isdocumented any emotion felt during the performance becomes void and it losesthe raw and real sensory experience. Regarding his work, Franko B suggests thatlive performance is the most “ eloquent way to communicate” (B, 2003) Thissupports Phelan’s claim in that Franko B considers the experience of a liveperformance piece to be a separate and even superior ‘ secondary’ experience andthose viewing the documentation are secondary viewers. By including the nakedbody within a live presence and through the changing proximity between theartist and audience, this could make either viewer feel uncomfortable but it isundoubtedly stunted for the secondary viewers.

Ultimately, this experiencewould be de-sensitized through viewing the performance as a documented version, as a screen is separating the artist and audience removing the sense ofproximity; this ultimately devalues the intended message of the performance andtherefore backs up Phelan’s claim “ otherwise participate in the representationof representations” (Phelan, 1993). Although both looking at pain inrelation to the live-ness of their art, Franko B and Burden are dissimilar intheir approach to documentation. Burden’s recording of Through The Night Softly, 1973 was a real-time recording, where thestatic camera was only allowing us to watch the performance as if there were anaudience, attempting to trick the viewer into being engulfed in the document.

Onthe other hand, OB’s documentation of work is an edited document where it ismore of an overview of the work rather than the performance in its raw form, through multiple camera angles the viewer doesn’t get the experience of oneangle, that could be argued is a more ‘ truthful’ way to experience. Although, as an artist he still chooses to document the performance as an artefact of hiswork, Franko B is aware that this is invalid as a document. Within Through The Night Softly, 1973, Burdendid not have a live audience, whereas OB’s work was performed for them. Although Franko B had a larger audience within the live setting; it can beargued the work of Burden reached more though the accessibility of the media. Likewise, the artist may change the performance in a symbiotic reaction and relationshipto the audience. This leads to the questions of whether live performance dependson the audience for its authenticity; can their documentation of theperformance exist alone? And can it exist without anyone to experience it? Whodefines performance art; this relationship between the audience and artist isin a constant state of flux, Joshua Sofaer suggests “ one minute the audience isobserving, the next, they are the ones being observed” (Sofaer, 2013).

Thisinfers that there is a reciprocal relationship between the audience and theartist during a performance. To define it as ‘ Performance’ art means to acceptthere is a co-dependency in this relationship. Sofaer supports Phelan’s ideathat a performance piece must be enacted live in front of an audience due tothe artists dependency on them, for the piece to exist. Stuart Brisleys 10 days/5-year anniversary 1978. Where presenting a banquet tableof food, as a representation of food consumed by the artist within a week.

Inviting the audience to participate in his 10-day durational performance; theaudience consumed the food while he starved for the whole 10 days, after the 10days were up, Brisley stripped off his clothes and dragging his body throughthe remains of the food. Watching the documentation of this work, it isapparent Brisley is aware of the cameras in addition to the audience, attempting to push the boundaries of performance, suggesting his intentionswere for perhaps a cohesive live performance and a documented one. To questionwhether Briley’s deliberate actions are for the documentation or performance isto ask if its liveness is central to nature and intentions of the piece. Clearly the content of the performance and the repercussions of the having aparticipatory audience, in comparison to the previous artists the necessity ofhaving the audience to be ‘ co-producers’, is a direct catalyst to why theliveness of performance is key to its definition to propose that performancearts role is to provide an insight to the consciousness of the artists.

Aliketo the work of Abramovic and Franko B, it is evident that the present event orfeelings cannot be reciprocated through documentation and if it does, so it losesall right to be defined as Performance Art. “ regarding performance art wereach the threshold where the human being experiences himself primarily as aspiritual being” (Beuys 1997). In conclusion, in regard to Phelan’squote, the definition of Performance Art is resistant to constraining to onedefinition, therefore to come to a natural conclusion we must consider how theconcept of being present relies within the action, artist and the audiencedefine the work. As one cannot occur without the other, alongside howdocumentation is making the social attitudes towards performance artincreasingly appealing. We must build a different vocabulary to accept theworks as artists have subjective views of what they classify their art to be. “ actualmoment of encounter between artist and spectator” (Soferer, 2013).

Artists likeChris Burden whom uses the platform of documentation, where the live element isnot fully removed by the presence of this lies within the context of work, further supporting the that the advancements of society, not to dismiss Phelan’sstatement but a wish to challenge this vocabulary. On the other hand; performance art that is following in the footsteps of traditional performanceart Stuart Brisley, Franko B and Abramovic suggest that the liveness ofperformance art must be a tangible entity and is crucial to its definition andthe documentation of their work ultimately lost something. Overall categoricallythe changes within performance art are fluid.