

Conventionally, is not
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Conventionally, performance art is formed through the physical actions of an artist, whether this remains live or transferred into recorded documentation. The definition of performance art is constantly being challenged and redefined. Some artists continue to indulge in the fluidity of this expressive medium whereas other artists attempt to define the artistic genre as a singular practice. For Peggy Phelan, performance art only exists in the present thus meaning that she dismisses the idea that performance can be accessed through secondary documentation. Phelan proposes that the documentation of live performance is not a performance but belongs in a different category of art. I will be exploring the validity of Phelan's argument by looking at different instances of artists who have presented their work through live or documented performance, whilst maintaining the title of a performance artist.

Additionally, I will discuss how the relationship between the artist and viewer contributes to the validity of the performance and within the definition of what a performance is. Therefore, I will be questioning whether live performance exists as an entity that cannot be replicated in any way through recording or documentation and assessing whether it is true that "performance is the art form that is not one, that which exceeds the photograph, that which evades the video, and so on. Performance is a raw immediacy" (Westermann, 2015). Marina Abramovic was a leading force for the development of Performance Art within the second upsurge of feminism in the 1970's. Working towards a new age of multidisciplinary styles of art, Fluxus was used to describe the fundamental deviations within art; challenging societal surplus values, with artists like Abramovic, who

attempted to develop Performance Art and push the public's boundaries towards inequality. Questioning the "Here and Now" (Orrell, 2010). *Imponderabilia*, 1977 was performed in the Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna, Bologna. Attempting to address boundaries in regards to personal space, Abramovic describes the artist's body to be the 'door' of the museum.

Abramovic and Ulay stood naked in close proximity to one another, meaning audience members of the gallery were required to walk through the tight space between the pair, using a physical action and often creating an uncomfortable experience. In regards to the contextual situation of this performance, the piece was considered radical, considering the concept of 'here and now' when recreating this piece in 2010, for the MOMA show, New York. Abramovic altered her work in some significant ways; using trained performers instead of herself and having a wider gap between them due to the dimensions of the doorway. Despite the alteration of the performance, Abramovic suggests how the preservation of Performance Art is unsuccessful and how contextual, situational and periodical differences the concept of 'here and now' is apparent. Henceforth, when Abramovic recreated this work it was an attempt for it to be live again and withhold the connotations of the past images. The viewer of either the documentation or the recreation in 2010 will never see the original performance and the intentions Abramovic had back then. The artist herself concludes that "the nature of performance is about the present" (Abramovic) thus supporting Phelan's statement that dismisses the concept of a performance's documentation being valid as Performance Art. With the intention of recreating the piece in a live setting the original performance is lost.

“ Is the live practice of today dead tomorrow? And does it need to be dead, like meat, in order to be consumed?” (Orrell, 2010). The concept of ephemerality, of things being transitory and only existing briefly are fundamentally the key concepts behind Phelan’s argument. This ideological position of a performance being made to last for a temporary period to gain validity “ becomes itself through disappearance” (Phelan, 1993).

However, this would be questioned by many in the art world. It has been said that “ documentation should be a formative part of, rather than secondary practice of performance, documentation can be the end goal of performance” (Auslander, 2006) thus suggesting that there are now ways of documenting and recording, live performance which make it close to being a live experience, due to the increased ability of technological recording techniques; such as higher resolution film quality, virtual reality and the accessibility of live streaming on social media platforms for example. This view states, Phelan’s rather closed-minded way of thinking is outdated within our mediatized society.

Chris Burden’s *Through the Night Softly*, 1973, is a performance piece in which the artist crawled on glass within a parking lot. He attempted to explore the idea of re-sensitizing views of violence. Performed for the purpose of showing the documentation, he attempted to push the bounds of what is considered Performance Art. The life of this work was made for that purpose, therefore only having a life in the past. Remaining with the concept of ephemerality, Burden’s performance was not just presented in a gallery space but was aired on TV through an advertising slot bought by Burden. Only showing the clip for 10 seconds, the piece was televised though the <https://assignbuster.com/conventionally-is-not-one-that-which-exceeds-the/>

homes of the nation, with the intention of creating an imprint of shock and feeling when transcribed outside of a gallery space. Transcribing this outside of the traditional liveness or space of a performance, Auslander suggests that it is not the audience, gallery space or liveness that makes the action performance art but is the repercussions of the artist's actions.

If a performance is documented with the purpose to be shown in that form, it is a direct reflection of the artist, implying that as long as the artist intends for the documentation of the performance to be an integral part of it, it does not subtract from their initial concept. Consequently, Burden's piece transcends the definition of performance and can push the artist's conceptions likewise that of live Performance Art. It has been claimed that "depends on documentation to attain symbolic status within the realm of culture" (Jones 1998). Therefore, Amelia Jones would suggest that documented art is more 'neutralised' allowing the viewer to consider the piece outside of the present of performance art.

The accessibility of documentation is necessary for performance to keep it within the circulation of relevance and context within society, if not the work becomes a myth and no longer has a place in modern society.

Juxtaposing Phelan's ontology of performance, the concept of ephemerality doesn't just concern the live act, but that of a documentation. Contesting Phelan's statement, unlike Abramovic, Burden is a clear example of how a momentary performance can have the same repercussions and representations within the circulation of society, to stick in the memory of the audience is to that have the same intentions as live performers, thus challenging traditional conceptions of performance art and the classification it

lies within. It seems that, to argue that documentation is ultimately classified as something other than performance, completely disregards the idea that the artist can have control over the end recording of it. The use of documentation as a tool accordingly lends itself to their original performance and their overall practice. The idea of a 'one-time event' where the artist uses the spectator to create a single moment of relevance for live performance art, could be contrasted with Burden's view of preservation through the document.

For example, the work of Franko B, a performance artist whom explores his body using pain, the untouchable and beauty to evoke a condition of painful intimacy and emotional involvement for both himself and the spectators. In his performance I Miss You! 2003, Franko B uses the aesthetic of a catwalk show to parade his naked, white painted body whilst walking up and down the runway, simultaneously bleeding from both arms. We perceive the ultimate 'truth' when performance art is watched live, stimulating all our senses and not just our limited sight and hearing we get from a documentation, for example; the sound of blood dripping directly in front of the audience remained an essential part of the performance which cannot be emulated through alternative medium. Franko B is a clear example of how when performance is documented any emotion felt during the performance becomes void and it loses the raw and real sensory experience. Regarding his work, Franko B suggests that live performance is the most "eloquent way to communicate" (B, 2003) This supports Phelan's claim in that Franko B considers the experience of a live performance piece to be a separate and even superior 'secondary' experience and those 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 <https://assignbuster.com/conventionally-is-not-one-that-which-exceeds-the/>

the performance in a symbiotic reaction and relationship to the audience.

This leads to the questions of whether live performance depends on the audience for its authenticity; can their documentation of the performance exist alone? And can it exist without anyone to experience it? Who defines performance art; this relationship between the audience and artist is in a constant state of flux, Joshua Sofaer suggests "one minute the audience is observing, the next, they are the ones being observed" (Sofaer, 2013).

This infers that there is a reciprocal relationship between the audience and the artist during a performance. To define it as 'Performance' art means to accept there is a co-dependency in this relationship. Sofaer supports Phelan's idea that a performance piece must be enacted live in front of an audience due to the artist's dependency on them, for the piece to exist. Stuart Brisley's 10 days/5-year anniversary 1978. Where presenting a banquet table of food, as a representation of food consumed by the artist within a week.

Inviting the audience to participate in his 10-day durational performance; the audience consumed the food while he starved for the whole 10 days, after the 10 days were up, Brisley stripped off his clothes and dragging his body through the remains of the food. Watching the documentation of this work, it is apparent Brisley is aware of the cameras in addition to the audience, attempting to push the boundaries of performance, suggesting his intentions were for perhaps a cohesive live performance and a documented one. To question whether Brisley's deliberate actions are for the documentation or performance is to 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 a participatory audience, in comparison to the <https://assignbuster.com/conventionally-is-not-one-that-which-exceeds-the/>

previous artists the necessity of having the audience to be 'co-producers', is a direct catalyst to why the liveness of performance is key to its definition to propose that performance art's role is to provide an insight to the consciousness of the artists.

As to the work of Abramovic and Franko B, it is evident that the present event or feelings cannot be reciprocated through documentation and if it does, so it loses all right to be defined as Performance Art. "regarding performance art we reach the threshold where the human being experiences himself primarily as a spiritual being" (Beuys 1997). In conclusion, in regard to Phelan's quote, the definition of Performance Art is resistant to constraining to one definition, therefore to come to a natural conclusion we must consider how the concept of being present relies within the action, artist and the audience define the work. As one cannot occur without the other, alongside how documentation is making the social attitudes towards performance art increasingly appealing. We must build a different vocabulary to accept the works as artists have subjective views of what they classify their art to be. "actual moment of encounter between artist and spectator" (Soferer, 2013).

Artists like Chris Burden whom uses the platform of documentation, where the live element is not 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's statement but a wish to challenge this vocabulary. On the other hand; performance art that is following in the footsteps of traditional performance art Stuart Brisley, Franko B and Abramovic suggest that the liveness of performance art must be a tangible entity and is crucial

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to its definition and the documentation of their work ultimately lost something. Overall categorically the changes within performance art are fluid.