



Between Evidence and Representation: A New Methodological Approach to the History of Performance Art and Its Documentation

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Between Evidence and Representation: A New Methodological Approach to the History of Performance Art and Its Documentation

1. Rose Lee Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979).

Goldberg uses here, as do many scholars later, ‘performance art’ and ‘live art’ as synonyms. Others, instead, use ‘live art’ in relation to the particular history of this term in the UK since the 1980s; see, for example, the special issues of *Contemporary Theatre Review* on ‘Live Art: Definition and Documentation’, 2, no. 2 (1994); and ‘Live Art in the UK’, 22, no. 1 (2012). In this article, I refer only to ‘performance art’, as I am interested in examining the disciplinary history specifically related to this term.

2. See Amy Bryzgel, *Performance Art in Eastern Europe since 1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017); Peggy Phelan, ed., *Live Art in LA: Performance in Southern California, 1970–1983* (London: Routledge, 2012); and Áine Phillips, ed., *Performance Art in Ireland: A History* (Bristol and London: Live Art Development Agency and Intellect, 2015).

Tancredi Gusman 

Early accounts of the history of performance art, such as the influential *Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present* by RoseLee Goldberg, have tended to categorize all twentieth-century performance and action-based works of art as part of the broad category of ‘performance art’.¹ Many heterogeneous phenomena have been gathered under this single label, while discontinuities and differences within the development of live and bodily art practices in the twentieth century have been downplayed or neglected. The most recent historiography has rejected the attempt to provide a linear and all-encompassing history of performance art and has instead preferred to investigate its *histories* in different geographical, political, and cultural contexts. This has led to publications of great interest, such as Amy Bryzgel’s *Performance Art in Eastern Europe since 1960*, or the collections *Live Art in LA: Performance in Southern California 1970–1983*, edited by Peggy Phelan, and *Performance Art in Ireland: A History*, edited by Áine Phillips.² However, despite these histories’ plurality, they all address a single epistemic object – they are histories of ‘performance art’. Crucial questions remain unanswered: what makes these individual histories part of a common framework called ‘performance art’? What exactly is ‘performance art’?

The diversity of works indicated with this term – ranging from live actions performed for an audience to works designed specifically for photographic record – has made answers to these questions provisional and partial. Whenever the features of the medium performance are supposed to be what links these artistic practices together, examination

grinds to a halt and the elusiveness of this category is necessarily recognized. Nothing much could be added to the topic if we remain within a mimetic theory of knowledge, that is to say, if we assume that what we designate as ‘performance (art)’ possesses in itself immanent and timeless properties that the historian has to decipher in order to engage properly with this historical-epistemic object.

I argue that a radical change in approach is required to overcome this impasse. The unity of this domain should not be taken as the product of a quality that all performance artworks share, but rather as the result of discursive and non-discursive processes of disciplinary construction in which practices of historiography themselves participate. These processes have a temporal index: the specificity of performance art should therefore be sought in the historical-artistic context of the 1960s and 1970s in which the term appears and begins to designate a new autonomous discipline within the visual arts. In order to launch an investigation of this kind, it is then necessary to switch from a work-based art history to a history of the construction of the framework in which these artworks are contained. However, this does not entail denying the interdisciplinary character of the artistic practices to which the term ‘performance art’ refers, nor the legitimacy of adopting different methodologies to approach such works. On the contrary, as Shannon Jackson has pointed out in her essay ‘When “Everything Counts”’, the scrutiny of how certain disciplinary frames situate artistic practices and define their specificity is to be understood as integral to an interdisciplinary approach to performance historiography.³ In fact, as I suggest here, the study of the disciplinary formation of performance art shows precisely the constructed and unstable character of its unity.

One could speak of ‘performance art’ in terms of Michel Foucault’s *dispositif*: that is, as a network of heterogeneous elements – such as discourses, procedures of conservation and exhibition, spatial and economical arrangements – that emerges at a given moment in response to a strategic objective: the structuring of a new area of ephemeral artistic practices within the field of the visual arts.⁴ The objective of this article is to provide a methodological approach aimed at the analysis of this *dispositif*.

‘Performance Art’: The Rise of a Category in the 1970s

From the late 1950s through the 1960s, artists around the globe began to perform unique live actions instead of producing artifacts such as paintings or sculpture. These ephemeral art practices had developed within various artists’ movements that possessed strong trans- or anti-disciplinary dynamics, such as the Gutai group, Happenings, Fluxus, or Viennese Actionism. The events produced were called by various names: happening, action, demonstration, concert, event, and activity. What all these forms of artistic intervention shared was the capacity to undermine the ruling order that held an artwork is a material, autonomous, and transportable object, with which the established procedures of its

3. Shannon Jackson, ‘When “Everything Counts”’: Experimental Performance and Performance Historiography’, in *Representing the Past: Essays in Performance Historiography*, ed. Charlotte M. Canning and Thomas Postlewait (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), 240–60.

4. See Michel Foucault, ‘The Confession of the Flesh’, in *Foucault: Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. and trans. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 194–228.

- exhibition, conservation, and collection can proceed. This worldwide range of actions, events, and activities only began to be referred to collectively as ‘performance art’ in the early 1970s. In the English-speaking art world, of course, the term ‘performance’ had already been used to indicate the process of performing an artistic action or event. Only in the 1970s, however, did it begin to be adopted as a designation of a specific aesthetic object and, with it, an art genre. This terminological development notably stemmed from the post-minimalist and conceptual New York art scene, whose members – such as Vito Acconci, a key figure for this dissemination – understood the term ‘performance’ as naming the very process constituting social categories and identities.⁵ ‘Performance art’ accordingly became an artistic intervention in social reality through which the latter can be analyzed, reflected, and deconstructed. Despite its semantic proximity to the performing arts, this label became utilized to circumscribe new performance-based practices, which belonged to the realm of visual art. The trans- and anti-disciplinary work of the 1960s starts thereby to be contained in new disciplinary boundaries, a shift recognized and furthered by addition of ‘performance art’, as separate from that of ‘performing arts’, to *Art Index*’s subject headings in 1973.⁶
5. Cindy Nemser, ‘An Interview with Vito Acconci’, *Arts Magazine*, March 1971, 20–3.
6. *Art Index 1972–73*, ed. David J. Patten, indexers Susan V. Craig, Emanuel J. Matera, and Isabel Wellisz, vol. 21 (New York: H.W. Wilson Company, 1973). See also Bruce Barber, ‘Indexing: Conditionalism and Its Heretical Equivalents’, in *Performance by Artists*, ed. A.A. Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1979), 183–204.
7. See Stuart Brisley, ‘Anti Performance Art’, in *Arte inglese oggi 1960–1976*, Exhibition Catalogue vol. 2 (Milano: Electa Editrice, 1976): 416–7; Klaus Rinke, ‘Interview by Georg Jappe’, *Studio International* 192, no. 982 (July/August 1976): 62–4; and Franz Erhard Walther, ‘Interview by Georg Jappe’, *Studio International* 192, no. 982 (July/August 1976): 65–8.
- Shortly after their emergence in the USA, the terms ‘performance’ and ‘performance art’ spread internationally, bolstered by the art press, exhibitions, and scholarly publications. The success of these new concepts, which gradually subsumed other designations, is evidenced in part by the growing number of themed issues by international art magazines devoted to the topic throughout the decade. Among these, one should mention ‘Performance at the Limits of Performance’ (*TDR*, March 1972); ‘Actions and Performance’ (*Art And Artists*, January 1973); ‘Performance Art’ (*Studio International*, July/August 1976); and the three issues about performance by *Kunstforum* (volumes 24, 1977; 27, 1978; and 32, 1979). As these terms were applied in new linguistic and artistic contexts, they lost their geographical and semantic specificity, no longer solely referring to the US artistic discourse from which they emerged. By the mid-70s, very different artists and works were brought together under the label ‘performance art’, which also became a posteriori a general category used to designate the live and action art practices of the 1960s. The opposition of European artists such as Stuart Brisley, Klaus Rinke, and Franz Erhard Walther to this terminology and, in their view, the conceptual misunderstandings it conveyed did not hinder its success and abiding in the visual art world.⁷
- Of course, ‘performance art’ did not completely replace other previous designations. But these latter became increasingly a means to describe groups of artists or practices that shared a specific historical-programmatic frame, such as Happenings and Fluxus, or an artistic-geographical context, such as Viennese Actionism. More or less simultaneously, other terms such as ‘body art’ or ‘bodyworks’ or, slightly later, ‘live art’ arose. While referring to a domain of practices that widely overlapped with that of ‘performance art’, these terms emphasized

specific aspects of the artists' works. The first two focused on the centrality of the living body and its images and traces, regardless of whether or not the work was performed for an audience. The latter instead emphasized live enactment for an audience and became, as Dominic Johnson shows, over the 1980s in the UK the name of a sector or a frame of production and presentation for different types of works.⁸ Still, 'performance art' developed during the 1970s into the most broadly inclusive category, regulating its competitors to prehistory or a species of the 'performance art' genus.

During this decade, critics, scholars, curators, and historians tried to keep up with the propagation of the term 'performance art' as well as with the enlargement of its semantic field. However, it soon became clear that any attempt to give an unambiguous and precise definition of its boundaries and features was bound to fail, as Chantal Pontbriand recognized in her introduction to the 1979 anthology *Performance by Artists*:

Performance is a word which, when applied to the vocabulary of contemporary art, can present some difficulty [...]. Rinke prefers the words *action* or *demonstration*, as he feels that using the latter term comes more from a confusion of genres among music, dance and visual arts. Performance can elsewhere be assimilated into *intervention*, insofar as it may intervene in a physical or social reality. It is also body art, but goes beyond the style whose considerations of narcissism can be restricting just as can the requirement that the body itself be present. [...] [Performance art is] a different phenomenon, difficult to define, characterized by the multiplicities of tendencies and forms.⁹

Despite its elusiveness, or perhaps because of it, this label played a crucial role in the critical discourse and in art exhibition practices of the 1970s. The use of 'performance art' thus served the creation of a stable space to contain a vast range of new ephemeral art forms into the taxonomy and disciplinary space of the visual arts.

So, what is 'performance art'? Performance art is a category that emerged and established itself in the 1970s and that situates a constellation of different ephemeral art practices within the field of visual art. The formation and circulation of this category is simultaneous with the gradual inclusion of live and conceptual art practices within the authoritative institutional spaces – such as biennials, art fairs, and major international exhibitions – that were attaining a dominant position in the emerging global system of contemporary art. This process of institutionalization can be tracked down to the early 1970s, when Harald Szeemann curated *Happening & Fluxus*, the first retrospective on the two movements (Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne 1970–1971), just 2 years before *documenta 5* (Kassel 1972), which included conceptual and live works of art as showcase pieces. In that same year, Francesco Arcangeli, Renato Barilli, and Marco Valsecchi curated *Work or Behavior* for the Venice Biennale's Italian Pavilion. The exhibition focused on the opposition between the artwork, intended as something

8. Dominic Johnson, 'Introduction: The What, When and Where of Live Art', in 'Live Art in the UK', Special Issue, *Contemporary Theatre Review* 22, no. 1 (2012): 4–16.

9. Chantal Pontbriand, 'Notion(s) of Performance', in *Performance by Artists*, ed. Bronson and Gale, 9–10.

static and autonomous, and the embodied and processual forms of action in art. The distinction between ‘performance art’ and contemporary categories such as ‘conceptual art’, which was very fluid at the beginning of the 1970s, began to acquire a more stable status alongside these same developments. This distinction, however, was not rooted in the characteristics of the works alone, but was the result of procedures within which certain genealogies, forms, and paradigms were established. The convergence between the process of naming of this new genre and its integration into exhibitions reached an important turning point a few years later, when international art events such as *documenta 6* (Kassel 1977) and *Arte Inglese Oggi 1960–1976* (Milan, Palazzo Reale 1976) began to add sections devoted to ‘performance’ alongside those devoted to other mediums like painting, sculpture, and film. At the same time, ‘performance art’ gained a prominent place in major international art fairs such as Art Cologne (1977).

The constitution of ‘performance art’ as a disciplinary *dispositif* in the 1970s ensues from the challenge of live and ephemeral artworks to visual art and its institutions. What the practices gathered under the label ‘performance art’ share is in fact the inclusion in a field (visual art) which, unlike theatre, for example, had not until that moment contemplated event-based aesthetic objects. The various agents working in the production and circulation of visual arts – artists, curators, museums, galleries, art-dealers, critics, and scholars – were forced to find answers to the questions raised by this context of crisis. What is the aesthetic status of these works? How does one exhibit, preserve, and circulate intangible and non-reproducible works of art? How could they generate an economy that would sustain both artists and commercial enterprises? The aesthetic and epistemic status of performance artworks as well as their placement in the arts system resulted from the answers to these questions, determining models for the representation, reception, and preservation of performance.

The history of the disciplinary formation of performance art in the 1970s can therefore be understood as the history of this crisis and of the different strategies chosen to overcome it. An investigation of this kind should focus on two aspects of the same developments: on the one hand, the way in which ‘performance’ was configured in order to be contained in the framework of the visual arts; on the other, how these art practices have produced a transformation of this very framework by opening it up to ephemeral and performative art forms. This new approach to performance art and its history provides a unitary frame of reference and, at the same time, accounts for the differentiation and localization of the strategies as implemented by different agents. The inquiry, therefore, does not address the works themselves, but rather the processes of their mediation.

Performance Documentation and the History of Performance Art

Within the scholarly debate on performance art since the 1990s, great attention has been devoted to performance’s relationship to its

10. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 146.
11. Amelia Jones, "Presence" in 'Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation', *Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 11–8.
12. Philip Auslander, 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 28, no. 3 (2006): 1–10.
13. Barbara Clausen, 'After the Act: The (Re)Presentation of Performance Art', in *After the Act: The (Re)Presentation of Performance Art*, ed. Barbara Clausen (Wien: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, 2007), 7–20.
14. Rebecca Schneider, 'Performance Remains', *Performance Research* 6, no. 2 (2001): 100–8.
15. Pip Laurenson and Vivian Van Saaze, 'Collecting Performance-Based Art', in *Performativity in the Gallery: Staging Interactive Encounters*, ed. Outi Remes, Laura MacCulloch, and Marika Leino (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014), 27–41; and Gabriella Giannachi and Jonah Westerman, eds., *Histories of Performance Documentation: Museum, Artistic and Scholarly Practices* (New York: Routledge, 2018).
16. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield, eds., *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2012); and Gabriella

documentation. At the center of the discussion lies documentation's ability to preserve and convey the embodied and time-based experience of performance. As is well known in the last three decades, these issues have prompted various answers. In her pioneering work *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993), Peggy Phelan emphasized the ephemerality of performance and denied that it could be 'saved, recorded, documented or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations'.¹⁰ Disagreeing, several scholars subsequently advocated to varying degrees for performance's documentation and its pivotal role in the reception of the artwork. Amelia Jones, in "Presence" in *Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation* (1997), recognized documentation as a legitimate medium conveying knowledge about performances in the past.¹¹ Expanding on this line of thinking, Philip Auslander in 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation' (2006) stated that performance documentation actually produces the performance, inasmuch as it frames it as a work of performance art.¹² Similarly, Barbara Clausen in 'After the Act: The (Re)Presentation of Performance Art' (2007) stressed the process-based nature of performance art, as well as the close interdependency of event, mediation, and later reception in its creative constitution.¹³ However, prior to this, Rebecca Schneider, in 'Performance Remains' (2001), had completely opposed the interpretation of performance as ephemeral and had instead provided a definition of performance as a form of conservation and conveying knowledge body-to-body.¹⁴

The introduction of performance art into important international museums in recent years has also brought much attention to this discussion, which has been further bolstered by the increasing number of research projects, workshops, and conferences on the topic, both in academic and museum-related institutional contexts. With respect to the most recent research, focus has shifted toward issues ensuing from the actual practices of conservation, sharing, and collection of performance-based art. This can be seen, for instance, in Pip Laurenson and Vivian Van Saaze's 'Collecting Performance-Based Art: New Challenges and Shifting Perspectives' (2014) or, more widely, in the volume edited by Gabriella Giannachi and Jonah Westerman, *Histories of Performance Documentation* (2018).¹⁵ Nonetheless, the few positions briefly mentioned above can still be considered as paradigmatic for research on the topic and crucial for scholars who engage with performance art documentation. This is made clear, for example, by anthologies such as *Perform, Repeat, Record* (2012), edited by Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield, or by the overview on the scholarly debate provided by Giannachi in 'Performance at Tate: The Scholarly and Museological Context' (2014).¹⁶

What has been at stake in this debate is the ability of performance art to resist commodification and challenge the supposedly fixed nature of social roles and identities. In other words, the underlying question has been whether performance art can maintain its subversive potential when transferred and mediated through documents. From this angle, it is possible to gain a deeper insight into the implications of the discussion

Giannachi, 'Performance at Tate: The Scholarly and Museological Context' (2014), <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/features/performance-scholarly-museological-context> (accessed August 30, 2019).

17. Mechtild Widrich, 'Can Photographs Make it So? Repeated Outbreaks of VALIE EXPORT's *Genital Panic* since 1969', in *Perform, Repeat, Record*, ed. Jones and Heathfield, 89–104; and Lara Shalson, 'Enduring Documents: Re-Documentation in Marina Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces*', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 23, no. 3 (2013): 432–41.

around documentation and understand why, while productively side-stepping the ontological discourse, it still addresses the question of what performance art *is*. What is usually investigated, in fact, is the legitimacy of performance's reception through the medium of documentation, notably as something which can be inferred by the definition of what a performance is: a non-reproducible event (Phelan); a work of fine art (Auslander); or a form of bodily knowledge and transmission (Schneider). In recent years, however, approaches have emerged that focus on the diverse ways in which performance and documentation can relate. For instance, essays such as Mechtild Widrich's 'Can Photographs Make It So?' and Lara Shalson's 'Enduring Documents' have delved into the changing role and significance of a document and its capacity to re-instantiate and transform a performance in the course of its history.¹⁷

The pivotal position of performance documentation in performance art research is not accidental. In the disciplinary framework of the visual arts – which is based on material and permanent artworks rather than on live events, as in theatre or dance – documentation has become, since the 1960s, the means to mediate between ephemerality and objecthood. Since then, it has been documentation that allows performance art to be exhibited, preserved, and collected and that provides art history with the visual evidence it needs. By acknowledging the very function carried out by the documentation in the history of performance art, and upholding the growing interest in its variable functions, it should then also be possible to reverse the terms of the longstanding debate on the topic around its validity as a vehicle of performance art. There is no intrinsic property of performance art that can legitimize its documentation; it is rather the strategies of production and distribution of documentation which define the properties of performance as aesthetic object and establish legitimate modes of its reception. Different ways of conceiving and presenting performance documentation imply different ways of thinking and defining the work of performance art. For instance, its aesthetic 'core' can be located in the non-reproducible live event, in its score or concept, or in its audiovisual records. Each of these possibilities set in turn different conditions for the creation, reception, and commercialization of performance art. In doing so, documentation produces performance art in accordance with distinctive theoretical and practical premises. Therefore, in a disciplinary history of performance art, there is no singular relationship between performance and documentation. This relationship varies instead according to the different conceptual and socioeconomic conditions in which it has been framed. Borrowing a concept by Bruno Latour, we can consequently define performance documentation as a 'mediator':

18. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 39.

An *intermediary*, in my vocabulary, is what transports meaning or force without transformation: defining its inputs is enough to define its outputs. [...] Mediators transform, translate, distort and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry.¹⁸

Through these mediators, artists, curators, and collectors began in the 1970s to negotiate the aesthetic and epistemic status of performance art. For this reason, the history of performance art documentation provides the means to study how performance art and its disciplinary space have been defined within the field of visual art. But how to decipher the strategies of those agents through the analysis of these mediators? And how to examine through these strategies the epochal crisis in which the *dispositif* ‘performance art’ formed?

Performance Documentation between Evidence and Representation

To answer these questions, one should look at the functions assigned to documentation in performance art’s history. It can be argued that in the reception of performance-based art, documentation fulfilled primarily a documentary function providing a medium for the knowledge of past art events. This concept resonates, for example, with the description offered by photographer Peter Moore in an interview by Ronald Argelander in *The Drama Review* in 1974. Speaking about his works and methods, Moore, who had photographed the New York performance-based avant-garde since the early 60s, stated:

There is a similarity in approach to documenting sculpture and documenting performance. What you’re trying to do is to do justice, as much as you are able to, to the intent of the artist, rather than impose your own point of view on it to such a degree that it becomes distorted and unrecognizable.¹⁹

19. Ronald Argelander and Peter Moore, ‘Photo-Documentation: (And an Interview with Peter Moore)’, *TDR: The Drama Review* 18, no. 3 (1974): 51–8 (52).

Two separate moments can then be detected in Moore’s photographic documentation: the artistic work – for example, Yvonne Rainer’s *Three Seascapes* (1963), whose images were printed with the interview – and the work of the photographer who can more or less accurately depict the artwork. Photography remains just a piece of evidence, a merely external record that does not intervene in the constitution of the work.

However, performance documentation has also been given another function. It has been indeed used as an aesthetic medium of a performance artwork, as the site of its enactment and representation. This emerges very clearly, for example, in the piece *12 Pictures* by Vito Acconci (The Theater, New York, May 28, 1969) (See [Image 1](#)). As indicated by Acconci’s accompanying statement, the performance consists in the act of photographing the audience. The pictures realized are its proper aesthetic medium. The spectator of the work is therefore not the one who witnesses the artist’s performance in person but the one who views the photographs resulting from the performance:

House lights out, stage lights out.
Starting from stage left, facing the audience and looking through a camera, I step to my right, across the stage.



Image 1. Vito Acconci, *12 Pictures* (1969). Photo courtesy of Maria Acconci.

At each step, I press down the shutter: the flash-cube flashes, the stage lights up, the house lights up.

The performance results in 12 photographs.²⁰

20. Vito Acconci, Artist Statement for *12 Pictures* (1969), http://www.vitoacconci.org/portfolio_page/12-pictures-1969/ (accessed August 30, 2019).

The fluctuation of performance documentation between documentary evidence and aesthetic representation reveals an oscillation between two opposing ways of defining performance art and its aesthetic experience. As to the first approach to documentation, as illustrated by Peter Moore, the work of performance is located in an event, for which documentation is nothing but historical evidence which can convey knowledge but not necessarily mediate an aesthetic experience. Within this conceptual frame, which often held actual bodily ‘presence’ as vehicle for a transformative experience, performance art seemed to offer to many artists of the 1960s and 1970s a way out from the commodity and alienation in which the art object appeared to have fallen. In this context, the documentation has often been seen with skepticism, if not rejected all together as reification. Taken as non-reproducible event, performance stood to challenge and resist the institutional and disciplinary framework of the visual arts.

For the second approach, as exemplified by Acconci’s *12 Pictures*, performance is considered a conceptual and visual art form for which documentation is the outright medium of the aesthetic experience. In this case, the aesthetic quality of performance does not reside only in the time and space of its enactment but is rather constituted through its mediatization. Considered in this way, performance art can enter the traditional exhibition space and art market as a typical art object and can therefore be contained within the disciplinary field of the visual arts.

Performance documentation’s oscillation between *evidence* and *representation* thereby reflects the dialectics that characterizes performance art’s formation: on the one hand, we have a radical questioning of the framework of visual arts, achieved by means of performance as ephemeral event and, on the other, a subsumption of performance within this very framework, notably through the documentation as an aesthetic device. The distinction between these two opposing ways of producing and presenting documentation thus offers an analytical tool to distinguish between two opposing ways of conceiving performance art and constructing its aesthetic-disciplinary space.

Looking at the two examples chosen above, the distinction seems easy and self-evident. However, if we consider a third example, Chris Burden’s 1971 performance *Prelude to 220, or 110* and its documentation (See [Image 2](#)), the matter appears to be far more complicated. In this piece, performed for three nights between 8 and 10 pm in September 1971 (F. Space, Santa Ana, California), Burden was strapped to the floor with copper bands bolted into the concrete. Near him were placed two buckets of water, in which live 110-volt electric lines were submerged. Had a visitor poured the water, the artist would have been electrocuted. The form in which the performance is constituted as an artwork is therefore primarily that of the encounter with a live audience; the photographs of the piece seem to have a merely secondary and illustrative role – such as in the case of



Image 2. Chris Burden, *Prelude to 220, or 110, F Space*: September 10-12, 1971. Photo: Chris Burden / licensed by The Chris Burden Estate and Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2019.

Moore. However, if we consider Burden's performance practices in the early 1970s and the importance he ascribes to various media – photography, film, and video – we can no longer attribute to this documentation only an accessory function. Burden notably uses them to establish an audiovisual representation of his pieces. In an interview by Liza Béar and Willoughby Sharp, published in the magazine *Avalanche* in 1973, the artist, while emphasizing the exchange of energy with the live audience, stresses the visual character of his performances:

WS: Why is your work art?

CB: What else is it?

WS: Theatre?

CB: No, it's not theatre. [...] there is no element of pretense or make-believe in it. [...] Another reason is that the pieces are visual too. That's maybe why they are art.²¹

21. Willoughby Sharp and Liza Béar, 'The Church of Human Energy: Chris Burden' (Interview), *Avalanche*, no. 8 (Summer/Fall 1973): 54–61 (58).

The importance that he assigns to visual documentation in the mediation of his performance art is made explicit in the same interview a little later:

I'm always pissed off if I don't get good photos. I'm trying to work that out. It always seems something fucks up; it's just unbelievable. So, I think, why didn't I make a movie of that? What the hell was I thinking about? Or why didn't I have somebody there taking pictures?²²

22. *Ibid.*, 61.

Are then the photographs depicting Burden tied to the floor in *Prelude* just documents, or the actual medium of the artwork? Neither the concept for the piece nor the artist's ideas around performance art documentation seem to offer a conclusive answer to this question.

This allows for further clarification of the terms 'evidence' and 'representation' as they are used in this article. With this terminology, I do not designate two clearly separate and mutually exclusive modes of documentation. 'Evidence' and 'representation' are rather to be considered as two potentialities that coexist within the same document. The status of a document is not dependent on some allegedly intrinsic set of properties but on a process of negotiation within which its relation to the performance is determined. 'Evidence' refers to a conception of documentation not as an element inherent to the artwork but as a mere vehicle of conveying information about a past performance event. Thus, the material as well as the compositional and symbolic features of the document are not considered as responsible for the meaning of the work or its relationship with the audience. I use 'representation', on the other hand, in its double meaning of 'bringing (or bringing back) into presence' and of 'acting in the name or on behalf of someone'. A document is hence considered as a 'representation' of the performance when it is perceived as both containing and conveying the artwork. In the latter case, both the document's materiality and its visual and compositional qualities matter because they co-constitute the performance artwork. The ambiguity of performance documentation is therefore rooted in the absence of a distinct, unequivocal, and self-contained site of the artwork.

The same ambiguity in Burden's work characterizes countless other iconic documents of the genre: the photographs of Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (East Hampton, New York, August 1975); the photographs, the film, and the relics of Joseph Beuys's *I Like America and America Likes Me* (René Block Gallery, New York, May 1974); the photographs of Marina Abramović's *Rhythm 0* (Studio Morra, Naples, 1974), to name just a few. In all these cases, documentation can both act as evidence producing knowledge concerning a past event and assume an aesthetic function by replacing as representation the missing artwork, thus becoming an art object and medium itself. Any attempt to draw well-defined boundaries between a *document-as-evidence* and a *document-as-representation* would miss the peculiar instability of performance documentation. No matter what the 'original' intention beyond its production was, the same document can shift from being considered as documentary source to becoming an artwork itself. There is nothing encountered in the document from which its function can be intrinsically and conclusively inferred.

Auslander, in his essay 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation', addresses a comparable issue: the difference between what he calls 'documentary' and 'theatrical' modes of performance documentation. The first category refers to documentation as a record of a performance and evidence of its actual occurrence. The second category addresses performances staged solely for the camera and which 'had no meaningful prior existence as autonomous events presented to audiences'.²³ Due to the lack of any intrinsic characteristic that

23. Auslander, 'Performativity of Performance Documentation', 2.

would make it possible to clearly distinguish between these two modes of performance documentation, Auslander rejects this distinction as merely ‘ideological’:

In the end, the only significant difference between the documentary and theatrical modes of performance documentation is ideological: the assumption that in the former mode, the event is staged primarily for an immediately present audience and that the documentation is a secondary, supplementary record of an event that has its own prior integrity. As I have shown here, this belief has little relation to the actual circumstances under which performances are made and documented.²⁴

24. Ibid., 3–4.

I agree with Auslander that the difference between modes of documentation does not depend on the actual circumstances in which a performance was enacted. However, it is precisely the fact that this distinction is not based on immanent qualities of the performance/document but on ideological processes of its definition/reception that makes it fundamental to the historical-epistemological approach proposed by the present article. Indeed, it is within processes of disciplinary framing that the negotiation around the site and attributes of performance art takes place. Thus, I use the terms ‘evidence’ and ‘representation’ instead of ‘documentary’ and ‘theatrical’ because while the latter set would imply a difference that originates in the actual circumstances in which a performance is enacted and documented, the distinction between ‘evidence’ and ‘representation’, as explained above, only refers to subsequent processes of definition and construction of meaning.

The status of documentation and its relation to performed actions is indeed independent from the features of the document-as-object and has rather to be considered as the result of the coaction of agents, such as artists, curators, collectors, archivists, and museums, and their strategies in exhibiting, conserving, and collecting a performance. Through the analysis of these strategies, we can read how in each case the dialectics between event and artwork which characterized the disciplinary structuring of performance art in the 1970s is resolved. And in comparing these strategies, we can account for the policies that have determined the aesthetic canons, as well as the models of production, dissemination, and marketing of performance art. It is not therefore a matter of defining whether a document *is* documentary evidence or a medium of the artwork, but rather of examining *how* it has been placed between these two options; and *how*, consequently, the aesthetic and disciplinary status of performance art has been defined.

If we now examine some of the reception to Chris Burden’s performance *Prelude to 220, or 110* with this approach, the results will no longer be ambiguous but fruitful. For example, within the paradigmatic exhibition ‘Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979’ (Los Angeles, 1998), the leftover objects and photographs of Burden’s piece were clearly aestheticized by the curatorial conception of Paul Schimmel, who explicitly understood the material remains and

25. Paul Schimmel, 'Introduction and Acknowledgments', in *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979*, ed. Paul Schimmel et al. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 11.
26. Los Angeles Modern Auctions, 'Lot 12: Chris Burden', March 5, 2017 <https://lamo.com/auctions/2017/03/1/12> (accessed August 30, 2019).

images of performance art as a means of its re-presentation within the museum.²⁵ As one can see from the catalogue, the relics were displayed as auratic objects and the photographs as a visual device for the aesthetic representation of the missing piece. Almost 20 years later, the sale by Los Angeles Modern Auctions of two gelatin silver print photographs of this same piece within a lot of four photographs by Burden for \$93,750 confirms this aestheticizing trajectory: the economic value of these images proves that they had been now acknowledged as art object.²⁶ Two further details show how this aestheticizing trajectory was consciously co-initiated by the artist himself: the gelatin prints are signed and numbered by Chris Burden and were acquired from the artist by a private collector.

Although the dialectic that characterizes documentation was exemplified above by means of performance-photographs, it is not solely in photographic documentation that this duplicity can be assessed, nor does it stem from the specificity of this medium alone. This can also be detected in other types of records, such as film and videotape, or in the performance's material remains. A particularly interesting case in point is Dennis Oppenheim's *Extended Armour*, performed in January 1970 at the Reese Palley Gallery in New York (See [Image 3](#)). In this performance, Oppenheim, lying on his belly with his face at the entrance of a long narrow channel formed by three conjoined boards, picks strands of his own hair and blows them into the channel in order to keep away a dangerous animal – a tarantula. On the other side of the channel, a video camera captures images of his face to be projected, in real time, on a TV screen facing the audience sitting behind him. The video, which is a fundamental constituent of the live performance here, is the device that structures the audience's relationship with the action. In addition to this primary function, the footage recorded was later edited and presented by the artist in different ways, for instance, as part of the film and video of the *Aspen Projects* within his retrospective at the Musée d'art contemporain in Montreal in 1979. In this version, recently re-edited and published on DVD by the Slought Foundation and the artist's studio, there is no sign of either a tarantula or an audience. One can only see Oppenheim's face in the foreground blowing his hair into the channel. This recording hence takes on the same intimate character of many body-works of the same period conceived only for the close-up gaze of the camera such as *Nail Sharpening* (1970). By editing and presenting this video in this manner, Oppenheim clearly framed it as an aesthetic medium of a body-piece and not as the mere documentary evidence of a live performance. Thus, this case further shows how the function of a document and its relation to a performance depends on the choices regarding its production, presentation and reception.

Performance art documentation ultimately can be seen as historical aggregates formed by the stratification and interweaving of multiple interventions and interpretations. These aggregates can therefore be taken as the site to investigate the different strategies to deal with ephemerality in visual art and to examine how these strategies participate in structuring

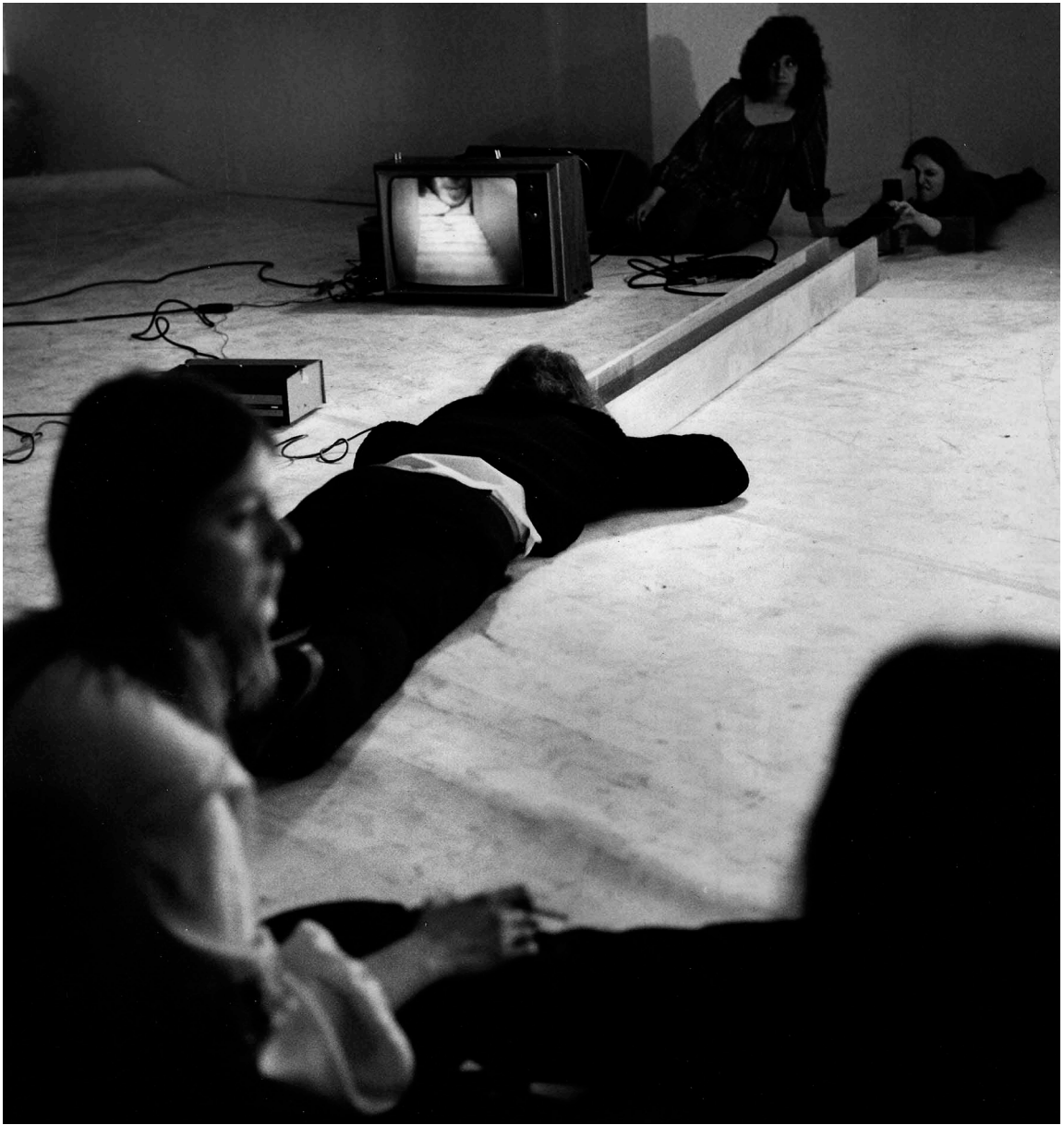


Image 3. Dennis Oppenheim, *Extended Armour* (1970). A material is manipulated at greater and greater distances from the body that produced it. The mechanism that governs its direction (air currents through breathing) comes from the same system that once contained it. Greater demands are made upon the hair when it is used to block-repel an oncoming force (spider). Boards, video camera, amplifier, spider, hair. Part of 'Environmental Surfaces: Three Simultaneous Situational Enclosures', Gallery Reese Palley, New York. 16 January 1970. 10 to 11 pm. Photo: Shunk-Kender, New York, courtesy of Dennis Oppenheim Estate.

performance art as an autonomous discipline. In order to untangle the different layers of a performance document, one has to juggle through different kinds of analysis and draw from various types of sources. In this regard, the following section identifies four areas of investigation whose reciprocal boundaries should be considered as porous and mobile.

Analyzing Performance as Mediated by Archives, Press, Exhibitions, and Economics

The method proposed by this article relies on performance documentation as a device for deciphering the strategies employed to deal with performance within the visual arts. Because of its stratification, this device cannot be considered as an autonomous object produced once and for all according to the artist's intentions. On the contrary, it is rather the junction in which said intentions relate to those of other agents active in the field of visual art. For this reason, performance documentation must be examined in context, that is to say in relation to the apparatuses of visual arts that mediate it: the archive, or the medium of its conservation; the press and the art exhibition, or the mediums of its (re)presentation; the economics of art, or the medium of the definition of its material value. With the term 'apparatus', I do not define structures with intrinsic properties but rather sets of knowledge, practices, and models that have historically acquired a stable professional-disciplinary status, but which are nevertheless open to being expanded or changed.

The formation of performance art as a discipline within the visual arts has been described as resulting from the dialectics between the given historical framework of the visual arts and the live and ephemeral art practices that undermine that framework's fundamentals. I understand that framework as the paradigms, procedures, and standards that set up the conditions for the production, reception, commercialization, and conservation of the artwork in a given time and space. These apparatuses are the sites in which these procedures and standards are performed and, at the same time, in which their transformations can be negotiated. Agents who act within them, such as archivists, curators, critics, and art dealers, can perform the old set of procedures, confirming the past order, or execute new ones, which can lay the ground for a new order.

Therefore, the proposed methodology takes into account how performance documents have been configured, disseminated, and distributed through the visual arts apparatuses taking part in the definition of the disciplinary space of performance art. Through the analysis of the documentation as mediated by those apparatuses, it will be possible to address the ways in which the works of performance are contained in the field of visual art, as well as the ways in which this same field has been transformed to contain these new ephemeral forms of art.

Artistic Intention and the Production of the Documentation

27. See Alice Maude-Roxby, ed., *Live Art on Camera: Performance and Photography* (Southampton: John Hansard Gallery, 2007); Catherine Grant, 'Private Performances: Editing Performance Photography', *Performance Research* 7, no. 1 (2002): 34–44; and Amelia Jones, "'Individual Mythologist': Vulnerability, Generosity, and Relationality in Ulay's Self-Imaging', *Stedelijk Studies* 3 (Fall 2015): 1–16.
28. See Schneider, 'Performance Remains'; Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). See also Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996); and Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).
29. See Barbara Büscher and Franz A. Cramer, eds., *Fluid Access: Archiving Performance-Based Arts* (Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Georg Olms, 2017); and Paul Clarke, Simon Jones, Nick Kaye, Johanna Linsley, eds., *Artists in the Archive. Creative and Curatorial Engagements with Documents of Art and Performance* (London: Routledge, 2018).

A first area of investigation concerns the artist's intention and that of the other authors of the documentation (photographers, film- or videomakers). The methodology's goal here is to reconstruct the role these agents assign to documentation and to the live work itself. This intention can be discerned in iconographic and audiovisual sources (the performance art documents) and in narrative sources, such as statements, writings, and interviews of artists and documenters as well as letters between artists, documenters, curators, and galleries. Sources of this kind have been already used above with respect to performance documents by Peter Moore, Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, and Dennis Oppenheim. Equally important can be the examination of documentary sources that indirectly testify to the intentions behind the production of a document (for example, documents indicating the print run of photographs or the copyright of the image), as well as the technologies and media chosen to document the performance. Texts such as the interviews with artists and performance photographers in *Live Art on Camera*, Catherine Grant's analysis of how artists Ana Mendieta, Marina Abramović, and Gina Pane used photographic documentation, and Amelia Jones's investigation of Ulay's Polaroids, demonstrate the importance of examining the strategies adopted by artists and documenters to understand which function is conferred to performance documentation.²⁷

Archives: The Conservation of Performance Art Documentation

A second area of analysis concerns the strategies of conserving and archiving performance documentation. In recent years, the term archive has been on the rise in performance art research both in an applied sense, that is, in the development of performance art archives, and in a theoretical sense, that is, in the reflection on the issues of power and authority in the construction of the 'history' and of the canon of the performance. This latter aspect has been strongly stimulated by the reflections of Rebecca Schneider and Diana Taylor on the processes of knowledge transmission in performance, as well as the writings of French philosophers Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault on the subject.²⁸ Recent publications such as *Fluid Access: Archiving Performance-Based Arts* and *Artist in the Archive* have furthered this interest by questioning the notion of archive as a simple static container of past evidence, underlining the capacity of archival materials to activate new meanings and possibilities in their encounters with artists, scholars, and audiences.²⁹ As far as the methodological approach here proposed is concerned, with the term 'archive', I indicate both a physical place where documents are stored and the practices and concepts that guide this process of conservation and organization of documents. From an operational point of view, Derrida's statement that 'the archivization produces

30. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 17.

as much as it records the event³⁰ serves as the preliminary assumption to the work undertaken here.

In order to understand how the archive produces the performance, one should first look at what in the archives has been preserved. In fact, every archiving practice presupposes a principle of selection according to which documents are included and excluded; this indirectly indicates what is considered essential in the event and in its registration. By investigating these processes of choice, it is then possible to assess which conceptions of performance art have been favored over others. For example, my recent survey of the archival material related to *documenta 5* in the documenta archiv reveals that very probably no document relating to the definition of the tasks of photographers (i.e., instructions from curators and artists on how to document live performances) nor contracts relating to the ownership of images produced has been preserved.³¹ This allows me to assume that the photographic documentation produced in that context was perceived neither by the artist nor by the institution as part of the artistic work, but rather as an informational supplement – an external reportage performed by independent professionals authorized by the same institution. It would be fair to argue then that the aesthetic quality of the performances presented by *documenta 5*, such as Terry Fox's *Selfgovernment/Selbstregierung* or James Lee Byars's *Calling German Names*, is firmly located in their live enactment.

In the analysis of this area, which is mainly based on material and documentary sources, it proves very informative to examine the archiving context: who keeps the documents (archives, public institutions, artists, photographers or museums); whether professional archiving procedures have been followed; and by what policy and logic the archive has been organized. The field of analysis of the collection and conservation processes of the performance documentation of the 1960s and 1970s is extremely complex, as institutions and museums have only begun to pay attention to these processes in recent years. For this reason, in her dealing with the legacies of performance art, Heike Roms, for instance, takes into consideration a heterogeneous set of actors in archival practices: the expected archivists and artists, but also the artists' family members and scholars.³² A similar approach can be fruitfully followed in the historical analysis of the archives and collections of performance art as to provide a full account of their internally developed habits and standards.

However, it is not only the archive that defines the aesthetic and epistemic space of performance art, as the performance documentation itself potentially redefines the function and the status of the archive. In its oscillation between evidence and representation, the performance documentation can blur the boundaries that divide the archive from the exhibition spaces and the art collections. As the document can become an art object, a site in which the work of performance is located, the archive itself can become an aesthetic space or an integration to the permanent 'collection' of a museum. As soon as it is enacted as an artistic medium, then, the document places the performance in the disciplinary

31. I have examined, in particular, the folders containing the correspondence between *documenta* organizers and artists, galleries, photographers, and institutions (documenta archiv, AA, d5, Mappen 37–66 and 90) as well as the folder containing loan contracts, the consents of photographic filming of the artworks, and press information and protocols (documenta archiv, AA, d5, Mappen 67–73 and 139).

32. Heike Roms, 'Archiving Legacies: Who Cares for Performance Remains?' in *Performing Archives/Archives of Performance*, ed. Gunhild Borggreen and Rune Gade (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2013), 35–52.

framework of visual art, while reformulating this very framework by changing the status and function of one of its apparatuses – the archive.

Art Press and Art Exhibitions: The (Re)presentation of Performance Art

The third area of analysis focuses on what I have defined as the (re)presentation of performance art, deliberately choosing a multi-semantic expression to indicate both the conceptual representation – that is, how critics, curators, or artists have defined performance art on a discursive level – and the aesthetic (re)presentation – that is, how curators, magazine editors, and artists represented or exhibited performance artworks and its mediations. The boundaries between the two domains are mobile and porous, these two levels acting together in defining performance art and its status.

The mediating apparatuses here examined are the press (art books, art magazines, catalogues, scholarly publications) and the art exhibitions with their varied spatial and discursive settings, such as museums, galleries, biennials, art fairs, festivals, and alternative spaces. It can be assumed that representing performance art discursively or aesthetically does not simply mean presenting a phenomenon already formed before its mediation. It means, rather, to produce it in a specific way, much as the archive does. Amelia Jones and Jane Blocker, for instance, have shown how historiographic, critical, and curatorial narratives have inscribed performance and body art in the lineage of the modernist avant-gardes, or domesticated their physicality, thereby determining their disciplinary framework.³³ As exhibitions and the press in the 1970s allowed the circulation of performance art in a transnational space, the importance of these two apparatuses for the disciplinary history of this phenomenon can hardly be exaggerated. Magazines, international networks of galleries and alternative spaces, biennials, and international art fairs have all decisively contributed to the definitions of performance's canons and paradigms.

The press represents the place par excellence for the discursive construction of the disciplinary field of performance art. This construction is mainly achieved through artist manifestos, critiques, and historical and theoretical accounts. Academic journals, such as *TDR* and *PAJ*, magazines, such as *Avalanche*, *Interfunktionen*, *Artitudes*, *DATA*, and *High Performance*, and books, such as *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*, edited by Michael Kirby (1965),³⁴ and Goldberg's *Performance* have defined and disseminated terms such as 'happening', 'bodywork', and 'performance art'. Responsible for tracing genealogies and connecting different practices and artists to common frames of reference, the press has also launched possible ways of thinking the relationship between performance art and the fields of theatre and dance. The study of the history of the ideas linked to performance and live art provides therefore a determining background for the analysis of performance documentation. The importance given to the elements of 'presence' and

33. Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 58–62; and Jane Blocker, *What the Body Cost: Desire, History and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 83–103.

34. Michael Kirby, ed., *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co, 1965).

‘immediacy’ for early performance art, for example, is key to the understanding of the general dismissal of documentation by many performance artists as a form of unwanted reification.

However, between the 1960s and the 1970s, art books and art magazines were not simply a means for circulating ideas. They were also a medium of the (re)presentation and documentation of live, conceptual, and ephemeral art practices, as emphasized, for example, by Gwen Allen and Kathy O’Dell.³⁵ The press can therefore be considered also as an iconographic source for the analysis of the strategies of visual (re)presentation of performance art. In the dissemination of photographs of performances through books and magazines, we see at work the distinctive dialectics pertaining to documentation. These images can in fact be presented as mere visual evidence – not unlike the photograph of a painting that accompanies its critical review – or they can play the role of an aesthetic medium or space of reception for the performance artwork. The way documentation is published determines thereby the aesthetic and medial status of performance art. As in the case of the archive, this process of construction of performance is potentially able to modify the role and function of the mediating apparatus itself. The printing of visual or textual performance documents can transform magazines or books either into archives (document as evidence) or into reproducible exhibition spaces (document as medium of the artwork). By way of example, one could mention here issue number 6 of *Avalanche*, published in the fall of 1972 and entirely dedicated to Vito Acconci. His work is here extensively presented through performance images and related artist statements. These latter do not serve to illustrate a discourse on the works but are a medium for its visual presentation. They are not a supplement or a catalogue of an exhibition; they rather set up an exhibition on paper.

Those scrutinizing the (re)presentation of the performance in the press can avail themselves of two types of sources: narrative-iconographic ones (or the publications themselves) and documentary, that is, for example, archival material regarding subscriptions and the diffusion of the publications. Further input is moreover provided by assessing iconographic sources from a material point of view, taking into consideration the printing techniques, the quality of the supports and the graphics chosen.

Within the third area of analysis, one can finally address the mediating apparatus of art exhibition, or the (re)presentation of performance within the framework of specific architectural spaces such as galleries, museums, festivals, or alternative art spaces. In this context, the inquiry into the definition process of performance art can rely on the information available on what has been exhibited. From a general point of view, presenting performance as a live art form in a gallery or a museum means situating the aesthetic core of performance in its actual execution, while opening up those spaces to ephemeral aesthetic ‘objects’: they are no longer places for presenting finished and permanent works but a site of enactment of events that transform the art spectators into a (theatrical) audience. Conversely, if performance is instead exhibited through the

35. Gwen Allen, *Artists’ Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2011), 1; and Kathy O’Dell, ‘Displacing the Haptic: Performance Art, the Photographic Document, and the 1970s’, *Performance Research* 2, no. 1 (1997): 73–81 (74).

documentation, the dialectical oscillation between evidence and representation comes once more to the fore: as soon as the documentation is conceived as an aesthetic medium, the performance is constructed as a traditional form of visual art and the art exhibition is confirmed as a space for the presentation of autonomous, permanent, and transportable art objects. This confirming dynamic can be seen at play, for example, in the presentation of Chris Burden's *Prelude to 220, or 110* in the exhibition *Out of Actions*. Differently, whenever the document is presented as mere evidence, the aesthetic quality of performance is rather placed in the space-time of the event and the art exhibition loses its aesthetic character. The oscillation between the experience of witnessing a performance and acquiring knowledge through the encounter with its documentation when on exhibit has been recently illustrated by Barbara Clausen's study of such cases as Joan Jonas and Babette Mangolte as well as Sarah Pierce and Jimmy Robert.³⁶

36. Barbara Clausen, 'Performing the Archive and Exhibiting the Ephemeral', in *Histories of Performance Art Documentation*, ed. by Giannachi and Westerman, 93–114.
37. Hanns Sohm, ed., *Happening & Fluxus: Materialien* (Cologne: Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1970); and *Happening & Fluxus Site Plan and Catalogue* (Cologne: Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1970), addendum to the book *Happening & Fluxus*, unnumbered.
38. Harald Szeemann, 'Zur Ausstellung', in *Happening & Fluxus Site Plan and Catalogue*.

An instance of documentation exhibited as evidence is provided by the first retrospective devoted to the forms of action and live art of the 1960s, the above-mentioned *Happening & Fluxus* exhibition, which included both documentation and live actions. The publications produced for the exhibition clearly show that Szeemann understands Happenings and Fluxus as live art forms.³⁷ In fact, he explicitly distinguishes the exhibition's main section ('documentation') from the other two, 'artist contributions' and 'festival'. Only in the latter are 'works of art' present, while the documents are considered as mere historical sources for the production of knowledge of past artistic actions.³⁸ As a result, the art exhibition becomes a historiographical space, a site that does not host works of art but documents. This obliges Szeemann to redefine its devices. The traditional art catalogue is reduced to a brochure of a few pages without images and is accompanied by a large volume of documentary materials. Curating grows into a procedure for organizing collections of documents, blurring the boundaries between exhibition practices and archival practices.

Objects of examination within the apparatus of art exhibition are therefore in particular the curatorial conceptions in their ability to produce performance art and define its spatiality and temporality. The sources are narrative-iconographic (i.e. exhibition catalogues, exhibition reviews and critiques, curator's manuscripts, and correspondence) and documentary (i.e. exhibition plans, contracts, technologies, and materials used). Finally, it is particularly important to take into account the specificity of the different exhibition spaces. The museum, the gallery, festivals, and alternative spaces stand indeed for different discursive-historical frames that determine the way of perceiving the aesthetic objects presented inside them. In this respect, they all participate in the formatting of performance and in the definition of its aesthetic and epistemic status.

Economics of Art: The Value of Performance Art and of Its Documentation

The fourth and final area of analysis, the economics of art, focuses on how the marketing or funding procedures participate in determining the aesthetic 'core' and the shape of the final products of performance art. What has already been said regarding the archiving and (re)presentation practices also applies here: different economic models of art produce different models of performance art. An economy of performance art that is based on the sale and collection of visual documents (photographs, videotapes, films) and objects from the performance contributes to making performance-based art a visual product and a commodifiable art object. On the other hand, a performance economy based on the embodied and ephemeral event necessarily brings performance art closer to the conditions of production of theatre and dance. In the first case, the performance artists will be encouraged, by the system, to materialize the performance in images and artifacts; in the second, to produce scores, concepts, and live events. A late development of this latter understanding can be seen in the rise of an economy of the immaterial and ephemeral in contemporary performance art, as Sven Lütticken has shown by examining the case of Tino Sehgal.³⁹

39. Sven Lütticken, 'Progressive Striptease', in *Perform, Repeat, Record*, ed. Jones and Heathfield, 187–98.

Alongside commercial procedures (like the aforementioned sale of Chris Burden's photographs), different forms of patronage and public funding of performance need to be assessed, especially with respect to how they contribute to establishing canons and paradigms of production. The implementation of specific models and criteria for funding and the disciplinary definitions they imply indeed encourage the artist to produce outcomes which fit in the given funding pattern. Funding on a project or subsidy basis, for example, bear different consequences in terms of structuring an artist's work. An example of this analysis is Graham Saunter's article 'The Freaks' Roll Call: Live Art and the Arts Council, 1968–1973', published in the special issue of *Contemporary Theatre Review* devoted to Live Art in the UK.⁴⁰ Here, he reconstructs the developments of the frameworks for performance and Live Art funding in the Arts Council of Great Britain, showing how deeply the criteria for funding relate to the effort of defining the disciplinary belonging and features of the new experimental practices.

40. Graham Saunders, 'The Freaks' Roll Call: Live Art and the Arts Council, 1968–1973', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 22, no. 1 (2012): 32–45.

To assess how the art market and the funding policies participate in the disciplinary construction of performance art, the examination of another apparatus, art education, can also be of particular interest. A topic worth analysis is how the introduction of curricula relating to performance and conceptual practices in different national and educational contexts reformulated models of art training and thinking. Most important within this investigation are the methods and the professional skills taught in relation to performance art. In a rapidly globalizing art context (as was the 1970s) and in relation to an ephemeral art form, the production of documentation not only as archival or artistic means but also as portfolios for applications for funding or for presentation to exhibitions and biennials became

crucially important. Tracing when and how this became part of the artist's training could be very useful to studying the professionalization of performance art practices, as well as the way in which this professionalization responds to the demands of the art market. Sources for the investigation of the economy of performance art are mainly narrative and documentary: sales contracts, insurance papers concerning the loans of documents and relics for the purpose of exhibiting them, artists' payment contracts, legal and public funding policies, and articles on the topic by artists and critics. To analyze art education's history, the archives of art schools and institutions, as well as oral sources and writings of both teachers and students, are of particular relevance.

In conclusion, this article has intended to offer a methodological approach to examining a still underexplored object of study: the disciplinary history of performance art. This approach engages with the history of the formation of this discipline between the 1960s and the 1970s, as the appearance of new ephemeral and bodily aesthetic 'objects' undermined the visual arts system and its practices of art conservation, exhibition, and collection. The tool identified for the analysis of this disciplinary history is performance documentation, understood as the device used by the agents active in this field to mediate between ephemerality and objecthood. The history of documentation and the oscillation of its status between evidence and representation thus become the instruments for analyzing the history of performance art.⁴¹

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