

Creating Afterlives:

Preserving Traces of Performance Art from a Museological Perspective

By Rachel Augusto

MA Thesis

Word count: 17594.

Leiden University

Master's Programme: Arts and Culture

Specialization: Museum and Collections

Academic year: 2019/2020

First reader: Dr. H. Westgeest

Second reader: Dr. S.A. Shobeiri

Student: Rachel de Alcantara Augusto (s2244284)

E-mail: rachelaugusto94@gmail.com

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5
Chapter 1 <i>The Nature of Performance Art's Ephemerality</i>	9
Dematerialization of Art.....	10
Performance art.....	12
Performance art as a purchasable artwork.....	14
Collecting physical remains of Performances.....	18
Chapter 2 <i>Documenting Performances: Preserving the Ephemeral</i>	23
Preserving Performance art through documentation processes.....	23
Photo-performances and photos of performances.....	26
Registering Performances: documentation or creation?.....	28
Performance documentation through words.....	30
Allowing performances to be ephemeral.....	33
Chapter 3 <i>The Value of Spectators' and Artists' Perspectives while Preserving Performances</i>	37
The value of the audience's perspective.....	38
Connecting performers' intentions to the audience.....	40
Interviewing artists from the museological point of view.....	42
Guidelines for interviewing and performances.....	46
Conclusion.....	51
Credits Illustrations.....	52
Bibliography.....	53

Introduction

During the twentieth century, art flourished into formats that were not restricted to the materiality of artworks. In 1917, the famous yet controversial artwork *Fountain* by Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) was one of the first pieces that proposed the dissociation of art from objects. By exhibiting a ready-made, the Dadaist artist aimed to debate the limits of perceiving art, the process of art creation and the audience's relation with it; consequently, the traditional approach to the materiality of artworks was brought into question, and other angles on how one relates to art were being debated. This process resonated on inquiring about the necessity of expressing art through physical objects, which matured during the 1960s and 1970s into a few types of artworks that aimed to dissociate art from objects, a process that the art historian Lucy Lippard named as the dematerialization of art. Nevertheless, two types of these art manifestations gained visibility: conceptual art and performances, this last one particularly carrying ephemerality as a central aspect of the manifestation.

While artists explored new forms of creating contemporary art in non-material-based formats, museum professionals had to reconsider how to approach these new artworks inside their institutions. Before such traces of these art pieces appeared in museums' collections, professionals mainly managed tangible artworks through preservation procedures. However, as some contemporary artworks gained the possibility of incorporating intangible traces, standard museological procedures became insufficient for these manifestations. Conservation and documentation procedures are two fundamental practices in the museology field; yet, these approach artworks from their materiality, which conflicts with the essence of intangible artworks.

According to the International Council of Museums, conservation refers to “all measures and actions aimed at safeguarding tangible cultural heritage while ensuring its accessibility to present and future generations” and has three levels of measures: preventive conservation, remedial conservation, and restoration.¹ The concept itself and the actions to execute it are tied to the materiality of objects, which were aligned with the standard museological perspective proposed to deal with artworks made until the mid-twentieth century in general. Still, as some types of contemporary artworks were not strictly attached to material-based formats, applying these conservation measures challenges its purpose and creates conflict.

Moreover, documentation is another activity in museums that had its structure altered to suit some non-material-based artworks. Museum documentation relates to the elaboration,

¹ ICOM-CC. “Terminology to characterize the conservation of tangible cultural heritage”. Accessed on 06 July 2019. <http://www.icom-cc.org/242/about/terminology-for-conservation/#.XXZEEsGzY2w>

consolidation, and management of data and information about objects within museum collections.² Usually, it happens with the creation of archive and catalog forms that assemble information through written documentation and photograph register. Therefore, documentation combines intrinsic and extrinsic data about the material properties of each item and additional information related to the object. The structure of museum documentation intends to be an appendage that retains information about tangible artworks; so, like conservation, the standard purpose and format of this museological documentation had to be reconsidered to deal with non-material-based artworks.

As a museologist, I learned the concepts of conservation and documentation from ICOM's perspective, and the guidelines to be followed while preserving and archiving objects within museums were perceived as closed procedures. As my personal interest lies in contemporary artworks, while visiting museums within my home country, Brazil, I started to question the compatibility of such frameworks in cases where the poetic character of the artwork was not completely attached to material-based objects. While collecting data for my bachelor's final project, I visited the Museum of Art of Rio (MAR), in Rio de Janeiro, to gather information about the museological documentation of art installations. On such occasion, I became familiar with the fact that the museum collects items related to performance art, which caught my attention.

Regardless of the artworks' form, once it enters a museum, it ought to undergo these procedures to enable it to be comprehended and preserved. These actions provide professionals with material to reexhibit the art piece as accurately and respectfully as possible in the future. However, while dealing with artworks that do not have its poetic character attached to material objects, one must expand on how and what methods to apply to comprehend and archive the piece. As performance art is a type of time-based art, and therefore have a proper time to initiate and to finish, the essence of the artwork conflicts with the standard framework employed in museums to deal with museological items.

As non-material-based contemporary art pieces started to gain space within the walls of museums, some institutions reconsidered the applicability of conservation and documentation procedures, which resulted in altering them to incorporate additional information regarding the artworks. The case of performance art intensifies this conflict because ephemerality and intangibility are central elements. The immateriality of performances is not compatible with standard conservation strategies of museums; therefore, documentation processes usually gain a protagonist role while archiving (traces of) performance art. Frequently, these documentation

² ICOM-CIDOC. "Statement of principles of museum documentation." Accessed on 06 July 2019. http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/minisites/cidoc/DocStandards/principles6_2.pdf

processes need to be expanded to compensate for the lack of materiality of performances; moreover, they aim to register specific elements relevant for understanding such artwork. So, how do the different forms of documentation used for the preservation of the traces of these artworks come into conflict with and compensate for the ephemerality of performance art?

This research will explore such a question in three chapters. The first chapter will explore the nature of performance art's intangibility and how this component alters the way art collections incorporate this artwork. For that, the framework of the art historian Lucy Lippard's about the process of dematerialization of art will provide a background to understand the origins and ideas that stimulated the dissociation of art from objects into art as experience. The arguments of the art historian Peggy Phelan and the artist Marina Abramovic will provide a basis to comprehend how this dissociation is manifested in performance art and to explore key elements of this art genre, such as ephemerality and its relationship with the audience. A case of acquisition of performance art will be compared with Phelan's framework in "Ontology of Performance" to identify possible conflicts while commodifying this type of artwork. Moreover, the arguments of Rebecca Schneider, a researcher in performance and theater practices, regarding the (lack of) connection between performances and their physical remains will be counterpointed with a case study of conservation of performances' material remains in the Museum of Art of Rio, in Brazil.

The second chapter will explore forms of registration and documentation procedures that enable afterlives for performances in museums and how these might conflict with the nature of performance art. The dissertation of Stephen Gray, a scholar in digital and cultural heritage collections, regarding conservation and performance art will help us understand the challenges that emerge while applying documentation practices into the framework of performances. Hence, the dilemma of registering performance art with visual means will be analyzed through the case study of Berna Reale's photo-performances. Then, photographs taken during Abramovic's performance at the MoMA will provide a basis to speculate elements that distinguish photo-performances (as an independent artwork) and photos of performances (with documentation purpose). Furthermore, two case studies concerning forms of documentation of performances in written formats will exemplify this process as script and as text. These case studies will enable us to conclude the creation of afterlives for performance art through documentation procedures, which, according to some scholars and artists, contradict the essence of performance art.

Lastly, as performance is an ephemeral experience between people, the third chapter will explore forms of preserving this type of artwork from the audience and the performer perspective; also, this chapter aims to inquire to what extent documenting the spectators' and the artists' perspective is a valuable source while preserving the experience of performance art. For that, the

importance of the audience's point of view will be explored with the artist John Cage's perception of the presence of the public on performances. Then, the case study of the phenomenologist John Falk will demonstrate a possible form of producing this sort of documentation for contemporary art pieces. Secondly, two case studies at the MoMA and the Tate Museum will exemplify forms in which museums have been connecting the performer directly to the audience and investigate the value of this material as documentation data. Moreover, a literature review on the frameworks of conservator Carol Mancusi-Ungaro and the art historian Sandra Kisters regarding the practice of interviewing artists will provide a background to critically analyze the applicability of the *Concept Scenario Artists' Interviews* model for performance art.

Chapter 1

The Nature of Performance Art's Ephemerality

While investigating how performance art manifests in the museological context, it is crucial to identify the nature of this artwork type. The roots of performance and the different forms that it can have, along with how artists and professionals in the art field comprehend these artworks, are relevant for this research. This chapter will identify intrinsic elements in performance art and enquire how they contributed to the way professionals perceive and incorporate these artworks (and their traces) into their collections.

For that, firstly, the processes that unchained the performance art will be explored with the framework proposed by the art historian Lucy Lippard in the essay “Dematerialization of Art” in 1967. The author inquired about the political and social circumstances related to the desire to produce non-material-based artworks that some artists had during the 1960s. Lippard's arguments will provide a basis to investigate the backgrounds of why some art genres aim to express art through immaterial means.

The argumentation of the art historian Peggy Phelan in “Marina Abramovic: Witnessing Shadows” regarding performance art will provide a theoretical framework about how the academic sphere perceives this type of art manifestation. Some aspects of the essence of performance art, such as temporality and its relationship with the audience, will be explored with the point of view of the artist Marina Abramovic concerning her performance at the MoMA in 2010. Both these academic and practical perspectives about performance art aim to outline elements of this art genre that conflict with the standard museological procedures.

A case study of the art collector Sergio Carvalho purchasing two performances will contribute to questioning how this type of artwork can be commodified and what aspects are relevant during this process. Phelan's argumentation in “Ontology of Performance” will illustrate her perception of the existence of performance art and how she comprehends this format of artwork.

Lastly, by analyzing the case study of conserving and documenting physical remains of performance in the Museum of Art of Rio (MAR), this research will question the implications and consequences of preserving objects resulted from performances. The possible relation of such objects will be counterpointed with the nature of performance art explored during the chapter and, finally, with the argumentation of the performance researcher Rebecca Schneider about the remains of performances.

Dematerialization of Art

During the 1960s, some artists started to investigate forms of expressing their artistic intentions in ways that would not be strictly associated with material objects. With the dissemination of these types of artworks in the art field, some scholars aimed to comprehend the reasons that contributed to the emergence of these non-material-based artworks. In 1967, the art historian Lucy Lippard wrote the essay “The Dematerialization of Art” in collaboration with John Chandler regarding this phenomenon. The art critic Philip Barcio stresses the impact the essay had because the authors

Presented evidence that art might be entering a phase of pure intellectualism, the result of which could be the complete disappearance of the traditional art object. The piece grew out of, and helped contextualize, the preceding decade or so of wildly inventive conceptual art, which often left behind only ephemeral, non-archival relics, or no relics at all other than perhaps recordings of experiences.³

Lippard argues that the new industrial form of production also intensified the fabrication of art objects in a standardized structure; this system of artworks’ creation reflected on “a number of artists are losing interest in the physical evolution of the work of art.”⁴ This shift into a trend of the dematerialization of art, which aimed to reject art production through object-based means. While creating highly conceptual pieces, some artists intended to challenge art critics by not providing them physical information to look at; while diminishing the amount of visual material, the focus would be drawn to intangible elements.

According to Lippard, non-material artworks require time for the viewer to experience the piece effectively. These pieces demand the viewer to get involved with the idea proposed; therefore, the spectator spends time experiencing such work of art. While contemplating an artwork with less visual details, the time spent absorbing the piece feels longer. “This time element is, of course, psychological, but it allows the artist an alternative to or extension of the serial method.”⁵ Consequently, art began to demand time from the public, or the sensation of it, which is an essential requirement to experience ephemeral art, such as performances.

Given the attention the essay “Dematerialization of Art” received, Lippard edited in 1973 *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972*, which is a cross-reference book collecting evidence of artworks, exhibitions, interviews, and documents in chronological order that support the framework she proposed previously with the essay. The author intended to “expose the chaotic network of ideas”⁶ correlated to the phenomena she denominated in 1968.

³ Barcio, Phillip. “What Was the Dematerialization of Art Object?” *IdeelArt Magazine*. 2017. Accessed on August 2019. <https://www.ideelart.com/magazine/dematerialization-of-art>

⁴ Lippard and Chandler, 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Lippard, 5.

Although the book mainly approaches conceptual pieces, other manifestations related to the process of dematerialization of art were incorporated as well, such as the performance *Two Correlated Rotation* by Dan Graham that happened in 1969. While the artworks mainly presented in the book were briefly explained, this piece was thoroughly described with several paragraphs:

Two performers with camera's viewfinder to their eyes are each other's subjects (observed) as they are simultaneously each other's objects (observers) (...) In the gallery, the spectator "sees" the feedback loop in a very close time between the cameras' recorded images (...) The two cameramen spiral conterdirectionally, the outside performer walking outward while his opposite walks inside the center.⁷

In addition to the written description, Lippard introduced a picture of the performance (Fig. 1.) altered manually with arrows to demonstrate the direction the performances were taking. It is relevant to emphasize that Lippard expanded the explanation about this artwork into more detail, including the audience's point of view and added a photo with additional information so readers could imagine the performance happening. These complementary elements reflect on the necessity of adding information about non-material artworks to enable understanding of them.

Eventually, Lippard's belief that artists' opposition to using materiality to express art would challenge its commercialization was proved incorrect. Barcio points of that

One of the early, and obvious, criticism of *The Dematerialization of Art* was that even though these ephemeral, conceptual concepts were less object-based, they still nonetheless result in physical phenomena. Even a performance artist creates a thing—a performance—which can be sold as an experience or recorded.⁸

So, according to Barcio, this type of artwork failed its purpose of not being commercialized; however, artists continued to produce dematerialized artworks and this gained



Fig. 1: Altered photograph of the performance *Two Correlated Rotation* by Dan Graham in the book 1973 "Six Years: The Dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972".

⁷ Ibid, 85.

⁸ Barcio, Phillip. "What Was the Dematerialization of Art Object?" *IdeelArt Magazine*. 2017. Accessed on 13 January 2020. <https://www.ideelart.com/magazine/dematerialization-of-art>

visibility in the contemporary art scenario mainly as performance art or conceptual art. The artists that explored the idea of the dematerialization of art were opening a concept that, until today, some artists opt to adopt while creating art.

Performance art

The vocabulary to identify these emerging types of art manifestation was not well established during the first few years of their existence. Lippard, for instance, referred to dematerialized art as “information” or “idea” art in her book *Six Years*, which exemplifies this uncertainty of which term to employ while referring to those artworks. The same occurred while establishing a terminology for performances. As mentioned previously, the roots of performance art in western art history date from the 1910s with Dada art manifestations. However, performance art, aligned with conceptual art, only flourished in the post-war period.

Some art manifestations that are currently identified as performances might have been previously named as conceptual art or happenings. Happening is a term that gained popularity with the Fluxus inter-artistic manifestations during the 1950s when Allan Kaprow and John Cage planned events to present to an audience their creations that combined music with visual art.⁹ Although the concept of the event is parallel to the idea of performance, the term *Happening* soon became obsolete, and the art community started to use the term *performance art* in the 1970s. From that point forward, other artists gained visibility as performers and the term became known as an art manifestation that occurs with the presence of the artist in a pre-determined timeframe.

During the decade of the 1960s, some artists “dematerialized” art seeking to oppose the commercialization of art as a product. The art historian Peggy Phelan believes that this attitude continued during the following decade, particularly in the United States of America:

A significant aspect of the US-based performance art of the early 1970s defined itself in opposition to the commodity based art market. Attempting to create art that had no object, no remaining trace to be sold, collected, or otherwise ‘arrested,’ performance artists of the seventies were working against the accumulative logic of capital.¹⁰

Marina Abramovic, who was performing in Serbia during an authoritarian regime, vastly explored performance arts during the 1970s, and she continues nowadays as one of the most iconic performers. Phelan comments about the artist’s relevance in the paper *Marina Abramovic: Witnessing Shadows*, where she describes how Abramovic experimented with the limits of her consciousness

⁹ Tate. “Happenings.” Accessed on September 2019. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/h/happening/happening>

¹⁰ Phelan, “Marina Abramovic: Witnessing Shadows”, 570.

in her early solo pieces.¹¹ The artist lost her consciousness twice while performing, which, according to the artist, leads her to dedicate herself “to designing performances in which her consciousness was not necessary for the completion of the event itself.”¹²

Abramovic is arguably one of the most well-recognized performers within the art scenario, which led to a solo exhibition of her career at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 2010 under the name *The Artist is Present*. During this retrospective exhibition, items such as some objects used during her performances, photos, videos, and texts of the events composed the historic part regarding her past performances. Nevertheless, the curator Klaus Biesenbach and the Abramovic also included performers reenacting some of Abramovic’s performances in the exhibition (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Marina Abramovic performing *The Artist is Present* in 2010 at MoMA.

Additionally, the artist herself performed a piece also named *The Artist is Present*, where she would remain sitting still and individually making eye contact with a member of the audience for as long as they wanted. Later, during an open lecture, Abramovic commented about the hesitant opinion of the curator about this idea "That's ridiculous, you know, this is New York, this chair will be empty, nobody has time to sit in front of you."¹³ Nonetheless, Abramovic sat there every day for three months for at least eight hours per day, and the seat in front of her was always occupied. Regarding this performance, the artist expresses that:

This performance, maybe 10 or 15 years ago -- nothing would have happened. But the need of people to actually experience something different, the public was not anymore the group -- relation was one to one. I was watching these people, they would come and sit in front of me, but they would have to wait for hours and hours and hours to get to this position, and finally, they sit. And what happened? They are observed by the other people, they're photographed, they're filmed by

¹¹ Ibid, 571.

¹² Ibid, 572.

¹³ Abramovic, Marina. "An art made of trust, vulnerability, and connection", *TED*. March 2015. Accessed on September 2019. https://www.ted.com/talks/marina_abramovic_an_art_made_of_trust_vulnerability_and_connection/transcript?language=en

the camera, they're observed by me and they have nowhere to escape except in themselves. And that makes a difference. There was so much pain and loneliness, there's so much incredible things when you look in somebody else's eyes, because in the gaze with that total stranger, that you never even say one word -- everything happened. And I understood when I stood up from that chair after three months, I am not the same anymore.

Her reflection about how the success of this performance relates to the fact that society needed that type of interpersonal connection in 2010 emphasizes how the temporal context is relevant for performance. According to the artist, the artwork would have failed if it had happened a decade before because society had changed within that period. This argument stresses how the (temporal, political, and spatial, for example) context of one performance might relate directly with its poetic and how the audience perceives it; by altering the context, one can also jeopardize the purpose of the artwork and how the audience experiences it.

The Tate Museum has been researching the process of acquisition of performances from a museological perspective to deal with this type of dilemma in their institution, which resulted in the article "Developing a strategy for the conservation of performance-based artworks at Tate." According to the scholars Lawson, Finbow and Marçal, the Tate museum has at least 25 performance-based artworks in its collection, so the necessity to re-elaborate the strategies to archive them is evident, but "the ways these strategies for preservation are to be applied are still nuanced at best, as actions cannot be stored, migrated or emulated."¹⁴ So, while dealing with performance art, using documentation procedures to preserve its traces is unavoidable because the physical form of performances is not tangible – and therefore, conservable.¹⁵ Some of these documentation processes will be addressed in the next two chapters. Performance art is an experience between the audience and the performer that occurs within a pre-determined time frame and location; however, this can be done in various ways. The forms to conduct a performance can range a lot, and some artists might consider some elements essential while other artists interpret them as are more flexible.

Performance art as a purchasable artwork

Phelan has expressed her opinion regarding performance art as a commodity: "While I do not believe it is possible to think of performance art as somehow beyond or outside the art market, I do continue to believe that one of the most politically radical aspects of live art is its resistance to the commodity form."¹⁶ Even though performances appeared as a form to oppose the commercialization of art, art collectors and institutions can still purchase them. The possible terms

¹⁴ Lawson, 116.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Phelan, "Marina Abramovic: Witnessing Shadows", 571.

of this acquisition are intriguing: What are the conditions for the frequency of reenactments? What are the terms for the availability of artists to reenact performance? Is there a maximum of reenactments the owner can ask? Is there a limit per year, for example? Do proprietors buy a performance per reenactment or do they purchase the concept of the whole artwork? Can the artist sell the same performance several times to different owners such as in the case of engravings or photographs? If the artist passes away or is unable to be the performer, what are the conditions for reenactment in the body of other artists?

These questions accentuate a few factors that can be approached while negotiating performance art, and the terms of the transition can vary according to the proprietor and the artist. In the case of the Brazilian art collector Sergio Carvalho, who acquired two performances from the collective group EmpreZa in 2014, both parts already had a good relationship when the purchase was made.¹⁷ *Maleducaao* (Fig. 3) is a performance where several artists of EmpreZa have both their hands tied to the performer next to each other while sitting at a round table. The performers try to eat food while using retractors in their mouths, which makes the artists chew with their open mouths and spill food and liquids constantly. Spectators, in general, are disgusted while watching this performance.¹⁸ The second performance Carvalho purchased from EmpreZa was *Tríptico Matera* (Fig. 4); during this performance, three types of materials that represent the city where the performance is happening are processed and mixed in a bucket. Then this mix is placed over the head of the performers. The materials vary according to the city, so the form of mixing the materials and placing them on the performances can also suffer alterations; the number of performers can also vary.¹⁹



Fig. 3: EmpreZa performing *Maleducação* in 2017 at the Museum Honestino Guimaraes, Brazil.



Fig. 4: EmpreZa performing *Tríptico Matera*.

¹⁷ Tinoco, 270.

¹⁸ The author watched this performance in 2017 in Brazil and this was her impression.

¹⁹ Paco das Artes. Catalog of the exhibition “Duplo Olhar”. Accessed on December 2019. https://www.pacodasartes.org.br/eventos-e-aco-es-de-formacao/lancamento_catalogo_duplo_olhar.aspx

The transaction was done through informal means, and there is no contract establishing any terms between EmpreZa and Carvalho. According to the collector, both parts have been debating what conditions must be established to “guarantee the integrity of the artworks without creating restrictions for future reenactments.”²⁰ So far, the conditions agreed verbally are based on the costs of materials used in the performance and the remuneration of the artists presenting, which should be provided by the collector. Even though the arrangements for the purchase are yet to be formulated, it is interesting to notice that what Carvalho possesses is the concept of both performances, which is an intangible possession. The documents that will verbalize the ownership will try to stipulate terms for the concept of a product, but the documents themselves are not the artwork.²¹

According to EmpreZa, they researched contracts of music production, since it is an immaterial good. In that sense, the thorough description is essential to create something like a “music sheet” of the performance, which should contain key steps or acts of the event, mentioning essential materials as well. However, depending on the artwork, some variables are possible without compromising the intentionality of the piece, which is the case of the performances acquired by Carvalho. A member from EmpreZa, Angelini, comments that this is one of the main concerns they have been facing while elaborating such terms:

In the case of *Triptico Matera* and *Maleducação*, there is a complicator: both performances were created as urban interventions and have variables. In *Triptico Matera*, the objects processed in the bucket before placing it in the head vary according to the political moment: we already have done it with brick, dung, charcoal, newspaper, chalk. The choice of food in *Maleducação* is not determined, nor the number of people who feed: in the first execution, there was only one. These variations make it appear to be almost different works, but this feature is part of the malleability of these works. So, you need to predict in the contract what changes can happen.”²²

These complications Angelini faced while establishing the terms of the purchase echoes on the fact that the commodification of performances results in possession of an immaterial good. While accepting performance as a commodity to be traded, it is possible to foresee this type of acquisition in museums as well. The conditions for formulating a contract can be compared to the documentation process a museum would elaborate while incorporating a performance as a museological item. Either within a museological or private collection, while dealing with performance art, the owner will possess the concept of the artwork; contracts or documentation procedures can only retain some traces about the piece, but not the artwork itself.

²⁰ Tinoco, 272.

²¹ The contract between Carvalho and EmpreZa was not complete until the interview was published by Tinoco (2018).

²² Tinoco, 270.

In the prospect of a museum acquiring a performance, the administration regarding the artwork should take into consideration possible variable factors such as in the case mentioned. Some performances have specific intentions that might require alterations to meet what the artist proposed initially. Documentation processes should identify what aspects are essential in the performance and what can be altered to do these variations without compromising the integrity of the artist's intention. For instance, the number of performers and the kind of food consumed during *Maleducação* are elements that can vary without compromising the artwork. But would an alteration, such as blindfolding the performers, alter the purpose of the artwork?

In the case of *Maleducação*, the owner of the performance and the collective artwork in collaboration to construct the reenactment, and EmpreZa still has the autonomy to supervise these alterations on firsthand. However, within a few decades from now, the artists might not be accessible anymore, so the contract would be the only accessible source to understand the artwork. Arguably, this type of information is also valuable in the museological context as well; museum professionals do documentation and registration procedures to collect data about the artwork, so other strategies should be used when formulating a purchasing contract.

Using document and register processes to preserve performances is not a consensual approach among professionals and artists. The performer Abramovic outlines that: "Performance is a mental and physical construction that the performer makes in a specific time in a space in front of an audience and then energy dialogue happens. The audience and the performer make the piece together."²³

According to Abramovic, there are two indispensable parts for a performance: the audience and the artist; this encounter occurs in a predetermined time and place, which are two conditional elements for the performance's existence. Performances have a moment in time to start and to end; after that, the experience does not exist any longer. In 1993, Phelan argued in favor of total deterioration of performances in *The ontology of performance: representation without reproduction*:

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance.²⁴

²³ Abramovic, Marina. "An art made of trust, vulnerability, and connection", *TED*. March 2015. Accessed on 06 July 2019.

https://www.ted.com/talks/marina_abramovic_an_art_made_of_trust_vulnerability_and_connection/transcript?language=en

²⁴ Phelan, "The Ontology of Performance", 147.

The ephemerality of performances should not be mistaken with the impossibility of reenactments. As exemplified previously with the case of Carvalho's performances purchasing, this type of artwork can be commodified and commercialized, and thus, musealized. In these cases, the owner of the performance does not possess the performance, but the concept of the artwork; there are possible forms to enable the proprietor to access this concept in the future. Art collectors and galleries might elaborate on strategies such as contracts, images, scripts, but this research will explore procedures museum professionals have created to access performance art.

There is not an official code of guidelines imposed or suggested by ICOM of how museums and art institutions should approach performance art. Some art professionals and scholars have been investigating strategies that would satisfy their needs while documenting and preserving (traces of) performance art, which will be explored further in the next chapters. In the International Network for Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA) has an online database where members have access to articles and dissertations with possible strategies to preserve performance in museums; even though, professionals have the liberty to approach this, the institution chooses and focuses on the aspects that they consider relevant.

Collecting physical remains of Performances

The Museum of Art of Rio (MAR) is a Brazilian institution that has been collecting contemporary art since it opened its doors in 2013. The museum has been the stage for some performances during its first years of existence and, by instructions of the then curator and director of the museum Paulo Herkenhoff, the remains of performances were incorporated in the museum's collection.²⁵ The objects underwent conservational and documentarian processes, and they were incorporated as museological items under the category of "Remains of Performances." The professionals, while conserving and documenting these items, applied the standardized procedures used for any museological item added in the collection.²⁶

The practice of incorporating items resulting from a performance in this structure is a controversial practice by itself. According to the Brazilian museum studies' researcher Anna Paula da Silva, while visiting MAR, the museologist Bianca Mandarino showed her one of the remains of performance *Descarrego* (Fig. 5) and rhetorically questioned how such piece would be reexhibited

²⁵ Silva, 2.

²⁶ Therefore, the author accessed standard catalog records that follow the museological framework suggested by ICOM. It was not possible to assert if the professionals responsible for documenting these pieces incorporated extra data in other formats to complement these records. Thus, the author did not access further data about the performances such as interviews or videos. However, since this case study aims to explore the matter of archiving the remains of performances and not the documentation itself, the author chose to proceed with this specific purpose while putting aside the necessity of implementing new interdisciplinary approaches.

in the future, which is a question from a curatorial perspective.²⁷ However, alongside Mandarino's inquiring lies, other implicit questions: what is the purpose of collecting these remains, and what is its significance? What do they represent in the collection as a museological item? What would they represent when reexhibit? To what extent can these remains contain traces of the performance that happened?

Currently, the museum has nine of these types of items, and three are remains of the same performance. The same artists behind Carvalho's performances, EmpreZa, created this artwork. The performance was presented during a temporary exhibition, and it is entitled *Descarrego*, which would be freely translated as "Unload" or "Discharge." During the performance, the artists stamped strands of their hair to a wood board creating a semi-circle. The performers forced their heads far from the board until the hair was ripped out of the panel, and consequently, the artists bleed during this process. The museum has three different cataloged items of wood boards with stamped hair and blood archived in their system. However, it is not clear if these three boards are remains of one performance that had three performers concurrently pulling their hair or if the same performance happened three times on different occasions.

Conflict can emerge while choosing to incorporate these objects into the collection and to apply the equivalent procedures in the case of material-based artworks. The structure used for tangible items does not comprehend some aspects of performance art that extend materiality. Information regarding the concept and intention of the artwork does not fit this format, and data about reenactments would not be comprehended. So, it is necessary to (re)formulate forms of preserving performance art that would enable documenting other sorts of information specific for performances.



Fig. 5: EmpreZa performing *Descarrego* in 2014 at MAR.

²⁷ Silva, 1.

According to the documentation accessed, the remains of *Descarrego* were bought and then donated to the museum after the performance happened. However, it is not clear if the artists agreed with collecting the remains as museological items or not. There is not an explicit attribution of those objects as artworks, so MAR incorporated these items as remains of performances that happened in the past but are not a piece of artwork. This is a different situation than the performances Carvalho purchased, which are the concept of the artwork, and it is not linked to materiality. From the museological point of view, these items can collaborate while telling the history of these performances, but the items themselves do not carry the complete experience of the performance.

While the artists forced themselves away from the wood board, the performers suffer. During the performance, the artists push themselves into feeling extreme pain until the hair is ripped out of their heads, which then results in blood. This sequence of actions might have last minutes or hours, but once it finished, the artist went home and, therefore, the performance is completed. Although the intentionality of this performance was not clearly described in the documentation of the remains, one can presume that the essence of this artwork relates to suffering and pain, which most likely caused aversion in the viewers. The disgust and repulsion that the audience experienced while watching the performances undergo such pain are elements that constitute the performance as much as the wood board, the hair, and the blood. While conserving objects with the blood spilled out during the performances, these items are traces of the sensations felt in the artwork.

In the case of reenacting *Descarrego*, a new board should be used since the processes of stamping the hair and bleeding are part of the performance. The board MAR should not be reused because the process of spilling blood should take part during future reenactments. The same applies to elements such as the food eaten during *Maleducação*; however, this can be different while dealing with objects that were not altered during the performance, such as the chair that Abramovic used while performing.

Regarding the material remains of performances, the theatre and performance practices researcher Rebecca Schneider stresses the difficulty western societies have of accepting performances' disappearance: "The archive is habitual to western culture. We understand ourselves relative to the remains we accumulate, the tracks we house, mark, and cite, the material traces we acknowledge."²⁸ This struggle to permit something valuable to vanish can be perceived with the case of MAR. The curator chose to incorporate the remains of performance because he very likely

²⁸ Schneider, 100.

believed that these remains contained, even if partially, traces of the performance and could represent the artwork somehow.

Museums are consolidated as institutions that aim to conserve history and art through material items. Thus, the ephemerality of performances presents an ideological dilemma. If on the one hand, performances should be ephemeral; on the other hand, the role of museums to preserve history through materiality contradicts this concept. As exemplified with the case of MAR, the practice of archiving remains of performances can become a paradox because, according to Schneider, “Radically 'in time,' performance cannot reside in its material traces, and therefore it 'disappears.’”²⁹

While analyzing MAR’s case through Schneider’s framework, these objects do not possess any trace of the performance, and archiving them is incompatible with the nature of performances. The blood that should bleed during the performance already bled; the poetics of performance are attached to the timeframe when it occurred. The physical remains should disappear concurrently with the artwork itself, and conserving them is an ineffective practice.

From the museological point of view, conserving and collecting remains of performance can serve the same purpose as other musealized objects.³⁰ While doing this, professionals are preserving objects that relate to the memory of a valuable event for the museum. Although the remains do not fully carry the artwork’s poetic, these objects accomplish the purpose of contributing to telling the story of that performance, such as occurred in Abramovic’s solo exhibition, where objects of her first performances were exhibited.

Lippard’s theory about the dematerialization of art relates to the desire of opposing art as a commodity, which, according to Phelan, intensifies with ephemerality in performance art. Moreover, the case study of Carvalho accentuates that while trying to commodify this type of art, a conflict emerges because the essence of performance is a concept, and the formats to outline this are not clear. Schneider’s argumentation regarding the preservation of performance’s remains reaffirms the detachment of this artwork to material objects. So, as the essence of performance art connects to intangibility, the practice of collecting these artworks (and their traces) conflicts with the nature of this art genre. Artists, professionals, and scholars are used to experiencing art through visual and tangible means, and shifting this configuration disrupts how these artworks are perceived from a museological perspective. Professionals and art collectors often have a difficulty

²⁹ Schneider, 100-101.

³⁰ This term being employed according ICOM concept of musealisation, which affirms that “From a strictly museological point of view, musealisation is the operation of trying to extract, physically or conceptually, something from its natural or cultural environment and giving it a museal status, transforming it into a museum or ‘museum object’, that is to say, bringing it into the museal field.” Desvallées and Mairesse, 50.

to accept performance art's total ephemerality, so they formulate strategies to preserve (or to materialize) these artworks. These actions can appear to be contradicting the essence of the artwork, but the total disappearance of the whole poetics of the artwork can also be seen as too extreme to be a viable option.

Chapter 2

Documenting Performances: Preserving the Ephemeral

As the essence of performances relates to its ephemerality, museums' professionals face a dilemma while allowing their complete disappearance. Since conservation practices became unfruitful because physical remains do not retain performance art's poetics, documentation procedures expanded to complement this insufficiency. This chapter will explore forms of registration and documentation and inquire about how these practices conflict with the nature of performance art.

The first part will consist of a literature review of Stephen Gray's dissertation, a scholar in digital research and cultural heritage collections. It will allow questioning the consequences of converting performances into other arrangements. The transaction from performance into registering practices is done mainly in two ways. One option is that the artist controls this adaptation and incorporates further artistic elements, which results in a secondary artwork, such as photo-performances. The case of the photo-performances *Quando todos se calam* of the artist Berna Reale will be used to investigate elements of this type of practice.

A second way is documentation of performances with an explicit registering purpose. The case studies of the photos of the exhibition "The Artist is Present" will be used to identify elements that accentuate the purpose of registration of the performance. The second case study will be analyzed to differentiate recording performance by registering intentions or poetic intentions. Non-visual formats will be explored to illustrate possible documentation practices further. The case studies of the artists Yoko Ono and Barbara Visser will be used to demonstrate two forms of registering practices through textual means.

These case studies will reveal various forms of documenting performance art, which will be used to question the consequences of creating afterlives for performance art. While applying these practices, one is ensuring forms of re-accessing these performances in the future. The case study of the artist Tino Sehgal will exemplify a performer that opposes these practices and provide a framework to question to what extent the documenting practices conflict with the essence of performance art.

Preserving Performance art through documentation processes

Stephen Gray explored the problematic idea of conserving an intangible artwork in his dissertation "Conservation and Performance Art: Building the Performance Art Data Structure (PADS)" in 2008. According to the author, the first occurrences of performances' documentation are simultaneous to the first appearance of the artworks themselves. This likely occurred because it is

the primary way of preserving the “existence” of these pieces. Photographs, video-recording, and transcription were used as a testimony of a past event.

Gray points out that although the documents are not the work, they are traces that compose the performance. While accessing the performance through this media, “the user must first answer some fundamental questions relating to the documentation; what are the relationships between them?”³¹ The documentation enables an ephemeral artwork to have an afterlife, providing it material to have a memory; however, it never resurrects it. “The performance art document is by necessity a compromise but maybe the only manifestation of an artwork which remains in existence and so its status should not be equated to that of access or handling collection.”³²

Since the afterlives of non-material contemporary artworks rely mostly on documentation practices, the standard procedures might be considered ineffective in many cases. It led researchers to reevaluate the role of conservation, documentation, and curatorial roles while archiving these contemporary art pieces. New inter-disciplinary practices emerged to fit this new art genre, and according to Gray,

Documentation schemes have proved extremely effective in achieving this, and so have featured heavily in this area of work, blurring the activities of conservation and documentation. We now have several functioning data handling models intended to describe complex and hybridized artworks. These schemes were primarily designed to trace ephemeral, interactive, and performative elements through the work to facilitate its future re-exhibition.³³

Consequently, new approaches to archive ephemeral contemporary pieces proved to be crucial to handle the complexity of these artworks. In performance art, elements such as materials, intentions, interactions, and techniques can vary a lot, which reflects the necessity of approaching specific aspects while documenting performance art. As some artworks might need specific points to be included, in other cases, this specific feature might be dispensable. The vast diversity of formats a performance might have reflected on the need for case-based documentation:

Artists and work become central to this process [case-based approaches], and qualitative research methods, such as interviews, surveys, and case-based reasoning, are now increasingly applied to this type of conservation practice. The artist's engagement (or lack of engagement) with the preservation process can significantly affect the level of success achieved by a chosen course of action.³⁴

Aware of such complexity, Gray formulated the Performance Art Data Structure (PADS), which suggests technical format to digitally compile the metadata created while registering this

³¹ Gray, 8.

³² Ibid., 9.

³³ Ibid., 11.

³⁴ Ibid., 12.

type of artwork. This structure is one of the few ones that aim to convey such type of information. Though, according to the scholars in information engineering, Pierfrancesco Bellini and Paolo Nesi, PADS still shows limitations while trying to embrace the diversity of performance art.³⁵

The process of photographing or recording a performance might be perceived at first sight automatically as a registering practice. One should keep in mind that while doing this, the performance itself will continue to be an ephemeral experience within its parameters of existence, and this process is introduced in another format to preserve the performance from one perspective. Photographs and videos of a performance cannot incorporate the experience of performance because this one has temporality as an essential component of its structure. These registration procedures preserve a past event that ended and cannot incorporate the intentionality of the performance itself. Gray stresses that while photographing and recording performances, a second structure is projected into the performance during the process; but applying this structure involves some conflicts.

Each of these types of these documents has limitations of scope, and each medium brings the conventions associated with it as an art form in its own right, often masking these over the performance work. The well-taken photograph of accomplished performance artwork, for instance, looks like an accomplished photograph, imposing its own conventions onto a work of different type and intent.³⁶

These forms of documentation will still carry their specific functionality and restrictions as well as to continue following their structure. While registering performances, the documentation produced will firstly be a form of document and secondly incorporate the role of registering something. Therefore, it follows conventions of a different code than what it is registering, which in this case, is performances. So, although the purpose of these forms of documentation is accurate, the results will never function as the artwork itself. For instance, while documenting performance through photographs, the result will primarily be a photograph with the registering purpose incorporated into it. Regardless of the purpose of the registration practice, the one who documents holds the creative choices and adopts techniques that they believe is appropriate; therefore, attributing their perception.³⁷ Hence, it is tamed to follow the structure of a photograph.

Documentation practices cannot comprehend the whole poetic of performance art since, however, registering a performance can have mainly two types of intentions. While photographing and recording performances with register focus, some elements must be included, which will be explored further during this chapter. However, it is also possible for the artist to use registration

³⁵ Bellini and Nesi, 428.

³⁶ Gray, 7.

³⁷ Ibid., 8.

practices to incorporate poetic intentions and transform them into artwork. In this case, these other artistic components eclipse the registration purpose, and the product becomes an independent artwork, such as photo-performances.

Photo-performances and photos of performances

Photographs are a standard part of museological documentation and usually are introduced as an archival component; still, while creating them as artworks, their preservation factor loses its predominance to give space to the artistic element. One of the main contrasting factors that alter this perception is when this initiative originates from the artists themselves. In the case of photo or video-performances, this often happens through the performance being registered in a pre-agreed format. Here, artists appoint a professional photographer or video-maker to capture the performance within a specific layout while the artists themselves perform. This process results in two artworks, the performance itself and the result of this commissioned piece of documentation. As the artist supervises the visual factors of photographing a performance, the role of registering is undermined to expand these additional elements. Moreover, while directing these registration practices to fit their poetics, artists become concurrently model and maker of the photographs.

MAR has in its collection items that fit this scheme of photo-performance; however, they are archived in their system under the category of “photo of a performance,” which creates a conflict about its functionality. The items in this category are photos serving the role of registering a performance, or are they photos where performance was part of the creative process?

Three singular photos named as *Quando todos se calam*, (Fig. 6) which translates as *When everyone shuts up*, by the Brazilian artist Berna Reale, were inserted in MAR’s collection as “photos of a performance”; however, some characteristics of these items challenge this title as a photo-performance. The performance that conceived the triptych of photos happened in 2009 in an open public market in a port area in the north of Brazil. This location has many scavenger animals seeking rests of food from the market, but it is also a public space with people of low or medium social status that are not necessarily engaged with the art scenario. During the performance, Reale lay naked on a table with pieces of viscera on top of her body. The photos were taken while many vultures flew over Berna to grab these pieces of meat while she remained still. In an article written by the art researcher Susana Rocha, the artist commented that this performance relates to the “violence of silence,” “The silence of the ‘victim/performer’ is only comparable to that of the spectators, who accept their inert role in the spectacle of the attack. Only the scavengers move.”³⁸

³⁸ Rocha, 27.



Fig. 6: Berna Reale, *Quando todos calam* (*When everybody silences*), 2009.

Berna Reale is an artist that often addresses themes associated with social violence and inequality. According to the art historian Lais Lacerda, her performances usually have a political connotation of happening in public spaces with the presence of her body incorporating multiple meanings in that specific moment and place.³⁹ The artist aims to shock those watching her perform, but by producing photos and videos of her performances, she materializes this intentionality into other formats. Lacerda emphasizes that

Her actions happen in public spaces aiming to reach the people present there at that moment and place. However, Berna's artworks outspread in videos [and photos] send by the own artist to galleries to be exhibited and commercialized. (...) Within Berna Reale's poetic, the videos are part of a work that can be exhibited later, the performances are not private. On the contrary, Berna does her performances in public, and the videos are a step in a process that reiterates body and video.⁴⁰

In the case of *Quando todos se calam*, the performance did not happen in the museum, and it was not possible to reenact this performance in such kind of context without compromising its poetics. The performance happened in 2009 in another region in the country, and the museum acquired the photos in 2013; thus, the occurrence of the performance is not linked to MAR in any sense. What the museum incorporated to its collection was indeed photos that the artist herself produced during a performance that happened many years before.

The fact that the creation of these photos was an action planned by the artist herself, and not by a museum or institution, reinforces the idea that these items function firstly as a photo-performances than documentation. Before performing, Reale arranged the photos to be taken and consciously attributed a poetic factor to them, and while doing this, she conceived independent art pieces as well. Moreover, some visual elements of the photos contribute to this; the three

³⁹ Lacerda, 77.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 79.

photos were taken from the same angle and have the same composition, the only distinguishing element between the photos is the number and position of the vultures that appear in each photo grabbing the food over the performer's body, who lies still. The fact that there are three identical photos where only the vultures seem to be in movement relates to the poetics about silence that the artist intended. Therefore, the visual aspects in this format of tryptic compose with the purpose of the artist as an independent artwork where the performance was used in the process to achieve this composition.

It is relevant to mention that MAR has the printed and framed version of these photos and not the digital files. These physical objects have their catalog record attributing it as a museological item, which supports that what was musealized here was three independent artworks, a photo-performance, but not photos of performance with documentation purpose to preserve performance. So, differently from the remains analyzed during the first chapter, these photos do not function as a perpetuator of a performance or an extension to document an event that happened in the museum.

As a side-effect of the ephemerality of performances, some artists, such as Reale, apply these procedures to materialize the poetic intended during that experience. This process ends up creating photo-performances, which function as autonomous artworks that can be archived, purchased, and musealized. However, while doing this, artists partly "materialize" an ephemeral manifestation, which creates the paradox of materializing an occurrence that should be initially ephemeral. Additionally, while using performance as a process in making a photo-performance, the poetics of the artwork is completed, and the purpose of reperforming is put into question. If reenacting this performance, one would re-access the concept of the performance itself, but the poetic attributed the photo-performances remains unchanged.

Registering Performances: documentation or creation?

On the other hand, the photos of Marina Abramovic's performance *The Artist is Present* on MoMA's website can be perceived as a case of using photos with documenting purposes. These photos are from a collection of pictures about the whole exhibition, which is a common registration process in museums to document their exhibitions. The photos available on the website very likely were not incorporated in MoMA's collection as independent artworks, such in MAR's case, but archived as material that enables access to a past event that happens in the museum.

During Abramovic's performance, the presence of the audience is essential and could not be excluded as in Reale's photo-performances. This interaction was documented in several pictures through many angles with members of the audience in a focused position and the back watching

the event and even the facial expressions of the people sitting in front of Abramovic were registered. In one of the pictures (Fig. 7), it is possible to see technical equipment such as cameras,



Fig.7 and 8: Abramovic performing *The Artist is Present* at MoMA in 2010.

light equipment and tapes on the floor delimiting the borders the audience can reach. In the sequence of pictures, we can observe that Abramovic sometimes appears using a white dress (Fig. 8), sometimes a black dress and in other times, a red dress, which might indicate that there is no specific dress code regarding the performer's vestment. Additionally, in some photos, there is a wooden table placed between Abramovic and the person sitting in front of her, which might also indicate an optional element in the performance. The variables of the garment and the presence of the table also indicate that the performance was documented more than once since it was performed many days, which is unusual for performances since, in general, artists only perform once. The technical equipment, the audience, the objects and the garments used are all relevant elements while documenting performance and should be included while photographing performances with this purpose.

Regarding documentation of performance and re-performing, Marina Abramovic herself comments about the problematic practice of registering an ephemeral manifestation.

The performance for me makes sense if it's live. And doesn't make so much sense if it's documentation. Everything else would leftover, like photograph or video, not the real thing. (...) But I really think that it's very important to re-perform the pieces even with all this danger that becomes somebody else piece. But still you have to refer to the original source and you can make your own version. If today you can re-perform Bach, and make techno Bach out of this, why you can't re-perform the performance? The only way that reformists of this live element inside. So I have to live like that because otherwise it's just dead photograph on the paper or just another video.⁴¹

⁴¹ Abramovic, Marina. "Documenting Performance" *Artist Interview Performance*. MoMA. Khanacademy. Accessed on Oct 2019. <https://www.khanacademy.org/partner-content/moma/artist-interview-performance/v/moma-abramovic-documenting-performance>

While Abramovic argues against incorporating the poetics of performances in documentation formats, she concurrently is in favor of reacting performances. She believes that the essence of performances cannot be expressed through photos and videos, and it is a type of artwork that can only happen in time and that re-performing is the only way to re-exhibit a performance properly, even if the performer re-elaborates the original version and incorporates its own identity.

This framework can be compared to the philosopher Nelson Goodman in *Languages of Art*. In 1979, Goodman proposed that some art genres, such as music, have a two-stage format: “One notable difference between painting and music is that the composer’s work is done when he has written the score, even though the performances are the end-products, while the painter has to finish the picture.”⁴²

While applying this framework to performance art, one can interpret performers as creators of the concept of performances and the reenactments as equally valid forms of recreating the artwork, even if alterations are needed. However, the composer usually is not part of the score, but, in the case of Abramovic, the artist is part of the original setting.

Abramovic opposition to documentation relates to the impossibility of expressing the poetics of performance art through these processes. However, applying them with registration intentions is not pointed as a problem. This type of documents enables professionals to comprehend the artwork more thoroughly, which contributes to accurately reenacting the performance.

Performance documentation through words

Although visual means are intuitively the most efficient way of documenting performances, it is certainly not the only one possible. Yoko Ono’s performance *Cut Piece* (Fig. 9) was presented the first time in 1964, and it has been reenacted by the artist herself several times, and more recently by other performers. During this performance, the artist kneels on the floor quietly wearing her best pieces of clothing with a pair of scissors placed in front of her; people in the audience are invited individually to take the scissors and cut a piece of her clothes and keep it. According to the art historian Kevin Concannon, a script for *Cut Piece* appeared for the first time in January 1966 along with other works in a document named *Strip Tease Show* as the following text:

Cut Piece

First version for single performer: Performer sits on stage with a pair of scissors in front of him. It is announced that members of the audience may come on stage—one at a time—to cut a small

⁴² Goodman, 114.

piece of the performer's clothing to take with them. Performer remains motionless throughout the piece. Piece ends at the performer's option.

Second version for audience: It is announced that members of the audience may cut each other's clothing. The audience may cut as long as they wish.⁴³

It is interesting to observe that the artist separated the performance in two versions, and the interactivity with the public is an essential element in both. This script can be perceived as a form of expressing the concept of the artwork through words. In 1971, in Ono's book *Grapefruit*, the artist added to the score a description that stated that the performer did not need to be necessarily a woman.⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that textual instructions relate less to the appearance of the artist and provides a more abstract idea visually speaking. According to Concannon, when Ono established these guidelines for the performance and referred to the performer in the third person, she dismissed the ownership of the manifestation and the first performance as the "original" piece. While creating a script with two different versions that could be performed by other artists, the essence of the artwork surpasses the individuality of the artist herself and allows its intentionality to be (re)interpreted by other performers.⁴⁵

Having conceived *Cut Piece* as an event score, Ono foresaw the work's realization in a succession of presents. And from the start, she understood that in each of these presents, the work would be transformed—not from any authentic original, but from an idea into an experience—each one distinct from the others. Ono has described her instruction works—or scores—as "seeds," activated individually and collectively in the minds and actions of those who receive them. And as is often the case with her work, this germinating idea is manifest in multiple variations.⁴⁶

Therefore, according to Concannon, Ono converted the intentionality of the performance into an independent idea that could be reinterpreted differently, allowing its reenactment since its



Fig. 9: Yoko Ono performing *Cut Piece* in 1964.

⁴³ Concannon, 81.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

early stages. By facilitating and encouraging reperformance at such a level, the authorship of the artwork is put into question. As Goodman argues, performing is an equally valid format of that artwork, but, in this case, would the performers need to pay for copyrights, such as in the music industry?

In the 1960s, Ono affirmed that this artwork was “test of her commitment to life as an artist, as a challenge to the artistic ego, as a gift, and as a spiritual act.”⁴⁷, but art critics interpreted the piece as a striptease, a protest against violence and war (in particular the war between Vietnam and the United States) and most recently as a feminist work. However, when reenacting the artwork in 2003, thirty-eight years after its first occurrence, the artist expressed that this piece was against ageism, racism, sexism, and violence. Thus, converting the concept of the performance through words allowed different interpretations to emerge; this emancipation enabled the performance to be revisited and reinterpreted in parallel with the social and political context of that period.

In 2005, the Witte the With Center for Contemporary art published the book *Life, Once More – Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art*, which is a result of an exhibition curated by Sven Lütticken with this same name. In the introduction, Lütticken argues that reenactments are, to a greater or lesser extent, representations of the original performances.

Moreover, the book assembles essays about reenacting performances written by scholars such as Phelan, but also includes pieces of documentation of performances in different formats. The Dutch artist Barbara Visser included her performance, which happened in 2004 in Berlin, through a short text introducing the piece and a text of the performance. In 1997, Visser lectured at a symposium on “reality as fiction”; later, she conducted a performance of actress (the performer Saskia Temmink) of her own speech named *Lecture with Actress*. In 2004, a second reperformance happened with the name *Lecture on Lecture with Actress*, where the first reenactment was incorporated with video footage “Like Actress I, Actress II receives her lines live through an earpiece, but unlike her predecessor, she has been allowed a glimpse of the text beforehand.”⁴⁸

The document describes what Actress II (who was performing live), the moderator (in the video), Actress I, and people in the audience (also in the video) said during this performance. So, the interaction between what is being said live and what was on screen is a relevant element. While producing this documentation, the structure resembles a script of a theatrical performance. For instance:

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Lütticken, 139.

The complexity of the layers of each reenactment with the interaction between the performer and the screen makes the textual format a necessary format to understand the artwork, and in special with the intention of reenactment. This documents the order of what was said by Actress II and the speakers on the screen to perceive the patterns of interactions between them. Differently from Ono's case, this is not a script; this document was created after the performance was finished, and it has the purpose of registering the lines that were said during the performance, even though the artist does not clearly states this as a source for reenactments.

Allowing performances to be ephemeral

While some artists agree with the registration practices, this is not a consensual rule among performers. Some artists defend the ephemerality of performance to a degree of opposing to apply any type of registering procedure to the performance. The artist Tino Sehgal is in favor of the idea of total ephemerality of his performance *This is propaganda 2002/2006*. In the performance, the artist requests a female assistant in the gallery to sing "This is propaganda, you know you know, This is propaganda you know" while staring at an empty wall. The art historian Acatia Finbow argues that

By prohibiting any visual or material record of the work, Sehgal makes it impossible to see his performance without directly experiencing it. He has claimed that 'substituting [the work] with some material object like a photo or video doesn't seem like adequate documentation.' Not wanting his work to follow the tendency of some performance works to eventually be represented, or even substituted, by a single, material object – often a photograph – Sehgal's limitation of this documentation process, coupled with the museum's freedom to re-perform the work, ensure a continued liveness.⁵⁰

By opposing registering this performance, the artist also is preserving the element of surprise that the audience will experience with the artwork. After the performance is completed, the artwork disappears with no material traces to reclaim its existence, and what remains only resonates in the mind of the ones that performed and watched the experience. Among the artists analyzed in this research, Sehgal perceives that the ephemerality of performance art is the most extreme format possible. By entirely opposing registration purposes, he is in parallel with the

⁴⁹ Ibid, 140.

⁵⁰ Finbow, Acatia. "This is propaganda 2002/2006", *Performance at Tate: Into the Space of Art*. Tate Museum. Accessed on December 2019. <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/performance-at-tate/perspectives/tino-sehgal>

framework of Phelan in *The Ontology of Performance*. However, the artwork has been re-enacted several times, so although registration purposes are not permitted, the concept of the artwork reemerges in other bodies.

A less extreme approach could be to oppose reperformance but not to document procedures. In this case, the traces of the performance could only be partially accessed with these documents, but the artwork itself would not be reenacted in the body of another performer, so the artwork itself could not exist any longer in that format of performance. As we have seen with Ono's case, reperformance is a viable option for some artists; this can be done with or without the reinterpretation factor. However, reperforming an "original" piece without reinterpretation can be a contractional idea because, as accurate this might try to be, the original event is fixed within its past timeframe and cannot be reproduced entirely, only partially.

The art historian Amelia Jones used the performance of Abramovic at the MoMA to comment about reenactment through the article " 'The Artist is Present' Artistic Re-enactments and the Impossibility of Presence", where she argues that:

Re-enactment, currently a hugely popular strategy in the art and performance worlds and beyond (as signaled, importantly, by Abramovic's own *Seven Easy Pieces*), activates precisely the tension between our desire for the material (for the other's body for "presence"; for the "true event") and the impossibility of ever fixing this in space and time. The re-enactment both testifies to our desire to know the past to secure ourselves in the present and the paradox of that knowledge always taking place through repetition. It thus exposes the paradox of that knowledge, proving our own inexorable mortality: the fact that we are always reaching to secure time, and always failing.

Jones draws attention to the fact that the presence of the artist is essential for this type of art; she emphasizes that the context of performing in a solo exhibition about her career makes Abramovic's presence nearly irreplaceable. Reperforming this artwork would fail because the circumstances of the art are exceptional. In this case, the ephemerality of the performance is related to the circumstances of the presence of the artist inside that context, and reenactment would fail for not repeating those circumstances.

Jones' perspective regarding the ineffectiveness of reenactments can be linked to the ephemerality of performances. While allowing reenactments to happen, the ephemeral element is put into question because this enables the performance to continue to be re-accessed. By doing this, the essence of the artwork continues to partly exist from time to time in the body of other artists. Reperformances are also a form of producing afterlives for performance, and consequently, they defy their own nature by preventing their total ephemerality.

As demonstrated with the case studies and literature review of this chapter, documentation can be applied in different formats depending on its intentions. A visual documentation through photos and videos represses performances into new structures, and this transaction can be used to generate another type of artwork or with a registering role; preserving performance through textual means has been adopted in cases as well. Nonetheless, these forms of documentation create afterlives for performance art. Pictures, videos, textual means, and even reenactments are practices that allow (partial) access to performances in the future; therefore, although these processes cannot retain the whole concept of experiencing a performance, they can comprehend traces of these artworks.

However, if perceiving performance art not as an artwork attached to time that has one original version and then disappears, but as a concept independent from timeframes, the matter of ephemerality would be altered. It can be done by using a similar framework that for a score of music would enable to understand performances as an artwork independent from timeframes. In other words, such as music where the creator(s) make an immaterial concept that can have various interpretations, performance art can be seen as an idea or concept that can have many versions and reinterpretations in the form of reenactments. Comprehending performance as a concept independent from timeframes would allow performances to be completely dematerialized artworks and yet continuing to exist through reenactments. So, a more flexible approach provides this type of artwork to be perceived as dematerialized poetic concepts and not as occurrences that disappear.

Chapter 3

The Value of Spectators' and Artists' Perspectives while Preserving Performances

As performance art emerged to oppose to the materialization of art, the consequences of the ephemerality of these artworks reflect on how museums approach them within their institutions. The previous chapter illustrated possible methods that produce afterlives for performance art and questioned the compatibility of these with the nature of this art genre. Moreover, performance is an experience that happens between artists and the public; thus, this chapter will explore the forms of preserving performance art through the perspective of the people present during the experience (public and the performer); this will provide a basis to question to what extent is this source of information valuable to preserve the concept of performance art and if this is aligned with the nature of this art genre.

Firstly, a literature review on written interviews of the artist John Cage about the relationship art can have with the audience will emphasize how intrinsic the presence of spectators is to performance art. This will provide a background to question the value of the perspective of the audience while preserving immaterial artworks. A case study of a model of documenting the audience's impression created by the phenomenologist Rolf Wolfensberger will demonstrate how this type of data can be produced in museums; this case study will provide a basis to question the applicability of this framework to performance art.

Secondly, a case study at MoMA and another at Tate museum will demonstrate forms of formats of connecting the performer to the audience while having the museum as mediator. These cases will provide a background to analyze to what extent the documentation produced during this type of activity is relevant as registration information.

A literature review about the practice of interviews in the art field will provide a background to explore the origins of this procedure from the museological perspective. Then, the framework of the art conservator Carol Mancusi-Ungaro's will explore how professionals have perceived this practice as a form of preserving contemporary artworks. The argumentation of the art historian Sandra Kisters will explore this practice from the academic perspective. These two sources will provide a basis to identify possible conflicts that can emerge while interviewing artists to preserve non-material artworks and inquire about the value that this type of information has in this context.

Finally, the model of interviewing practices elaborated by the Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art will be analyzed. This will be done to identify the areas that conflict with the intangibility of performances and speculate forms of modifying this arrangement to enable compatibility with the framework of performance art.

The value of the audience's perspective

As Abramovic has emphasized in one of her interviews for MoMA, the audience has an essential role during performances, and therefore their viewpoint and memory can be a vital source of information while registering performances. For her, the real experience happens with the presence of the audience in that specific time and place. "So maybe the most [truthful] documentation, which is valuable would be the memory of the audience and the actual story which they will tell to somebody else."⁵¹

John Cage was one of the first artists to inquire about the audience's point of view and to experiment with it. As mentioned in the first chapter, Cage was part of the Fluxus group, where he and Kaprow would elaborate "happenings." During these events, the public often would be requested to no longer have a spectator posture, but to have an active and participatory role. Thus, questioning the place of the public during performance art is related to the origins of the artwork itself. While experimenting with the presence of the audience during these events, artists were consequently speculating what points of view one has while watching a performance and emphasized the presence of the audience to complete the artwork.

By experimenting with the audience's viewpoint, artists were concurrently exploring forms that one can experience contemporary art. During an interview, Cage claimed "I try to get it so that people realize that they themselves are doing their experience and that it's not being done to them."⁵² As a musician, Cage was entirely concerned about the effect art would have on his audience and formulated projects to experiment with these effects. One that gained attention happened in the Black Mountain College, where the artist would set up presentations coordinating where the audience should sit during the event.

I had at Black Mountain in 1952 a square composed of four triangles with the apexes of the angles merging towards the center, but not meeting. The center was a larger space that could take movement, and the aisles between these four triangles also admitted to movement. The audience could see itself, which is, of course, the advantage of any theatre in the round.⁵³

The artist's concern regarding the view of the audience while experiencing modern and contemporary artworks echoes on the value this perspective can have. Documenting the audience's point of view might produce a valuable source of information while comprehending art manifestations, and therefore, conserving and reexhibiting it. This source of information can

⁵¹ Abramovic, Marina. "Documenting Performance" Artist Interview Performance. MoMA. Khanacademy. Accessed on Oct 2019: <https://www.khanacademy.org/partner-content/moma/artist-interview-performance/v/moma-abramovic-documenting-performance>

⁵² Cage, Kirby, and Schechner, 51.

⁵³ Ibid., 52.

provide the museum with information about the personal experience one has during a performance, which might include their impressions and feelings. However, not many art institutions have been using strategies to retain this form of information, and not much has been written about these processes in museums.

While investigating the experience public has in museums, John Falk has emphasized the benefits of collecting data to understand what attracts people into museums and to improve their experience.⁵⁴ However, he notes that while interrogating audiences, professionals mainly focus on the experience in the museum as a whole “In taking this perspective, the question becomes more about satisfaction than ‘outcomes’; whether or not the museum satisfies the individual’s needs (intellectual or otherwise).”⁵⁵ Consequently, more focused matters, such as the experience during one specific artwork, are nearly never explored.

In 2009, Rolf Wolfensberger conducted three activities to preserve the viewer’s perspective on one contemporary artwork being exhibited in the Museum of Communication (MoC) in Berne, Switzerland. The interactive networked installation *Telematic Vision*, from 1993, by Paul Sermon, is an artwork that primarily occurs through video, images, and sounds; therefore, the immateriality of the artwork reflected on the elaboration of strategies that intended to register the experience visitors had with the installation.

The artwork itself emerges only through the lived experience of the audience. Therefore, any kind of discourse and any kind of knowledge regarding a strategy for the preservation of the artwork are based on memorized subjective experiences, captured and documented as first-hand accounts or retold as reflective narratives. Sources representing such phenomenological information, no matter be they textual, oral or visual, become the pivotal points of interest.⁵⁶

Seeking to retain the public’s experience, Wolfensberger conducted three types of activities: (1) video observation of participants while watching the videos, (2) polling of randomly chosen participants by a specific questionnaire, and (3) video-cued recall interviews with a selected group of participants.⁵⁷ Applying these methods through three different angles enabled museum professionals with visual, written, and oral data regarding visitors’ experience during the art installation. The framework Wolfensberger elaborated is not connected to the (im)materiality of the artwork, so one can only speculate that this structure would be compatible while registering the experience public had during a performance.

⁵⁴ Regarding this topic, Falk has written the book “Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience”, 2009.

⁵⁵ Falk, 2.

⁵⁶ Wolfensberger, 9.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 54.

Consequently, even though the audience's perspective can be a valuable source, not many museums have demonstrated concern about documenting this angle. However, Wolfensberger's framework exemplifies forms of retaining the audience's impression lived in an immaterial artwork, which provides a basis to assume that similar strategies can be implemented for performance art.

Connecting performers' intentions to the audience

Aware of the vastly different meanings a performance can have, some museums have been developing practices to allow artists to voice opinions and remarks about their artworks to the audience. For the exhibition "The Artist is Present," MoMA produced short audios of Abramovic briefly commenting on her previous performances and the one she was presenting on that occasion. These audios were part of an audio tour of the exhibition while it was happening, but the public can still access this material through the museum's website.

These audios have a very open format; on some occasions, the artist has a more descriptive approach and, on other occasions, a more poetic view. While commenting about *Rhythm 0*, Abramovic says: "I was standing there in the middle of the space, [with] this table with objects I put the objects on the table very carefully chosen, because the objects were for pleasure, and there was also the object for pain and objects that can bring you to death."⁵⁸ Concurrently, she describes the scene and explains the motives that led her to choose such objects.

Regarding the performance she was presenting at that moment in the museum, she approaches the listener directly: "so you can observe this as a kind of stage for the experience. Or you can enter that space and take active participation, which brings you much closer to the artist, and this presence, and to your own experience." By using this format, she imprints her goal of what she wants the person to experience during this performance.

Moreover, MoMA's director, Glenn Lowry, occasionally complemented Abramovic's speech to provide the listener with more information regarding what she was commenting on:

MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ: I had a very strict upbringing when I was a child in the former Yugoslavia.

GLENN LOWRY: Abramović began performing in public at the age of 21. From then until the age of 29, when she finally left home, she was subject to her mother's stringent rules.

MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ: I had to do all my performances, before ten in the evening, because ten in the evening I have to be home. And there, I was learned to be very disciplined.

This collection of audios can contribute from a broader perspective as documentation material about the exhibition and partially about Abramovic's career. Compiling information about

⁵⁸ MoMA. "Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present". Accessed on December 2019. <https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/243/3118>

the performances through the artist's own words might contribute in the future to understand her production and the relation she typically aimed to have with her public. However, the briefness of the audios, as well as the liberty of what and how Abramovic expresses her ideas, leads to limited data about each artwork. It might become problematic when re-accessing this material with a reexhibiting goal.

The freedom of speech given to Abramovic is a valuable source of her poetic intentions and to identify recurrent elements such as the interactivity factor. Thus, from this perspective, these audios can contribute as registration documentation about the exhibition and the artist's career, but not individually of each artwork. Moreover, the museum produced this audio for the public, so these documents did not intend to have a registration purpose from the start. The absence of an outline to enquire some points about her production resulted in the omission of specific information about some artworks.

The Tate Museum has been researching vastly about performance art and producing material to explain to the public some angles of the complexity of dealing with this type of art. During the production of short videos with this thematic, one of the videos inquires, "Does Performance Art Need to be Experienced Live?." As explored in the previous chapter, there are forms of creating and prolonging the afterlife of performances through documentation procedures, when the artist desires so. Nevertheless, the Tate Museum has a project that defies the boundaries of this question by streaming live performances and uploading the footage of such events on their website.

According to the platform, the *BMW Tate Live* project aims to ensure accessibility for audiences, and one of the methods conceived to do so is the *Performance Room*, which is a series of performances commissioned exclusively to be broadcasted online for the public. After the artwork, the footage resulted from the event is uploaded into their website, where it remains indefinitely. However, while enabling endless and unlimited access to videos of performances, the ephemerality of these artworks is put into question. Differently from registration procedures and reenactments, these videos are interruptedly available to the public and continuously accessible. While providing such a level of accessibility, therefore the ephemerality connotation only lies in the physical presence, the artwork is perpetuated in time through this type of video reproduction. The production of this streaming intends to be as neutral as possible. Only one camera is used, and the whole performance can only be watched from this angle; there is neither the presence of other spectators or a physical audience.

The *BMW Tate Live* happens annually with many performances happening in different locations and formats. In 2014, the artist Nora Schultz performed *Terminal+*, where she interacts

with pieces of foam on the floor and walls and later shape them into sculptures.⁵⁹ The video available has in total around 27 minutes; the performance lasted a bit longer than 8 minutes, and it was followed by an interview done by the curator, which is a standard format this project.

The pertinent part to stress about this case is the way the interviews are conducted. After the curator and the performer do a brief introduction about the artwork, the audience is given control over the questions through the intermedium of the curator that occasionally rephrases or redirect some questions. Through social media, the audience could send questions while and after the performance was happening, and during the interview, the curator would choose questions for the artist to answer. The questions were spontaneous and unpremeditated; however, the mediation of the curator prevents repetitions or misleading the theme.

Nevertheless, the structure of this type of interview aims to engage the audience with the performative world and to provide an interactive platform that allows them to communicate with the artist directly. The freedom given to the stream of questions might direct the debate to more poetic and intuitive themes or either technical or practical, but mainly the public enquires about the motivation of the performance. As in the Abramovic's audios to the public, this case does not have a structured arrangement formulated by the museum to register specific purposes regarding the performance. However, in contrast with MoMA's case, the audience had an active role in inquiring specific aspects that interested them.

The cases at MoMA and the Tate Museum exemplify two activities created by museums to connect the performer directly to the audience. In both cases, the museums have a moderator role, but the Live Q&A activity provides spectators with a participative role. In neither case, it is evident the documental purpose of preserving technical and intentional information from the museological point of view to reexhibit the performance. It happens even though these actions might contribute to such a role in the future.

Interviewing artists from the museological point of view

Some professionals in the art field have been aware for decades about the benefits of interrogating artists about their production. Regarding this approach, the curator Hans Ulrich Obrist has conducted the extensive Interview Project, which contains over 2000 hours of audio with conversations with not only artists but other people in the cultural field.⁶⁰ The purpose of his project has an interdisciplinary tone and often focuses in more narrowed subjects depending on

⁵⁹ Tate. "BMW TATE LIVE: PERFORMANCE ROOM – NORA SCHULTZ - TERMINAL +" *Tate Modern Performance*. 2014. Accessed on December 2019. <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/performance/bmw-tate-live-2014/bmw-tate-live-performance-room-nora-schultz>

⁶⁰ Kisters, "Interviewing the Artist: Richter Versus Bacon", 166.

the expertise of the interviewed person; while interrogating artists, usually he asks about sources of inspiration “One of the questions Obrist always asks is who (from the past) has inspired or influenced the artist.”⁶¹

In the book, *Modern Art: Who Cares?*, published in 1999, the conservators Cornelia Weyer and Gunnar Heydenreich discussed prior forms of interrogating artists (before the interviewing methodology gained visibility in the field).⁶² The first actions, which were done to extract information about artworks directly from artists, mostly had the questionnaire format and focused on topics regarding techniques and materials. By the end of 1980, some professionals started questioning the artist's opinions on restoration matters, which, according to the authors, was the first step taken toward inquiring about the artist's intentions and poetic.⁶³

The art conservator Carol Mancusi-Ungaro has been researching about interviewing artists and applying this type of strategy for several decades. Mancusi-Ungaro is currently head of the conservation department of the Whitney Museum in New York, but previously she was part of a long restoration project of the paintings of Mark Rothko, who committed suicide decades before. In 2006, the journalist Randy Kennedy interviewed Mancusi-Ungaro for an article, and she mentioned that, during this process, often she questioned how the artist would have wanted his artworks to be restored, which led her to question: “Why do conservators tend to wait until after artists die to begin figuring out how they would have wanted their work cared for, searching for clues in archives, in the memories of friends and in chemical paint analysis?”⁶⁴ As a response to this question, Mancusi-Ungaro soon started to interview aiming to fill the gaps she often encounters while conserving art, especially conceptual and contemporary art.

As a conservator, during the first interviews, Mancusi-Ungaro rapidly directed the conversations into technical aspects about the artist's production; however, she perceived that the materiality of the artworks often is related to the essence of artworks themselves. While dealing with contemporary art pieces, questions regarding materials and techniques used during the creative process soon developed into dialogues about the intentionality, purpose, and poetic intentions that led to those choices. While being interviewed by Kennedy, she then commented that:

"It became clear to me over time," she said, "that there was no way I was going to be asking the important questions, the right questions that would matter in the future." Instead she often simply starts out by asking, "So, how does this piece look to you now?"⁶⁵

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Weyer and Heydenreich, 385.

⁶³ Ibid., 386-387.

⁶⁴ Kennedy, 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Consequently, she shifted the structure of the interviews into firstly philosophical and poetic questions to then focus on technical aspects, such as materials and techniques. This reconfiguration can relate to the process of dematerialization of art, commented in the first chapter, that altered the emphasis of some types of art manifestations from materiality to conceptuality. While conserving contemporary art pieces, Mancusi-Ungaro perceived that this disturbance reflected on how professionals should approach these objects from the museological point of view.

Taking into consideration that performance art is one of the most extremes forms of dematerialization perceived in contemporary art pieces, the conflict Mancusi-Ungaro faced would be even more prominent while interviewing artists to preserve these items. Her strategy of interviewing artists emerged to prevent possible divergencies between the artist's intentions and conservation or restoration processes applied to artworks; while dealing with performance art, this strategy would aim to avoid divergencies between the performer's poetic and the forms of reexhibiting the artwork, such as reenactments.

Mancusi-Ungaro expressed how the notion of temporality influenced how she approached the interview; she soon realized that by only relying on specific questions about materials, the dialog would not remain effective for future generations of conservators because they will face different problems and solutions regarding the objects. While questioning the motivations regarding the choices of materials and techniques, the interviewer could engage in a more complex level of understanding the artist's intentions, which can orient present and future professionals to make more accurate decisions when restoring and reexhibiting the artwork.

From the outset, it was clear to me that my questions would inevitably reflect the concerns of my own time and might therefore not provide answers to the problems that might confront future conservators. What I had hoped to document was not merely a discussion of materials and technique but, more than that, a solid sense of the artists' concerns about what they were looking at and its future preservation. Naturally, artists' relationships to their materials and thoughts about the future care of the art are as varied as their personalities.⁶⁶

Mancusi-Ungaro perceived that recording the interview with the artist in front of their artworks could provide a fruitful information about the poetic of the artworks. She believes that this strategy enables a cross-section explanation between the physical objects, technique, and processes and the context of such choices. The art historian Sandra Kisters agrees with the benefits of such format: "In contrast to the written form, the filmed artist's interview has the obvious advantage of both seeing and hearing the artist while he or she speaks about their art and can

⁶⁶ Mancusi-Ungaro, 157.

include footage of the artist at work.”⁶⁷ Therefore, among written, audio-recorded, and video footage, this last option allows the interviewed and interviewer to interact with visual elements and comment on it immediately.

Regarding performance art, the idea of interviewing the artist while he or she performs is merely impracticable. In such a scenario, the meeting should occur previously or following the event; the post-momentum could provide the interrogator a complete view of the performance as a whole and how the piece relates to the audience. Moreover, taking into consideration that performances are ephemeral and that the artists will refer to events that rely on time, a video-footage of the performance occurring can be crucial to provide visual information about the artwork. While recording performance art, many technical approaches are possible, but the audience’s point of view can be especially valuable because it allows the spectator of the video to partly share the experience that members of the audience had during the event.

Furthermore, Kisters emphasizes that this process enables artists to guide professionals on how to best treat their artworks; according to her, this method “suggests that artists know best how their work should be treated, exhibited, and explained. Its general premise is that knowing the artist's intention is necessary to understand a work of art.”⁶⁸ Even if the interview does not fully achieve such a goal in some sense, it should still be regarded as a key primary source. Through the data generated during interviews, one can access and use direct information provided by the creator of the piece to comprehend the artwork, which enables professionals to conserve and reexhibit the artworks in a more truthful manner.

In the book *The Lure of the Biographical: On the (Self-)Representation of Modern Artists*, Kisters contemplates how, why, and what are the possible actions that connect the artistic *oeuvre* and its creator. Modernism raised the value of attributing one’s production to the artists themselves, so the art scene started to develop methods to create a public image of artists’ personalities. For instance, in creating a solo exhibition, curators select features of the artist’s identity to talk about the artist, so what is being said or omitted is collaborating on shaping this persona.⁶⁹

Interviews have the peculiar characteristic of enabling artists to express their opinions regarding their production. However, Kisters observes a possible conflict that can emerge through self-biographical methods.

Yet, although an artist can manipulate the interview both while it is taking place and afterward by demanding a right to edit the text, the interviewer or editor is equally, if not more, influential in the editing process. We should therefore always question the reliability of the interview as a source and

⁶⁷ Kisters, *Interviewing the Artist: Richter Versus Bacon*, 166.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 167.

⁶⁹ Kisters, *Lure of Biographical*, 11-12.

wonder to what extent they have been edited and what role they play in the construction of the artist's identity.⁷⁰

Indeed, there is the possibility of an artist's altering, consciously or not, their discourse depending on who is questioning them and the goal of the debate. The consistency of the discourse given during an interview might be bias as a consequence of who is interviewing the artist and with what purpose. For instance, while answering the audience's questions, the artist might use a different language or emphasize precise aspects of their production to cause a specific effect on the audience. In contrast, while being interviewed by a museum professional, the tone of the discussion could change, and the artist might respond to this differently, having in mind that such data will be used in the future to comprehend, conserve and reexhibit their art.

Professionals and scholars have been aware of the advantages and disadvantages that interviewing procedures can have. Although there is no one correct form of conducting this type of interview, professionals have been investigating how to do so and what points are relevant to be discussed in the process.

Guidelines for interviewing and performances

The effects of conducting interviews as a strategy to preserve valuable immaterial information about contemporary pieces were already evident by the end of the twentieth century among specialists in the field. Some organizations elaborated reports to orient other professionals on how to conduct this type of interview; among those, the Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art elaborated guidelines in 1999 while applying this method in contemporary art institutes.

The *Concept Scenario Artists' Interviews* is a model that outlines a general structure to lead interviews. Like Mancusi-Ungaro, they suggest the interviewers initiate the debate with open questions and then narrow into more focused and technical pieces of information.

The artist is first invited to speak as freely as they like about their working methods, their choice of materials, and what they mean. Only later are questions relating to aging, conservation and restoration addressed. This model presents the subjects of the interview and the preferred order. However, this model may be adapted to all kinds of interviews.⁷¹

Therefore, the writers suggest flexible guidelines for the debate and encourage professionals to readapt the interview to cover relevant aspects of that specific artist's production. The outline proposed follows the following stages: introduction, opening questions, creative process, materials and techniques/meaning, context, conveyance/aging, deterioration and

⁷⁰ Kisters, *Lure of Biographical*, 82-83.

⁷¹ *Concept Scenario Artists' Interviews*, 2.

conservation, and restoration. These subjects should follow a triangular structure from general to specific questions, so in the first stages the artist is stimulated to speak as openly as possible about meanings, methods, use of materials and “the closer the interview comes to the tip of the triangle, the more specific and concrete the answers will become. There are no open questions at the tip of the triangle. These questions mainly have a control function.”⁷² Therefore, in the final stages, the debate should be punctual by addressing specific conservation and restoration points.

Such a structure offers a wide range of possibilities to frame the interview in the manner that best suits the situation, yet some complications might emerge while applying such guidelines on performance art. The interview stages involve many subjects that address the materiality of the artwork, which, depending on the artist's view about the topic, can provide fruitful or irrelevant information. The three initial stages (introduction, opening questions, creative process) are compatible with the framework of performances and would provide the interviewer with valuable information to understand the artwork. Nevertheless, the following states (materials and techniques/meaning, context, conveyance/aging, deterioration and conservation, and restoration) need alterations to comprehend the immateriality of performances.

While dealing with performances, usually, the conceptual intentions of the artwork are more relevant than the material goods used in the process, which resonates with the evident necessity to adjust the interview to fit such a framework, and these modifications can incorporate two possible behaviors of how to approach performance art. One option is to treat the physical remains of the event as items that should be preserved and the performance as the process that produced them. In this case, the structure of the interview would not suffer many modifications since there is still a material trace to refer to during the discussion. This would be the case while interviewing artists to conserve musealized items, such as the wooden board from *EmpreZa in MAR*. In these situations, the stages proposed by the guidelines would provide fruitful information about conserving such items. Likewise, this original structure would be applicable in cases of photo-performances, where the artwork is perceived as an independent piece and the performance as a process that resulted in the final artworks.

Generally, this is not the case for the category of performance art, where artists aim for the ephemerality of the artwork. While trying to apply this original structure to performance while not addressing its immateriality, the system might fail. For instance, in the case of *The Artist is Present*, Abramovic can assert the chair used as completely disposable and irrelevant to be conserved; in such a scenario, the closer the mentioned model of the interview gets to the tip of the triangle, the less relevant the questions became. Authors such as Phelan and Scheiden defend

⁷² Ibid.

the complete ephemerality of performance – according to their view, physical objects used during the performance do not carry any poetic trace and should not be preserved. Therefore, the more narrowed the interview becomes to the material-based matters, the more unproductive it would be while applied to performance art.

Nonetheless, there is a second possible approach to modify the stages of the interview to better-fit performance art's framework. While perceiving the artists' poetic and art creation itself as dissociated from each other, this structure might fail in the code of performances. However, if dealing with both instances concurrently, and viewing performance as a unity, the applicability might be more effective. In such a scenario, the modifications could approach performances as a whole, and the four last stages could be redesigned in the following arrangement:

The stage regarding 'materials and techniques/meaning' could inquire about the objects used during the performance and their possible meanings. While questioning the 'context,' the performer could comment about the location, the timeframe and the role of the audience and political or social context. In the stages 'conveyance/aging' and 'deterioration,' the interviewer could approach the possibility of reexhibiting the performance in the future and the necessity of updating it, so it continues coherently with the artist's intentions. For last, 'conservation and restoration' would deal with more specific points of possible reenactments. So, while interpreting performance as a complete artwork and not as a material-based artwork, the professional might readjust the questions more productively.

The *Concept Scenario Artists' Interviews* model provides museum professionals with a solid structure to conduct interviews for material-based artworks; however, the framework of performances can be unsuited with some stages of this model. The ephemerality and, consequently, the immateriality of performances resonates on the necessity of rethinking the form one approach performance art while interviewing artists.

The viewpoints of the audience and performers during a performance art can provide valuable data for museums while preserving the experience people had with the artwork. However, the literature review made evident that most museums have not explored forms of registering the experience their public had with artworks, in particular, performance art. Regarding registering the performers' point of view, there is an apparent need for stipulating a few points to be explored while interviewing artists. By conducting processes that aim to preserve the spectators' and performers' perspectives, museums are producing a source of information that aims to register the performance art through the eyes of those who have experienced it. As Phelan has defended, the essence of performance art remains in time, and this form of registration process assesses the

memory of a past event. Among the documentation practices explored during this research, these produce traces of the performance by using the experience as a medium, so the results can provide valuable data to re-access the intangible impressions lived during the performance.

Conclusion

Although the essence of performance art relates to ephemerality, it is not always viable for professionals (and sometimes artists) to acknowledge the full disappearance of these artworks. On the one hand, according to Phelan, once a performance is complete, it is fated to disappear; Schneider defends that material traces do not possess any poetic trace and therefore should not be preserved. On the other hand, Gray pointed out that documentation processes can provide fruitful sources of information about performances and these strategies create afterlives that preserve traces of the experience lived in that moment. The viewpoints of the spectators and performers can provide relevant material while registering the poetic of performance and are ought to be explored further from the museological perspective

Phelan's framework acknowledges documentation processes as contrary to performance's nature of being ephemeral; however, professionals and artists have the liberty of dealing with this conflict as they desire. Generally, performers and professionals accept the advantages that the documentation processes provide of allowing traces of the artwork to be archived in museums, which is a form of still allowing the artwork itself to disappear and yet providing forms of re-accessing it in the future.

Through the case studies, especially according to Abramovic and Ono, it was possible to identify a recurrent perception that reenactments are one of the most truthful forms of re-accessing performances, which contrasts with the framework of Phelan of total ephemerality. When applying Goodman's framework regarding scores of music and interpreting performance art not as one original and singular occurrence that ends, but as a concept independent of time that can have various versions and reinterpretations, a more flexible (and viable) approach arises. While perceiving performance art as concepts detached from material-based objects and timeframes, it is easier to perceive documentation processes as strategies that aim to preserve traces of these concepts, and not conflicting with their ephemerality.

Credits Illustrations

Fig. 1. Lippard, 32.

Fig. 2. Downloaded 15 November 2019

<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/964>

Fig. 3 Tinoco, 265.

Fig. 4. Downloaded 15 November 2019

https://www.hojeemdia.com.br/polopoly_fs/1.380893!/image/image.jpg_gen/derivatives/landscape_653/image.jpg

Fig. 5. Downloaded 15 November 2019

<https://www.pipaprize.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/1-1.jpg>

Fig. 6. Downloaded 20 November 2019

<https://www.newcitybrazil.com/2018/09/25/forensic-artist-the-powerful-performance-art-of-crime-scene-investigator-berna-reale/>

Fig. 7. Downloaded 21 November 2019

<https://apollo.imgix.net/content/uploads/2017/02/Abramovic.jpg?auto=compress,enhance,format&crop=faces,entropy,edges&fit=crop&w=900&h=600>

Fig. 8. Downloaded 21 November 2019

<https://www.artmonthly.co.uk/images/uploads/marina-abramovic-the-artist-is-present%402x.jpg>

Fig. 9. Downloaded 2 December 2019

<https://static01.nyt.com/images/2019/10/31/books/30bookprincenthal3/30bookprincenthal3-articleLarge.jpg?quality=75&auto=webp&disable=upscale>

Bibliography

Abramovic, Marina. "An art made of trust, vulnerability, and connection." *TED*. March 2015. Accessed on September 2019.

https://www.ted.com/talks/marina_abramovic_an_art_made_of_trust_vulnerability_and_connection/transcript?language=en

Abramovic, Marina. "Documenting Performance" *Artist Interview Performance*. MoMA. Khanacademy. Accessed on Oct 2019: <https://www.khanacademy.org/partner-content/moma/artist-interview-performance/v/moma-abramovic-documenting-performance>

Auslander, Philip. *Liveness: Performance in a mediatized culture*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Barcio, Phillip. "What Was the Dematerialization of Art Object?" *IdeelArt Magazine*, 2017. Accessed on 13 January 2020. <https://www.ideelart.com/magazine/dematerialization-of-art>

Bellini, Pierfrancesco, and Paolo Nesi. "Modeling performing arts metadata and relationships in content service for institutions." *Multimedia Systems* 21, 5 (2015): 427-449.

Cage, J., Kirby, M., and Schechner, R. "An Interview with John Cage". *The Tulane Drama Review* 10, 2 (1965): 50-72.

Concannon, Kevin. "Yoko Ono's Cut Piece: From Text to Performance and Back Again." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 30 (2008): 381-93.

Concept Scenario Artists' Interviews. Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage/Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art, Amsterdam 1999.

Desvallées, André, and François Mairesse. "Key Concepts of Museology", International Council of Museum, 2010.

Falk, John. "Museum audiences: A visitor-centered perspective". *Loisir et Société/Society and Leisure*, 39 (2016): 357–370.

Finbow, Acatia. "This is propaganda 2002/2006", *Performance at Tate: Into the Space of Art*. Tate Museum. Accessed on December 2019. <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/performance-at-tate/perspectives/tino-sehgal>

Goodman, Nelson. *Languages of art: An approach to a theory of symbols*. Cambridge: Hackett publishing, 1976.

Gray, Stephen. "Conservation and Performance Art, Building the Performance Art Data Structure PADS." PhD Dissertation. Northumbria University, 2008.

Weyer, Cornelia and Heydenreich, Gunnar. From "Questionnaires to a Checklist for Dialogues" *Modern Art: Who Cares?: An Interdisciplinary Research Project and an International Symposium on the Conservation of Modern and Contemporary Art*. 485 – 490. Amsterdam: Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art and Institute for Cultural Heritage, 1999.

ICOM-CC. "Terminology to characterize the conservation of tangible cultural heritage". Accessed on August 2019. <http://www.icom-cc.org/242/about/terminology-for-conservation/#.XXZEEsGzY2w>

ICOM-CIDOC. "Statement of principles of museum documentation". Accessed on August 2019. http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/minisites/cidoc/DocStandards/principles6_2.pdf

Kennedy, Randy. "Giving the Artists a Voice In Preserving Their Work." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*. New York, N.Y., 2006.

Kisters, Sandra. "Interviewing the Artist: Richter Versus Bacon." In: *The Mediatization of the Artist* ed. Esner and Kisters, 165–180. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Kisters, Sandra. *The Lure of the Biographical: On the (self-) representation of Artists*. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017.

Lacerda, Laís Miguel, and Regilene A. Sarzi Ribeiro. "Arte Midiática, Performance e Empoderamento Feminino: Berna Reale." In: 1º Congresso Ibero-americano sobre Ecologia dos Meios-Da Aldeia Global à Mobilidade, 2019.

Lawson, Louise, Acatia Finbow, and Hélia Marçal. "Developing a strategy for the conservation of performance-based artworks at Tate." *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* (2019): 1-21.

Lippard, Lucy, and John Chandler. "The dematerialization of art." *Art international* 12, no. 2 (1968): 31-36.

Lippard, Lucy. *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972*, ed. London: Studio Vista, 1973.

Lütticken, Sven. *Life, Once More: Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art*. Rotterdam: Witte De With, 2005.

Mancusi-Ungaro, Carol. "Material and Method in Modern Art: A Collaborative Challenge." *Examination of Art: Modern Techniques in Conservation and Analysis*. Washington. 2005

MoMA. "Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present". Accessed on December 2019. <https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/243/3118>

Paco das Artes. Catalog of the exhibition "Duplo Olhar". Accessed on December 2019. https://www.pacodasartes.org.br/eventos-e-aco-es-de-formacao/lancamento_catalogo_duplo_olhar.aspx

Phelan, Peggy. "Marina Abramović: witnessing shadows." *Theatre Journal* (2004): 569-577.

Phelan, Peggy. "The ontology of performance: representation without reproduction." In *Unmarked*, 155-175, Routledge, 2003.

Rocha, Susana de Noronha Vasconcelos Teixeira. "Berna Reale: A importância do choque e do silêncio na performance." *Revista: Estúdio* 5, no. 9, (2014): 22-30,

Schneider, Rebecca. "Performance Remains." *Performance Research* 6, no. 2 (2001): 100-08.

Silva, Anna Paula da. "A Presença no Pós-Acontecimento: Registros de Performances em Museus." In: *1 Encontro de Museologia da UnB*, 2018.

Tate. "BMW TATE LIVE: PERFORMANCE ROOM – NORA SCHULTZ - TERMINAL +" Tate Modern Performance, 2014. Accessed on December 2019. <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/performance/bmw-tate-live-2014/bmw-tate-live-performance-room-nora-schultz>

Tate. "Happenings". Accessed on September 2019: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/h/happening/happening>

Tinoco, Bianca. "A vertigem do querer de um colecionador voraz: entrevista com Sérgio Carvalho." *MODOS*, 2.3 (2018): 262-272.

Wolfensberger, Rolf. "On the Couch—Capturing Audience Experience." PhD dissertation, Danube University, 2009.