FAME, CELEBRITY AND PERFORMANCE: MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ—CONTEMPORARY ART STAR

by

INDRA K. LĀCIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Art History and Art

CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

May 2014

CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

We hereby approve your dissertation of

Indra K. Lācis

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

Ellen G. Landau
(Committee Chair)

Elina Gertsman
(Committee Member)

Martha Woodmansee
(Committee Member)

Barbara Tannenbaum
(Committee Member)

March 13, 2013

* We also certify that written approval has been obtained
for any proprietary material contained herein

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures ……. iii

Acknowledgements …… xii

Abstract …….. xv

Introduction ……. 1

Chapter One: Marginal to Mainstream …… 15

Chapter Two: Intimate Strangers and the "It-Effect" …… 58

Chapter Three: Celebrity Worship ……. 101

Chapter Four: Gunplay and the Riddle of Re-Performance …….. 150

Chapter Five: Corporate and Corporeal: The Executive Female Artist ……. 196

Conclusion …….. 245

Figures ……. 257

Bibliography……. 382

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Marina Abramović, *The Artist is Present,* 2010 ……257

Figure 2: Marina Abramović, *The Artist is Present,* May 31, 2010 ……258

Figure 3: Marina Abramović, *Luminosity*, 1997……259

Figure 4: Re-performance of *Luminosity* (1997) during *The Artist is Present*, 2010……260

Figure 5: Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 10*, 1973……261

Figure 6: Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Nightsea Crossing*, 1982 …… 262

Figure 7: Marina Abramović, *Balkan Baroque,* 1997…… 263

Figure 8: Cover of *Marina Abramović, Artist Body* (1998)……264

Figure 9: Marina Abramović and Jay Z during "Picasso Baby," July 10, 2013……265

Figure 10: Sherrie Levine, *After Walker Evans 4,* 1981……266

Figure 11: Walker Evans, *Alabama Tenant Farmer Wife*, 1936……267

Figure 12: Marina Abramović*, Entering the Other Side*, 2005……268

Figure 13: Marina Abramović*, Entering the Other Side*, 2005……268

Figure 14: Tilda Swinton and Cornelia Parker, *The Maybe*, 1995……269

Figure 15: Tilda Swinton, *The Maybe*, 2013……270

Figure 16: Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Relation in Space*, July 1976……271

Figure 17: Steven Meisel's *Crossview* layout, *Vogue Italia*, November 1998……271

Figure 18: Steven Meisel's *Crossview* layout, *Vogue Italia*, November 1998……271

Figure 19: *Vogue Italia,* November 1998. Cover photo by Steven Meisel……272

Figure 20: Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 0*, 1974……273

Figure 21: Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 0*, 1974……274

Figure 22: Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 0*, 1974……275

Figure 23: Abramović and Ulay, *Expansion in Space*, June 1977……. 276

Figure 24: Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Rest Energy*, 1980……. 277

Figure 25: Marina Abramović and Ulay, *The Great Wall Walk*, 1988…….…..….. 278

Figure 26: Re-performance of Marina Abramović and Ulay's *Imponderabilia,* 1977/2010……... 279

Figure 27: Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Imponderabilia*, June 1977……280

Figure 28: Marina Abramović, *The Artist is Present*, 2010……281

Figure 29: Installation view of *The Artist is Present*, 2010……282

Figure 30: Marina Abramović, *House with the Ocean View*, 2002……... 283

Figure 31: Marina Abramović, *House with the Ocean View*, 2002……... 283

Figure 32: Marina Abramović, *House with the Ocean View*, 2002……283

Figure 33: Marina Abramović, *House with the Ocean View*, 2002……... 284

Figures 34: Screen shot, *Sex and the City*'s parody of *House with the Ocean View*…. 285

Figures 35: Screen shot, *Sex and the City*'s parody of *House with the Ocean View*…. 285

Figures 36: Screen shot, *Sex and the City*'s parody of *House with the Ocean View*…. 285

Figures 37: Screen shot, *Sex and the City*'s parody of *House with the Ocean View*…. 285

Figure 38: Kim Cattrall and Marina Abramović, *Drawn Together, V Magazine*, 2013…… 286

Figure 39: Marina Abramović in *Vogue*, November 2005…… 287

Figure 40: Marina Abramović re-performing Bruce Nauman's *Body Pressure* (1974) at the Solomon R. Guggenheim, 2005……288

Figure 41: Marina Abramović re-performing Vito Acconci's *Seedbed* (1972) at the Solomon R. Guggenheim, 2005…… 289

Figure 42: Marina Abramović re-performing VALIE EXPORT's *Action Pants/Genital Panic* (1969) at the Solomon R. Guggenheim, 2005…….. 290

Figure 43: Marina Abramović re-performing Gina Pane's *The Conditioning* (1973) at the Solomon R. Guggenheim, 2005……..…... 291

Figure 44: Marina Abramović re-performing Joseph Beuys's *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965) at the Solomon R. Guggenheim, 2005…….……... 292

Figure 45: Marina Abramović, *Lips of Thomas*, 1975/2005…….…..... 293

Figure 46: Marina Abramović *The Artist is Present*, 2010……..… 294

Figure 47: Examples of Marco Anelli's photographs of Abramović's sitters, 2010..... 295

Figure 48: Andy Warhol, *Screen Tests* (Bob Dylan and Salvador Dali), 1964-66…..… 296

Figure 49: DVD cover for *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*, 2010…….. 297

Figure 50: Abramović and Ulay reunite during *The Artist is Present*, 2010…….. 298

Figure 51: Screen shot of the tumblr site, *Marina Abramović Made Me Cry*..……. 299

Figure 52: Examples of Marco Anelli's photographs reproduced *Marina Abramović Made Me Cry* tumbrl site ……... 300

Figure 53: Abramović walking the red carpet at the closing of *The Artist is Present*, 2010…… 301

Figure 54: Marina Abramović, *Dragon Heads,* 1990 ……301

Figure 55: Anya Liftig communing with Abramović during *The Artist is Present*, 2010…… 302

Figure 56: Chris Burden, *Shoot*, 1971…….…..... 303

Figure 57: Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance 1978-1979*…….. 304

Figure 58: Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance 1980-1981*……305

Figure 59: Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance 1981-1982*……306

Figure 60: Tehching Hsieh, *Rope Piece, 1983-1984*……. 307

Figure 61: Abramović photographed for *The Economist*, Sept. 10, 2012 ……308

Figure 62: Marina Abramović, *Portrait with Potatoes*, 2008 …….. 309

Figure 63: Marina Abramović, *Spirit Cooking*, 1997……. 310

Figure 64: Marina Abramović, *The Kitchen I,* 2009…….. 311

Figure 65: Marina Abramović, *The Kitchen IV,* 2009……..……. 312

Figure 66: Marina Abramović, *The Onion*, 1995…….……..... 313

Figure 67: Abramović photographed in *Harper's Bazaar,* March 2012…….……... 314

Figure 68: Abramović photographed in *Harper's Bazaar,* March 2012…..……..... 315

Figure 69: Marina Abramović and Riccardo Tisci, *Visionaire*, Summer 2011…….…. 316

Figure 70: Joseph Beuys and Andy Warhol, New York, 1979/printed 1982-83…… 317

Figure 71: Chris Burden, *Transfixed*, 1974 ……...… 318

Figure 72: Chris Burden featured in the *New York Times*, September 2, 1973 …...…. 319

Figure 73: Chris Burden, *Five Day Locker Piece*, 1971…….…….…. 320

Figure 74: Chris Burden, *Bed Piece*, 1972……...…….…….…… 321

Figure 75: Chris Burden, *Jaizu*, 1972……...…….…… 322

Figure 76: Chris Burden, *Jaizu* (relic), 1972…….…… 323

Figure 77: Chris Burden, *Oh Dracula*, 1974…….…… 324

Figure 78: Chris Burden, *White Light/White Heat*, 1975. …….....……...… 325

Figure 79: Joseph Beuys, *I like America and America Likes Me*, 1974….……...… 326

Figure 80: Marco Anelli, *Skin, Portrait of Marina Abramović,* 2007 ……... 327

Figure 81: VALIE EXPORT, *Action Pants/Genital Panic*, 1969 ……. 328

Figure 82: VALIE EXPORT, *Action Pants/Genital Panic*, 1969 ……. 328

Figure 83: VALIE EXPORT, *Action Pants/Genital Panic*, 1969 ……. 328

Figure 84: VALIE EXPORT, *Action Pants/Genital Panic*, 1969 ……. 328

Figures 85: VALIE EXPORT, *Action Pants/Genital Panic*, 1969 …… 329

Figures 86: VALIE EXPORT, *Action Pants/Genital Panic*, 1969 …… 329

Figure 87: VALIE EXPORT, *Action Pants/Genital Panic,* Installation in public space in Berlin, 1994/95 …….. 330

Figure 88: Lynda Benglis, *Artforum* advertisement*,* November 1974 ……... 331

Figure 89: Marina Abramović, *Art Must be Beautiful, Artist Must be Beautiful*, 1975 …… 332

Figure 90: Hannah Wilke, *S.O.S. Starification Series*, 1974-5 …….. 333

Figure 91: Marina Abramović, *Lips of Thomas*, 1975 ……..... 334

Figure 92: Newswire photographs of female Yugoslavian Partisans published in the Chicago Tribune ……. 335

Figure 93: Danica Abramović, Belgrade, 1946 ……...….. 336

Figure 94: Hannah Wilke, *Beware of Fascist Feminism*, 1977 ……..…… 337

Figure 95: Hannah Wilke, *Venus Envy*, *with Richard Hamilton*, 1980 ……. 338

Figure 96: Hannah Wilke, *So Help Me Hannah* series, 1978 ……...……. 339

Figure 97: Hannah Wilke, *So Help Me Hannah* series, 1978 ……...……. 339

Figure 98: Hannah Wilke, *So Help Me Hannah* series, 1978 ……...……. 339

Figure 99: Hannah Wilke, *So Help Me Hannah* series, 1978 ……...……. 339

Figure 100: Patty Hearst on videotape robbing Sunset Branch, Hibernia Bank, San Francisco, April 15, 1974 …… 340

Figures 101: Patty Hearst poster, "We love you Tania"1974 …… 341

Figures 102: Patty Hearst poster, "We love you Tania"1974 ……... 341

Figure 103: Madonna performing with guns during her spring 2012, MDNA tour ….. 342

Figure 104: Marina Abramović, *The Family III*, 2008……...…… 343

Figure 105: Marina Abramović, *Eight Lessons on Emptiness with a Happy Ending*, 2008 …… 344

Figure 106: Marina Abramović, *The Family XI*, 2009 ……..……... 345

Figure 107: Marina Abramović, *Family I*, 2008 …… 346

Figure 108: *Women & Guns* magazine, August, 1994 cover ……. 347

Figure 109: Shirin Neshat, *Untitled (Women of Allah)*, 1994 …… 348

Figure 110: Shirin Neshat, *Rebellious Silence (Women of Allah)*, 1994 ……...…… 348

Figure 111: Zaynab's Sisters commemorate the eighth anniversary of the holy defense against Iraq …… 349

Figure 112: Jonathan Horowitz, *CBS Evening News/www.Britneycrotch.org*, 2008…. 350

Figure 113: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled # 261*, 1992 …… 351

Figure 114: Kiki Smith carried on a palanquin. Francis Alys, *Modern Processional*, 2002 …… 352

Figure 115: Hollis Frampton, *Frank Stella*, 1959 …….. 353

Figure 116: Hollis Frampton, Frank Stella, 1960 …….. 353

Figure 117: Marina Abramović, Suzanne Dikker and Matthias Oostrik, *Measuring the Magic of the Mutual Gaze*, 2011 ……..…... 354

Figure 118: Marco Anelli, *Marina Abramović with Firewood*, 2010 …… 355

Figure 119: Marina Abramović and Charles Atlas, *SSS*, 1989. Video still ……... 356

Figure 120: Marina Abramović and Charles Atlas, *The Biography*, 1992, Opening scene …… 356

Figure 121: Marina Abramović re-performing *Lips of Thomas* (1975) In *The Biography* ……357

Figure 122: Marina Abramović and Charles Atlas, *The Biography*, 1992 …… 357

Figure 123: Marina Abramovic instructing students during *The Biography Remix*, 2004 …… 358

Figure 124: Marina Abramović, Robert Wilson, Antony Hegarty and Willem Dafoe, *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*, 2011/2013 ……. 359

Figure 125: Marina Abramović, *Forest*, 1972. Sound installation …… 360

Figure 126: Marina Abramović, *White Space*, 1972 ……..… 361

Figure 127: Marina Abramović, *The Airport*, 1972. Sound environment ……. 362

Figure 128: Marina Abramovic, *Black Dragon*, 1994 ……363

Figure 129: Prologue, *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović,* 2011/2013 ……...364

Figure 130: Epilogue, *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*, 2011/2013 …….. 365

Figure 131: Promotional photo, *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*, 2011 ….. 366

Figure 132: Billboard advertisement for *Marina Abramović Presents*, at the Whitworth Gallery, Manchester, UK,2009……. 367

Figure 133: *Abramović* leading *The Drill* at the Whitworth Gallery, 2009 …….. 367

Figure 134: Future home of the Marina Abramović Institute, Hudson, New York ….. 368

Figure 135: Future home of the Marina Abramović Institute, Hudson, New York ….. 368

Figure 136: Rendering of the Marina Abramović Institute, Rem Koolhaas/OMA ..…. 369

Figure 137: Rendering of the Marina Abramović Institute, Rem Koolhaas/OMA ….. 370

Figure 138: Rendering of the Marina Abramović Institute, Rem Koolhaas/OMA ….. 370

Figure 139: Certificate of completion, Marina Abramović Institute ……. 371

Figure 140: Architectural rendering, Marina Abramović Institute, em Koolhaas/OMA……. 372

Figure 141: Andy Warhol's silver-lined Factory studio on 47th Street in New York City ……373

Figure 142: Andy Warhol, *Sleep,* 1963 ……. 374

Figure 143: MAI-Protoype, Trinity-Bellwoods Park, Toronto, Canada. June 2013….. 375

Figures 144: Installation view, *The Abramović Method*, PAC Milan, 2012 …….. 376

Figures 145: Installation view, *The Abramović Method*, PAC Milan, 2012 …….. 376

Figures 146: Installation view, *The Abramović Method*, PAC Milan, 2012 …….. 376

Figure 147: Marina Abramović Institute: The Founders, Kickstarter fundraising campaign homepage……. 377

Figure 148: Screen shot of "I am performance artist Marina Abramović. Ask me anything," Reddit.com…….. 378

Figure 149-150: Pippin Barr, *The Artist is Present*, 2010. Online video game …….. 379

Figure 151: Marina Abramović in *Harper's Bazaar*, October, 2013 …….. 380

Fig. 152. Marina Abramović, *Energy Clothes,* video and photo work*,* Como, Italy, 2001. (*Cleaning the House* workshop) ……381

Acknowledgements

I owe deep gratitude to my dissertation advisor Dr. Ellen G. Landau, whose sage advice and firm, sincere guidance have been instrumental in my growth as a scholar. She has taught me not only about research and writing but also what it means to be a devoted teacher and mentor. Throughout these past seven years, Dr. Landau's generosity of time and encouragement has made all the difference for me.

Each of my dissertation committee members has provided me with direction and support to complete this project. Dr. Elina Gertsman urged me to engage the field of performance studies in tandem with my investigation of celebrity culture. Dr. Martha Woodmansee motivated me to weigh the cultural value of authorship and artistic genius. Dr. Barbara Tannenbaum invigorated the later phase of this project with her willingness to listen and respond thoughtfully to my thematic and practical concerns.

At Abramović LLC, Allison Brainard and Sidney Russell patiently endured various follow-up phone calls and emails from me. I am grateful to Allison for facilitating my inquiry to Marina Abramović and kindly providing me with a transcript of Marina's thoughtful responses. My sincere appreciation also goes to Sean Kelly, whose candor and understanding of Marina was eye opening. Lauren Kelly's comments about specific aspects of the gallery's work with Marina Abramović were most instructive. The Public Programs Archive at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, kindly arranged access for me to view recordings of symposia and artist talks on various occasions. Without these individuals, this dissertation would not have been possible.

The intellectual pursuits of this study are also embedded in my experiences as a teacher and curator. My appointment as the Emily Hall Tremaine Curatorial Fellow at the

Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland and my work on subsequent projects in MOCA's curatorial department continually provided me with new and compelling reasons to study the work of living artists. Instructing courses at CWRU, the Meyers School of Art at the University of Akron and the Cleveland Institute of Art reminded me that making, critiquing and interpreting art is a truly vibrant and often unpredictable process. Spearheading projects and exhibitions at SPACES and Zygote Press alerted me to the meaningful overlap between art production and contemporary culture. To the colleagues and artists with whom I have worked with at these institutions—thank you!

Drs. Dana Cowen and Tony Morris have acted as constant sounding boards; their friendship and advice has been indispensible. I am thankful to Dr. Catherine Scallen and the entire Department of Art History and Art at Case for its continued support of my work. The Edward Olszewski Travel Fund helped make possible research trips to the Venice Biennale in 2011 as well as to Toronto and New York City in 2013 and 2014 respectively. Debby Tenenbaum has been a constant and refreshing source of support. The Arts and Sciences Dissertation Fellowship at Case during the fall of 2010 provided much-needed camaraderie at a critical time. Intrepid librarians at Kelvin Smith Library, the Gund Library at the Cleveland Institute of Art and Ingalls Library at the Cleveland Museum of Art helped obtain nearly any piece of literature necessary for my research.

To my friends and family: your support and levity has been vital to maintaining a positive, productive approach to my studies. Both of my parents instilled in me a deep and abiding appreciation for art, music, writing and theater, and I am grateful for their continued support. My mother Ilze Lācis' kindness, love and sound advice are a constant source of reassurance; the creative, gentle spirit of my late father Māris Lācis continues to

inspire me. My brother Markus' adventurous spirit and intellectual rigor is revitalizing. My late Grandmother Omiņa's warmth, humor and *joie de vivre* continue to motivate my outlook on life and work. My partner Matthew Hering is my rock. His affection, patience and big-heartedness keep me thriving; his companionship, unyielding support and sense of humor help me find happiness every day.

FAME, CELEBRITY AND PERFORMANCE:
MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ—CONTEMPORARY ART STAR

Abstract

by

INDRA K. LĀCIS

This dissertation analyzes Marina Abramović's rise to mainstream attention and her subsequent status as a celebrity through the prism of her major New York City performances—*House with the Ocean View* (2002), *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005) and *The Artist is Present* (2010)—as well as the most recent iteration of her *Biography* (*The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*, 2011/13), and her plan to build the Marina Abramović Institute in Hudson, New York. While the popular success of Abramović's Manhattan performances is widely acknowledged, especially, for example, the fanfare that surrounded *The Artist is Present*, serious consideration of how these performances have sustained such a devoted fan base and why she has become an intense presence in the media remains lacking.

Comparison with a diverse roster of past and present artists, including Andy Warhol, Hannah Wilke, Shirin Neshat, Chris Burden, and Tehching Hsieh, helps to formulate my investigation. I present strong links between the recurring, interactive use of the telescope and/or camera lens in Abramović's three New York performances in relationship to the film studies concept of "intimate strangers," the "It-effect," and 1990s relational aesthetics. Although Abramović is avowedly not a feminist, I argue that concepts of gender performativity inform not only the reception of her work, but also her Internet and mainstream media presence. She is seen to fit the paradigm of the "executive

female artist," a designation used in this instance to reconfigure collaborative performance art practices. Abramović's status as an art star is paradoxically rooted in a multiplicity of presences and absences that exhibit both a corporeal and corporate structure.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation analyzes specific aspects of an expansive theme—the culture of female celebrity in the contemporary art world. Belgrade-born, New York City-based performance artist Marina Abramović acts as my primary muse in this discourse, but I do not present a monographic study. As a woman in her sixties who collaborates with others and nurtures an intimate relationship with her audience, Abramović dramatically reconfigures traditional models for art world fame. Arguably more than any other artist since the rise and fall of Pop artist Andy Warhol, Abramović has harnessed the kind of popularity that few living artists attain. My project scrutinizes the convergence and divergence of celebrity culture and Marina Abramović's recent performance art practice. The latter, traditionally a live, temporal medium, today can be documented and reproduced at will.

The proliferation of performance art exhibitions in mainstream museums demonstrates that this genre, produced in its infancy during the 1970s quickly, inexpensively and on the periphery of the art world, has by now become "a luxury game."[1] Whereas historically, performance art's claim to "liveness" and impermanence allowed it to escape commodification, in the twenty-first century these characteristics endow the medium with social cachet.[2] Performance art historians and celebrity studies scholars have been deeply preoccupied with the overlap of meaning produced by the live act, its subsequent documentation, dissemination, and the latent or sentient performativity

[1] Claire Bishop, "Delegated Performance: Outsourcing Authenticity," *21st Century: Art in the First Decade*, ed. Miranda Wallace (Brisbane, Australia: Queensland Art Gallery, Gallery of Modern Art, 2012): 243.

[2] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999): 58.

of photographs and films. Celebrities are inundating the contemporary art world. This study seeks to satisfy the increasingly insistent need to analyze clinically, and from a critical distance, the overlap between performance art and celebrity culture. This, then, is my focus for which I use Abramović as an important case study.

In May of 2009, one year prior to Abramović's blockbuster retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, *Art in America* critic and editor David Ebony claimed, "If there's anyone who can rightly be called an art-world diva, it's Marina Abramović."[3] Ebony was right. During the spring of 2010, Abramović's celebrity status rose exponentially. As she indicated in the title of her signature performance, *The Artist is Present*, Abramović held vigil during the Museum of Modern Art's open hours in the Donald B. and Catherine C. Marron Atrium [Fig. 1]. Her idea was simple: invite visitors to sit silently across from her for a time length of their choosing. Prior to the opening, exhibition curator Klaus Biesenbach conjectured that Abramović would be sitting in the atrium at times "alone, confronting the towering emptiness of the space."[4] He radically underestimated; over the course of seventy-five days or 716 hours, Abramović was virtually never by herself [Fig. 2].

Between March 14th and May 31st, the Belgrade-born artist who had relocated to New York City from Amsterdam in 2002, sat with more than 1,545 individuals at the Museum of Modern Art. This constant stream of visitors was punctuated by an eclectic range of celebrities, including news anchor Christiane Amanpour, artist and filmmaker

[3] David Ebony, "Marina Abramović: An Interview," *Art in America* 5 (Nov. 2009): 112.

[4] Klaus Biesenbach, "Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present, The Artist was Present. The Artist will be Present," in *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present,* curated by Klaus Biesenbach (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010): 15. Hereafter "Biesenbach, *The Artist is Present*."

Matthew Barney, musicians Björk and Lou Reed, Antony of Antony and the Johnsons (Abramović's favorite musician), Patti Smith and Michael Stipe, magician David Blaine, actors James Franco, Isabella Rosellini, Sharon Stone and Marisa Tomei, and the songwriters Rufus and Martha Wainwright. Upstairs at MoMA on the sixth floor, hired performers trained by Abramović restaged a selection of other performances from her forty-year career, several of which required nudity [Fig. 3 + 4]. Compounded by Abramović's regal deportment on view in the atrium, this institutionally sanctioned public display of nudity provoked a hailstorm of media attention in the popular and art press. Adoring fans set the Internet on fire with hero-worshipping testimonials that recounted their personal experiences of sitting with the artist. Abramović's cynics, however, sarcastically described her as a queen holding court.

Marina Abramović's rise to success pivots on a long-standing question: how can artists retain an avant-garde edge after they earn widespread fame? When Abramović's career defining performance *The Artist is Present* (2010) successfully piqued international public interest, it became clear that for many artists, critics, historians, as well as for the general public, celebrity remains an intriguing yet suspicious facet of the art world's inner workings. Abramović's recent career demonstrates celebrity's costly price. She has earned lasting recognition with the masses in part because she is as reviled as she is respected.[5]

[5] The satirical website, "The Marina Abramović Retirement Fund of America" (M.A.R.F.A.), for example, poses as a citizen's action group determined to force Abramović into retirement. It is the brainchild of Scott Indrisek, executive editor of the monthly art magazine *Modern Painters*. It features hateful comments couched in humor and is seeking to solicit donations that actually benefit the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society of America in honor of Indrisek's father, Peter, who died of cancer in 2009. See http://stopmarinaabramovic.tumblr.com (accessed November 24, 2013).

Born in Serbia in 1946, in what was then Josip Broz Tito's Yugoslavia, Abramović worked on the fringe of the European art world throughout her youth. By 1976, when she engaged in a publicized intimate/artistic partnership with West German photographer and performer, Uwe Laysiepen (known as Ulay), she was already notorious for aggressive and dangerous avant-garde solo performances. Between 1970 and 1975, she performed as a solo artist in Belgrade and other European cities, exhibiting several conceptual sound installations and her *Rhythm* performances. In this series Abramović transgressed mental and physical boundaries by subjecting her body to vulnerability, pain, peril and chance [Fig. 5]. She laid down in the center of a burning star (*Rhythm 5,* 1974), stomped a knife metrically between her outspread fingers (*Rhythm 10*, 1973) and permitted an audience member to raise a loaded gun to her head while she remained silent (*Rhythm 0*, 1974). Although at that time performance art in both America and Europe was characterized by audacious and visceral approaches to the body, it could not be foreseen that four decades, Abramović's celebrity would benefit immensely from the broader public's understanding of these early works as highly sensationalized.

During her twelve-year collaboration with Ulay, the danger implicit in many of Abramović's early works became softened through the pair's shared responsibility for one another's safety. Ulay and Abramović's collaborative *Relation Work* (1976-1979) and later, the pair's long durational performances, became famous among art cognoscenti but remained unknown to wider audiences [Fig. 6]. More extensively recognized in Europe than the United States, the pair parted ways permanently in 1988. While Abramović had already created a significant and wide-ranging program of work, much of it in collaboration with Ulay, she was absent from the first edition of Roselee Goldberg's

historic survey, *Performance Art: Live Art 1909 to the Present* (1979).[6] Mentioned briefly, and only once, in the second edition nine years later, it was not until Abramović firmly regained her identity as a solo artist in the 2000s that observers, both inside and outside the art world, would zero in on her achievements.

As Abramović began to reclaim her career as a solo artist in the early 1990s, she created a series of sculptural installations or "transitory objects" that demanded audience participation. She also created a body of video work, a medium then on the rise, and was often mistakenly categorized as a video artist.[7] The first critical, monographic publication on Abramović in 1995 examined the range of work she had made to date, both solo in her twenties and as a collaborator with Ulay, including paintings (few of which survive), objects (constructed by assistants according to her specifications), as well as performances, videos and sound installations.[8] Then in 1997, *Balkan Baroque*—her most visceral performance since her split with Ulay—earned Abramović the coveted Golden Lion award at the Venice Biennale [Fig. 7]. In this emotionally charged work, the artist scrubbed clean by hand thousands of bloody cow bones over the course of four days, an obvious metaphoric reference to the gruesome ethnic cleansing that took place in the Balkans during the 1990s.

Importantly for the purposes of this study, after her break with Ulay, Abramović began teaching a series of performance art workshops in Europe she titled *Cleaning the House*. By training others, the artist refined a style of performance that involves

---

[6] Discussions of Abramović's solo work are also absent from texts such as Gregory Battcock and Robert Nickas, *The Art of Performance: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E. P. Dutton, Inc., 1984) and Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). As a collaborating pair, Ulay and Abramović are mentioned only briefly.

[7] Biesenbach, *The Artist is Present*, 17.

[8] *Marina Abramović, Objects, Performances, Videos, Sound*, ed. Chrissie Iles, with essays by Roselee Goldberg, Thomas McEvilley and David Elliot (Oxford, Museum of Modern Art, 1995).

overcoming mental or physical duress through extreme willpower. Although Abramović became more widely acknowledged internationally and in America only after she relocated to New York City, it was through these workshops abroad during the 1990s that she began to develop her particular brand of performance art. When Abramović enacted her Manhattan trilogy—*The House with the Ocean View* at Sean Kelly Gallery in 2002; *Seven Easy Pieces* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 2005; and *The Artist is Present* at MoMA in 2010—she solidified her niche as a durational performance artist. The presence of a live audience was integral to each of these performances; it helped launch her life and art into the global public limelight.

This dissertation breaks new ground in scholarship on female celebrities by focusing Abramović's rise to A-list celebrity status through the lens of these three major New York City performances. Presenting the first full-length analysis of Abramović's twenty-first century work, I examine *House with the Ocean View*, *Seven Easy Pieces* and *The Artist is Present* through the prism of celebrity and in context with a highly diversified roster of male and female performance artists, including Chris Burden, Tehching Hsieh and Hannah Wilke, among others. In the final chapter, I construct Abramović's legacy as what I am calling an "executive female artist." I scrutinize her plans to build the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI) in Hudson, New York, as well as the assertive public marketing and fundraising campaign launched by MAI and Abramović LLC, the artist's non-profit company, during the summer of 2013.

In tandem, I develop the trope of the executive female artist by analyzing Abramović's current iteration of an ongoing theatrical series based on her life and work. Originally titled *The Biography* (1986-present), it was most recently produced as *The Life*

and Death of Marina Abramović (2011/2013) in collaboration with director Robert Wilson, actor Willem Dafoe and Antony of New York City band Antony and the Johnsons. In it, others interpret and abstractly narrate the story of Abramović's personal and artistic life.

The Life and Death of Marina Abramović and MAI in particular distinguish Abramović not only as a performer who seeks a genuinely deep connection with audience, but also as a fashionable woman of nearly mythical proportions who sits at the helm of a thriving performance art empire. As such, she belongs to the same lineage as Andy Warhol, the Pop artist who became as well known for his collaborations and business pursuits as he did for his trademark Campbell soup can paintings. Despite this important similarity, however, in the pieces comprising her New York City trilogy, Abramović engaged directly with her audience, a gambit that contrasts markedly with Warhol's legendarily aloof attitude. In order to align Abramović's late-career fame with Andy Warhol's popular appeal during the 1960s, I argue that the forfeiture of traditionally private studio space (which began with Warhol's Factory but has accelerated since) has granted performance artists unprecedented access to an attentive art world audience. This access has prompted an even more communal, participatory approach to authorship than what Warhol famously established.

Abramović's recent work targets issues particularly integral to present-day performance art concerns. She confronts such theoretical problems as original/copy and presence/absence, and raises debate about authorship, collaboration, and artistic brand management. Acknowledging that performance art cannot compete with the market prices that paintings by British artist Damien Hirst or sculptures by stock-broker-cum

artist Jeff Koons command, Abramović has emphasized that her brand of power in the art world is neither financial nor commodity oriented.[9] She exerts a different kind of influence, she insists, tied not only to her historical accomplishments as a performance artist but also to her public image, her perceived aura and the relationship she nurtures with her audience.

In Chapter One, I lay out my key concepts and theoretical concerns by re-contextualizing the trajectory of Abramović's forty-year career. Instead of splitting her work into time periods that coincide with the years before, during, and after her collaboration with Ulay as is typically done, I employ constructs such as notoriety, fame, renown, celebrity and legacy to demarcate the arc of her changing reputation, public image and critical reception over time. A concise interdisciplinary historiography of celebrity culture, including specific attempts to define this phenomenon within the art world, provides a synopsis of the sociological, film and performance studies theories that guide my methodology. I emphasize exactly how the changes in Abramović's reputation have affected the reception of her work. As will be demonstrated, around 1989 Abramović's youthful "bad girl" image began a process of mitigation when she decided to embrace glamour and unveiled a more personable, flirtatious temperament [Fig. 8]. This redirection forms the fulcrum of Chapter Two, which initiates as a formal and thematic comparison of *House with the Ocean View*, *Seven Easy Pieces*, and *The Artist is Present*.

In Chapter Two, examination of critical theories developed in the 1990s regarding

[9] Abramović in conversation with Klaus Biensenbach, "Art Basel Miami: Marina Abramović, The Seminal Artist in Conversation with MoMA's Chief Curator at Large Klaus Biesenbach," posted on *NOWNESS*, December 2011, http://www.nowness.com/day/2011/12/1/1731/art-basel-miamibrmarina-Abramović (accessed June 20, 2012).

artist/audience relationships in participatory art and relational aesthetics helps me to elucidate my argument that Abramović confounded conventional concepts of public and private space in her major New York City performances. Coupled with an analysis of fan subculture, and adopting theater historian Joseph Roach's notion of the "It-effect," as well as film critic Richard Schickel's concept of "intimate strangers," I establish previously unnoticed connections between Abramović's recurring, interactive use of the telescope and camera lens in her three New York pieces. These drive my proposition that the audience is actually performing in tandem with Abramović. The Internet, which has rapidly expanded the boundaries of a once insular and elite art world, is also dissected as one of the main conduits that popularized Abramović's work and molded her public image.

Chapter Three introduces comparison of durational work by two performance colleagues Abramović admires—west coast artist Chris Burden, with whom Abramović shares a significant yet slightly tenuous relationship historically, and Taiwanese-born Tehching Hsieh, whom Abramović reveres as her personal hero. In both instances analogy reveals my concern with Abramović's dismantling of the concept of individual artistic (male) genius in exchange for a brand of fame that solicits the public's investment in her performances. I show how Abramović propagates her role as a pedagogue through the Abramović Method (a cornerstone in the curriculum for *Cleaning the House* workshops and MAI) as well as through the close relationship she has established with her fans. Audience has and continues to play an active role in building Abramović's reputation. My application and re-reading of German critic and essayist Walter Benjamin's concept of "aura" validates how documentation of Abramović's

performances informs her art star reputation. Significantly, Abramović's relationship to her audience distinguishes her from Burden and Hsieh and other performance artists in whose work the performer appears to be more vital than those who witness his or her activities.

Marina Abramović's marked distaste for feminism shapes my discussion of her gender performativity in Chapter Four. Comparisons between Abramović and women artists who perform primarily for the camera instead of a live audience are particularly relevant; after Abramović's performances conclude, they remain similarly accessible through documentary photographs and films. Abramović's 2005 re-performance of Viennese Actionist VALIE EXPORT's scandalous *Action Pants: Genital Panic* (1969) bridges Chapter Four's two fundamental themes. First, I characterize the genre of re-performance as functioning akin to a prosthetic device that compensates for a lost original. I argue that Abramović's pattern of re-performing her own work and that of others has assisted in cultivating her celebrity image. In the second half of the chapter, portrayals of female aggression—literally, women wielding weapons—by American performance pioneer Hannah Wilke and the currently active Iranian-born, New York City-based artist Shirin Neshat, form the backdrop against which I reconcile EXPORT's original 1969 performance of *Action Pants: Genital Panic* and Abramović's re-presentation of it more than thirty-five years later. My analysis advances and complicates the stereotype that hostile, erotic and domineering female protagonists frequently make headlines, a generalization that is fostered not only by mass media, but also art's history.

Consideration of Abramović's gender performativity initiates my discussion of the "executive female artist" featured in Chapter Five, a paradigm used in this instance to

reconfigure female collaborative practice. Women working closely with others have often been mischaracterized as merely managers or muses, not original makers. Abramović reverses this standard; she works consistently with others but maintains primary authorship by practicing a corporate and corporeal form of collaboration. In other words, Abramović's role as executive female artist allows the public to function as major stakeholders in her brand. She views the building of MAI as her legacy, and yet the Institute's initial fundraising and marketing phase has been bolstered by the fact that she is already a *bona fide* celebrity. As an establishment dedicated to time-based, immaterial art through the study, preservation and presentation of long durational performance, the Marina Abramović Institute is set up to efface the artist's private identity with an agenda to publicize and, significantly for this study, democratize or make accessible her profile as an accomplished performance artist to the public at large. These collaborative endeavors require that the artist perform herself performing.

This dissertation's interrogation of Marina Abramović's rise to A-list celebrity status has been prompted in part by how frequently she is associated today with the star power of actors and musicians who have infiltrated the art world. Proof of this was evident on July 10th, 2013 at PACE Gallery in Chelsea. There hip-hop artist and record producer Shawn Corey Carter, better known as Jay Z, rapped his new song, "Picasso Baby," continuously for six hours while interacting with an intimate, yet exclusive audience that packed the gallery's perimeter. Picasso's granddaughter Diana Widmaier-Picasso, performance art historian Roselee Goldberg, philanthropist and collector Agnes Gund, director of the Museum of Modern Art Glen Lowry, and a stream of accomplished filmmakers, actors and artists including Andreas Serrano, Lawrence Weiner, and Kehinde

Wiley, each took turns standing opposite Jay Z, who was positioned on a low stage in the center of the gallery. Despite the presence of these elite guests, it was the well-publicized appearance of sixty-seven year old Marina Abramović that branded Jay Z's six hour happening as a genuine celebrity event [Fig. 9]. Whereas three years prior, during *The Artist is Present*, celebrities had legitimized Abramović's performance as newsworthy, during Jay Z's PACE recital, it was Abramović who sanctified the fashionable nature of his performance. Jay Z has acknowledged that *The Artist is Present* inspired his performance "Picasso Baby." Without Abramović's support, the event would have been considerably less successful and prestigious.[10]

Rankings such as the "ArtReview Power 100," published annually since 2002 in the November issue of *ArtReview* magazine, signal the timeliness of an analysis of the nexus of celebrity and power in the art world.[11] Roughly comparable to the criteria of *TIME* magazine's "Person of the Year" nomination list, the "ArtReview Power 100" list considers financial impact, influence and activity over the past year to grade the relevance of artists, scholars, critics, curators, dealers and collectors. Abramović has

[10] PACE gallery posted a short synopsis of the event two days after Jay Z's performance: http://www.pacegallery.com/news/1912/jay-z-s-picasso-baby-video-shoot-at-pace-gallery-organized-by-jeanne-greenberg-rohatyn-directed-by-mark-romanek-hosted-by-andrea-glimcher (accessed Oct. 29, 2013).

[11] The list can be viewed at http://artreview.com/power_100// (accessed October 29, 2013). *ArtReview* magazine was founded in London in 1949 and has been published under a variety of names including *Art News and Review*, *The Arts Review*, *Arts Review*, *Art Review*, and since 2000, as *ArtReview*. In 2013, *ArtReview* invited Nicolas Bourriaud, director of the École des Beaux-Arts, Paris, to comment on the year's Power 100 list. See "An Anatomy of Power," in which Bourriaud, noting the lack of "thinkers" or critics to make the list in both 2012 and 2013, suggests that the "old three-way conversation" between museum directors, gallerists and artists has been replaced by a broader ecosystem comprised of curators, collectors, art-fair directors and art advisors. (http://artreview.com/features/november_2013_feature_an_anatomy_of_power_by_nicolas_bourriaud/ accessed March 20, 2014).

steadily climbed the list since 2009 and is currently the highest rated female artist.[12] Arbitrary as it may seem (one's ranking can fluctuate dramatically from year to year), the "ArtReview Power 100" seeks to calibrate art world celebrity power by mapping how its members' images are branded and consumed. But, in contrast to the "Art Review Power 100" list, which provides heady but often-oversimplified annotations regarding each person's position, this dissertation details the manifold factors that have and continue to affect visibility in the case of one "powerful" female artist. While it is not my objective to replace the concept of male artistic genius with executive female identity, the former provides the latter an inherent foil.

Fifty years after cultural theorist Daniel Boorstin asserted his claim that a celebrity is "a person who is well-known for his well-knownness," this definition remains a touchstone for contemporary sociologists.[13] Boorstin suggested that fans "enjoy watching the process of celebrity-making" and that "the same is true of works of art."[14] My investigation of Marina Abramović's popular appeal establishes how notoriety, fame and celebrity are each both a symptom and a product of a powerful discourse central to the art industry and its system of representations. Like the athletes, actors and politicians who dominate mass media outlets, artists actively seek recognition for their accomplishments. Marina Abramović, the primary focus of this dissertation, is a critical and contemporary case in point. Appropriately, commenting in the fashion magazine

[12] Sheikha Al-Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, head of the Qatar Museums Authority, ranks first; Julia Peyton-Jones, one of the directors of the London's Serpentine Galleries, is fifth; and Beatrix Ruf, director of the Kunstgalle Zurich, is seventh.

[13] Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image, or What Happened to the American Dream* (New York: Antheneum, 1962): 57.

[14] Ibid., 170.

Harper's Bazaar about her meteoric rise to fame, she stated recently, "I've spent forty years working for this."[15]

[15] Marina Abramović in *Harper's Bazaar*, "Once upon a Time," by Elisa Lipsky-Karasz, March 2012, http://www.harpersbazaar.com/magazine/feature-articles/marina-Abramović-interview-0312#slide-1 (accessed June 20, 2012).

CHAPTER ONE

MARGINAL TO MAINSTREAM

Fame and celebrity are not necessarily synonymous. Celebrity occurs spontaneously with no guarantee of lasting permanence. Fame, on the other hand, is intimately associated with legacy and one's meaningful, enduring achievements. It indicates iconic status, gained over time through accomplishments that imprint permanently on society. Fame and celebrity are often used interchangeably, but these two words are not reciprocal; while famous individuals may attain celebrity status, celebrities do not always earn durable fame.

In his extensive historical investigation of fame, cultural studies scholar Leo Braudy located Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar as the paradigms of his chronological model. In *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and its History* (first published in 1986), Braudy described fame as "a history of the changing ways by which individuals have sought to bring themselves to the attention of others and, not incidentally, have thereby gained power over them."[1] He claimed fame as a vital ingredient in Western society since Roman times and argued that, from its beginnings, fame "required publicity" and celebrated uniqueness even as it mandated that this uniqueness be "exemplary and reproducible."[2] As will be demonstrated by this dissertation, Marina Abramović has capitalized on this latter facet of fame. By reproducing historical performances in an institutional museum environment Abramović proved that, like

[1] Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (New York: Vintage Books [1986] 1997): 3.

[2] Ibid., 5

Braudy's definition of fame, the genre of re-performance is also premised on duplicating iconic, one-of-a-kind events.

During her 2010 Museum of Modern Art retrospective *The Artist is Present***,** Abramović trained others to re-perform two of her solo works and three of the pieces she had made collaboratively with Ulay.[3] For her production of *Seven Easy Pieces* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 2005, she premiered a new work, reproduced one of her own earlier performances and enacted five works by other famous 1960s and '70s performance artists. Abramović's approach to these already legendary artworks as both "exemplary and reproducible" needs to be examined at the outset.

American appropriation artist Sherrie Levine's series, *After Walker Evans*, provides an unlikely and yet instructive comparison to the readymade performances Abramović staged in Manhattan [Fig. 10]. In 1981, Levine exhibited this group of small format photographs at Metro Pictures, a gallery in New York City. As the press release noted, these photographs were in fact simply re-shot by Levine from the "well-known Farm Securities Administration series by Walker Evans readily available to anyone from the Library of Congress" [Fig. 11].[4] The pictures Levine "borrowed" and presented as her own nearly fifty years after Evans first made them became instantly emblematic of

---

[3] Performances originally made by Abramović and Ulay included *Relation in Time* (1977), *Imponderabilia* (1977) and *Point of Contact* (1980). Re-performances of Abramović's solo work included *Nude with Skeleton* (2002, 2005, and 2010) and *Luminosity* (1997). See the exhibition checklist for *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present,* curated by Klaus Biesenbach (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010): 15. Hereafter abbreviated as "Biesenbach, *The Artist is Present*."

[4] The exhibition took place from May 14th to June 5th 1981. See the original press release, http://www.metropicturesgallery.com/exhibitions/1981-05-14-sherrie-levine/ (accessed November 24, 2013). The most famous example from this series is *After Walker Evans 4*, but the full suite of photographs comprises twenty-two images. See Johanna Burton and Elisabeth Sussman, *Sherrie Levine: Mayhem*, with contributions by Thomas Crow, David Joselitt, *et. al*. (New Haven and London: Whitney Museum of American Art; distributed by Yale University Press, 2012): 44-55.

postmodern appropriation strategies. In effect, Levine destabilized the notion of an original author by calling into question so-called (usually male) artistic "genius."

For *The Artist is Present* and *Seven Easy Pieces*, Abramović abandoned her once stalwart position on the sanctity of performance art's singular nature—that it cannot be reproduced authentically—a conviction that guided her early solo career and her collaboration with Ulay; For her exhibition at the Guggenheim, Abramović was granted permission to re-create Bruce Nauman's *Body Pressure* (1974), Vito Acconcci's *Seedbed* (1972), VALIE EXPORT's *Action Pants/Genital Panic* (1969), Gina Pane's *The Conditioning* (1973), and Joseph Beuys's *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965).[5] She re-staged these works on the first five evenings; then on the sixth, she presented an extended version of her own 1975 performance, *Lips of Thomas*, saving the premiere of her new work, *Entering the Other Side*, for the seventh and final day.[6] In this latter piece, Abramović emerged triumphant and towering from a gigantic *haute couture* dress [Fig. 12 + 13]. Made in collaboration with the exclusive Dutch fashion designer Aziz, Abramović's colossal royal blue dress covered her body and cascaded down to the

[5] *Marina Abramović: 7 Easy Pieces*, photographs by Attilio Maranzano; film stills by Babette Mangolte (Milano: Charta, 2007).

[6] In the literature on Abramović the title *Lips of Thomas* occasionally appears as *Thomas Lips*, the name of a Swiss man the artist met and with whom she had a brief affair in the summer of 1975 while in Austria. When Abramović enacted *Lips of Thomas* later that same year, the performance, according to James Westcott, was "originally meant as a demonstration, a plea, a play, an offering for Lips" yet became the artist's most "violent and baroque piece" to date. Although Westcott, who provides a rich description of the original performance, has acknowledged that "none of this [the performance] had anything to do with Thomas Lips the man. He didn't even show up to the performance," he uses the title *Thomas Lips* throughout his biography on Abramović. (For a short discussion of the iconography of this performance and subsequent changes Abramović made when she re-performed it at the Guggenheim in 2005, see Chapter Four, p. 155, in this dissertation.) For purposes of consistency, in this study I use the title *Lips of Thomas* which reflects how documentary photographs of this performance are listed in the collection of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, on Sean Kelly's website, and in the most recent major monographic publication on Abramović (*The Artist is Present*, MoMA, 2010). See James Westcott's *When Marina Abramović Dies, A Biography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010): 79-82 for an account of the original 1975 performance at Krinzinger Gallery, Innsbruck.

floor, entirely wrapping the stage on which she had performed for the past six days. The leaflet Abramović distributed that evening stated, "The Artist is Present, Here and Now. Dress by Aziz."[7]

The major difference between Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces* and Levine's series *After Walker Evans* is not conceptual, but corporeal. Abramović endured the physical stress of each work she restaged for seven hours, from five until midnight, consecutively for one week. By embodying the work of others during the first five nights as if these performances were in fact her own, the artist triggered a rupture in the linear narrative of performance art's history. She mended this fissure by using her body to reconstitute these works in the present. In so doing, she demonstrated that fame itself is marked by an essentially "performative" function, a strategy that strengthened her emergence as a celebrity artist in a line-up of otherwise already recognizable, historic performances.

Here it is useful to define exactly what I mean by terms such as "performative" and "performativity," as well as how the act of re-performance is, in this study, seen to help establish Abramović's brand identity. Theater historian Richard Schechner has described performativity as everywhere—"in daily behavior, in the professions, on the internet and media, in the arts and in language."[8] An exceedingly broad term, performativity cannot be deduced to one specific meaning.[9] It describes "performance-like qualities" that point to "a variety of topics, among them the construction of social

[7] Ibid., 55.

[8] Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies An Introduction* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006): 123.

[9] Ibid.

reality, including gender and race, the restored behavior quality of performances, and the complex relationship of performance practice to performance theory."[10] Although at certain points in this dissertation, I offer precise ways of thinking about the terms performative and performativity (as articulated by British linguist J.L. Austin or performance studies theorist Peggy Phelan, for example), the basic distinction between my use of "performance" and "performative" is semantic; each refers to an act or process that either "is" or "does something."

Delineating why fame (and specifically Abramović's celebrity) is marked "by an essentially performative function" requires a brief explanation as to how performance art relates to both the discipline of art history and to theater or performance studies. Traditionally, performance art (including work by Abramović, Chris Burden, Tehching Hsieh and Hannah Wilke) has been understood as distinct from theater in part because during the late 1960s and early 1970s artists such as these generally did not rehearse their actions prior to staging their work. The events they enacted were understood as singular, ephemeral and therefore also as unequivocally *real* events. Re-performance changes these stakes by restoring the fleeting nature of an already made (but now recast and edited) gesture.

Specifically regarding re-performance, art historians have been arguably more concerned with how this process disturbs authorship, authenticity and the archive rather than with how it affects an artist's personal identity and public image—the latter of which is a major concern in this dissertation.[11] By contrast, performance studies theorists

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., 158 As Schechner points out, viewers of a performance artwork will be inclined to ask, "Who is this *person* doing these actions?" whereas a theater audience would instead question, "Who is this

understand that an actor in the theater or the director of a ritualistic ceremony who re-presents the self by repeating actions (but always seemingly for the first time) is actively processing and solidifying his/her character as something both distinct but also malleable. This explicit investment in the construction of one's identity, shared by theater, performance art and arguably also pop culture is one of the intersections from which I approach study of Marina Abramović's fame and celebrity.

Although Abramović's early work has been at times associated with avant-garde experimental theater practices—Polish theater director Jerzy Grotowski's concept of "poor theater" and the French playwright Antonin Artuad's "theater of cruelty"—it nonetheless remains embedded within the realm of fine art.[12] In post-war America the medium of performance art grew out of the early Happenings movement (1958-1961), which has been examined by art historians as both a reaction and critique of high modernism's ideals including "originality, authorship and mastery."[13] As Johanna Drucker pointed out in 1993, this, in addition to the fact that Happenings were "collaborations without object(s)" that produced relationships among individuals, helped

---

character [actor] doing these actions?" Although feminist performance art is an important exception, the rise of Pop, Conceptual and Minimalist art as well as the postmodern trend of eschewing biographical interpretations was marked in art history marked by a decreased interest in identity politics throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

[12] Although Abramović's work has been examined peripherally with regard to the ideas of both Grotowski and Artaud, it is worth noting that future studies of her performances should more carefully consider Grotowski's "poor theater" concept of actors and audience as co-creators of the theater event as well as Artaud's idea that theater is necessary for exposing the truth. See, for example, David Elliot's brief mention of both Grotowski and Artaud in "Balkan Baroque," *Marina Abramović, Objects, Performances, Videos, Sound*, ed. Chrissie Iles (Oxford, Museum of Modern Art, 1995): 58-62; and Iles's concluding remarks in "Marina Abramović and the Public: A Theater of Exchange" in *The Artist is Present*, 43. See also Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, ed. Eugenio Barba (New York: Routledge, A Theatre Arts Book [1968] 2002) and an *Antonin Artaud Anthology*, ed. Jack Hirschman (San Francisco, City Lights Books 1965).

[13] Johanna Drucker, "Collaborations without Object(s) in the Early Happenings," *Art Journal*, 52 (Winter 1993): 52.

to establish the movement as more closely intertwined with the art world than with issues pertaining to alternative theater, music or dance.[14]

Schechner has argued that re-performances in an art context are "fundamentally different from, say, a restaging of Wagner's *Ring* cycle at the Met, where what is prized is a 'new' vision of an old score/text."[15] In his estimation, re-performances of Abramović's earlier work at the Museum of Modern Art in 2010 were celebrated not "as instantly perishable enactments but 'things' available for experiencing in their pristinity—*again*."[16] For Schechner,

> All of this redoing hinges on branding and marketing. A brand is a product made familiar, instantly recognizable, and needed by means of advertising and other kinds of marketing. Branding depends largely on the repetition of slogans and the reproduction of images, over and over and over. This kind of reproduction is the opposite of the avant-garde's claim to be 'new' or 'first' or 'only'."[17]

In this study, I approach re-performance similarly in part because it cannot be denied that this particular mode of operation has helped to codify Abramović's brand. And yet, while Schechner's ideas can be employed to understand how others who re-stage Abramović's work contribute to the construction of her brand identity, each performer who partakes in the activity of re-performance also experiences a unique process of "becoming." How, in other words, can the re-performer's own experience be understood, and what happens

---

[14] Ibid., 58. Despite the fact that Happenings were perched on the edge of Conceptualism, these events were nonetheless "still grounded in stuff, the canvas, the paint, the materials—sorting through and rethinking its relationship to them, wresting the old modernist dictums." As Drucker has asserted, replacing actual art objects with collaborations between people allowed the early Happenings (and later, performance art) to escape objectification and thus also commodification. Re-performance, however, specifically the kind Abramović has practiced in New York City since the turn of this past century, complicates this scenario.

[15] Schechner, "The Conservative Avant-Garde," *New Literary History*, 41 (Autumn 2010): 897.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

when Abramović herself re-stages the work of another artist? I examine these questions from various perspectives in Chapters Three and Four, in particular the notion that Abramović did indeed set out to make "new interpretations" of the work she restaged during *Seven Easy Pieces*. Here at the outset, however, I want to make to clear that the idea of her and others having an *authentic* and *individual* experience is fundamental to both Abramović's practice and her brand.

Despite my positioning of Abramović's recent work specifically within the art world, I concede that the re-performances she enacted during *Seven Easy Pieces* can also be contextualized under the auspices of "restored behavior," a concept Schechner developed in the mid-1980s. Frequently also referred to as "twice-behaved behavior," restored behavior, Schechner states, is the "key process of every kind of performing, in everyday life, in healing, in ritual, in play and in the arts."[18] It can be defined as a heightened psychological state (such as when one retells a story or acts out a traumatic or celebratory event) but it can also refer to everyday social etiquette or diplomatic protocols.[19] Restored behavior is "living behavior treated like a film director treats a strip of film. These strips of behavior can be arranged or reconstructed; they are independent of the causal systems (social, psychological, technological) that brought them into existence. They have a life of their own."[20] I return to this concept in Chapter Four, but important to my analysis at this point is the fact that some restored behaviors are marked by a trance-like state of being—in particular when someone behaves as if they were

[18] Schechner, *Performance Studies,* 34.

[19] Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985): 35.

[20] Ibid., 35.

someone else. Schechner explains, "Restored behavior can be put on the way a mask or costume is. Its shape can be seen from the outside, and changed. That's what theater directors, councils of bishops, master performers, and great shamans do: change performance scores. A score can be changed because it is not a 'natural event' but a model of individual and collective human choice."[21] This description is especially fitting for Abramović's project *Seven Easy Pieces*. She has in fact compared her approach to re-performance not only in terms of the process of interpreting a musical score, but also to enacting a repetitive ritual. Speaking in 1998 to curator Hans Ulrich Obrist about her desire to re-make performances, Abramović emphasized her personal experience of witnessing various Australian Aboriginal rites and performances, stressing that, "Repetition in all cultures interests me very much."[22]

Although Abramović's recent forays into the realm of proper theater productions—specifically the most recent staging of her *Biography* (discussed in Chapter Five)—complicate the historical divide between theater and performance art, Abramović has continued to maintain her identity as a performer—not as an "actor." Clarifying how her approach to re-performance differs from how a theater director might approach the re-presentation of theatrical productions, Abramović singled out "context" as the primary difference.[23] "The question comes down to the difference between performing and acting," she stated in 2005, because "in a performance there are no scripted cues or stage

[21] Ibid., 37.

[22] Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Talking with Marina Abramović, riding on the Bullet Train to Kitakyushu, somewhere in Japan," *Artist Body* (Milan: Charta, 1998): 41.

[23] Chris Thompson and Katarina Weslien, "Pure Raw: Performance, Pedagogy and (Re)presentation," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 28 (Jan. 2006): 39.

settings; it is pure and raw."[24] Although during *Seven Easy Pieces,* Abramović was in fact relying on "cues" provided not by directors, but by the artists whose works she would re-create, her characterization of performance as "pure and raw" suggests that even during a re-performance, authenticity and individuality can and will prevail.

Returning here to the programmatic organization of *Seven Easy Pieces*, I want to emphasize that the order in which the artist presented these performances helped dictate the public's perception of her as a specifically contemporary figure, despite the fact that chronologically she is part of the generation whose works she reenacted. Erika Fischer-Lichte has suggested that the sequence of Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces* constructed a highly ironic reference to the Biblical story of Genesis, in which God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh.[25] Historically, the romantic notion of the (male) artist-genius has been structured by comparison to divine inspiration, but Abramović appeared to ridicule "the idea of the male artist as a God-like creator," as Fisher-Lichte has suggested, "by citing and, at the same time, transforming, even subverting the theme of Genesis."[26] Notably, Abramović exuded a queenly presence during *Entering the Other Side*, but throughout the previous six days, she had acted out a directorial role through her concomitant position as subject, author, reader and (re)writer of performances past. Her decision to re-stage work by other artists marked the collapse of her individual reputation into a broader social hierarchy by relying on forms of communal (shared) authorship, which, distinct from appropriation, give credit to the original author. This collaborative,

[24] Ibid.

[25] See Fisher-Lichte's essay, "Performance Art—Experiencing Liminality," *7 Easy Pieces*, 42-43.

[26] Ibid., 43.

corporeal (and corporate) approach licensed her as a legitimate star, in particular because it was she who determined the specific conditions through which her current audience would come to know these artworks.

In re-producing these works, Abramović, like Levine, probed the nature (but not necessarily the law) of authorship and intellectual property rights. But, it was not Abramović's intent to contest the original's authenticity in the same way Levine did when she re-photographed Walker's prints. Since the late 1990s, Abramović has defined her quest to re-do iconic performances primarily in defense of an artist's claim to copyright. Conversing in 1998 with Hans Ulrich Obrist about the financial stakes of re-performance, Abramović concurred with Obrist's sentiment that "the artist must be protected somehow."[27] She stated,

> ... definitely, there should be some kind of rights for artists. But, now they don't even mention the artist's name, not to mention the money. They're completely eliminated from history, just like the piece by that young British artist who was sleeping in the gallery. […] This got huge publicity without giving credit to anybody who had done the performance before. Chris Burden spent three weeks sleeping in a gallery. There is a list of artists who have been doing this kind of thing, and it was presented as completely new. History is distorted."[28]

Abramović's mention of "that young British artist who was sleeping in the gallery" refers to a collaborative piece, *The Maybe* (1995/2013), which consisted of a performance by Scottish/British actress Tilda Swinton that, when originally performed in 1995, was staged within an installation designed by the British artist Cornelia Parker. Presented at

[27] Obrist, 43.

[28] Ibid. In this 1998 conversation, Abramović also expressed desire to re-perform specific works by other artists including Vito Acconci's *Seedbed* (1972), Chris Burden's *Transfixed* (1974), Dennis Oppenheim's *Tarantella* and Gina Pane's *The Conditioning* of 1973 (which, at the time, Abramović referred to as *Candlebed*).

London's Serpentine Gallery September 4th - 10th, 1995, *The Maybe*'s performance component involved Swinton, like Snow White, sleeping motionless in a glass vitrine for eight hours on seven consecutive days [Fig. 14]. In the rooms leading toward Swinton sleeping, Cornelia Parker selected to exhibit various historical relics in glass cases, including Queen Victoria's stockings, the quill with which Dickens wrote *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) and Winston Churchill's cigar stub, among others cultural ephemera. Culled in part by Swinton from lists Parker had provided her,[29] these cultural artifacts formed a reliquary for the departed, thus soliciting associations between life/death, memory/ history, presence/absence, and not least, the viewer's response to a confrontation with something or someone famous.

Due in large part to the British mainstream media's interest in Swinton's performance, *The Maybe* became a cause *célèbre*; in just one week, 25,000 visitors viewed this exhibit at the Serpentine.[30] During her performance, however, Swinton was literally unavailable to speak with the press; resultantly, *The Maybe* became widely known as a "Cornelia Parker piece," despite the fact that, as art historian Amelia Jones discovered, it was Swinton who conceived, developed and raised funds for her performance independently of Parker's involvement.[31] Swinton's reflections regarding

---

[29] Amelia Jones has published a lengthy e-mail correspondence between herself, Tilda Swinton and Joanna Scallen, who helped produce *The Maybe* at the Serpentine in 1995. It is the most thorough examination of this work, in particular because it presents Swinton's role in the project, which as noted above, is often obscured. Amelia Jones, Tilda Swinton and Joanna Scallen, "The Maybe: Modes of Performance and the 'Live'," *Perform, Repeat, Record, Live Art in History*, ed. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (Bristol, UK and Chicago, USA: Intellect, The University of Chicago Press, 2012): 476.

[30] Ibid., 478-480. Joanna Scallen's e-mail to Jones emphasizes that, somewhat unexpectedly for the Serpentine, the press seized on this event the morning the exhibition opened.

[31] Jones notes that Swinton emerges as a mere object in Parker's descriptions of the collaboration. See for example, Lisa Tickner's interview with Cornelia Parker, "A Strange Alchemy: Cornelia Parker," *Difference and Excess in Contemporary Art: The Visibility of Women's Practice*, ed. Gill Perry (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004): 65-7. Despite Jones's careful examination of Swinton as the original author of *The Maybe* (and the

the inaccuracy of both art historical and media interpretations of *The Maybe* need to be cited at length. In 2008, she stated,

> … it never occurred to me that anyone could ever doubt my original authorship of the piece, as the generator of the project over two years and the physical 'body' in and of the work […]. I was blissfully unaware of any risk of any hijack. I was aware that the Serpentine needed me to work with an artist 'legitimate' within the art world, I was aware that our grant was expressly geared towards collaboration. What I never felt aware of was the danger that my first public gesture of authorship, albeit shared in collaboration with an established sculptor with fine art credentials, might be undermined, let alone ignored or never imagined.[32]

As Abramović points out, west coast artist Chris Burden had indeed done it first. He slept in Ronald Feldman's New York City gallery during *White Light/White Heat* in 1975 for nearly three weeks; her suggestion that Swinton was appropriating his performance is not especially relevant to my present discussion. Burden's durational work will be discussed in Chapter Three; for now it suffices to note that he decisively obscured himself from public view whereas Swinton purposefully exposed herself. For my purposes here, *The Maybe* provides an instructive example of how, when the author becomes the "object," the work's historical intent and meaning is drastically (and in the case of *The Maybe*, also inaccurately) re-positioned.[33] Moreover, *The Maybe* is relevant to analysis of Abramović's re-performances primarily because, like *Seven Easy Pieces,* it shares in Braudy's definition of fame as both "exemplary and reproducible."

---

fact that Swinton re-performed this work as a solo performance at MoMA in 2013, as discussed below), qualification of *The Maybe* as a "Cornelia Parker piece" continues to persist. See for example, Bruce W. Ferguson's introduction to Parker's recent monograph where he writes, "*The Maybe* is the title of the work *that Parker made* in collaboration with the actress Tilda Swinton" (italics mine). Ferguson, "Introduction: Improbus Materia: Maybe," *Cornelia Parker*, with essays by Iwona Blazwick (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2013): 15.

[32] See Swinton's lengthy E-mail in Jones, "The Maybe," 476-477.

[33] Ibid., 471.

During the spring of 2013, Swinton reprised *The Maybe* as a solo work at MoMA on three different occasions, none of which were publicly announced in advance [Fig. 15].[34] Although Parker's name was now largely absent from media accounts, tabloids blasted Swinton's "snooze" as a sham, while art critics cited their suspicion regarding MoMA's affiliation with celebrity culture—misgivings that, undoubtedly, had been heightened three years prior during *The Artist is Present*.[35] Of Swinton's performance, critic Jerry Saltz claimed that "placing living art in MoMA's atrium has become the museum's crystal meth […] MoMA is narcissistically puffing its celebrity feathers."[36] More importantly (although perhaps unsurprisingly), Swinton's personal reasons for creating *The Maybe* were all but absent in this sensationalizing, media-driven dialogue.

Swinton first enacted *The Maybe* one year after her mentor, director Derek Jarman, died of AIDS—a premise that, for this performance, provides only a starting point for her thoughtful explanation of it as a rumination on unconditional love, the act of "witnessing" and the intimacy one feels when watching another sleep.[37] Unfortunately for Swinton, not only did her celebrity status overshadow the artistic merits of her performance, but neither she (nor the Serpentine Gallery, nor MoMA) could protect

---

[34] *The Maybe* occurred at MoMA on March 23rd, 25th and April 17th, 2013. See MoMA's exhibition archive list, accessible online, http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/archives_exhibition_history_list#2010 (accessed Jan. 5th, 2014).

[35] See, for example, the celebrity tabloid/gossip channel TMZ's laughable and completely misleading account of "Tilda Swinton Sleeps in a Glass Box," accessible online, http://www.tmz.com/videos/0_tofwkiha/ (accessed Jan. 3rd, 2014).

[36] Jerry Saltz, "Saltz on Tilda Swinton in a Box and How Living Art Has Become MoMA's Crystal Meth," *Vulture*, March 25th, 2013, accessible online, http://www.vulture.com/2013/03/jerry-saltz-moma-sleeping-tilda-swinton.html (accessed January 1, 2014).

[37] For anyone who wants to understand the genesis and meaning of Swinton's performance, her e-mail to Jones is indispensable. See Jones, "The Maybe," 472-478.

herself against what Obrist and Abramović deemed essential—preserving the artist's claim to original authorship and the integrity of the work's historical meaning—highlighting the fact that context, intentionality and authorship are key to understanding the genre of re-performance. Abramović became an outspoken proponent about exactly these issues for more than a decade before she performed *Seven Easy Pieces* at the Guggenheim.

In November of 1998, the year Abramović complained to Obrist that "[performance] artists are completely eliminated from history," renowned fashion photographer Steven Meisel appropriated, without permission, the actions and the aesthetic of a joint performance by Abramović and Ulay, *Relation in Space*, which the pair had premiered at the Venice Biennale in 1976 [Fig. 16 - 18].[38] Published in the November issue of *Vogue Italia* as a sixteen-page layout, one of the photographs from Meisel's spread appeared on the magazine's cover [Fig. 19]. It featured two svelte, lithe models walking briskly past one another, their bodies colliding as they move forward in opposite directions. Unmistakably based on Abramović and Ulay's 1976 performance, Meisel's fashion spread did not credit either artist.

In the next decade of her career, Abramović would make multiple appearances in *Vogue, Vogue Italia*, *Vogue L'Uomo* and *Harper's Bazaar*, but in 1998 she was unknown to mainstream audiences. Livid about Meisel's blatant copying, Abramović repeatedly recounts this instance as spurring her desire not only to re-make performances, but also to devise a systematic approach that would bring the performance art archive back to life

[38] Steven Meisel, "Crossview," *Vogue Italia*, No. 579 (November 1998): n.p.

without dismantling the integrity of the original.[39] Scholars have echoed Abramović's concern, often citing Meisel's 1998 fashion spread for *Vogue Italia* to exemplify how pop culture and, in this case, the fashion industry, "rips-off" or "riffs on" the fine and performing arts.[40] Meisel's layout in *Vogue Italia* however, must also be examined for its relationship to the concept of "modeling" and a deeper understanding of how and why fashion photographers use art and artists as inspiration.

Art historian Antje Kruase-Wahl has pointed out that several discourses converge in the term "model." Modeling means both "to make" (as in shaping clay, for example), while also explicitly implying the re-making of an original. Krause-Wahl writes, the noun "model is not only a synonym for mannequin, it also means 'a model for artistic studies' and is therefore equally connected to the artist's studio."[41] This shall be important in my discussion of Abramović's fashion profiles, but what interests me here is Krause-Wahl's assertion that, when an artist poses with an artwork, or if an artwork frames the mood of a photograph that includes a model, "the [fashion] photographer takes over the role of an artist."[42] In other words, when the fashion photographer "pictures" his/her model in relationship to an artwork, or when photographs imitate the artwork's composition,

---

[39] Abramović emphasized this in her discussion with *Seven Easy Pieces* curator Nancy Spector at the Guggenheim on November 18th, 2005. A DVD of this talk is available in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Archives.

[40] Curators Klaus Biesenbach and Nancy Spector both make references to Meisel's fashion shoot in Abramović's retrospective catalog. See Spector (39, note 2) and Biesenbach, 16, in *The Artist is Present*. Abramović continues to be concerned with this issues, stating in 2012 that, "I hate people who steal your work." See Elisa Lipsky-Karasz, "Once upon a Time," *Harper's Bazaar*, March 2012, http://www.harpersbazaar.com/magazine/feature-articles/marina-Abramović-interview-0312#slide-1 (accessed June 20, 2012).

[41] Antje Kruase-Wahl, "Between Studio and Catwalk—Artists in Fashion Magazines," *Fashion Theory*, 13, 1 (2009): 9.

[42] Ibid., 11.

"fashion is revaluated as art; the fashion photograph itself is raised to the level of an artwork."[43] This basic fact—that fashion photographs, in certain instances, are identified as works of art in popular culture—will inform my analysis of Abramović's presence as a model in *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar.* Abramović, however, does not produce objects; when photographed in fashion magazines, her body stands in for or "restores" her behavior (or performance) as an artist. The process provides a key to analyzing Abramović's celebrity status.

I return to the deeply seeded "riddle of re-performance" in Chapters Three and Four, but I want to clarify initially that originality and reproducibility operate rather differently in performance art than in photography or the plastic arts of painting and sculpture. Performance art at its core is a history of individual performing bodies, not objects. As such, it has been exempt from the notion that artists must have work circulating outside or independently of its producer.[44] According to art historian and theorist Isabelle Graw, "Artists whose work is performative put their physical selves on the line, and as a result, the distinction of their private and public identities is blurred."[45] Photographs mediate the unsteady relationship between the live act and its latent (re)incarnation as an image, but in the living performance art archive—examples of which Abramović presented at the Guggenheim—the individualized performing body

[43] Ibid.

[44] Isabelle Graw, *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture*, trans. Nicholas Grindell (Köln, Germany: Sternberg Press, 2009): 163.

[45] Ibid., 163-164. Benjamin Meyer-Kramer reiterated this point when he compared British-German performance artist Tino Sehgal's highly ephemeral practice with socialite and heiress Paris Hilton's multi-dimensional business empire. Meyer-Krahmer, "The Simple Life, On Tino Seghal," *Texte sur Kunst,* 68 (December, 2007): 160-163.

becomes the work. In celebrity culture, this "performing body" likewise constitutes the parameters of one's work and identity.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FAME AND CELEBRITY

For centuries, the notation of proper names and faces in printed texts and images—namely, literature and art—has played a compulsory role in the production of fame; in this respect, fame is a history of authorship. Recently, David Giles reoriented Braudy's authoritative cultural and literary history of fame toward an examination of human behavior by emphasizing that the significance of named individuals in Western civilization cannot be overstated. According to Giles, fame is about "the history of the individual and therefore … about the history of human psychology too."[46] During the Renaissance, the popularity of theater alerted audiences that the psychology of self-presentation was a powerful political tool. When performed on stage, the impression of one's identity could be manipulated, live and instantaneously. This paramount change in self-perception became heightened by the Industrial Revolution as social orders loosened and print culture proliferated; one could be "out front" while also "in disguise."[47] The classic declensions of fame and success dissolved, widening to pave way for modern notions of celebrity, genius, originality and authorship, each of which would cultivate distinctly different kinships with audience.

[46] David Giles, Illusions of Immortality: A Psychology of Fame and Celebrity (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000): 12.

[47] See Chris Rojek's chapter, "The Rise of the Public Face," in *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001): 110. See also Braudy, 7.

During the eighteenth century, the notion that an individual could reveal his or her self through performance became a guiding principle of Western thought.[48] The realization that one's persona could be performed publically increased further during the American and French revolutions, which helped democratize fame. Braudy has argued that the American inventor and statesman Benjamin Franklin, for example, pioneered the notion of a self-made man. During Franklin's time, it seemed that anyone "might create a name entirely of one's own efforts."[49] This became absurdly easy with the rise of reality television shows in the twenty-first century, a genre that bears structural similarity to Abramović's New York trilogy. Each of the comprising exhibitions was produced in front of a live audience, filmed and later redacted into documentation that portrayed the immediacy of her performances. This likeness, however, is arguably only skin-deep.

In recent decades, reality television shows have thrived in part because viewers imagine themselves as the subject. Abramović's performances since 2000 mandated extreme self-awareness and Zen-like concentration on her part—hardly the typical content for mainstream television shows. Yet, like reality television, Abramović's public durational performances of this period share the genre's commitment to watching an individual experience a given certain situation over time. The post-World War II television industry and specifically, the late twentieth century rise of reality television have helped shape viewing itself as a profitable, economic activity.[50] Prior to that, the nineteenth century genre known as *tableaux vivants*—literally, "living pictures"—and the

[48] Feelings of intimacy between two entities who have never met face-to-face can be dated to oral mythological histories that sustained the power and influence of gods, heroes and heroines. For more on this concept, see Rojek, *Celebrity*, 103-112.

[49] Braudy, 366.

[50] Sven Lütticken, "Performance Art After TV," *New Left Review*, 80 (March-April, 2013): 113.

emergence of the dandy or street *flâneur* in France by the 1860s , had likewise operated within an economy of looking.[51]Abramović's durational performances partake in this tradition.

The emergence of the dandy or street *flâneur* in nineteeth century France distinctly presaged the exuberant appearance of modern celebrity, which has had a much shorter shelf-life than fame. In his text *Intimate Strangers* (1985), film critic Richard Schickel argued that, "there was no such thing as celebrity prior to the beginning of the twentieth century."[52] He cited the first million-dollar film contract in 1916 as a pivotal moment that loosened the exchange value between "what (and how) one did and what one received for doing it."[53] Schickel extrapolated his position on celebrity from what Daniel Boorstin accounted for in 1962 as the "pseudo-event"—a happening drafted and staged for media and social consumption; it amassed attention not for its substance, but by the amount of interest it attracted and sustained.[54] In *The Image or What Happened to the American Dream* (1962), Boorstin suggested four ways in which the American shift toward hegemonic mass media practices nurtured the birth of the pseudo-event. Happenings of this kind are not spontaneous, he writes, but planned. Arranged for media

---

[51] Jennifer Fischer has analyzed several of Abramović's durational works in relationship to *tableaux vivants*. See "Interperformance: The Live Tableaux of Suzanne Lacy, Janine Antoni, and Marina Abramović," *Art Journal*, 56, 4 [Performance Art: (Some Theory and (Selected Practice at the End of this Century] (Winter, 1997): 28-33.

[52] Richard Schickel, *Intimate Strangers: The Culture of Celebrity in America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, [2000] 1985): 21.

[53] Ibid., 47.

[54] Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image, or What Happened to the American Dream* (New York: Antheneum, 1962): 11-12. Boorstin's focus on the cultural effects of rapidly disseminated images presaged classic descriptions of the de-centered, allegorical nature of postmodernism. He identified self-deception as symptomatic of celebrity's inauthenticity and claimed the willing suspension of disbelief as the source of illusion and simulated experience in journalism, heroism, travel tourism and the arts.

convenience, pseudo-events are created for the purpose of being reported; the question "Is it real?" is less important than "Is it newsworthy?" Abramović's New York City trilogy, Levine's show at Metro Pictures in 1981, and Swinton's recent reprise of *The Maybe* classify as just such. As pseudo-events these exhibitions maintain an ambiguous relationship to reality.

Another prominent theorist of contemporary celebrity culture, Graeme Turner, has pointed out the shortcomings of Boorstin's position. Despite Boorstin's genuine concern regarding the vacuity of popular culture, Turner has argued that critiques of this kind personify "an elitist distaste for the demotic or populist dimension of mass cultural practices."[55] (Andy Warhol's banal subjects, not discussed explicitly by Boorstin, serve as one archetypal "art-world" example.) Generations upon generations have lamented "shifts in new fashion," Turner notes, bemoaning these as "the end of civilization as we know it."[56] He suggests that alternative definitions of modern celebrity benefit from a "disinterested and less moralistic" viewpoint. The phenomena of celebrity since the globalization of the 1990s have reflected "an ontological shift in popular culture."[57] Ordinary individuals—not just famous ones—have a stake in understanding and interpreting celebrity, a construct Turner defines as "a genre of representation and a discursive effect; it is a commodity traded by promotions, publicity, and media industries that produce these representations and their effects; and it is a cultural formation that has a social function we can better understand."[58] Writing prior to Turner, Richard Dyer in

[55] Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity* (London: Sage Publications, 2004): 5.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., 9.

Stars (published in 1979) had already put forth the construct of celebrity as endowed with cultural meaning. Actors, for instance, are the product of their performance on the screen or stage as well as the cultural discourse of their time.[59]

Dyer suggested that stardom works like a sign or semiotic system, maintaining that a star's position in society is rooted in a conflicted understanding of the individual as both a private and social being. "Stars" are symbolic of power regimes, he argued, because fame cannot be divorced from how fans personalize their interpretation of a celebrity's social value. Cultural studies theorist P. David Marshall lengthened the range of Dyer's argument in *Celebrity and Power*: *Fame in Contemporary Culture* (1997) by suggesting that celebrity culture represents decisive ideological functions—democracy, individualism and the free market chief among these.[60] I will return to Marshall's definition when I discuss Abramović in the context of other celebrities who visited with her in the atrium at MoMA during the spring of 2010, but the ideas of another prominent theorist of celebrity culture deserve mention at this point.

Around the turn of this past century, sociologist Chris Rojek identified three categories to describe the multivalent nature of contemporary celebrity.[61] An "ascribed" celebrity, according to Rojek, is born of lineage and biological descent (e.g. Britain's Prince William). This differs from "achieved" celebrity which is "derived from the perceived accomplishments of individuals in open competition" with one another (e.g.

[59] Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1979): 3.

[60] P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power, Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): x.

[61] Rojek, 17-18.

actor Brad Pitt or tennis stars Venus and Serena Williams).[62] Closely aligned to what Rojek has termed a "celetoid," the third kind of celebrity he describes is "attributed" to individuals through sensationalized public interest and mass media attention; a lottery winner or a politician's mistress exemplify "celetoids."[63] Evincing the growth of celebrity studies during the past fifty years, Rojek's concept of attributed celebrity updates Boorstin's disdain for what he conceptualized as the pseudo-event. As Rojek writes, "once we recognize the attributed celebrity as a category, we disarm the argument that the line between reality and illusion has been erased."[64] At different points throughout her career, Marina Abramović has fit within each of Rojek's categories. In the section that follows, I invoke Boorstin, Rojek and Turner to clarify Abramović's position as an "art star," a phrase I will use interchangeably with the concept of "celebrity artist."

MYTH MAKING

The definitive biography of Abramović, James Westcott's *When Marina Abramović Dies*, was published in 2010 with full support of the artist.[65] Authored largely in the present tense, Westcott's book articulates Abramović's coming-of-age story in extremely compelling terms. The deftly stitched string of narratives he provides reads like a first-hand account of the artist's upbringing, her ambitions and disappointments, her successes and failures, her flaws, her resilience and inner strength, her relationships

[62] Ibid., 18. As Rojek notes, however, achieved celebrity is not always "exclusively a matter of special talent or skill." When it results from concentrated attention bestowed on an individual by a given audience or cultural intermediary (often the mass media), he or she ends up earning "attributed" celebrity; in other words, the types of celebrity Rojek identifies are not always categorical, but closely related and often malleable.

[63] Ibid., 20-21.

[64] Ibid., 18.

[65] Westcott, *When Marina Abramović Dies, A Biography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010).

and family lore.[66] Although not entirely hagiographic, *When Marina Abramović Dies* is replete with anecdotes emphasizing Abramović as an unsuspecting and yet ideal candidate for fame—a shy child who became a daring but disciplined performance artist.[67] It actively contributes to the mythology that, like Leonardo and Michelangelo for instance, Abramović was born to be an artist.

As a former assistant to Abramović, Westcott gained full access to the artist's own archives and conducted interviews with her and more than sixty people close to her on numerous occasions between January 2007 and February 2009.[68] Art historians since Giorgio Vasari's time have relied on autobiography, memory, oral history or interviews to graph an artist's *vita*; Westcott's text follows suit. Prior to the publication of *When Marina Abramović Dies*, she herself was the primary mouthpiece through which stories of her upbringing unfolded. Westcott engaged Abramović's autobiographical statements as a primary source, even though some of these stories had been published previously by Abramović herself and in a plethora of interviews for monographs, catalog publications, or on-line features.[69] His acknowledgment of Abramović as a "myth-maker" activates

---

[66] As family legend has it, for example, Abramović maternal grandmother's brother—Petar Rosić, who adopted the name Varnava—was patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox church from 1930 until 1937, when he died unexpectedly. Official death records indicate that Abramović's great uncle was poisoned, supposedly by diamond dust that had been sprinkled on his food. Westcott, 13.

[67] In my opinion, Westcott's account of Abramović's life and work does not align seamlessly with *New York Times* art critic Holland Cotter's judgment of it as unbiased and "nonhagiographic." Holland Cotter, "Performance Art Preserved, in the Flesh," *New York Times,* March 11, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/12/arts/design/12abromovic.html?pagewanted=all (accessed June 20, 2012).

[68] Westcott, 319.

[69] See, for example, her short vignettes in "Small Stories" included in Kristine Stiles, Klaus Biesenbach, Chrissie Iles, *Marina Abramović* (London: Phiadon Press, 2008): 119-122. See also Westcott's "Notes on the Text" (xi) where he cautions that Abramović's friends have stated that, every time she tells a story, "it gets better."

what elsewhere has been referred to as an "enacted biography," a narrative in which the subject actively contributes to his or her self-construction.[70] *When Marina Abramović Dies* also adheres to the established narrative arc that sociologists have identified as underpinning the tale of a celebrity-in-the-making: an engrossing personal story that is linked first to triumph over challenge and later, the "discovery" of his or her celebrity. [71]

Throughout the first part of his text, Westcott animates Abramović's reputation as a curious and yet apprehensive child, innately driven to overturn the circumstances of fear and her sense of confinement in an austere Eastern European household of many rules. Considered war heroes, both of Abramović's late parents served in Tito's Partisan army. Reared in this strict and military-oriented family, Marina inherited privileged social status through her parents' close connections to Tito and his unique brand of communism, tied both to the West and the Soviet Union but not aligned definitively with either.[72] Her father, Vojo Abramović, of Montenegrin descent, fought with the First Proletariat Brigade as a Yugoslav resistance fighter during World War II, later serving as the chief commander of Tito's elite guard.[73] He met his wife of Serbian descent, Danika

[70] Two texts have informed my thinking on the historical meaning of the "image of the artist": Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz's *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979; originally published in German in 1934, with a preface by E.H. Gombrich) and Catherine M. Soussloff's *The Absolute Artist: The Historiography of a Concept* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[71] Charles Kurzman, et. al., "Celebrity Status," *Sociological Theory* 25, 4 (December 2007): 354-6.

[72] Distinct in the Eastern Bloc for establishing independence by 1948 from Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union, Yugoslavia's victory over the Axis powers without significant Allied assistance was a feat of abiding national pride until Yugoslavia dissolved.

[73] For details about Abramović's parents, see "Partisan Stories" in Westcott, 17-24.

Rosić, on the battlefield, a chance meeting that led to a marriage but ultimately divorce, after years of domestic discord.[74]

Audacious and yet obstinate, in her youth Marina played Russian roulette with her father's handgun[75] and sat perfectly still for hours when instructed not to move by her maternal grandmother with whom she lived, until the age of six when her brother Velimir was born.[76] After her brother's birth, young Marina and her grandmother moved into her parents' large apartment. Yet, instead of receiving the attention she desired from her mother and father, the focus was now on her baby brother, who occasionally suffered epileptic fits.[77] The family rarely spent time together as a unit, Marina was fifteen when her parents split up and Velimir was nine years old.

In her pre-teen years Abramović suffered migraines and claustrophobia; she was afraid of the dark and endured beatings by her mother who, by the 1960s, was serving as director of the Museum of Revolution and Art in Belgrade.[78] Her mother rarely, if ever, expressed affection physically, a lack which scholars have interpreted as supplying the artist with an unyielding desire for attention and the will to rebel.[79] Danika Abramović,

---

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid., 29.

[76] Raised until the age of six almost exclusively by her grandmother (Varnavas's sister, Milicia), Marina bears fond memories of the latter's culinary and religious rituals, which Westcott describes as "a great source of stability for the vulnerable child." As Westctott points out, it was not unusual for grandparents to provide primary care for their grandchildren, especially if the parents had demanding jobs. Ibid., 9-10, 13.

[77] Ibid., 15.

[78] Ibid., 25-32.

[79] For various interpretations of Abramović's work in view of her difficult relationship with both her mother and father, see Kristine Stiles' survey of Abramović's work, "Cloud with its Shadow" in *Marina Abramović* (2008): 34-42 and 46-52; and Bojana Pejić, "Being in the Body: On the Spiritual in Marina Abramović's Art," in *Abramović* (Edition Cantz, 1993): 32-33. On fame as a unique motive in human behavior, see social psychologist Orville Gilbert Brim's *Look at Me! The Fame Motive from Childhood to Death* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 2009).

however, was determined to groom her daughter culturally through exposure to the arts. As a young girl, Marina visited the Venice Biennale where she viewed work by American art stars, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol and Louise Nevelson.[80] In 1965, she began studying at the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade. She focused on academic painting but took an interest in unconventional subjects, such as car crashes, which also fascinated Warhol around the same time. Upon graduation in 1970, Abramović was accepted to the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb, which Westcott suggests was "probably secured by her mother's connections," since, by this time, "it was clear that Marina had no special talent for painting."[81] Marina's mother is said to have also helped her daughter secure a teaching post at the University of Novi Sad in 1973.[82]

At the Academy, Marina had fallen in love with a fellow student, Neša Paripović, whom she married in autumn of 1971. This marriage, however, was never conventional; apart from a brief stint of studying together in Zagreb, the pair never lived in the same home as husband and wife. When Marina returned to Belgrade, she continued to live in her mother's apartment, although she was married.[83] Moreover, Marina was still married to Neša when she began her romantic and artistic relationship with Ulay in 1976; eight months after she left Belgrade, Abramović confessed to Neša of her affair. The pair divorced in September of 1977.[84]

---

[80] Westcott, 24.

[81] Ibid., 47.

[82] Ibid., 64. While Marina was on a trip to London, her mother submitted an application on her daughter's behalf.

[83] Ibid., 47, 52, 103.

[84] Ibid., 119.

Notwithstanding her academic upbringing, Abramović's personal encounter with avant-garde conceptual and performance art occurred in a focused way in 1971 when she began to participate in activities and exhibitions along with her husband Neša at the Student Cultural Center (*Studentski Kulturni Centar* or SKC) in Belgrade.[85] SKC provided an invaluable postgraduate education where Abramović could make and exhibit work free of academic rigors and reviews.[86] Characteristics of the performances Abramović developed throughout this early period—including self-mutilation, for example—have much in common with what contemporaries such as Gina Pane and Chris Burden were developing in France and the United States respectively. Abramović learned of such performances through word of mouth and through brief encounters with artists and curators, including Joseph Beuys and Roselee Goldberg, whom she first met in Edinburgh and London respectively. She was able to interact with other significant art world personalities on trips to European cities including Rome, Milan, Innsbruck, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Berlin, and Paris.[87] Without these trips abroad, Abramović would have been culturally isolated.[88] By the time she was working on her early sound

[85] The Center was the result of a surprising concession Tito made to quell the student uprising in Belgrade in 1968. One of the students' demands was that the Belgrade secret police social club be converted into a cultural and art center for students. Abramović participated in these demonstrations against her mother's wishes and when the Center was founded three years later in 1971, she moved quickly toward a risqué style of performance. For Abramović's personal recollections of her early 1970s work and her involvement with the SKC see "Marina Abramović in Conversation with Radovan Gajic, 1974" in Stiles, Biesenbach and Iles, *Marina Abramović*, 125-127.

[86] Westcott, 49-58.

[87] Ibid., 67.

[88] Miško Suvaković, "Conceptual Art," *Impossible Histories*, *Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991*, ed. Dubravka Djurić and Miško Suvaković (Cambridge and London, The MIT Press, 2003): 213. Suvaković notes that conceptual art arose in Yugoslavia around the same time as it did elsewhere in Eastern Europe, but because Yugoslavia was open to the west, its artists were influenced by a wider array of artistic trends.

installations and aggressively developing her *Rhythm* series, Abramović was also writing letters to museums and galleries worldwide, requesting exhibition information and application guidelines in an early bid to mobilize a budding career from what was then a marginalized position on the fringe of the Western art world.[89]

REALLY GOOD BAD GIRL

Staged at Studio Morra in Naples, Italy, in 1974, *Rhythm 0* is the most famous (arguably infamous) solo performance Abramović undertook during this early phase of her career [Fig. 20]. Standing silently like a sculpture in the gallery for nearly six hours, she willingly succumbed to objectification. Next to her on a table she placed items including grapes, honey, lipstick, a feather, a rose, a scalpel, a hammer, and a gun with a bullet beside it. At the start of the performance, a crowd was summoned in from the street and the gallery director invited those present to treat Abramović as they wished by using the variety of objects she offered to induce either pleasure or pain [Fig. 21]. The text accompanying this performance stated on Abramović's behalf, "I am the object. During this period I take full responsibility."[90] The performance lasted six hours, ending only when a gallery attendant halted an audience member's final gesture of raising a loaded gun to Abramović's head. Twenty-eight at the time, the artist recalled that when she looked in the mirror afterward, she noticed her first gray hair.[91] She had been pricked, cut, disrobed, smeared with lipstick, ridiculed and nearly murdered.

[89] Westcott, 52.

[90] See the catalog description of *Rhythm 0* in *The Artist is Present*, 74.

[91] Stiles, "Cloud with its Shadow," *Marina Abramović*, 60.

Reproduced on the verso side of the catalog accompanying Abramović's MoMA exhibition in 2010, a photograph documenting *Rhythm 0* captures Abramović's absent gaze [Fig. 22]. She is staring off toward her right; her eyes appear stony, impenetrable but watery, as if she were wincing. In this photo, the man standing directly in front of Abramović has removed the artist's shirt to stare blankly at her exposed breasts, as if she were a manikin. Vulnerable and yet tolerant of her aggressors, Abramović's hollow stare tells of her attrition. She was "inviting trouble," Roselee Goldberg wrote in 1988, actively inciting the passive aggression she would explore after partnering with Ulay.[92]

Interrogating the physical and mental limits of her body within the gendered, social context of a crowded art gallery, in *Rhythm 0* Abramović transgressed accepted rules of decorum by surrendering control and allowing others to structure the boundaries of her flesh. This posture exemplifies her choice at an early stage in her career to pose as a provocateur or a "bad girl," an appellation that since the 1960s has been associated with female artists who voluntarily sexualize or objectify the female body.[93] Locating the roots of the "bad girls" idiom within the entertainment industry, in 1994 curator Marcia Tucker pointed out that this slang phrase was appropriated from Black English to refer to someone who is in fact "really good"—women admirable for their effrontery—including celebrities of that time such as Madonna, Roseanne Arnold and Whoopi Goldberg.[94]

---

[92] Roselee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, Inc., 1988): 165.

[93] Cherry Smyth, "Bad Girls," *Bad Girls* (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1993): 6.

[94] Marcia Tucker, "Introduction and Acknowledgements," *Bad Girls* (New York, Cambridge: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, MIT Press, 1994): 5. It would be an omission here not to mention Andrea Fraser, who enacted arguably the most notorious and critically problematic female performance of the twenty-first century. For *Untitled* (2004), a collector paid Fraser $20,000 not just to have sex with her, but supposedly to make a performance piece that consisted of exactly that: a sexual encounter between the two. Elsewhere Fraser's performance should be investigated in view of Abramović's 1975 performance *Role*

In the critical literature on Abramović, the notoriety associated with dangerous performances she staged between 1970 and 1975 was initially overshadowed by the collaborative work she created from 1976 to 1988 with her then intimate/creative partner West German photographer and performer Uwe Laysiepen. The reasons for this are two-fold: Ulay and Abramović's relationship lasted more than twice as long as Abramović's initial solo career. And, more critically, their partnership dictated the erasure of an individual self in lieu of collective authorship. As a frame for Abramović's rise toward fame, it remains significant that, well into the mid-1990s, her legacy was more closely tied to the history of collaboration, a sub-category of performance art that tames each performer's individual fame.

Various scholars have articulated this point. Australian art historian Charles Green, who authored the first thorough study on collaboration in conceptual and postmodern art, has described Abramović's "theater of self-imposed cruelty" in *Rhythm 0* as "morally ambivalent." He casts the notoriety of this performance in high relief, maintaining that what Abramović embraced with Ulay "was more complex than in [her] solo actions."[95] Paul Schimmel, organizer of the exhibition, "Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979" in 1998, compared Abramović's early solo career to her subsequent work with Ulay similarly, suggesting that the "dangerous and

---

Exchange, when Abramović swapped places with a prostitute for several hours; the prostitute attended her exhibition opening at De Appel Gallery in Amsterdam while Abramović took her place in a Red Light District window. Although Abramović avoided a sexual encounter, in both works, Fraser and Abramović equate selling art with selling sex. On *Role Exchange* see, Anna Novakov, "Point of Access: Marina Abramović's 1975 Performance 'Role Exchange'," *Woman's Art Journal*, 24, 2 (Autumn, 2003 – Winter, 2004): 31-35, and Nevenka Stankovic, "An Institutional Travesty, "Risk as Strategy in Marina Abramović's Performance *Role Exchange*," *Third Text*, 23 (September 2009): 565-570.

[95] Charles Green, *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001): 159.

uncontrollable spectacle" Abramović orchestrated in *Rhythm 0* could be construed as a mere preface to the series of works in which Ulay and Abramović "investigated gender, sexuality and trust in a manner that would have been impossible as individuals."[96] As these descriptions suggest, in art historical scholarship, Abramović's initial rise to fame was seen to manifest alongside Ulay. The work they performed together between 1976 and 1988 is imprinted on the bedrock of performance art's history.

Although Ulay and Abramović's joint performances appeared at first to short-circuit the notoriety of her early solo career, the pair's work together earned her the renown on which she would later build her second solo career. Renown, a term often used interchangeably with fame but not celebrity, is used in this study to refer to a level of localized distinction within a specific network,[97] in Abramović and Ulay's case, a system comprised of artists, art critics, scholars and curators at first in Europe and later internationally. The preface to a 1998 exhibition catalog featuring Abramović and Ulay's collaborative work illustrates my point in its supposition that "the work of Ulay and Marina Abramović needs no introduction." While such a statement verifies the couple's claim to fame within the art world, in 1997 Abramović and Ulay were as yet virtually unknown to a wider public.[98]

---

[96] Paul Schimmel, *Out of Actions, Between Performance and the Object, 1949*-1979 (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998): 101.

[97] Rojek, 12.

[98] See Jan Debbaut's preface to *Ulay/Abramović, Performances 1976-1988* (Eindhoven: Stedelijk Van Abbenmuseum, 1997): 7.

Born in a bomb shelter in Solingen, Germany, in 1943, Ulay was attracted to Abramović upon meeting her.[99] Abramović had received an invitation from Amsterdam's de Appel gallery to create a performance for Dutch television. Ulay by then had developed a small body of photographic work (primarily Polaroids); he was assigned as Abramović's guide during her stay in the city. Intrigued by the comprehensive nature of Abramović's work, Ulay was more apprehensive—even secretive, as their friend the critic Thomas McEvilley has described—about forging a public career as an artist.[100]

Encouraged by her connection with Ulay and ready to break away from Belgrade and Neša, Abramović created a symbolic trilogy of work about freeing the body, mind and voice, and bought a train ticket to Amsterdam where she moved in with her new partner.[101] Abramović was twenty-nine in 1976, the year that she left her mother's home permanently for the first time to begin what would become a twelve-year collaboration with Ulay. (He had spent his twenties quite differently than Abramović, living a vagabond existence and traveling through Europe. By contrast, her strict mother imposed a curfew even after Abramović turned eighteen.) That summer of 1976 Abramović and Ulay were invited to participate in the Venice Biennale where they performed *Relation in*

[99] Ulay's father fought in both World Wars and died in 1958. His mother, severely disturbed by the events of WWII, left her son to be raised and educated at a boarding house throughout most of his teenage years. See Westcott, 85-92. For a brief biography of Ulay, see Thomas McEvilley, *Art, Love, Friendship, Marina Abramović and Ulay, Together and Apart* (Kingston, NY: McPherson & Company, 2010): 229-237. See also http://www.ulay.si for information on Ulay's recent film, *Cancer Project* (accessed Nov. 30, 2013).

[100] McEvilley, 232.

[101] Abramović and Ulay were both born on November 30th, three years apart, and they bonded over this immediately.

Space, the erotic charge of which, as we have seen, fashion photographer Steven Meisel would select to emulate in the pages of *Vogue Italia* more than ten years later.[102]

Throughout the first years of their partnership, Abramović and Ulay vowed impermanence toward both life and art by enacting the tenets of a personal and artistic manifesto they referred to as "Art Vital." It stipulated "No rehearsal. No predicted end and no repetition."[103] This served as the couple's dictum throughout their first four years together. Together they outlined ideal living circumstances for a transitory existence: "No fixed living place; permanent movement; direct contact; local relation; self-selection; taking risks; mobile energy; extended vulnerability; exposure to chance; primary reactions."[104] As the couple performed in avant-garde European galleries and at performance art festivals, the van in which they traveled became their home, their archive, and even, the performance object itself in one case, *Relation in Movement*, 1977, performed at the 10th Biennale de Paris.[105]

Abramović and Ulay's nomadic existence generated their collective *Relation Work*, the power of which was bound up and embedded within the pair's specific

---

[102] Westcott, 99-100. The couple performed at the Biennale on July 16th, 1976, but this was not their first performance together. Earlier that year, Abramović and Ulay performed *Talking About Similarity* in their friend Jaap de Graaf's photography studio (Westcott, 105). In this work, Ulay stoically sewed his mouth shut with a needle and thread. He then disappeared from sight and left Abramović to act as the event's (executive) spokesperson, fielding questions from shocked onlookers. See Kathy O'Dell's discussion of *Talking About Similarity* in *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970s* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998): 31-38.

[103] See the catalog introduction to the pair's collaborative work in *The Artist is Present*, 90; as well as Westcott, 109, and McEvilley, 49.

[104] Ibid. The pair's dictum is reprinted in each of the sources cited above.

[105] In this work, Abramović and Ulay circled a small public plaza located near the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in their Citroën HY van which, upon purchase, Ulay had painted matte black. Ulay was at the wheel while Abramović (who only learned to drive much later in 2009) broadcast the number of revolutions through a megaphone. After 2,226 times around, the van broke down and thus the performance concluded. Westcott, 125.

circumstances as a couple [Fig. 23].[106] While the historical importance and sheer physicality of Abramović and Ulay's joint performances can be re-created, the charge of their relationship cannot [Fig. 24].[107] In other words, hired performers cannot recreate the passion intrinsic to Abramović and Ulay's relationship nor the agony of its later demise. During Abramović's premiere at MoMA, however, the general public embraced the nostalgia of the couple's once mutually shared spotlight, in particular when Ulay took his place as one of Abramović's first sitters during *The Artist is Present*, a moment described in more detail in Chapter Three.

When demand for performance art waned during the early 1980s, and as many of the medium's practitioners moved onto more saleable art forms, Abramović and Ulay bucked the current and traveled throughout the Thar and Gobi deserts and the Central Australian Sahara. There they communed with Aborigines and conceived of *Nightsea Crossing*, a powerfully introspective work in which the couple sat motionless across from one another at a table, their eyes locked in a mutually meditative stare for seven hours at

[106] Other examples of the couple's *Relation Work* include performances such as *Breathing in/Breathing out* (1977), during which the couple knelt face-to-face and pressed their mouths together, their noses plugged with filter tips; for nineteen minutes, each alternately breathed oxygen and carbon dioxide until Ulay lost consciousness. In a rare privately performed work, *Relation in Time* (1977), the two were literally conjoined like a pair of Siamese twins sitting back-to-back tied together by their hair for sixteen hours, inviting the audience in only for the cathartic seventeenth (and last) hour of the performance. In *AAA-AAA* (1978), Abramović and Ulay screamed into each other's open mouths for fifteen minutes and then abruptly halted at the same time, as if on cue; Abramović was unable to speak for a month thereafter. The couple's earliest published mono/duo-graph, *Marina Abramović /Ulay, Ulay/Marina Abramović, Relational Work and Detour* (Amsterdam: Idea Books, 1980), documents these works. Westcott (157) reports that Ulay and Abramović could not afford to pay the printer "so instead they made him the beneficiary of the life insurance policy they had taken out for their trip … He was so touched he printed the book for free." 2,500 editions of this text were printed in the Netherlands with photographs and sparse text documenting not only the couples' performances, but also their daily lives and travel adventures.

[107] Dan Fox of *Freize* magazine calls attention to this point in "Ten Notes on Marina Abramović's The Artist is Present," May 4, 2010, http://blog.frieze.com/ten_notes_on_marina_Abramovićs_the_artist_is_present/ (accessed June 15, 2012).

a time [Fig. 6].[108] Performing during museum or gallery open hours, Abramović and Ulay repeated this performance twenty-two times between 1980 and 1988.[109] Although breaking with their earlier dictum and personal manifesto of "No rehearsal. No predicted end and no repetition," in this performance the couple literally became a "work of art" that viewers would observe like a painting or sculpture. More than two decades later Abramović would reprise key aspects of *Nightsea Crossing* by sitting with strangers during *The Artist is Present*; in this latter performance, celebrities and anonymous audience members literally replaced Ulay's presence.

When Abramović and Ulay permanently parted ways in 1988, the couple marked their split with a final performance. Each walked a portion of the Great Wall of China starting from opposite points and meeting in the middle to bid farewell [Fig. 25]. Abramović and Ulay had undertaken three trips to China between 1985 and 1987 to prepare for the performance which, when originally conceived, was intended to serve as the pair's marriage ceremony.[110] By the time that *The Great Wall Walk* actually happened, Ulay's relationships with other women and Marina's own infidelities ultimately resulted in the dissolution of their intimate and artistic partnership and launched the third, transitional phase of Abramović's career.[111]

---

[108] See *The Artist is Present*, 138. The script (or score) for this performance reads: "Presence. / Being present, over long stretches of time / Until presence rises and falls, from / Material to immaterial, from / Form to formless, from / Time to timeless."

[109] Ibid.

[110] Thomas McEvilley accompanied the two on their separate journeys (he spent about one month with each artist) and chronicled the experience in great detail. Numerous articles McEvilley had previously published on Abramović and Ulay are reprinted in his text *Art, Love, Friendship,* as well as his personal, diaristic musings about the walk as he experienced it.

[111] See Westcott, 205, where he notes that after *The Great Wall Walk* was completed, Abramović returned quickly to Amsterdam whereas Ulay remained in China for several months. He had fallen in love with his Chinese translator, Ding Xiao Song, and he married her in Beijing that December.

Beginning in the late 1980s, Abramović began to work at transforming her "bad-girl" image, which she had nurtured throughout her initial solo career and, albeit in a somewhat quieter manner, also during her twelve-year collaboration with Ulay. According to Abramović, she had at first based her image on a "strong, almost male energy,"[112] allowing the public to see her, in her own words, in just one "very radical way, no make-up, tough, spiritual."[113] After her break with Ulay, she began to highlight aspects of her personality formerly suppressed, namely her (more feminine) desire for "glamour, kitsch, humor and irony."[114] Abramović supplanted her stoicism with a dose of charisma, an attitude and identity she had previously eschewed. Reflecting on this change, years later Abramović noted that, as an artist in the 1970s, "you had to hate fashion because you'd never be taken seriously. And then that slowly started to change."[115] In 1989, she purchased her first high-fashion ensemble and in the early 1990s, opted for breast enlargements.[116] In 2012, *New York Times Magazine* columnist Andrew Goldman prompted Abramović to expound on the latter: "Not long after you and your lover and collaborator, Ulay, broke up in 1988, you got a breast enlargement, which

---

[112] Dobrila Denegri, "Conversation with Marina Abramović," *Marina Abramović, Performing Body* (Milan: Charta, 1998): 21.

[113] Leslie Camhi, "Grand Gestures, Pioneering performance artist Marina Abramović re-creates history this month at the Guggenheim," *Vogue* (November 2005): 232.

[114] Denegri, 21. Peggy Phelan corroborates Abramović's view of herself, stating that, around this time, the artist "began to change her image, and to some degree, her work as well." See Phelan, "Marina Abramović: Witnessing Shadows," *Theatre Journal*, 56, 4 (Dec., 2004): 569.

[115] Abramović cited in Elisa Lipsky-Karasz, "Once upon a Time," *Harper's Bazaar*, March 2012, http://www.harpersbazaar.com/magazine/feature-articles/marina-Abramović-interview-0312#slide-1 (accessed June 20, 2012).

[116] See Westcott, 229, for an account of Abramović's decision to augment her breasts. For an interview focusing on Abramović's interest in fashion, see Donatien Grau, "Marina Abramović, An Intellectual Fashion," *AnOther* (December, 13, 2010), accessible online, http://www.anothermag.com/current/view/680/Marina_Abramović (accessed Jan. 12, 2013).

some found to be an anathema to the feminist tradition of performance art."[117] Abramović responded, "I don't care. You know, I was forty years old. I heard that Ulay made pregnant his 25-year-old translator. I was desperate. I felt fat, ugly, unwanted, and this made a huge difference in my life. Why not use technology if you can, if it can build your spirit? And I'm not a feminist, by the way. I am just an artist."[118] As will be seen, Abramović has on more than one occasion invoked her anti-feminist stance in defense of her penchant for glamour, a key component of celebrity.

MAINSTREAM TO MARGINAL

Paralleling Abramović's changing personal and physical aspirations at this time, by the time she had firmly reestablished her solo career, descriptions of *Rhythm 0*'s severity and violence had assumed a notably softer tone. Comparing *Rhythm 0* to Parisian artist Gina Pane's *The Conditioning* of 1972, in which Pane lay on an iron bed above burning candles (a work Abramović would re-perform in 2005), in 1988 Roselee Goldberg emphasized Abramović's "ritualized pain of self-abuse" and the trials of her "harrowing" experience in which her "skin [was] slashed" by "tormentors."[119] Writing of the work two decades later in 2008, by which time Abramović was a rising star in the art world, curator Kristine Stiles diluted the danger implicit in *Rhythm 0* by inflecting her interpretation with a moral, ethical angle. "Exhibiting the depravity to which most people will stoop when given control over another person," Stiles wrote, "Abramović was

[117] Andrew Goldman, "The Devil in Marina Abramović," *New York Times Magazine*, June 13, 2012, accessible online, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/17/magazine/the-devil-in-marina-abramovic.html?_r=2&partner=rss&emc=rss&pagewanted=all& (accessed July 1, 2012).

[118] Ibid.

[119] Goldberg, 165.

one of the few who maintained responsibility for, and dignity throughout, this action."[120] Likewise, in describing *Rhythm 0* that same year, Chrissie Iles tempered the decadence of Abramović's legendary performance by comparing her passive stance to "the actions of a painter deconstructing a painting by handing the process of its mark-making over to the viewer and transforming herself into the surface."[121] During *The Artist is Present*, the audience likewise imprinted "on" Abramović. This was evident in the plethora of personal anecdotes recounting participants' personal experiences. These flooded mainstream media outlets and the blogosphere; in effect, *The Artist is Present* became as much about the audience as Abramović. For this reason, its performance can be considered a more glamorous version of the physical, visceral mark-making that occurred during *Rhythm 0*.[122]

As Chris Rojek explains, notoriety can sometimes be at odds with glamour, a desirable aspect of celebrity lifestyle exacerbated by the media and viewed with envy by the public.[123] Connoted by transgression, moral depravity and deviance, notoriety as a sub-set of celebrity might be used, for example, to characterize terrorists such as Osama

---

[120] Stiles, "Cloud with its Shadow," 60.

[121] Chrissie Iles, "The House with the Ocean View," *Marina Abramović*, 100. More than ten years prior Iles had stated that, in *Rhythm 0*, "the audience accosted and adorned [Abramović] in sometimes benign, sometimes aggressive, occasionally violent ways" projecting "their fantasy personae onto her, including that of a whore." See Iles, "The Shadow and the Reflection," *Ulay/Abramović, Performances 1976-1988* (Eindhoven: Stedelijk Van Abbenmuseum, 1997): 9.

[122] Biesenbach (*The Artist is Present*, 17) has also noted that *Rhythm 0* foreshadowed *The Artist is Present*. My suggestion here, however, differs from Biesenbach's in that his relationship between these two works is largely premised on the fact that, at first, Abramović placed a table in between herself and those who would sit across from her in the atrium—a table that was eventually removed because Abramović wanted to connect more directly with those who sat with her. It is from this perspective that Biesenbach wrote, "*Rhythm 0* predicts many of Abramović's works, including *The Artist is Present*, in its loaded use of the table, here an altar for the profane, sacrificial, or ritualistic objects, there the fraught stage of meetings and actions—the Last Supper, a family meal, a conference, an operation or dissection."

[123] Rojek, 10.

bin Laden or the Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, whose trespasses remain the primary source of their fame.[124] In addition to giving rise to personal celebrity, notoriety also ignites public awareness and the recognition of a transformation in culture. Famously censored, so-called "culture wars" artists of the 1980s, including Robert Mapplethorpe, Andreas Serrano, and Karen Finley, became notorious not only for the ways in which the media scandalized the content of their work, but also for inciting public consciousness and heated debate regarding government funding for individual artists.[125] Precisely because notoriety coaxes the public into making moral judgments, notoriety functions similarly to celebrity: it commands public attention.

By the time she enacted *The Artist is Present*, Abramović was no longer directly performing the role of a "bad girl" in the same way she had in *Rhythm 0*. Indeed, no longer a "girl," a word used in reference to mature women until the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s,[126] Abramović was now older and established, with two additional major New York City exhibitions under her belt. In the atrium at MoMA each day, she appeared fully clothed, dramatic and once again queenly in her stillness. Although explicitly physical, risky performances such as *Rhythm 0* were not presented at the 2010 show, Abramović continued to renegotiate accepted social and artistic terrain at MoMA via the live performers who restaged her work upstairs on the sixth floor. These live nude bodies in the museum environment galvanized the public's attention and signaled nudity's central role in 1970s performance. To recreate *Imponderabilia*, two

[124] Ibid., 10, 156.

[125] Ibid., 177.

[126] Tucker, 4.

performers stood, like statues without clothing, on either side of a doorway intended for visitor passage [Fig. 26]. When Abramović and Ulay performed the work in 1977 at the Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna in Bologna, Italy, museum visitors were forced to squeeze between the pair because they flanked the sole entryway [Fig. 27]. At MoMA, however, members of the public could decide whether or not they wanted to participate in the performance. The result of twenty-first century museum policy, visitors could elide passing between two nudes via a nearby doorframe. Writing of his experience at MoMA and of *Imponderabilia* specifically, veteran New York City art critic Jerry Saltz (who, as one of the hosts of cable channel Bravo's reality TV show, *Work of Art: The Next Great Genius*, is arguably a celebrity in his own right) quipped, "I'm not positive, but I'm pretty sure that a naked dangling penis brushed lightly against me Tuesday night."[127] Geared to incite notoriety, Saltz's wisecrack typifies the sensationalizing attitude that has rendered Marina Abramović's fame infamous. The nude re-performers generated as much allure and curiosity as Abramović's highly visible, shamanistic performance in MoMA's atrium [Fig. 28].

As Rojek has explained of the link between anthropological studies of shamanism and celebrity, the "shamanic spectacle is associated with revelation and rebirth … [it is designed] to achieve social integration."[128] Abramović secured this kind of position at MoMA by transgressing, but not entirely abandoning, her former "bad girl" image. As

[127] Jerry Saltz, "Genital Contact" on artnet.com, "http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/saltz/marina-Abramović3-12-10.asp, as well as his review for *New York Magazine*, "In the End, It Was All About You," May 23, 2010, http://nymag.com/arts/art/reviews/66161/ (accessed June 20, 2012).

[128] Rojek, 56. Goldberg NEEDS A SOURCE (165) discussed Abramovic's work under the auspices of "ritual," which as I suggest, can be related to Rojek's analysis of celebrity as also occurring in religion and through shamanistic, tribal rituals.

she executed her 700-hour silent opera downstairs,[129] videos, photographs and material artifacts documenting her forty-year career upstairs competed with the live, outsourced performances of her earlier work [Fig. 29].[130] (At this retrospective, her foresight and penchant for intrepid documentation certainly paid off.)[131] Furthermore, it is significant that some scholars have qualified shamanism as "Ur-drama" or the "original theater."[132] In 1974, for example, anthropologist E.T. Kirby characterized modern forms of entertainment—"ventriloquism, puppetry, conjuring and escape acts, acrobatics, acts like fire-eating and clowning"—as representing the "shamanistic origins of popular entertainment."[133] Although Abramović did not enact any such circus-like spectacles, the comparison linking shamanism to theater and performance is salient here. Consider, for example, Richard Schechner's broader description of this relationship, "In certain ways, shamans are very much like stage actors: both shamans and actors play roles using both stock and new means of expression. […] In this drama, the shaman is the main but not only performer. […] Always there is audience."[134] During *The Artist is Present*, Abramović recycled aspects of *Nightsea Crossing* by using "stock" imagery from her

[129] I borrow here from the title of *New York Times* art critic Holland Cotter's review, "700-hour Silent Opera Reaches Finale at MoMA," May 30, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/31/arts/design/31diva.html (accessed June 15, 2012).

[130] Several scholars have noted the competition between the live performances and documentation in *The Artist is Present*. See Christopher Grobe, "Twice Real, Marina Abramović and the Performance Archive," *Theater*, 41, 1 (2011): 104-113. For further examination of the counterpoint between the filmic documentation of Abramovic's early performances and the re-performances of these works by trained individuals, see Sarah Bay-Cheng, "Theater is Media: Some Principles for a Digital Historiography" *Theater*, 42, 2 (2012): 26-41.

[131] Westcott (xi) notes that she "never throws anything away."

[132] Schechner, Performance Studies, 199.

[133] E.T. Kirby, "The Shamanistic Origins of Popular Culture," *The Drama Review,* 18, 1 (1974): 14.

[134] Schechner, Performance Studies, 201.

collaborative work with Ulay. Yet, she also added a new component because, at MoMA, the public helped complete the work. The next chapter of this dissertation begins with an in-depth investigation of Abramović's now famous shamanistic role in her first major New York City performance, *House with the Ocean View* (2002).

CHAPTER TWO
INTIMATE STRANGERS AND THE "IT-EFFECT"

For her first major 21st century performance, *House with the Ocean View*, which took place over a period of twelve days, from November 15th - 22nd in 2002, Marina Abramović fasted publicly on an elevated, tri-part minimalist stage at Sean Kelly Gallery in New York City. She had recently relocated to the United States from Amsterdam.[1] Performing little more than one year after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York, Abramović executed the mundane activities of everyday life—sleeping, drinking water, going to the bathroom, showering, sitting, lying down, thinking, looking—silently and with meditative deliberateness, in front of a mutually mute audience [Fig. 30 +31]. The tick of a metronome, re-set on occasion by the artist, rhythmically sliced the gallery air.

During the period Abramović performed *House with the Ocean View*, she did not eat, read, speak or write. Divided into a bathroom, bedroom, and living or sitting room, the three inter-connected spaces where the artist lived for close to two weeks were sparsely adorned with a wooden bed, a chair, a low table, a shower and sink. Ladder rungs made of butcher knives pointed from the floor to the edge of each room in her temporary home. The white line on the gray gallery floor, which viewers were not permitted to cross, reinforced the boundary between Abramović and her audience. Presented in the form of traditional museum or gallery wall text, Abramović's directives to the audience stipulated: (1) remain silent, (2) establish energy dialogue, and (3) use

[1] According to Westcott, Abramović had felt uninspired in Amsterdam since her split with Ulay. She moved to New York City in part due to Kelly's urging. Kelly, who has represented Abramović since 1995, helped her secure an apartment there despite the artist's reservations. The artist had "lingering resentment toward the U.S. over the NATO bombing of Belgrade in 1999" but more importantly she feared Americans would not know of her achievements since she had primarily worked in Europe up to that point. James Westcott, *When Marina Abramović Dies, A Biography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010): 273.

telescope, a device stationed on the floor and surrounded by standing, seated or sprawled-out visitors [Fig. 32 - 33].[2] At its conclusion, Abramović dedicated this work to "New York City and the people of New York." "In a city that has no time," she explained, "I wanted to create an island of time."[3]

Several notable curators and critics have interpreted *House with the Ocean View* in context of the city's post-9/11 upheaval. During the Sean Kelly performance, Klaus Biesenbach wrote, Abramović "tapped into ideas of meditation, reflection and remorse."[4] His sentiment echoed Roselee Goldberg's contention that Abramović's work there began with a desire "to provide a place of contemplation for the aftermath" and "for the dramatic changes it had wrought in the psyche of a wounded New York City."[5] Chrissie Iles, who also commented on Abramović's ability to sense "trauma and grieving," observed that the audience for this piece found an "unexpected sense of release in witnessing the artist's own suffering and endurance in public."[6]

According to Sean Kelly, for Abramović, *House with the Ocean View* was, indeed, about making a "gift" for the city, although he has emphasized that the

---

[2] See Marina Abramović*, The House with the Ocean View* (Milan: Charta, 2003) for thorough photographic and textual documentation of the installation, and essays by Cindy Carr, RoseLee Goldberg, Chrissie Iles, Thomas McEvilley, and Peggy Phelan.

[3] James Westcott, "Marina Abramović's 'The House with the Ocean View': The View of the House from Some Drops in the Ocean," *TDR, The Drama Review*, 47 (Autumn, 2003): 136. Hereafter Westcott, "House with View."

[4] Klaus Biesenbach, "Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present, The Artist was Present. The Artist will be Present," *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010): 17. Hereafter Biesenbach, *The Artist is Present*.

[5] Goldberg, "The Theater of the Body," *House with the Ocean View*, 158.

[6] Iles, "Marina Abramović: Staring at the Ocean," *House with the Ocean View*, 164.

performance was not a deliberate reaction, interpretation or reflection on 9/11.[7] Significantly, Kelly has described Abramović's state of mind during this and other performances as "almost trance-like. I've taken her out of pieces over the last twenty-five odd years where it almost took us a while to get her to come around. You couldn't just bring her out and say, 'do you want some M & Ms,' because she wasn't present. So you had to bring her out slowly."[8] After *House with the Ocean View* concluded, Kelly recalls, Abramović "was exhausted and very, very tired, but she wasn't weak and she was almost luminous. She'd almost become transparent in a funny way […]. We took her into the back rooms and she really wasn't present for quite a while […]. It really took us some time to bring her around, even enough to be able to bring very close friends back to talk to her."[9] Kelly's description qualifies Abramović's performance as deeply meditative and suggestive of an otherworldly state of consciousness, which is quite different than the "high" a rock 'n' roll star feels after a performance. While I do not intend to suggest that Abramović literally enacted the role of a contemporary shaman, it should be emphasized that, during this performance, the artist appeared to mend the division between the sacred and the secular, a hallmark of the earliest kinds of performances in which spiritualists both entertained and sought to heal their audience.[10]

Throughout the 171 hours that she was on public display at Sean Kelly's gallery, Abramović relied almost solely on eye contact to satiate her hunger, an interaction her

---

[7] Interview with Sean Kelly by the author, Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, Saturday, January 18th, 2014.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies An Introduction* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006): 53, 199.

biographer James Westcott described as the artist's "nourishment and the audience's addiction."[11] His transcript of conversations between gallery visitors documents individuals wondering out loud about the difference between Abramović's performance and reality television, which strengthens the suggestion that, despite the severity and seriousness of *House with the Ocean View*, it could be perceived as a form of entertainment.[12] "Reality T.V. is over-stimulation but this is like watching grass grow," one individual complained, while acknowledging, "there's something to be said for watching grass grow."[13] Present each afternoon throughout the performance, Abramović's close friend, the critic Thomas McEvilley, noted how her eye contact with gallery visitors transformed the space into a "social sculpture" in which the artist stood out center stage.[14]

As McEvilley's comment suggests, Abramović and those present in the gallery during the run of *House with the Ocean View* became akin to "intimate strangers," a concept coined by film critic Richard Schickel in 1985 to define how television can break down barriers between the "well-known and the unknown." Schickel argued that T.V. caused it to seem as if "famous folk" were standing in one's living room in "physically

---

[11] Westcott, *When Marina Abramović Dies,* 2. Westcott's introduction (1-5) includes a lengthy description of his experience at the gallery. Important to note, at night, Abramović slept at the gallery so *House with the Ocean View* lasted, in fact, a total of 271 continuous hours.

[12] Westcott, "House with View," 130.

[13] Ibid., 131.

[14] Locating the work in a broader historical context—the Pali tradition of Theravadin Buddhism's *vipasana* retreats and *Mahasatthipattana Sutta* Buddhist meditations—McEvilley explained that, "In a *vipasana* retreat one is not supposed to have eye contact with anyone. By introducing this subversive element," he concluded, "Abramović broke the performance out of ashram and made it a social sculpture." Thomas McEvilley, *Art, Love, Friendship, Marina Abramović and Ulay, Together and Apart* (Kingston, NY: McPherson & Company, 2010): 292.

manageable size."[15] Abramović's decision to include the use of a telescope as part of her performance in *House with the Ocean View* magnifies the idea that she intended herself to be viewed both up-close as an intimate stranger, and from afar simultaneously—meant to be inspected like a work of art. The formal composition of Abramović's elevated, tri-part minimalist stage supported this kind of relationship. The structure in which she lived for twelve consecutive days resembled a veranda or porch, a liminal architectural space. Both public and private, it offered an open view of the gallery from a nevertheless protected site.[16]

The concept of intimate strangerhood can be used not only to define Abramović's relationship to those who visited her in the gallery during *House with the Ocean View* but also as a position through which a number of art historians and critics have viewed her personality. Many descriptions of *House with the Ocean View* support the intimate stranger perspective. Performance studies scholar Peggy Phelan and cultural critic Cindy Carr submitted astoundingly personal, subjective accounts of their experience for the gallery's exhibition catalog. In hers, Phelan interspersed personal letters addressed to the artist. Italicized passages—"*Dear Marina, I don't really know you, but I feel as if I do*"—read like adoring fan mail in what is otherwise a decidedly more straightforward

[15] Richard Schickel, *Intimate Strangers: The Culture of Celebrity in America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, [2000], 1985): 9-10. The rampant rise of reality television during the late 1990s and its acceleration in the early twenty-first century has altered this scenario even further. Ordinary individuals—bachelors, housewives, restaurant chefs, aspiring supermodels, and the youth of New Jersey—have now become a fundamental component of T.V. entertainment. Not only are classic celebrity-types seen on nightly broadcasts, so can anyone who passed a television network's audition cut.

[16] Bernice McPherson, "The Verandah as a Feminine Site in the Australian Memory," *Strange Women: Essays in Art and Gender*, ed. Jeanette Hoorn (Melbourne University Press, 1994): 75.

account of Abramović in the history of performance art.[17] Carr's diary entries are also structured by a sense of intimacy with her subject.[18] Narrated as an account of her reactions to Abramović's hourly and daily movements, Carr's essay is composed as a meticulous record of the present moment, one that vanished right after it appeared. As Phelan has described, this animated type of emotional writing differs from personal criticism and the autobiographical essay; it is also performative in nature because it enacts "the affective force of the performance event again."[19] Westcott, who "met" the artist for the first time while witnessing *House with the Ocean View*, likewise authored his essay for *The Drama Review* in diary format. He sent the text to Abramović; a few weeks later, she called him for a meeting and soon thereafter, he became her assistant.[20]

Although Schickel's concept of the "intimate stranger" is useful, it is not a seamless fit with Abramović's persona and artistic goals. In Schickel's estimation, intimate strangers are celebrities whom the public has internalized and "unconsciously made them part of our consciousness, just as if in fact, they were friends."[21] The analogy, however, is not reflexive according to Schickel, primarily because the celebrity's variation on the relationship entails the attitude of, "They know me; I don't know them." Abramović, perhaps hyperbolically, has said about her experience during *House with the*

---

[17] Peggy Phelan, "On Seeing the Invisible: Marina Abramović's *The House with the Ocean View*," *House with the Ocean View*, 174.

[18] Carr, 149-155.

[19] Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (London: Routeledge, 1997): 11-12.

[20] Westcott, "House with View," 129-136.

[21] Schickel, 9-10.

Ocean View, and later of *The Artist is Present*, that she remembered every face.[22]

PARODY AS PUBLICITY

Not since the German artist Joseph Beuys spent three days living with a wild coyote in the René Block Gallery in 1976 during *I Like America and America Likes Me* had New York City witnessed as tense a durational performance as Abramović's *House with the Ocean View*. It landed her firmly on the art world map and vaulted her into popular culture as well. In September of 2003, roughly one year after its premiere, *House with the Ocean View* was parodied on HBO's hit series *Sex and the City*.[23] The episode deserves a brief synopsis, in particular for its representation of how fame, glamour and art intersect.

Arguably cable television's sexiest, most fashion-savvy protagonist at that time, fictional columnist Carrie Bradshaw, acted by Sarah Jessica Parker, visited Sean Kelly's gallery to view a performance based directly on *House with the Ocean View*. Carrie accompanied her friend Charlotte York (actress Kristin Davis), who as viewers learn, once worked Manhattan's art world circuit. Depicted as the disheveled antithesis of glamour, the actress playing Abramović's role is shown pacing calmly from room to room on a raised stage identical to Abramović's original installation. Miffed by the performance Charlotte has dragged her to witness, Carrie mockingly suggests that the

[22] Two days after the exhibition closed, MoMA solicited questions for the artist from their Facebook and Twitter fans. Asked how she felt now that the performance was over, Abramović stated, "I've been looking by now into 1,565 pair of eyes, which is lots of eyes, and the people who I look, I know them, they're like family. And yesterday it was incredibly emotional when I came out and I saw them. They're there and I know them. I remember all of them." See "Marina Abramović: The Artist Speaks" *Inside/Out, A MoMA/MoMA PS1 BLOG,* June 3, 2010, accessible online, http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2010/06/03/marina-abramovic-the-artist-speaks/ (accessed Jan. 1, 2014).

[23] Abramović's *House with the Ocean View* was restaged and parodied in episode 86 of the sixth season of *Sex and the City*. It aired on September 14, 2003. A brief clip of the episode is available on-line, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5JvdsNpkMcU (accessed Nov. 24, 2013).

artist on stage was likely consuming Big Macs at night, adding that she needed "to run a comb through her hair" [Figs. 34 - 37]. Further joking that this waiting game being played out before her eyes was every New York City girl's Friday night routine, Carrie drolly dismisses Abramović's performance as a sham; according to her, the knife blades on each ladder kept the artist from "running out for a snack." Both Carrie and Charlotte, however, were impressed and flustered by the presence at Sean Kelly of an older, distinguished male sculptor, a fictional character named Aleksandr Petrovski played by Mikhail Baryshnikov. Charlotte, who approached him excitedly, deemed Petrovski's work crucial to her own gallery career, extolling him for defining the 1970s art scene. Fictional though it was, the Marina Abramović-inspired episode of *Sex and the City* pointed to the fact that even in 2003, the classic myth of the male artist/genius continued to circulate as the leading popular conception of artistic celebrity.

As cultural studies theorists have rightly asserted, one of the important aspects of *Sex and the City* was that, in it, "women have agency: Their actions drive the narrative."[24] In contrast to Carrie's coy, flirtatious nature and unmistakable sex appeal, Abramović's character was not portrayed as desirable physically; instead, the uniquely powerful nature of her performance itself was presented as kindling sparks between Carrie and Petrovski. After returning to the gallery together on a late-night date, for example, the pair shared a passionate kiss, the beginning of what was to become a meaningful romance between the two. As will become clear, in this case, it was the bizarreness of Abramović's performance that served to typify the *It*-effect.

[24] Susan Owen, Sarah Stein, and Leah R. Van de Berg, "Leaving the Mothership: Postmodernity and Postfeminism in *Ally McBeal* and *Sex and the City*," *Bad Girls: Cultural Politics and Media Representations of Transgressive Women* (New York, Washington DC: Peter Lang, 2007): 120.

Despite the show's rather flippant interpretation of Abramović's appearance in *House with the Ocean View*, the performance's public parody in a hit cable show nodded to the growing reception of her work and her increasing renown beyond the traditional art crowd. The HBO episode prompted Phelan to declare in 2004 that while "Marina Abramović might be too old to qualify as an 'It girl,'" certainly "she is enjoying a new level of concentrated attention, if not quite celebrity."[25] Reflecting on the parody a few years later, Abramović relayed a confessional anecdote:

> Ah… you know, [for] the first time the woman who sell me vegetables for, you know, twenty years of my life in Amsterdam, had a big smile on her face, and said, 'Good Morning, Ms. Abramović, do you like fresh strawberries today?' I mean, she never talk to me before. So somehow it looks like that by being on *Sex and the City*, I was/must be accepted by mass culture. And you know, what is the purpose of art … it is to be accepted. But is this at any cost? There, I, I—em, I didn't perform. Somebody else perform my role in the performance [on *Sex and the City*]. But I think that it is better to see this during my lifetime than when I'm dead and it would happen anyway.[26]

As Abramović's sketch illustrates, as early as 2003 her persona was becoming markedly more intimate, even to strangers or casual acquaintances she encountered on the street.

According to Sean Kelly, although she was not actually in it, this *Sex and the City* episode was the first instance in which "Marina's work drew attention from outside the art world, arousing curiosity in many viewers."[27] Initially, however, Kelly had

---

[25] Peggy Phelan, "Marina Abramović: Witnessing Shadows," *Theatre Journal*, 56, 4 (Dec., 2004): 569.

[26] See Abramović's interview, "Tate Shots: Twitter with Marina Abramović" at the Whitworth Gallery, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y54iBzyTBdI (This video interview featured questions for Abramović submitted by the audience via Tate's Twitter account; accessed Nov. 24, 2013). For sake of clarity regarding this citation and others, it must be noted that Abramović's English is often mangled. Although she studied English during her youth in Belgrade, she has never lost her accent. Paralleling Jack Flam's observations regarding Pablo Picasso's complicated relationship to the French language, Abramović's broken English identifies her status as an outsider in the United States.

[27] Joanne W. Chen, "The Patron on Conceptual and Performance Art in USA Art Market: An Interview with Sean Kelly," *Art Taipei Forum Media*, May 6th, 2011.

reservations about filming the episode because it would position Marina's "rigorous, intellectual performance base" in association to contemporary culture.[28] Of equal concern was the fact that the show's producers actually wanted Abramović to play herself, a request that Kelly and the artist denied. "If she were in it," Kelly later stated, "it was a re-presentation of her work whereas to us it was important that it was an interpretation of the event by them."

Although in 2003 Abramović was not quite yet a celebrity *per se*, her Sean Kelly performance, as imitated on *Sex and the City*, harnessed some of the polarized qualities that theater historian Joseph Roach has described as part of the "It-effect" referred to by Phelan. These comprise an effortless combination of strength *and* vulnerability, innocence *and* experience, singularity *and* typicality.[29] First conceptualized by British expatriate, romance author and Hollywood tastemaker Elinor Glyn in 1927, the *It* quality, Glyn declared, is defined by one who is "entirely unselfconscious and full of self-confidence, indifferent to the effect he or she is producing, and uninfluenced by others."[30] Abramović's unflinching posture throughout the twelve days she fasted at Sean Kelly's gallery in 2002 fits Glyn's description in some respects but not others. As Kelly has described, when she performs, Abramović is like a "vampire" who feeds on the energy of her audience; certainly, from this perspective, she is not indifferent to how audience helps

[28] Interview with Sean Kelly by the author, Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, January 18th, 2013.

[29] Joseph Roach, *It* (Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 2007): 8. Roach cautions that the "It-effect" is an exceedingly broad concept—rare but inexhaustible, obvious when seen and experienced, but difficult to define with exactitude.

[30] Glyn described, "To have 'It,' the fortunate possessor must have that strange magnetism that attracts both sexes […]. Conceit or self-consciousness destroys 'It' immediately." Elinor Glyn, *It* (New York: Marclay, 1927): 5-6; see also Roach, 4.

her maintain "presence."[31] Recently, for example, Abramović recalled watching an Olympic skater who fell badly, hurt himself, and yet finished the routine as the audience cheered. Reflecting on this incident, Abramović observed, "His energy was held entirely by the public. He was not thinking about whether he was going to win or lose, but rather that he had to keep going for the people who supported him. He recognized that there was something stronger and larger than him in that moment. I see this as this kind of a heroic pact. The hero is sustained by the energy of the public, and the public needs to witness firsthand examples of this type of heroism."[32] Although Abramović was not describing her own performance practice explicitly, her comment is indicative of the significant role that the audience assumes in helping sustain her energy while she is performing on stage. The implication that Abramović also views her work as fulfilling the public's desire—their "need"—to "witness" heroism "firsthand" will be seen as equally important to her status as a celebrity.

In his historical examination of what actually produces *It* (one's hair, clothing or accessories, for example), Roach continually returns to the effect's two-pronged nature. Writing of celebrities, who "like kings, have two bodies, the body natural, which decays and dies, and the body cinematic, which does neither," he emphasized that these "double-bodied persons" are defined by contradictory attitudes, especially the "simultaneous appearance of strength and vulnerability in the same performance, even in the same gesture. Let those marks of strength be called *charismata*; the signs of vulnerability, *stigmata*." The qualities of *charismata* and *stigmata* work cooperatively, Roach writes,

[31] Interview with Sean Kelly by the author, Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, January 18th, 2014.

[32] Marina Abramović, email response to the author, Feb. 18th, 2014.

and their interplay has a "long history as well as popular currency as the source of public intimacy."[33] For Roach, an ancient shaman's eccentricity—his/her difference—is in modernity akin to actors whose "abnormal perfection" defines their so-called oddity.[34] For each, apartness or otherness is what actually matters, he avers; it is "no less important than their availability."[35] From this perspective, the outsider-status and blatant weirdness of Abramović's character as it was portrayed on *Sex and the City*—her over-exaggerated, intense stare, dark eyeliner and shaggy, unkempt black hair—can be understood as tapping into an intrigue that rivaled Carrie's flawless, sexy demeanor. As Glyn originally described in 1927, to have *It*, "there must be physical attraction, but beauty is unnecessary."[36]

Almost exactly ten years after the premiere of this episode, during the summer of 2013 Abramović appeared in *V Magazine* for a fashion shoot with actress Kim Cattrall, who played the highly sexual and professionally successful Samantha Jones on *Sex and the City*, [Fig. 38].[37] In the picture headlining this layout, the two women are poised on opposite sides of a small rustic table. Each wears a black, floor-length ensemble. Perched on a stool, Cattrall flashes her thigh nearly to the hip. Lifting a glass of water, her back is arched slightly, as if she might make a sudden move; she emanates an unambiguous air of confidence. By contrast, Abramović stands with eyes closed, paused, basking in the

---

[33] Roach, 36.

[34] Ibid., 38. I am expanding the use of the term shaman here to include both sexes, despite that shamans and "medicine men" are generally gendered male. For more on shamanism and celebrity, see Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001): 53-56.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Glyn, 5; Roach 4.

[37] Cattrall cited in Sarah Cristobal, "Drawn Together," photographs by Santiago & Mauricio, *V Magazine*, 83 (Summer 2013). Accessible online, http://www.vmagazine.com/site/content/1004/drawn-together#!/1 (accessed Jan. 15, 2014).

quietude of an ethereal, reflective moment. One of her hands reaches toward a glass of water—a significant reference to her work. Drinking a glass of water slowly and deliberately is a hallmark of the Abramović Method, Marina's performance art teaching philosophy, which, in this photograph, doubles as her brand.

Abramović's pose recalls the kind of countenance she typically displays in her durational performances; she appears meek and yet in control, theoretically impervious to those surrounding her. In this photograph with Cattrall, Abramović looks as if she might fall over at the touch, invoking a sensation of vulnerability and weightlessness that is grounded in two ways. Echoing the simplicity of her coiffure—parted in the middle, her trademark long dark hair disappears behind her neck—Abramović is wearing an androgynous-looking *Givenchy* tuxedo-style jacket, its slim lapels stretching just above the waist. The interiority and restraint radiating from her pose and the clothing she wears is balanced by Cattrall's outwardly commanding, racy deportment. Superimposed on the image, a sketchy, seemingly hand-drawn white line weaves between the two; reiterating the article's title, "Drawn Together," in this photograph, Cattrall and Abramović are clearly linked. Both individually and as a pair, these two women embody *It*, Roach's combination of *charismata* and *stigmata*.

The dialogue accompanying the photo-essay's three images (the other two portray each woman individually) likewise reflects the *It*-effect's polarizing qualities. Cattrall recalls, for example, that upon meeting Abramović, she was "overwhelmed" by her beauty and humor, but intimidated by her presence during *Seven Easy Pieces* at the Guggenheim ("I didn't dare speak to her"). Abramović, she states, has this "wonderful creative state of being very free. Her mind sees things in a very serious way, but she

doesn't."[38] Whereas for Cattrall, the combination of Abramović's dual-sided nature—her seriousness and her humor—defines the artist's *It* quality, for Abramović, the assertiveness of Cattrall's role as Samantha on *Sex and the City* exemplifies the kind of irreverence also often associated with the *It*-effect. "You were my favorite character," she tells Cattrall, "You don't give a shit about anything. It's so good."[39] As this example demonstrates, Abramović summons the *It*-effect even when she is not performing on stage. The fusion of her severity and accessibility underpins her status as a celebrity as much as it defined artist/audience intimacy during *House with the Ocean View* and *The Artist is Present*.

SPECTACLE: SEVEN EASY PIECES / THE ARTIST IS PRESENT

Coinciding with her exhibition *Seven Easy Pieces*, Marina Abramović was profiled in the November 2005 issue of *Vogue* magazine [Fig. 39]. Titled "Grand Gestures," the profile's byline stated "Pioneering performance artist Marina Abramović re-creates history this month at the Guggenheim."[40] In the accompanying photograph Abramović straddles a blue Vespa; her light pink sweater, belted at the waist, accentuates her curves. With the ancient arches of Rome's Colosseum lit up behind her, Abramović sports cropped black pants and pointy-toed pumps, her right leg resting gingerly on the ground beside her bike.

As seen in this photograph, Abramović's foreignness enhances her marketability as an artist. Here she exemplifies the *It*-effect not only through an almost perfect balance

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Leslie Camhi, "Grand Gestures." *Vogue*, 195 (November 2005): 228, 232.

of straight-forward confidence and ever-slight apprehension, but also through the way in which this image reiterates Abramović's self-ascribed "modern nomad" status.[41] Abramović's rise to fame in New York City following the 1990s Yugoslav wars coincided with a more comprehensive globalization of the art world after the turn of the millennium that situated Abramović in an advantageous position. When she speaks, the artist's broken English (perhaps considered charming in its awkwardness) certainly makes clear her status as an "other," but Abramović's exoticism is not so extreme as to render her persona inaccessible. In media representations such as this picture, she emerges as a both a world traveler and as a foreign-born, cosmopolitan New Yorker. (That Abramović identifies with the latter characterization is made clear by her 2009 comment, "I think there's really only one 'metropol' in this world right now and it's New York.")[42] Not coincidentally, in *Vogue*'s profile, Lesli Camhi introduced the artist's "return to New York" through a pithy description of her international career highlighting her Belgrade roots, early performances she made in Italy, and her *Great Wall Walk* in China with Ulay.

Although this dissertation focuses for the most part on Abramović's more recent performances in New York City—and her position within American performance art history—ramifications of the artist's foreignness in relationship to her celebrity status

---

[41] Abramović as cited in Helen Kontonva, "Modern Nomads: Marina Abramović, Vanessa Beecroft, Shirin Neshat," *Flash Art*, July–September, 2007. http://www.flashartonline.com/interno.php?pagina=articolo_det&id_art=170&det=ok&title=MARINA-ABRAMOVIC-VANESSA-BEECROFT-SHIRIN-NESHAT (accessed March 17, 2014).

[42] Chiara Clemente, *Our City Dreams. Five Artists. Their Dreams. One City* (Milan: Charta, 2009): 70. Published to accompany Clemente's feature length documentary film of the same title, *Our City Dreams* also features four additional female artists: Swoon, Nancy Spero, Ghada Amer and Kiki Smith. In an interview, Clemente explains that the genesis of this project and common thread between these five women was rooted in her desire as filmmaker to tell "the story of an artist, a woman, coming to New York, who is making her dreams come true" (106).

should not be discounted. In a 2007 interview Abramović confessed, "even if I am Yugoslavian, I haven't been a Yugoslavian artist, and here [in America] I do not feel like an American artist. I don't have a strong sense of belonging to any given nationality. I am used to thinking about a kind of global space."[43] This liminal identity—the idea that Abramović "belongs" neither here (in America) nor there (in former Yugoslavia)—reinforces her position as a global (and globetrotting) artist.

Following her award-winning *Balkan Baroque* performance at the Venice Biennale in 1997, Abramović has created other works based on her cultural roots.[44] Most important for this study, however, is Abramović's repeated emphasis on the fact that her opportunity to surface as a pioneer of performance art was primarily due to the circumstances of her youth and artistic upbringing in Belgrade. On various occasions, the artist has noted—sometimes verbatim—that her forays into performance art throughout her twenties were akin to "being the first woman walking on the moon" and that there was "a kind of innocence and purity about it."[45] This is a significant assertion

---

[43] Abramović as cited in Helen Kontonva, "Modern Nomads: Marina Abramović, Vanessa Beecroft, Shirin Neshat," *Flash Art*, July–September, 2007. http://www.flashartonline.com/interno.php?pagina=articolo_det&id_art=170&det=ok&title=MARINA-ABRAMOVIC-VANESSA-BEECROFT-SHIRIN-NESHAT (accessed March 17, 2014).

[44] Abramović's *Balkan Epic* series included several performances made for video including *The Hero* (2001), which the artist dedicated to the memory of her father; *Count on Us* (2003), a collaboration with school age children in Belgrade; *Nude with Skeleton* (2003), a performance re-performed by others at MoMA in 2010; and *Balkan Erotic Epic* (2005), a video series exploring Balkan folk culture and eroticism while teetering between kitsch and pornography. See *Marina Abramović*, *Balkan Epic*, ed. Adelina von Fürstenburg, with essays by Steven Henry Madoff, Fulvio Salvadori and Bojana Pejić. (Milan: Skira, 2005). This text is dedicated to Marina's parents and, although the essays give a general view of this series, Abramović's own voice as the primary storyteller (in her artist's statements in the catalog) emerge as the most informative source regarding the genesis and meanings of these specific works. Art historian Bojana Pejić, in *Marina Abramović, The Star* (Contemporary Art Museum, Kumamato, Japan): 2003, has offered a nuanced, historic reading of the Balkans and Marina's relationship to her homeland. See, in particular, Pejić's detailed account of Abramović's 1997 performance at the Venice Biennale, 36-50.

[45] Ibid. Two years after her dialogue with Beecroft and Neshat, Abramović elaborated that, "I was really very alone with the performance idea … I was the only one interested in performance as the most direct and immediate kind of art form." See Clemente, 72.

particularly because, in it, Abramović positions herself as an innovator, an identity she eagerly assumed during her exhibition *Seven Easy Pieces*.

In *Vogue*'s profile, Abramović was quite literally depicted as "driven to action," a notion reiterated in the caption and throughout the text. "Of a generation willing to risk life and limb in service of art," the article's author declared "Abramović is the only one who continues to perform," a statement misleading both factually and in its suggestion that it was solely Abramović who was producing performances around this time.[46] In addition to iconic late 1960s and '70s performance artists such as Joan Jonas, who has continued to stage her work for a live audience, writer Leslie Camhi also discounted a younger generation of performance artists active at that time.

Part of her larger project to chronicle and preserve the temporal, ephemeral nature of performance art, Abramović's seven-day exhibit held at the Guggenheim the month she appeared in *Vogue* placed the artist at the epicenter of a practice raising fresh questions regarding the symbolic, cultural and market value of revisiting prior examples of performance art.[47] As already mentioned, during *Seven Easy Pieces* Abramović re-performed Bruce Nauman's *Body Pressure* (1974), Vito Acconcci's *Seedbed* (1972), VALIE EXPORT's *Action Pants/Genital Panic* (1969), Gina Pane's *The Conditioning* (1973), and Joseph Beuys's *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965), as well as her own 1975 *Lips of Thomas*, and added a new work, *Entering the Other Side* (2005) [Fig. 40 – 45].

---

[46] Ibid., 232. More precisely, it could be argued that Abramović was the only one who continued to perform either specifically *durational* performances or *re-performances*.

[47] I borrow here from the criteria Pierre Bourdieu established with regard to cultural capital in his essay, "The Market of Symbolic Goods." See *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993): 112-144.

Performing these in the Guggenheim's first floor rotunda, Abramović again opted to include a telescope for audience use. While in *House with the Ocean View* this device supplanted the do-not-cross-line drawn before Abramović's balconies, the telescope's placement further away from the artist during *Seven Easy Pieces*, on the second floor of the Guggenheim's upward spiraling gallery, granted the audience a bird's eye view of the action below. In both exhibitions the telescope actively synthesized closeness between Abramović and her observers while also allowing audience members to scrutinize one another.

In her critical review of *Seven Easy Pieces* Johanna Burton commented that the audience's profound interest in itself was heightened by the addition of the telescope. "As much as people looked toward the platform [at] the artist," Burton observed, "they also looked past it to survey each other surveying."[48] Strangers could inspect one another voyeuristically during Abramović's performance through an intimate, yet distancing telescopic gaze. Suggesting that Abramović's performances functioned like a mirror that cajoled the audience out of complacency, it was Burton's conclusion that, despite Abramović's actual presence, the artist looked "for all the world, like a picture."[49] Burton's observations are reinforced by the fact that, behind the stage on which Abramović performed, seven large flat screens displayed footage of the previous day's performance. Documented in real time, recordings of each day's "easy piece" were added into the queue and played back the following day. Filmmaker Babette Mangolte was responsible for documenting the exhibition and, as Burton noted, "the filming of *Pieces*

[48] Johanna Burton, "Repeat Performance: Johanna Burton on Marina Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces*," *Artforum* 44 (January 2006): 55-56.

[49] Ibid., 56.

was itself a performance, with [Mangolte] deftly choreographing a fleet of cameras and crew."[50]

Burton's observation that Abramović's presence paradoxically functioned like a traditional still image informs my claim that her developing role as an art world celebrity during this exhibition (in concert with *House with the Ocean View* and *The Artist is Present*) was due in part to these events' live participatory structure and the spectacle they generated. As Guy Debord defined in 1969, spectacle manifests as a "social relation among people, mediated by images," criteria elementary to both celebrity status and to performance art.[51] The term "image" as used by Debord and in this study, can have a double meaning. It refers, on one hand, to a representation, either real or artificial. But it may also reference a discursive field of representations and symbolic associations, indicating a broader public persona that supersedes the static, two-dimensional quality of a traditional picture.

Debord's comments about the nature of celebrity in relationship to spectacle are significant. As the "spectacular representation of a living being," celebrities embody the "image of a possible role."[52] "Being a star," Debord continues, "means specializing in the *seemingly lived*."[53] Debord's concept of stardom applies to *Seven Easy Pieces* in particular because Abramović arguably relived the performances she was making specifically by embodying the roles Acconci and EXPORT, for example, had once performed. The distancing effect evoked by such a process (Debord referred to the

[50] Ibid.

[51] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983 [originally published in 1967]): 4.

[52] Ibid., 60.

[53] Ibid.

"banality" of not being able to experience an event directly and authentically) is mediated by images, not an actual interaction. This reflects Burton's charge that Abramović's performances assumed the quality of a still image, made markedly more acute when observed through the telescope.

Inclusion of the telescope in *Seven Easy Pieces* and *House with the Ocean View* activated any given viewer's role by transforming a communal glance into a single, specific perspective. The telescope functioned like a camera lens, providing a framed, editorialized point of view. This aspect of these exhibitions illustrates quite literally Debord's concept that, in spectacle, viewers are paradoxically united through separation from one another. As Debord described, "The spectacle, like modern society, is at once unified and divided. Like society, it builds its unity on the disjunction."[54] Before explaining how Abramović made this work to her advantage, I first want to articulate a variety of definitions of the term telescope which I will apply.

In its form as a noun, this word refers to an optical instrument used for examining remote objects, for example distant stars. Consisting of one or more tubes and an arrangement of lenses and mirrors, a telescope enhances and clarifies what one sees. Rooted in the Greek word *teleskopos*, a compound of *tele* or "far" and s*kopos* or "seeing," telescope can also function as a verb. *To telescope* means to shorten by compression—to force or drive one thing into another (or into something else), in order to evoke the sensation of looking through time toward the present. Imitative of a

[54] Ibid., 54.

telescope's sliding tubes and used in reference to high-speed train-car collisions, *to telescope* means to combine, conflate, condense or compact into a more concise form. [55]

The conflation and compression of the past into the present in Abramović's work has been of foremost interest to certain observers, including art historian Amelia Jones. Particularly relevant to the act of re-performance, a defining feature of Abramović's practice after her Guggenheim show, Jones has argued that Abramović's claim to authentic presence is flawed because "the live act itself *destroys presence* (or makes the impossibility of it being secured evident)."[56] This, she says, is because, during the live act, the performer's body is understood as a representational expression of the self.[57] Jones acknowledges, however, that art criticism and history—and, as I shall contend, also the study of celebrity image-making in the art world—reside in a willing suspension of disbelief. She emphasizes that performance art's documentation and re-enactment allows for one to participate in an "*as if*" scenario—*as if* performance (and also one's art star persona) can be retrieved and experienced again and again, fully and in the moment.[58]

Jones's line of thinking forms a natural link to what theater historian Richard Schechner has described "as" performance, or rather, the very premise of performance theory that any behavior, event, action or thing can be studied "as" performance.[59] Celebrity culture, I want to make clear, also thrives on this idea. Schechner writes, "The

---

[55] Oxford English Dictionary on-line, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/198739?rskey=Vc26P8&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid (accessed June 20, 2012).

[56] Amelia Jones, "The Artist is Present': Artistic Re-enactments and the Impossibility of Presence," *TDR: The Drama Review* 55, 1 (Spring 2011): 18.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., 25

[59] Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 38.

self can act in/as another; the social or transindividual self is a role or set of roles […]. Performance means: never for the first time. It means: for the second to the *n*th degree. Performance is 'twice-behaved behavior'."[60]

French curator Nicholas Bourriaud's concept of relational aesthetics can help to elucidate why Schechner's ideas about restored behavior are relevant to my argument. Claiming that "art is a state of encounter" Bourriaud coined the term "relational aesthetics" in 1998.[61] According to his definition, relational art cannot be traced to a chronology of "stylistic, thematic or iconographic links."[62] What its various artists have in common "is much more determinant" because, theoretically and practically, relational art operates "on the sphere of inter-human relationships."[63] *Volksboutique*, the working thrift store Christine Hill erected and managed in Berlin in 1996; Gabriel Orozco's *Hamoc en el MoMA* (1993), a hammock that hung in MoMA's sculpture garden for anyone to use; and Rirkrit Tiravanija's reconstructions of working restaurants in galleries and museums (1992) constitute several of Bourriaud's examples.

Participatory projects enacted by artists such as these beginning in the late 1990s and continuing after the millennium differ distinctly from the sensorial experience offered by traditional performance, installation and interactive-based art. Alternately known as socially engaged, dialogical, collaborative, or interventionist in nature, these kinds of artworks fit the conditions for what Claire Bishop has referred to as a "social

---

[60] Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985): 36. Theater?

[61] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods, with the participation of Mathieu Copeland (Dijon: Les Presses du reel, 1998): 18.

[62] Ibid., 43.

[63] Ibid.

turn" in art.[64] In 2006, Bishop identified three key elements that distinguish participatory art. These include: (1) activation, or the desire to create an active subject through an experience of physical or symbolic participation; (2) authorship, or what Bishop calls the "collaborative creativity" resulting from "non-hierarchical social models"; and (3) community—social bonds that restore a "collective elaboration of meaning."[65] (The latter, for example, can be argued as central to the success of *House with the Ocean View*—Abramović's 'gift' to a wounded New York City.)

As Bishop has pointed out, these same characteristics—activation, authorship and community—underscore Debord's critique of spectacle and his advocacy for situations *not* mediated by images. Considering Schechner's hypothesis that any behavior in almost any situation can be studied "as" performance, the viewers and participants who experienced Abramović's major New York City performances are understood "as" performing. Recall Burton's observation that spectators used the telescope during *Seven Easy Pieces* to look closely not only at Abramović but also at each other. At MoMA, spectators had a clear view of the atrium from above floors.[66]

In comparing Abramović's recent performance to relational or participatory art, I am not arguing that they epitomize these genres.[67] Rather, it useful to employ the

---

[64] Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents," *Artforum* 44 (Feb., 2006): 178-83.

[65] Claire Bishop, ed. *Participation* (Whitechapel, London; Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006): 12.

[66] The concept that people want to see and be seen—especially at a cultural or artistic event—is not a new one. Mary Cassatt's painting *In the Loge* (1878), which depicts both a man and a woman peering at others (not the action on stage) through opera glasses, exemplifies this idea.

[67] More recently, Amelia Jones has examined the British artist Jeremy Deller's most famous work, *The Battle of Orgreave,* 2001, as a backdrop against which to analyze Abramović's re-performances at the Guggenheim in 2005 and at MoMA in 2010. In *The Battle of Orgreave*, Deller (whom Bishop has cited as the "epitome" of participator art) restaged the British miners' strike of 1984 by outsourcing hired actors, some of whom were involved in the original historic event. Jones, however, is more interested in Deller's work as a reenactment, not necessarily the participatory edge that it expounds. See Jones, "The Artist is

critiques leveled at relational art to support my reading of Abramović's celebrity, especially as it accelerated during *The Artist is Present*. The shortcomings of relational art revolve around the accusation that such situations demand too much of a literal, structured and often physical engagement on behalf of the viewer. For example, proponents of relational art have championed the fact that Rirkrit Tiravanija gives away the products of his cooking, while not examining *what* he cooks, *how* and *for whom*.[68] Without investigating the latter, his projects become routine exercises wherein people are merely following instructions. Resultantly, the constructed "relationships" occurring between those involved in the work's participatory elements belie the more open-ended philosophical traditions on which relational art was meant to be based—i.e., Roland Barthes's *Death of Author* (1968) and Umberto Eco's *The Open Work* (1961). The typical relational artist's reliance on (and role in) producing an actual formal structure for the viewer—usually participants are set-up to interact with each other or "do" something specific at the artist's behest—closes off the work instead, denying, in effect, what Barthes's considered the reader's "birth."[69] Moreover, as Bishop has argued, "The *quality* of relationships in 'relational aesthetics' is never examined or called into question."[70] The problem inherent to relational art, then, is that the presence of any kind of dialogue

---

Present," 23-25 and 36-37; and Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London, New York: Verso, 2012): 30-33. In this publication, Bishop distanced her relationship from Bourriaud, despite the fact that the rhetoric surrounding the work she discusses is theoretically similar. Acknowledging that "many of the projects that formed the impetus for [*Artificial Hells*] have emerged in the wake of *Relational Aesthetics* and the debates that it occasioned, Bishop explains that the artists she analyzes are "less interested in a relational *aesthetic* than in the creative rewards of participation as a politicized working process" (2).

[68] Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October*, 110 (Fall 2004): 64.

[69] Ibid., 62.

[70] Ibid., 65.

between the artist/participant or between partakers themselves (however mediated), is assumed to be "democratic and therefore good."[71] As Bishop suggested, the logical question to ask of relational art is "what *types* of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?"[72]

Citing Marilyn Monroe's statement that, "… the people—if I am a star—have made me a star, no studio, no person, but the people did," legal theorist and anthropologist Rosemary J. Coombe, makes a key point regarding fame, that "the star image is authored by multitudes of persons engaged in diverse activities."[73] Coombe is suggesting that once a star's image begins to circulate in the public realm, the audience becomes integral in sustaining it. Concerned primarily with the authorship of celebrity as determined legally through publicity rights, Coombe has asserted that stars and their fame "are never manufactured from the whole cloth," but are instead forms of improvised "cultural bricolage."[74] During *The Artist is Present*, for instance, children emulated Abramović's performance by sitting cross-legged on the sidelines in the atrium, staring into one another's eyes; this exemplifies the kind of chain reaction that both promotes and mutates a star's image.

In response to Marilyn Monroe's statement that the people "made" the actress a star, Abramović has elaborated on why, in her view, the production of celebrity implicates a reciprocal relationship between the star and her/his admirers. "If enormous

---

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Rosemary J. Coombe, "Author/izing the Celebrity," *The Construction of Authorship*: *Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature*, ed. Martha Woodmansee and Peter Jaszi (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994): 106.

[74] Ibid.

celebrity occurs," Abramović has stated, "this process is definitely collaborative. It is the projection of an audience onto an idol. It is a very strange phenomenon that human beings need iconic figures to look up to," hastening to add that, "this phenomenon, especially the idea of the hero or icon, is much more obvious with the development of social media and television."[75] In the final pages of this chapter, I examine how the Internet helped shape Abramović's image during *The Artist is Present*. Here, however, it is important to emphasize that Abramović understands herself as embodying a mirror-like role precisely because the audience is actively "projecting" itself. In other words, if the audience were not present, she would be unable to "reflect" its needs and desires. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, Abramović steadfastly believes that "artists should never think of themselves as an idol"—i.e. artists should not actively pursue fame and success.[76] She views her recent celebrity ranking as a side effect long in the making; to that effect, she has stated, "I've been working for forty years, and for at least thirty nobody even gave a shit about it, and for at least twenty years people were laughing about it."[77]

Known for her endurance as a solo performance artist, Abramović has not been considered under the auspices of participatory art or relational aesthetics; and yet, according also to Sean Kelly, it is the audience who, in fact, "completes" Abramović and

---

[75] Marina Abramović, email response to the author, Feb. 18th, 2014.

[76] Elisa Lipsky-Karasz, "Once upon a Time," *Harper's Bazaar*, March 2012, http://www.harpersbazaar.com/fashion/fashion-photography/marina-abramovic-interview-0312#slide-1 (accessed June 20, 2012).

[77] Abramović quoted in an interview with Charles Atlas, "Marina Abramović," *The Lab Magazine*, July 9, 2013. Photography by Justin Tyler Close, http://thelabmagazine.com/2013/07/09/marina-abramovic/ (accessed Feb. 18, 2014).

therefore, also her performances.[78] Although this statement appears to echo Marilyn Monroe's idea seamlessly, Kelly has pointed out how it diverges. "The audience cannot make somebody something if that person does not exist," he stated, continuing that, "Marina was Marina before the audience at MoMA found her. Marina was Marina for forty years before the audience at MoMA."[79] As will be seen, the crowds at MoMA and the resulting fanfare surrounding her performance there are but one among several components comprising the cultural bricolage that accounts for Abramović's celebrity status.

During *The Artist is Present*, the *It*-effect was generated by a spectacle premised on inclusion and exclusion—accessibility and segregation—with, as a result, the isolating yet inviting effect of becoming an intimate stranger for members of the audience. Throughout the exhibition, the line to sit with Abramović was long; she could not accommodate everyone. This, in part, helped produce the spectacle. Even museum visitors who did not sit with Abramović were, by virtue of the exhibition's design, prodded into asking themselves—*do I want to sit with her?* While I am not denying that the exhibition activated a bond between Abramović and her wider audience (by many accounts it certainly did), the answer to this question is less important than its effect. I wish to highlight the tug and pull between artificiality and authenticity and its crucial role in raising Abramović's celebrity profile. As an experience, *The Artist is Present* relied on the contrast of either being "in" the situation (present, sitting across from the artist), or being outside of it—watching, waiting with others. This duality is the motor of celebrity culture. Fans assist in authoring their celebrity's status by establishing a relationship with

[78] Interview with Sean Kelly by the author, Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, January 18th, 2013.

[79] Ibid.

their star (either real or imaginary) as well as with each other (in fan clubs, for instance). The act of authoring celebrity is participatory even in, and precisely because of, its form as spectacle.

DOCUMENTING THE ARTIST'S PRESENCE

The final installation of *The Artist is Present* did not include an actual telescope, but it had been a vital element in the performance as initially conceived. Describing her idea for a durational project at MoMA one year prior to her retrospective's opening, Abramović stated that she envisioned herself descending a series of shelf-like platforms on the main wall of the museum's second floor atrium over the course of the exhibition. "It will be about a kind of geographic and spiritual journey of an artist," Abramović said, continuing that she planned to have "lounge chairs in front of the wall, like beach chairs, where the visitors can sit and watch. There will be telescopes, too. The idea is that you really can see the detail if you want, but you can also see the entire image … I'm thinking of it basically as a luminous painting on the wall."[80] By May of 2009, Abramović emailed Biesenbach with a change of heart:

> I decided that I want to have a work that connects me more with the public, that concentrates on the interaction between me and the audience. I want to have a simple table, installed in the center of the atrium, with two chairs on the sides. I will sit on one chair and a square of light from the ceiling will separate me from the public. Anyone will be free to sit on the other side of the table, on the second chair, staying as long as he/she wants, being fully and uniquely part of the Performance. I think this work [will] draw a line of continuity in my career.[81]

---

[80] David Ebony, "Marina Abramović: An Interview," *Art in America* 5 (Nov. 2009): 112.

[81] Cited in Arthur Danto, "Sitting with Marina" in *The New York Times Opinionator*, May 23, 2011, http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/23/sitting-with-marina/ (accessed April 3, 2011).

As a result, Abramović's original intent to provide telescopes for viewers in MoMA's atrium was no longer necessary. She would commune with visitors in a direct, one-on-one format [Fig. 46]. Shortly after the exhibition opened, Abramović desired to increase even further her level of intimacy with the strangers she was encountering and so the table separating her and the participants was removed.

Documenting the MoMA event from mid-March until the end of May 2010, Abramović's collaborator, Italian photographer Marco Anelli, captured the portrait of each and every person who participated in her atrium performance—1,545 sitters overall. Present each day, all day, throughout Abramović's *magnum opus*, Anelli time-and date-stamped his shot of each sitter's likeness. Visible only from their shoulders up, the sitters in Anelli's passport-style portraits convey a potpourri of reactions [Fig. 47]. Enthralled with Abramović's wherewithal, or entranced by the opportunity to share her spotlight, most participants' body language and facial expression conveyed reverence and solidarity. Some are teary-eyed and brimming with excitement; others are motionless, silent or spellbound by uninterrupted concentration. In the most frequently published photographs from this suite, each sitter appears to scrutinize Abramović with a grateful and yet penetrating glance; many are wide-eyed, displaying a countenance of grief or sublime calm. Taken as a group, Anelli's close-up images of the sitters' widely varying emotional responses to the experience of communing with Abramović contradict the idea that performance can be documented objectively.

During the summer of 2012, Anelli exhibited *In Your Eyes: Portraits in the Presence of Marina Abramović* as an independent suite of photographs at Fotografie Forum in Frankfurt, Germany; by autumn, it was published as a book. In his essay for the

catalog, Beisenbach suggested that Anelli and Abramović working together transformed the image of each sitter into a double gaze.[82] When Anelli photographed the sitters through a powerful telephoto lens and recorded their portraits on his high-speed camera, the sitters' expressions referenced Abramović's presence in MoMA's atrium, although she is not actually "present" in any of them. The resulting portraits, in effect, document the artist's physical absence and her spiritual presence.

Anelli's pictures form a chronological table of contents that reveals traces of the energy dialogues that transpired in MoMA's atrium between Abramović and her sitters.[83] Abramović intimated such a meaning for this work when she observed that she was merely a "trigger" or a "mirror" and that, through the experience of sitting opposite her in the atrium at MoMA, participants became aware of "their own life, of their own vulnerability, of their own pain."[84] In other words, Anelli's portraits of participants form an indexical, reciprocal relationship with the artist and this particular performance as an event that, once live, now exists only in memory, through documents and as an archive of images and recordings. While the latter is generally true of any recorded action, Anelli's pictures of participants support my contextualization of *The Artist is Present* as participatory in nature.

---

[82] Klaus Biesenbach, "In the Presence of the Artist," *Marco Anelli: Portraits in the Presence of Marina Abramovic* (Bologna, Italy: Damiani, 2012): 9. One comment repeatedly associated with this text is that Anelli's photographs allow others to see the exhibition through Abramović's eyes.

[83] See also Anelli's website to view additional portraits, http://www.marcoanelli.com/portraits-in-the-presence-of-marina-abramovic/ (accessed Jan 15, 2014).

[84] "Marina Abramovic: The Artist Speaks," *Inside/Out, A MoMA/MoMA PS1 BLOG,* June 3, 2010, http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2010/06/03/marina-abramovic-the-artist-speaks (accessed Sept. 17, 2012).

One of Claire Bishop's major reservations about participatory art is that it regularly eschews aesthetics as a viable category by which to judge its successes or failures.[85] Anelli's involvement in *The Artist is Present* ensured the project's visual documentation, thus establishing criteria for evaluating it aesthetically. This, however, did not compromise Abramović's role as the primary author of the piece. As she herself stated, "Marco is the photographer, I am the author of the work."[86] Key to her identity as an "executive artist," this association points to the fact that Abramović retains her position as the originator of a performance even when she collaborates.

As a suite of photographs, Anelli's portraits appear to portray a cross-section of the museum-going public. Men, women and children of differing ages, races and social classes are represented. Iles has compared Anelli's documentation of Abramovic's sitters to Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests*, a series of short, starkly lit, silent film portraits memorializing the famous personalities—including, among many others, musician Bob Dylan, artist Salvador Dalí and poet Allen Ginsberg—who visited Warhol's Factory between 1964 and 1966 [Fig. 48].[87] Warhol forms an important paradigm for the study of Abramović's celebrity, and Iles's observations can be explicated further.

Although Warhol's *Screen Tests* were filmed, he often also took photographs of his subjects before they sat for their cinematic (or painted) portraits.[88] Describing Warhol's filmic tropes (his frequent use of an unmoving, static camera, for example),

---

[85] Bishop, "The Social Turn, 183.

[86] "The Artist was Here," in *The Economist* on-line, Sept. 10, 2010, http://www.economist.com/node/17036088, (accessed Feb. 12, 2012). Except for special contributions, *The Economist* neither identifies nor prints the bylines of its regular authors and columnists.

[87] Iles, "Marco Anelli: Portraits in the Presence of Marina Abramovic," *Marco Anelli*, 20.

[88] Patrick S. Smith, *Andy Warhol's Art and Films* (Ann Arbor: U.M.I. Research Press, 1986 [1981]): 154.

Patrick S. Smith has argued that, in his films, Warhol annexed and presented a "cinematic version of his Pop Art: *a monitored stare*."[89] Warhol, writes Smith, "wanted to discover the possibilities of 'found' personalities who live the esthetic of beauty on film."[90] The act of making portraits matched perfectly his Pop Art philosophy that artists can (and should) create by using borrowed or obvious subject matter. In both his full-length films and for his short *Screen Tests*, Warhol was interested in capturing his subjects "as" performance. So long as his sitters were not actually trying to "act" in a specific way, anything one might do for the camera was perfectly acceptable—desirable, even. Moreover, in his studio, Warhol often positioned his camera so that "what happens off camera [e.g. an eavesdropped conversation] can be a counterpoint to what is filmed."[91] Describing the resultant effect, Smith has stated that Warhol "allows viewers to feel like frustrated voyeurs because the real focus of attention is excluded from the camera's point of view."[92] Like Anelli **with his** pictures of Abramović's sitters, Warhol was absorbed with making portraits that created not just a record of the action, but also its absence.

In addition to Anelli's photographic documentation of Abramović's MoMA performance, filmmakers Matthew Akers and Jeff Dupre produced a 106-minute film documenting the retrospective from its initial planning stages to final inception. *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present* premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in February 2012 and in theaters, as well as on the cable network HBO later that year, contributing considerably to Abramović's exposure outside art-world boundaries [Fig. 49]. Producer

[89] Ibid., 150.

[90] Ibid., 138

[91] Ibid., 151.

[92] Ibid., 152.

and co-director Jeff Dupre's chance meeting with Marina Abramović and Klaus Biesenbach at a dinner party ignited the notion of making such a film. Afterwards Dupre approached Akers (co-director and director of photography) with the concept.[93] Initially skeptical about the project's relevance, as well as the plausibility of gaining unadulterated access to his subject, Akers could not refuse collaborating with Dupre when Abramović offered him the keys to her apartment.[94]

Cast as a woman whose powerful charisma has endowed performance art, a once marginalized medium, with mainstream appeal, Abramović is shown successfully capturing public interest and media coverage, two conditions that celebrity status mandates.[95] The directors also captured footage of the artist waking in her bed, entertaining friends and coaching the performers who would re-stage her earlier performances as live tableaus upstairs at MoMA on the sixth floor. They listened in when Abramović presented an especially outlandish idea to Sean Kelly—that she collaborate with the illusionist David Blaine. Kelly promptly discouraged the notion, reminding Abramović that her work focused on real experience, whereas Blaine had built his career on deceiving his audience. Through this humanizing approach, Akers and Dupre demystified the process of planning a performance and its installation, while also heightening Abramović's art-star status through focus on her desire to connect with audiences. In the trailer for the film, curator Klaus Biesenbach states of Abramović, "She needs the audience like air to breathe."

---

[93] "Interview: Matthew Akers on the Art of Making *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*," http://blog.documentarychannel.com/post/24983210378/matthew-akers-interview (accessed Sept. 12, 2012).

[94] Ibid.

[95] Elizabeth Currid-Halkett, *Starstruck, The Business of Celebrity* (New York: Faber and Faber Inc., 2010): 63.

The immense crowds at the Museum of Modern Art granted not only Abramović but also the performance art genre unprecedented exposure. Highlighting the metaphor of Marina as a mirror, the artist's live performance in MoMA's atrium was a major component of *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*. Throughout their film, Akers and Dupre sutured participants' before and after experiences of sitting with the artist with behind-the-scenes views of Abramović, whose pre-performance jitters exposed both her vulnerability and fortitude—the opposing qualities I discussed in support of the relevance of Roach's concept of *It, charismata* and *stigmata*. Their cameras also captured Abramović's reunion with Ulay, first at her New York City apartment, then in her farmhouse in upstate New York, and finally, their face to face public meeting at MoMA during the opening of *The Artist is Present*. When Ulay, whom Abramović had not seen in nearly fifteen years,[96] sat down across from her (she is now much more widely known than he), a smile of disbelief and pride overtook his face. Abramović flinched and sat up straighter as the core of her concentration softened to a degree seldom seen during the two and a half months that followed; she reached across the table and clasped Ulay's hands [Fig. 50]. After a few minutes, Ulay walked away from what was once the couples' mutually shared spotlight (as seen prominently during *Nightsea Crossing*) while Abramović continued with her longest and most important "solo" performance to date. Ulay's honorary appearance in the atrium alongside Abramović materialized as one of the

[96] After not meeting for nearly ten years, Abramović and Ulay reunited briefly at her fiftieth birthday party in 1996. There they performed *A Similar Illusion* (1981) in which they held one another in a dramatic, but static classic tango pose. Their reunion at *The Artist is Present* was in front of a much larger, more public crowd and this time materialized as a far more emotional encounter. See Westcott, 253-254 for a short description of *A Similar Illusion* at Abramović's birthday, and Charles Green, *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001): 170-171 for a concise interpretation of this work as being closely associated to the motives that also guided the couples' performances of *Nightsea Crossing*.

documentary's most moving scenes. It also captured public ; this particular clip has been viewed more than six and a half million times on YouTube.[97]

Although filmmakers taped more than 700-plus hours of Abramović sitting with participants via three continuously rolling cameras mounted on the atrium walls, most of the footage remained unused. In the film's final cut, Akers and Dupre chose to include only two celebrities: James Franco and Blaine. Akers accounted for this decision stating,

> We didn't put David Blaine or James Franco in the film because of their celebrity or fame. We put them in because each scene represents some concept. With David Blaine it's, is this real or is this illusion? With James Franco it's, is she acting or is she not? There are a lot of other celebrities that sat and I filmed that we didn't put in. We were very concerned that that was going to come across as something else, but really everything was there for a very specific purpose.[98]

Despite Akers and Dupre's decision not to focus on the mainstream celebrities who sat with Abramović, the popular press took note. Celebrity presence became essential to maintaining what cultural studies theorist P. David Marshall has designated the "audience-subject" of the celebrity sign. The celebrity's power, he explains, is derived collectively—"the audience is central in sustaining the power of any celebrity."[99] Marshall's statement was certainly true for Abramović, who silently soaked up the star power of others throughout the spring of 2010.

ABRAMOVIĆ'S INTERNET PRESENCE

---

[97] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OS0Tg0IjCp4 (accessed November 24, 2013).

[98] "Interview: Matthew Akers on the Art of Making *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present,*" http://documentarychannel.tumblr.com/post/24983210378/matthew-akers-interview (accessed Nov. 30, 2013). Christopher Campbell originally published his interview with Akers on June 12, 2012.

[99] P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power, Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 65.

MoMA's Producer of Digital Media, David Hart, was apparently dumbfounded when he learned that the institution wanted "to live-stream a silent woman, sitting still in a chair all day for three months." Scoffing that he should not be surprised by such a bizarre request because "MoMA is a museum that has in its collection an alleged can of poop" (Piero Manzoni's *Artist's Shit No. 014*, 1961), Hart helped engineer MoMA's imperative to supplement Abramović's atrium performance with a live feed on its website during the exhibition's open hours. [100] Simultaneously, Anelli was also uploading his portraits of sitters to *Flickr* each day. In combination with MoMA's live stream of the exhibition, *The Artist is Present* gained an unavoidable presence on the Web, helping Abramović secure an online following far greater than the audience numbers at the exhibition.[101] As the *Huffington Post* conceded, during *The Artist is Present* Abramović officially became "an artist the people have heard of…online at least."[102]

The history of modern celebrity has been tied to developments in communication technology. Throughout the twentieth century, this primarily involved photography, radio and television. The Internet magnifies this toggle by granting even more immediate

---

[100] David Hart, "Live Streaming, Marina Abramović: Crazy or Brave?" *Inside/Out, A MoMA/MoMA PS1 BLOG,* March 15, 2010, http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2010/03/15/live-streaming-marina-Abramović-crazy-or-brave (accessed June 12, 2010).

[101] Since I refer to the Internet throughout this dissertation, I wish here to differentiate its definition from that of the World Wide Web, two constructs often used interchangeably. American inventor, scientist and engineer W. Daniel Hillis emphasizes that, "the Internet is much more than just the Web. [It] is the global network of computers that enables, *among other things*, the Web." I accentuate Hillis's phrase "among other things" because for the purposes of this study, it must be understood that the Internet is not merely a resource or tool, but a forum that facilitates an exchange of information. An interconnected network of networks, the Internet acts as a medium through which all kinds of information may pass. Joining the interlinked hypertext documents that comprise the World Wide Web is only one of its functions. See Hillis, "Introduction: The Dawn of Entanglement" in *Is the Internet Changing the Way You Think*, ed. John Brockman (New York and London: Harper Perennial, 2011): xxix

[102] See Malilika Rao and Amy Lee's interview with Abramović, "Marina Abramović on 'Art21,' Charles Atlas, and Her Plan To Save Performance Art," *The Huffington Post*, June 12, 2012. "http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/15/marina-Abramović-on-art21_n_1347380.html (accessed June 12, 2012).

access to transpiring events; it acceleartes the pace and speed with which current events or one's reputation can be broadcast to the public. As Chris Rojek describes, the Internet has become "a global highway for the exchange of news and personal details about celebrities."[103] Not only has it bulldozed new boulevards for the acquisition of fame, but the Internet also offers ready access to images of and private information about stars via the stroke of a single key. No need to wait for next month's issue of *People* or *Photoplay*.

Keenly aware of the web's impact and "all the options it offers in matters of communication," Abramović has stated that, above all, the Internet has affected her perception of time—a component she accentuates in her live endurance performances.[104] Analysis of *The Artist is Present* in context of recent research on the relationship between celebrity and technology is revealing: even though MoMA arranged for the performance's digital broadcast, Abramović's goal was to offer unmediated "face time" to a live audience that turned out with anticipation each day. One of the most popular websites that made headlines during *The Artist is Present* is *Marina Abramović Made Me Cry* [Fig. 51].[105] Compiled by blogger Katie Notopoulos, this *tumblr* site meticulously catalogued Anelli's photos of those sitters who were moved to tears in her presence.[106] Image after image suggests that sitting with Abramović was cathartic and genuinely moving for many who experienced it [Fig. 52]. Interestingly, Amelia Jones, whose

---

[103] Chris Rojek, *Fame Attack: The Inflation of Celebrity and Its Consequences* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012): 12.

[104] See Abramović's comments in *Is the Internet Changing the Way You Think*, 370.

[105] *Marina Abramović Made Me Cry*, http://marinaabramovicmademecry.tumblr.com, accessed Sept. 10, 2012.

[106] Ibid. Less inventive bloggers and YouTube contributors pitched their opinions of the exhibition as well. Titled "Live Newdy [*sic*] Exhibit: Museum of Modern Art," one short YouTube video critiquing Abramović's "perverted agenda" and "this naked thing they're calling art" has generated more than one million views, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EH7cO_1pG2k (accessed November 24, 2013).

analyses have already been cited as perceptive, sat with Abramović during *The Artist is Present* and found the scenario "to be anything but energizing, personal and transformative."[107] Indeed, she expressed pity for the artist, stating that she felt "vaguely sorry for Marina."[108] "If anything," Jones averred, she felt moved "to revert to reading books about performance to escape the noisy emptiness of the 'real' live art experience."[109]

Although Jones was concerned primarily with what she considers Abramović's "impossible" claim to authentic presence in the atrium at MoMA, she does not account for the multivalent cultural context of "presence" in the digitally driven twenty-first century. The advent of technologies such as Skype, iPhone's *FaceTime* (a video calling application that allows users to be "present" in two places simultaneously), instant messaging, Twitter feeds and live streaming video has transformed social consciousness of how "presence" functions in daily life. These interfaces also have affected society's relationship with celebrities. Rojek writes of the Internet's impact, "Vicariously, you can always be in the company of your star, even though you never stand by his or her side or exchange the merest pleasantry."[110] In other words, just as the documentation of performance art intends to stimulate a sense of its live experience, images of celebrities or nowadays their daily Tweets to their followers, for instance, also dispense a (false) feeling of accessibility and closeness when in fact, the celebrity, like the original performance event, is distant, enigmatic and ultimately unknowable. As a performance

[107] Jones, 18.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Rojek, *Fame Attack*, 12.

based in real time, however, *The Artist is Present* allowed Abramović and those who joined her to become exceedingly aware of time passing or seeming to pause. In counterpoint to Jones, Kirsten Swenson, another reviewer, asserted that, for many others in attendance at MoMA, Abramović's "meditative quiet was genuinely transformative. Teenagers stopped texting; chatty groups paused to . . . look at art."[111]

As a variety of websites published loquacious testimonials recounting participants' personal experiences of sitting with Marina Abramović, numbers at MoMA's box office complemented the artist's online presence.[112] In its analysis of international museum attendance records in 2010, *The Art Newspaper* reported that with 561, 471 visitors in total, approximately 7,120 individuals attended her exhibition daily. That year, *The Artist is Present* was the most attended contemporary art exhibition internationally and the third most attended exhibition in New York City; it also became the ninth most popular exhibit that year of any time period or genre (Renaissance, Impressionist, etc.), worldwide.[113] Without a doubt, Marina Abramović was now the art-world "It-girl" of the hour.

Sponsored by *Givenchy*, the iconic French fashion house stewarded since 2004 by Abramović's close friend Ricardo Tisci, the closing gala for *The Artist is Present* was attended by an additional host of celebrities, including musicians such as REM's Michael

---

[111] Kirsten Swenson, "Marina Abramović," *Art in America*, June 4, 2010. Accessible on-line, http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/marina-Abramović/ (accessed June 20, 2012).

[112] See for example, *Sitting with Marina* (http://sittingwithmarina.tumblr.com) and *Essays about Sitting*, (http://essaysaboutsitting.tumblr.com/post/5749504829/day-61-portrait-19-6-min). Another fan-based review of the exhibition published six days before this event concluded was titled, "That day I fell in love with the world again," http://artmusicfilmwhatever.blogspot.com/2010/05/day-i-fell-in-love-with-world-again.html (all sites accessed June 16, 2012).

[113] "Exhibition and Museum Attendance Records, 2010," *The Art Newspaper* 223 (April 2011): 23-30.

Stipe, Patti Smith and Courtney Love as well as Liv Tyler, among others. Tisci dressed many of the attendees according to the color code Marina indicated—black, white or gold. Abramović herself walked the red carpet at MoMA on June 2nd in a black *Givenchy* gown cinched at the waist and a *couture* snakeskin jacket designed by Tisci, who drew inspiration for the garment from her daring 1991 performance, *Dragon Heads*, in which live boa constrictors slithered on top of her head and across her body [Fig. 53 - 54].[114] As pictures of the evening surfaced on various Internet fashion blogs and media outlets, Abramović emerged as an artist whose identity in the public eye had been transformed. Grinning and glamorous at the star-studded party in honor of her accomplishments, she was no longer a silently poised effigy, but a vivacious star savoring her success.

Throughout *The Artist is Present*, the majority of Abramović's sitters were ordinary individuals whose proverbial "fifteen minutes of fame" manifested as a result of their participation in the event.[115] But some became more famous because of it. New York City make-up artist Paco Blancas was one such "micro-celebrity" to emerge from the crowd during *The Artist is Present*.[116] He sat with Abramović twenty-one times,

---

[114] *Dragon Heads* was Abramović's first series of solo performances after her painful break with Ulay. Although it was not a direct inspiration for Abramović, Carolee Schneemann's *Eye-Body: 36 Transformative Actions* (1963), in which the artist was photographed nude with two garden snakes crawling on her torso, set an important precedent for the use of snakes in female performance art.

[115] Although Andy Warhol coined this phrase in 1968, he later redacted his statement. Recalling the days of Studio 54, Warhol stated, "It's the place where my prediction from the sixties finally came true: 'In the future everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes.' I'm bored with that line. I never use it anymore. My new line is, 'In fifteen minutes, everybody will be famous." Andy Warhol and Bob Colacello, *Andy Warhol's Exposures* (New York: Andy Warhol Books/Grosset & Dunlap, A Filmways Company, 1979): 48.

[116] My understanding of the term "micro-celebrity" is drawn from Theresa M. Senft's study, *Camgirls: Celebrity and Community in the Age of Social Networks* (New York, Washington DC: Peter Lang, Publishing, Inc., 2008), in which she defines the construct as "a new style of online performance that involves people 'amping up' their popularity over the Web using technologies like video, blogs and social networking sites." Although Blancas did not personally partake in the making of his online identity, his celebrity certainly increased because of Internet reports.

sometimes all day, sometimes for only part of the day. Blancos became known as the mystery man or the artist's stalker; his frequent presence was seized upon by both Internet outlets and within smaller circles, such as among MoMA's intrepid guards, who helped to control the flow of the line in the crowded atrium. After the exhibition concluded, Abramović was anxious to speak with him; to commemorate his experiences, Blancas tattooed the number twenty-one on his arm.[117]

The glare of publicity regarding so-called "celebrity" participation in *The Artist is Present*, including Blancas's repeat visits, overshadowed the more significant art world personalities who also communed with the artist. For example, German art collector Julia Stoscheck, performance artists Tehching Hsieh, Joan Jonas and VALIE EXPORT, as well as film and video installation artist Dara Friedman and photographer Andres Serrano each took a turn in the chair opposite Abramović. Lesser-known art-world personalities also took the stage alongside Abramović. Brooklyn-based performance artist, Anya Liftig, for example, arrived at MoMA early on Saturday, March 27th, 2010, wearing a dress nearly identical to Abramović's and a wig whose hair she braided to the side, mirroring the older artist's appearance [Fig. 55]. Despite the pushy crowd that day, she was the first to sit with Abramović.[118] To the dismay and frustration of others biding their time in line, she did not relinquish her post until the museum closed for the night and guards ushered her out; Liftig remained seated across from Abramović for more than

[117] Linda Yablonski, "Artifacts: Marina the Magnificent," *New York Times Style Magazine* (June 2, 2010) http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/02/artifacts-marina-the-magnificent/ (accessed June 19, 2012).

[118] Liftig describes her experience sitting with Marina on her website, http://anyaliftig.com/index.php?/performance/the-anxiety-of-influence/, and Tatiana Berg's interview with Liftig, "Art: The Anxiety of Influence," *BOMBLOG*, March 29, 2010, http://bombsite.powweb.com/?p=8919 (accessed June 5, 2012).

300 minutes.[119] Operating within the format of Abramović's tour-de-force and contravening a conventional approach to participation, Liftig titled her intervention after Harold Bloom's lead essay in his highly influential 1973 book, *The Anxiety of Influence*, which argued that poets misread and contest the work of their predecessors in order to attain originality.

Construed as a slyly humorous, mocking gesture and as a profound homage to the older, established artist, Liftig's six-hour staring contest with Abramović zeroed in on the main concerns currently preoccupying performance art historians and critics. As Abramović's döppelganger for a day, Liftig confronted issues of authenticity, authorship and collaboration; copy and original; influence, reverence and derivation; as well as the problem of managing one's brand. Liftig's actions also addressed an issue central to Abramović's career: the unsteady relationship between the original performance "score"—the first active inception of an idea as lived and/or recorded through documentary photos, videos or written directions—and its re-enactment, or the changes that occur when one interprets original archival material and subsequently (re)performs the event.

Several scholars have attempted to resolve these issues both theoretically and with regard to applied artistic practices. Christopher Bedford, who has analyzed the afterlife of west coast artist Chris Burden's iconic performance *Shoot* (1971), conceptualized the

[119] See also performance artist Amir Baradaran's site, http://amirbaradaran.com/ab_toaip_act_I.php, where he describes his intervention at *The Artist is Present*. Titled *The Other Artist is Present*, Baradaran sat with Abramović three times, once donning a dress similar to hers, another time writing messages to her on sheets of canvas taped to his face, and on his third encounter, chanting softly in Arabic. After being escorted out of the museum, Baradaran continued his performance (which had now become a symbolic dialogue) outside the museum walls by sitting silently at a wooden table pressed against a glass wall near MoMA's entrance.

breakdown of performance art's boundaries through a concept he referred to as "viral ontology." Bedford writes,

> Performance is a myth-making medium and as such essentially viral in nature. It extends indefinitely through history, its auratic charge often gaining traction and potency, just as the originary act receded and recedes. It is the absence of the event, the absence of an object, which makes the work available for re-writing, and it is this quality that permits the work to travel through time and space, absorbing and assimilating the conditions of history. The moment of performance, then, is simply the beginning point, the source of the myth, one of its functions being the foundation of a viral chain, the ontology of which is predicated on a perpetual revision, by historians and practitioners.[120]

Bedford's concept can be profitably applied to assessing Abramović's presence on the Internet, the re-creation of her earlier work at MoMA, and her re-staging of canonical performances by others at the Guggenheim in 2005. In the following chapter, I examine some critical ways in which the concept of a viral ontology underwrites Abramović's celebrity sign. These can be characterized under the term "executive female artist," a model of authorship that confounds traditionally gendered notions of fame. Marina Abramović is not the first artist to have staged lengthy durational performances in a gallery or museum environment, but she is certainly, by now, the most famous to do so. Chapter Three begins by addressing the historiography of this lineage.

[120] Christopher Bedford, "The Viral Ontology of Performance," in *Perform, Repeat, Record*, *Live Art in History*, eds. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (Bristol, UK; Chicago, USA: Intellect, The University of Chicago Press, 2012): 86.

CHAPTER THREE
CELEBRITY WORSHIP

As Marina Abramović's retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York neared its conclusion at the end of May 2010, *Artforum* published a trilogy of essays investigating "The Next Act: Issues in Contemporary Performance." In one of these articles performance art scholar Carrie Lambert-Beatty identified Abramović as "a brilliant artist, an electrifying performer and an art-historical legend," yet questioned why must she be "both martyr and superstar as well?"[1] MoMA's wall text, press release and website emphasized Abramović's nearly three-month residency in the museum's atrium. Confounded by the museum's insistent promotion of Abramović's physical presence during its open hours, Lambert-Beatty inquired, "Why? Why would it matter if we saw her walk into the room and sit down at the table? All it could possibly do is make her seem like an ordinary human."[2] Acknowledging that poignant moments likely transpired between the artist and the strangers who sat with her, Lambert-Beatty nevertheless problematized Abramović's limelight concluding that from the sidelines, it appeared "performance art is entering the Museum of Modern Art in the form of unabashed celebrity worship."[3] Chapter Three interrogates the basis of this claim.

Celebrity worship is not a new phenomenon in the art world, but the issue has become glaring in twenty-first century performance art criticism and art history.

---

[1] Carrie Lambert-Beatty, "Against Performance Art," *Artforum* 48 (May 2010): 212. The other two essays comprising "The Next Act: Issues in Contemporary Performance" include Caroline A. Jones, "Staged Presence," 214-219; and Joe Scanlan, "Fair Use: An Artist's Project," 220-221.

[2] Lambert-Beatty, 212.

[3] Ibid.

Performance involves a live act, which, by the very science of its existence, can be also recorded and *re*-performed; significantly, performance opens itself more completely to the presence of an audience who witnesses its genesis. In the previous chapter, I argued that Marina Abramović's rapport with those who attended *House with the Ocean View* (2002), *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005) and *The Artist is Present* (2010) aligns closely with the concept of intimate strangerhood and the *It*-effect. My analysis of fan and celebrity subculture argued that the telescope included in *House with the Ocean View* and *Seven Easy Pieces* was a key iconographic component; this device magnified the artist's image while also narrowing it, helping to cultivate the sensation of Abramović as simultaneously close and far. The ever-present documentary lens of photographer Marco Anelli and filmmakers Matthew Akers and Juff Dupre during *The Artist is Present* likewise elicited a tailored point of view. Their documentation of the exhibition highlighted Abramović's role as mirror, underpinning the notion that a celebrity's persona often reflects the needs and desires of those who "worship" his or her image. In Chapter Three, I expand on ways that the audience has been integral to establishing Abramović's celebrity. Those who admire, observe, critique and participate in the experience of her performances author this status collectively.

Undeniably, Marina Abramović is an excellent brand manager. To understand more fully her executive identity, Abramović's position at the helm of her thriving practice must also be analyzed through the personal, subjective interactions she shares with the spectators and participants who attend her exhibitions. Belgrade-born art historian Jovana Stokić has interpreted Abramović's durational performances as instrumental in the way in which the artist "performs the gallery" by activating its

physical space, a premise this chapter's argument builds on and from which it simultaneously diverges.[4] Whereas I am interested in how the audience interacts with Abramović, Stokić's concern is primarily with the use of time as a transformative context and/or quality in the gallery/museum space. I shall contend that Abramović's daily physical presence in MoMA's atrium also set a new precedent for how an artist might "perform the studio," or lay bare the physical process of making a performance.

In the following pages, I examine how and why "seeing" and sensing the presence of a performer—however near or far away he or she may be—is integral to the act of celebrity worship. Re-conceptualizing the public space of MoMA's atrium specifically as an expansion of the artist's studio allows me to navigate Abramović's process of making performance art through the lens of another recurring iconographic element in her *oeuvre*—the kitchen. As a domestic space typically gendered female, the kitchen is at once a site of creativity, ritual, transformation and nourishment; feminist artists such as Miriam Shapiro and Judy Chicago's Womanhouse group and Martha Rosler have quite explicitly equated the mythology of the housewife with that of the artist.[5] Although

---

[4] Jovana Stokić titled her public conversation with Marina Abramović at Location One in New York City (October 27, 2009), "Performing the Gallery/Performing the Museum." In her dialogue with Abramović, Stokić does not expand on the idea of "performing the gallery" beyond a few basic statements and, to my knowledge, has not published further on this concept, although it certainly deserves attention. Dominated by Abramović's discussion of a performance art exhibition that she organized at the Manchester Whitworth Art Gallery (discussed in Chapter Five), the recorded talk at Location One can be viewed in full on line, http://www.location1.org/abramovic-studio/ (accessed Dec. 15, 2013).

[5] Brian Winkenweder, "The Kitchen as Art Studio: Gender, Performance, and Domestic Aesthetics," *The Studio Reader, On the Space of Artists*, ed. Mary Jane Jacob and Michelle Grabner (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2010): 241. My ideas regarding the kitchen as metaphor for the studio are exploratory rather than didactic. Winkenweder, who discusses a range of works including Ilya Kabalov's *Kitchen Series* and Martha Rosler's *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975), among others, suggested that, "Women artists, when referencing kitchens in their work, contest the uneven distribution of domestic labor along gendered lines, whereas male artists more often extol the site as a zone of artistry and elide its gendered implications." See page 247 for the latter citation. Rosler's six minute performance, *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, is available on YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zSA9Rm2PZA (accessed Dec. 15, 2013).

Abramović fasted for the duration of her performance each day in MoMA's atrium, as well as during her premiere at the Guggenheim and Sean Kelly's gallery, the kitchen, as a communal site of exchange, productivity and consumption, can nevertheless be used as an allegorical framework to reposition Abramović's relationship with participants. While currently the artist maintains two office spaces in New York City,[6] in order to account for the many anonymous individuals who are liable for the success and scope of her recent performances, the studio, in her case, must be re-conceptualized as a generative space the artist shares with others.

To corroborate the arguments I have outlined here, Abramović's recent performances must be located in two distinct lineages: live, time-based durational performance and the more recent genre of "re-performance."[7] While it is not my intent to rehearse the histories of these two sub-genres, I mine these lineages, leveraging specific intersections to evidence the construction of Abramović's celebrity as occurring over time and through an interactive process. I invoke comparisons between Abramović and two male performance artists, Taiwanese born Tehching Hsieh (pronounced "dur-ching shay") and west coast practitioner Chris Burden, in order to irradiate not only widely discussed issues in performance art's history (e.g. the presence/absence binary), but also understudied ones, including the role of the studio and how sensorial perception operates

[6] See Charles Atlas' interview with Abramović, "Marina Abramović," *The Lab Magazine*, July 9, 2013. Photography by Justin Tyler Close, http://thelabmagazine.com/2013/07/09/marina-abramovic/ (accessed Feb. 18, 2014).

[7] Amelia Jones has meticulously cataloged a "Timeline of Ideas: Live Art in (Art) History, A Primarily European-US-based Trajectory of Debates and Exhibitions Relating to Performance Documentation and Re-Enactments," in *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, ed. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (Bristol, UK; Chicago, USA: Intellect, The University of Chicago Press, 2012): 425-432. Citations from other essays in this compendium will be abbreviated hereafter as appearing in *Perform, Repeat, Record.* On the topic of re-performance, see also Sven Lütticken, ed., *Life, Once More: Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art* (Rotterdam: Witte De With, Center for Contemporary Art, 2005).

during a live art event. In the final pages of this chapter, I apply revised interpretations of Walter Benjamin's concept of aura, first defined in his iconic 1936 thesis, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Whereas in traditional readings of Benjamin's essay, Abramović's aura would have been diminished through the very act of re-production, I seek to show how "copies" of her work—the photographs and re-performances documenting it—function to increase, not decrease, the perception of her celebrity. My discussion of the lesser-known artist Tehching Hsieh, whom Abramović lauds as her hero, provides a springboard for these ideas.

TIME AS CONTEXT

The obvious should be emphasized here at the outset: Tehching Hsieh, while an admired cult figure, is the antithesis of an art star. Having consciously denied access to his work and his persona, Hsieh is a marginal figure at best, venerated by a far narrower fan-base than Abramović. Born in Taiwan in 1950, Hsieh arrived in America as an illegal alien in 1974. Renowned for his enigmatic sequence of one-year performances in New York City, Hsieh's practice has consistently utilized the passage of time as its primary context.

Often used interchangeably, the terms "duration" and "endurance" in their adjective forms both denote persistent presence through time; subtle but substantial distinctions differentiate the two kinds of performance they describe. Durational performances generally differ from endurance works in that the latter implicates both physical duress and heroic suffering, e.g. athletic fortitude or a martyr's resolve.[8] *Shoot*

[8] Conceptual durational projects, such as New York City-based Japanese artist On Kawara's *Today Series*, do not require physical stamina. Begun in 1966 and continuing through today, for the *Today Series*, Kawara paints the day's date in white font on a solid background; ideally, one canvas should be produced each day, although that is not always the case. See Adrian Heathfield, "Impress of Time," in Heathfield and Tehching

(1971), for example, in which Chris Burden had himself shot in the arm, required that the artist endure pain, yet the event was not durational; it transpired rapidly, concluding almost as quickly as it began [Fig. 56]. Epic durational works, however, also often demand physical tenacity and unflinching discipline, the kind Abramović exhibited at MoMA, for which she trained rigorously. Abramović spent six weeks at a yoga retreat in Goa, India; adopted a vegetarian diet; and learned to control her bodily functions so that she could sit for up to ten hours without urinating.[9]

Championing Hsieh as the master of long-duration performance art, Abramović has stated, "If I talk about performance … I start with him."[10] Begun in the 1970s and collectively known as his *Lifeworks*, the first long-duration work Hsieh performed was *Cage Piece* (1978-79), in which he locked himself alone in a cell for an entire year, allowing only infrequent visitors [Fig. 57].[11] In *Time Clock Piece* (1980-81), Hsieh

---

Hsieh, *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh* (Live Art Development Agency, London; The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA: 2009): 22-23. Citations from other essays in this text will hereafter be abbreviated as *Out of Now*.

[9] Jennifer Fisher, "Proprioceptive Friction: Waiting in Line to Sit with Marina Abramović," *The Senses and Society,* 7 (July 2002): 162. Various online rumors speculated as to how Abramović was able to sit for such a long time without urinating. For a sampling of these see, "The Mysterious Location of Marina Abramović's Pee," *Art Fag City*, May 10, 2010, http://www.artfagcity.com/2010/05/10/the-mysterious-location-of-marina-abramoviks-pee/, which directs readers to various hypothesis suggested by Mira Schor, among others. Abramović put the rumors to rest once and for all on June 2, 2010, just days after the exhibition closed. At the MoMA symposium titled, "Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present: The Legacy of Performance," Abramović confessed that there was in fact a small hole in her chair. After three days, however, she realized that she would never use it—"I never had the urge to pee," she stated—and so she sat on a pillow instead. The symposium was recorded live and can be accessed online, http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/7401378 (accessed Jan. 20, 2013).

[10] Marina Abramović, "When Time Becomes Form," *Out of Now,* 352.

[11] Tehching Hsieh and Adrian Heathfield, "I Just Go in Life," *Perform, Repeat, Record,* 459. Audience members could visit Hsieh every three weeks, for a total of nineteen days the entire year. On a daily basis, however, Hsieh's friend Cheng Wei Kuong, was responsible for supplying food, clothing and removing waste from Hsieh's cage. Heathfield has interpreted the relationship between Kuong and Hsieh not as collaborative per se, but rather as a kind of "bondage," a metaphorical state of being "caged" during which these two subjects were contractually tied to one another for an entire year; see Heathfield, "Impress of Time," *Out of Now,* 29.

punched a time clock every hour on the hour for one year, documenting each instance with a photograph [Fig. 58]. In *Outdoor Piece* (1981-82), he spent twelve months entirely outside, never entering a building or vehicle of any kind [Fig. 59]. And for *Rope Piece*, an eight-foot rope tethered Hsieh and performance artist Linda Montano to one another continuously for one year between July 4th, 1983 and July 4th, 1984 [Fig. 60]. Abramović, and approximately forty other people, were present when Hsieh and Montano ceremoniously cut the rope as the performance concluded.[12]

Hsieh's menu of *One Year Performances* required that he enact his work outside the art gallery system.[13] Many of the constituents mandated erasure from both public life and the constraints of a traditional studio. For his fifth one-year performance, *No Art Piece*, for example, Hsieh abstained from entering art galleries or museums, talking about or making art from July 1st, 1985 to July 1st, 1986. This was followed by an even more extreme avowal, his *Thirteen Year Plan* for which he stipulated that, despite making art, he would not exhibit it between December 31st, 1986 and December 31st, 1999.

As curator Adrian Heathfield asserts, by blurring art and life in extreme ways, Hsieh's *Lifeworks* have been paradigmatically uneventful. His exceptionally long-term durational performances deceive the notion of "event-ness," an integral aspect to such performances as *Shoot*. Despite the fact that self-sacrifice—the proverbial tightening of one's belt—should, per traditional economic models, lead to gain, aesthetic duration such as Hsieh's "is a wasteful form of labor," Heathfield suggests.[14] Rather, Hsieh's work can

[12] Abramović, "When Time Becomes Form," 351.

[13] Heathfield, "Impress of Time," 13.

[14] Ibid., 22-23.

be aligned with an "ethic of slowness," in which the synapses between intent and effect, act and representation, passage and reception, are slowed or stalled.[15]

Although meticulous documents chronicle his work, Hsieh's story is a difficult one to reclaim, animate and launch into the present.[16] The duration of his performances has made a relationship with audience not only impractical but also obsolete. If an audience was present, he confessed to avoiding eye contact with any of its members.[17] "To get the message of my art … an audience's presence is not vital," he states.[18] "As long as audiences know my concept and the real action I did, they can use their own experiences and imagination to feel these artworks."[19] In counterpoint, eye contact, visibility and direct connection with her audience have been key elements in Marina Abramović's three major durational performances since 2000. Reflecting on the importance of spectators in *The Artist is Present*, *Seven Easy Pieces* and *House with the Ocean View*, in 2012 she explained,

> In my experience, as developed in a career of over 40 years, I have arrived at the conclusion that the public plays a very important and indeed critical role in performance. The performance has no meaning without the public because, as Duchamp said, it is the public that completes the work of art. In the case of performance, I would say that the public and performer are not only complementary, but almost inseparable."[20]

---

[15] Pamela M. Lee as cited in Heathfield, "Impress of Time," 23. See Lee's extensive study of time in art of the 1960s, *Chronophobia* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004): 307.

[16] Hsieh and Heathfield, "I Just Go in Life," *Perform, Repeat, Record*, 458-459. Word of mouth was the primary way in which the art world knew of Hsieh, as most of the documents that record his work were published twenty years after he made the performances.

[17] Ibid., 460.

[18] Ibid., 458.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Abramović made her statement specifically with regard to these three works. Quoted in the press release for *Marina Abramović, The Abramović Method*, on view at the Contemporary Art Pavilion Milan (PAC Milan) from March 21st to June 10th, 2012**.** Accessible online, http://theAbramovićmethod.it/it/english/

Throughout her New York City trilogy, Abramović consummated this close relationship between herself and the audience by enacting her work over an extended period of time. Her admiration for Hsieh's work is reflected in her goal to redefine the pace and environment within which audiences experience durational performance. Currently in its planning phase, the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI) in Hudson, New York, when completed, will be dedicated to showcasing and preserving long durational performance art. An unmistakable self-tribute to her legacy, MAI is a foundational facet of Abramović's artistic brand, celebrity and executive identity; this issue shapes my arguments in Chapter Five, but I want to call attention here to the Institute's guiding principle, "By slowing down, or lengthening, or repeating actions normally unexamined, a long durational work encourages both its performers and audience to step outside of traditional conceptions of time and examine what this experience means to them."[21] The effect MAI hopes to channel hinges, in other words, on the "ethic of slowness."

As a cult figure lionized by a handful of people, Hsieh would not be considered a celebrity in any popular sense, yet the shadowy presence of his "uneventful" practice has arguably been made more visible via Abramović's own recent actions and praise for his career. When some critics inaccurately referred to *The Artist is Present* as the longest durational work on record, Hsieh's name surfaced in the press since he actually holds claim to that particular distinction. Inadvertently perhaps, Abramović helped recuperate his legacy; as Isabelle Graw has defined in regard to other cult figures, Abramović and

---

(accessed Dec. 12, 2012).

[21] See MAI's mission statement, http://www.marinaabramovicinstitute.org/mission/long-durational-work (accessed November 30, 2013).

Hsieh symbiotically animate the "artist's artist" liaison.[22] As the phrase suggests, the "artist's artist" relationship is based on peer recognition, not commercial success. Citing André Cadere, the Polish-born artist-nomad known for entering galleries with his walking sticks—poles now enshrined at MoMA—Graw has argued that such iconic, yet marginalized, figures are "well suited to retrospective transfiguration" because of the way their work has emphasized performativity.[23] Instead of striving for marketable practices, cult figures such as Cadere and Heish opt for a practice "sustained by throwing themselves wholeheartedly into their work." This, in turn, Graw suggests, "charges their objects with performative energy."[24]

Significantly, *The Artist is Present* was staged at MoMA less than two years after the collapse of the Lehman Brothers brokerage in September of 2008, an event that signaled the start of a worldwide economic recession. Although plummeting sales in the art world pointed to the fact that the international art market bubble was bursting, this crisis in confidence led institutions at all levels to diversify their rosters and identify "artist's artists" who "would never appear in the rankings published by success-fixated art and lifestyle magazines."[25] Abramović acknowledged her awareness of such an effect, stating, "Every time when performers have disappeared and reappeared again, it's

[22] Isabelle Graw, *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture*, trans. Nicholas Grindell (Köln, Germany: Sternberg Press, 2009): 82.

[23] Ibid., 83.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 85. Graw considers neither Abramović nor Hsieh in her study, and my contention here differs from hers, especially in that she suggests promoting an "artist's artist" during an upturn in the market likewise allows institutions to differentiate themselves.

always when an economic crisis has happened."[26] Market instability can in fact promote the relevance of once ostracized, underground artists, allowing them to become germane figures whose newly found pertinence most critics can agree on.[27] This process exposes the art world's capacity to transform symbolic value into market worth—a key facet of celebrity to which I return in the conclusion of this chapter.

Indeed, after the millennium, Tehching Hsieh began to exhibit the documents and artifacts that cataloged his previously seemingly invisible practice. In October of 2009, Sean Kelly announced that, like Marina Abramović (whom he has represented since 1995), his New York City gallery would also represent Hsieh. The cell from *Cage Piece* was exhibited at MoMA in 2009 as part of the museum's inaugural exhibition in a series devoted to performance art; the following year, Abramović would take her seat as the series' leading lady.

THE ROLE OF THE STUDIO

Considering the reclusive nature and extensive scope of Hsieh's practice, I want to speculate that it would have been difficult for Allan Kaprow, founder of the late 1950s/early 1960s Happenings movement, to foresee such performances as his when Kaprow predicted in 1958,

> [Artists] must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life, either our bodies, clothes, rooms, or, if need be, the vastness of Forty-second street … artists of today need no longer say, 'I am a painter' or 'a poet' or 'a dancer.' They are simply artists. All of life will be open to them. They will discover out of ordinary things the meaning of ordinariness. They will not try to make them

[26] See the extensive interview with Abramović by Jesse Pearson and Richard Kern (portraits by Kern), "Marina Abramović," *VICE*, October 31, 2010, http://www.vice.com/read/marina-abramovic-599-v17n11 (accessed Jan. 10, 2014). Although Abramović frequently appears nude in her performances, it is unusual that, in this photo shoot, she appears topless bathing in a river although she is not performing.

[27] Graw, 87.

> extraordinary but will only state their real meaning. But out of nothing they will devise the extraordinary and then maybe nothingness as well.[28]

Kaprow's sage prognostication implies the impending obsolescence of the traditional artist's studio as a confined physical space. Beginning with the Happenings movement and continuing throughout the 1960s and '70s, as Pop and performance art proliferated, artists who renounced the studio as a private, patriarchal locus of invention initiated a dialectical tension between the "performance" of "art" and celebrity worship in one critically specific way—by granting audiences unprecedented access to an artist's persona and the ephemeral process of making art. The situation Abramović devised for her MoMA debut—sitting in a chair day after day—revealed the corporeal and exhausting process of "making" a performance. MoMA's public atrium became an expanded studio including both her and the audience.

Amelia Jones illustrated the meaning of the studio as an active, performative space in her discussion of what she referred to as the "Pollockian Performative." This involved a sense of theatricality captured by Hans Namuth in his famous photographs of Abstract Expressionist painter Jackson Pollock at work in his studio.[29] Characterizing the art historian or critic as a "priest" who transmits the artist's "transcendence," Amelia Jones noted, for example, that Barbara Rose's 1980 account of Namuth's photography is

---

[28] Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," *Essays on the Burning of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993): 7, 9; originally published in *Artnews* 57 (October, 1958): 22-26, 55-57

[29] Amelia Jones, *Body Art / Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998): 62-63. Abramović has stated, "I really love Pollock. His energy seems to me, looking now, nervous and confused, even though he was very close to performance, with his bodily involvement in paintings." Janet A. Kaplan, "Deeper and Deeper: Interview with Marina Abramović," *Art Journal* 58 (Summer, 1999): 16 (hereafter "Deeper and Deeper").

saturated with "adulatory and hero-worshipping" language.[30] "The secrecy and mystery of the creative act," Rose wrote, was "laid bare for all to see … the public at large became witness to the sacred rites to which they never before had been admitted."[31] Describing the revealing nature of Namuth's intimate photographs, Rose had recognized that the "conversion of reality into myth, the essence of media culture, began with Namuth's documentation of Pollock painting."[32]

After the heyday of Abstract Expressionism, the "preset spatial ontology" of the Romantic studio began to dissolve;[33] consequently, the art historian and critic's role as a translator of the activities occurring in the studio also diminished. Audience involvement became a prime conduit for establishing the meaning of an artist's work, and also in determining how his or her persona might be publically received. In the late 1960s Conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner, for example, claimed "art" should be defined not by its construction, but rather its reception. "The decision as to condition," Weiner declared, rests "with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership."[34] Concurrently, prominent Earthworks artists, including Robert Smithson, had begun to intervene directly into the American landscape. A prolific writer, Smithson never personally used the term "post-studio" to describe his Land Art monuments, yet along with Daniel Buren, he emerged as

---

[30] Jones, *Body Art / Performing the Subject*, 63.

[31] Many of Namuth's photographs of Pollock at work are compiled in *Pollock: Painting*, ed. Barbara Rose (Paris: Marcula/Pierre Brochet, 1978 [1980]). My citations of Rose are drawn from her introduction to this text, which does not include page numbers. See also Amelia Jones, *Body Art,* 63.

[32] Rose, *Pollock: Painting*, n.p.

[33] Wouter Davidts and Kim Paice, "Introduction," *The Fall of the Studio: Artists at Work*, Wouter Davidts and Kim Paice, eds. (Valiz, Amsterdam: Antennae, 2009): 4.

[34] Lawrence Weiner as quoted in Alexander Alberro, "Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1977," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999): xvii. See also Davidts and Paice, 5.

a leading exemplar of the decentered, mobile art-making strategies that defined this kind of practice—its "*peripheral* and *peripatetic* productivity"—as Caroline Jones would later describe Smithson's work and his writing.[35]

In the hyper-connected twenty-first century, established models for post-studio practice suffice even less to provide a proper explanation of Abramović's collaborative endeavors and audience-based work. Rife with implications for my thesis, Abramović has repeatedly expressed disdain for so-called orthodox studio concepts, avowing on one occasion that "Going to the studio every day is a really bad habit, it's like being an employee. You have to live life and from life comes ideas."[36] While her refusal to equate an artist's work ethic with that of a mere "employee" appears to contradict basic tenets of her communist upbringing, her assertion, "you have to live life and from life comes ideas," articulates a socially engaged, as well as performative approach to art making. It also recalls the attitude of 1990s relational artists who rejected the private studio and instead used public interactions as both the context and content of their work. There is no better example of this idea than Rirkrit Tiravanija's *Untitled (Free)* of 1992, for which the artist set-up a makeshift kitchen in the storeroom of 303 Gallery in New York City,

[35] Caroline Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 270. Widely considered the founder of the Earthworks movement, Robert Smithson's practice was likely first referred to as "post-studio" by Lawrence Alloway in his description of *Spiral Jetty* (1970). See Alloway, "Robert Smithson's Development," *Artforum* 11 (November 1972): 59; and Jones, *Machine in the Studio,* 271. Davidts and Paice (7) point out that John Baldessari also used the term "post-studio" early in the 1970s to describe a course he taught at the California Institute of Art, Valencia.

[36] Julie L. Belcove, "High Performance," *W Magazine* (January 2010): 81.

cleared out the main gallery space, and served curry and rice to whoever might drop by the gallery.[37] His "artwork" was the creation of a platform for human interaction.

Although relatively unremarked by scholars, Marina Abramović has qualified the theme of the kitchen as prominent in her work; as such it can be used to situate Abramović's "studio" as a personal space into which she invites her audience.[38] It is important, however, to distinguish the fact that my use of the term studio here does not focus on the organizational structure of Abramović's practice, which involves various assistants. Rather, my concern is with Abramović's image in the public realm. As she has clarified, "I don't have a studio – I have an office. This office is a place where I can talk with people from different disciplines. This is a social space from which many types of projects are born."[39] Although I use the term "studio" as a metaphorical framework, the literal meaning of the studio as the place where an artist actually makes work provides a more thorough understanding of Abramović's relationship to her audience.

In a tellingly illustrated article published by *The Economist* just a few months after *The Artist is Present*, a snapshot was included that depicts Abramović in her kitchen at home in upstate New York, chopping "tomatoes from her garden" to make gazpacho, a

[37] Since 1992, Triavanija's project has been restaged several times, most recently at MoMA in 2011. Needless to say, re-creating the work in an institutional environment such as MoMA robbed this piece of a certain spontaneity, which as some have argued, was also absent (in that it was contrived) in the original. For a critique of this work and the problems of relational aesthetics more broadly, see Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October*, 110 (Fall 2004): 51-79.

[38] In a video diary made for the occasion of the opening of "Marina Abramović – The Kitchen: Homage to Saint Therese de Avila" at La Fábrica Galleria in Madrid in 2009, Abramović acknowledged the kitchen as "another great theme." Accessible on line, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37GtB4hMINY (accessed Dec. 15, 2013).

[39] Marina Abramović, email response to the author, Feb. 18, 2014.

traditional, home-style Spanish soup [Fig. 61].[40] Vehemently censuring the function of the studio, Abramović refers to this soup and goes even further in her analogy between art-making and everyday activities. "I hate [the] studio," she said. "For me, [the] studio is a trap to overproduce and repeat yourself. It is a habit that leads to art pollution. […] Ideas can come anywhere, anytime, while I am making this gazpacho or going to the bathroom."[41] Recently, Abramović reiterated this belief, further explaining how "the studio for me is life itself, wherever I am, from hotel rooms to the jungles of Brazil."[42] In a formal portrait printed to accompany her interview with David Ebony in *Art in America* one year prior, Abramović had likewise been shown engrossed in a ritualistic domestic task; against the backdrop of a spare wooden structure, in *Portrait with Potatoes* (2008), the artist is seen methodically peeling a pile of spuds, her countenance implying a quiet but enticing solitude [Fig. 62].[43]

As the selection of such press images suggests, for Abramović, the kitchen, while not necessarily a social space *per se*, is certainly one into which she invites the presence of her viewers. Significantly, the kitchen is the domain of an ordinary housewife; nearly all women, and today, also most men, have a distinct experience of what it means to perform the menial task of working in a kitchen. Like many of Abramović's

---

[40] "The Artist was Here, Marina Abramović on the aches and pains of performance," *The Economist*, Sept. 10, 2010, http://www.economist.com/node/17036088 (accessed Feb. 12, 2012). Except for special contributions, *The Economist* neither identifies nor prints the bylines of its regular authors and columnists.

[41] Ibid. Abramović has reiterated this on several occasions, including in an interview conducted at her home with the actor James Franco, who is also her friend. In "James Franco Interviews Artist Marina Abramović / Dec. 3, 2009," Abramović stated, "Studio is the trap. Studio is the worst place where artist should never be. The art comes from life not from studio." This interview is accessible on YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eugnrk8Nfi0&feature=player_embedded, June 15, 2011.

[42] Marina Abramović, email to the author, Feb. 18, 2014.

[43] David Ebony, "Marina Abramović: An Interview," *Art in America* 5 (May 2009): 113.

performances, kitchen work demands repetitive forms of labor, the fruits of which are consumed soon after or as they appear.

The importance of the kitchen theme in Abramović's work is further highlighted considering that the warmth and safety she associated with this space in her maternal grandmother's home; it has remained one of her earliest, most enduring childhood memories.[44] Admittedly, throughout her nomadic travels with Ulay in the 1980s Abramović rarely cooked or spent time in a kitchen.[45] But, by the late 1990s as she was reclaiming her solo career, the iconography of the kitchen began to appear as quite literally crucial to her work.

In the multi-media text installation *Spirit Cooking* (1997), Abramović evoked the act of "cooking" as a cryptic, spiritual process [Fig. 63].[46] Originally installed at the Associazione per l'Arte Contemporanea in Zerynthia, Italy, this work consisted of enigmatically violent recipe instructions painted in pig's blood on the gallery's white walls: "Spin around until you lose consciousne (*sic*), try to eat all the questions of the day / With a sharp knife cut deeply into the middle finger of your left hand, eat the pain."[47]

---

[44] Until the age of six, Abramović was raised almost exclusively by her maternal grandmother. James Westcott has described Marina's fondness for her culinary and religious rituals as "a great source of stability for the vulnerable child. See Westcott, *When Marina Abramović Dies, A Biography* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2010): 13.

[45] Abramović comments on this point specifically in a short video essay produced to accompany her exhibition, *The Kitchen: Homage to St. Theresa* at La Fábrica Galleria in Madrid in 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37GtB4hMINY (accessed Dec. 15, 2013).

[46] Documented in Marina Abramović, *Performing Body* (Milan: Charta, 1998): 32-39, ten minutes of this installation at Associazione per l'Arte Contemporane in Zerynthia can be viewed on YouTube and ArtFem.TV, http://www.artfem.tv/id;5/action;showpage/page_type;video/page_id;spirit_cooking_by_marina_abramovic_flv/ (accessed December 15, 2013). Since the late 1990s, the original installation of Abramović's *Spirit Cooking* recipes has been edited and packaged in various ways, with numerous editions appearing as prints and artist's books.

[47] Abramović, *Performing Body*, 34.

The dripping letters of this textual installation confer a particularly eerie mood of martyrdom on the work. Abandoning the raw, pagan tone associated with the act of "cooking" in this earlier installation, ten years later in collaboration with photographer Marco Anelli, Abramović produced a series of self-portraits titled *The Kitchen: Homage to St. Theresa* (2009).[48] In one of the more widely circulated of these, Abramović hovers suspended in midair, her arms outstretched above a neatly arranged, rustic kitchen equipped with empty oversize pots and ladles; clearly, this kitchen is equipped to feed the masses [Fig. 64]. Photographed at an abandoned orphanage in Spain's northern Gijón region, Abramović enacted a pose in this image that references an account from Saint Theresa's diary, where she recorded stories about reaching a state of mind that would allow her to levitate.[49]

For purposes of my argument here, it is significant that, in this series, Abramović selected the kitchen as a specific context through which to sharpen her persona as an otherworldly artist. While in the photograph mentioned above, her outstretched arms suggest the shape of crucifix as she ascends, in another from the series she sits slumped on the floor surrounded by carefully stacked pots and pans [Fig. 65]. Here the kitchen serves Abramović as a direct metaphor for the artist as a contemplative, spiritual being who produces the nourishment that others consume. Significantly, however, in *The Kitchen* series Abramović is not actually engaged in preparing food, marking a clear shift in tone from an earlier and far more visceral performance made for video, *The Onion*

[48] The series is fully documented in Marina Abramović, *The Kitchen*, photographs by Marco Anelli. (Madrid: La Fábrica, 2012).

[49] One of the passages from Saint Theresa's diary that ostensibly inspired Abramović is reprinted in Diego Sileo, "The Phenomenology of Marina Abramović," *The Abramović Method*, v. 1 (Milan: PAC / Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, 2012): 21, n. 7.

(1995), in which Abramović consumed that vegetable bite by bite [Fig. 66]. It is an excruciating process to watch. By the time she is partway through the bulb, tears are streaming down her face and saliva covers her chin, as she chokes back the urge to vomit. The monologue heard in the background acts as her swansong, segments of which should be rehearsed here:

> […] I am tired of more career decisions: museums and gallery openings, endless receptions, standing around with a glass of water in my hand, pretending that I am interested in conversation. […] I am tired of always falling in love with the wrong man. I am tired of being ashamed of my nose being too big, of my ass being too large, of the war in Yugoslavia. […] I want to go away. Somewhere so far that I am unreachable by telephone, or fax. […][50]

Coupled with the unbearable visual of Abramović eating an onion, the soliloquy is both tender and disarming yet also melodramatic—the artist's tears are literally provoked because she is eating an onion. In *The Onion*, Abramović consciously depicted herself as a suffering woman and artist.

I call on the example of this video work not to suggest a line of continuity regarding food or its consumption as a theme *per se* in Abramović's career, but to provide evidence as to how Abramović sources her life as material for art. *The Onion* is one of seventeen videos made between 1975 and 2002 comprising her *Video Gallery Portraits*, Each of these represents the artist's face in a close-up frame, literally as a shot of her head; this series' inaugural work, *Art Must be Beautiful/Artist Must be Beautiful* (1975), tells of the suite's deeply personal and confessional leitmotif.[51] In the final two

[50] See the full text for "The Onion" in *Marina Abramović: Artist Body: Performances 1969-1998* (Milan: Charta, 1998): 344.

[51] For a brief discussion of Abramović's *Video Gallery Portrait* series, see the last few pages of a chapter devoted to Marina Abramović in Jovana Stokic's "The Body Beautiful: Feminine Self-Representations, 1970-2007," PhD dissertation, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University (May 2009): 146-148. See also Marina Abramović, *The Bridge/El Puente, Marina Abramović*, Exposición Retrospectiva, with texts by

chapters of this dissertation, I will return to the use of biography as central to Abramović's late career performances, but it is important throughout to understand that Abramović's celebrity is enhanced by the fact that the public recognizes her as an artist who has endured hardships—some self-inflicted.

Indeed, a profile piece on Abramović in *Harper's Bazaar* in March of 2012 began with the declaration, "Art is life for Marina Abramović, but it's not always easy."[52] The picture selected to highlight this idea, however, conveys the exact opposite [Fig. 67]. Supine and lounging on a bright purple couch, Abramović wears a flowing white and blood-orange gown with an over-the-top headdress comprising what appears to be a stuffed ostrich. Photographed at her downtown Manhattan townhouse, which she shares with her close friend, *Givenchy* designer Riccardo Tisci, here Abramović embodies the opposite of the prototypical, suffering artist. She basks in the lap of luxury, glamour and outrageous fashion. "I hate kitchens," she is quoted as saying in *Harper's Bazaar*. "I don't understand these enormous American kitchens that take up half the living room and then they just order pizza."[53] While Abramović's statement levels a specific critique of the American lifestyle and "McMansion" craze of building oversized, inefficient homes, it is significant that the columnist misinterpreted her comment as meaning, "Guests at her new house should not expect her to whip up dinner."[54] (Abramović is known to cook for

---

Pablo J. Rico, Marina Abramović, and Thomas Wülffen (Valencia: Consorci de Museus de la Comunitat Valenciana; and Milan: International Distribution, Charta, 1998): 192.

[52] Elisa Lipsky-Karasz, "Once upon a Time," *Harper's Bazaar*, March 2012, http://www.harpersbazaar.com/fashion/fashion-photography/marina-abramovic-interview-0312#slide-1 (accessed June 20, 2012).

[53] Ibid., Abramović as cited in Lipsky-Karasz.

[54] Ibid.

friends and for students who complete her Abramović Method training workshop—a meal of rice and vegetables follows days of fasting.)

The portrayal of Abramović in this issue of an upscale fashion magazine is pitched to reject domesticity as a familial site that is traditionally gendered female. In it Abramović states, "People ask why there are so few female artists who succeed. It's because women are not ready to sacrifice as much as men. Women want a man, they want a family, they want to have children, they want to be loved, and to be an artist. And they can't; it's impossible."[55] I dissect the artist's views on feminism in the next chapter, but it is worth noting here that her comments in this context underscore the fact that her work as an artist occurs outside the privacy of the home; in other words, she "performs the studio"—the actual act of making performances—in the public realm. This, however, is not to say that Abramović was uninterested in performing for the camera during the *Harper's Bazaar* shoot. The two other photographs included in this layout emphasize the meditative stance Abramović conjures in her durational work. In one, statuesque and sculptural, she stares toward the viewer from the balcony of her home; her trademark minimalist aesthetic made plain, the spare surroundings of her abode appear to suggest that no one actually lives within [Fig. 68].

The trope of the kitchen used to understand Abramović's concept of her artistic output as a direct form of nourishment—she as its wellspring—was made dauntingly

[55] Ibid. By the time Abramović sat for this interview with *Harper's Bazaar* she was divorced from her second husband, Italian artist Paolo Carnevari whom she met at a party during the Venice Biennale in 1997. He was thirty-four when they began dating; Abramović was fifty. After living together in Amsterdam the pair moved to New York City in early 2002 and married in a small civil ceremony in 2006. They divorced in 2009. In her youth Abramović was extremely clear about the fact that she felt having children would impede her career as an artist (for details regarding this specifically, see Westcott, 79 and 105). Westcott, however, suggests that had she been young enough, Abramović would have considered having children with Carnevari (301).

clear in another fashion spread featured in the limited edition, high-fashion quarterly journal *Visionaire*. Seated in an iconic pose, Abramović breastfeeds Riccardo Tisci in order to illustrate the relationship between fashion and art [Fig. 69].[56] According to her, she asked Tisci to "Please admit that fashion is inspired by art." When he agreed that it was, she responded, "OK, this is very simple. You are going to lie in my lap wearing a tuxedo and suck my tit because I am the art and you are the fashion."[57] Clearly, in this photograph most specifically with its overtones of the Madonna and Child, Abramović sought to capitalize on her image as a maternal figure whose art feeds others. Composed so as to recall a stylish, contemporary restatement of the Mary breastfeeding Christ, the image is as campy as it is redolent of Abramović's serious interpretation of art as the source of spiritual and creative sustenance.

THE PARA-SOCIAL SPHERE:
JUST WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ SO DIFFERENT, SO APPEALING?[58]

The implicit notion that the artist is a mystical being also aligns Marina Abramović with such European figures as the shamanistic German artist Joseph Beuys, whom she had met decades earlier during her youth in Belgrade, and one of whose signature works she re-created at the Guggenheim in 2005. In an insightful essay

[56] As guest-editor of the 60th edition of *Visionaire* magazine (Summer, 2011), Riccardo Tisci chose the theme of religion as inspiration. Housed in a wooden case, 3,000 limited editions have hard covers and sell for $425.00.

[57] Abramović cited in the online video accompanying the print edition of Lipsky-Karasz's article in *Harper's Bazaar*. See "On Set with Marina Abramović, Otherworldly performance artist unveils her new Manhattan townhouse and speaks on the relationship of fashion and art," http://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/reviews/on-set-with-marina-abramovic-video-1413975536001 (accessed Jan. 1, 2014). See also her full comments about her collaboration with Tisci and its concept as cited on *Visionaire*'s official website, http://www.visionaireworld.com/116-religion (accessed Jan., 12, 2014).

[58] I borrow this subtitle from British artist Richard Hamilton's 1956 collage on paper, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* in the collection of the collection of the Tate Modern.

comparing Beuys and Andy Warhol, the seemingly shallow, self-effacing Pope of Pop, the critic Thomas McEvilley, Abramović and Ulay's friend, noted that in tandem with changing definitions of the studio, stable forms of artistic identity also began unraveling after 1960. McEvilley pointed out that Beuys and Warhol performed their reactions against Abstract Expressionism's so-called metaphysical conceit in dramatically different public ways [Fig. 70].[59] While Beuys embraced the weight and "high seriousness" of European culture, the collective guilt of post-war Germany, and the role of the artist as a redeemer, Warhol celebrated the "high frivolousness" of American consumer culture, appearing to revel in its vacuity.[60] Suggesting that both Warhol and Beuys made "a performance piece for the public eye"[61] out of their respective lives, McEvilley convincingly argued, "each of them affected a costume and public manner that were out of the ordinary and meant to make a point. Each was therefore a Performance artist who was performing on many, perhaps most occasions when he was seen in public."[62] McEvilley's observation that Warhol was in fact "performing" throughout his life lends credence to critic Stephen Koch's argument that, for Warhol, the "dimension of Personhood in himself [was] an exaggerated dimension of Presence."[63] In Chapter Five of this dissertation, I will analyze the relationship between Abramović and Warhol more fully, but Koch's ideas are worth quoting at this point in order to highlight how, well

---

[59] Thomas McEvilley, "Beuys and Warhol: The Poseur's Mantle," *The Triumph of Anti-Art, Conceptual and Performance Art in the Formation of Post-Modernism* (Kingston, New York: McPherson and Company, 2005): 265.

[60] Ibid., 255.

[61] Ibid., 258.

[62] Ibid., 256.

[63] Stephen Koch, *Stargazer: Andy Warhol's World and His Films* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973): 8.

before Abramović, Warhol's celebrity was also premised on the idea of "presence." For this reason, Warhol's fame can serve as a vital precedent in understanding Abramović's effect. Writing in 1973, Koch described,

> In his life and in his art, "Presence" is Warhol's prime theme; he acquired his own spooked undismissable version of it by successfully giving the impression that, for all his delicate charm, he wasn't really a person in the ordinary sense of the word, certainly not a person like the rest of us, who reveals his desires and satisfactions and distastes with every move, for whom the incarnation in the world, the body and face and hands, is animated with whatever sustains one's life and makes it life. Warhol seemed not to have a personality in this sense: Instead, he had a persona; his actions revealed not so much who he was, but *what* he was. He was that phenomenon, Andy Warhol.[64]

Koch's commentary contradicts the shallowness or "absence" that, in so many other historical accounts, has been summoned to define Warhol's persona. Koch's statement that Andy "wasn't really a person in the ordinary sense of the word, certainly not a person like the rest of us" unmistakably articulates a god-like demeanor. Koch's positioning of "presence" as the major theme in Warhol's life and art (whether consciously sought or not) suggests a strong parallel to Marina Abramović, who has actually claimed "presence" as the central tenet in her life and work. Furthermore, Koch's characterization of Warhol supports Abramović's re-conceptualization of the studio as a specifically public space within which she performs her Persona. It is from this perspective that art historian Dobrila Denegri's comment, "it is impossible to understand the art of Marina Abramović without understanding her personality" merits re-visioning.[65] In the second half of this chapter, I shall contend that it is not Abramović's

---

[64] Ibid.

[65] Dobrila Denegri, "Conversation with Marina Abramović," in *Marina Abramović, Performing the Body*, 9.

actual personality with which the audience seeks to make a connection, but rather her celebritized, larger-than-life Persona.

Coined in 1956 by Donald Horton and Richard Wohl with regard to television, the term "para-social" has become central to the lexicon of celebrity studies.[66] Originally defined by an imagined or illusionary personal relationship between a performer and spectators, para-social relationships are premised on the notion that "the celebrity and the fan never actually meet, with the exception of highly conditioned settings" that might include premieres, concerts and press events.[67] Abramović's recent performance art events, although they often take place in galleries and museums, which are relatively more intimate settings, offer just such an opportunity. Notwithstanding her avowal that she relies on the audience to sustain her energy while performing, Abramović "meets" participants through a tightly mediated process akin to highly successful P.R. events. Just like television personalities aim to nurture feelings of kinship with their viewers, and just as novelists seek to secure empathy for their protagonists,[68] so Abramović has sought (particularly in her more recent work) to bond with her onlookers. This pretense of familiarity and closeness is one reason why fans often refer to celebrities by their first

[66] Donald Horton and Richard Wohl, "Mass Communication and Parasocial Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance," *Psychiatry* 19 (1956): 215-29. Reprinted and accessible online in *Particip@tions*, 3 (May 2006), http://www.participations.org/volume%203/issue%201/3_01_hortonwohl.htm (accessed November 23, 2012). Sociologists frequently use the term para-social, but it does not appear in the Oxford English Dictionary.

[67] Chris Rojek, "Introduction," *Celebrity: Critical Concepts in Sociology*, Vol. 1 of 4, ed. Chris Rojek (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2010): 5. Important to note is that despite Horton and Wohl's initial identification of the relationship as between a "spectator" and "performer," contemporary sociologists who study celebrity (e.g. Graeme Turner and Rojek) reference para-social relationships as existing between fans and celebrities.

[68] Robert H. Wicks, *Understanding Audiences: Learning to Use Media Constructively* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers: London; Mahwah, New Jersey, 2001): 167.

names; by all accounts participants who were waiting in line to sit with Marina during *The Artist is Present* did just that.[69]

The scope of para-social relationships grew swiftly with the advent of audio-visual mass communication during the latter twentieth century; historically, psychologists have identified its most extreme forms as indicative of celebrity worship.[70] While at its inception the term "para-social" was coined to reference pejorative, delusory aspects of fan culture—"an impoverished surrogate for 'real' social relations,"[71] as Graeme Turner has described—para-social relationships have begun to compensate for the loss of such traditional communities as the nuclear family.[72] Turner claims that a greater investment in celebrity culture actively promotes new dimensions of public ethos and alternate forums for social exchange.[73] In other words, it can now be argued that para-social bonds are not secondary to "real" social relationships because they actively assist in organizing cultural meaning. This is particularly true in regard to celebrities and specific historic events. The worldwide public outpouring of emotion following Britain's Princess Diana's sudden violent death is a case in point.

---

[69] Ibid. Jennifer Fisher and Mira Schor have each described how tempting it was to call Marina by her first name during her MoMA performance. See Fisher, 165, and Schor, "Looking for Art to Love, MoMA: A Tale of Two Egos," published May 8, 2010, on her blog, *A Year of Positive Thinking*, http://ayearofpositivethinking.com/2010/05/08/looking-for-art-to-love-moma-a-tale-of-two-egos/ (accessed Jan. 20, 2013).

[70] Chris Rojek, "Introduction," 5.

[71] Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity* (SAGE Publications Ltd., London: 2004): 23

[72] Ibid., 6.

[73] Ibid., 92-94. Online interfaces such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or the comment sections following online articles, have replaced interactions once governed by more personal and direct forms of communication.

According to Chris Rojek, the most efficacious para-social relationships do more than entertain.[74] Their purpose is also to inform, a goal Abramović admittedly achieved with her New York City trilogy. The widespread attention given these three performances introduced the genre to mainstream audiences—to people other than art historians and critics. Somewhat similarly, Jackson Pollock (via Hans Namuth) revealed to the American public the hitherto private process of painting in one's studio, although that was not his intention. But, whereas the revelation of Pollock's technique inspired many artists, he never appeared to nurture an intimate relationship with mainstream audiences nor was any conscious role as a teacher suggested or implied. By contrast, within ten years of her break with Ulay, Abramović openly adopted the identity of a pedagogue. In 1999 she stated,

> I have a need to teach. At the point in your life when you've gained so much experience, it's important to be generous to the young generation … I teach them what it is to be an artist, and that it's very important that you really know that you have to take responsibility. I absolutely disagree with artists who say that they are only doing work themselves. I'm sitting in the studio and I don't care. This is total bullshit. The moment you create the work, it's not yours anymore. It's not your property. The artist is a servant to society. You have to have a clear-cut function, and you have to have responsibilities.[75]

Abramović's characterization of an artist as a "servant to society" highlights her belief that teaching students or the general public is not a choice, but a duty. More recently, she clarified that, "as an artist, it was extremely important to create my own body of work and then, at some point, to unconditionally transmit my knowledge to a younger generation of artists and thinkers. These two functions of artist and teacher, in my case,

---

[74] Ibid. 6.

[75] Abramović quoted in Kaplan, "Deeper and Deeper," 15.

happen simultaneously."[76] Following her seven year appointment (1997-2004) as Professor of Performance Art at the Hochschule für Bildende Kunst in Braunschweig, Germany (HBK, or Braunschweig University of Art), Abramović has continued to implement the workshop class for which she is best known, *Cleaning the House*.[77] The thirty-six performers who re-enacted Abramović's performances during *The Artist is Present* underwent this training at the artist's Hudson Valley country home in August 2009.[78] The activities comprising this ritualistic, seven-day physical and spiritual cleanse will form the core of the "The Abramović Method," the guiding principle of the Marina Abramović Institute.

As I explain more thoroughly in Chapter Five, Abramović's concept of legacy is intimately associated with her dual roles as both artist and teacher. "In creating the [Marina Abramović Institute]," she has stated, "I am not compromising my own work in any way. I see the creation of this Institute as an important thing to do as an artist and a teacher. I have to concentrate on my own legacy, but also on creating some kind of structure that the public can participate in."[79] This kind of participatory structure began with her implementation of *Cleaning the House* workshops, in which participants partake in a series of ascetic exercises that resemble Abramović's own performance history.

---

[76] Marina Abramović, email to the author, Feb. 18, 2014.

[77] In 1990-91, Abramović served as a visiting professor at Académie des Beaux-Arts, Paris, France. From 1992-1996, she taught at the Hochschule für Bildende Kunst in Hamburg, Germany. For thorough discussion of Abramović's views on teaching see Marina Abramović and Tania Bruguera, "Conversation," *Art School (Propositions for the 21st Century)*, ed. Steven Henry Madoff (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2009): 177-188.

[78] Judith Thurman reported her observations of this particular workshop in "Walking Through Walls: Marina Abramović's Performance Art," *The New Yorker*, March 8, 2010, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/03/08/100308fa_fact_thurman?currentPage=3 (accessed Jan 9, 2013).

[79] Marina Abramović, email to the author, Feb. 18, 2014.

During these intense performance art tutorials, students abstain from eating and talking; they take long walks in the landscape and find their way out of a forest blindfolded. (The latter activity, Abramović avers, teaches artists to see with their entire bodies, not just with their eyes.) She also asks participants to bathe in ice-cold water; sleep on a hard surface; practice slow breathing and motionlessness; stare into a mirror or one another's eyes; and write their names continuously for an hour, without allowing the pen to lose contact with the paper.

Abramović's relationship with her students undergoing these rigors is documented in *Student Body* (2004), the final edition in a series of three titanic 500-plus page monographic tomes.[80] Transcripts of the extensive interviews between Abramović and *Cleaning the House* workshop participants, as well as more than 300 pages of reproductions of her students' work, reveal a clear focus on the artist's devotion to pedagogy; in *Student Body*, Abramović materializes as a version of the "artist's artist" who steadfastly promotes the activities of a younger generation. Answering her pupils' widely ranging interrogations—"Can art really be taught? What do you think of students who don't become famous? Are your inner problems reflected in your performances?"—Abramović emerges as the performance artist-cum-oracle, freely dispensing wisdom and advice.[81] Her answers are revealing on multiple levels, not least because they seem to

[80] Marina *Abramović, Student Body: Workshops, 1979-2003 / Performances, 1993-2003* (Milan: Charta, 2003). The two other publications in this series include *Marina Abramović: Artist Body: Performances 1969-1998* (Milan: Charta, 1998) and *Marina Abramović: Public Body* (Milan: Edizione Charta, 2001). Published in 1998, *Artist Body* portrays Abramović's identity as the consummate performer before, during and after her collaboration with Ulay; this text examines the status of performance art on both a macro level, as a medium with a developmental history, and on a micro level, regarding Abramović's position therein. In *Public Body* (2001), Ulay's role as a specific longtime collaborator is lessened in lieu of an emphasis on the audience's role in the sculptural installations and transitory objects that Abramović created between 1969 and 2001.

[81] See "Questions and Answers: Marina Abramović and Students," *Student Body*, 15-41.

evince her contempt for success as an intentional goal in an artist's career: "For a true artist, success is not the aim; it is only the side effect."[82] In stark contrast to Andy Warhol, who not only openly sought artistic success but also routinely refused to answer interview questions directly, Abramović appears to reject fame's trappings and eagerly dispenses her answers to these young artists' questions, frequently drawing on specific examples from her own performance art practice. Warhol's typical interview responses demonstrate the opposite approach to the one Abramović seems to take. Some examples of the former include:

> *What is Pop Art trying to say?*
> AW: I don't know.[83]
> (1962)
>
> *How did you get started making movies?*
> AW: Uh … I don't know. What movie did you see last week, Ted? [84]
> (1965)
>
> *What does life mean to you?*
> AW: I don't know. I wish I knew.[85]
> (1975)

---

[82] Ibid., 18. When asked if she was proud to see former students succeed, Abramović responded, "Proud is not even the word. I am more than proud, I am excited and happy for them and I see that all the efforts of teaching do produce their fruits—this is a wonderful feeling for me." The artist also noted, however, that she was "horrified at the idea of being a professor for twenty or thirty years. I am afraid that if I am a professor that long, I may slip into complacency or develop routine habits and lose my enthusiasm." This statement, in particular, foreshadowed Abramović's growing desire to interact with the public at large, not only within the more limited scope of academia.

[83] Warhol cited in "Pop Art? Is it Art? A Revealing Interview with Andy Warhol," *Art Voices,* December, 1962. Reprinted in Kenneth Goldsmith, ed., *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews 1962-1987* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2004): 5.

[84] Warhol cited in David Ehrenstein's "An Interview with Andy Warhol," March 3, 1965, *Film Culture*, Spring 1966. Reprinted in Goldsmith, 65.

[85] Warhol cited in Bess Winakor's interview "Andy Warhol's Life, Loves, Art and Wavemaking," *Chicago Sun-Times*, September 28, 1975. Reprinted in Goldsmith, 222.

In her insightful analysis of Warhol's interview tactics, Reva Wolf identified Warhol's responses like these as not only collaborative, but also as indulging in a creative exercise that allowed him to confuse the roles of interviewer and interviewee.[86] Like Abramović during *The Artist is Present*, Warhol assumed a mirror-like role in such conversations.

As these few examples seek to demonstrate, comparison of Abramović's persona to Warhol's can suggest new ground on which to stake a re-definition of the so-called idea of individual artistic genius. Abramović has even further expanded traditional parameters of the studio, reconfiguring it as a pseudo-archival space in which audience members can emerge as living relics—as both the producers and consumers of her work. Abramović's performative energy and her status as a celebrity resonate in the public realm not only through media reports, but also through the average individuals and stars who attend her performances. This type of social setting was suggested in Warhol's Factory, which could be retrospectively described as a considerably more intimate space than the gallery/museum environments Abramović uses for her performances; generally, visitors to Warhol's Factory knew someone (who knew someone) in the artist's inner circle.

There is nothing immediately exhibiting "genius" nor canonically "artistic" about sitting for three months in the atrium at MoMA (*The Artist is Present*), re-creating the historic works of others (*Seven Easy Pieces*), or fasting for twelve days in an art gallery (*House with the Ocean* View) and yet, Abramović became a celebrity art star for doing just those things. By contrast, Tehching Hsieh's more mundane acts—punching a time clock or wandering the streets of New York City for an entire year—have gone unnoticed by mass audiences precisely because he did not pursue intimacy with them, and, perhaps

[86] Reva Wolf, "Introduction: Through the Looking Glass," in Goldsmith, xvii.

more importantly, he lacked—and was uninterested in—the kind of "image" management she has produced. Abramović's performances since 2000 have articulated patently different approaches than male predecessors to whom she is often compared. Contrasts between Marina Abramović and Chris Burden discussed in the next section of this chapter further advance my argument that Abramović has earned celebrity, Burden notoriety, and Hsieh desires nor achieves either.

FROM A TO B AND BACK AGAIN: ABRAMOVIĆ AND BURDEN'S DURATIONAL WORK

Burden's relationship with Abramović has been strained ever since 1979 when she stayed with him in his Venice, California studio en route to an artists' gathering on the Micronesian island of Ponape.[87] During this visit, Abramović recalls, she spent hours on the phone with Ulay who was in Amsterdam, never offering to pay for the long distance bill she incurred on Burden's dime; later, she says, she "felt terribly guilty about it."[88] Despite Abramović's claim that the awkwardness between herself and Burden had nothing to do with their respective practices,[89] their approaches to presence in an endurance performance remain strikingly different.

As we have seen, like Abramović during her early solo career, Burden garnered publicity for making performances that transpired as quick, violent actions. After *Shoot*, which evoked a direct reference to the Vietnam War, in *Transfixed* (1974) Burden had himself nailed to the hood of a Volkswagen car [Fig 70], a clear reference to martyrdom and specifically the crucifixion. In these, as well as in other performances such as

[87] Westcott, 149-150.

[88] Ibid., 150.

[89] Ibid.

Through the Night Softly (1973), when the artist crawled through broken glass on his belly, Burden intensely challenged his body's physical limits, but only for brief periods of time. To control how others would perceive his performances after they occurred, Burden would carefully select only one dramatic image to represent the entirety of each action.[90] Reproduced as spare historical documents accompanied by text, photographs and recordings of these performances established his public image by alerting the audience to his daring and hazardous approach to making art. Although Abramović's documentation of her own performances has evolved significantly since her early days in Yugoslavia (video, as she has asserted, was a scarce and prized commodity at that time), during the early 1970s her approach echoed Burden's. "I found that the most interesting way to present my work was not to look at the sequences of how the performance developed," she later explained, "but rather to decide which photograph had the energy itself … [I would] show just that one. The photograph then has power itself."[91] This tactic references what Christopher Bedford has argued about Burden's documentation—that it "activates the page as a performative space."[92] In 1973, for example, a *New York Times* article, "He Got Shot—For His Art" illustrated Chris Burden wearing a ski mask [Fig. 72], which he had in fact worn for *You'll Never See my Face in Kansas City*

[90] In his own words, Burden said he would take the photographs "home and study them for a l-o-o-o-ng time. And usually I'd select one image to represent the whole thing." Jan Tumlir, "Jan Tumlir Looks Back at the Shot Heard Around the Art World—Chris Burden's 1971 Performance Piece *Shoot*," *Artforum* (Dec., 2001). Accessible online in the *Artforum* archives, http://artforum.com/inprint/id=1933 (accessed Dec. 1, 2012).

[91] Abramović quoted in Kaplan, 11.

[92] Christopher Bedford, "The Viral Ontology of Performance," *Perform, Repeat, Record*, 82.

(1973).[93] Despite the fact that the *Times* article was about his 1971 performance *Shoot,* when juxtaposed with that particular image, it appeared Burden was, as Cindy Carr has noted, in fact "a threat to society, a criminal."[94] That same year, *Esquire* magazine also celebrated Burden's impudence in a "Man of the Year" themed article titled "Proof that the Seventies Have Begun." Here he was described as a rebel "ready to lay his life on the line" for art's sake.[95]

To a certain extent, the durational work Burden began producing in the early 1970s was actually at odds with this rough-and-tumble bad boy image. Looked at more carefully, his performances of this period exhibit a latent, non-violent aggression characterized by resolute passivity. For his M.F.A. project at The University of California, Irvine, in 1971 (eight years before Tsieh's *One Year Performance* in a cage), Burden sealed himself in a locker measuring two feet high by two feet wide and three feet deep for five consecutive days [Fig. 73].[96] The following year he spent twenty-two days lying naked under white sheets in a bed pushed against a gallery wall, a performance that

---

[93] Peter Plagens, "He Got Shot—For His Art," *The New York Times*, September 2, 1973, D3. For his 1973 performance, *You'll Never See my Face in Kansas City*, Burden donned a ski mask not only during the performance, but also throughout his three-day stay in Kansas City from November 5-7, 1971.

[94] Cindy Carr, *On Edge, Performance at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1993): 19.

[95] "Proof that the Seventies Have Begun," *Esquire* 79 (May, 1973): 163-4. See also Tumlir, who cited Burden's reflection that, "I'll never forget the first I heard of [the *Esquire* story] … I went to a photo store on Pico Boulevard and the guy behind the counter says, 'You're f-a-a-a-mous!' From there, all the magazines picked up on it: *Newsweek, High Times, Penthouse,* whatever." Accessible online in the *Artforum* archives, http://artforum.com/inprint/id=1933 (accessed Dec. 1, 2012).

[96] Until 2007, *Five Day Locker* piece was widely accepted as Burden's first performance. Fred Hoffman, however, has argued that Burden's body was also a central component in *Being Photographed: Looking Out, Looking In*, which predates *Five Day Locker Piece.* It was enacted by Burden early in 1971 at F Space gallery in Santa Ana, CA, where he would later perform *Shoot*. For a full description of this earlier work see Hoffman's preface in *Chris Burden*, ed. John Bewley and Jonty Tarbuck, with essays by Fred Hoffman, Lisa Le Feuvre, Paul Schimmel, Kristine Stiles and Robert Storr (Locus+ Publishing Ltd., Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, 2007): 17-18.

took place at Market Street gallery in the California beach town of Venice [Fig. 74]. *Bed Piece* came about at the invitation of curator Josh Young, who provided Burden with food, water and toilet facilities between February 18th and March 10th, 1972. As the artist has recalled, during *Bed Piece* he could sense "energy, a real electricity going on" between him and his observers; he became, in his own words, "this repulsive magnet."[97]

Performed almost forty years prior to Abramović's *The Artist is Present*, Burden's *Jaizu* (1972) was likewise premised on the concept of an artist receiving visitors in a gallery space [Fig. 75-76]. In Burden's clerical, straightforward description of *Jaizu*, which accompanies a photograph he selected to represent it, he explains:

> Dressed in white and wearing a pair of sunglasses, I sat facing the door. Just inside the door were two cushions and a small box of marijuana cigarettes. Viewers were permitted to enter the room one at a time. They were under the impression that I was observing them, but the sunglasses had been painted black on the back and I was virtually blind. I remained immobile and speechless during the performance. Many people tried to talk to me, one assaulted me and one left sobbing hysterically. The piece was performed on two days for five hours each day.[98]

As this description suggests, Burden designed himself as an object in *Jaizu*; in it, he became the recipient of an unseen gaze, one he could not return. Instead, he lingered, detached and aloof. "We can neither share [the artist's experiences] nor fill them with ourselves," critic Jan Butterfield commented about Burden's art around this time. His work, she observed, exhibited a "curious kind of remove."[99] Howard Singerman likewise

---

[97] Robert Horvitz, "Chris Burden," *Artforum* 14 (May 1976): 25. Horvitz perceptively links his informative account of Burden's early environmental sculptures (which were often susceptible to elements beyond the artist's control) as directly related to the artist's turn toward durational performance.

[98] See the catalog description in *Chris Burden*, 50.

[99] Chris Burden and Jan Butterfield, "Chris Burden: Through the Night Softly," *Arts Magazine* 49 (March 1975): 69. Cited in Howard Singerman, "Chris Burden's Pragmatism," *Chris Burden: A Twenty Year Survey* (Newport Beach, CA: Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1988): 21.

described the power of Burden's work as one "over an audience left out."[100] I want to argue that it was not only the brutal nature that seemed to pervade Burden's most scandalous actions, e.g. *Shoot*, that sculpted his infamous reputation, but also the "remove" that Butterfield and Singerman highlight. Many of Chris Burden's performances, and particularly his endurance work, have brokered "presence" through a calculated distance and sustained unreachability, thus inviting parallels with Marina Abramović .

In *Oh Dracula* (1974) at the Utah Museum of Art in Salt Lake City, for instance, for eight hours on October 7th, 1974, Burden remained cocooned inside a hammock-like swing mounted on the wall in between two paintings with candles burning at each end on the floor below [Fig. 77]. Suspended in the pod, he lay there motionless while the museum was open between 9am and 5pm. The following year, Burden staged *White Light/White Heat* (1975), his longest and most intense endurance performance [Fig. 78]. This required that he live, sleep, and fast on a raised, triangular platform in the corner of the Ronald Feldman Gallery in New York for twenty-two days and nights, lasting from February 8th until March 1st, 1975. That, like Vito Acconci in *Seedbed*, he remained hidden from view—invisible, so to speak—was apparently as frustrating as it was intriguing for his audience. One month after the exhibition closed, the artist relayed to film critic Roger Ebert a visitor's unsettling observation, "He can hear us, and he doesn't answer, but he can't help listening … it's like God."[101] As Kristine Stiles has pointed out,

---

[100] Singerman, 21.

[101] Roger Ebert, "Chris Burden: 'My God are they going to leave me here to die?'" *Chicago Sun Times*, May 25, 1975. Accessible online, http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19750525/PEOPLE/71024001/1023 (accessed Dec. 12, 2012).

while some doubted Burden was truly present at the Ronald Feldman gallery throughout the twenty-two days he claimed to be, Joseph Beuys's earlier *I Like America and America Likes Me* (performed May 23rd- 25th, 1974), escaped such speculation [Fig. 79].[102] This is particularly ironic, Stiles alleges, because Beuys was widely believed to have "lived" continuously for three days with a wild coyote in the René Block Gallery in New York City when, in fact, he left each night after the gallery closed.[103]

Much of the late twentieth century conversation regarding performance art has oscillated around the question of absence versus presence implied in the above examples. In Burden's work of the 1970s, he concealed the self and effaced the other's gaze, whereas Abramović's major durational works—including early performances such as the infamous *Rhythm 0*—have demanded that she actively invest not only in her own presence, but also in her audience being there to observe it. In *Five Day Locker Piece*, *Oh Dracula* and *White Light/White Heat* Burden made himself visually inaccessible; even in *Bed Piece*, he was lying prone on his back in a somatic slumber observers could not penetrate. By contrast, Abramović's staunch assertion of presence has required that she expose herself (often literally) and secure the viewer's gaze. Consider, for example, Burden's didactic, matter of fact description of *Jaizu* mentioned above in comparison to the meditative verse written by an anonymous monk that Abramović reproduced to accompany the concept photographs she chose for the catalog accompanying *The Artist is Present*:

The movement in the middle of silence.
The silence in the middle of a movement.

[102] Kristine Stiles, "Burden of Light," in *Chris Burden*, 25.

[103] Ibid.

At the beginning of my life I travelled a lot.
I kept making trips.
I was restless.
But since I have my temple, the visitors come to see me.
It is fundamental to be openly inclusive in both phases.
It is an all-inclusive principle where even the most tiny things can enter.
You can arrive in a state of mind where you can give oxygen to the people.
You can arrive in a state of mind where you can give oxygen to the people.
Or in the case of art to the viewer.[104]

The final written prompt Abramović issued to her MoMA audience was straight to the point. One declarative sentence displayed to participants lining up in the atrium instructed viewers to partake actively in the performance, stipulating, "Sit silently with the artist for a duration of your choosing." This open invitation contrasted sharply with the severe distance Burden commanded in his works. As Singerman has observed of Burden's relationship with the audience during *White Light/White Heat*, "the more the audience needed Burden … the less Burden needed them."[105] His irreverent, take-the-audience-for-granted approach is most blatant in *Shout Piece* of 1971. Perched atop a suspended platform illuminated by four 500-watt lights, Burden yelled repeatedly, "get the fuck out, get out immediately," as people attempted to enter the gallery. Needless to say, most visitors left quickly.[106]

Although critics and scholars have not analyzed Abramović's later durational work in view of Burden's earlier performances, such a comparison demonstrates that Abramović and Burden can be profiled as stark opposites, emblematic of the absence/presence binary vital to performance art. Both artists have demanded much

[104] *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010): 204. I add parenthesis.

[105] Singerman, 22.

[106] See Burden's description of *Shout Piece* in *Chris Burden*, 204-5.

more of their spectators than just looking, but they approach the role of the audience in profoundly different ways. Applying the concept of proprioception to the artist-spectator relationship present in each artist's work, both Burden and Abramovic's performances solicit a combination of sensorial reactions.

In layman's terms, proprioception refers to a sixth sense that interprets the body's reading of space, mood and ambiance. It is one's feeling that another stands behind, despite not seeing, hearing, smelling or being able to touch that person. Discussing Burden's invisible body in *White Light/White Heat* as perceptible through proprioception, Stiles has suggested that Burden "supplanted viewers' knowledge-by-sight in order to awaken psychophysically felt relations to presence in place, space and time."[107] Citing the fact that some amputees continue to feel pain in an absent limb, Stiles has associated the reflex of proprioception with the viewer's ability to detect that "something was amiss in the gallery" during Burden's performance.[108] By "alerting viewers to unseen conditions in the gallery," *White Light/White Heat*, she claims, prepared Burden's audience "to be more attuned to the surrounding world" and to extreme circumstances, even after leaving the gallery.[109]

Along similar lines, Jennifer Fisher has argued that Abramović's corporeal demeanor during *The Artist is Present* could be sensed not only visually, but also through

---

[107] Stiles, "Burden of Light," *Chris Burden*, 24.

[108] Ibid., 24.

[109] Ibid. As neurobiologist Paul Grobstein described to Stiles, proprioception (which Grobstein refers to as the "I-function") "represents an enormous and continual barrage of incoming information that greatly influences our behavior but that we have little or no direct access to." Kristine Stiles and Paul Grobstein's extensive email correspondence on proprioception is published online, "The Art Historian and Neurobiologist: A Conversation About Proprioception, the 'I-Function,' Body Art, and Story Telling?" *Serendip*, Bryn Mawr University, http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/bb/artneuro/ (accessed on-line, Dec. 14, 2012). Their correspondence began in October of 2005 and continued through March of 2006.

physical staging. Its structure required the audience "to engage (not disengage), to associate (not dissociate) in the real-time performance."[110] While the sensation of participation was paramount in MoMA's atrium, the line between spectators and those actually participating was marked on the floor with in white.

In her analysis, Fisher invokes not only proprioception to explain the performer-spectator relationship in *The Artist is Present*, but also two other aspects of the haptic continuum, tangibility and the kinesthetic sense, the impulse that detects weight, body posture and muscle movement.[111] Referred to as "sensorial aesthetics,"[112] the haptic continuum could also be described as an "aesthetic of presence." Sitters opposite Abramović would have perceived tangibility and, in Fisher's words, "the contiguity of touch" through the surface of the hard, wooden modernist chair "still warm from the previous sitter."[113] Likewise, the sitter's awareness of both Abramović and his/her own posture would have been activated by kinesthetic consciousness. Relevant to my study's concern with celebrity worship, Fisher contextualizes the haptic continuum in Abramović's performance as *darshan*, likening the experience to an Indian spiritual tradition that denotes the "ritual of seeing the divine in persons, animals, rivers, rocks or places where mythic events have occurred."[114] This is aesthetically significant because

[110] Fisher, 159.

[111] Ibid.

[112] For further reading, see *The Senses in Performance*, ed. Sally Banes and André Lepecki (New York: Routledge, 2007).

[113] Fisher, 159.

[114] Ibid., 160

darshan connotes "dialectic vision: the beholder *sees* and at the same time *is seen*."[115] Such a framework not only positions Abramović differently from Burden, it sets her up as a guru or modern-day deity, problematic because of the profound narcissism such a status implies. The analogy requires further analysis.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND FALSE GODS

Fisher's remark regarding Abramović's potential to become an idol reflects Carrie Lambert-Beatty's charge that *The Artist is Present* indulged her penchant for a certain form of celebrity worship. Concepts and words used to describe theological figures and themes—worship, icon, legend, divinity, god/goddess, sin, fall, rise and salvation—are often likewise employed to characterize celebrity life.[116] Despite the implication here that fame represents a distinct type of religious devotion, many cultural critics agree that the two have little in common. Religions are typically serious, dictate morality, and can be used as a tool to plumb the depths of the communal or individual psyche. Celebrity culture, on the other hand, is fickle, morally ambivalent and certainly not transcendent. In order to distinguish between celebrity and religion, theologian Pete Ward has referred to celebrity culture as a "para-religion" in which "celebrities are sacred figures that reflect versions of our own selves, painted as divine."[117] In other words, "para" or "pseudo" religions are similar to, but also outside the realm of, and not exactly like "real" religions.

In her writings on performance art, Peggy Phelan has suggested situations that mirror Ward's description of para-religions. "Performance spectacle," she states, "is

---

[115] Ibid., 160-161.

[116] Pete Ward, *Gods Behaving Badly: Media, Religion and Celebrity Culture* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2011): 6.

[117] Ibid., 5.

itself a projection of the scenario in which [the viewer's] own desire takes place."[118] As I discussed in Chapter Two, Marina Abramović appeared to cultivate just such an effect during *The Artist is Present*, even comparing her role to a mirror. Like religion in previous centuries, modern celebrity culture has provided new orders of meaning, solidarity, and what Chris Rojek calls "social integration."[119] From this perspective, it can be argued that during *The Artist is Present* Abramović alone did not sustain her audience's attention; her adherents assisted in this process, a fact, as we have seen, repeatedly emphasized in narratives that document the time-consuming, anticipatory process of waiting in line for a potential chance to sit with her.[120]

Religious overtones (also clearly present in Burden's *Transfixed*) have long inflected the common trope of artists as divinely inspired or possessed.[121] In an early 20th century study, Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz examined the cult of the artist stipulating that the mystery, or the "riddle" of the artist, can be viewed from either psychological or sociological points of view; the former considers motivation to make artworks, the latter accords these works value.[122] Writing more than half a century later, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu also considered art from opposite angles: it is priceless and has what he

---

[118] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993): 152.

[119] Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001): 99.

[120] Many art historians and critics have noted, albeit briefly, the affect and effect of waiting in line to sit with Abramović. Fisher (163-168) provides the most thorough analysis of the wait in line as a social microcosm.

[121] One of the best accounts of the modern (male) artist as divinely inspired is Chapter Three, "God's Little Artist," in Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker's *Old Mistresses: Art and Ideology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981): 83-113.

[122] Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth and Magic in the Image of the Artist*, preface E.H. Gombrich (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, [1939, German] 1979): 1.

calls "symbolic value," but can nonetheless be conferred a price (its "market value").[123] While a performance is singular and irreplaceable, its documentation can be priced, marketed and archived. Since symbolic and market values are unbalanced (sub-par artwork fetches scandalous sums of money in today's world), Bourdieu proposed that art and artists operate in an "autonomous universe," one in which economic norms cannot be applied evenly.[124]

Prior to Bourdieu's two-pronged approach, the German critic and essayist Walter Benjamin, in his celebrated 1936 treatise, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," also assessed art from several interrelated points of view. "Works of art are received and valued on different planes," he wrote, claiming that "two polar types stand out: with one, the accent is on the cult (existence) value; with the other on the exhibition value of the work."[125] Importantly for this study, media theorist and philosopher Boris Groys has recently radically re-positioned Benjamin's thesis. Discounting what art historians have seized upon for half a century—the notion that, through the process of reproduction, artwork loses its "aura"— Groys instead reads Benjamin's definition of aura as existing in a far more liminal space. He calls on what he terms the "topology of the aura," explaining that, "technical reproduction as such is by no

[123] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Market for Symbolic Goods," *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996): 141-175.

[124] Ibid., 141. Despite Bourdieu's stance being a convincing one, contemporary studies of the art market have contested such a view, claiming that art prices do not operate in an "autonomous universe" but instead, are tied to fluctuations in the broader economic market. For more on this see Graw, 31-32.

[125] Originally published in 1936 in *Zeitschrift für Soazialforschung*, V, I, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is reprinted in full in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt; trans Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968 [2007]): 217-251. For the specific context of my citation here, see 224.

means the reason for loss of aura."[126] Rather, Groys points out, "The copy lacks authenticity … not because it differs from the original but because it has *no location* and consequently is not inscribed in history."[127]

In his exegesis, Groys re-interpreted Benjamin's concern with aura as existing independently of the work's material nature (the copy's actual form as a woodcut, etching, engraving, photograph, etc.). Significantly for this study, *re*-performance fills a similar role. Benjamin's critical realization, Groys has suggested, is that "the original has a particular site—and through this particular site the original is inscribed into history as this unique object. The copy, by contrast, is virtual, siteless, ahistorical."[128] Resituating Benjamin's distinction between original and copy as essentially topological and thus situational, Groys bids to solve the problem of performance art's documentation by suggesting that, through its actual installation in an exhibition, "documentation gains a site—the here and now of a historical event … all of the documents placed in the installation become originals."[129] It is from this perspective that I want to reconsider an oft-quoted, influential claim made by Peggy Phelan in 1993, where she asserted,

> Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *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.[130]

---

[126] Boris Groys, "Art in the Age of Biopolitics: From Artwork to Art Documentation," *Perform, Repeat Record*, 216.

[127] Ibid. Emphasis on "no location" is the author's.

[128] Ibid., 217.

[129] Ibid.

[130] Phelan, 146.

While I do not intend to contest the truth-value of Phelan's observation—a photograph of someone sitting with Abramović in MoMA's atrium belies the actual experience of doing so—I want to refine her appraisal of presence as it pertains to a performance artist's image, for its worship as something real in the here and now.

Fisher, among other critics, has noted (somewhat chidingly) that Abramović's performances, when re-staged by others under her aegis, could be considered "rote performances of karaoke" because they lack her own "enigmatic presence."[131] This, however, is precisely how Abramović forges her celebrity identity; re-performance allows her to "be"—albeit symbolically—in more than one place at a given time. In my view, these re-performers were not necessarily attempting to muster Abramović's actual aura during *The Artist is Present*. Not only would that be impossible, but it was also unnecessary; Abramović was available in the flesh, in the atrium on MoMA's second floor. When lissome, youthful male and female performers posed fully in the nude for hours, upright and statuesque, re-staging such works as *Imponderabilia* (1977) and *Luminosity* (1997) they effectively conjured the cult-like presence of a youthful Abramović; predictably, she was critiqued for selecting only performers with beautiful bodies to represent her accomplishments.[132]

---

[131] Fisher, 156.

[132] Overcoming physical exhaustion has been and remains a key component of Abramović's practice. Although she is conscious about keeping her body in excellent shape, the stamina of a nearly seventy year old is different than that of a twenty or thirty-something; yet only on rare occasions has Abramović suggested that her age might actually affect her level of performance. Commenting in 2009 about her 2005 re-performance of *Lips of Thomas* at the Guggenheim (originally performed in 1975) she conceded, "[It] comes after five other performances I've done already. So physically I'm really exhausted and plus you know, I did all of my performances when I was in top of my physical condition. I was twenty-five when I made this piece and this piece was only one hour. And now I'm sixty and this piece is seven hours and much more complicated." Considering the age factor, it is clear that younger performers will have an advantage over older performance artists even within the sub-genre of re-performance. See Chiara Clemente, *Our City Dreams. Five Artists. Their Dreams. One City* (Milan: Charta, 2009): 74.

Abramović's choice of an ideal body-type to represent herself can be compared to arguments about the nature of the venerated Greek *kouros*. As a sculptural embodiment that both "is and is not the person represented," Richard Howells has suggested, Greek *kourai* were an early form of celebrity worship in art.[133] The *kouros* figure was systematically depicted in peak physical condition, heroic and ideal, despite its intended use to mark the graves of those who died at every age. Along similar lines, Abramović has remarked many times that re-performance ensures preservation—but not necessarily the work's original intent. Re-performance can thus serve to sanctify an artist's ideal self. Often considered to be mere copies, when considered from this perspective, re-performances can be said to yield an original from a copy by re-territorializing it as a new historical site.[134] Abramović, as a celebrity, has capitalized on this particular effect.

Howells's parallel between the use of holy relics as a form of divine embodiment and the Byzantine-era concept that individuals depicted as icons are "somehow present in that depiction" is useful in understanding the construction of Abramović's celebrity.[135] He suggests an analogy between such types of worship and modern celebrity culture when he writes, "the photograph inevitably and actually *is* its subject, captured and preserved at one instant of time."[136] In the performance art archive, then, photographs, like pictures of celebrities, can operate like holy relics or painted images of saints.

When such photographs are circulated among art historians and critics these

---

[133] Richard Howells, "Heroes, Saints and Celebrities: The Photograph as Holy Relic," *Celebrity Studies* 2 (July 2012): 115.

[134] Groys, 216-217.

[135] Howells, 119.

[136] Ibid., 123.

images, as well as the objects once used in live performance, are often called "relics" as well. Artists including Abramović, Burden and even Hseih, have frequently exhibited items from performances alongside other visual documentation of their work. Such relics, it is now clear, as well as the photographs, videos or re-performances documenting an original, increase—rather than decrease—the performer's individual aura as well as the mystique of the original work. In other words, in a post-Benjamin world reproductions have become necessary to maintain aura, instead of cancelling it. While it is true that grainy still images or video reproductions of early performances are not generally valued for their aesthetic appeal, these have increased in actual market value and are likewise appreciated for their symbolic and cultural value—for who and what is portrayed.[137] When photographs of Abramović's early work are displayed alongside relics and re-enactments of these same performances her "aura" is recuperated and re-claimed as something present, not past [Fig. 29]. My final example clarifies this assertion.

In 2012 at the acclaimed, annual art fair in Basel, Switzerland, two performers re-staging Abramović and Ulay's *Imponderabilia* (1977) flanked the entryway to Sean Kelly's booth. Visitors could choose to enter the booth either by passing between the nude performers or through another entrance. Exhibited during two vernissage days and the first public day of the fair, this re-performance of *Imponderabilia* was not for sale, but a video of Abramović and Ulay's 1974 performance was acquired during the VIP opening at the cost of $225,660.[138] It was the first time *Imponderabilia* was re-performed

[137] In this respect, Kristine Stiles may not be correct in her positivistic assessment that "Burden focused on the aesthetic result of his act [in *Shoot*] and its photographic documentation … rather than highlight the sensational aspects of his deed." Stiles, "Burden of Light," *Chris Burden*, 30.

[138] Margaret Studer, "At Art Basel, Financial Woes Look Far Away," *The Wall Street Journal*, C14, Saturday/Sunday, June 16-17, 2012.

for a specifically European audience and the gallery has clarified that "We didn't do it for commercial reasons. We did it because it was a nice opportunity for a European public to see a recreation." [139] Yet the re-making of *Imponderabilia* at Art Basel in 2012 naturally garnered press attention, "as naked people in a booth might do."[140] This decisive exhibition strategy, situated in the supposedly "autonomous universe" Bourdieu described, thus leveraged the divide between symbolic and market values. The conscious packaging of one of Abramović and Ulay's signature images at Kelly's Art Basel booth suggested that the symbolic value of the video could be adjusted or inflated by the re-performance.

As I articulated in the previous chapter, celebrity tends to be authored collaboratively and is not available on demand. Sean Kelly, Abramović's dealer, and MoMA curator Klaus Biesenbach have helped ensure the proper management of her legacy; the efforts of both have served to mediate connections between the artist's image and her audience. As described above, Kelly strategically and successfully marketed the artist's early (seemingly unsalable) work. His 2009 comment, "If you present information

[139] Lauren Kelly, speaking on behalf of the gallery in an interview with the author, Sean Kelly Gallery, January 18th, 2014. Certainly, Sean Kelly is known as a dealer who promotes conceptual and performance art; by his own admission, he is uninterested in the idea of just selling art. For him, context and the historical placement of a work is of paramount importance.

[140] Ibid. This was not the first time a performance by Abramović was re-staged at an international art fair. In 2005 Abramović herself re-performed *Nude with Skeleton* at Art Unlimited during Art Basel; originally she had performed this work for video in Belgrade in 2002. Commenting about *Nude with Skeleton*, Abramović stated, "It's fantastic, because art fairs are the place where performance doesn't belong at all." (Abramović cited in Jörg Heiser, "Do it again," *Freize*, 94 (October, 2005), https://www.frieze.com/issue/article/do_it_again/, accessed March 20, 2014). Although Abramović's comment seems to reference the fact that art fairs are notoriously commercialized, her position as a global artist or "modern nomad" complements the international milieu that today defines this kind of environment. Furthermore, her perception that performance does not belong at art fairs signifies that she views performance art as sensationalizing in the art fair setting. Similar to Daniel Boorstin's concept that "pseudo events" are celebrated by the media not for their spontaneity (which in the late 1960s/early 1970s was a key aspect of performance) but rather for their newsworthiness, the kind of sensationalism that (not unexpectedly) surrounded Kelly's booth at Art Basel in 2012 naturally functioned to increase Abramović's art star status.

in a very specific way and it gets institutional support, you've effectively created a market," is particularly relevant.[141] Biesenbach, who introduced Abramović to many of her celebrity friends,[142] has been equally influential. Emphasizing his role in Abramović's career, in 2012 Biesenbach explained, "When I introduced [Abramović] in the MoMA show a couple of years ago, she still wasn't a household name in America, and performance art wasn't a well-established art form people expected to see in a major museum—a place for art held in frames and on pedestals."[143] Ironically, however, Abramović had compared durational performance to the static arts of painting and sculpture just prior to her New York retrospective; in so doing, she inadvertently provided an answer to Lambert-Beatty's query regarding why it was of consequence that the artist be consistently visible throughout her turn at MoMA. In an interview for *W Magazine*, Abramović stated, "The idea is that we [she and performers who re-enacted her work] are there before the museum opens and we are there when the museum closes. The attitude is the same as toward a painting—the performance is always there."[144] Indeed, as if she were a valuable work of art, MoMA guards protected the sanctity of Abramović's presence so that the sanctity of her image remained undisturbed. And yet, I contend, it is precisely because Abramović is a person and not a painting that her performances provide ripe ground on which to base a theory of celebrity in the art world.

---

[141] Linda Yablonsky, "Taking It to the Limits," *Art News* (Dec. 2009), http://www.artnews.com/issues/article.asp?art_id=2801 (accessed March 31, 2011).

[142] Sarah Lyall, "For Her Next Piece, a Performance Artist will Build an Institute," *The New York Times*, October 19th, 2013. Accessible on line, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/20/arts/design/marina-abramovic-is-putting-her-name-on-a-center-in-hudson-ny.html?pagewanted=2&_r=0 (accessed Dec. 15, 2013).

[143] Kelly Crow, "Klaus Biesenbach," *The Wall Street Journal Magazine,* October, 2012. The article, which includes a one-page statement by Biesenbach, calls attention to the curator's own celebrity status.

[144] Abramovic quoted in Belcove, 79.

CHAPTER FOUR

GUNPLAY AND THE RIDDLE OF RE-PERFORMANCE

Marina Abramović is not a feminist; throughout her career, she has professed a gender-neutral stance. This position, however, has not precluded feminist interpretations of her work. Early performances such as *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful* (1975) and *Lips of Thomas* (1975/2005) initiated a critical dialogue between the role of woman-as-perpetrator and woman-as-victim (or martyr) and these complex dualities remain relevant to understanding Abramović's current work and rising celebrity. In this chapter I elucidate the deeply rooted congruency Abramović has sown between pain, aggression, self-will and the female body. For Abramović, the process of self-knowledge occurs during a performance, when the body and mind cohere: "I learn about myself through work, not through my life," she has stated.[1] It is from this perspective that, two years after her exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim museum, photographer Marco Anelli made a conceptual portrait of Abramović by photographing her scars [Fig. 80].[2]

This chapter pivots on a brutal and glamorized juxtaposition increasingly visible in popular culture: women and guns, and in particular on how Abramović, as well as other female artists including Hannah Wilke and Shirin Neshat, have pictured or performed themselves armed. Typically guns are associated more with notoriety than fame. My commentary concentrates primarily on Abramović's 2005 re-performance of

[1] Chris Thompson and Katarina Weslien, "Pure Raw: Performance, Pedagogy and (Re)presentation," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 28 (Jan. 2006): 43. Also cited in Kristine Stiles, "Cloud with its Shadow," Kristine Stiles, Klaus Biesenbach, Chrissie Iles, *Marina Abramović* (London: Phiadon Press, 2008): 69.

[2] Marina Abramović, "The Artist is Present, Photographer is Present," *Marco Anelli: Portraits in the Presence of Marina Abramović* (Bologna, Italy: Damiani, 2012): 7.

Viennese Actionist VALIE EXPORT's *Action Pants: Genital Pants* (1969), which occurred on the third night of *Seven Easy Pieces* at the Guggenheim Museum. There, on November 11th, 2005, between the hours of 5PM and midnight, Abramović introduced the menacing presence of a gun into the civic environment. On a round raised stage, she cradled an American M16 rifle in her arms that, contradictory to its appearance, was not real but a replica [Fig. 42].[3] As in EXPORT's original, Abramović wore pants whose crotch area was cut away; she sat with legs splayed or stood with her feet apart, continuously exposing the most private area of her body to the audience.[4]

As part of her self-appointed "duty to retell the story of performance art in a way that respects the past and also leaves space for reinterpretation," in preparation for her 2005 Guggenheim show, Abramović established guidelines as to how a performance artist might approach the practice of re-performance.[5] Her conditions were:

> Ask the artist for permission.
> Pay the artist for copyright.
> Perform a new interpretation of the piece.
> Exhibit the original material: photographs, videos, relics.
> Exhibit a new interpretation of the piece.[6]

---

[3] Mechtild Widrich, "Can Photographs Make It So? Repeated Outbreaks of VALIE EXPORT's *Genital Panic* since 1969," in *Perform, Repeat, Record*, *Live Art in History*, eds. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (Bristol, UK; Chicago, USA: Intellect, The University of Chicago Press, 2012): 100. Hereafter essays from this compendium will be noted as *Perform, Repeat Record*.

[4] As discussed in Chapters One and Two, *Seven Easy Pieces* also included re-performances of works by Bruce Nauman, Vito Acconci, Gina Pane and Joseph Beuys, alongside one of Abramović's own earlier performances, *Lips of Thomas* (1975), as well as *Entering the Other Side* (2007), a new work by Abramović that premiered on the seventh and last evening of her Guggenheim exhibit in which she emerged from the tip of a gigantic, flowing blue *couture* dress.

[5] Marina Abramović, "Reenactment. Introduction," *7 Easy Pieces*. Photographs by Attilio Maranzano. Film Stills by Babette Mangolte (Milan: Charta, 2007): 10.

[6] Ibid., 11.

With this rubric in mind, Abramović re-constructed EXPORT's definitely notorious *Action Pants: Genital Panic* by studying various 1969 images that photographer Peter Hassmann had made of EXPORT in his studio located in the northern outskirts of Vienna. In the least published photograph, the young Austrian artist (born Waltraud Lehner in 1940) stands with legs spread, hips front and center. The hole in the crotch of her black pants is cut in an asymmetrical circle, as if it were a target. Dressed also in a black leather jacket, EXPORT turns her face to the side, her eyes locked on an unseen target in the distance at which she points her weapon [Fig. 81]. For another shot, EXPORT sat with her left leg propped on a nearby chair wearing black sling-back heels, which are absent in the other photographs. In one version of this pose, she again looked at something or someone the viewer cannot see, the barrel of her gun pointed toward the ceiling, where it casts its phallic shadow on the wall behind her; in another version of the pose, EXPORT lowered her gun and directed a blank, vapid stare in the direction of the camera [82 - 84]. And in the third, most widely published photograph, the artist sits on a bench with legs splayed, staring directly at the viewer, her gun pointed slightly to the side [Fig. 85 - 86]. Published as a silkscreen poster by Kari Bauer that same year, the latter image appeared on the streets in both Vienna and Berlin—a calculated gesture that informs this chapter's argument regarding celebrity, and a point to which I shall return [Fig. 87].[7]

EXPORT's fabled performance of *Action Pants: Genital Panic* was said to have taken place in Munich, Germany in 1969, but when Abramović sought to question EXPORT about the event, the artist hesitated to expound on details. "[VALIE EXPORT]

[7] Bojana Pejić, "On Pants, Panics and Origins," *VALIE EXPORT* (Moscow: Folio, Hedwig Saxenhuber, 2007): 56.

wouldn't give me any clear answers when I asked her about it," Abramović described to art historian Amelia Jones.[8] Until recently, the ostensible "realness" of EXPORT's performance was an important interpretative aspect of the original event, which, as Mechtild Widrich has now shown, never actually occurred. According to EXPORT's original report of the event, she walked up and down the aisles of a porn cinema with the crotch of her black pants cut away; yet no photographic or filmic evidence has ever surfaced to support such a story.[9] The fact that EXPORT supposedly toted a gun during the rampage—as a "feminist warrior," to quote Widrich—spurred interpretations that presaged Laura Mulvey's 1975 treatise, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" by half a decade. EXPORT is said to have inverted the voyeuristic male gaze through direct confrontation, by exposing (her) "real" sex.[10]

Two years after Abramović "re-performed" *Action Pants: Genital Panic* at the Guggenheim, EXPORT clarified, "I never went in a cinema in which pornographic

---

[8] Amelia Jones and Marina Abramović, "The Live Artist as Archeologist: Marina Abramović and Amelia Jones," *Perform Repeat Record*, 550.

[9] Prior to EXPORT's admission that she never actually performed *Action Pants: Genital Panic*, the artist did note that she "could never go into a pornography cinema with a gun … [she] would have been killed," explaining that the "theater was instead a kind of art house." As Mechtild Wildrich has pointed out, "The confusion reached a climax when EXPORT stated in a 2005 email to curator Nancy Spector that she 'did it [*Genital Panic*] two times, once time in an art cinema in Munich and second for the poster,' and only then with the weapon." See Widrich, 98 and n. 21. Although in 2010 Anna Chave discussed EXPORT's work as if it did occur—"at a Munich art house cinema"—she noted that EXPORT had begun to change her story of the event during "Artist Conversation: Valie Export and Maria-Christina Villasenor," in "(Re)Presenting Performance: A Symposium, April 9, 2005, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NY. See Chave, "'Is this good for Vulva?' Female Genitalia in Contemporary Art," *The Visible Vagina* (New York: Francis M. Nauman Fine Art, LLC, 2010): 20 and n. 64; and Kathleen Wentrack, "The Female Body in Conflict: U.S and European Feminist Performance Art, 1963-1979, Carolee Schneemann, Valie Export and Ulrike Rosenbach," Ph.D. dissertation, The Graduate Center, CUNY (2006): 212-214. Published to accompany the Museum of Modern Art's acquisition of six screenprint posters of *Action Pants/Genital Panic,* an easily accessible and up-to-date account of how EXPORT's performance is now recounted was authored by photography curator Roxana Marcoci. See MOMA's INSIDE/OUT blog, http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2010/06/02/action-pants-genital-panic/ (accessed Dec.13, 2012).

[10] Widrich, 90-91.

movies were shown, and NEVER with a gun in my hand."[11] Despite EXPORT's retraction of the initial account, as Widrich has asserted, "we" are not "dealing with a fake work of art."[12] Widrich's eloquent argument is grounded in British philosopher J.L. Austin's late 1950s thesis, *How to Do Things with Words*, in which Austin, like his Oxford colleague R. G. Collingwood before him, made a case for (written) history as a performance itself. Applying Austin's theory, Widrich has qualified EXPORT's story (and the interviews in which she corroborated it) as "an utterance being taken for the action of that which is being uttered … with concrete consequences in contrast to a [mere] descriptive statement."[13] In other words, EXPORT performed the self through speech.[14]

Throughout this chapter, I will be using images of performances by women wielding weapons as a lens through which to read differences between celebrity culture and art historical critique of female social roles. One of my aims is to identify the implicit and explicit feminist posture Abramović assumed during her so-called re-presentation of EXPORT's *Action Pants/Genital Panic*. I approach Abramović's repetition of EXPORT's signature work as an opportunity to re-contextualize Abramović's own relationship to feminism and the proverbial "armed woman." Granting priority to the

---

[11] Ibid., 90.

[12] Ibid., 93.

[13] J.L. Austin quoted in Widrich, 93; see also Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962): 12.

[14] In an interview with Andrea Juno in 1991, EXPORT recalled another example in which she performed through speech: "I did a performance with a dead bird in which I poured liquid wax over this bird and over my hands. But in my descriptions and photographs of it I said I had a *living* bird. So everybody thought I killed the bird—I did not; this was trick photography. This was also an example of the fact that photography can lie; that representations can be a *fake*." See Juno's interview with the artist, "VALIE EXPORT," *Angry Women*, eds. Andrea Juno and V. Vale (Re/Search Publications, 1991): 190.

issue of celebrity, I question the concerns at stake when an artist (in this case Marina Abramović) re-performs a work that, in fact, lacks an original performance.

In Chapter Three, I argued that pedagogy has become a central tenet of Abramović's successful late career gambits and pointed out that her teaching career has amplified her status as a celebrity in the art world. Here I build on that argument. I begin with an examination of several of Abramović's early performances against the backdrop of her Yugoslavian heritage, the frame within which she developed an enduring reticence toward the causes and claims of Western feminism. My comparison between early career performances by American artist Hannah Wilke (1940 - 1993) and Marina Abramović show how these two artists, in similar ways, seamlessly transcribed the perceived vulnerability of the female body as the source of its power.

In the pages that follow, I characterize the genre of re-performance as a powerful game of who's who among artists—a microcosm of celebrity culture in the art world. Abramović has claimed that re-performance is central to the preservation and pedagogy of the medium. I mobilize her contention in order to show how, in an institutionalized museum/gallery environment, performance and its re-doing (or undoing) invite celebrity worship in two ways—by dissolving the traditionally private space of the studio and by re-authoring the past, not through the "self," but rather through a contemporary social context. To emphasize the relevance of the latter, I scrutinize some of the historical and present ways in which women are or have been said to "perform" with guns, including such cultural figures as Patty Hearst and the pop singer Madonna. During the past several decades, armed women have become even more of a Hollywood staple; an extensive line-up of hostile, erotic and domineering female protagonists performs this very scenario

nightly on prime-time television.[15] Moreover, for a brief period of time around 2007, the infamous celebrity female "crotch-shot" carried more cachet than any other type of paparazzi photograph—a point I emphasize in this chapter's closing statements.

Although accounts analyzing the value and meaning of re-performance had begun to flood art history before 2005, this trend was heightened by Abramović's exhibition *Seven Easy Pieces*. Amelia Jones has referred to the artist who re-performs the work of others as an "archeologist," while scholar Mechtild Widrich has described re-performance as a "monumentalizing" form of architecture.[16] Interrogating Abramović's re-performance of *Action Pants: Genital Panic* through two lenses—her Yugoslavian past and the contemporary present—allows me to characterize the genre of re-performance as akin to a prosthetic limb and imbued with a quality of timelessness—a notion that runs counter to the general understanding of re-performance as a recuperative project. My remarks seek to offer conclusive evidence that, in art's recent history, images of women with guns are acclaimed and critiqued much as they are in contemporary celebrity culture—as a site of conflict, within which the relationship between women as victims and women as aggressors remains decidedly uneasy.

THE ARTIST MUST (NOT) BE BEAUTIFUL

> On one of the platforms, I'm thinking of wearing nothing but an enormous strap-on dildo. The idea is a personal one from when I first started to study art. I was full of hope, but a professor said you don't have the balls to be an artist. I went home crying desperately, thinking I could never be an artist because I'm not a man. So I have this idea now to appear with a really grotesque, huge penis. It won't be used for the same kind of feminist statement as Lynda Benglis's

[15] Mike Hale, "Sugar and Spice and Vicious Beatings," *New York Times*, March 10, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/13/arts/television/women-bring-the-beatings-to-ncis-and-elsewhere.html (accessed Dec. 12, 2012).

[16] Widrich, 100; and Jones, "The Live Artist as Archeologist," *Perform Repeat Record*, 559.

> *Artforum* ad from the 1970s. And it's not about porn images. It's about the artist being self-sufficient, and using a kind of male-female equilibrium.[17]

Although *The Artist is Present* did not involve a "strap-on dildo" after all, in this 2009 rumination on the possibilities of what she might enact for her solo atrium performance at MoMA the following year, Marina Abramović purposefully distanced herself from Benglis's now-infamous flagrant parody of male bravado in which she appeared in an advertisement oiled and nude, except for sunglasses, with a large double dildo in her hand poised strategically. In November 1974, Benglis paid for this sensationalized photograph to be published in the pages of *Artforum*, ostensibly as an announcement of her upcoming show at Paula Cooper Gallery [Fig. 88].[18] It was an extreme, and extremely public, expression of the kinds of performative gambits American feminist artists were beginning to employ. Male artists might have owned the market in painting and sculpture during the 1970s, but it was feminist artists who laid claim to body politics through the medium of performance art. To combat male/female inequality, feminist artists had begun to capitalize on the benefits of performance, both as

---

[17] David Ebony, "Marina Abramović: An Interview," *Art in America* 5 (Nov. 2009): 112.

[18] Benglis's advertisement belongs to a series the artist referred to as "sexual mockeries," in which, according to Susan Krane, her "masculine posturing" became a way to play-act in the "boys art game." Prior to this particularly infamous *Artforum* advertisement, Benglis had produced two other ads for the magazine; in one from January 1974 she posed à la James Dean, casually leaning against a Porsche with aviator glasses and slicked back hair. Considered a response to Benglis's advertisement, Minimalist artist Robert Morris (whom Benglis had previously collaborated with on video-projects), made a poster of himself in which he was shown, "bearded and naked from the waist up, in a German helmet and dark glasses, shackled with heavy chains," a photograph that, as Krane described, was a "tough, nasty, stereotypically male image that simultaneously evoked the subjugation of sado-masochism and the sinister domination of Nazism." Benglis's "reply" to Morris's portrayal of masculine dominance came just a few months later, as an exhibition opening invitation for her show at Paula Cooper Gallery in May of 1974; in it she bared her behind while imitating a "cheesecake shot," with her jeans slumped around her ankles. Then, in November of 1974, Benglis published the advertisement Abramović mentioned in her conversation with Ebony. For more on Benglis's advertisements and her relationship with Morris, see Susan Krane, *Lynda Benglis*, *Dual Natures* (Atlanta, Georgia: High Museum of Atlantic Art, 1991): 38-42.

a live act witnessed by an audience and one that could be recorded photographically. Despite the growing weight of the Women's Liberation Movement, Benglis's *Artforum* ad was tremendously controversial. It was condemned as vulgar by five of *Artforum*'s six associated editors; Annette Michelson and Rosalind Krauss resigned from the magazine soon thereafter.[19]

In Yugoslavia during the '70s, the perception and use of performance art differed dramatically from that of contemporaneous U.S. practitioners. Performance functioned under the auspices of "new art practice," an umbrella genre that included many other post-object practices: earth works, ready-made objects, conceptual art and video, as well as analytic painting and Fluxus-oriented events.[20] Performances by both male and female artists were promoted through state-sanctioned institutions including the Student Cultural Center (SKC) in Belgrade where Abramović undertook her early sound installations and presented several versions of her *Rhythm* series. Although modernism, not social realism, had been the official academic aesthetic in Yugoslavia since the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, performance was not considered "underground or dissident art," and it was certainly not affiliated with feminism.[21]

As art historian Bojana Pejić has noted, Abramović, who left Belgrade in 1976, was, in fact, the only Serbian artist to specialize in performance.[22] Moreover, Abramović

---

[19] Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-74* (New York: Solo Press, 2000): 524-525.

[20] Bojana Pejić, "Yugoslavia: Body-based Art: Serbia and Montenegro," *Body and the East: From the 1960s to the Present* (Ljubljana, Slovenia: Museum of Modern Art Ljubljana and The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia, 1999): 72.

[21] Ibid., 73. Despite the fact that Yugoslavia did not have a centralized state censorship office, performance, like any other cultural activity or art form, was subject to "unofficial" censorship, primarily through funding cuts to state run arts institutions.

[22] Ibid.

was the only woman in an informal group of five other artists who, prior to the formation of the SKC, often met in her studio, a room in the family apartment that Marina's mother allocated her when she began to show serious interest in painting.[23] As Abramović's biographer Scott Westcott points out, "[Marina] wasn't concerned about being the only woman in a group of six artists; if anything she enjoyed the attention."[24] Comprised of Raša Todosijević, Gera Urkom, Neša Paripović (who became her first husband), Zoran Popović, Era Milivojević, and Abramović, this group, as Westcott describes, had "formed more through natural cohesion than any firm decision … there was no manifesto, no declaration or publication, nor even a name apart from the retroactively applied 'group of six' or Group 70"—the year these six artists realized that, together, they were a force.[25]

Abramović, who would take up her own body as the primary medium for her art, was in an advantageous situation at that time. She was surrounded by a group of colleagues, but not bound to any particular dogma, as several key American feminist artists would later characterize the negative aspect of their own situation. Tito's Yugoslavia lacked the kind of progressive women's movement thriving in the United States and Abramović adopted what she has described as a "completely male approach" in her work, one that dissipated only when she met and partnered with Ulay in 1976.[26] "As soon as we were together," she confessed to Thomas McEvilley in 1998, "my female

[23] James Westcott, *When Marina Abramović Dies, A Biography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010): 24.

[24] Ibid., 40.

[25] Ibid., 39.

[26] Thomas McEvilley, "Stages of Energy: Performance Art Zero?" *Marina Abramović, Artist Body, Performances 1969-1998* (Milan: Charta, 1998): 16.

energy came out and I really didn't feel [the] need to be like a man anymore."[27] According to Abramović, this male energy sourced from her rigorous attitude toward body art, an approach that was palpable in her solo 1975 performance piece *Art Must be Beautiful, Artist Must be Beautiful* [Fig. 89]. Grasping a comb in her right hand and a brush in her left, Abramović violently stroked her face and hair, alternating between a placid trance-like state and a more violent, aggressive mode of attack. Throughout her hour-long performance at the Charlottenburg Art Festival in Copenhagen, she incessantly repeated, "art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful," modulating her voice from a soft whisper to a low, tortured growl. Reflecting on this in 1998, Abramović stated, "At that time, I thought art should be disturbing rather than beautiful."[28]

Art Must be Beautiful, Artist Must be Beautiful is one of the first instances of self re-performance in Abramović's career, a rare occurrence in which the documentation that preserved the work for posterity was performed only for the camera, not a live audience. Dissatisfied with the way in which the videographer had captured her initial performance of the work at the Festival (video was new to Abramović and she did not supply her cameraman with adequate instructions), she performed it a second time without an audience (immediately following the live version) to produce the effect she had envisioned. She wanted a straight shot of her face, not a full scan of her writhing body against the banal background, as in the original recording.[29]

---

[27] Ibid.

[28] Janet A. Kaplan, "Deeper and Deeper: Interview with Marina Abramovic" *Art Journal* 58 (Summer, 1999): 7.

[29] Abramović reflects on this story in "Interview: Klaus Biesenbach in Conversation with Marina Abramović," in Kristine Stiles, Klaus Biesenbach, Chrissie Iles, *Marina Abramović* (London: Phiadon Press, 2008): 16. See also Westcott, 95-96, who admits that Abramović's memory of this performance is "fuzzy." Significantly, however, Westcott reports that *Art Must be Beautiful/ Artist Must be Beautiful* was

As Westcott has pointed out, conventional feminist readings of *Art Must be Beautiful, Artist Must be Beautiful* might suggest that Abramović was "acting out the pain involved in fulfilling a societal—and art historical—beauty imperative, and ironizing and attacking it at the same time."[30] Women, in particular, have always been expected to uphold certain standards of beauty and, until 1970's feminist artists began to reclaim their own image, the corporeal beauty of the female body in art had been defined, with few exceptions, according to the ideals of the male gaze. Like most little girls, Marina was aware of these kinds of social expectations. In what she considers her first "performance," Abramović spun around in her mother's room with the aim of getting so dizzy she would smash her 'big' nose on the bedpost. Her plan did not succeed, but in the event that it had, Abramović had tucked in her pocket a picture of Bridget Bardot, which she would have presented to the doctor as a guide for reconstructing her nose.[31] Clearly, Abramović understood beauty as desirable and glamorous, even if it could only be achieved through a self-inflicted process involving pain.

According to Westcott, Abramović displayed a "serious, borderline pathological" concern with beauty throughout her childhood, and on some level believed "… that yes, she as an artist, and in her everyday life, must be beautiful."[32] Westcott's observation can

---

in fact performed three times total. The first public version of the performance was actually truncated when a fuse blew causing the lights to go out. Resultantly, Abramović was asked to re-do the piece (for a third time, now, as she had already re-performed it backstage for the camera only) a few days later for a bigger audience in a rather large hall at the Copenhagen Academy of Fine Arts.

[30] Westcott, 96.

[31] Ibid. Abramović recounts this story in a short interview posted on MoMA's interactive exhibition website for *The Artist is Present*; see "Abramović's First Performance," http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2010/marinaabramovic/marina_first.html (accessed online May 1, 2012).

[32] Ibid.

be magnified. In *Art Must be Beautiful, Artist Must be Beautiful* Abramović acted out the roles of both perpetrator and victim. She evidenced how, for women, social expectations of physical beauty generate enormous internal conflict. In *Art Must be Beautiful, Artist Must be Beautiful* Abramović approached the female body (her own self) as one who had fallen victim to orthodox gender roles—that the female (artist) must be beautiful—even as she desired to violate these same conventions.

American feminist sculptor, photographer and performance artist Hannah Wilke employed a similar strategy in New York throughout the 1970s.[33] In her *S.O.S. Starification Series* (1974-75), Wilke challenged stereotypical responses to beauty by adhering to her body and face the vaginal shaped gumfolds she had already used in previous works [Fig. 90].[34] The format of Wilke's *S.O.S. Starification Series* mimicked the fashion photography layouts of the day in which models posed differently wearing the same garment in order to show its various sides. Wilke transformed herself into a "star" by posing coyly and seductively, and certainly in ways that the male gaze might find desirable. Yet, as the other half of Wilke's title implies, she was also unleashing a cry of distress, the internationally understood anagram "SOS."[35] The tiny vaginal formations

[33] Abramović briefly met Hannah Wilke in New York City in May of 1978, when she and Ulay visited on account of an invitation to participate in the European Performance Series at the Brooklyn Museum where they performed *Charged Space*. The couple stayed with Edit Deak, the publisher of *Art-Rite* magazine, who introduced Wilke and Abramović. According to Westcott, "Wilke was stunningly beautiful, and Marina immediately felt her as a rival in personal terms (artistically, she was never too concerned with what others were doing). While visiting Wilke's apartment, Marina thought she was flirting with Ulay, trying to entice him into her bedroom. Marina was furious; Ulay played innocent." See Westcott, 140.

[34] Danielle Knafo, "Hannah Wilke: The Naked Truth," *Gender and Psychoanalysis* 5 (2000): 6.

[35] Ibid., 15.

made of chewing gum created small scars that disrupted (or scarified) the otherwise flawless surface of Wilke's skin.[36]

As art historian Danielle Knafo describes, Wilke sought to "direct our attention to how we objectify the other, in this case 'beautiful people' and celebrities," as conversion of scar to "star" in *SOS Starification Series* suggested.[37] Knafo compared this series by Wilke to society's "perverse fascination with stars, like that of Princess Diana, Paris Hilton, and Brittany Spears," which "involves powerful aggressive drives intended to objectify and violate," a phenomenon less widely understood in the 1970s than in the twenty-first century. As for Abramović, for Wilke glamour, celebrity and victimization were closely interrelated.

Like Wilke's *SOS Starification Series,* Abramović's production of *Art Must be Beautiful, Artist Must be Beautiful* was also deliberately created from a point of view that associates female beauty with pain, wounds and scars. Instead of brushing her hair to beautify herself, Abramović used the gesture to inflict pain, wounding her scalp until it bled, and splintering her hair. Two years prior in *Rhythm 10* (1973) Abramović had likewise juxtaposed mutilation with attractiveness; after painting her nails with polish, she proceeded to quickly stamp a knife between her fingers, nicking her skin [Fig. 5].[38] One of the most striking performances in which Abramović imposed pain and scarring on

---

[36] Of her choice to use gum, Wilke has stated, "gum is the perfect metaphor for the American woman – chew her up, get what you want out of her, throw her out and pop in a new piece." Wilke quoted in Knafo, "The Naked Truth," 14-15. The physical scarification implied in the *S.O.S. Starification Series*, however, also corresponds to non-western concepts of beauty, in particular the African tradition of self-inflicted or willfully endured cutting of the body. For African women, the process of scarification is interpreted as a mark of one's external beauty, internal strength, and social sophistication.

[37] Danielle Knafo, *In Her Own Image: Women's Self-Representation in Twentieth Century Art* (Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corp, 2009): 107.

[38] Stiles, "Cloud with its Shadow," 64.

her flesh occurred during *Lips of Thomas*, first enacted in 1975 at Galerie Krinzinger in Innsbruck and again in 2005 at the Guggenheim on the sixth evening of *Seven Easy Pieces* [Figs. 91]. After eating a kilo of honey and drinking a liter of wine, Abramović crushed the glass in her hand and carved a five-pointed star (a Communist symbol), on the skin of her stomach with a razor blade. She repeatedly lashed herself with a whip and, finally, lay down on blocks of ice positioned under heaters, perpetuating the flow of blood from her fresh wounds. When Abramović re-performed this work in New York, she added several conspicuous new elements, including the boots she wore when she walked the Great Wall of China with Ulay in 1988, as well as her mother's military cap, which she donned as she stood at attention, a sad Slavic folksong playing in the background [Fig. 45].

As curator Nancy Spector has perceptively argued, Abramović's decision to add fresh elements to her original score moved the performance *Lips of Thomas* "beyond mere reconstruction to a place of cultural relevancy, given the not-so-distant upheaval in former Yugoslavia."[39] Moreover, Klaus Biesenbach suggests, in this re-performance, "Abramović proved that she wanted to look back at her homeland to underscore the personal as political."[40] Reared in a culture that lauded heroism, throughout her youth

[39] Nancy Spector, "Seven Easy Pieces," *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*, ed. Mary Christian (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010): 38.

[40] Klaus Biesenbach, "Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present, The Artist was Present. The Artist will be Present," in *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010): 25. Since Carol Hanisch first penned the words, "the personal is political" in 1969, this adage has endured as a touchstone in feminist art, history and theory. Hanisch's essay was originally published in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation, Major Writings of the Radical Feminists*, eds. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (New York: Radical Feminism, 1970): 76-78. Since then, the phrase has been shaped and reshaped, eventually taking on a life and meaning of its own, one far removed from Hanish's original context that referenced the impact of female group consciousness-raising sessions. Hanisch's website offers her personal comments about her 1969 essay, http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html (accessed December 18, 2013).

Abramović was keenly aware of the ways in which celebrity and sacrifice cohered for women. During the National Liberation Struggle (1941-45), women, including Marina's mother Danica, fought alongside men in the army; 100,000 of Yugoslavia's 800,000 troops were women, sixty percent of whom were killed or seriously wounded [Fig. 92 - 93].[41] Danica Abramović was present on the front lines of the Partisan resistance as both a nurse and as a combatant; Abramović recalls that both of her parents slept with pistols on their nightstands throughout her youth.[42] In other words, access to and the use of guns was one way in which the Yugoslavian government promulgated gender equality.

In a conversation with Pablo J. Rico in 1998, Marina Abramović confirmed that the cultural and political landscape against which she commenced her solo career had deeply informed her unsympathetic stance on feminism. Woman, she stated, "is at the same level as a man … I never had anything to do with feminism. This comes from my Yugoslav origin."[43] Indeed, during Tito's rule, which lasted nearly four decades between November of 1943 and May of 1980, the government did not discriminate against females through any official means. The state believed that feminism sought not to equalize power tensions, but rather to replace so-called male authority with another, likewise gendered form of control. In a political and economic system that stressed equal

[41] Sabrina P. Ramet, "In Tito's Time," *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999): 93. During World War II, 282,000 Yugoslav partisan women died in concentration camps; only eighty-seven were decorated with military honors.

[42] Westcott, 21.

[43] Pablo J. Rico, "On Bridges, Traveling, Mirrors and Silence … In Amsterdam, Interview with Marina Abramović (April, 1998)," in *The Bridge/El Puente, Marina* Abramović, Exposición Retrospectiva, with texts by Pablo J. Rico, Marina Abramović, and Thomas Wülffen (Valencia: Consorci de Museus de la Comunitat Valenciana; and Milan: International Distribution, Charta, 1998): 76.

rights for all workers, feminism was deemed a culturally elitist activity—something intellectualized (i.e. not spontaneous) and therefore, dangerously beyond state control.[44]

Although, by law, Yugoslav men and women had equal civil/working rights (ones that could be revoked regardless of gender),[45] inequalities existed, particularly on the domestic front, where women undertook household duties in addition to their work outside the home.[46] Functioning via federal, state and local channels, "official" government women's groups in Yugoslavia were often associated with and took charge of social issues such as child welfare.[47] Propagated as imported Western ideology, so-called "apolitical" strains of feminism were referred to in socialist terminology as "bourgeois" feminism.[48] Despite ties to social leftism in democratically developed countries such as America, under the thumb of Tito's communist regime, such feminist groups would "suddenly and suspiciously" be branded as conservative, even as women remained underrepresented in politics and party hierarchies as well as in most professional fields.[49]

---

[44] Rada Iveković and Slavenka Drakulić-Ilić, "Yugoslavia: Neofeminism—and Its "Six Mortal Sins," *Sisterhood is Global, The International Women's Movement Anthology*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1996): 736-7.

[45] Bojana Pejić, "Being in the Body: On the Spiritual in Marina Abramović's Art," *Abramović* (Edition Cantz, 1993): 32. Pejić (28) writes that "Marina Abramović, who has never declared her adherence to any collective dogma, is a woman artist who decided to make her own body in performance: this means that she in her praxis, in her performances, was and is continually un-doing constructed femininity."

[46] Iveković and Drakulić-Ilić, 735.

[47] Ramet, 97.

[48] Iveković and Drakulić-Ilić, 737; see also Ramet, 93.

[49] Ramet, 97.

The Yugoslavian state-circulated philosophy, "Women have all rights by *law*, so they are already *equal*," was not as transparent as it may seem.[50] Political scientist Sabrina P. Ramet's analysis of Yugoslavian party propaganda makes clear that, "Any activity that could be described as counterrevolutionary … worked against the *entire* party program, including its policy of promoting gender … hence, feminists were described as working against the achievement of gender equality—in essence, of promoting patriarchy."[51] Ironically, women who were perceived as working "against" feminist causes in the United States were likewise accused. Hannah Wilke, an extremely good-looking woman, was one example. An outsider to the 1970s feminist art scene, she never enjoyed accolades from critics such as Lucy Lippard, who accused her of confusing her roles as "flirt and feminist."[52] As Nancy Princenthal describes, it was from a position of deep disdain and "heartfelt indictment of judgmental sectarianism among women making art,"[53] that Wilke, in 1977, created a poster titled "Marxism and Art: Beware of Fascist Feminism." In it, she stands contrapposto, bare-breasted, with her hands on her hips [Fig. 94]. Scar-like, vaginal-shaped gum folds perforate her abdomen, neckline, cheeks and face, framing the phallic necktie she selected to wear in this image. According to Princenthal, it is as if Wilke were saying, "Look at me … I defy you to resist the

[50] Iveković and Drakulić-Ilić, 735.

[51] Ramet, 92.

[52] Lucy Lippard, "Pain and the Pleasures of Rebirth: European and American Women's Body Art," in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976): 135.

[53] Nancy Princenthal, *Hannah Wilke* (Munich, Berlin, London, NY: Prestel Verlag, 2010): 64.

simple truth of my beauty, to keep your ideological wits about you when your senses are so clamorously engaged."[54]

Unlike Wilke, an adamant feminist who claimed at one point in her career that she had "invented" feminism via her early interest in vaginal iconography,[55] Abramović was not raised in a political atmosphere that acknowledged women as socially or politically repressed. "I have never, ever experienced in my whole life any of this [the idea of the woman being repressed]," Abramović has stated.[56] "Just the idea of women being able to give birth to human beings … It's such an amazing energy and power … I think that all energy, all power is so much in the hands of women and it always has been genetically like that. I feel the complete opposite. I feel I have to help men."[57] Wilke shared parts of this sentiment, as evidenced in her statement, "Women are biologically superior. I can have a baby, you can't. Penis envy equals real venus envy."[58] In a Polaroid triptych titled *Venus Envy*, *with Richard Hamilton* (1980), Wilke visualized herself giving birth to the British Pop artist [Fig. 95]. In it, Hamilton's compressed head protrudes and recedes from between her thighs, "as if reclaiming his place in the womb."[59] (The double play on this image could also be read as mimicking the erection and retraction of a penis.) By

[54] Ibid., 62.

[55] Wilke stated: "I feel, that using my relation to the word and activity of feminism, that, in my own terms, I started feminism. I was living in California with Claes [Oldenburg] in 1969, which was well before the feminist movement hit California, making the vaginal sculptures … everybody knew about it: and, I had been making vaginal art since 1959, and showing it in Philadelphia, and as early as 1966 ('67)." See Saundra Louise Goldman "'Too Good Lookin' to be Smart": Beauty, Performance, and the Art of Hannah Wilke," PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin (May, 1999): 36.

[56] Rico, 76.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Wilke quoted in Knafo, *In Her Own Image*, 102; see also Marvin Jones, "Hannah Wilke's Art, Politics, Religion and Feminism," *The New Common Good* 1 (1985): 9-11.

[59] Chave, 9; see also Princenthal, 68-69.

inverting Freud's suggestion that women, symbolically castrated, suffer dolefully from "penis envy," Wilke offered a novel, feminist twist on Ovid's Pygmalion myth, in which a sculptor brought to life the female effigy he carved of ivory.[60] She visualized psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray's sentiment that "one might be able to interpret the fact of being deprived of a womb as the most intolerable deprivation of man."[61] Although both Abramović and Wilke emphasized a woman's ability to give birth—thus arguing for the biological superiority of their sex—the artists' respective relationships with their own mothers could not have been more different.

In counterpoint to Wilke's incredibly warm relationship with her mother, Selma Butter, in her youth, Marina Abramović "dreamt to kill" the woman who gave her birth.[62] As noted in Chapter One, Marina engaged in the deadly game of Russian roulette during her childhood. In 1970, one year prior to Chris Burden's performance *Shoot*, the then twenty-four year old girl transformed this flawed game into an "absurdly risky performance" proposal, which, as Westcott points out, Abramović must have known would be refused.[63] After slowly changing into the kind of frumpy clothing her mother wanted her to wear—"a dowdy skirt down to her calves, heavy synthetic stockings, orthopedic shoes, a white cotton blouse with red dots"—Abramović proposed that she would insert one bullet into a gun, spin the chamber, hold the pistol to her temple and

[60] Chave, 8-9.

[61] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Women* (1974), trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985): 23; see also Chave, 8, for further analysis of Irigaray.

[62] Westcott, 43; see also Stiles, "Cloud with its Shadow," 48.

[63] Westcott, 43.

pull the trigger.[64] The performance was never realized, but, like a scar, it testifies to how deeply Abramović resented her mother's authoritarianism and how unmistakably she must have experienced the dichotomies between love and pain, her mother and herself—woman-as-victim and women-as-perpetrator. Abramović would continue to indoctrinate in her work this perforated, sometimes-ambiguous female identity.

In her psychologically complex so-called "performalist" self-portraits made in 1978, Hannah Wilke also relied on the gun as a metaphor for deeply seated feelings of resentment. Wilke's bitterness, however, was not directed toward her mother, but rather the sculptor Claes Oldenburg, with whom she had been personally and professionally involved between 1969 and 1976. The latter year he abruptly married curator Coosje van Bruggen, who remained his intimate creative partner until her death in 2009.[65] Comprised of forty-eight aggressive and confrontational, yet poignant self-portraits, her *So Help Me Hannah* series featured a number of variations of Wilke posing naked using toy guns as a prop. This was an obvious reference to Oldenburg's assortment of found "ray gun" sculptures—his ultimate, ubiquitous phallic symbol—a collection and trademark Wilke had helped Oldenburg develop. Photographed on site in New York at P.S.1 prior to her 1978 exhibition opening at the institution, this suite of images comprised pictures of Wilke naked, wearing nothing but high heels that elongated her lithe body and accentuated the vulnerability of her nudity. In many of these high-contrast black and white photos, Wilke's body appears pale and sinuous against a gun's gleaming, angular contours [Fig. 96 - 99].

[64] Ibid.; see also Stiles, "Cloud with its Shadow," 48.

[65] Reputedly, Oldenburg announced his union with van Bruggen to Wilke in a particularly ugly way—via his apartment's speakerphone. Goldman, 144.

Appropriating aphorisms from famous male writers and thinkers, many of the works in the *So Help Me Hannah* series allude in a general way to the violence men are capable of inflicting on women. In *What Does This Represent/What Do You Represent*, Wilke presented herself as cornered by the male gaze [Fig. 98]. She is sullen, slumped against the wall, like VALIE EXPORT with her genital area exposed, and with an array of guns and Mickey Mouse dolls (another reference to Oldenburg) scattered around her on the floor. In contrast to her pose, the quotation Wilke superimposed on this image detracts from the viewer's ability to unequivocally objectify the female body. Instead of issuing a straightforward statement, Wilke's inclusion of a philosophical question made famous by the modernist painter Ad Reinhardt complicates the act of objectification. In reconfiguring the male artist's words, she angled her susceptibility to the male gaze towards a personal, rather than political feminist critique.[66]

The intertwined questions "What does this represent? What do you represent?" also apply unequivocally to Abramović's re-enactment of *Action Pants: Gential Panic*. As Wilke suggested in 1980, "Art is only a weapon, which may endanger women's art that is formally and humanly relevant but does not adhere to a specific political or commercial concept."[67] In this sense, during their early solo careers both Abramović (despite her demurral) and Wilke were ahead of their time with regard to feminism. They inflected their works with their own personal subjectivities, a position that would be more aligned with third wave feminism of the 1990s. In the next section of this chapter, I focus further on Abramović's re-creation of EXPORT's *Action Pants: Genital Panic* at the

[66] Amelia Jones, *Body Art / Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998): 157.

[67] Wilke quoted in Princenthal, 64.

Guggenheim using it to interrogate specifically how second-wave feminist work might be interpreted anew when re-performed today.

BACK TO BURDEN / HOMAGE TO EXPORT: WOMEN WIELDING WEAPONS

Her avowed gender-neutral stance notwithstanding, in 2012 Marina Abramović accepted an invitation from her friend and collaborator, Antony Hegarty of the musical group Antony and the Johnsons, to host a talk for a female-only audience at the Meltdown festival in London. Mainstream Internet outlets capitalized on this fact, for by agreeing to the event, Abramović appeared to transgress her established image as an artist uninterested in the politics of gender. *The Huffington Post* declared, "That's right—no boys allowed,"[68] while *The Guardian* cited Abramović's admonishment that, "Artists can do whatever they want" as a rationale to explain "why men will be banned from Abramović's Meltdown show."[69]

Chris Burden's 1975 definition of art prefigured Abramović's recent line of reasoning. Art, he said then, is "a free spot in society, where you can do anything."[70] At the time, however, it was difficult to foresee how proprietary issues and market values would shift as interest in re-performance increased; performance art's eventual full acceptance as an institutionalized, museum-appropriate medium undeniably brought with it certain limitations. As already noted, when Abramović sought Burden's permission to

---

[68] Katherine Brooks, "Marina Abramović Plans Women-Only Lecture for Meltdown 2012 Festival in London," July 30, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/30/marina-Abramović-women-only-lecture_n_1720020.html (accessed online, Dec. 30, 2012).

[69] See Gemma Kappala-Ramsamy's interview with Marina Abramović, "Meltdown, 2012—Marina Abramović: 'Artists can do whatever they want," July 28, 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2012/jul/30/meltdown-2012-marina-Abramović-interview (accessed online, Dec. 30, 2012).

[70] Burden quoted in Robert Horvitz, "Chris Burden," *Artforum* 14 (May 1976): 27. Also cited in Howard Singerman, "Chris Burden's Pragmatism," in *Chris Burden: A Twenty Year Survey* (Newport Beach, CA: Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1988): 20.

re-do *Transfixed* at the Guggenheim in 2005, for example, he denied it, a fact Abramović has lamented—particularly because (according to her) he did not supply a reason.[71] In an interview with Amelia Jones in 2007, Burden summarized his response to Abramović:

> Marina, the truth is you don't need to ask and you don't need my permission you can do whatever you want but now that you are asking me I'm saying no because it's absolutely meaningless for you to do that performance or it has no meaning. It becomes a parody and I think stupid.[72]

Burden, in fact, had made his thoughts on re-performance abundantly clear as early as 2004. At that time he resigned from his twenty-eight year teaching post at UCLA after one of his own graduate students, Joe Deutch, walked into visiting professor Ron Athey's classroom, drew a purportedly real revolver from a paper bag, loaded one bullet and, as in a game of Russian roulette, spun the chamber, held it to his head and fired. The gun did not go off, the student left the room and a moment later, a firecracker, exploding like a bullet shot, rang out in a hallway nearby.[73] No one was hurt, but UCLA's unwillingness to discipline Deutch prompted Burden's resignation.[74]

---

[71] See, for example, Abramović's interview with Chris Thompson and Katarina Weslien, "Pure Raw," 47. Abramović states, "I wanted to do [Chris Burden] very much and I could not. I would be very interested if you can try—good luck—to find out why Chris Burden doesn't want these pieces to be re-performed. I was not lucky enough to get an answer."

[72] See Amelia Jones's interview with Abramović, "The Live Artist as Archeologist, Marina Abramović and Amelia Jones," *Perform, Repeat, Record*, 566, n. 9.

[73] Some confusion continues to surround the event, but most accounts reflect my report herein. See Kristine Stiles's description in "Burden of Light," *Chris Burden* (Locus+ Publishing Ltd., Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, 2007): 29-30; and Christopher Bedford's narrative in "The Viral Ontology of Performance," in *Perform, Repeat, Record*, 84-85; as well as Joe Deutch's comments in a recent interview with Rozalia Janovic on the occasion of his exhibition at Marlborough Chelsea in New York City, "Joe Deutch, Artist Who Presented Russian Roulette at UCLA, Hits Marlborough Chelsea," June 22, 2012, http://galleristny.com/2012/06/joe-deutch-is-not-a-gun-person/ (accessed online, Jan 1, 2013). Deutch claims the gun was real, a fact difficult to corroborate with certainty. See also Abramović's comment, "Chris Burden was not even there. It was not even his class. And the gun was not real. I mean, it's so ridiculous this whole thing about Chris Burden. I think he wanted to resign" (Thompson and Weslien, 47).

Burden had performed *Shoot* (in which someone else pulled the trigger) during the Vietnam War, little more than one year after the Kent State University shootings in Ohio when the Ohio National Guard killed four students, paralyzed one and wounded eight others. Burden said he was thinking of this event—'of flipping it over and doing it on purpose'—but chose consciously not to perform the work in a university setting, a public space in which one expects that his/her security to be safeguarded.[75] In fact, Burden invited only a few bystanders to observe *Shoot* and unlike his student Joe Deutch, Burden cautioned his audience about what they would witness at his performance.

Four years after the Kent State Shootings, another defining moment in America's history of guns ricocheted through the nation when newspaper heiress Patty Hearst was kidnapped and allegedly brainwashed by a group calling themselves the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA). Snatched by the SLA from her Berkeley townhouse in February 1974, Hearst was bound, raped and held captive in a tiny closet for six weeks. When she reappeared in April of that year, Hearst announced her new revolutionary identity as "Tania," and was caught on videotape helping the SLA to rob a bank [Fig. 100]. After most of the group's members were killed in a shootout with Los Angeles police, Hearst and two other SLA members went underground. When she was apprehended in September of 1975, Hearst defiantly "raised a fist for the cameras and identified her occupation on jailhouse forms as 'urban guerilla.'"[76] Yet, when the heiress was tried five

---

[74] Jenny Hontz, "Gunplay, as Art, Sets Off a Debate," *New York Times*, Feb. 5, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/05/arts/05shoo.html?pagewanted=print&position=&_r=0 (accessed online, Jan. 3, 2013).

[75] Stiles, "Burden of Light," *Chris Burden*, 30; see also Bedford, "The Viral Ontology of Performance," *Perform, Repeat, Record*, 82-83, for a detailed, archival description of *Shoot.*

[76] Laura Browder, *Her Best Shot: Women and Guns in America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 180.

months later, her defense rested on the claim that her captors had indoctrinated her against her natural will; ostensibly, her new identity as a terrorist was a result of Stockholm syndrome, a psychological condition in which hostages come to express loyalty and allegiance with their captors. Convicted in March 1976, Hearst spent two years in prison before President Jimmy Carter granted her clemency in February 1979.[77] As historian Laura Browder states, "Patty Hearst was symbolically a victim and an aggressor embodied in one woman."[78]

This dualism between victim and perpetrator—as a specific site of conflict—pervaded the reputation of VALIE EXPORT's supposed original "performance" of *Action Pants/Genital Panic*, as well as Marina Abramović's recreation of it at the Guggenheim. As we have seen, EXPORT's "performance" was said to have taken shape in three different mediums: as photographs, as a performance in a theater, and as a silkscreen poster which appeared on the streets in Vienna and Berlin. According to Bojana Pejić, EXPORT generated the poster in an attempt to bridge the gap between high and low art—and specifically as a means for "questioning modernist myths enmeshed in the theorization of artistic originality, subjectivity and uniqueness."[79] By inserting her provocative image into the economy of pictures circulating in the public sphere, EXPORT reached a much wider audience, increasing her fame. It can be argued that Marina Abramović's public event at the Guggenheim, furthered EXPORT's initial intent

---

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid., 183.

[79] Pejić, "On Pants, Panic and Origins," 55.

to shatter the notion that this performance was a singular event, framed only by one specific time and place.

EXPORT's *Action Pants/Genital Panic* poster was published shortly after German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas authored his pioneering thesis, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) where he argued that the public sphere is a civil, mediated "bourgeois" space in which inclusive, rational ideas could prevail. Yet, as Rosalyn Deutsche has argued of the public sphere from a feminist perspective, democratic communities come into being precisely through the opposite—via exclusions, conflict and fragmentation—as well as through efforts to expunge all traces of these exclusions.[80] The fact that the image of Hearst wearing a beret and clasping a carbine became a best-selling poster strengthens my argument that these images of EXPORT, like those of Hearst (and later Abramović) were celebrated—and celebritized—precisely for the conflict they aroused. By depicting herself simultaneously as victim and as perpetrator at the Guggenheim, Abramović reiterated in a very public way to a new audience the question EXPORT (and Wilke) had probed decades earlier: "What does this represent? What do you represent?"—an inquiry that denies the possibility of a singular, cohesive answer [Fig. 101 - 102].[81]

Most descriptions of the outfit EXPORT wore in *Action Pants/Genital Panic* explain clearly that the crotch area of her pants was "cut away." i.e. that her private parts were exposed purposefully, not against her will. However, it might be argued that these images belie such a characterization, particularly if one knows nothing of the

[80] Rosalind Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* [1996] (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988): XII. See also Pejić's application of Deutsche's argument ("On Pants, Panic and Origins," 57).

[81] Before it entered the public sphere, the poster was first sent to Hearst's parents on April Fool's Day, 1974. See Browder, 177, and Shana Alexander, *Anyone's Daughter* (New York: The Viking Press, 1979): 215.

circumstances surrounding EXPORT's supposed original staging of *Action Pants/Genital Panic*. This lack of information certainly must have applied to at least a portion of the visitors who entered the Guggenheim the night of Abramović's performance. (On that particular night, the entire museum was open late, not just for Abramović's exhibition.) For unsuspecting museum visitors, as well as for the individuals in 1969 who saw Export's poster in the streets, it could be plausible to assume that the subject's pants had in fact been torn away—and that now the gun was meant to function as a measure of protection.

In an extended essay analyzing the depiction of female genitalia in contemporary art, Anna C. Chave suggested a similar interpretation of *Action Pants: Genital Panic*. "By arming herself," Chave averred, EXPORT "acted to illuminate the vulva's complicated role as, at once a magnetic site of pleasure and an age-old target of attack, hence a source of fear or pain."[82] From this perspective as well, the photographs that document EXPORT's *Action Pants/Genital Panic* can be compared to the grainy, infamous video footage that captured Hearst wielding a weapon. As she herself was to argue, Hearst picked up the SLA's arms as a defense mechanism against the sexual assaults she endured at their hands. EXPORT's and then Abramović's perpetration of social codes in the public realm can likewise be read as deeply entangled with the notion of women as targeted victims (of the male gaze).

Like EXPORT in her photographs, on stage at the Guggenheim Abramović appeared pugnacious and hostile, not the least bit flirtatious or beguiling. She was on

[82] As Chave points out, the theme of rape comprised only a small minority of feminist artworks, including for example, Yoko Ono's *Rape* (1969) and Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz's *In Mourning and in Rage* (1977).

guard, deploying her own gaze and posture in a strategic gesture of defensiveness, not an unprovoked assault. Moreover, while the image of Abramović on stage is sexualized, it is decidedly *not* sexy, resembling nothing of Angelina Jolie's glamorous, gun-toting character, Lara Croft, of the *Tomb Raider* action movie series, for example.[83] Whereas Abramović sought to confront the male gaze, she did not entice it. Her breasts are concealed and except for her pubic area, she does not show any skin. This, I want to emphasize, differs dramatically from the way in which pop singer Madonna incorporated the use of firearms during her spring 2012 MDNA world concert tour [Fig. 103].

As part of a multi-media extravaganza, Madonna's theatrical use of guns on stage garnered heavy media scrutiny and public chagrin, particularly in Colorado where, despite outcry regarding the singer's insensitivity to the recent, deadly shooting at a movie theatre in Aurora, Madonna's provocative show proceeded as planned. During one of her songs, she pounced across the stage holding a gun singing "Bang-bang, shot you dead, shot my lover in the head," as blood spattered on an enormous screen behind her. A primary difference between Abramović's recreation of EXPORT's *Action Pants: Genital Panic* and Madonna's gutsy on-stage antics arises from the perception that Abramović's performance provides a critique that questions a woman's capacity to remain "sexy" and appealing to the male gaze in the very moment that she seeks to deflect it. By contrast, Madonna's so-called refusal to be victimized embraced the marketing tactics that have propagated female gun ownership in America since the 1990s.

[83] EXPORT's original and Abramović's re-performance clearly juxtaposed the violent and the erotic, yet neither suggested the air of availability often present in portrayals of female heroines. An expanded study of women who either perform or are photographed/filmed with guns should account for the widely varying types of armed women that pervade contemporary American culture, as well as diverse cultural concepts of beauty, heroism, sexuality and the coded dialectic of glamour/anti-glamour.

In America, debate concerning gun violence reached its high water mark in late 2012 after a lone gunman opened fire at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut; twenty children and six adults perished. Abramović had however seized on the theme of children and guns to comment pointedly on violence, its pervasiveness in global media culture (especially on television) and its effects on children in 2006, when she first visited Luang Prabang in Laos for a residency through the UNESCO and Laotian government cultural endeavor, "The Quiet in the Land."[84] She noticed children playing with toy machine guns—enacting scenes of war on the street—while nearby, hundred of Buddhist monks were praying at temple in observance of a Laos spiritual festival. The juxtaposition of these two activities sparked her concept for a suite of photographs, *The Family Cycle*, and a five-channel video installation, *Eight Lessons on Emptiness with a Happy End*, a sequence of eight short takes presenting children in fatigues, engaging one another in games of war using fake guns [Fig. 104 -107].[85] When she completed this body of work in 2008, one seductive and yet horrifying image from the *Family Cycle* was featured on the cover of *Art in America* in May of 2009. In it, seven young girls wearing green fatigues sleep in an oversize bed fit with bright pink sheets; each ominously clasps an unnervingly real-looking toy machine gun [Fig. 104].

Ranging in age from four to ten years old, the children featured in both the video and the related photographs epitomize the innocent pawns of war; in the video

[84] Shirin Neshat, Ann Hamilton, Janine Antoni and Cai Guo-Qiang have also participated in this residency program. See Francis Morin and John Alan Farmer, *The Quiet in the Land, Luang Prabang, Laos* (New York: The Quiet in the Land, 2008).

[85] For an overview of *The Quiet in the Land, Luang Prabang, Laos* including a statement by Abramović, see Morin and Farmer, 41-42, and 43 for a statement about it by Abramović. See also Abramović's interview with David Ebony, "Marina Abramović: An Interview," *Art in America* 5 (Nov. 2009): 115-121, where she discussed the project.

installation, scenes of children pretending to execute one another or firing their toy guns into the air are contrasted with the serenity of what Abramović refers to as places of power—a waterfall and a holy island where a Laotian shaman told her spirits lived.[86] According to the artist, these dichotomous images typify the clash between the communist government in Laos and Buddhist beliefs, and reference the terror of the long Civil War that raged in Laos beginning from 1953 until 1975. Yet, she insists, they should be read on a broader level, as a critique of "the influence of media," and as a way "to get people to start thinking about the kind of education we want our children to have."[87] This intended message, however, is difficult to read. For the artist, photographs such as *The Family III* are imbued with personal relevance—here is where she said, "I think of my parents, who were often in uniform during the day, and at night they always slept with weapons nearby or under the bed."[88] But, as an isolated image on the cover of *Art in America*, this photo evokes exactly what it seeks to undo; for a self-professed apolitical artist such as Abramović this, perhaps is in part her point exactly. In a self-portrait from the series, *The Family XI* [Fig. 106], it is Abramović who clasps a "bouquet" of guns. While for her, this image was intended to be "ironic," without knowing the context of this project or the artist's intent, it appears to be a female call to arms, a situation with which, as I have been arguing, Abramović is personally familiar.[89]

---

[86] Morin and Farmer, 42; Ebony, 118. Narrated by Abramović, an excellent video made by Ramon Coelho in 2008, "Everything you always wanted to know about the making of a video installation," documents the filming of scenes for the five channel video installation. In it, Abramović is clearly directing the action. See http://vimeo.com/52665956 (accessed Jan. 25th, 2014).

[87] Abramović cited in *The Quiet in the Land*, 43.

[88] Abramović cited in Ebony, 120.

[89] In the interview with Ebony (121), Abramović stated that during the shoot, she was "constantly walking around with armfuls of children's weapons," and that after a while, she started to think of it as a "bouquet."

Although the Newtown shooting refocused American public opinion about gun control more generally, by the early 1970s, such figures as Patty Hearst had already inoculated divisiveness about the role of the armed female in America.[90] In order to realign the general public's understanding, during the 1980s the National Rifle Association launched an aggressive marketing campaign that equated gun ownership as a "logical extension" of the Women's Liberation Movement.[91] As Richard Feldman of the American Shooting Sports Council suggested, "It's like the bumper sticker says: God didn't create men and women equal. Samuel Colt did."[92] In 1992, Christopher Dolnack, the marketing manager of Smith & Weston, claimed that "Firearms are the last bastions of male dominance … today [it is] OK for women to be CEOs of companies and go in to space as astronauts, so why shouldn't they own guns?"[93] In other words, the construction of a niche market for female gun owners was being sanctified by a call for gender equality, but, as Laura Browder makes clear, it was a campaign that sought not to disturb the domesticated role of women as wives and nurturers. The cover image of the August 1994 issue of *Women & Guns* magazine featuring a smiling, seemingly innocuous woman wearing an apron and cleaning her gun as if it were a kitchen appliance, precisely illustrates Browder's point [Fig. 108].

Amidst these kinds of idealized portrayals of armed American women, Iranian-

[90] Browder, 140. Unlike in Yugoslavia, where female partisans had actively fought alongside men during World War II, at mid-century the American military defined all members of the Women's Auxiliary Corps as noncombatants.

[91] Ibid., 213.

[92] Richard Feldman quoted in Ian Katz, "Firearms Industry Woos Women Who Dress to Kill," *The Guardian*, May 21, 1996; see also Browder, 213.

[93] Browder, 215.

born, New York City based photographer and video/film artist Shirin Neshat's first series of photographic work, *Women of Allah* (1993-1997), began to circulate in the United States [Fig. 109 - 110]. Twelve years younger than Marina Abramović (and her good friend), Neshat was born in Qazvin, Iran, in 1956. She left the country to study in the United States, where she completed her college and graduate studies, and has remained exiled from Iran since 1978, when the Shah was deposed and the Iranian Revolution broke out.[94] When Neshat was finally able to return in 1990 for a visit home, the first time in twelve years, she discovered a country profoundly changed under the despotic and theocratic regime of Ayatollah Khomeini. Neshat's encounter with Iran's strict Islamic theocracy inspired the creation of her *Women of Allah* series, in which female models, and often the artist herself, are depicted covered in a black *chador*, or *hijab* connoting religious observance. Typically Iranian script blankets what is visible of the face; notably, these women also often bear firearms.[95] An untrained photographer in the early 1990s, Neshat hired others to capture these images, including Larry Barns, Cynthia Preston, and her own husband at the time, Korean curator Kyong Park. Except for their inclusion in the credit line, Neshat's relationship to these individuals as collaborators remains relatively unexamined.[96] The copyrights belong exclusively to Neshat, implying

[94] See Scott MacDonald's interview with Shirin Neshat, "Between Two Worlds: An Interview with Shirin Neshat." *Feminist Studies* 3 (Fall 2004): 620-659 for more on Neshat's upbringing and initial studies on the west coast.

[95] For a full catalog of these images see Shirin Neshat, *Women of Allah* (Torino: Marco Noire Editore, 1997). While under Ayatollah Khomeini the *hijab* became mandatory for women in public, the social and religious practice of veiling did not arise with Islam in the seventh century, but was a fixture in pre-Islamic Arabia, Ancient Greece and the Byzantine Empire.

[96] See the photo credits in Shirin Neshat, *Women of Allah* (Torino: Marco Noire Editore, 1997). Neshat is not the only model; in her acknowledgements she thanks and lists the first names of "those friends and relatives who kindly posed for my photographs." Although Neshat has stated, "I think that everything I have ever done has been in one way or another in collaboration with someone or a group of people," a critical discussion of labor division in her work, as well as her directorial role, remains lacking in the

that, rather than mere photographs, these images should be read as documents of performance.

Akin to Abramović's re-performance of *Action Pants: Genital Panic* at the Guggenheim, Neshat's *Women of Allah* series considerably heightens the tenor of the feminine gaze; the women in these images (prominently role-played by Neshat herself) stare defiantly, sometimes seductively. The calligraphic Farsi Neshat used to cover any exposed flesh consists of verse by Islamic feminist poets.[97] In one of the most unsettling images, *Untitled* (1994), Neshat is seen standing slightly right of center, veiled in a black *chador* from which emerges the tip of an uneasily-close gun barrel pointed directly at the nose of the viewer [Fig. 109]. Less widely circulated and discussed than the more lyrical, contemplative and subtly romanticized images from this series, this picture produces an impact that is immediate and disconcerting; who or what is the target here? Unlike EXPORT or Abramović, neither of whom pointed their guns directly at the viewer,

---

literature on Neshat. In a 2007 conversation with Marina Abramović and Vanessa Beecroft, Neshat agreed with Abramović that collaboration is not an "easy" process, continuing, "I have learned that [collaboration] is all about a tedious negotiation. I compare collaboration with dance. That once you have a partner, you must learn to respect and learn to discover your partner's tendencies, strengths and weaknesses. Sometimes you lead and other times he or she leads. I find collaboration makes artists humble, as we all can suffer from our egos. But the biggest challenge in collaborating is of course not to compromise the essence of your art and give in to mediocre ideas." For the context of these quotes, see Helen Kontonva, "Modern Nomads: Marina Abramović, Vanessa Beecroft, Shirin Neshat,"
Flash Art (July–September, 2007),
http://www.flashartonline.com/interno.php?pagina=articolo_det&id_art=169&det=ok&title=MARINA-ABRAMOVIC-VANESSA-BEECROFT-SHIRIN-NESHAT (accessed March 23, 2011).

[97] Coupling textual meaning with aesthetic effect, the pictures in *Women of Allah* demand to be read on multiple levels. The words of Forough Farokhzad, a revolutionary mid-century Iranian feminist, occur prominently. Neshat applied Farokhzad's text by hand to the surface of these images and as such, these poems can be read as a surrogate "signature" for Neshat's visual voice and aesthetic persona. Paralleling Abramovic's recreation of other artist's performances, Neshat's authorial persona also engages with the activity of both reading and (re)writing texts to create new work. Neshat's use of self-imaging in *Women of Allah* is direct and immediately visible, but the addition of Farokhzad's poetry splices her authorship. Farazeneh Milani writes of this fusion, "Giving voice to the body and the body to the voice, [Neshat] memorialized Iranian women's defiance at the same time she launched her own artistic career." See Milani, "The Visual Poetry of Shirin Neshat," *Shirin Neshat*, ed. Sara Tedesco (Milan: Charta, 2001): 7.

Neshat deflects the other's gaze, not with her own eyes, but rather through the cavernous round eye of the gun's cask.

When Shirin Neshat created *Women of Allah* she had not yet launched her art career and she later admitted that she "was not thinking about the audience since I did not have any; I was making this work for *myself*."[98] Despite this demurral, these works harnessed immediate attention in the West. The veiled women who populate Neshat's pictures have been often misinterpreted as repressed in a formulaic way through which the Orient becomes "something one judges (as in a court of law)."[99] Philosopher and critic Arthur Danto suggested to Neshat that her interpretation of Islamic women was not "entirely different from feminist discourse in the West," which is by contrast rooted in the notion of equality among the sexes—a specifically American feminist principle.[100] Yet, as Neshat clarified, "Iranian women…feel that men and women have their own distinct roles and places, they are not competitive…[women] want the domestic responsibility—which actually gives them a lot of power."[101] Repression, according to Neshat, is precisely why the women she portrays in her work "are more likely [than men] to resist and ultimately to break free."[102] Reflecting an approach not dissimilar to Wilke and Abramović's earlier work, Neshat also has suggested that eventually the vulnerability of the female body might give way to rebellion.

---

[98] MacDonald, 629.

[99] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books): 40; see also her partner Shoja Azari's comments about Said in relationship to Neshat in his essay, "An Inside Look at Shirin Neshat's Art," *Shirin Neshat* (Montreal: Contemporary Art Museum of Montreal, 2001): 117-119.

[100] Arthur C. Danto, "Shirin Neshat," *BOMB* 73 (Fall 2000). This interview is accessible on-line, http://bombsite.com/issues/73/articles/2332 (accessed Feb. 17, 2012).

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid.

During the Iran/Iraq war of the 1980s depictions of armed Iranian women standing in formation solicited scrutiny by Western journalists; in Iran, these images appeared in government propaganda publications [Fig. 111].[103] Particularly because the Iran hostage crisis was still fresh (more than fifty Americans were held for 444 days from 1979-1981), media outlets in the United States capitalized on the notoriety of these images depicting the female Iranian guard. Arguing for a postcolonial, allegorical reading of *Women of Allah*, Iftikhar Dadi has observed, "it is precisely Neshat's canny recognition of the easy slippage between stock media imagery of revolutionary Iranian women as metonymic of all Muslim women that has brought the artist's strikingly graphic yet deeply ambivalent work to prominence."[104] As Dadi suggests, Neshat's sudden rise to fame was closely associated with—or read through the lens of—media representations of actual veiled women wielding weapons. Although Neshat "was not playing an Islamic Patty Hearst,"[105] comparison to these photojournalistic portraits functioned to increase her popularity, situating her "as the singular privileged translator" of the armed Iranian woman and thereby instigating the very notoriety for herself that Neshat's *Women of Allah* appeared to problematize.[106]

Not dissimilar to Abramović, Neshat's personal views of gender relations have been shaped by her cultural roots.[107] The presence of guns in their work reveals traces of

---

[103] Iftikhar Dadi, "Shirin Neshat's Photographs as Postcolonial Allegories*," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 34 (Autumn 2008): 126.

[104] Ibid., 128.

[105] Nancy Princenthal, "The Garden of Diaspora," *Shirin Neshat* (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Art, 2013): 9.

[106] Ibid., 138-139.

[107] A thorough comparative study focusing specifically on these two female artists is yet to be written. Abramović inadvertently outlined the basic premise for such an investigation in her forward to a monograph on Neshat in 2010 when she wrote, "Dear Shirin […] As we have both often observed, there

each woman's brand of identity politics, as well as of their non-American social and religious upbringings. Although another artist from a different European country originally submitted *Action Pants: Genital Panic* into art's history, the fact that arming women was socially normative in Abramović's Yugoslavia heightens the work's matrix of interpretation. Each implicitly violent and explicit in their break with stable meaning, Abramović's recreation of *Action Pants: Genital Panic* at the Guggenheim as well as her project in Laos and Neshat's *Women of Allah* series all intensify the American fascination and social ambivalence regarding male/female equality.[108] "We are titillated," Browder remarks, "but we are afraid."[109]

As Hanne Loreck has observed, although the prominence of Abramović's re-performance of *Action Pants: Genital Panic* was ostensibly due in part to how she "flatly distanced herself from everything feminist," this so-called homage she was paying to VALIE EXPORT remained oddly lifeless.[110] Yet to sit with legs splayed and sex exposed for seven hours while holding an inert gun, is indeed, to say and do something "feminist," however awkwardly the gesture may be retrieved, re-written and subsequently received. It should also be noted in interpreting this piece that the re-performance sequence

---

are many similarities between our backgrounds and artistic personae. We both came to New York from distant lands rocked by conflict and injustice and marred by social and political difference. We are not only emigrants, but also nomads of a peculiarly modern or postmodern kind. […] As I discovered through my collaborative work with Ulay, a couple's interaction can stand in for a range of relationships beyond the romantic, including the political, the spiritual and the more broadly societal." Although Abramović does not mention by name Neshat's primary creative partner, her comments suggest a clear nod to Shoja Azari, the Iranian filmmaker and writer Neshat met in 1997 and with whom she has, since then, co-conceptualized, co-written, and co-edited her poetic, charged reveries. See Abramović's forward in *Shirin Neshat* by Arthur C. Danto (New York: Rizzoli, 2010): 6-7.

[108] Browder, 232.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Hanne Loreck, "I am, where I stage 'disappearance,'" *VALIE EXPORT: Time and Countertime* (Koln: Kunstmuseum Linz, Lentos, 2010): 259.

Abramović selected for *Seven Easy Pieces* at the Guggenheim was not historically chronological. Unremarked so far is the significance of the fact that Abramović enacted EXPORT's *Action Pants: Genital Panic* on the day immediately following her re-enactment of *Seedbed*, a 1972 performance in which male artist Vito Acconci lay under false floorboards at the Sonnabend Gallery in New York masturbating and fantasizing about the visitors who walked overhead.[111] Heightening her proprioceptive sense that unseen others were on top of her (stage) both literally and metaphorically, Abramović noted a problem for herself during *Seedbed* that Acconci seems not have encountered. She was unnerved by "the absence of public gaze: only the sound … I ended with nine orgasms. It was terrible for the next piece—I was so exhausted!"[112] After performing *Seedbed* from an explicitly female point of view that sought to re-wire Acconci's trenchant power/pleasure play—allegedly like EXPORT—Abramović intentionally displayed her sex on stage (although at times, as pictures document, with tears streaming

[111] Acconci originally performed *Seedbed* twice a week, six hours a day between January 15th and 29th, 1972. This notorious piece secured for the artist a definitive place in performance art's history. When recently asked, "What is the worst performance you've ever seen?" Acconci responded, "The worst performance, then, would have to be Marina Abramović at MoMA, three or so years ago, all-day, every-day sitting at one side of a table and looking/staring, in silence, at another person (though I think, I've heard, that Laurie Anderson & Lou Reed sat together and looked back at her in silence). She turned herself into a sculpture, into an act of endurance: the repetition, the constancy, turned her action into habit: the constant presence of an audience turned her so-called performance into theater." He adds, "I have to make a marginal note here: Marina's earliest performances, 1973 approx [*sic*], and her performances together with Ulay, were some of the best performances. You can't do performances for too long a time: performance has to be a way of breaking out of one kind of art in order to find/invent another kind." Acconci's statement makes clear two ideas: if performance art veers too close to theater, it fails; and second, if performance art is to be avant-garde, it must be vigorous, sensationalized, always on the edge and certainly not repeated. Concluding his interview Acconci conceded, "I went away from performance when I realized I wasn't thinking/behaving on the spot, I was listening to my self-in-the-past directing my self-in-the-present." See the interview with Acconci in the small-format, special edition to the *San Francisco Arts Quarterly,* Issue 15 Booklet: Performance (February-April, 2014): n.p. See also excerpts of the interview online, http://galleristny.com/2014/02/vito-acconci-the-worst-performance-would-have-to-be-marina-abramovic-at-moma/ (accessed March 22, 2014).

[112] Abramović, cited in Karen Rosenberg, "Provocateur: Marina Abramović," *New York Magazine*, Dec. 4, 2005, http://nymag.com/nymetro/arts/art/15228/ (accessed online, Dec. 29, 2012).

down her face). That this took place the night following her concealed, ecstatic re-enactment of *Seedbed* suggests a strong continuity between these two performances in Abramović's mind. By re-staging *Action Pants/Genital Panic* at that time, Abramović activated her own para-social relationship with EXPORT's celebrity image as well as with the "original" event. This is particularly the case because, as Abramović has admitted, her knowledge of it was limited, and in part imagined.[113]

In reclaiming EXPORT's persona as feminist, Abramović tacitly appeared to position her own image as just such—despite the fact that she has denied such affiliation throughout her career. Moreover, when women incorporate a phallus or a phallic substitute as a facet of their image—in this case a gun capable of destroying life—it adds an interpretative level that is absent for men. The key difference, I want to contend, is a primitive one. Images of women with guns leave ample room for both women and men to speak of feelings, consequences and morality. As Browder notes, armed women are everywhere in American culture today and they have undeniably become charged symbols of "women's access to full citizenship, of women's capacity for violence, and of women's sexuality."[114] My concluding remarks address the performativity of the latter in contemporary celebrity culture.

THE SO-CALLED "CROTCH-SHOT"

In 2007 and 2008, supposedly unbeknownst to them, several younger female celebrities, including Paris Hilton, Brittney Spears, Lindsay Lohan and Kim Kardashian, were each photographed from below without underwear. These infamous incidents occurred when the women climbed stairs or slid into a car wearing a short skirt and,

[113] Abramović as cited in Amelia Jones, "The Live Artist as Archeologist," 550.
[114] Browder, 230.

allegedly by accident, granted the paparazzi a peek at their private parts. In 2008, New York City-based video, sculpture and installation artist Jonathan Horowitz capitalized on Brittney Spears's infamous "crotch-shot" in *CBS Evening News/www.Britneycrotch.org* by combining the lower portion of Spears's photo (in which her c-section scar is also visible) with an image of then evening news anchor Katie Couric's torso [Fig. 112]. Included in his solo exhibition, *And/Or*, at MoMA P.S.1, Horowitz's *CBS Evening News/www.Britneycrotch.org* is an unsettling, intrusive image in which the public and private spheres collide mercilessly.

The most obvious difference between Spears's notorious "crotch-shot" and EXPORT or Abramović exposing themselves in public as part of a performance is that, by also holding a gun, the two female artists clearly represented their bodies as both dangerous and off limits, whereas Spears and other female celebrities seemed to thrive on the thrill of flashing their privates. Margaret Schwartz has called attention to the current media's frequent use of the term "vagina," or its hip-hop slang counterpart, "vajayjay," to describe what these images portray—notwithstanding the fact that the vagina is as invisible to the human eye as a kidney or liver.[115] Schwartz has theorized that employing the term 'vagina' or 'vajayjay' to denote what these explicit photographs reveal has acted as "a discursive *prosthesis*: a suturing … but also a kind of substitution that is structured much like a fetish, that is, as a replacement that also memorializes a loss."[116] Understood as a discursive prosthesis, the term vagina, she explains, simultaneously acts as an extension or support. Like Freud's fetish, it

[115] Margaret Schwartz, "The Horror of Something to See: Celebrity Vaginas as Prostheses," *In the Limelight and Under the Microscope: Forms and Functions of Female Celebrity*, ed. Su Holmes and Diana Negra (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Company, 2011): 226.

[116] Ibid.

> both substitutes for and forever marks the mother's fantasized castration, in the very act of replacing a limb, a prosthesis always points out its absence. It shows that something is missing by compensating for what is missing … the prosthetic limb has a life of its own: it is more durable than flesh, impervious to pain and articulated, literally and figuratively […] it represents an unresolved binary."[117]

Here Schwartz focused on Freud's specifically psychoanalytic use of the term *prosthesis*, a concept also prominently examined by Marshall McLuhan in his landmark text, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964). In its opening passage McLuhan wrote, "In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message."[118] For McLuhan, media and technology, not necessarily what or how these means communicated, were themselves worthy of scrutiny. These mediums, he argued, both extended and short-circuited or amputated the self. In his reconsideration of the Greek Narcissus myth, for example, the youth did not fall in love with his own image, but rather "mistook his own reflection in the water as that of another person."[119] For McLuhan, it showed that "men at once become fascinated by any extension of themselves in any material other than themselves."[120] Narcissus's failure to recognize his reflection as an extended version of the self pointed toward "self-amputation."[121] Drawing on medical research while never articulating the term "prosthesis" as such, McLuhan suggested that although humans might "elongate"

---

[117] Ibid., 227.

[118] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, with an introduction by Lewis L. Lapham (Cambridge, MA; London, England: MIT Press, 1998 [1964]): 7.
[119] Ibid., 41 – 42.

[120] Ibid., 41.

[121] Ibid., 43.

themselves in myriad ways—clothes might be considered an extension of one's skin, for example—the pace and pervasiveness of "electric technology" and media manifested as an extension of the central human nervous system, which, in its outward reach, suggested "suicidal autoampuation." This disconnectedness, for McLuhan, was both metaphorical and physiological, a kind of numbness that forbade "self-recognition."[122]

The use of actual prosthetic body parts by American photographer Cindy Sherman in her so-called *Sex Pictures* can help clarify my understanding of how prosthesis operated in Abramović's reenactment of *Action Pants/Genital Panic*. In the early 1990s Sherman produced a series of images depicting contorted mannequins in overtly sexualized and extremely compromising poses. Notably, in this series, she abandoned the use of her own body as the work's subject. In Sherman's *Untitled #261* (1992), an-upside down manikin's artificial gaze uncomfortably meets the viewer's eye [Fig. 113]. Lying prostrate on a swath of silky red linens, the plastic model's female genital area is blatantly exposed and a separate pair of prosthetic breasts has been tentatively placed on top of the manikin; its loosely attached head appears to be borrowed from a male model. Neither sexy nor erotic, the manikin's cold clinical anatomy defies its pseudo porn-studio setting while at the same time instigating a dialogue with the classic lexicon of pornography, the male gaze and even the work of previous artists who have used manikins or dolls in their work.[123] Sherman's models in these pictures function on two levels: as physical prosthetics that both extend and substitute for the actual human

[122] Ibid.

[123] See Rosalind Krauss's discussion of the German photographer Hans Bellemer's series *La Poupée* (1934 – 1949) in Krauss, *Cindy Sherman 1975-1993*, with an essay by Norma Bryson (New York: Rizzoli, 1993): 207-212; see also her essay "Informe without Conclusion," *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, ed. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (Malden, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2005): 395 - 407.

body, and discursively, through a chain of meanings that may or may not have been intended initially.

I want to summarize Marina Abramović's re-performance of VALIE EXPORT's *Action Pants: Genital Panic* from precisely this perspective, by considering it a physical and discursive prosthetic device, compensating for the loss of an original (EXPORT's *Action Pants: Genital Panic*) by (re)presenting it anew. From the very beginning of her career, although she displays it differently than in Shirin Neshat's more literal interpretation, Abramović has been keenly aware of the ways in which a sense of loss can be "written on" and through the body.

When she performed *Action Pants: Genital Panic* Abramović adhered to the conditions she had prescribed for herself and indeed created a "new interpretation" of this work, one made possible by considering her own past and the contemporary context through which it can be re-read. It supports my argument that Abramović's artistic and celebrity identity is recalibrated, altered and reshaped when she stages another artist's work. If Abramović is re-performing "as" someone else, her persona does not remain static; she is neither translating nor mimicking nor copying. Her brand, however, remains stable precisely because she is offering what can only be perceived as an "authentic" experience, a kind of fragmentary realism that has less to do with EXPORT than Abramović herself.

Marina Abramović did not witness the performances she remade at the Guggenheim; this was in part one of her personal reasons for staging the exhibit. "The choice for me," she has stated, "came from the fact that the pieces had really struck me deeply, but had done so only through photographs and the little documentation that one

could find at that time. This has always interested me, and I have wanted to ask how would I deal with them now, in real time?"[124] Here Abramović echoes Richard Schechner's description of restored behavior previously discussed: "The original 'truth' or 'source' of the behavior may be lost, ignored, or contradicted—even while this truth source is apparently being honored and observed. How the strip of behavior was made, found, or developed may be unknown or concealed; elaborated; distorted by myth and tradition."[125]

In the final pages of this chapter I have emphasized that re-performance works like a prosthetic might—substituting for something missing and irretrievably gone. This reach toward the past is in fact essential to extending the self. It "offers to both individuals and groups the chance to rebecome [*sic*] what they once were—or even, and more often, to rebecome what they never were but wish to have been or wish to become," according to Schechner.[126] It is here—by considering the very process of becoming—that Marshall McLuhan's interpretation of the Narcissus is most helpful. Recall that in his version the youth falls in love with "his" reflection not because he sees himself, but because he believes his reflection is another person entirely.

In Chapter Five I continue to analyze Abramović's position as an avowedly gender-neutral artist, one who nonetheless fits my concept of the "executive female." In it

---

[124] Asked why she did not consider Carolee Schneemann as part of her line-up, Abramović responded, "Apart from her *Interior Scroll*, I understand her work as having more to do with the history of painting and installation. I respect her work enormously and I like her very much as a person. However, the work did not deal with the amount of danger, and with the pushing of physical limits, that I was after for myself." Abramović as cited in Chris Thompson and Katarina Weslien, "Pure Raw: Performance, Pedagogy and (Re)presentation," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 28 (Jan. 2006): 39-40.

[125] Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985): 35.

[126] Ibid. 38.

I analyze her *Biography* (1987 – present) as well as her current aim to secure her legacy by soliciting others to restore her behavior through audience-made performances at the Marina Abramović Institute in Hudson, New York.

CHAPTER FIVE

CORPORATE AND CORPOREAL: THE EXECUTIVE FEMALE ARTIST

Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, feminist critic Germaine Greer claimed in 2005, "was the first ever true performance artist." Kahlo's performance, Greer observed, lasted all her life long; indeed, "she was indefatigable in presenting it, year on year, day by day."[1] Kahlo's diverse, intimate and often surreal self-portraits functioned like advertisements; "they were the hoardings announcing the stages in the performance," according to Greer.[2] Not unlike Kahlo, Abramović also portrays the narrative of her life as art. She performs herself performing, an effective way to market in the era of Facebook.

That people perform in their everyday lives, through dress, speech, or deportment is not a new concept. The world as a great theater—*theatrum mundi*—was a pervasive and widely accepted view in Renaissance Europe.[3] William Shakespeare's melancholic Jacques summarized it best in *As You Like It* when he said, "All the world's a stage/ And all the men and women merely players; / They have their exits and their entrances; / And one man in his time plays many parts."[4] In *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Erving Goffman articulated Jacques's position from a sociological point of view,

---

[1] Germaine Greer, "Patron Saint of Lipstick and Lavendar [Lavender?]Feminsm," *Tate, Etc.,* 4 (Summer 2005). http://www.tate.or.uk/context-comment/articles/patron-saint-lipstick-and-lavender-feminism (accessed July 25, 2013).

[2] Ibid.

[3] William Shakespeare (2, 7: 139-42) cited in Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002): 8.

[4] Ibid.

suggesting that daily face-to-face interactions are dramaturgical in nature. In Goffman's terms, "others" are audience.[5]

To apprehend Marina Abramović's art star status, I have examined her reputation through such constructs as notoriety, fame and celebrity, arguing that the desire to establish a certain kind of intimacy with her audience has defined her public persona. This chapter establishes Abramović's collaborative endeavors and managerial role as likewise crucial to understanding her increasingly popular success. Here I examine Abramović's specific identity as an "executive female artist," one who, while maintaining primary authorship, also works consistently with others. Although it is not my objective to replace the dogma of "male artistic genius" with "executive female identity," the former provides the latter an inherent foil. A snapshot of artist Kiki Smith's three-hour carriage ride through New York City illustrates the point [Fig. 113].

In 2002, the Museum of Modern Art temporarily relocated from Manhattan to Queens, while it undertook a two-year expansion and renovation. MoMA commemorated its impermanent transition across the Queensboro Bridge with a three-hour processional.[6]

---

[5] Goffman's treatise *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1959) is a cornerstone of both performance studies and sociology. My use of Goffman's thesis here is brief but illustrative of what today, especially on social media, has become increasingly more egregious: the constant role playing of everyday life, particularly the idea that as one acts out his/her role, their "audience" is made aware of how they, in turn, should enact their roles. This kind of symbiotic reaction is nowhere more evident than in interfaces such as Twitter or Facebook. On the basic idea that others are audience, see Goffman's introduction (1-16) and Chapter I, "Performances," in particular the opening pages (17-19) wherein he states, "When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them […] (17)." On the idea that we are acting out roles in daily life, see Goffman's discussion of the "Front" which he defines as that "part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (22). For Goffman this "front" is the "expressive equipment of a standard kind of intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance" (22). See also Goffman's acknowledgement that, "All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify"—not least because as Goffman makes sure to note, "we all act better than we know how" (72, 74).

[6] Co-presented by the Public Art Fund and the Museum of Modern Art, *The Modern Processional* was conceived by the Belgian artist Francis Alys. On June 23rd, the processional began in front of MoMA at 53rd Street and Fifth Avenue and concluded later that same day at MoMA QNS, 33rd Street and Queens

Marching slowly to the beat of a Peruvian brass band from midtown to Long Island City, participants hoisted replicas of artwork by three canonical male artists represented in MoMA's collection: Pablo Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907), Marcel Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), and Alberto Giacometti's *Standing Woman* (1948). In counterpoint to the male creative presence that has defined MoMA since its founding in 1929, organizers of the museum's processional selected Kiki Smith as a living icon of contemporary art, an act that seemingly signaled MoMA's public embrace of a decidedly more feminine principle.[7] Carried on a palanquin by participants, Smith appeared to float above the crowd, the ceremonial horses, dog walkers, and rose petals scattered on the street below. Eight years later, Marina Abramović's body would replace Barnett Newman's towering, phallic obelisk in MoMA's atrium for nearly three months. As curator Cornelia Butler suggests, this juxtaposition reconfigured "the female subject within the body of the Museum."[8] The fact that MoMA employed actual female bodies to replace products of so-called male genius—or what Carol Duncan has referred to as "*artifacts* of rule"—suggests the further need to investigate female artistic identity.[9]

Boulevard. See http://www.publicartfund.org/view/exhibitions/5997_the_modern_procession (accessed July 20, 2013).

[7] Eleanor Heartney, "Kiki Smith: A View from the Inside Out," *After the Revolution: Women Who Transformed Contemporary Art*, forward by Linda Nochlin (New York, London and Muncih: Prestel Publishing, 2007): 189.

[8] Writing just shortly before Abramović's MoMA debut, Cornelia Butler phrased this idea as a question in "The Feminist Present: Women Artists at MoMA," *Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*, eds. Cornelia Butler and Alexandra Schwartz (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010): 20.

[9] For more reading on MoMA's historical tendency to display "recurrent images of sexualized female bodies" and thus "actively masculinize the museum as a social environment," see Carol Duncan's landmark essay, "The MoMA's Hot Mamas," *Art Journal* 48 (Summer 1989): 171-8. See also Duncan's earlier essay, "Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth Century Vanguard Painting," *Feminism and Art History Questing the Litany*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1982): 293-315.

Accompanying the institutionalization of video and performance art in museums, exhibitions highlighting collaboration, as both a practice and process, proliferated throughout the 1980s and 1990s.[10] Although by the '90s solo exhibitions featuring women at contemporary art museums hit an all-time high nationwide, accounting for approximately one third of all shows, accurate characterizations of female artists who have collaborated with men remains limited.[11] Glen Zorpette, writing for *Art News* in 1994, hypothesized that female collaborators are often inclined to act as managers, yet his description of the labor divide also followed traditional gender lines. Tasked with administration and logistics, women who collaborate, he observed, "can be found in the library poring over archives. And whenever there is welding to be done, it is the male who holds the torch."[12] As this comment makes clear, in myriad twentieth century

[10] See Cynthia Jaffe McCabe, *Artistic Collaboration in the Twentieth Century*, with essays by Robert C. Hobbs and David Shapiro (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institute, 1984); and *Team Spirit*, Susan Sollins and Nina Castelli Sundell, curators; with essays by James Hillman, Irit Rogoff, Sollins and Castelli Sundell (New York: Independent / Curators Incorporated, 1990).

[11] See the data graphs in Eleanor Heartney, Elaine Posner, Nancy Princenthal and Sue Scott, "Introduction," *After the Revolution*, 22-23.

[12] Zorpette highlights partnerships between Helen Mayer/Newton Harrison, Anne and Patrick Poirier, Bernd and Hilla Becher, among others, in "Dynamic Duos: Artists Are Teaming Up in Growing Numbers," *Art News* 93 (Summer 1994): 169. See also Eleanor Heartney, "Combined Operations," *Art in America* 77 (June 1989): 140-147. More recently, Rachel Donadio's *New York Times* report on video artist Bill Viola's solo exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris minimized the role of Viola's collaborator and wife, Kira Perov. Donadio stipulated, "He has the visions, she helps realize them, along with a small technical team." Jessica Dawson of *The Daily Beast* attempted to verify this characterization with Perov, to which Perov (Executive Director of the Bill Viola Studio) responded, "That is only part of my role. I am responsible for the exhibition program and the way that the works are presented in the world, all publications on the work, the archives (paper, photo, video), the finances, and also play a creative role in making the works." Although Perov did not respond to Dawson's follow-up inquiry regarding whether or not she desired co-authorship of the work, Dawson observed, "As Viola's bookkeeper, archivist, publisher, as well as his creative collaborator, Perov is integral to the work, and it likely wouldn't exist without her. Yet the Grand Palais survey's title remains 'Bill Viola.' And its sole author, the receiver of its accolades, attendant cash, and a secure spot in the history books, is just one person: Bill Viola." See Dawson, "Why the Art World Ignores Wives," *The Daily Beast*, March 17th, 2014, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/03/17/why-the-art-world-ignores-wives.html and Rachel Donadio, "Bill Viola's Journey of Emotions," *The New York Times*, March 11, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/12/arts/international/12iht-Bill-Viola-A-Journey-of-Emotions.html?_r=0 (accessed March 17, 2014).

examples, women artists working intimately with men have been cast as more static and reclusive partners—Georgia O'Keeffe as Alfred Steiglitz's muse, Lee Krasner as the keeper of Jackson Pollock's legacy,[13] Patty Mucha as Claes Oldenburg's sixties' seamstress,[14] Jeanne-Claude as Christo's irreverent but effective assistant, and Coosje van Bruggen as Oldenburg's strategic, organizational force.[15] Some of the more complicated roles played by these women have been recuperated to greater or lesser degrees by now, but, as will be seen, Abramović's career as a collaborator presents an altogether different situation for analysis. She has never been classified as a silent partner.

In her well-publicized relationship with Ulay, Marina Abramović was often recognized as the more charismatic public relations manager of the two.[16] Her physical stamina at times trumped Ulay's, most notably during their repeated marathon sitting performance, *Nightsea Crossing* (1980-1988), in which the couple would stare silently for hours into one another's eyes. Citing the anatomy of his body as the source of his fatigue—"Marina has a bum. I am sitting on my bones. I still have scars"—on more than one occasion Ulay ended his performance earlier than Abramović, which, to her, was

---

[13] Harold Rosenberg's essay, "The Art Establishment" (*Esquire*, January, 1965) characterized Lee Krasner as "the official source of the [Jackson Pollock's] life story, as well as of his private interpretation of that story's coinage." See *Artists' Estates: Reputations in Trust*, ed. Magda Salvesen and Diane Cousineau (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005): 5. On O'Keeffe ensuring Steiglitz's legacy, see Michael Robert Weil, "Stieglitz's Dream, O'Keeffe's Reality: The Stieglitz Collections in American Museums," Ph.D. dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 2007).

[14] Patty Mucha, "Sewing in the Sixties: Recounting how some classic examples of Claes Oldenburg's Pop sculpture came into existence, with cameo appearances by Dick Bellamy, Dennis Hopper and Charlie the cat," *Art in America* (Nov., 2002): 79-87; reprinted as "Soft Sculpture Sunshine" in *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists, 1958-1968*, eds. Sid Sachs and Kalliopi Minioudaki (Philadelphia, University of the Arts; New York, Abbeville Press Publishers: 2010).

[15] See Charles Greene, "Negotiated identity: Christo and Jeanne-Claude," *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) and Germano Celant, *Claes Oldenburg Coosje van Bruggen* (Milan: Skira, 1999).

[16] James Westcott, *When Marina Abramović Dies, A Biography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010): 129, 145-146.

incomprehensible.[17] Abramović's frustration with what she perceived as impatience or lack of discipline on Ulay's part reached an apex during the couple's dispute over the proprietary rights to their shared archive, initially in Ulay's possession. In a deal brokered by Sean Kelly, Abramović purchased the archive from Ulay for $210,000 on April 29th, 1999.[18] Ulay retained twenty percent profitable sales, Abramović thirty, and Kelly, fifty percent.[19] What Ulay did not foresee was that Abramović would wait nearly ten years to release signed, limited edition prints and videos of their work into the market, so that she could first reclaim her status as a solo artist—a very profitable decision. "Ten years later," Abramović has remarked, "this work got the value it's supposed to have," hastening to add that "Ulay would have never waited that long."[20]

Abramović's business acumen in this instance summons comparison with Andy Warhol's cunning 1970s assertion, "Business is the step that comes after Art." Warhol's thoughts on the matter are worth citing at length:

> I started as a commercial artist, and I want to finish as a business artist. After I did the thing called "art" or whatever it's called, I went into business art. I wanted to be an Art Businessman or Business Artist. Being in good business is the most fascinating kind of art. During the hippie era people put down the idea of business—they'd say, 'Money is bad,' and 'Working is bad,' but making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art.[21]

As the tone of his statement demonstrates—"after I did the thing called 'art' or whatever it's called"—Warhol appeared to revel in the fact that his legacy as an "Art Businessman

---

[17] Ibid., 169-171. For discussion of *Expansion in Space* (1977), another work in which Abramović trumped Ulay's endurance, see Westcott, 123.

[18] Ibid., 262. For an overview of the couples' split and resulting settlement, see Westcott, 261-264.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975): 92.

or Business Artist" would be secured not only by the objects he produced, but also by the money and prestige earned from their sale. Abramović, also a "Business Artist," is not defined by the fiscal operations of her practice, but rather the intriguing concept that she, like Warhol, is actively devoted to constructing a legacy not entirely based on her identity as a producer. For Abramović, the worth of her artistic legacy runs deeper than the performances she makes. Tracing Abramović's executive identity through the lens of Andy Warhol's aforementioned statement, "being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art," in this chapter I analyze the two projects that best represent Abramović's "brand," namely *The Biography* (1987 - present) and her ambition to build the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI) in Hudson, New York.

IMAGING THE EXECUTIVE ARTIST

To begin with, the concept "executive artist" requires definition. I borrow the phrase from Caroline Jones's characterization of the artist Frank Stella in her 1996 study, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Post-War American Artist*.[22] As Jones pointed out, Stella quite literally "performed" the role of the executive in his official photograph for MoMA's 1959 *Sixteen Americans* exhibition catalog [Fig. 114]. Clad in a businessman's black suit and tie, with his left hand slung loosely in his pocket, Stella appears as deadpan and dispassionate as his black and white pin stripe paintings. Curator Dorothy Miller suggested that the artist submit a more conventional portrait for the publication—perhaps seen at work in the private space of his studio—but Stella declined

[22] Caroline Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. #s

her request.[23] At this time, Stella was producing canvases by hand, an important aspect of his process. Nevertheless, he was seeking, through self-portraiture, to disassociate his artistic persona from the impassioned angst of the indexical Abstract Expressionist mark.

Stella first used the expression "executive artist" in reference to Condé Nast editorial director Alexander Liberman, who was a photographer, painter and sculptor as well. At the time, Liberman, well known for his photos of artists' studios in the pages of *Vogue* magazine, had begun to produce commercially fabricated tondo paintings.[24] Admiring the fact that Liberman was a "good painter when he doesn't paint," Stella coined him an "executive artist," noting that he himself would welcome mechanical reproduction as part of his own painting practice.[25] As Jones has identified, when Stella truly became an executive artist, directing the assistants who helped carry out his work, he ever more earnestly began to emphasize the physical labor involved in their manufacture.[26] Photographed by Hollis Frampton one year after *Sixteen Americans*, Stella's bespectacled face and slight figure now appear unassuming and diminutive against the backdrop of imposing steel scaffolding [Fig. 116].[27] Published ten years later to accompany Stella's retrospective exhibition at MoMA, this 1960 photograph

---

[23] Ibid., 117. See also *Sixteen Americans*, ed. Dorothy C. Miller (New York, Distributed by Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., 1959): 76.

[24] Jones, *Machine in the Studio,* 114 and 401, note 1. Liberman served as the art director for *Vogue* from 1943-61; see also Antje Kruase-Wahl, "Between Studio and Catwalk—Artists in Fashion Magazines," *Fashion Theory*, 13, 1 (2009): 9 -10.

[25] Jones, 114.

[26] Ibid., 180.

[27] Ibid., 120. As Jones points out, both of these images located Stella's persona in the social space of the outside world, not the artist's private studio sanctuary.

demonstrates that the artist opted to present himself with a more industrious look.[28] Even though by then he was using hired assistants, Stella was personally channeling the blue-collar look of the "artist-worker," a clear departure from his *Sixteen Americans* poker-faced swagger.[29] The link between Stella's persona as an artist-worker and his previous identity as an executive was underscored, according to Jones, by connoting two very different anonymous forms of labor. For the worker, anonymity was "imposed from without" by a corporate entity striving for a systematic product that lacked individuality; for the "ideator-executive," invisibility was a "prerequisite of power," in that those in this position were already established as the center or source of brand identity.[30]

While Stella's role as executive was more rhetorical than actual (dressed in his suit, he did not need to show himself at work), Warhol introduced the American public to a more literal version of the artist as a brand name. Whereas Stella shifted his public persona between the artist-worker and the executive, Warhol, Jones argues, oscillated between the proletariat and the Factory boss.[31] His famous statement, "I think everybody should be able to be able to do my paintings for me," encapsulates Warhol's role as the "boss" of the Factory's supporting cast of collaborators (primarily Billy Linich/Name, Gerard Malanga and Brigid Polk).[32] Using these characterizations of Stella and Warhol as precedent, my analysis of Abramović's practice locates her executive role as vacillating

---

[28] Ibid., 179.

[29] Ibid., 116.

[30] Ibid., 121.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Quoted in Ibid., 189; see also Part 1 of Gene Swenson's "What is Pop Art? Answers from Eight Painters," Part 1 and 2: *Art News* 62 (November 1963): 26.

between corporate and corporeal structures. One of my goals in this chapter is to show that when the Marina Abramović Institute opens its doors to the public in 2015 those who participate in the experience of MAI will, in fact, learn to make Abramović's performances *for her* and without her being there, as Warhol was in The Factory. The corporate executive's corporeal presence, as I shall argue of Abramović, does not demand the presence of her physical body; in its corporeal absence, the public emerges as a major stakeholder in perpetuating her brand.

A few clarifications must be made before advancing. Characterizing Abramović as an executive female artist is not the only useful lens that might pull her identity into focus and help unravel her rapid rise to mainstream attention. Given her interest in the intersection of performance, science, technology and spirituality Abramović could also be considered a modern-day "Renaissance Woman," for example. The work that best exemplifies this, *Measuring the Magic of the Mutual Gaze* (2011- ongoing), gauges the interaction of brain activity between two individuals locked in a mutual gaze [Fig. 117].[33] After *The Artist is Present* premiered at MoMA, a version of the exhibition travelled to Moscow's Garage Center for Contemporary Culture, where, as at MoMA, Abramović's performances were re-staged.[34] This time, however, Abramović collaborated with neuroscientists to mount an interactive installation in which participants would sit across from one another and look into each other's eyes while their brain activity was traced—

[33] This "real-time brain installation and science experience" began as a joint project between Abramović and cognitive neuroscientist Suzanne Dikker and artist Matthias Oostrik. It was the first project in the *Art and Science: Insights into Consciousness* workshop hosted by The Watermill Center in New York during the summer of 2010. For more information see http://kiblix.org/kiblix2012/softcontrol/?p=4 (accessed Jan. 23, 2014). See also the Garage Center's website, http://abramovic.garageccc.com/en/works/10.

[34] The exhibition at Moscow's Garage Center for Contemporary Culture ran from October 8th to December 4th, 2011. A team of Russian performers/artists (trained by Abramović) restaged the same five works as at MoMA.

quite literally an attempt to assess whether two people locked in a mutual gaze were on the same wavelength. Measured in real time, viewers could see the brain activity of each participant and whether the two sitters were in sync. As a continuation or re-statement of *The Artist is Present* at MoMA, the Moscow installation *Measuring the Magic of the Mutual Gaze* translated the artist's emotional experience into empirical data. That her most renowned performance quickly gave way to a science experiment certainly seems to qualify Abramović as a "Renaissance woman"; constant reinvention is one of the hallmarks of her identity. Sean Kelly has described the difficulties inherent in categorizing Abramović's pioneering spirit. Asked if he might consider Abramović an "executive" artist—one who collaborates with others while steadfastly remaining in charge—Kelly stated:

> If you said to me that Frank Stella is an executive artist, and what is Marina, I'd tell you that my title for her would be "confounder-in-chief," because the minute that you think you've got her pegged as this radical Serbian artist who has produced these incredibly tough, difficult, pieces with blood and whipping herself and all the rest of it, she pops up dressed from head to toe in couture gowns dressed by Riccardo Tisci of *Givenchy*; the minute you think she's become this fashion beast, then she's off to produce a show where there is nothing for sale; the minute you think she's reverted or become an artist who's confounding the market, she is raising six hundred thousand dollars on crowd-funding for a performance Institute that's going to teach her practice.[35]

Kelly's point—one with which I agree—is that Abramović's prolific artistic output in combination with the adaptability of her practice tends to derail totalizing critical attempts to pigeonhole or condense her persona into one dimension. That is not, however, what I set out to do here. Instead, my identification of Abramović as an executive female artist offers a platform from which to decode and contextualize certain recurrent qualities

[35] Interview with Sean Kelly by the author, Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, January 18th, 2014.

of her practice and her position within it. My analysis begins by granting focus to the concept of an "authentic" self-made woman.

During Abramović's retrospective *The Artist is Present*, the performance-workers who took turns re-staging the artist's earlier pieces upstairs enacted what became a "relay," as one hired participant described of her shift changes.[36] Although each was credited in the exhibition catalog and publically acknowledged elsewhere, these re-performers assumed a certain kind of namelessness, which helped guarantee continuity. Jill Sigman, who re-performed *Luminosity*, *Imponderabilia*, and *Nude with Skeleton* for a collective sum of 108 hours, has explained that, although each of the re-performers would "grasp" at "arbitrary features of the work and [make] them virtues" in an attempt to extract their personal sense of a "good" re-performance (e.g. extreme stillness or not blinking), there really was no one way "better" than another."[37] "There is a natural tendency to want to create a way to do it [the re-performance] 'well' or 'better' than last time,'" Sigman averred. As she and others attest, these re-performances were a labor of love, but significantly, they also required a rigorous work ethic.[38] This observation can

[36] Performance artist Jill Sigman provided a candid and personal account of her experience as a re-performer during the run of *The Artist is Present* in "On the Wall: Reflections on Being Present," *Contact Quarterly* 36 (Annual 2011): 23-28.

[37] Ibid., 27.

[38] Another interesting account from re-performers hired by Abramović emerged when the artist served as the artistic director of Los Angeles MoCA's donor gala in 2011. Her use of hired performers as naked, living human centerpieces during the dinner portion of the evening outraged many, particularly choreographer Yvonne Rainer, who published a scathing letter addressed to Jeffrey Deitch, the museum's director at that time. In her diatribe, Rainer railed against Abramović's artistic direction and claimed the performances she organized were a form of grotesque entertainment. This prompted three performers who had trained with Abramović and performed at her MoMA retrospective to author a response addressing Rainer's antagonism. In it, they described negotiations with MoMA regarding compensation for their work, which ultimately led to in their change of status as "temporary employees" of MoMA (which, importantly, included workman's compensation) and a modest increase in pay from the museum's original, and exceedingly low, offer to pay the re-performers fifty dollars for each two and half hour performance. Specific accounts regarding the fiscal operations of re-performance are not discussed in this dissertation, but need to be examined in order to reveal the fully weighted relationship between the symbolic and market

be parsed by applying Richard Schechner's ideas regarding restored behavior specifically in relationship to rehearsals.

A central but versatile component of theater, rehearsals according to Schechner "make it necessary to think of the future in such a way as to create a past."[39] The formal composition of *Imponderabilia,* the only re-staged performance directly inviting visitor participation, can be read as mediating both the visitor's and the performers' sense of past and present; rehearsal and actuality. The piece itself is structured as a threshold crossing between the two main realms of performance theory: human behavior as a genre (or the reaction of the person passing through the doorway) and performance as an art form, in this case, a live performance that, as already mentioned, was reproached for engaging what many critics understood as a rote theatrical enactment.[40] The weight of this accusation, however, can be lessened if the re-performances of *Imponderabilia* that took place at MoMA are conceived of as having been in a constant state of rehearsal. Only in instances when someone actually passed through the doorway could this liminal state be resolved and pushed forth into active performance for each participant, including audience. From this perspective, *Imponderabilia* in its static form can be compared to the concept underlining the moments before, say, a re-created historic village such as the seventeenth century Plymouth Plantation in Massachusetts opens its gates to the public

---

values of re-performance. Rainer's letter is available on-line, http://blogs.artinfo.com/artintheair/2011/11/14/read-yvonne-rainers-final-letter-decrying-marina-abramovics-moca-performance/ (accessed October 20, 2012). Abigail Levine, Gary Lai and Rebecca Brooks, "Three Reperformers from 'Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present' Respond to the MOCA Gala Performances," November 28, 2011, http://theperformanceclub.org/2011/11/three-reperformers-from-marina-abramovic-the-artist-is-present-respond-to-the-moca-gala-performances/ (accessed Dec. 15, 2013).

[39] Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985): 39.

[40] Ibid., 296.

and begins to enact its day-to-day operations.[41] It is a rudimentary yet pertinent observation that only active audience engagement could bring *Imponderabilia* to life.

As a re-performance, *Imponderabilia* represents one of the more specific threads that bind audience as integral in shaping Abramović's brand. The point here is that if a performance is to "sell" or engage the idea of authenticity, it need not actually "be" authentic in and of itself, though it must provide an *experience* of authenticity. In the instance of *Imponderabilia*, the performance becomes genuine only in the fleeting moment that someone passes through the doorway between the two performers.[42] The commercialism of *The Artist is Present* exhibition, involving what might be aptly described as long periods of rehearsal, times of waiting for that "authentic" moment of performance, was not lost on re-performers such as Sigman. Tempering her devotion and genuine appreciation for her own involvement in the project she reported, "About a month in, some people who came to the show said, 'You look really sad.' I said, 'I *am* sad.' I was watching America turn into a giant shopping mall, watching the museum environment reinvented as a consumer mecca. People shop the images, the brand, me—strolling, browsing, glazed, and already outfitted with MoMA shopping bags from the gift shop downstairs."[43]

Claire Bishop has identified this kind of delegated or outsourced performance—in Abramović's case, the use of professionals who share her area of expertise—as

---

[41] See http://www.plimoth.org and Schechner's comments on re-creating such historical environments/experiences (80-93).

[42] It often goes unmentioned that Abramović and Ulay filmed their original performance of *Imponderabilia* (1977, Galleria Communale d'Artre Moderna, Bologna) and broadcast the footage on two television monitors upstairs in the main gallery. See Westcott, 121-122; see also the nearly constant stream of visitors during the original ninety-minute performance, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QgeF7tOks4s (accessed March 26, 2014).

[43] Sigman, 26.

marking performance art's shift toward industrialization.[44] According to Bishop, the genre's transition "from festival to museum space, mobilizing large numbers of performers, unionized modes of remuneration, and even larger audience—means that contemporary art increasingly exists in a sphere of collaboration akin to theater and dance, even while it retains art's valorization of individual authorship."[45] This transition can be used to help locate Abramović's celebrity position and executive authorship.

During *The Artist is Present*, Abramović likewise performed the role of the artist-worker downstairs in the atrium. Day after day, she re-performed the exact activity she had the day prior. The cover of her MoMA retrospective catalog, Marco Anelli's photograph *Artist with Firewood* (2009), accentuates the image of Abramović as proletarian [Fig. 118]. On it, the artist is depicted wearing a nondescript workman's jacket, a nod to her communist upbringing. Clutching a pile of firewood, wisps of hair flank her wistful stare. Tree branches frame her face like a forest of barbed wire and the bandage on her left index finger indicates a small wound presumably the result of a work-related accident. She is resolved, stoic and statuesque. Abramović has described this picture as, "very important. It's just the moment when I'm carrying the wood to make a fire [at] home, because it was cold…something about practicality but also strength and surviving."[46] Read in context of the catalog's recto image, which features the youthful,

[44] See Claire Bishop's chapter "Delegated Performance, Outsourcing Authenticity" in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London, New York: Verso, 2012): 219-274; and pages 230-232 specifically, for the relationship between outsourcing performance art workers and 1990s global economic strategies of the same vein. Though she does not offer her thoughts on Abramović's retrospective, Bishop (230) blasted Abramović's use of hired models at LA MoCA writing that, "What is shocking is the performance's banality and paucity of ideas, and the miserable fact that a museum such as LA MoCA requires this kind of media stunt dressed up as performance art to raise money."

[45] Ibid., 232.

[46] Track 2, CD. *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010).

daring bare-breasted Abramović of *Rhythm 0*, her gaze in *Artist with Firewood* appears to reference simultaneously her past and her future; her searching outward stare indicates she is looking toward something not within her immediate reach [5.5].

Together the verso and recto pictures evoke a sense of timelessness and a certain if subtle form of absenteeism. In *Artist with Firewood* Abramović displayed herself as a common worker, suggesting a certain kind of anonymity, a pronounced sense of duty and an "I-am-just-one-among-the-masses" attitude. Evidenced here is Abramović's admission that she grew up like a soldier, bound to the strict rules of her military household. This perception, however, is at odds with the excruciatingly long lines that assembled in hopes of sitting at MoMA with a definitely more regal-looking artist, clad in a bold, tailored floor length gown. The image of Abramović as a devoted artist-worker in *Artist with Firewood* clearly evokes the menial forms of labor that underscore her more privileged position as an "executive" artist in control of her career. The selection of this picture for the cover of her retrospective catalog denotes that Abramović's brand as well as her resulting status as celebrity, has been built on hard work. It personifies what Warhol meant when he stated simply that, "working is art."[47]

As addressed in Chapter One, sociologists have described celebrity identity as resulting in part from the public's perception of triumph over challenge, circumstances shared by Warhol and Abramović, albeit differently. Born to working-class immigrant parents who resettled from Poland to Pittsburgh, Warhol had been openly desirous of beauty and glamour since childhood. Wayne Koestenbaum has singled out a relationship between Warhol's traumatic experience of suffering chorea when he was eight

[47] Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 92.

(colloquially known as St. Vitus's dance, its symptoms include shaking and skin splotches) and his later self-portraits. In these Warhol sometimes superimposed "camouflage protozoa—boomerangs, squiggles—onto his face," as if recalling the stigmatizing marks of his childhood trauma, which plagued him through early adulthood.[48] Literal as Koestenbaum's interpretation may be, my point here is that Warhol's triumph over challenge was intimately tied to how he embraced what he did not have—in this case, clear skin serving as metaphor for beauty more generally. Evident later in his career, Warhol's perceived ability to bestow beauty on others—especially celebrities, to whom he served as the proverbial "court painter" throughout the 1970s—perhaps helped satisfy his personal desire to become good-looking.[49] By contrast to Warhol, Abramović, born into a socially privileged family in her country, rejected conventional standards of beauty and power in order to establish humble beginnings as an artist. Later, after her split with Ulay, Abramović indeed embraced indulgences such as *haute couture* fashion. But for the purposes of my argument here, the artist's positioning of herself as a proletarian in *Artist with Firewood* is significant, indicating her pride in triumph over challenge and thus also her identity as self-made woman.

BIOGRAPHY AS ARCHIVE AND ALLEGORY

Recalling heartbreak over her 1988 split with Ulay, in 2005 Abramović stated, "After I went through that experience and all the pain of separation, there was a moment

[48] Wayne Koestenbaum, *Andy Warhol* (New York: Viking, 2001): 17. As Koestenbaum pointed out, Warhol's skin largely cleared up by the time he became famous in the early 1960s.

[49] David Bourdon initially pointed out Warhol's relation to upper class portraiture in "Andy and the Society Icon," *Art in America*, 63 (Jan. 1975): 42-45. Robert Rosenblum elaborated on the idea in his essay *Andy Warhol: Court Painter to the 70s*, originally published to accompany the Whitney Museum's 1979 exhibition *Andy Warhol: Portraits of the 70s*, and subsequently reprinted in *Andy Warhol: Portraits of the Seventies and Eighties* (London: Thames and Hudson, in association with Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1993).

when I decided to stage my life, and to have fun with it. I just said, Why not; let's have it all."[50] In 1989, film director Charles Atlas "convinced her of the merits of an autobiographical approach."[51] Together they made a short six-minute color video, *SSS*, which established what has become the essential formula for Abramović's continually evolving theater piece known as *The Biography* [Fig. 119].[52] *SSS* consisted of a monologue recounting Abramović's personal life and her performance work in counterpoint to imagery referencing these events. While in this first, short iteration, Abramović delivered the verbal narrative (which was accompanied by alternating scenes of snakes slithering on her head, the artist dressed in a tailored suit or shown earnestly scrubbing her feet), later versions would more fully narrate the story of her life and work.

In 1992, Atlas and Abramović collaborated a second time to expand this method of storytelling for the stage; *The Biography* was performed that year in various European theaters [Fig. 120].[53] In it, Abramović not only enacted scenes from her life, she also re-presented a selection of performances including *Lips of Thomas* where, as in the original and later at the Guggenheim, she drew blood by carving a pentagram on her stomach [Fig. 121]. Offstage, a recording of the artist's voice could be heard, while onstage, Abramović performed herself performing against a video montage backdrop that featured her early work with Ulay [Fig. 122]. The chronological text heard in the background consisted of

---

[50] Leslie Camhi, "Grand Gestures." *Vogue*, 195 (November 2005): 232.

[51] Thomas Wülffen, "Performance: Thoughts on Marina's Abramović's *Biography,*" in *Marina Abramović Biography*, 73. Reprinted in *Marina Abramović, Artist Body: Performances 1969-1998* (Milan: Charta, 1998): 385-387. *SSS* was originally broadcast on Spanish television as part of a video art series.

[52] See Charles Atlas's account of his work with Abramović, "Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present," *Artforum* 48 (January, 2010): 83.

[53] Marina Abramović, *Marina Abramović Biography*, in collaboration with Charles Atlas (Ostfildern bei Stuttgart: Cantz, 1994): 81. In 1992, *The Biography* was performed at documenta 9 in Kassel, Germany and Kunsthalle Wein in Vienna, Austria. In 1993, it was staged again in Germany at Thalia-Theatre in Hamburg Theater am Turn in Frankfurt, and Hebbel Theater in Berlin.

spare, but loaded year-by-year statements that juxtaposed the artist's private life and public performances. "1973 / Burning the hair / Cutting a star in the stomach with razor blade / lying naked on an ice cross / Listening to Maria Callas / Realizing that the kitchen of my grandmother is the center of my world."[54] German critic Thomas Wülffen has described the effect of this as one in which "the performance as performance within a performance is called Performance."[55] I want to pay special attention to the affect and effect of such layering.

When *The Biography* was initially staged under Atlas's direction, it was only Abramović who performed herself. By 2004 however, when she collaborated with director Michael Laub on *The Biography Remix* at the Teatro Palladium in Rome, Abramović had hired several former students to restage her performances [Fig. 123]. This production was particularly meaningful because, in it, Ulay's son, Jurriaan Löwensteyn, re-enacted his father's role. Abramović had learned of Jurriaan's existence only one year before the couple parted ways, in 1987.[56] As noted, Abramović's split with Ulay in 1988 was in fact the impetus in her pursuit of life as art in an (auto)biographical frame. After their final joint performance, *The Lovers*, on the Great Wall of China in 1988, Abramović was overcome with depression as she and Ulay began their separate paths.[57] Staging her life and work in the theater became a way of seeing outside of herself; she wanted to

---

[54] Ibid., 15

[55] Wülffen, 76.

[56] See Abramović's statement (11-16) in Marina Abramović, *The Biography of Biographies* (Milan: Charta, 2004): 13. See also Westcott, 289. Juriaan's mother was Henny Löwensteyn; see Westcott, 194-5 for details.

[57] Abramović, *The Biography of Biographies,* 12.

relinquish control of how she "saw" her life by ceding/seeding its interpretation onto others.[58] "I can't tell you how liberating that is," she wrote in 2013.[59]

The various directors who have "remixed" the contents of Abramović's life and work have yielded dramatically different results. While both Atlas and Laub omitted emphasis on Abramović's Slavic origin, in the most recent large-scale iteration of Abramović's *Biography—The Life and Death of Marina Abramović* (2011/2013)—director Robert Wilson, by contrast, romanticized the artist's Balkan heritage and the gritty aesthetic of communist-era Belgrade [Fig. 124].[60] Wilson was less interested in a didactic restaging of Abramović's performance works and focused instead on converting the tragic aspects of her life—her troubled childhood and her difficult relationship to her mother—into a poetic, abstracted and yet occasionally comedic send-up that, in my view, highlights Abramović's dual role as both victim and perpetrator.[61] This version is deeply significant for the artist herself because, in it, she played her mother.

Atlas, Laub and Wilson have each sampled Abramović's archive uniquely, a gambit that corresponds to curator Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of "postproduction," a technical term borrowed from the vernacular of television, music, film and video—industries in which the process he calls "post-production" aims to distill, delete or render seamless any divisions or inconsistencies. As Bourriaud explains, disk jockeys who spin

---

[58] Ibid.

[59] Program notes. *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*, Bluma Appel Theater, Toronto, Canada. June 14-17, 2013.

[60] Marina Abramović, "The Artist's Presence," *Robert Wilson from Within*, ed. Margery Arent Safir (Paris: The American University of Paris and The Arts Arena, 2011): 294.

[61] Abramović recounts Wilson's interest in the project in Jian Ghomeshi's radio interview, "Marina Abramović is not Dead" in Studio Q (June 3rd, 2013), which aired just prior to the Toronto debut of *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović.* Accessible online, http://blip.tv/q-tv/marina-abramovic-is-present-in-studio-q-6616544 (accessed Jan. 15, 2013).

and sample records, finessing the line between old and new—their music, and music written or belonging to another—maneuver "postproduction" as a profitable creative strategy. Similarly, artists who operate in a postproduction mode revive preexisting work.[62] As Bourriaud describes, "The material they manipulate is no longer *primary*. It is no longer a matter of elaborating a form on the basis of a raw material but working with objects that are already in circulation on the cultural market, which is to say, objects already *informed* by other objects." This is not unlike the strategy of appropriation endemic to 1980s American art. Postproduction, however, differs from appropriation in that it eliminates the distinction between "production and consumption, creation and copy, readymade and original."[63]

The restaging of Abramović's own work in early iterations of *The Biography*, through video montage, live performance and spoken narrative, allowed it to function in a perpetual mode of postproduction. (The re-performers who enacted Abramović's work during *The Artist is Present* also operated under this rubric, some of the individuals even professing to share in a sense of ownership over the work.)[64] Per Bourriaud's definition, Abramović's performances are already "in circulation on the cultural market." Their re-documentation as a theater piece embodies an impulse that, as I shall argue, is both allegorical and archival. My concern here pivots on the slippage between these two points and specifically how, when both strategies are at work, one's persona is imbued with a

---

[62] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World* (New York: Lucas and Sternberg, 2007): 7.

[63] Ibid.

[64] "Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present: The Legacy of Performance." The Museum of Modern Art. June 2, 2010. http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/7401378 (accessed Jan. 20, 2013).

surface-like quality. This metaphorical "space" helps me to pinpoint the source of Marina Abramović's celebrity identity.

Reorienting Craig Owens's concept of the allegorical as an inimitable urge of late 1970s and '80s postmodern art,[65] in 2004 Hal Foster discerned an "archival" impulse—a tendency among artists to mine and reinterpret data of all kinds in an effort to make lost historical information "physically present."[66] Focusing on installations by the Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn, British filmmaker and photographer Tacita Dean and the American multimedia artist Sam Durant, Foster classified their approaches to interpreting information (or history and philosophy, for example) as "archival" because "the work in question … not only draws on informal archives but produces them as well, and does so in a way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private."[67] While neither Foster nor Owens were particularly concerned with performance art, Jessica Santone has fruitfully applied Foster's concept of the "archival impulse" to Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces* deeming its documentary function as two-fold in purpose: "as a mode of production of contemporary art *and* a mode of critical interpretation."[68] This applies equally to *The Biography*, requiring me to account here for the specifically autobiographical nature of this work.

---

[65] Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," (Part I and II), posthumously published in *Beyond Recognition*, eds. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992): 54-87. In this same volume, see also "Representation, Appropriation and Power," 88-113

[66] Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 4.

[67] Ibid., 5

[68] Jessica Santone, "Marina Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces*: Critical Documentation Strategies for Preserving Art's History," *Leonardo* 41, 2 (2008): 147.

I want to suggest that when Abramović, and the directors with whom she works, encode her private (archival) life *on stage as public* (and allegorical in nature), the "presence" of the private is deleted altogether. Although Warhol's famous vacuity and automaton-like personality seem to fly in the face of the transparency Abramović appears to exude, continuing to compare the two artists will help in illustrating my point. In the scenario I wish to set-up here, I yield also to Johanna Burton's perceptive assertion that during *Seven Easy Pieces* Abramović's performance became a "picture," a concept that aligns with Warhol's statement, "If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and I am there. There's nothing behind it."[69]

Art historian Cecile Whiting has analyzed Warhol's self-promoted shallowness. Writing of his *Liz*, *Marilyn* and *Jackie* pictures, Whiting credited Warhol with undoing "the public/private dynamic of the popular press's presentation of famous women" by *aestheticizing* and *abstracting* the interplay of these two facets.[70] She has claimed that, in doing so, Warhol "denied the existence of a private self lurking behind the facade of the public celebrity and he took effacement of the private self even further by severing the connection between painted image and private artist as that relationship exists in both high-art portraiture and in Abstract Expressionism."[71] In the most recent duplication of Abramović's *Biography* Wilson indeed aestheticized and abstracted Abramović's death.

---

[69] Gretchen Berg's interview with Warhol, "Andy Warhol: My True Story," was conducted in the summer of 1966 and originally published in *The East Village Other* on November 1, 1966. I draw my citation from its reprinting in *I'll Be Your Mirror, The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews*, ed. Kenneth Goldsmith (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2004): 90.

[70] Cecile Whiting, "Andy Warhol: The Public Star and the Private Self," *Oxford Art Journal* 10, no. 2 (1987): 67 (emphasis by the author).

[71] Ibid.

The concept of traditional portraiture more generally is radically manipulated in *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović* and in *The Biography*.

Although Abramović has based her reputation on "presence," by consecrating her personal life *as* public in each version of *The Biography* (i.e. by making it a *surface* à la Warhol), she likewise elides the private as something *actually* personal. The process is one that precludes direct access to the artist. In the next section, I continue to examine Wilson's visually stunning portrayal of Abramović's mortality, but first I want to forward my idea that, even when Abramović's life is storyboarded by another director, it continues to privilege her authorship, her status as a celebrity and thus also her role as an executive artist.

More than a recitation of life facts, *The Biography* functions as an iconological framework. Abramović's collaborators, the directors in charge of her story's postproduction, have defined its conceptual overtones. Although the narrative is firmly linked to Abramović's body—through either her actual presence on stage or as abstracted re-enactments of her past performances—in my terminology *The Biography*, as an enterprise, can be classified as both corporeal and corporate. It is both "of the body" (corporeal) and comprised of individual bodies performing, i.e. a corporate theater company.

Also concerned with multiplicity, as I am here, in his 1968 essay, "The Death of Author," Roland Barthes offered a useful way to understand "inexorably blurring, by an extreme subtilization, the relation between the writer and his [/her] characters."[72] Not

[72] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," reprinted in *Participation*, ed. Claire Bishop (Whitechapel, London; Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006): 42; original publication in *Image – Music – Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977): 143-148.

preoccupied with the author's death as such, but rather with an author's ability to extend his/her voice in numerous dimensions simultaneously, Barthes claimed of Marcel Proust that, by making his "very life a work for which his own book was the model," he "gave modern writing its epic."[73] Barthes wrote,

> … the author is never anything more than the instance writing, just as *I* is nothing other than the instance saying *I*: language knows a 'subject,' not a 'person' and this subject, empty outside the very enunciation that defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together,' suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it.[74]

Abramović's performance as an executive is similarly predicated on a constant slippage between author, subject and reader/viewer. Only modestly preoccupied with the author, subject or reader's actual identity, Barthes recognized these entities as difficult to isolate. Each one exists because of the others; for the executive artist, by contrast, they form an amalgam. Of her choice to hire performers and cast Jurriaan Löwensteyn as Ulay in *The Biography Remix*, Abramović has stated, "I want to make clear that [*The Biography*] is not just a work about my life. It is much more about the idea that the performance can belong to anyone who can perform it. *The Biography* can go on without me."[75] Here the collapse between the author and the artist-as-subject (as opposed to the binary contrast of artist *versus* subject) underscores Abramović's executive persona as inexorably linked to both representation and invisibility; on stage, her image is immortalized. It also suggests the breakdown between archive and allegory—the private and the public. Diverging, or

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid., 43.

[75] Abramović, *The Biography of Biographies*, 14.

rather rewinding, I want to examine Abramović's earlier works as also catering to the space or surface that bridges this particular divide.

In Abramović's early career, the breakdown between subject, author and reader/viewer first took shape as choreographed instructions for the public. The artist would suggest, either verbally or through printed text, one critical imperative that explained how participants should take part in her sound-oriented interactive environments. In *Forest* of 1972 [Fig. 125], a one-room installation that included recorded sounds of birds, wind, animals and footsteps, Abramović stated to her audience: "This is a forest. Walk, run, breathe. Feel like you are in the forest."[76] That same year in *White Space* [Fig. 126], a spare room with walls covered in white paper, Abramović's written instructions were equally deductive if more commanding; the artist coached, "Enter the white space. Listen."[77] In another installation, *The Airport,* also made in 1972 [Fig. 127], Abramović recorded and replayed in a continuous loop the voice of an announcer who repeatedly broadcasted, "All passengers on the J.A.T. flight are requested to go to gate 343. The plane is leaving immediately for Tokyo, Bangkok, and Hong Kong."[78] Staged in Belgrade's Student Cultural Center (SKC) lounge at a time when escape from this city was not impossible, but also not simple, the directive was sardonic and whimsical at once. Straightforward directives to her audiences continued to appear in Abramović's work in the 1990s as she reclaimed her solo career. Writing of the transitory objects and installations she was producing at that time such as *Black Dragon* of 1994 [Fig. 128], by 2001 Germano Celant surmised that Abramović might be taking on the

[76] Abramović in *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010): 59.
[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid., 57.

"impersonal, neutral activity of an architect or designer,"[79] a position the artist has embraced in the various iterations of her *Biography*.

Textual analysis of the catalogs documenting Abramović's three major New York City performances—*The House with an Ocean View* (2002), *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005) and *The Artist is Present* (2010)—lend salience to my contention that Abramović's brand has been based in recent years at least in part on a physically invisible "presence." Although my contention may seem to contradict the magnetism Abramović exuded in the atrium at MoMA, the Guggenheim's rotunda and at Sean Kelly's gallery, the documents chronicling these three major performances support my point of view.

In 2002 James Westcott was working as Abramović's assistant. Charged with transcribing the video recordings that preserved Abramović's painfully slow and meditative movements during *House with the Ocean View* at Sean Kelly, Westcott conducted the artist's voice as if it were his own.[80] In such statements as "I sit on the bed, more to the right than the left. My hands are cupped in my lap. My feet are on the ground. My eyes are on someone in the audience,"[81] Westcott, as the artist's surrogate, translated Abramović's body language syllable by syllable so that readers of the one hundred-plus page transcript might be able to experience Abramović's unseen "presence" after the fact.[82] As the preface page suggests, "For the reader to have full sense of the duration of

---

[79] Germano Celant, *Marina Abramović Public body: Installation and Objects, 1965-2001* (Milan: Charta, 2001): 9.

[80] Westcott, 276-282.

[81] Marina Abramović*, The House with the Ocean View* (Milan: Charta, 2003): 110. See 41-143 for full transcription.

[82] In an email to Westcott, Abramović noted that he would "go through deep transformation at the end of this job … We finish when we finish. (but it should be finished at least by the end of June.)" Westcott, 282.

the performance—which is not possible to achieve by looking at the photographs—the text should be read each day for twelve days or all in one sitting."[83] Unlikely as it may be that readers would actualize this recipe, the exercise was a clear attempt to summon Abramović's presence in ways other than through her physical body.

As part of the documentation for *Seven Easy Pieces* the Guggenheim Museum distributed seven tiny microphones each night to anonymous members of the public tasked with recording the conversations of other unsuspecting attendees, i.e., per the catalog text, "the microphones picked up different conversations as the main audience remained unaware."[84] (Outside the museum walls, this technique might be considered a spy tactic.) Reprinted in the catalog as a form of documentation, these conversations are as laboriously slow as the performance was itself; and they are not invariably on topic. These dialogues point to the fact that many viewers' discussions were not at all focused on Abramović's performance.[85] Like Anelli's photographs of Abramović's sitters during *The Artist is Present*, these conversations suggest the artist's absence as helping define her presence.[86]

For *The Artist is Present* Abramović personally narrated the process of flipping through her retrospective catalog on the CD that accompanied it. "Dear Reader," the first track begins, "Before starting to read this book, you need a little preparation. Find

---

[83] Abramović*, The House with the Ocean View*, 41.

[84] Marina Abramović, *7 Easy Pieces*. Photographs by Attilio Maranzano. Film Stills by Babette Mangolte (Milan: Charta, 2007): 68.

[85] Abramović points this out in her public dialogue with Jovana Stokić, "Performing the Gallery/Performing the Museum," which took place at Location One in New York City on October 27, 2009, http://www.location1.org/abramovic-studio/ (accessed Dec. 15, 2013).

[86] Worth noting here is Andy Warhol's obsession with recording conversations. He began using a tape recorder in the mid-1960s, and his 1968 book, *a: a novel*, is comprised almost entirely of recorded conversations.

comfortable seat at the table in your living room or kitchen. Drink glass of pure water. Relax. Drink slowly, and close your eyes for a few moments until I count to seven. One… Two… Three… Four…. Five… Six… Seven. Open your eyes and let the energy flow." This example additionally demonstrates that the experience of performing alongside Abramović is not restricted to a bodily encounter with the artist. Nevertheless, the tactics I have outlined here ensure that reader/viewer/participant consistently remains aware of Abramović's (physically) invisible presence.

THE GLAMOROUS *LIFE AND DEATH OF MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ*

In 2004, the year that Abramović and Laub staged *The Biography Remix*, the death of Abramović's friend, critic Susan Sontag, awakened in her the realization that she should prepare her own funeral rites.[87] According to Abramović's plan, three coffins will be buried on three continents—America, Europe and Asia—but only one (which one, unknown) will contain her actual body.[88] Director Robert Wilson reified Abramović's vision in *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović* by staging two versions of her funeral as bookends, the prologue and epilogue in the latest iteration of her *Biography*.

When audience members enter the theater at the start of Wilson's show, the curtain is drawn and three motionless bodies (Abramović's corpses) lie prone on sloped caskets as Dobermans skulk amid scattered bones [Fig. 129]. The cinematic drama that ensues both magnifies and abridges events from Abramović's youth in Yugoslavia, her

[87] Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Marina Abramović* (Köln: W. König; New York: D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2010): 57-58; Marina Abramović, "The Artist's Presence," *Robert Wilson From Within*, 289.

[88] Obrist, 160-161; Westcott, xii. These two accounts are slightly different. In Westcott's biography, Abramović states that she wants her body to be buried in three "different places in the world (America, Europe, Asia)." In Obrist, "I want to have three funerals, with two fake bodies and one real body and I can be buried simultaneously in the three cities where I lived the longest in my life: Belgrade, New York and Amsterdam."

union with Ulay, her work as a teacher, and her life as an artist. Juxtaposed with an ethereal score composed and performed by Antony Hegarty, the alternately dark and comical story is compellingly narrated by actor Willem Dafoe. In the final scene, the audience is again returned to Abramović's funeral where three white, ghostly female figures hover above the stage, as if ascending to heaven [Fig. 130].

Although Abramović met Wilson in the early 1970s when he visited Belgrade, this current collaboration grew out of the artist's newly found desire to visualize her funeral. "I told Bob, 'This is the title I want to do. So please, can you direct my life with this title? So why don't we make the funeral?'"[89] Of their partnership, Abramović has stated,

> It's very difficult working with people who don't have a strong reputation because there is always this ego thing. But Bob doesn't have this problem at all. He always asks, "What do you think about this, what do you think about that?" If I have a good idea that is not what he was thinking, he really accepts it. He has this ability to collaborate, to accept good ideas and throw away the bad ones, and to rethink. And that's why it's great to work with him, and why this collaboration is so interesting, because I have to make compromises getting into his space, but he has to make compromises getting into mine. There's this real, true equality.[90]

Commenting more recently about collaboration as "incredibly important" to her practice, Abramović stated, "I almost always find the results extremely beneficial. In collaboration, you learn to deal with your ego differently in order to create one work out of joint experiences. In contrast, my solo work is based on my direct life experiences so the final works are only my own."[91] Although Abramović has emphasized the parity of her

[89] Abramović, "The Artist's Presence," *Robert Wilson from Within*, 289.

[90] Ibid., 296.

[91] Marina Abramović, email response to the author, Feb. 18, 2014.

collaboration with Wilson, the debut of *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović* has been widely regarded as quintessentially Wilsonian in its dreamlike mix of theater, opera, dance, performance, illusion and reality.[92] Many critics have noted their interest in seeing "a narcissist like Abramović become an object in the Wilsonian universe," but such critique is perhaps lacking in imagination.[93] I return to the accusation of narcissism and its relevance to celebrity in the concluding pages of this dissertation; here, it is best to examine ways in which Wilson and Abramović's high-profile collaboration invites opportunity to analyze the relationship between celebrity and death [Fig. 131].

Art historians have already examined the correlation between glamour and death in Andy Warhol's disaster series—pictures of car and airplane crashes, human skulls and the electric chair that he produced throughout the 1960s—as well as in his serial paintings of Marilyn Monroe and Jackie Kennedy from early in that decade.[94] Yet, for someone who appeared to have a marked interest in death, particularly its relationship to tragedy and fame-noir, Warhol himself had notoriously little to say about it. "I don't believe in [death], because you're not around to know that it's happened. I can't say anything about it because I'm not prepared for it."[95] Clearly, in wanting to prepare for it, Abramović views death as an important passage in an artist's life.

---

[92] Wilson has worked with major European theater and opera houses since the 1970s. He rose to fame initially in 1976 when he produced *Einstein on the Beach* in collaboration with Philip Glass who composed its musical score. It continues to be regarded as a masterpiece today.

[93] Linda Yablonsky, "Close Encounters: Dateline Manchester," July 18, 2011, *Artnet,* http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/yablonsky/manchester-international-festival-7-18-11.asp# (accessed July 25, 2013).

[94] See, for example, Thomas Crow, "Saturday Disasters: Trace and Reference in Early Warhol," and Hal Foster, "Death in America," in *Andy Warhol, October Files*, ed. Annette Michelson (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 2001): 49-68 and 69-90.

[95] Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 123.

The Christian concept of resurrection, or death as rebirth, as well as the Buddhist concept of emptying oneself as a form of renewal, are both useful in addressing the paradoxical nature of *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*. In it, her life is publically staged as art under the pretense that it allows her to "see" and experience her "self" anew. She has described this metaphorical process of rebirth.

> Every time I do a biography, I start with the same principle: to completely give up control. So by handing over the material to a director, he can make a remix of my life in a way. It can be chronological or not – it doesn't matter. I'm material, nothing more. I have no input, but what always happens is that my life looks new to me … artists always work with the material of their own lives. Making art is about transferring those feelings and thoughts into a universal language. That's how biography works too. The deeper you go into yourself, the more universal you become. This biography then could be anybody else's biography.[96]

These comments belie the idea that *The Biography* actually functions as one, however. By producing her funeral in a theater—on the corporeal surface of a stage—Abramović instills the metaphor of death, perhaps the ultimate form of invisibility, with an incredibly lifelike claim to presence.

Amelia Jones, who (as we have seen) admires Abramović a great deal, laments the fact that her token brand tends to freeze her presence as a commodity, one that, in some cases, has underlined the erasure of others involved in her projects.[97] In this regard, *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979), spearheaded by Judy Chicago, yet made collaboratively by approximately four hundreds artists (mostly women but also some men), sets an important precedent. Epic in its scale, scope and content, *The Dinner Party*'s triangular

---

[96] Program notes. *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*, Bluma Appel Theater, Toronto, Canada. June 14-17, 2013.

[97] Amelia Jones, "'The Artist is Present': Artistic Re-enactments and the Impossibility of Presence," *TDR, The Drama Review*, 55 (Spring, 2011): 42. Hereafter, "Impossibility of Presence."

banquet table comprises thirty-nine elaborate place settings for significant women in Western history. Each place setting consists of an embroidered runner and three-dimensional porcelain plates featuring radiating central core imagery. In the center of *The Dinner Party*, the names of 999 other women are inscribed on the white tiles. Describing her practice in 1977, Chicago stated:

> I … I don't believe in and can't function in collectives … I … feel most able to operate in what I would call cooperative structure. That means leadership. I believe in leadership. Of course, given the star system, there is no question that people will credit me with the piece. It was my original conception, it has been my energy that has actually sustained the piece. But nobody is going to think that I did this by myself.[98]

Chicago, in other words, was pointing out that collaborations are often unbalanced and that in this case she was at the helm of the project despite its cooperative structure—an enduring critical point of contention.

Advertisements for Abramović's 2009 performance exhibition, *Marina Abramović Presents*, at the Whitworth Gallery in Manchester, England, for example, featured Abramović posing with a curious "mini-me" slung over her shoulder [Fig. 132].[99] *Marina Abramović Presents*, which continued for sixteen days from July 3rd-19th, 2009, began each evening with Abramović leading participants in an hour-long energy

---

[98] Chicago, cited in Susan Rennie and Arlene Raven, "The Dinner Party Project: An Interview With Judy Chicago," *Chrysalis*, 4 (1977): 99; see also Amelia Jones's essay "The 'Sexual Politics' of the Dinner Party: A Critical Context" in *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History*, Amelia Jones, ed; with essays by Laura Cottingham, et. al. (Los Angeles: UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Culture Center; University of California Press, 1996): 84-118.

[99] *Marina Abramović Presents* featured installations by fourteen artists: Nikhail Chopra, Ivan Civic, Amanda Coogan, Marie Cool Fabio Balducci, Yingmei Duan, Eunhye Hwang, Jamie Isenstein, Terence Koh, Alastair MacLennan, Kira O'Reilly, Fedor Pavlov-Andreevich, Melati Suryodarmo, Niko Vascellari. Several weeks after the exhibition concluded, the show was reprised as video documentation in *Real Time/Real Documents*, also at the Whitworth, August 1 – September 6, 2009. The Whitworth gallery did not produce a catalog for these exhibitions. See Maria Balshaw and Alex Poots, "Creating Holy Ground: Marina, Manchester and the Making of an Event," *Marina Abramović and the Future of Performance Art*, ed. Paula Orrell (Munich: Prestel, 2010): 89-93.

exchange exercise titled *The Drill*, an adaptation of her student workshop, *Cleaning the House* [Fig. 132]. Following *The Drill*, participants were set free to explore fourteen site-specific durational performances by other artists for approximately three hours; all participants were encouraged to stay at the Whitworth for a minimum of at least another hour.

As Amelia Jones has pointed out, the names of students who staged durational performances alongside Abramović's daily iteration of *The Drill* were not included in mainstream advertisements.[100] Concerned with the inherently visual quality of brands as logos, products, packages or designs, Jones has made clear her suspicion that Abramović was becoming an "increasingly monolithic construction … along the lines of an artistic genius capable of delivering the true history of past performance events."[101] In this study, the traditional notion of genius is of less consequence than Abramović's reputation as a celebrity, but the following question is nonetheless an inevitable one: in what ways is genius synonymous with celebrity? Sean Kelly's description of Abramović as a "confounder-in-chief," particularly its suggestion that the artist is habitually outsmarting critics through unpredictability and constant self-reinvention, is perhaps more closely aligned to the conventional concept of genius than my notion of Abramović as an executive. What is clear from either perspective, however, is that Abramović's brand has and continues to trade in an ephemeral currency of experience over time. It is thus difficult to quantify with regard to the binaries so central to the traditional concept of genius, e.g. copy vs. original. Since the 1990s, Abramović has been marketing—and as of

[100] Amelia Jones, "Impossibility of Presence," 38.

[101] Ibid., 42.

2010 successfully selling—performance as experience, or conversely, the immaterial experience of performance/performativity. In the section that follows, I consider various ways in which we might better understand and frame Abramović's brand as both corporate and corporeal and as an enterprise based on the concept of co-creation that yet imposes a hierarchy.

CO-CREATING LEGACY: THE MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ INSTITUTE / THE ABRAMOVIĆ METHOD

On her sixty-sixth birthday in 2007, Marina Abramović indulged in an expensive acquisition. She purchased an abandoned theater in Hudson, New York, for nearly one million dollars.[102] In 2011, she donated it to the freshly founded Marina Abramović Institute (MAI) [Fig. 134 - 135].[103] At an estimated cost of twenty million dollars for renovation, the space will open its doors to the public in 2015. According to its mission statement, the MAI will be dedicated to:

> the presentation and preservation of long durational work including that of performance art, dance, theater, film, music, opera and other forms that may develop in the future. MAI will foster collaborations between art, science, technology, and spirituality, bringing these fields into conversation with long durational work. MAI will provide an educational space to host workshops, residencies and research.[104]

The first institute committed solely to durational performance and its preservation, MAI is being founded on the Abramović Method, an adaptation of the principles Marina

[102] See the MAI Kickstarter page, https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/maihudson/marina-abramovic-institute-the-founders, where it is emphasized in bold letters that, "As of now, Marina has paid $1.5 million out of pocket toward the early stages of MAI."

[103] French gallerist Serge Le Borgne has been appointed the director of MAI. Benjamin Genocchio, "Seeking to Create a Timeless Space," *The New York Times*, April 6, 2008. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/nyregion/nyregionspecial2/06artswe.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (accessed July 26, 2013). See also Westcott, 309.

[104] The mission statement of the Marina Abramović Institute is reprinted on the MAI website, http://www.marinaAbramovićinstitute.org/mission (accessed July 19, 2013).

Abramović has been teaching for more than twenty years to students who have participated in *Cleaning the House* workshops. Abramović, however, has cautioned that, "MAI is home for the Abramović Method but this is not all the MAI is about. The method is geared towards preparing the public to witness a long durational performance, which is the main focus of the institute. MAI also aims to create a space where artists and scientists and people in many different fields can collaborate together on new projects."[105] Although Abramović has been developing her performance art philosophy for close to four decades, her confrontation with "the general public's immense need to physically engage with long durational works" during *The Artist is Present* in 2010 solidified her vision for MAI.[106] Granted, the "general" public Abramović referenced was self-selecting and urban, unmistakably a New York City-based public comprised of locals and tourists alike.

Upon entry to MAI (the admission fee to which is still to be determined), visitors will be asked to trade in their cell phones, watches and cameras in exchange for a white lab coat and noise cancelling headphones [Fig. 136]. After signing a contract in which participants give their word of honor to stay at the Institute for a minimum of six hours, they will be guided through a series of chambers featuring time-based exercises such as walking in slow motion, drinking water slowly and deliberately, or gazing into another person's eyes for an extended period. As a set of time-based happenings, these Abramović Method activities are intended to increase physical and mental awareness

[105] Marina Abramović, email response to the author, Feb. 18, 2014.

[106] Abramović has reiterated this on many occasions. See MAI website's "MAI 101: Frequently Asked Questions," http://www.marinaAbramovićinstitute.org/mai/mai-101/3 (accessed July 19, 2013).

through "doing one simple activity at a time and nothing else."[107] After circumambulating a series of rooms (including, for example, crystal, levitation, luminosity and sound chambers, as well as "the wall," which reprises the linear composition of Abramović's early transitory object installations), visitors will be provided a "long durational chair" and wheeled by an attendant into the main hall to experience a long durational work by a resident visiting artist: dance, film, theater, music, performance art, opera or other [Fig. 137].[108] According to Abramović, "If the performance is many hours and you fall asleep," such a viewer would be rolled into an interior "parking lot" to snooze peacefully alongside other slumbering visitors [Fig. 138].[109] Like any modern twenty-first century public art institution, MAI will also include a café and library. And, when participants leave, they will receive a certificate of completion [Fig. 139]. Of this transaction, Abramović has stated, "It's very simple exchange. If you give [me] your time, I give you experience. If you don't give time, there is no experience."[110]

---

[107] Various videos of Abramović leading participants in exercises based on the Abramović Method are available online. See, for example, Abramović leading participants in *The Drill* at the Whitworth Gallery in Manchester, UK, in 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWuvaOTKyc0 (accessed July 19, 2013).

[108] On different occasions, Abramović has mentioned her interest in featuring artists such as Matthew Barney, David Lynch, Antony Hegarty, Laurie Anderson and Björk at MAI in the future. See, for instance, Mark Allen's partial transcript of an open-house day at MAI for the Hudson community, "Andy Warhol's Factory without the Drugs: Marina Abramović Debuts her New Space in Hudson," *The Awl*, August 14, 2012, http://www.theawl.com/2012/08/at-marina-Abramović-new-space-in-hudson (accessed July 24, 2013).

[109] See Abramović's virtual tour of MAI, http://vimeo.com/71082421(accessed Dec. 15, 2013).

[110] Abramović cited in the trailer for the Giada Colograndе's film *The Abramović Method*, accessible on MAI's website, http://www.marinaAbramovićinstitute.org/mission/the-Abramović-method (accessed July 29, 2013). A collaboration between Colograndе and Abramović, the film was shot and based on the first interactive exhibition that premiered the Abramović Method at Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea in Milan (PAC Milan, discussed below). See also Abramović's statement to the public, "Instructions," *The Abramović Method*, v. 2 (Milan: PAC / Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, 2012): 35.

Under the stewardship of Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas's New York City-based architectural firm, Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), a "white box" will be inserted into the dilapidated Hudson theater [Fig. 140].[111] The spare minimalist aesthetic that will define the Marina Abramović Institute seems utterly at odds with the fabled silver lining and vibrant social landscape of Andy Warhol's Factory and yet, on more than one occasion, Abramović has likened her Institute to just such. "Different people will meet, ideas can be exchanged and something creative can take place. My dream about this is like the Andy Warhol Factory without drugs."[112] Relevant as it is cheekily absurdist, this unlikely but salient analogy mandates discussion, the starting point of which is the physical structure of these two spaces.

Just as OMA plans to refurbish the derelict Hudson theater by inserting a new volume into an existing space it, so Billy Linich (a.k.a. Billy Name) rechristened the interior of Warhol's gruff industrial loft by lining it with foil and silver paint [Fig. 141]. Often nostalgically referred to as the "old factory," until 1968, the year Valerie Solanas went up the freight elevator to Warhol's fourth floor studio and shot him, Warhol's original "Silver Factory" was located on East 47th Street in New York City.[113] This

[111] Per MAI's website, "In order to simultaneously engage the existing structure and limit its predetermination of the performance space, a new volume is placed within the existing shell." See "Architectural Concept by the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA)," http://www.marinaAbramovićinstitute.org/mai/architecture_1/2 (accessed July 30, 2013).

[112] Abramović has restated this notion on various occasions. On August 1, 2013, it was posted directly on her official Facebook page on, https://www.facebook.com/pages/Marina-Abramović/300806525911 (accessed August 1, 2013). See also Mark Allen, "Andy Warhol's Factory without the Drugs: Marina Abramović Debuts her New Space in Hudson," http://www.theawl.com/2012/08/at-marina-Abramović-new-space-in-hudson (accessed July 24, 2013).

[113] See Caroline Jones, *Machine in the Studio*, 248-255, for an analysis of how this event contributed to the periodization in Warhol's work.

attempt on his life traumatized the artist, signaling the end of easy and relatively unregulated access to Warhol and with it an end to the Factory's *belle epoque*.[114]

According to Stephen Koch, in its heyday the Silver Factory was "crowded with a-heads, street geniuses, poor little rich girls, the very chic, the desperately unknown, hustlers and call boys, prostitutes, museum curators, art dealers, rich collectors, the best artists of the time, the worst artists of the time."[115] As this colorful description makes clear, the doors to Warhol's studio were open to a wide array of persons. My interest here, however, is not with the many celebrities—or alternately, countless other unidentified individuals—who fashioned the cultural backdrop of Warhol's Factory, but rather, the artist's role within this matrix. As I have argued of Abramović, Andy Warhol's celebrity persona has likewise been characterized as having mirror-like qualities. Consider, for example, Koch's description:

> Like the turntable sparkling with tiny mirrors in the center of the silvery room, forever turning at an unchanging rate, Warhol stood at the center of his time, passive and mute, the mirror of the decade, his little world its microcosm … He was central to that world, but he stood apart from it just a bit … It was the space of the mirror. Warhol's responsibilities were the mirror's responsibilities, his replies the mirror's replies … in Warhol's mirror, image and object somehow got interchanged, both vanishing into the sparkling light.[116]

In addition to the fact that, albeit in very different ways, both Abramović and Warhol can be characterized as reflecting their audience, Warhol's serialized images of Campbell's soup cans and Coca-Cola bottles, mass produced with the help of assistants, correlate to the universal, everyday activities (walking, drinking water, lying down) that will be

---

[114] Stephen Koch, *Stargazer: Andy Warhol's World and His Films* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973): 3.

[115] Ibid., 4.

[116] Ibid.

central to the experience of MAI. Warhol would convert a mundane image into art not by extensively altering its appearance, but rather, by reconfiguring the context of its sign, i.e. how it would be read. This soup-can-as-art philosophy can be deemed a forerunner to the experience MAI intends to provide, with some crucial differences. At the Institute, accessible, banal exercises such as lying down or sitting will be transposed into arguably more meaningful, meditative practices. Under the rubric of the Method, mundane rituals performed every day in people's private lives are anticipated to transform into experiences of and about time. Time, Abramović recognizes, "is worth more and more because we have less and less of it."[117] As shaped by MAI, the intangible, immaterial experience of time will become one of the major currencies in which Abramović's brand will trade.

Although Warhol is best known for engaging ephemeral Pop culture as content, he too was markedly interested in time. Warhol's durational films, such as *Empire* (8 hours) and *Sleep* (6 hours), both made in 1964, present one continuous, unbroken straight-shot of a single object or activity—the Empire State Building and the poet John Giorno sleeping nude, respectively [Fig. 142].[118] In *Chronophobia*, the first thorough study of time in art of the 1960s, art historian Pamela M. Lee theorized that films such as these, which are a curious cross of ennui and hyper-awareness, present time as both representational and actualized through the experience of duration.[119] Warhol distorted

[117] Marina Abramović, "The Abramović Method," *The Abramović Method*, 19.

[118] Screened as a continuous, six-hour straight-shot, *Sleep* was actually made over the course of three weeks and edited into one continuous loop. Koch, 36. Jonas Mekas shot *Empire* from the 44th floor of the Time-Life building on June 25th, 1964. At twenty-five hours, "****" or *Four Stars* (1967) is Warhol's longest (and perhaps least known) durational film, but it is not a straight shot; see Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *Popism: The Andy Warhol Sixties* (New York: A Harvest Book, Harcourt, Inc., 1980): 317-318.

[119] Pamela M. Lee, *Chronophobia: Time in Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004): 280.

time by screening his movies in *real* time, an approach then considered generally antithetical to filmic structure.[120] As Lee and others have gauged, Warhol likely anticipated that, watching *Empire* or *Sleep*, viewers would become extremely conscious of both themselves and of those surrounding them.[121]

My participation in the premiere of the Marina Abramović Institute-Prototype at the Luminato festival in Toronto in June of 2013 underscored a similar sensation. Nestled in partial shade on the sprawling grounds of Toronto's Trinity-Bellwoods Park, the MAI-Prototype comprised a large red tent divided into five chambers [Fig. 143]. Every half hour, four participants entered and disposed of their belongings in exchange for a pair of soft silver moon boots, a white lab coat, and headphones connected to a mini I-pod. (I visited on a rather warm June afternoon, when the temperature inside the tent felt particularly oppressive.) Once inside, participants simultaneously enacted a series of exercises, the directions for which were broadcast synchronically on our headphones. The assistant who greeted my group and helped us get started through the tent's hot, cavernous hollows was adamant, in fact, that we press play on our I-pods at *exactly* the same moment. This simultaneity seemed to ensure that partakers would remain exceedingly conscious of their own performance, while in view of others concurrently enacting the same exercises. In addition to signatures pledging our two-hour time commitment, image release waivers were required because participants to the MAI-Prototype were filmed. The experience of being watched manifested as a personal, if

[120] Gregory Battcock cited in Lee, 283. See Battcock, "Four Films by Andy Warhol," *Andy Warhol: Film Factory*, ed. Michael O'Pray (London: BFI, 1989): 46

[121] The notion that Warhol premised at least part of his own persona on seeing people act and react, while watching others do the same holds true not only for films such as *Sleep* and *Empire*, but also his more infamous gallery openings, e.g. the premier of his *Brillo Boxes* at the Stable Gallery in New York in 1964.

voyeuristic one, as if looking at one's own body from outside of it. An uncanny mix of the public and private, the entire experience seemed predicated on some alien form of escape in which real time became fictitious.

In 2012, Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea in Milan, Italy, (PAC Milan) hosted the first comprehensive exhibit featuring the Abramović Method [Fig. 144 - 146]. According to curator Eugenio Viola, "the hardest thing for [visitors] to understand was that Marina was not going to perform."[122] Instead, it would be the visitors themselves who enacted a series of three simple exercises (sitting, standing, lying down) with objects "for human and spirit use." This public performance was made impossible to ignore by the addition of binoculars and telescopes used for bird watching in nature. As I discussed in Chapter Two, Abramović had implemented the "watching" of performance—its visual consumption—in a literal way through the inclusion of a telescope in 2002 during *House with the Ocean View* and again in 2005 for *Seven Easy Pieces*. (During *The Artist is Present*, the sport of "people watching" escalated in magnitude.) It is from this perspective of performativity that I examine the concept of co-creation as integral to Abramović's brand.

Between July 26th and August 25th in 2013, as part of a massive fundraising effort, the Marina Abramović Institute launched an intensive public campaign to raise $600,000 on Kickstarter, an on-line public fundraising platform for the arts [Fig. 147]. The project was a success—4,765 backers pledged a total of $661,452, thus exceeding MAI's initial goal. This month-long affair can be characterized as an endurance performance, in that

[122] Eugenio Viola, "The Public is Present. A Personal Account," *The Abramović Method*, 82.

Abramović's public profile on Facebook was abuzz with daily updates, photographs and personal video messages from Marina.

Just a few weeks prior to the campaign kicking off, Abramović had appeared during a six-hour performance at Pace Gallery in New York by rapper Jay-Z.[123] As we have seen, the press seized on this event and representatives from both artistic camps later reportedly confirmed Jay-Z's promise to donate to the MAI, although the amount remained undisclosed.[124] Donation amounts for the MAI Kickstarter campaign varied from $1 to $5 to $25 to $50 to $100 and upwards into the thousands; clearly, these levels were targeting a more modest financial demographic than Jay-Z and his wife, the singer Beyoncé, who, according to tabloid reports, collectively earned ninety-five million dollars in 2012. Everyone who contributed monetarily toward the design phase of MAI, however, earned the corporate sounding title of MAI "founder."[125] Not least, each of these "founders" will also receive a hug from Marina Abramović during a future performance to be titled *The Embrace*, the location and date of which is yet to be announced. This very corporeal gesture is a clear nod to a woman Abramović admires,

[123] Jerry Saltz provided an amusing account of the event. He concluded that, "Jay-Z even got me to actually start liking Marina Abramović. That's art." See "'Picasso-Baby' Live: Jerry Saltz Goes Face-to-Face with Jay-Z," July 11, 2013, http://www.vulture.com/2013/07/jerry-saltz-face-to-face-with-jay-z.html (accessed July 11, 2013). On August 2nd, 2013, HBO aired a documentary film that chronicled the event, *Picasso Baby: A Performance Art Film*. Although he does mention Abramović by name in "Picasso Baby," *The Artist is Present* inspired Jay-Z's performance of this song; and yet, only the names of the most popular, celebritized male artists are mentioned by Jay-Z: Jean Michel Basquiat, Jeff Koons, Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol and Leonardo daVinci.

[124] Dan Duray, "Allow Me to 501(c)-3-Introduce Myself: On Jay and Marina's Pre-'Picasso' Meeting," *Gallerist*, October 15, 2013, http://galleristny.com/2013/10/allow-me-to-501c-3-introduce-myself-on-jay-and-marinas-pre-picasso-meeting/ (accessed Nov. 15, 2013).

[125] "Marina Abramović Institute: The Founders" on Kickstarter, http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/422090958/marina-Abramović-institute-the-founders?ref=live (accessed August 5, 2013).

Mata Amritanandamayi, known simply as Amma, the 59-year old Indian guru who has and continues to hug millions of people across the world.[126]

The Kickstarter announcement that Abramović will be distributing hugs to MAI founders came just days following the appearance of an eerie online analogue to *The Artist is Present*. In an effort to make her "self" virtually accessible to anyone—yet also physically invisible—Abramović went live for one hour on Reddit.com's "Ask me Anything" (AMA) interface [Fig. 148].[127] Queries from the public ran the gamut: "What question do you wish people asked you but never do?" "What is intimacy?" "Would you one day, when you are very old, choose to end your life as part of a performance?"[128] When pressed by one questioner as to why she needed fans to raise $600,000 for her project, the artist replied:

> The MAI institute is not a personal project. MAI is for everybody. I donate the whole building which I bought on my birthday for $950,000 to the non-profit organization and I don't own it. I also paid another half a million for the master plan of Rem Koolhaas from my own money and the office budget for five months. So this does not belong to me anymore, it belongs to anybody. If this kind of concept is something our society needs, they have to join me to create it … Also, I had a difficult life, and only

[126] Per the history of long durational performance work on the MAI website, Amma, a spiritual leader, is featured alongside Abramović, artists such as John Cage and Terence Koch, and composer Richard Wagner, among others. Amma toured in the United States during the summer of 2013; for an overview see Jake Halpern, "Amma's Multifaceted Empire; Built on Hugs," *The New York Times*, May 25, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/26/business/ammas-multifaceted-empire-built-on-hugs.html?pagewanted=all (accessed August 7, 2013).

[127] The Reddit AMA interface has been used by a number of notable personalities, including President Barack Obama during his 2012 campaign, as well as movie stars, entrepreneurs, news personalities, and athletes. For a transcript of Abramović's AMA session, "I am performance artist Marina Abramović. Ask me anything," see http://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/1jctbp/i_am_performance_artist_marina_Abramović_ask_me/ (accessed July 30, 2013).

[128] Ibid.

> since the last ten years I earned money, and most of the money I spent on supporting this Institute.[129]

Clearly, although it is her personal legacy that is at stake, Abramović is anxious to inculcate the notion of "co-creating" her brand with the public. Confirming this, Abramović recently stated, "I want to see MAI as an ever-changing structure, a space that is never static. I am creating a shell and its contents can take so many different forms depending on who occupy, collaborate and participate in it."[130]

According to business and marketing theories, the concept of brand co-creation has emerged in three key ways since the 1990s: in on-line communities, through direct consumer input, which often leads to adjustments in products or services, and through increasing emphasis on the "exchange of intangibles."[131] Abramović's online MAI Kickstarter campaign fits all of these criteria. Research in brand co-creation has shown that participation, or the "taking of an active role in constructing connections and developing meaning," emerges only through time.[132] To these ends, Abramović's MAI communications team (currently led by Siena Oristaglio) has continued to maintain the artist's online presence on outlets such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, even after her public fundraising campaign was over. During the Kickstarter campaign, pop music

---

[129] Ibid. This idea is reiterated on MAI's Kickstarter page: "A single person, no matter how successful or passionate, cannot singlehandedly fund and sustain a cultural institution of this size. She hopes an equally passionate public will join her in contributing to phase one." See "Marina Abramović Institute: The Founders," http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/422090958/marina-Abramović-institute-the-founders?ref=live (accessed July 30, 2013).

[130] Marina Abramović, email response to the author, Feb. 18, 2014.

[131] Nicholas Ind, Oriol Iglesias, Majken Schultz, "Building Brands Together: Emergence and Outcomes of Co-Creation," *California Management Review* 55 (Spring, 2013): 5.

[132] Ibid., 14.

phenomenon Lady Gaga caused a sensation by releasing a video in which she performed the Abramović Method; during some of the exercises, Lady Gaga appeared nude.[133]

The Abramović/Lady Gaga pairing finds precedent in singer/performer Madonna's earlier public embrace of the popular Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. From April to July of 1991, the Madonna/Kahlo coupling gained wide publicity when Madonna purchased not only two of Kahlo's works, but also the film rights to one of Kahlo's biographies.[134] Janice Bergman-Carton characterized the resulting "performer-artist" relationship as one in which "Kahlo is considered a better artist (investment) because her work is collected by Madonna, and Madonna is considered a more serious and respected celebrity (investment) because she collects Kahlos."[135] The reciprocity between Abramović and Lady Gaga functions similarly; certainly, Abramović's link with Lady Gaga assures her own high profile status in mass celebrity culture, not just within the art world, a more limited network. In return, Lady Gaga's association with Abramović presumably earns her rapport with an ostensibly more serious art-world audience. Moreover, like Madonna and Kahlo's respective work, which, as Bergman-Carton writes,

---

[133] Although this video was widely available for nearly forty-eight hours, it has since been either entirely removed or modified so as to obscure Lady Gaga's nude body (i.e. Lady Gaga's nudity is blurred). See the Kickstarter's Vimeo page, http://vimeo.com/71919803 / or http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1GUnM57XnTs&bpctr=1376164617. See also Abramović's interview with Andrea Simpson on Celebuzz on August 9, 2013, http://www.celebuzz.com/2013-08-09/marina-Abramović-explains-why-lady-gaga-went-nude-in-kickstarter-video/ (accessed August 9, 2013).

[134] Margaret A. Lindauer, *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1999): 173. Madonna purchased Kahol's *Self-Portrait* (1940) and *My Birth* (1932).

[135] Janis Bergman-Carton, "Like an Artist," *Art in America* 81 (January 1993): 35; cited in Lindauer, 173. For more on the Kahlo/Madonna link, see Kevin Sessum's description of the Kahlo paintings in Madonna's home in "Madonna: White Heat," *Vanity Fair* 53 (April 1990): 147; and Hayden Herrera's article "ART VIEW; Why Kahlo Speaks to the 90's," *The New York Times*, October 28, 1990, accessible online, http://www.nytimes.com/1990/10/28/arts/art-view-why-frida-kahlo-speaks-to-the-90-s.html (accessed Feb. 18, 2014).

is "about women's capacity for self-reinvention," Lady Gaga and Marina Abramović have also each sought to resist a static, one-dimensional public identity.[136]

Not all of Marina Abramović's fans have, however, been charmed by the media campaign accompanying her MAI Kickstarter endeavor. Posted on Abramović's own Facebook page, one particularly telling comment (among others with similar shadings) expressed clear outrage that, an artist as "serious and important" as Abramović was being advertised daily, as if she were "some detergent or toothpaste." Yet, Abramović has openly confessed that she considers herself a "good marketing figure,"[137] stating that, "I feel like I could become a brand, like Coca-Cola, or Levis for jeans. My names [*sic*] is now about performing art."[138] Notably, the brands with which Abramović chose to compare herself (Levis and Coca-Cola) reflect the so-called commonist aesthetic Warhol espoused. This resonance underscores my contention that Abramović's brand can be said to function as both a corporate and corporeal enterprise. One final example establishes this point.

As Klaus Biesenbach has noted, Marina Abramović's works have been "quoted and memed" in many different ways; one already discussed is Steven Meisel's Italian

---

[136] Bergman-Carton, 36. See also Abramović's candid comments regarding her relationship with Lady Gaga in "Marina Abramović in Conversation with María José Arjona," *Arte Al Día*, January 15, 2014. Here Abramović notes her role as a sage in comparison to the untamed spirit of the younger Lady Gaga, openly accounting for the fact that Gaga's interest in her work helped to expand her own audience. "Gaga sat with me during the performance at MoMA and her appearance was twitted [*sic*]; thousands of her followers started to come to the exhibition. It changed the structure and preconceived idea of the type of audiences expected by museums. They were young and I think this is crucial and very positive for art in general."

[137] Abramović cited in Jones, "Impossibility of Presence," 38.

[138] Matt Chaban and Rozalia Jonanovich, "Marina Abramović Wanted to Open Her Performance Art Institute in Brooklyn, but Bushwick Was Too Toxic, *GalleristNY,* May 7, 2012, http://galleristny.com/2012/05/marina-abamovic-wanted-to-open-her-performance-art-institute-in-bushwick-but-brooklyn-was-too-toxic/ (accessed August 3, 2013).

Vogue cover spread in 1998 that mimicked her and Ulay's 1976 *Relation in Space.*[139] Unlike the Italian *Vogue*'s appropriation of Abramović's work which as Westcott notes, "incensed" the artist, Abramović has embraced computer programmer Pippin Barr's 2013 pixelated 8-bit video game, "The Artist is Present," a real-time interface in which users can "enter" MoMA and stand in line to (eventually) sit with Abramović [Fig. 149 - 150].[140] Played using simple keyboard commands, the game mimics the slow anticipation that defined the actual experience of waiting to sit with Marina, e.g., one can only play if he/she logs on during the museum's actual open hours and, just as during Abramović's real-life performance, one might have to wait hours to move forward in the queue to "sit" with the artist. She has initiated collaboration with Barr to produce a series of video games that emulate exercises based on the Abramović Method: counting and separating sesame seeds and rice, breathing, looking into another person's eyes or drinking water slowly.[141] In these games, offered as a reward to MAI Kickstarter founders, the player/participant will have replaced, or rather, be asked to channel Abramović's presence.

Another series of compensatory rewards for MAI Kickstarter founders involves Abramović teaching them her Method exercises (eye-gazing and the slow motion walk, for example) via live stream to create "a large public performance that occurs at the same

---

[139] Another, more recent and more technologically sophisticated example is by Eva and Franco Mattes, the Italian-born artist duo, who developed a virtual Second Life version of *Imponderabilia* (2007). Other examples include Bruce Chatwin's travel novel *The Songlines* and a fictional character in Don DeLillo's *Mao II*. Klaus Biesenbach, "Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present, The Artist was Present. The Artist will be Present," *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010): 12.

[140] To play the game, one must log on to http://www.pippinbarr.com/art/ (accessed August 5, 2013).

[141] See Barr's interview with Paul Bruno, "Abramo-bits: Marina Abramovic Teams up with Video Game Designer Pippin Barr to create 8-bit Video Games for Kickstrater Campaign, http://dirty-mag.com/v2/?p=15359 (accessed August 13, 2013).

time in different locations all over the world."[142] The executive and corporate nature of this maneuver is at once evident, but again, the corporeal nature of performance is enacted by the player/participant in place of the artist. As I have argued throughout this chapter, this kind of substitutability is as much a part of Abramović's brand as her actual physical, bodily presence. Paradoxically perhaps, it is through this multiplicity of presences and absences that Abramović assumes the role of executive female artist.

[142] "Marina Abramović Institute: The Founders," https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/maihudson/marina-abramovic-institute-the-founders (accessed July 30, 2013).

CONCLUSION

On more than one occasion, Marina Abramović has expressed her desire to make an "image" of a crucified woman insisting that, "[It] would be a good thing for this century."[1] Her commitment to making such an image "as" performance is perhaps underpinned by the fact that Chris Burden denied her permission to re-do *Transfixed* for *Seven Easy Pieces* at the Guggenheim in 2005; in this now infamous work, Burden had himself nailed to the hood of a Volkswagen beetle in a Christ-like pose. "I am very disappointed about this," she confessed at that time, "because I really wanted to do this piece. The woman crucified, finally. I wanted to do it on a Volga, which was designed in the Tito era, though, instead of Volkswagen."[2] Abramović's interest in such imagery is not surprising. The theme of self-sacrifice, as we have seen, has been present in her work since her youth in Belgrade, first appearing in such notorious performances as *Rhythm 0* (1974) and again in *Rhythm 5* (1975), when she lay down with her arms outstretched in the perimeter of a burning star. If not for the onlookers who interfered, Abramović might have suffocated on the fumes.[3]

In 1975, crucified woman imagery appeared more literally in the first iteration of *Lips of Thomas* when Abramović now lay naked on a cross made of ice blocks, after cutting a star in her stomach and whipping her skin raw. In the iconic opening

---

[1] Abramović cited in James Westcott, *When Marina Abramović Dies A Biography* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2010): 291. Abramović made this statement in an unpublished portion of an interview with Westcott for *Artinfo*, November 9, 2005.

[2] Abramović cited in an interview with Jörg Heiser, "Do It Again," *Freize,* 94 (October 2005): 176.

[3] Kristine Stiles, "Cloud with its Shadow," *Marina Abramović*, with essays by Stiles, Klaus Biesenbach and Chrissie Iles (London: Phiadon, 2008): 52.

scene of *The Biography*'s inaugural production (directed by Charles Atlas) and in performances such as *Luminosity* (1997), *Entering the Other Side* (2005), and in a self-portrait from *The Kitchen* series (2011), Abramović placed her body in a position that would again suggest vaguely, but with urgency, the image of a crucified woman [Fig. 119, 2, 3, 64]. In each of these, the artist is raised up off the ground, her arms outstretched to either side. Rather than interpreting the severity of this pose as suggestive of a crucifixion, the motif can alternatively be read as a public embrace, which is exactly what Abramović promised during the summer of 2013 to provide each of the founders who contributed to the Marina Abramović Institute Kickstarter campaign. Abramović's crucified woman imagery in these works suggests her identity as both a martyr and as a modern-day performance art guru.

Curator Kristine Stiles has alluded to what I have been probing in this study when she wrote in 2009, "Abramović deploys the body as an index of experience embedded and shaped by public and private relations and events. While ritual is widely acknowledged in her performances, most viewers and critics have missed her work's outwardly directed social content."[4] Art historians have interpreted the meaning of this "social content" in myriad ways—as redolent of communist dogma, post-Yugoslavian politics, the artist's familial and autobiographical relationships, and in close proximity to her secular and spiritual beliefs.

In this dissertation I have read Marina Abramović's recent performances both within and against the grain of common knowledge about this artist: since the 1970s, Abramović's performances have had much to do with audience, and in this respect, my investigation of her celebrity from such a perspective seems a natural

[4] Ibid.

consequence. My dissertation, however, has also consistently analyzed developments occurring at the intersection where artist and audience meet mass media and celebrity culture. As I have been arguing, it is the mutually reactive spark between these faculties that has been responsible for producing the "social content" in Abramović's most recent performance work.

My personal interest in analyzing female celebrity culture in today's art world began with the initial goal of examining the role of contemporary female artists (for instance, Abramović and Shirin Neshat) who had or continued to collaborate with others and yet, remained better known than their creative counterparts. When Abramović skyrocketed to fame during *The Artist is Present* in the spring of 2010, the effect of her mass popularity could not be ignored. Significantly, this performance reprised a work once made in collaboration with another artist (*Nightsea Crossing* with Ulay, 1980-88), except that now, the audience was absolutely integral to ensuring its success. Given the media's overwhelming interest, it became clear that Abramović's recent performances in New York City present a complex set of unexamined issues. What specific circumstances might license a seasoned female avant-garde artist's crossover into the sphere of mass public interest? How might her current popular success affect the interpretation of previous and/or subsequent performances? And what broader trends might be discerned from Abramović's example regarding the relationship between women, art and fame?[5] Scholars and

[5] A succinct body of literature has been instrumental in developing my own thoughts on these questions. Isabella Graw's *High Price: Art between the Market and Celebrity Culture* (2009) presents an incisive analysis of the market's dependency on art making—and vice versa—arguing that even so, neither even completely relinquishes its autonomy. Though Graw does not dwell on the nuances between notoriety, fame and celebrity, subtleties I have emphasized in this dissertation, her study casts in high relief the often-duplicitous relationship between these spheres. See Isabelle Graw, *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture*, trans. Nicholas Grindell (Köln, Germany: Sternberg

critics who are interested in examining this wider cultural matrix will find useful my analysis of Abramović's newfound status as a celebrity.

Drawing on the fields of sociology, art history, and performance studies, as well as the current cultural preoccupation with being "present," enabled me to begin unraveling the process underpinning Abramović's popular success. I was able to look historically at Abramović's reputation and earlier career work using sociological concepts typically employed to define relationships between famous individuals and their admirers in culture at large—notoriety, fame, renown and celebrity chief among these. Seldom are the nuanced differences between such concepts emphasized as instrumental in driving art's discourse or the systems of representation that guide the invention of an artist's public image. Although it is clear that the discipline of art history lags behind film, politics and sports in the academic study of celebrity, my analysis confirms that concepts such as these are in fact vital to establishing a more thorough understanding of Marina Abramović's public identity. With one eye towards the pervasive critical issues endemic to 1990s relational and participatory art, my findings position Abramović's star status as symptomatic of classic fan culture rapport, especially the *It*-effect. This allowed me to align media representations of Abramović with the magnetism known to galvanize her live performances.

Press, 2009). In 2009, London's Tate Modern mounted an exhibition titled *Pop Life: Art in a Material World*, which, in adopting Andy Warhol's mantra, "good business is the best art," examined the shock value of commerce, glamour and brand-building in work by artists including Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons and Keith Haring, Tracy Emin and Takashi Murakami; see Jack Bankowsky, Alison M. Gingeras and Catherine Wood, eds. *Pop Life: Art in Material World* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009). This text is particularly useful for how it positions artists as brand-builders. Elsewhere Alison Gingeras, one of the contributors to the Tate catalog, has examined the cult of personality in relationship to Francis Picabia, Andy Warhol and Martin Kippenberger, among others, by questioning, "how important is persona in understanding an artist's practice?" See Gingeras, "The Lives of the Artists," *Tate Etc.*, 1 (Summer 2004), http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/lives-artists (accessed Jan. 30, 2014).

While dissecting Marina Abramović's celebrity might initially be seen as an attempt to dampen her limelight, my goal has been to show that artists who attract mainstream attention must be examined using slightly different criteria than artists who "make it" strictly within or inside the art world—a premise that warrants a few comments on what exactly an art world "is." Generally, this debate has focused on the question of art's autonomy.[6] Today, despite globalization, the production and consumption of art continues to operate within a closed system that includes universities, galleries, and museums as well as more specialized research foundations that issue fellowships and grants.[7] As British art historian and curator Julian Stallabrass has identified, this kind of insular structure mandates that art must be "a unified and bound thing," something that can be researched using a specialized language.[8] Collectively, these effects, writes Stallabrass, tend "to produce art that talks most effectively to art insiders, and seals out the wider public."[9] Although this dissertation does not attempt to resolve expressly the question of whether or not art operates outside or inside the influence of a wider economic market (the debate to

[6] Adopting Andy Warhol as his philosophical muse, the late philosopher and critic Arthur Danto argued in the early 1970s that, "The moment something is considered an art work … it becomes subject to interpretation," thus implying the "art world" is essentially defined by an imposing theoretical context. In her most recent study, *Forgetting the Art World*, Pamela M. Lee takes up this issue, arguing that the distance between what Danto set-up—roughly that the art world "stands to the real world in something like the relationship in which the City of God stands to the earthly city"—has lessened dramatically with the advent of globalization. Lee writes that "it is the *work* of art that has progressively mediated these two realms [the real world and the art world], formerly theorized as separate and distinct. To repeat: in its 'mattering and materialization' the work of art is both object of, and agent for, globalization." See Lee, *Forgetting the Art World* (Cambridge, MA; London, England: MIT Press, 2012): 17-22, for her initial discussion of Danto; and 186 for the context of this citation. Arthur Danto initially put forth his ideas about "what is an art world" in essays such as "Artworld," *Journal of Philosophy*, 61 (October 15, 1964): 571-584; and "Artworks and Real Things," *Theoria*, 39 (April 1973): 1-17.

[7] Julian Stallabrass, *Contemporary Art A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2006): 81.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

which the question of art's so-called autonomy is most closely tied), my thesis positions Abramović's rise to public attention alongside such inquiries. Performances like *The Artist is Present* unequivocally appear to interrogate—or at least, negotiate—the sanctity of the divide between the "art world" and the "real world," which thrives on the very inclusion and exclusion that is necessary for "Art" to exist as a consolidated history with attending theories, and a point to which I shall return to below.

Two principal art stars of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, Jeff Koons and Takashi Murakami, both of whom bear deep ties to commercialism and Pop culture, are conspicuously absent from my account of Marina Abramović's rise to fame. Their absence signals another of this study's primary contributions, namely my positioning of performance art as a unique (and hitherto much less discussed) avenue through which to consider celebrity in the art world and the power structures that underpin it. Koons, for example, designed the cover of Lady Gaga's 2013 *Artpop* album and Murakami continues to be well known for his high-profile collaboration with the designer firm Louis Vuitton. In other words, these two male artists are inherently tied to discussions concerned almost exclusively with the commodification of art. By contrast, I have shown how examining performance art and especially Abramović's "brand" of performance presents a particularly engaging set of circumstances through which to investigate whether or not "Art" operates in an autonomous sphere.

I have granted significant attention to the pivotal role today's audience plays in launching an artist toward mainstream fame, arguing that the authoring of

celebrity, as a collaborative enterprise, cannot manifest unaided; no single curator or dealer, nor Abramović herself bore sole responsibility for the spectacle generated by her daily appearances at MoMA during *The Artist is Present*. As noted earlier, even exhibition organizer Klaus Biesenbach expressed surprise that the chair opposite Abramović was consistently occupied. Moreover, in this respect, it has been telling to observe the still outstanding need for the kind of analyses I have presented herein. While prominent critics and art historians have been quick to critique the lack of immediacy plaguing the models whom Abramović trained for re-performance as they were presented at both MoMA and the Guggenheim, these same critics (Amelia Jones, for example) often seek to condemn not Abramović's artistic practice *per se*, but the celebrity system at work within it. This dissertation, using Marina Abramović as a critical case in point, has aimed to provide the tools necessary in analyzing the affect and effect of celebrity, its worship in the art world and the power structures it produces.

My examination of the concept of celebrity worship in Chapter Three, for example, suggested that Abramović's identity could be seen to act mirror-like, reflective of not just hers, but also her audience's desires. Although the theme of the mirror had appeared previously in Abramović's work, both literally and as a metaphor,[10] my examination of it in conjunction with *The Artist is Present* prompted a clearer explanation of why performance re-enactments and documentation actually promote (rather than devalue) an artist's aura within the wider public realm—a myth-making process Christopher Bedford refers to as a continually changing "viral

[10] On the theme of mirrors in Abramović's work see Bojana Pejić, "Bodyscenes: An Affair of the Flesh," *Marina Abramović* (Milan: Charta, 1998): 30-32.

ontology."[11] Comparing Chris Burden and Tehching Hsieh's durational work in view of Abramović's recent projects makes this latter point especially clear.[12]

Chapter Four's focus pivoted on re-reading images of and by female artists who have performed or pictured themselves with guns, namely Abramović, Hannah Wilke and Shirin Neshat. My analysis of Abramović's re-performance of VALIE EXPORT's *Action Pants/Genital Panic* (1969) demonstrated that assessing this re-enactment in the context of Yugoslavian gender politics could produce an altogether different understanding of it. From this perspective, I suggested that the genre of re-performance can function akin to what in psychology, media and literary theory is characterized as a prosthetic device—an extension, an addition—that both calls attention to and substitutes for that which has gone missing.

The roster of artists I have invoked throughout my thesis to emphasize the construction of Abramović's fame—Sherrie Levine, Andy Warhol, Tehching Hsieh, Chris Burden, Shirin Neshat and Hannah Wilke—is indicative of only a portion of cultural figures appropriate for such a comparative examination. Abramović's presence in the fashion economy, especially her relationship to *Givenchy*'s Riccardo Tisci, could be examined more carefully in light of American photographer Cindy

---

[11] Christopher Bedford, "The Viral Ontology of Performance," *Perform, Repeat, Record*, *Live Art in History*, eds. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (Bristol, UK; Chicago, USA: Intellect, The University of Chicago Press, 2012): 77-87.

[12] Although Frazier Ward does not discuss Abramović's most recent performances, focusing instead primarily on her 1970s work (as well as her recreation of *Lips of Thomas* at the Guggenheim in 2005), Ward's chapters on Abramović, Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, and Tehching Hsieh in *No Innocent Bystanders, Performance Art and Audience* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2012) demonstrate, both individually and taken together, a concerted effort to tease out specific relationships between performers, audience and the public sphere in the 1970s. Each chapter in Ward's book was previously published in slightly different form; see his acknowledgements for corresponding bibliographic information.

Sherman's collaborations with such fashion figures as Juergen Teller, Marc Jacobs and *Comme des Garçons*, for example.

More serious comparative analysis between Abramović and Marcel Duchamp—an artist who surely qualifies as a "confounder-in-chief"—would further inform the gambits each pursued to ensure her/his artistic legacy. Abramović's re-staging of her life and work in *The Biography*, for example, can productively be studied in view of Duchamp's *Boîte en Valise* (*Box in Valise*, *From or by Marcel Duchamp or Rrose Sélavy*, 1935-41*)*, the artist's so-called "portable museum" or "traveling suitcase" which contains hand-colored reproductions and miniature model replicas of his life's work. Duchamp, like Warhol and Abramović, was also a keen businessperson, and he too enlisted assistants to help with the arduous process of (re)producing his life's work.[13] Abramović's positioning of the audience as central to the completion of her recent durational work echoes Duchamp's routine of placing the onus of interpretation on the viewer. He also maintained a reverence for death as an important passage in an artist's life stating. "Death is an indispensible attribute of a great artist." Elaborating on his ideas about the "great artist," Duchamp said, "His voice, his appearance, his personality – in short, his whole aura – intrudes such that his pictures are overshadowed. Not until all these factors have been silenced, can his

[13] While working on an edition of Duchamp's *Box in Valise* in the 1960s, Jacqueline Monnier, his wife's daughter from a previous marriage, inquired about paper selection and frames for the reproductions. In response Duchamp responded, "I beg you not to hesitate to make decisions which you think good, without worrying about my preference." Duchamp to Monnier, May 3, 1960, quoted in Jennifer Gough Caumont, "Ephemerides on and about Marcel Duchmp and Rose Sélavy," in Pontus Hulten, ed., *Marcel Duchamp* (Milan, London: Thames and Hudson; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993); cited in Francis Nauman, *Marcel Duchamp The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Ghent, Amsterdam: Ludion Press, 1999): 208.

work be known for its own greatness."[14] On this account, however, Abramović diverges from Duchamp. Certainly, the visibility of her persona does not "overshadow" her work; it becomes part of her performance.

In her most recent fashion spread, "Marina Abramović Saves the World," appearing in *Harper's Bazaar* in October 2013, one photograph features the artist wrapped in a bright red sculptural cape and wearing a cylindrical headpiece that shoots up toward the sky, appearing to be a direct reference to Abramović's notion of "energy clothes," or garments meant to increase consciousness [Fig. 151 - 152].[15] (These embody Marshall McLuhan's concept that clothes might be considered an extension of this skin.) In this photograph, Abramović is clearly not focusing on the image of self-sacrifice as such. By contrast, the positioning of her vestment's curvaceous folds suggests that her arms might be folded across her midsection, as if she were embracing her own body.

In the *Harper's Bazaar* article accompanying this image, the artist recounts her experience of training Lady Gaga à la the Abramović Method, stating that her younger friend "loved" the slow, painstaking process of separating two pounds of lentils and rice into individual piles, seed by seed.[16] Although a significant portion of the Lady-Gaga/Marina Abramović liaison can certainly be considered hype, it is

---

[14] Marcel Duchamp quoted in "Artist Must Die to be Great, Frenchman Says," *The Berkshire County Eagle*, June 17, 1936; cited in Nauman, 286.

[15] Kimberly Cutter, "Marina Abramović Saves the World," *Harper's Bazaar*, October 2013, http://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/reviews/marina-abramovic-profile-1113 (accessed Feb. 2, 2014). Abramović's energy clothes often also include magnets as a way to help increase the body's energy field. See Angela Vettese, "Energy Clothes: Performance Accomplished" in *Marina Abramović*, with texts by Abramović, Anna Daneri, Giacinto Di Pietrantonio, et. al. (Milan: Charta, 2002): 49-63.

[16] Ibid.

striking that, as Abramović's statement intended to imply, what has been dubbed "Generation Y" (Lady Gaga's primary fan base) has for some time now been in hot pursuit of the nostalgia reminiscent of an indeed, slower time. This is ironically evidenced, for example, in their embrace of the picture-sharing platform Instagram, whose defining feature is a square photo format reminiscent of Kodak's Instamatic or the Polaroid. Mediated by technology, social connectivity has become a cultural obsession in the twenty-first century. Abramović's ability to suggest that, even in as little as a sustained old-fashioned staring contest, significant connection might be possible is, in my view, one of the more profound, if seemingly obvious reasons for her contemporary rise to fame.

Marina Abramović has described fame as a "great blessing," averring that it provides her with an opportunity to introduce her performance art philosophy and method to those "outside" the art world. She has proclaimed her belief that, "if you use [celebrity] for a kind of vanity or putting your ego as high as human life, then you are doing wrong, but if you are humble …and you really understand that actually this [fame] can give you a possibility to just work better, then it's really good."[17] While it is clear that any discussion of celebrity in the art world today would be incomplete without reference to Abramović, how exactly she will mobilize her newfound fame in regard to future accomplishments remains to be seen. There is little question, however, that the success of Marina Abramović's later career performances signals that observers and participants must in fact be "performing" alongside her. This realization underpins my analysis of Abramović's brand, which, as I argue, is

[17] Abramović, cited in her radio interview with Jian Ghomeshi in *Studio Q* (CBC), "Marina Abramović is not Dead" Studio Q (June 3, 2013), http://blip.tv/q-tv/marina-abramovic-is-present-in-studio-q-6616544 (accessed Jan. 15, 2014).

ultimately premised on her physical absence as much as her actual corporeal presence. When the Marina Abramović Institute opens its doors in 2015, the circle will be complete; others will make "her" performances without the artist actually being there.

To a certain extent, Abramović's metamorphosis as an art star might be seen as signaling a softening of the art world's boundaries, especially given the circus of critical voices circulating on the Internet during and immediately following her MoMA debut. Yet, as I have made clear here, this artist's launch into a broader cultural landscape—the celebrity ecosystem—can be understood as operating through both inclusion and exclusion. Mass appreciation for Abramović's work has not necessarily overturned or demoted her exclusive (executive) position as an artist or cultural producer; it has, in fact, emphasized her position as just such. Seen from this perspective, the actual process of waiting in line to sit face to face with Abramović at MoMA provided a quite distinct lesson on what an art world actually might be—cultural activity that is monitored, but not exclusively defined through its reception within and by a larger "outside-the-art-world" audience. Considering her ambitious goals for the building of MAI in upstate New York, this is exactly the position within which Marina Abramović might hope to "find" herself.

Figure 1: Marina Abramović, *The Artist is Present,* 2010
Performance, 716 hours between March 14th and May 31st
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Figure 2: Marina Abramović takes her final bow for *The Artist is Present,*
May 31, 2010
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Photograph © 2010 Marco Anelli

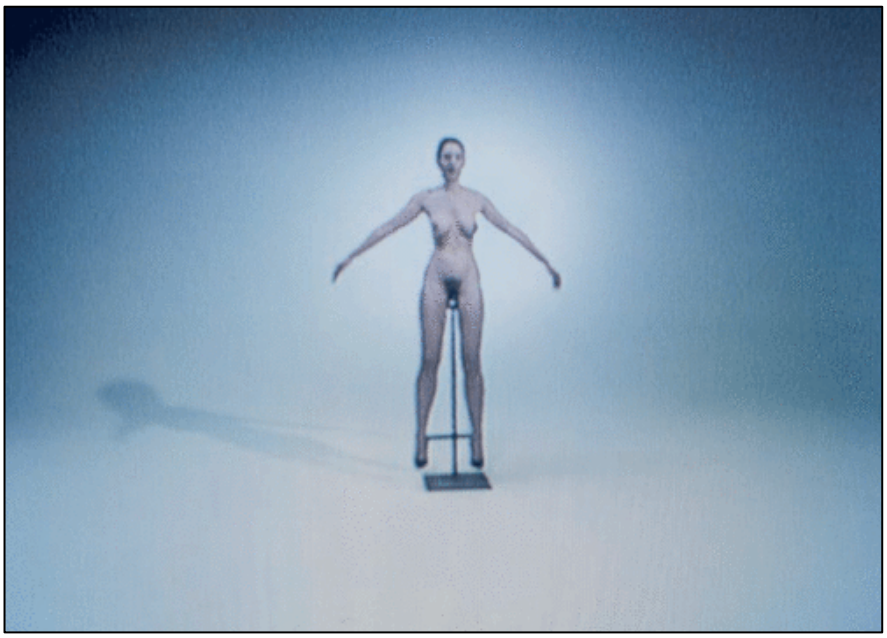


Figure 3: Marina Abramović, *Luminosity*, October 1997
Performance, 2 hours
Sean Kelly Gallery, New York

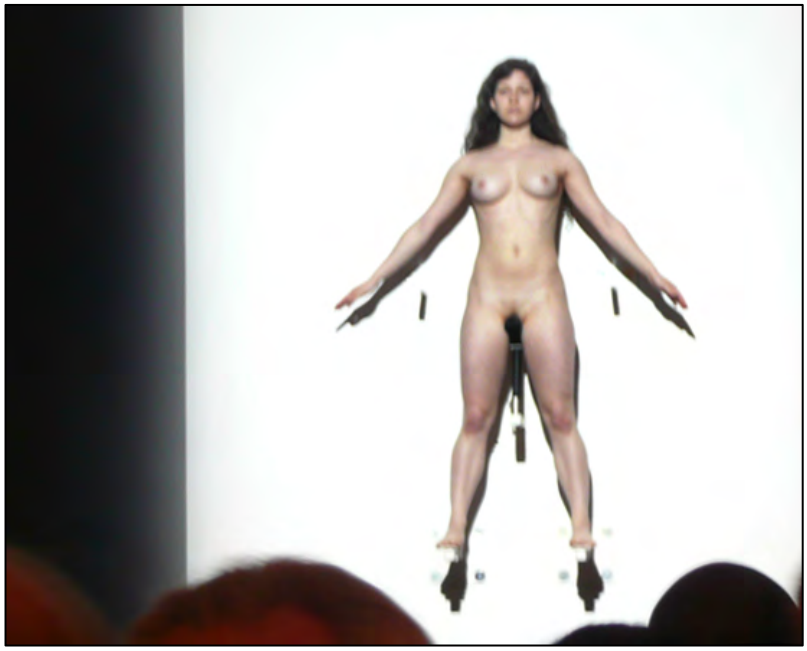


Figure 4:
Re-performance of *Luminosity* during *The Artist is Present*, 2010
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Figure 5: Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 10*, 1973
Performance, 1 hour
Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Villa Borghese, Rome

Figure 6: Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Nightsea Crossing*, 1982.
Performance, 7 days
Documenta 7, Kassel, Germany

Figure 7: Marina Abramović, *Balkan Baroque,* June 1997
Three channel video installation and performance, 4 days and 6 hours
XLVII Biennale, Venice

Figure 8: Cover of *Marina Abramović, Artist Body* (1998)
Photo title: *The artist with a waterball*,
Cocoa Island, Maldives, 1994
Photo by Michael Stefanowski

Figure 9: Marina Abramović and Jay Z during “Picasso Baby”
July 10, 2013
PACE, New York

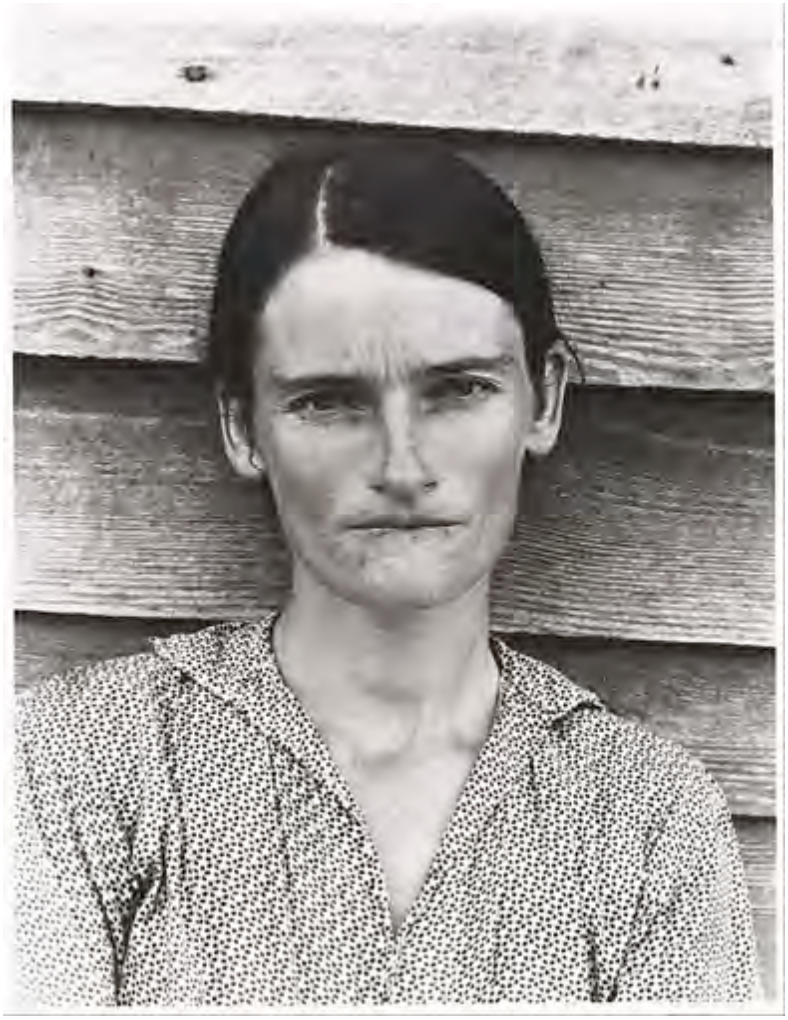


Figure 10: Sherrie Levine, *After Walker Evans 4,* 1981
Gelatin silver print

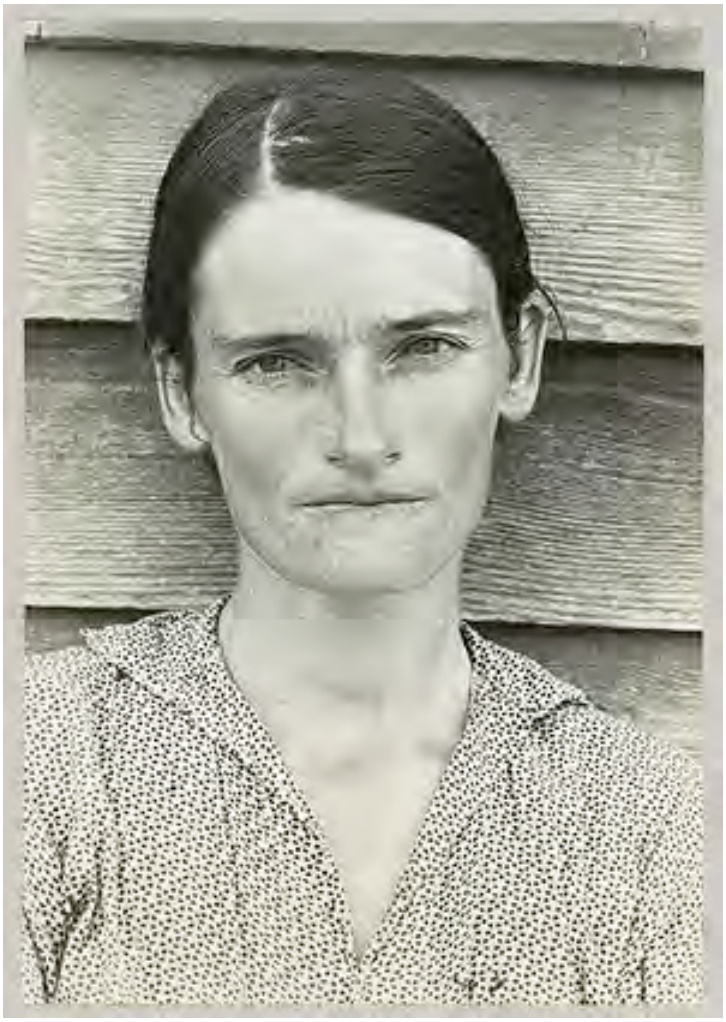


Figure 11: Walker Evans, *Alabama Tenant Farmer Wife*, 1936
Gelatin silver print

Figures 12 - 13: Marina Abramović*, Entering the Other Side*, 2005
Performance, 7 hours, November 15th

Figure 14: Tilda Swinton and Cornelia Parker, *The Maybe*, 1995
Serpentine Gallery

Figure 15: Tilda Swinton, *The Maybe*, 2013
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Figure 16 (above, left):
Marina Abramović and Ulay,
Relation in Space, July 1976
Performance, 58 minutes
XXXVIII Biennale, Giudecca,
Venice

Figures 17 – 18: (right)
Two photographs from Steven Meisel's *Crossview* layout. *Vogue Italia*,
November 1998.

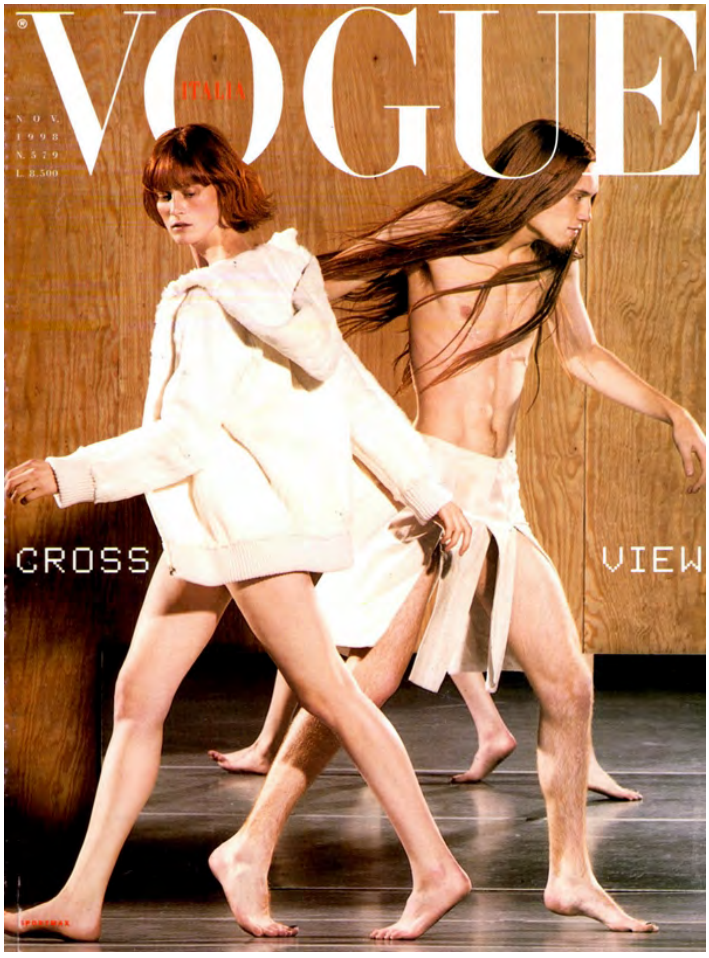


Figure 19: *Vogue Italia,* November 1998. Cover photo by Steven Meisel

Figure 20: Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 0*, 1974
Performance, 6 hours
Studio Morra, Naples, Italy

Figure 21: Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 0*, 1974
Performance, 6 hours
Studio Morra, Naples, Italy

Figure 22: Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 0*, 1974
Performance, 6 hours
Studio Morra, Naples, Italy

Figure 23: Abramović and Ulay, *Expansion in Space*, June 1977
Performance, 32 minutes
Documenta 6, Kassel, Germany

Figure 24: Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Rest Energy*, 1980
Performance, 4 mins.
ROSC'80, Dublin, Ireland

Figure 25:
Marina Abramović and Ulay, *The Great Wall Walk*, 1988

Figure 26: Re-performance of Marina Abramović and Ulay's *Imponderabilia* (1977/2010)
Performed continuously during *The Artist is Present*
600 hours, March 13th and May 31st, 2010
Museum of Modern Art, New York City

Figure 27:
Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Imponderabilia*, June 1977
Performance, 90 minutes, June

Figure 28: Marina Abramović, *The Artist is Present*, 2010
Performance, 75 days or 716 hours, March 13th - May 31st, 2010
Museum of Modern Art, New York City

Figure 29:
Installation view of Marina Abramović's retrospective, *The Artist is Present*, 2010
Museum of Modern Art, New York City

Figure 30 - 32
Marina Abramović, *House with the Ocean View*, 2002
Performance, 271 hours
Sean Kelly Gallery, New York

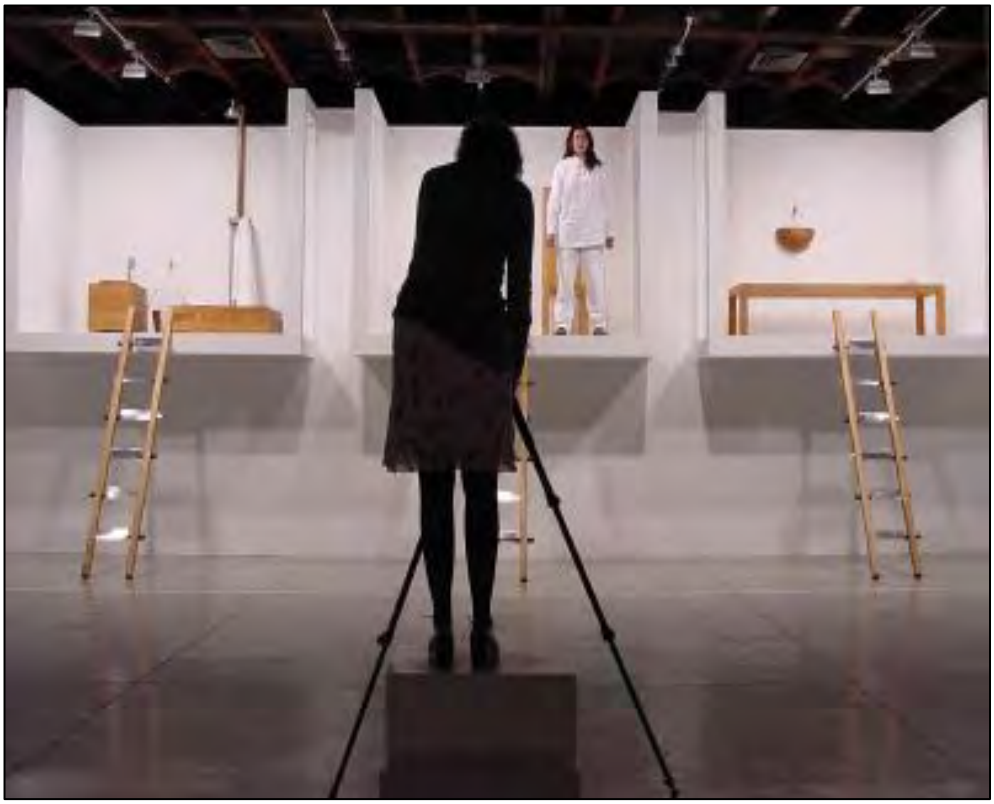


Figure 33:
Marina Abramović, *House with the Ocean View*, 2002
Performance, 271 hours
Sean Kelly Gallery, New York

Figures 34 – 37: Screen shots of *Sex and the City*'s parody of *House with the Ocean View*

Figure 38: Kim Cattrall and Marina Abramović
Drawn Together, V Magazine 83
Photograph by Santiago & Mauricio

Figure 39: Marina Abramović in *Vogue*, November 2005

Figure 40: Marina Abramović re-performing Bruce Nauman's *Body Pressure* (1974) at the Solomon R. Guggenheim on November 9th, 2005

Figure 41:
Marina Abramović re-performing Vito Acconci's *Seedbed* (1972) at the Solomon R. Guggenheim on November 10th, 2005

Figure 42: Marina Abramović re-performing
VALIE EXPORT's *Action Pants/Genital Panic* (1969)
at the Solomon R. Guggenheim on November 11th, 2005

Figure 43: Marina Abramović re-performing Gina Pane's *The Conditioning* (1973) at the Solomon R. Guggenheim on November 12th, 2005

Figure 44: Marina Abramović re-performing Joseph Beuys's *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965) at the Solomon R. Guggenheim on November 13th, 2005

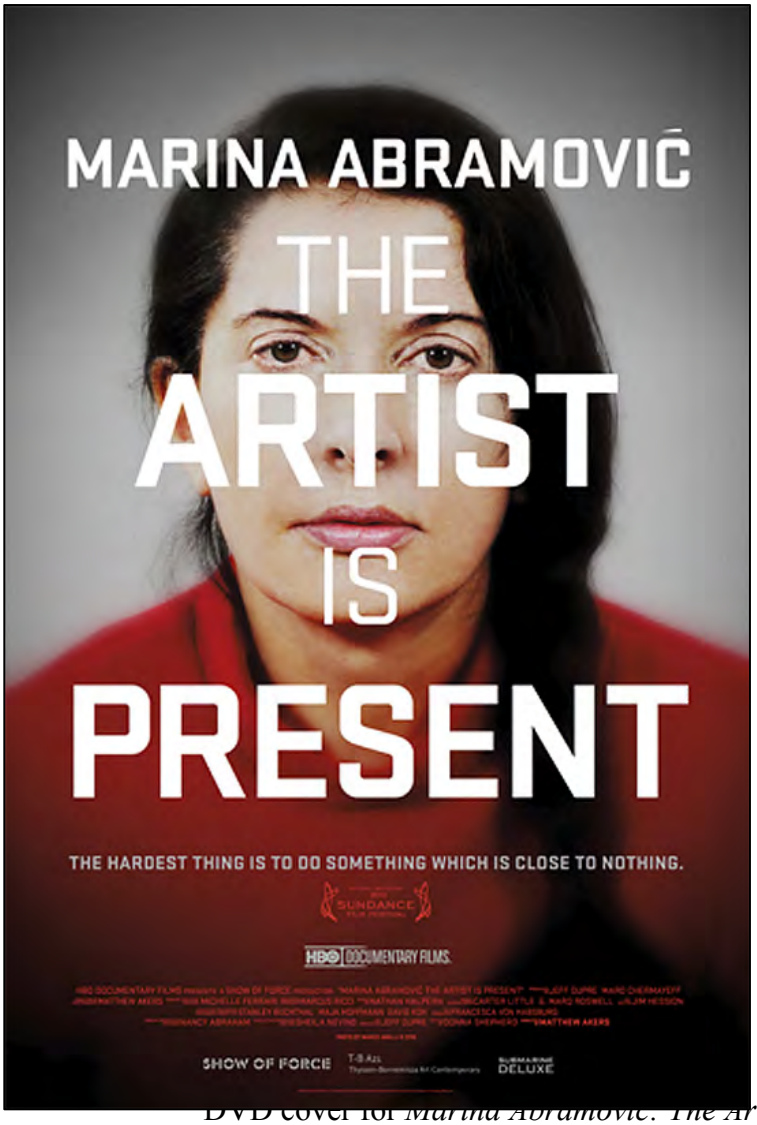
Figure 45:
Marina Abramović re-performing *Lips of Thomas* (1975)
at the Solomon R. Guggenheim on November 14th, 2005

Figure 46:
Marina Abramović performing *The Artist is Present* with strangers at MoMA during the spring of 2010

Figure 47:
Examples of Marco Anelli's photographs of Abramović's sitters, 2010.
All images © Marco Anelli

Salvador Dali), 1964-66

Figure 48:
Andy Warhol, *Screen Tests* (Bob Dylan and Salvador Dali), 1964-66.



DVD cover for *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*

Figure 49:
DVD cover for *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*, 2010.

Figure 50: Abramović and Ulay reunite during *The Artist is Present*, 2010

Figure 51: Screen shot of the tumblr site, *Marina Abramović Made Me Cry*

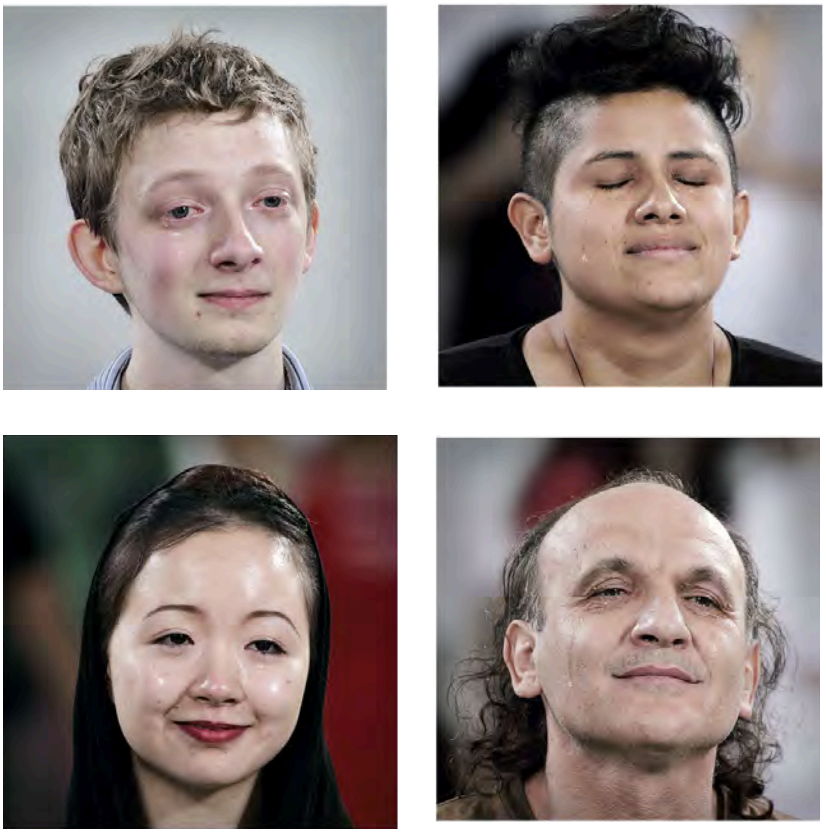


Figure 52: Examples of Anelli's photographs reproduced on the tumblr site, *Marina Abramović Made Me Cry*. © Marco Anelli

Figure 53: Abramović walking the red carpet
at the closing of *The Artist is Present*.

Figure 54: Marina Abramović,
Dragon Heads, 1990
Performance, 1 hour
Edge Festival 90,
Newcastle Upon Tyne, England

Figure 55:
Anya Liftig communing with Abramović during *The Artist is Present*, 2010

Figure 56: Chris Burden, *Shoot*, 1971

Figure 57:
Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance 1978-1979*

Figure 58: Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance 1980-1981*

Figure 59: Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance 1981-1982*

Figure 60:
Tehching Hsieh, *Rope Piece, 1983-1984*

Figure 61:
Abramović photographed at home in her kitchen for *The Economist*, Sept. 10, 2012.

Figure 62:
Marina Abramović, *Portrait with Potatoes*, 2008,
chromogenic color print.

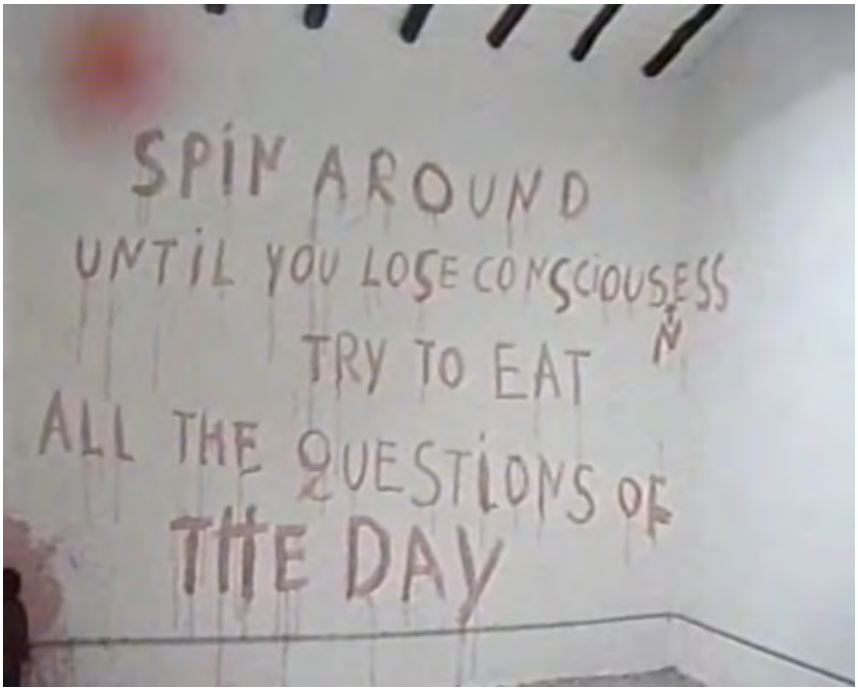


Figure 63: Marina Abramović, *Spirit Cooking*, 1997.
Mineral and inscriptions with pig blood. Zerynthia, Italy

Figure 64: Marina Abramović, *The Kitchen I,* from the series *The Kitchen, Homage to Saint Theresa*, 2009. Photo by Marco Anelli.

Figure 65: Marina Abramović, *The Kitchen IV,*
from the series *The Kitchen, Homage to Saint Theresa*, 2009.
Photo by Marco Anelli.

Figure 66: Marina Abramović, *The Onion*, 1995.
Duration 10 minutes. UTA, Dallas, Texas.
Performed for video.

Figure 67:
Abramović photographed in *Harper's Bazaar,* March 2012

Figure 68:
Abramović photographed in *Harper's Bazaar,* March 2012.

Figure 69: Marina Abramović and Riccardo Tisci,
Visionaire, 60th edition, Summer 2011

Figure 70: Joseph Beuys and Andy Warhol, New York. 1979/printed 1982-83. Gelatin silver print on RC paper.

Figure 71: Chris Burden, *Transfixed*, 1974

Art in California

He Got Shot —For His Art

"You'll Never See My Face in Kansas City" by Chris Burden, a young California artist ..Because everything else has been done?

By PETER PLAGENS

Los Angeles

"I know myself only insofar as I am inherent in time and in the world, that is, I know myself only in my ambiguity."

—Maurice Merleau-Ponty
"The Phenomenology of Perception"

IF YOU'VE never been to Venice (. . . West, in California): it's a shank-end community of semi-dilapidated one-story brick buildings abutting freaky/proletarian sections of public beach. Pacific Ocean Park, an amusement area, burned down a long time ago and its ruins form a buffer between Venice and staid Santa Monica to the north; but the marina mentality (sailboats, stewardesses, franchise fake-elegant res-

Figure 72: Chris Burden featured in the *New York Times*, September 2, 1973

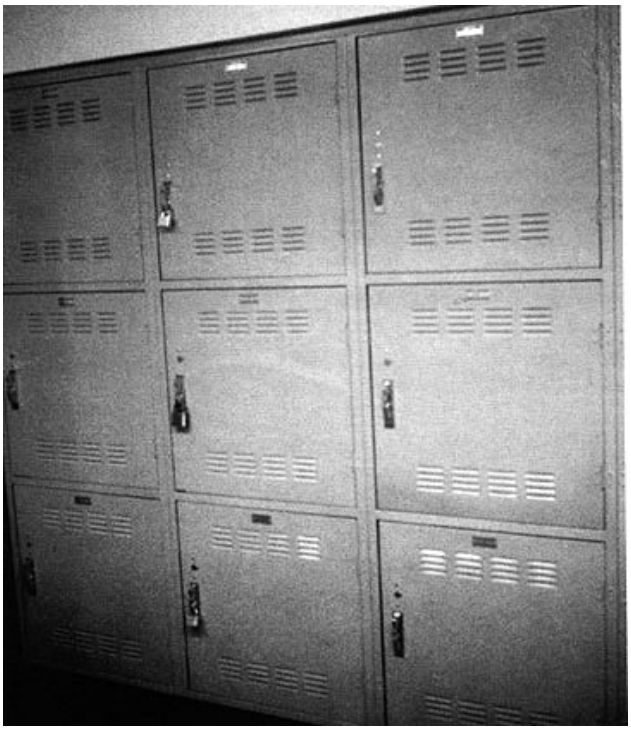


Figure 73: Chris Burden, *Five Day Locker Piece*, 1971

Figure 74: Chris Burden, *Bed Piece*, 1972

Figure 75: Chris Burden, *Jaizu*, 1972

Figure 76: Chris Burden, *Jaizu* (relic), 1972

Figure 77: Chris Burden, *Oh Dracula*, 1974

78: Chris Burden, *White Light/White Heat*, 1975

Figure 79:
Joseph Beuys, *I like America and America Likes Me*, 1974

Figure 80: Marco Anelli, *Skin, Portrait of Marina Abramović,* 2007

Figures 81 – 84: VALIE EXPORT, *Action Pants/Genital Panic*, 1969

Figures 85 – 86: VALIE EXPORT, *Action Pants/Genital Panic*, 1969

Figure 87: VALIE EXPORT, *Action Pants/Genital Panic,*
Installation in public space in Berlin, 1994/95.
Photo: Torsten Monschein / Charim Gallery, Vienna.

Figure 88: Lynda Benglis, *Artforum* advertisement*,* November, 1974.

Figure 89:
Marina Abramović, *Art Must be Beautiful, Artist Must be Beautiful*, 1975

Figure 90: Hannah Wilke, *S.O.S. Starification Series*, 1974-5

Figure 91: Marina Abramović, *Lips of Thomas*, 1975

Figure 92: Newswire photographs of female Yugoslavian
Partisans published in the Chicago Tribune.
The caption for this photograph read: "September 18, 1944. Battle Song."

Figure 93: Danica Abramović, Belgrade, 1946

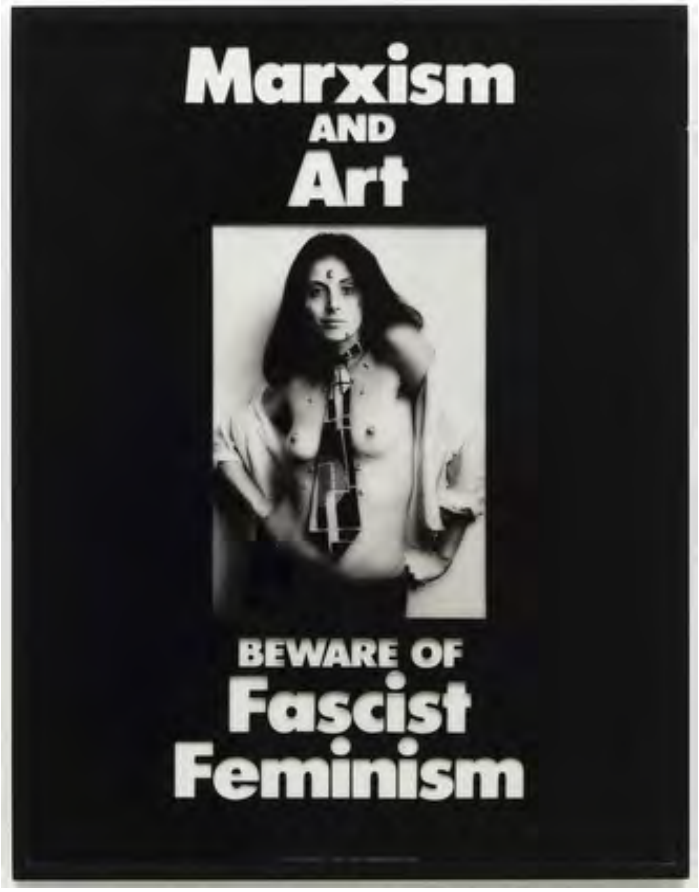


Figure 94: Hannah Wilke, *Beware of Fascist Feminism*, 1977

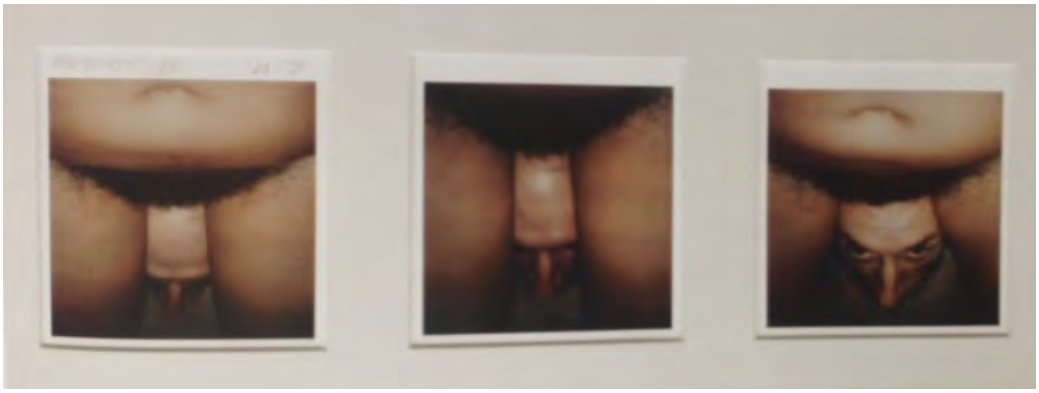


Figure 95: Hannah Wilke, *Venus Envy*, *with Richard Hamilton*, 1980

Figures 96 – 99: (left to right) Hannah Wilke, *So Help Me Hannah* series, 1978

Figure 100: Patty Hearst caught on videotape robbing
Sunset Branch, Hibernia Bank, San Francisco, April 15, 1974

Figures 101 – 102: Patty Hearst poster (top) and posters reading "We love you Tania" on bulletin boards at the University of California, Berkeley (April, 15, 1974 / © Bettmann/CORBIS).

Figure 103:
Madonna performing with guns during her spring 2012, MDNA tour

Figure 104: Marina Abramović, *The Family III*, 2008

Figure 105:
Marina Abramović,
Eight Lessons on Emptiness with a Happy Ending, 2008.
Five channel video installation

Figure 106: Marina Abramović, *The Family XI*, 2009

Figure 107: Marina Abramović, *Family I*, 2008

Figure 108: August, 1994 cover, *Women & Guns* magazine

Figure 109: (left) Shirin Neshat, *Untitled (Women of Allah)*, 1994

Figure 110: (right) Shirin Neshat, *Rebellious Silence (Women of Allah)*, 1994

Figure 111: Zaynab's Sisters commemorate the eighth anniversary of the holy defense against Iraq.
Photographer unknown, ca. 1988.
Reprinted from Faegheh Shirazi,
The Veil Unveiled: The Hijab in Modern Culture
(Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 129, fig. 5.7.

Figure 112: Jonathan Horowitz,
CBS Evening News/www.Britneycrotch.org, 2008

Figure 113: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled # 261*, 1992

Figure 114: Kiki Smith carried on a palanquin.
Francis Alys, *Modern Processional*, 2002

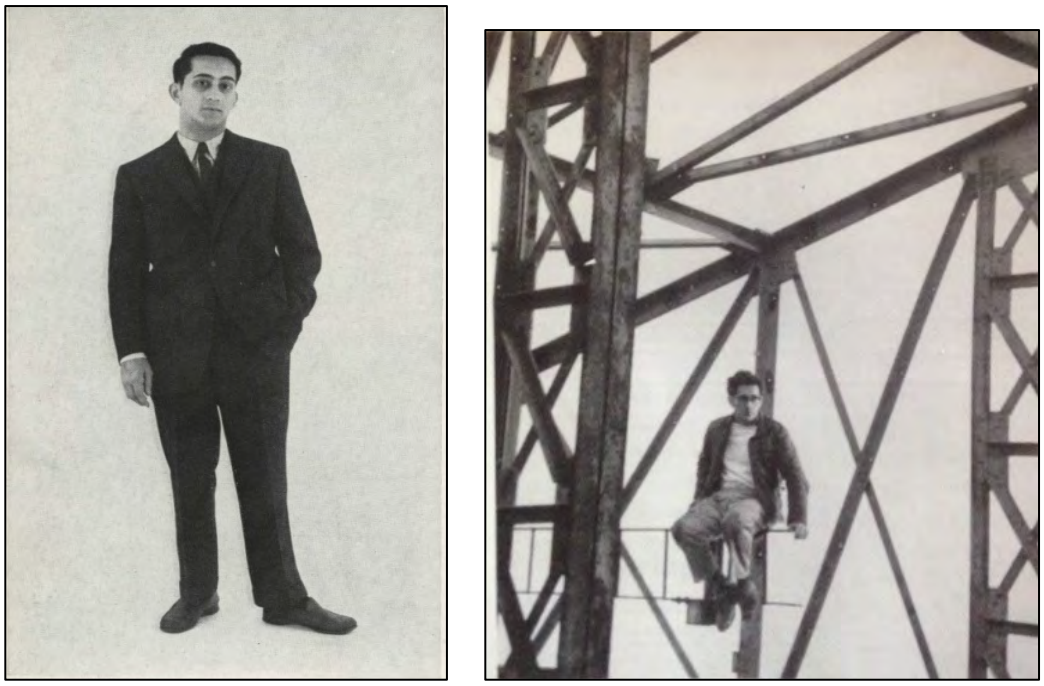


Figure 115: (left) Hollis Frampton, *Frank Stella*, 1959, photograph.

Figure 116: (right) Hollis Frampton, Frank Stella, 1960, photograph.

Figure 117: Marina Abramović, Suzanne Dikker and Matthias Oostrik, *Measuring the Magic of the Mutual Gaze*, 2011. Garage Center for Contemporary Culture. © Marina Abramović.
Photo by Maxim Lubimov.

Figure 118:
Marco Anelli, *Marina Abramović with Firewood*, 2010. © Marco Anelli

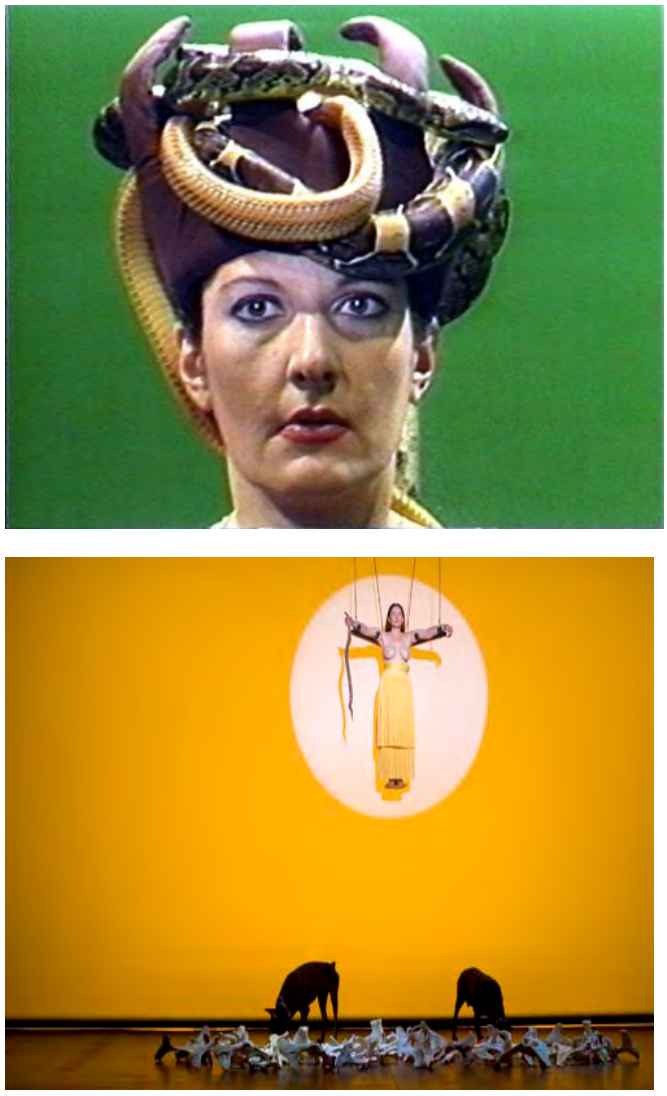
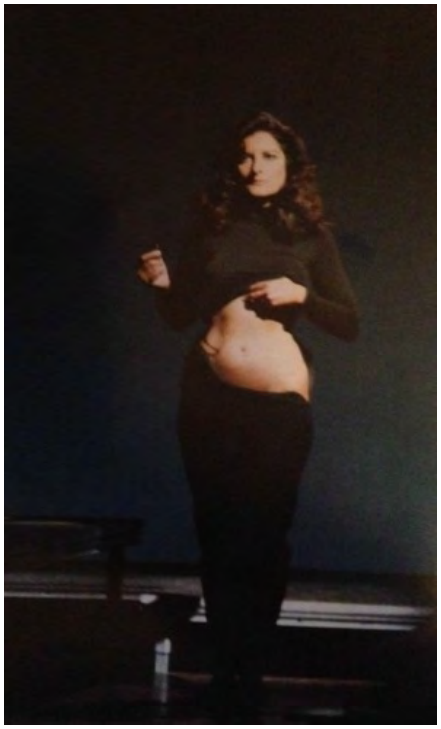


Figure 119:
Marina Abramović and Charles Atlas, *SSS*, 1989. Video still.

Figure 120:
Marina Abramović and Charles Atlas, *The Biography*, 1992.
Opening scene.



ramović re- performing *L*

Figure 121:
Marina Abramović re-performing *Lips of Thomas* (1975)
in *The Biography*.

Figure 122:
Marina Abramović and Charles Atlas, *The Biography*, 1992

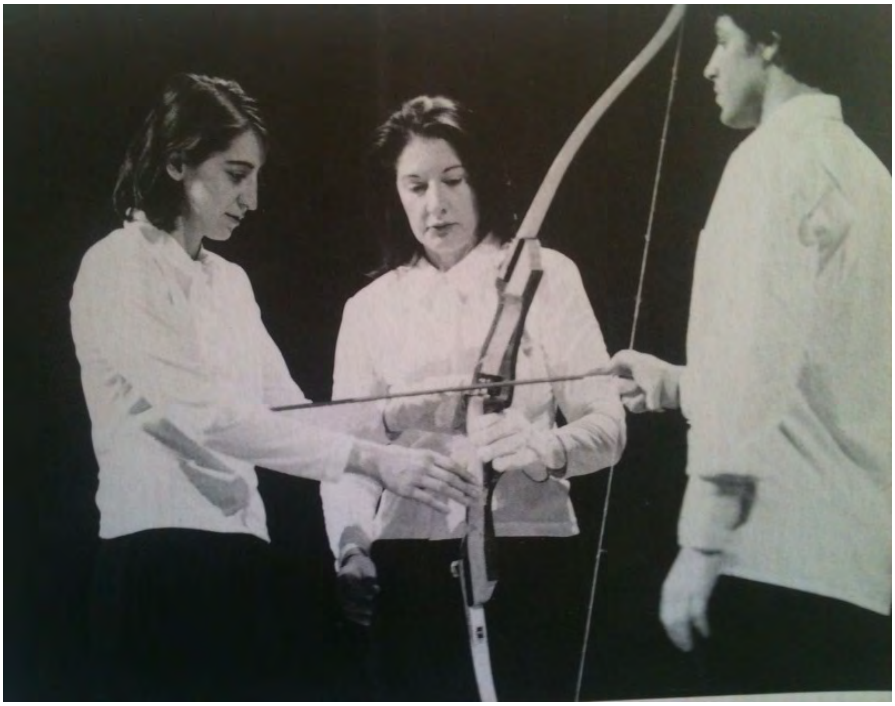


Figure 123: Marina Abramović instructing students on a re-performance of *Rest Energy* (originally performed by Abramović and Ulay in 1980) during *The Biography Remix*, 2004

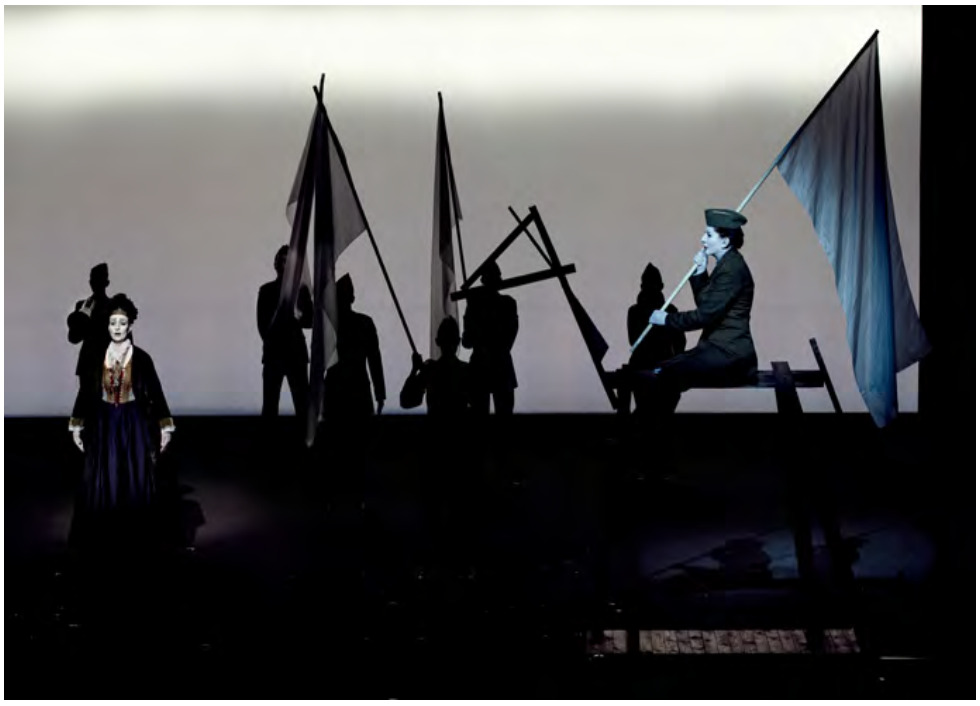


Figure 124: Marina Abramović, Robert Wilson, Antony Hegarty and Willem Dafoe,
The Life and Death of Marina Abramović, 2011/2013

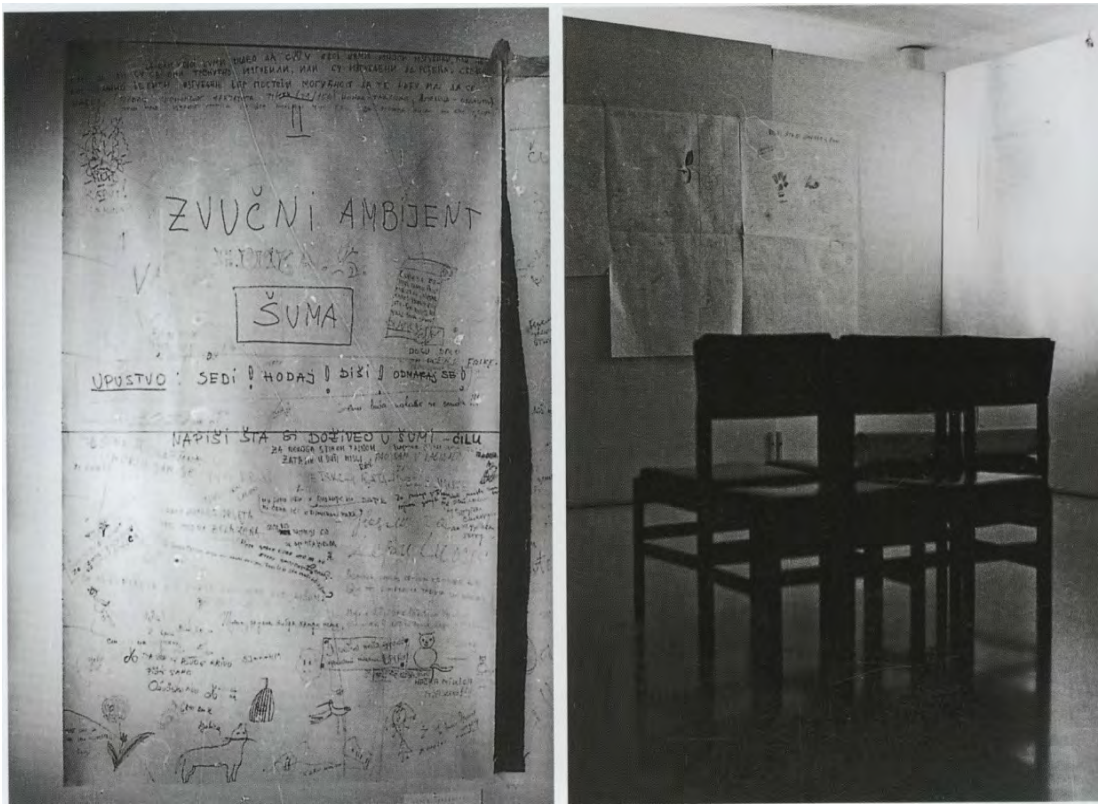


Figure 125:
Marina Abramović, *Forest*, 1972. Sound installation.

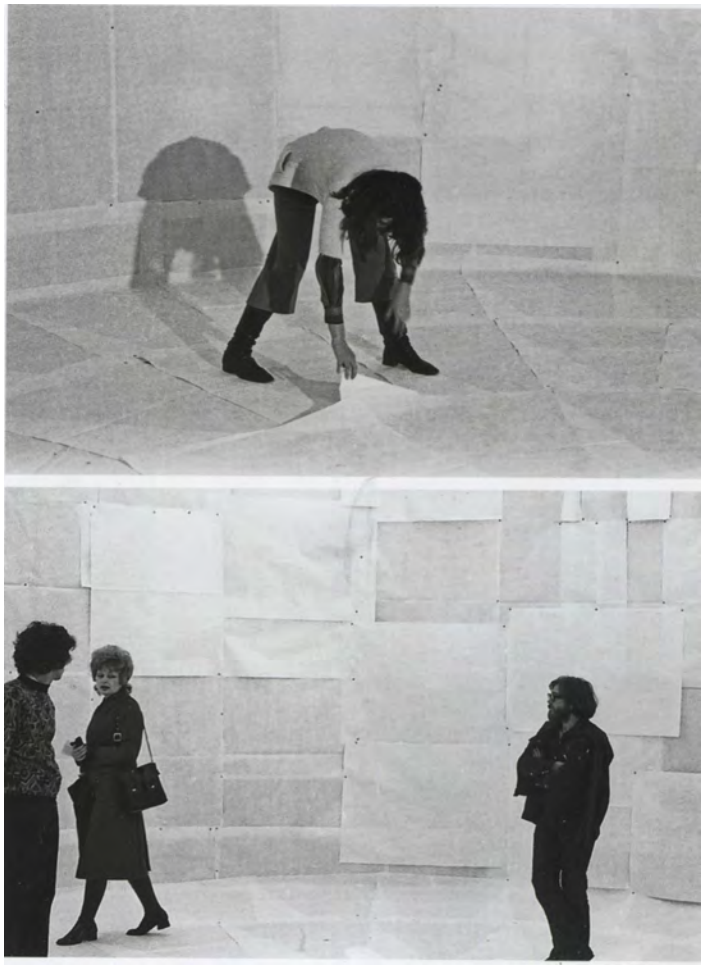


Figure 126: Marina Abramović, *White Space*, 1972

Figure 127: Marina Abramović, *The Airport*, 1972.
Sound environment.

Figure 128: Marina Abramovic, *Black Dragon*, 1994

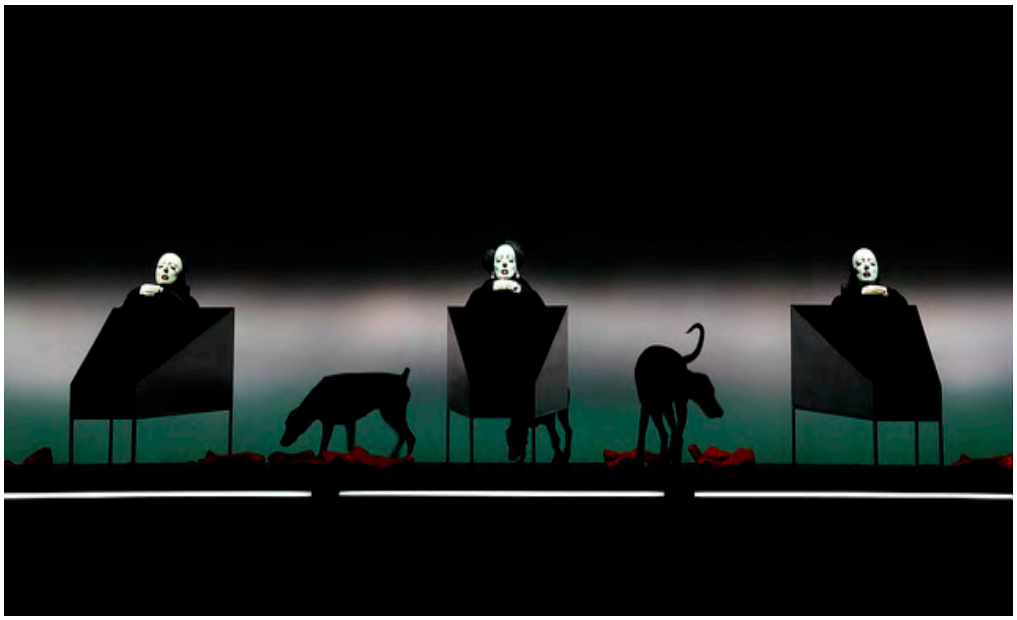


Figure 129: Prologue, *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović,* 2011/2013

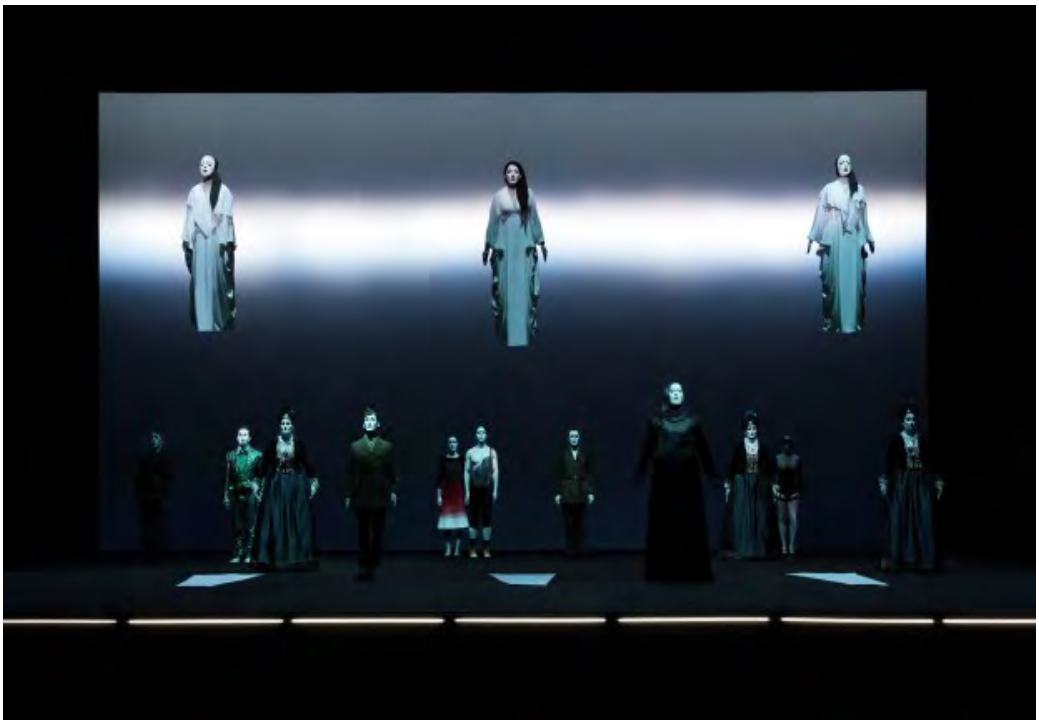


Figure 130:
Epilogue, *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*, 2011/2013

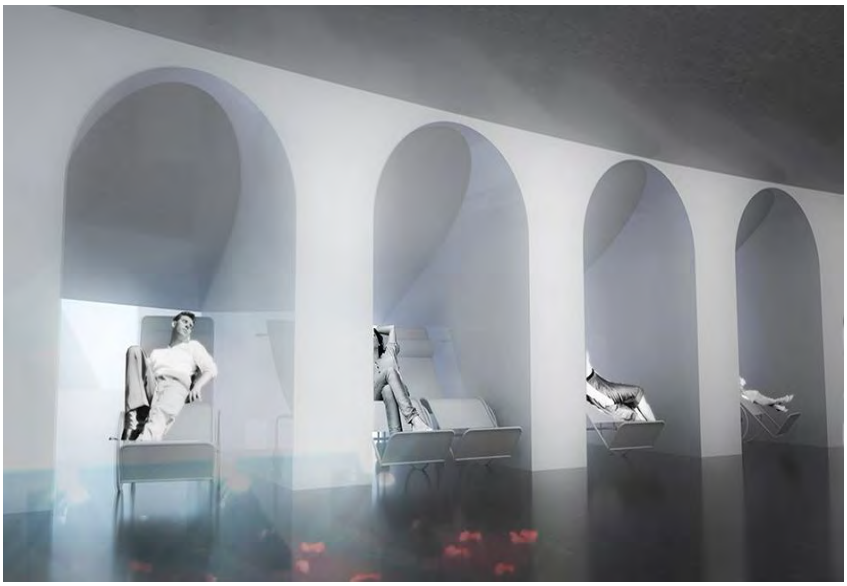
Figure 131: Promotional photo, *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*, 2011. From left to right: Willem DaFoe, Marina Abramović, Antony Hegarty, Robert Wilson.

Figure 132: (top) Billboard advertisement for *Marina Abramović Presents* at the Whitworth Gallery, Manchester, UK, 2009

Figure 133: (bottom) *Abramović* leading *The Drill* at the Whitworth Gallery, 2009

Figures 134 – 135:
The future home of the Marina Abramović Institute, Hudson, New York.
Photos by Phil Mansfield for *The New York Times*.

Figure 136: Rendering of the Marina Abramović Institute, Rem Koolhaas/OMA. © OMA



Figures 137 - 138:
Rendering of the Marina Abramović Institute, Rem Koolhaas/OMA. © OMA

Figure 139: Certificate of completion, Marina Abramović Institute.

Figure 140: Architectural rendering of the Marina Abramović Institute, Rem Koolhaas/OMA. © OMA

Figure 141:
Andy Warhol's silver-lined Factory studio on 47th Street in New York City

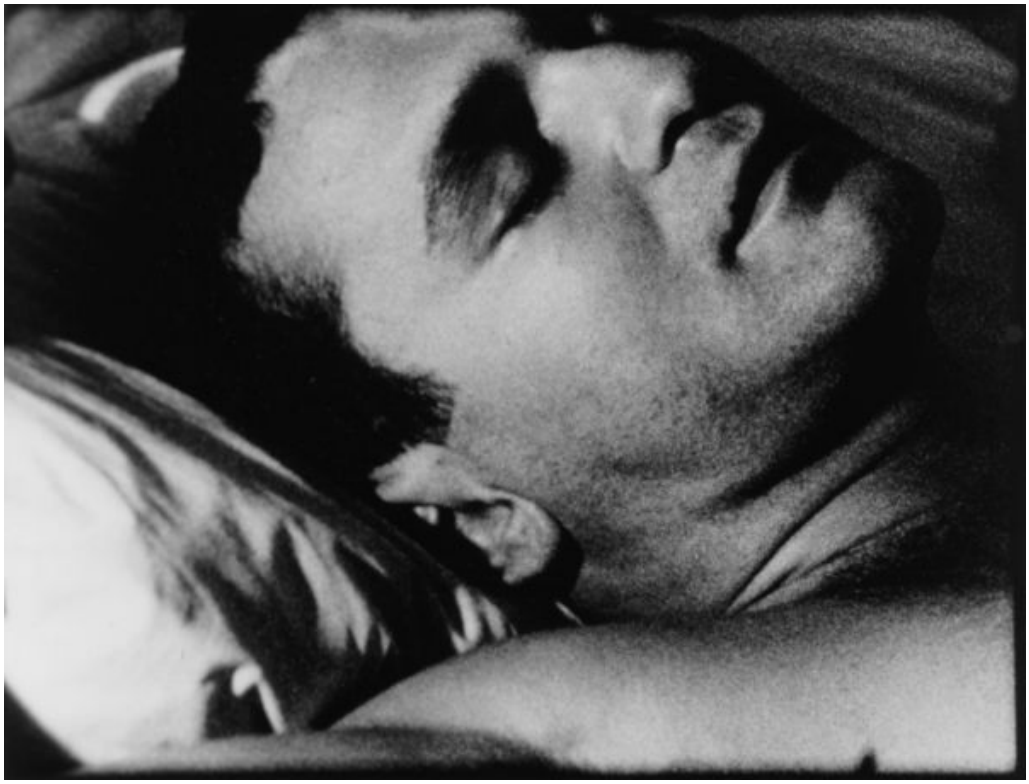


Figure 142: Andy Warhol, *Sleep,* 1963. Film still.

Figure 143: MAI-Protoype, Trinity-Bellwoods Park, Toronto, Canada. June 2013. Photo by the author.

Figures 144 – 146: The Abramović Method, PAC Milan, 2012

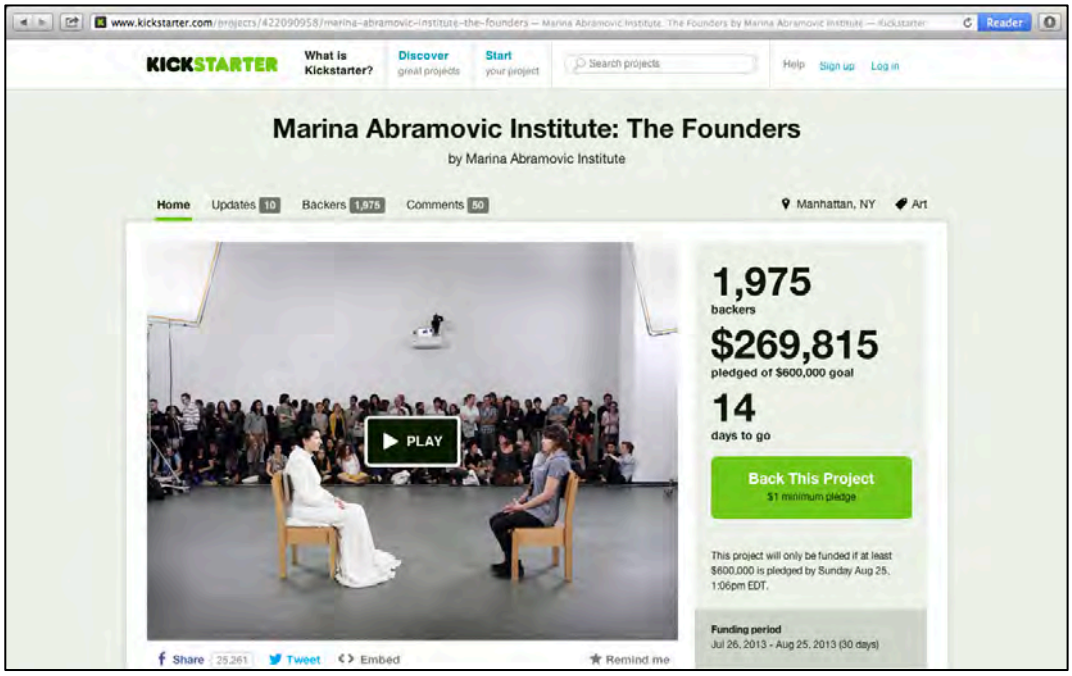


Figure 147: Screen shot of Marina Abramović Institute: The Founders, Kickstarter
fundraising campaign homepage.

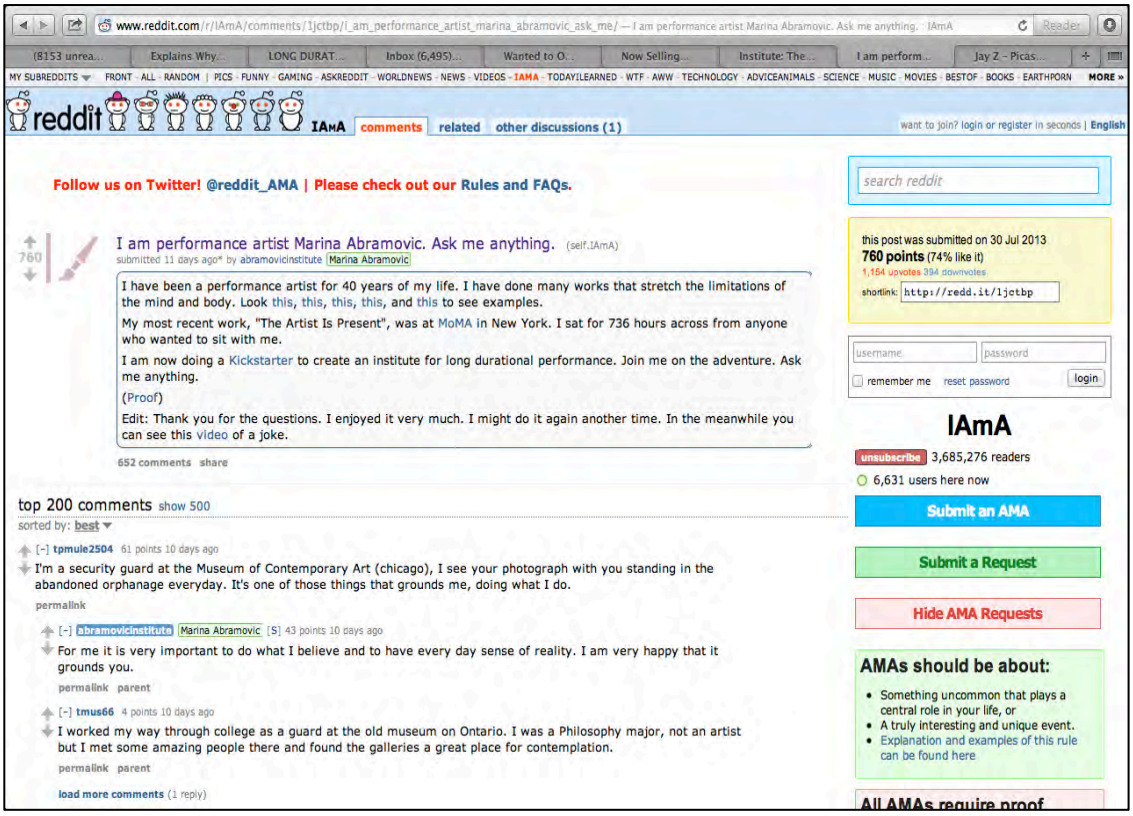
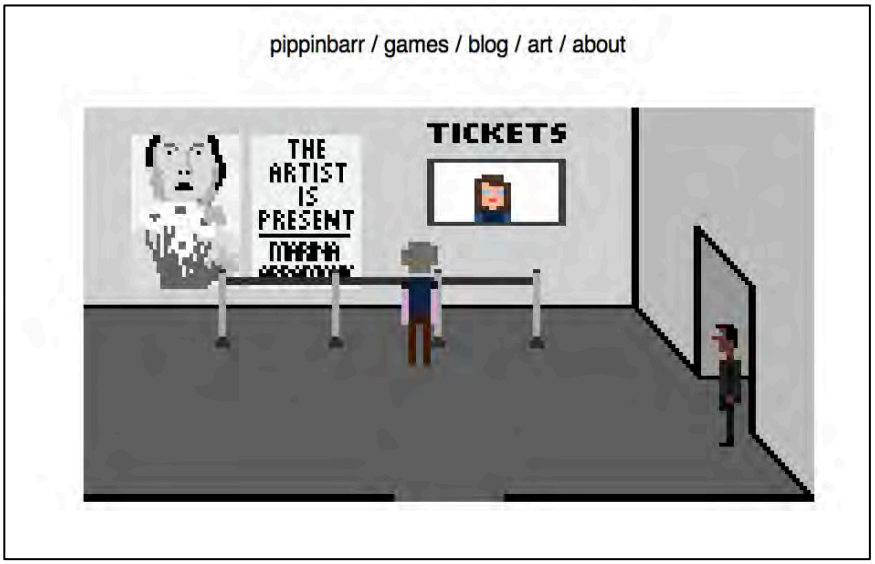


Figure 148:
Screen shot of "I am performance artist Marina Abramović. Ask me anything," Reddit.com



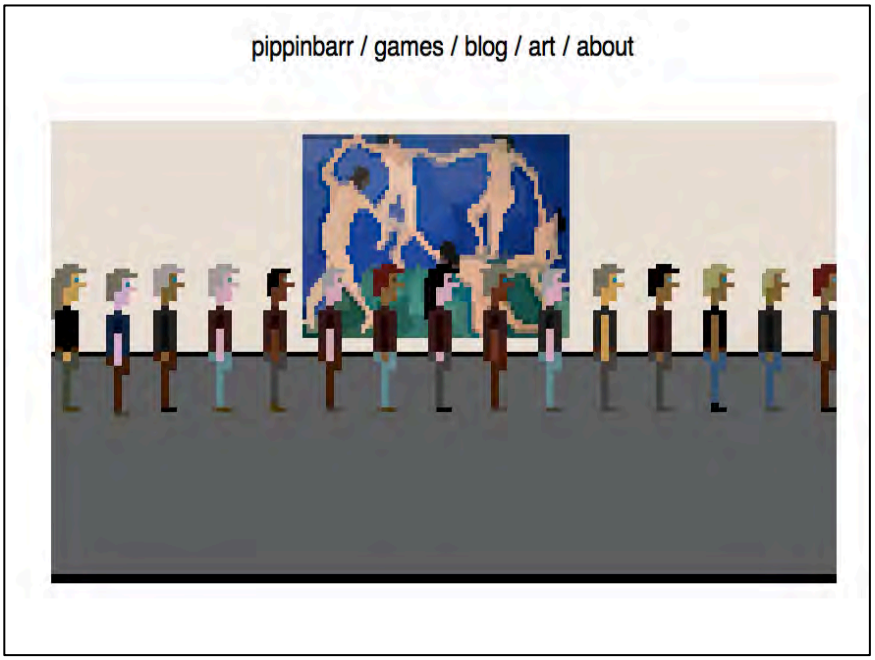


Figure 149-150:
Pippin Barr, *The Artist is Present*, 2010.
Screen shots of online video game

Figure 151: Marina Abramović in *Harper's Bazaar*, October, 2013.

Fig. 152. Marina Abramović, *Energy Clothes,* video and photo work*,* Como, Italy, 2001. (*Cleaning the House* workshop)

Bibliography

Abramović, Marina. *The Biography of Biographies* (Milan: Charta, 2004).

_____. *Marina Abramović: Artist Body: Performances 1969-1998* (Milan: Charta, 1998).

_____. *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present,* curated by Klaus Biesenbach (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010).

_____ *Marina Abramović*, *Balkan Epic*, ed. Adelina von Fürstenburg, with essays by Steven Henry Madoff, Fulvio Salvadori and Bojana Pejić. (Milan: Skira, 2005).

_____. *The Bridge/El Puente, Marina Abramović*. Exposición Retrospectiva, with texts by Pablo J. Rico, Marina Abramović, and Thomas Wülffen (Valencia: Consorci de Museus de la Comunitat Valenciana; and Milan: International Distribution, Charta, 1998).

_____. *The House with the Ocean View*, with essays by Cindy Carr, RoseLee Goldberg, Chrissie Iles, Thomas McEvilley, and Peggy Phelan (Milan: Charta, 2003).

_____. *The Kitchen*, photographs by Marco Anelli (Madrid: La Fábrica, 2012).

_____. *Marina Abramović: 7 Easy Pieces*, photographs by Attilio Maranzano; film stills by Babette Mangolte; essays by Nancy Spector, Erika Fisher-Lichte and Sandra Umathum (Milano: Charta, 2007).

_____. *Marina Abramović Biography*, in collaboration with Charles Atlas (Ostfildern bei Stuttgart: Cantz, 1994).

_____. *Marina Abramović, Performing Body*, with essays by Dobrilla Denegri (Milan: Charta, 1998).

_____. *Marina Abramović, Student Body: Workshops, 1979-2003 / Performances, 1993-2003* (Milan: Charta, 2003).

_____ and Tania Bruguera, "Conversation." *Art School (Propositions for the 21st Century)*, ed. Steven Henry Madoff (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2009): 177-188.

_____ and Ulay. *Marina Abramović /Ulay, Ulay/Marina Abramović, Relational Work and Detour* (Amsterdam: Idea Books, 1980).

Acconci, Vito. Interview. *San Francisco Arts Quarterly*. Issue 15 Booklet: Performance (February-April, 2014).

Alberro, Alexander and Blake Stimson, eds. *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999).

Alexander, Shana. *Anyone's Daughter* (New York: The Viking Press, 1979).

Alloway, Lawrence. "Robert Smithson's Development." *Artforum* 11 (November 1972): 52 – 61.

Anelli, Marco. *Marco Anelli: Portraits in the Presence of Marina Abramović*, with essays by Klaus Biesenbach, Chrissie Illes and Marina Abramović (Bologna, Italy: Damiani, 2012).

Arent, Margery. *Robert Wilson from Within* (Paris: The American University of Paris and The Arts Arena, 2011).

Atlas, Charles. "Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present." *Artforum* 48 (January, 2010): 83.

Auslander, Philip. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

Ayres, Anne, Paul Schimmel, Donald Kuspit and Howard Singerman. *Chris Burden: A Twenty Year Survey* (Newport Beach, CA: Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1988).

Badovinac, Zdenka. *Body and the East: From the 1960s to the Present* (Ljubljana, Slovenia: Museum of Modern Art Ljubljana and The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia, 1999).

Battcock, Gregory and Robert Nickas, *The Art of Performance: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E. P. Dutton, Inc., 1984).

Banes, Sally and André Lepecki, eds. *The Senses in Performance*, (New York: Routledge, 2007).

Bay-Cheng, Sarah. "Theater is Media: Some Principles for a Digital Historiography." *Theater*, 42, 2 (2012): 26-41.

Belcove, Julie L. "High Performance." *W Magazine* 39 (January 2010): 76-85.

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt; trans Harry

Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968 [2007]): 217-251. Originally published in 1936 in *Zeitschrift für Soazialforschung*, V, I, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

Bishop, Claire. "Delegated Performance: Outsourcing Authenticity." *21st Century: Art in the First Decade*, ed. Miranda Wallace (Brisbane, Australia: Queensland Art Gallery, Gallery of Modern Art, 2012): 240-249.

_____."The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents." *Artforum* 44 (Feb., 2006): 178-83.

_____, ed. *Participation* (Whitechapel, London; Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006).

_____. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London, New York: Verso, 2012).

_____. "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics." *October*, 110 (Fall 2004): 51-79.

Babaie, Sussan. Rebecca R. hart and Nancy Princenthal. *Shirin Neshat* (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Art, 2013).

Bankowsky, Jack, Alison M. Gingeras and Catherine Wood, eds. *Pop Life: Art in Material World* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009).

Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." *Image – Music – Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977): 143-148.

Bergman-Carton, Janis. "Like an Artist." *Art in America*, 81 (January 1993): 35 - 39.

Boorstin, Daniel J. *The Image, or What Happened to the American Dream* (New York: Antheneum, 1962).

Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Market for Symbolic Goods." *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996): 141-175.

Bourdon, David. "Andy and the Society Icon." *Art in America*, 63 (Jan. 1975): 42-45.

Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World* (New York: Lucas and Sternberg, 2007).

_____. *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods, with the participation of Mathieu Copeland (Dijon: Les Presses du reel, 1998).

Braudy, Leo. *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (New York: Vintage Books

[1986] 1997).

Brim, Orville Gilbert. *Look at Me! The Fame Motive from Childhood to Death* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 2009).

Brockman, John ed. *Is the Internet Changing the Way You Think* (New York and London: Harper Perennial, 2011).

Browder, Laura. *Her Best Shot: Women and Guns in America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

Burden, Chris and Jan Butterfield. "Chris Burden: Through the Night Softly." *Arts Magazine* 49 (March 1975): 68 – 72.

Burton, Johanna "Repeat Performance: Johanna Burton on Marina Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces*." *Artforum* 44 (January 2006): 55-56**.**

_____ and Elisabeth Sussman, *Sherrie Levine: Mayhem*, with contributions by Thomas Crow, David Joselitt, *et. al*. (New Haven and London: Whitney Museum of American Art; distributed by Yale University Press, 2012).

Camhi, Leslie. "Grand Gestures, Pioneering performance artist Marina Abramović re-creates history this month at the Guggenheim." *Vogue* 195 (November 2005): 282, 232.

Carr, Cindy. *On Edge, Performance at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1993).

Celant, Germano. *Marina Abramović Public body: Installation and Objects, 1965-2001* (Milan: Charta, 2001).

Chen, Joanne W. "The Patron on Conceptual and Performance Art in USA Art Market: An Interview with Sean Kelly." *Art Taipei Forum Media*, May 6th, 2011.

Clemente, Chiara. *Our City Dreams. Five Artists. Their Dreams. One City* (Milan: Charta, 2009).

Coombe, Rosemary J. "Author/izing the Celebrity." *The Construction of Authorship*: *Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature*, ed. Martha Woodmansee and Peter Jaszi (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994): 101-131.

Crow, Kelly. "Klaus Biesenbach." *The Wall Street Journal Magazine*. October, 2012.

Currid-Halkett, Elizabeth. *Starstruck, The Business of Celebrity* (New York: Faber and Faber Inc., 2010).

Dadi, Iftikhar. "Shirin Neshat's Photographs as Postcolonial Allegories." *Signs: Journal*

of Women in Culture and Society 34 (Autumn 2008): 125-150.

Danto, Arthur. "Artworld." *Journal of Philosophy*, 61 (October 15, 1964): 571-584.

_____. "Artworks and Real Things." *Theoria*, 39 (April 1973): 1-17.

_____. *Shirin Neshat*. Foreword by Marina Abramović (New York: Rizzoli, 2010).

Davidts, Wouter and Kim Paice, eds. *The Fall of the Studio: Artists at Work* (Valiz, Amsterdam: Antennae, 2009).

Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983 [originally published in 1967]).

Deutsche, Rosalind. *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* [1996] (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988).

Drucker, Johanna. "Collaborations without Object(s) in the Early Happenings." *Art Journal*, 52 (Winter 1993): 51-58.

Dubravka Djurić and Miško Suvaković, eds. *Impossible Histories*, *Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991* (Cambridge and London, The MIT Press, 2003).

Duncan, Carol. "The MoMA's Hot Mamas." *Art Journal* 48 (Summer 1989): 171-8.

_____. "Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth Century Vanguard Painting." *Feminism and Art History Questing the Litany*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1982): 293-315.

Dyer, Richard. *Stars* (London: BFI, 1979).

Ebony, David. "Marina Abramović: An Interview." *Art in America* 5 (Nov. 2009): 112-121, 169.

"Exhibition and Museum Attendance Records, 2010." *The Art Newspaper* 223 (April 2011): 23-30.

Ferguson, Bruce W. "Introduction: Improbus Materia: Maybe." *Cornelia Parker*, with essays by Iwona Blazwick (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2013): 11-15.

Firestone, Shulamith and Anne Koedt Hanisch, eds. *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation, Major Writings of the Radical Feminists* (New York: Radical Feminism, 1970).

Fisher, Jennifer. “Interperformance: The Live Tableaux of Suzanne Lacy, Janine Antoni, and Marina Abramović.” *Art Journal*, 56, 4 [Performance Art: (Some Theory and (Selected Practice at the End of this Century] (Winter, 1997): 28-33.

_____. “Proprioceptive Friction: Waiting in Line to Sit with Marina Abramović.” *The Senses and Society,* 7 (July 2002): 153-172.

Foster, Hal. “An Archival Impulse.” *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 3-22.

Geldzahler, Henry and Robert Rosenblum. *Andy Warhol: Portraits of the Seventies and Eighties* (London: Thames and Hudson, in association with Anthony d’Offay Gallery, 1993).

Giles, David. *Illusions of Immortality: A Psychology of Fame and Celebrity* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000).

Glyn, Elinor. *It* (new York: Marclay, 1927).

Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1959).

Goldberg, Roselee. *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, Inc., 1988).

Goldman, Saundra Louise. “‘Too Good Lookin’ to be Smart”: Beauty, Performance, and the Art of Hannah Wilke.” PhD dissertation. The University of Texas at Austin. May, 1999.

Graw, Isabelle. *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture*, trans. Nicholas Grindell (Köln, Germany: Sternberg Press, 2009).

Green, Charles. *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

Grobe, Christopher. “Twice Real, Marina Abramović and the Performance Archive.” *Theater*, 41, 1 (2011): 104-113.

Grotowski, Jerzy. *Towards a Poor Theatre*, ed. Eugenio Barba (New York: Routledge, A Theatre Arts Book [1968] 2002).

Heartney, Eleanor. “Combined Operations.” *Art in America* 77 (June 1989): 140-147.

_____, Helaine Posner, Nancy Princenthal, Sue Scott. *After the Revolution: Women Who Transformed Contemporary Art*, forward by Linda Nochlin (New York, London and Muncih: Prestel Publishing, 2007).

Heathfield, Adrian and Tehching Hsieh, *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh* (Live Art Development Agency, London; The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA: 2009).

Heiser, Jörg. "Do It Again." *Freize* 94 (October 2005): 176 - 183.

Hirschman, Jack, ed. *Antonin Artaud Anthology* (San Francisco, City Lights Books 1965).

Hoffman, Fred, Kristine Stiles, Robert Storr, et. al., *Chris Burden* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Locus+; New York, distributed by D.A.P., 2007).

Hoorn, Jeanette, ed. *Strange Women: Essays in Art and Gender* (Melbourne University Press, 1994).

Horton, Donald and Richard Wohl. "Mass Communication and Parasocial Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance." *Psychiatry* 19 (1956): 215-29.

Horvitz, Robert. "Chris Burden." *Artforum* 14 (May 1976): 24-31.

Howells, Richard. "Heroes, Saints and Celebrities: The Photograph as Holy Relic." *Celebrity Studies* 2 (July 2012): 112-130.

Hulten, Pontus, ed. *Marcel Duchamp* (Milan, London: Thames and Hudson; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

Iles, Chrissie, ed. *Marina Abramović, Objects, Performances, Videos, Sound*, with essays by Roselee Goldberg, Thomas McEvilley and David Elliot. (Oxford, Museum of Modern Art, 1995).

Ind, Nicholas, Oriol Iglesias, Majken Schultz, "Building Brands Together: Emergence and Outcomes of Co-Creation," *California Management Review* 55 (Spring, 2013): 5-26.

Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Women* (1974), trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

Jacob, Mary Jane and Michelle Grabner, eds. *The Studio Reader, On the Space of Artists* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2010).

Jones, Amelia. "The Artist is Present': Artistic Re-enactments and the Impossibility of Presence." *TDR: The Drama Review* 55, 1 (Spring 2011): 16-45.

_____. *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

_____, ed. *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History*, with

essays by Laura Cottingham, et. al. (Los Angeles: UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Culture Center; University of California Press, 1996).

_____ and Adrian Heathfield, eds. *Perform, Repeat, Record*, *Live Art in History* (Bristol, UK; Chicago, USA: Intellect, The University of Chicago Press, 2012).

Jones, Caroline A. "Staged Presence." *Artforum* 48 (May 2010): 214-219.

_____. *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Jones, Marvin. "Hannah Wilke's Art, Politics, Religion and Feminism." *The New Common Good* 1 (1985): 9-11.

Juno, Andrea and V. Vale, eds. *Angry Women* (Re/Search Publications, 1991).

Kaplan, Janet A. "Deeper and Deeper: Interview with Marina Abramović." *Art Journal* 58 (Summer, 1999): 6-21.

Kaprow, Allan. "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock." *Essays on the Burning of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993): 1-9. Originally published in *Artnews* 57 (October, 1958): 22-26, 55-57.

Katz, Ian. "Firearms Industry Woos Women Who Dress to Kill." *The Guardian*. May 21, 1996.

Kirby, E.T. "The Shamanistic Origins of Popular Culture." *The Drama Review,* 18, 1 (1974): 14.

Knafo, Danielle. *In Her Own Image: Women's Self-Representation in Twentieth Century Art* (Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corp, 2009).

_____. "Hannah Wilke: The Naked Truth." *Gender and Psychoanalysis* 5 (2000): 5-35.

Koch, Stephen. *Stargazer: Andy Warhol's World and His Films* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973).

Koestenbaum, Wayne. *Andy Warhol* (New York: Viking, 2001).

Krane, Susan. *Lynda Benglis*, *Dual Natures* (Atlanta, Georgia: High Museum of Atlantic Art, 1991).

Krauss, Rosalind. *Cindy Sherman 1975-1993*, with an essay by Norma Bryson (New York: Rizzoli, 1993): 207-212.

_____. "Informe without Conclusion." *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, ed. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (Malden, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2005): 395 - 407.

Kris, Ernst and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979; originally published in German in 1934, with a preface by E.H. Gombrich).

Kruase-Wahl, Antje. "Between Studio and Catwalk—Artists in Fashion Magazines." *Fashion Theory*, 13, 1 (2009): 7-28.

Kurzman, Charles. et. al., "Celebrity Status." *Sociological Theory* 25, 4 (December 2007): 347-367**.**

Lambert-Beatty, Carrie. "Against Performance Art." *Artforum* 48 (May 2010): 208-213.

Lee, Pamela M. *Chronophobia* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004).

_____. *Forgetting the Art World* (Cambridge, MA; London, England: MIT Press, 2012).

Lindauer, Margaret A. *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1999).

Lippard, Lucy. *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976).

Lütticken, Sven. "Performance Art After TV." *New Left Review*, 80 (March-April, 2013): 109-130.

_____, ed., *Life, Once More: Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art* (Rotterdam: Witte De With, Center for Contemporary Art, 2005).

Marshall, P. David. *Celebrity and Power, Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

MacDonald, Scott. "Between Two Worlds: An Interview with Shirin Neshat." *Feminist Studies* 3 (Fall 2004): 620-659.

McCabe, Cynthia Jaffe. *Artistic Collaboration in the Twentieth Century*, with essays by Robert C. Hobbs and David Shapiro (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institute, 1984).

McEvilley, Thomas. *Art, Love, Friendship, Marina Abramović and Ulay, Together and Apart* (Kingston, NY: McPherson & Company, 2010).

_____. *The Triumph of Anti-Art, Conceptual and Performance Art in the Formation of Post-Modernism* (Kingston, New York: McPherson and Company, 2005).

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, with an introduction by Lewis L. Lapham (Cambridge, MA; London, England: MIT Press, 1998 [1964]).

Meisel, Steven. "Crossview." *Vogue Italia*, No. 579 (November 1998): n.p.

Meyer-Kramer, Benjamin. "The Simple Life, On Tino Seghal." *Texte sur Kunst,* 68 (December, 2007): 160-163.

Miller, Dorothy C., ed. *Sixteen Americans* (New York, Distributed by Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., 1959).

Michelson, Annette, ed. *Andy Warhol, October Files*, with essays by Hal Foster, Thomas Crow, et. al. (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 2001).

Morgan, Robin, ed. *Sisterhood is Global, The International Women's Movement Anthology*, (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1996).

Morin, Francis and John Alan Farmer. *The Quiet in the Land, Luang Prabang, Laos* (New York: The Quiet in the Land, 2008).

Mucha, Patty. "Sewing in the Sixties: Recounting how some classic examples of Claes Oldenburg's Pop sculpture came into existence, with cameo appearances by Dick Bellamy, Dennis Hopper and Charlie the cat," *Art in America* 90, 11 (Nov., 2002): 79-87.

Nauman, Francis, Anna Chave and David Nolan. *The Visible Vagina* (New York: Francis M. Nauman Fine Art, LLC, 2010).

_____. *Marcel Duchamp The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Ghent, Amsterdam: Ludion Press, 1999).

Neshat, Shirin. *Women of Allah* (Torino: Marco Noire Editore, 1997).

_____. *Shirin Neshat* (Milan: Charta, 2001).

Newman, Amy. *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-74* (New York: Solo Press, 2000).

Novakov, Anna. "Point of Access: Marina Abramović's 1975 Performance 'Role

Exchange'." *Woman's Art Journal*, 24, 2 (Autumn, 2003 – Winter, 2004): 31-35.

Obrist, Hans Ulrich. *Marina Abramović* (Köln: W. König; New York: D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2010).

O'Dell, Kathy. *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970s* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

O'Pray, Michael. ed. *Film Factory* (London: BFI, 1989).

Orrell, Paula, ed. *Marina Abramović and the Future of Performance Art* (Munich: Prestel, 2010).

Owen, Susan, Sarah Stein, and Leah R. Van de Berg. *Bad Girls: Cultural Politics and Media Representations of Transgressive Women* (New York, Washington DC: Peter Lang, 2007).

Owens, Craig. *Beyond Recognition*, eds. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992).

Pejić, Bojana. *Abramović* (Edition Cantz, 1993).

_____. *Marina Abramović, The Star* (Contemporary Art Museum, Kumamato, Japan): 2003.

Perry, Gill ed. *Difference and Excess in Contemporary Art: The Visibility of Women's Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

Phelan, Peggy. "Marina Abramović: Witnessing Shadows." *Theatre Journal*, 56, 4 (Dec., 2004): 569.

_____. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993).

_____. *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (London: Routeledge, 1997).

Plagens, Peter. "He Got Shot—For His Art." *The New York Times*. September 2, 1973. D3.

Pollock, Griselda and Rozsika Parker. *Old Mistresses: Art and Ideology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

Princenthal, Nancy. *Hannah Wilke* (Munich, Berlin, London, NY: Prestel Verlag, 2010).

"Proof that the Seventies Have Begun." *Esquire* 79 (May, 1973): 163-4.

Ramet, Sabrina P., ed. *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

Rennie, Susan and Arlene Raven, "The Dinner Party Project: An Interview With Judy Chicago." *Chrysalis* 4 (1977): 88-101.

Roach, Joseph. *It* (Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 2007).

Rojek, Chris. *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001).

_____. *Fame Attack: The Inflation of Celebrity and Its Consequences* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012).

_____. ed. *Celebrity: Critical Concepts in Sociology*. Vols. 1 – 4 (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2010).

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

Salvesen, Magda and Diane Cousineau, ed. *Artists' Estates: Reputations in Trust* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

Santone, Jessica. "Marina Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces*: Critical Documentation Strategies for Preserving Art's History." *Leonardo* 41, 2 (2008): 147-152.

Saxenhuber, Hedwig and Pejić, Bojana. *VALIE EXPORT* (Moscow: Folio, 2007).

Scanlan, Joe. "Fair Use: An Artist's Project." *Artforum* 48 (May 2010): 220-221.

Schechner, Richard. *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

_____. *Performance Studies An Introduction* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006): 34.

_____. "The Conservative Avant-Garde," *New Literary History*, 41 (Autumn 2010): 895 - 913.

Schickel, Richard. *Intimate Strangers: The Culture of Celebrity in America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, [2000] 1985)

Schimmel, Paul. *Out of Actions, Between Performance and the Object, 1949*-1979 (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998).

Senft, Theresa M. *Camgirls: Celebrity and Community in the Age of Social Networks* (New York, Washington DC: Peter Lang, Publishing, Inc., 2008).

Sigman, Jill. "On the Wall: Reflections on Being Present." *Contact Quarterly* 36 (Annual 2011): 23-28.

Sileo, Diego. *Marina Abramović, The Abramović Method*, Eugenio Viola, ed. Vol. 1 and 2. (Milan: PAC / Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, 2012).

Smith, Patrick S. *Andy Warhol's Art and Films* (Ann Arbor: U.M.I. Research Press, 1986 [1981]).

Smyth, Cherry. *Bad Girls* (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1993).

Sollins, Susan and Nina Castelli Sundell. *Team Spirit*, with essays by James Hillman, Irit Rogoff, Sollins and Sundell (New York: Independent / Curators Incorporated, 1990).

Soussloff, Catherine M. *The Absolute Artist: The Historiography of a Concept* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

Stallabrass, Julian. *Contemporary Art A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

Stankovic, Nevenka. "An Institutional Travesty, "Risk as Strategy in Marina Abramović's Performance *Role Exchange*." *Third Text* 23 (September 2009): 565-570.

Stiles, Kristine, Klaus Biesenbach, Chrissie Iles. *Marina Abramović* (London: Phiadon Press, 2008).

Stokić, Jovana. "The Body Beautiful: Feminine Self-Representations, 1970-2007." PhD dissertation. Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. May 2009.

Studer, Margaret. "At Art Basel, Financial Woes Look Far Away." *The Wall Street Journal*. C14. Saturday/Sunday, June 16-17, 2012.

Swenson, Gene. "What is Pop Art? Answers from Eight Painters." Part 1 and 2: *Art News* 62 (November 1963): 24 – 27, 59 – 64.

The Life and Death of Marina Abramović, Bluma Appel Theater, Toronto, Canada. June 14-17, 2013. Program notes.

Thompson, Chris and Katarina Weslien. "Pure Raw: Performance, Pedagogy and (Re)presentation." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 28 (Jan. 2006): 29-50.

Tucker, Marcia. *Bad Girls* (New York, Cambridge: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, MIT Press, 1994).

Tumlir, Jan. “Jan Tumlir Looks Back at the Shot Heard Around the Art World—Chris Burden’s 1971 Performance Piece *Shoot*.” *Artforum* 40 (Dec., 2001): 23.

Turner, Graeme. *Understanding Celebrity* (London: Sage Publications, 2004).

Ulay and Marina Abramović, *Ulay/Abramović, Performances 1976-1988*, with an introduction by Jan Debbaut; essay by Chrissie Illes (Eindhoven: Stedelijk Van Abbenmuseum, 1997).

Ward, Pete. *Gods Behaving Badly: Media, Religion and Celebrity Culture* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2011).

Ward, Frazier. *No Innocent Bystanders, Performance Art and Audience* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2012).

Warhol, Andy. *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975).

_____ and Bob Colacello. *Andy Warhol’s Exposures* (New York: Andy Warhol Books/Grosset & Dunlap, A Filmways Company, 1979.

_____ and Pat Hackett, *Popism: The Andy Warhol Sixties* (New York: A Harvest Book, Harcourt, Inc., 1980).

Weil, Michael Robert. “Stieglitz's Dream, O'Keeffe's Reality: The Stieglitz Collections in American Museums.” Ph.D. dissertation. Case Western Reserve University. 2007.

Wentrack, Kathleen. “The Female Body in Conflict: U.S and European Feminist Performance Art, 1963-1979, Carolee Schneemann, Valie Export and Ulrike Rosenbach.” Ph.D. dissertation. The Graduate Center, City University of New York. 2006.

Westcott, James. *When Marina Abramović Dies, A Biography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010).

_____. “Marina Abramović’s ‘The House with the Ocean View’: The View of the House from Some Drops in the Ocean.” *TDR, The Drama Review*, 47 (Autumn, 2003): 129-136.

Whiting, Cecile. “Andy Warhol: The Public Star and the Private Self.” *Oxford Art Journal* 10, 2 (1987): 58-75.

Wicks, Robert H. *Understanding Audiences: Learning to Use Media Constructively*

(Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers: London; Mahwah, New Jersey, 2001).

Zorpette, Glen. "Dynamic Duos: Artists Are Teaming Up in Growing Numbers," *Art News* 93 (Summer 1994): 164 - 169.

Internet Sources

Abramović, Marina. Interview. "Tate Shots: Twitter with Marina Abramović." Whitworth Gallery. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y54iBzyTBdI (accessed Nov. 24, 2013).

_____."Marina Abramović: The Artist Speaks." *Inside/Out, A MoMA/MoMA PS1 BLOG.*June 3, 2010. http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2010/06/03/marina-abramovic-the-artist-speaks/ (accessed Jan. 1, 2014).

_____. "Marina Abramović – The Kitchen: Homage to Saint Therese de Avila." at La Fábrica Galleria. Madrid, 2009. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37GtB4hMINY (accessed Dec. 15, 2013).

Allen, Mark. "Andy Warhol's Factory without the Drugs: Marina Abramović Debuts her New Space in Hudson." http://www.theawl.com/2012/08/at-marina-Abramović-new-space-in-hudson (accessed July 24, 2013).

Anelli, Marco. http://www.marcoanelli.com/portraits-in-the-presence-of-marina-abramovic/ (accessed Jan 15, 2014).

ArtReview. Power 100 List. November 2013. http://artreview.com/power_100// (accessed October 29, 2013).

"The Artist was Here." *The Economist*. Sept. 10, 2010. http://www.economist.com/node/17036088 (accessed Feb. 12, 2012).

Barr, Pippin. http://www.pippinbarr.com/art/ (accessed August 5, 2013).

Berg, Tatiana. "Art: The Anxiety of Influence." *BOMBLOG*. March 29, 2010. http://bombsite.powweb.com/?p=8919 (accessed June 5, 2012).

Biensenbach, Klaus. "Art Basel Miami: Marina Abramović, The Seminal Artist in Conversation
with MoMA's Chief Curator at Large Klaus Biesenbach," *NOWNESS*, December 2011. http://www.nowness.com/day/2011/12/1/1731/art-basel-miamibrmarina-Abramović (accessed June 20, 2012).

Brooks, Katherine. "Marina Abramović Plans Women-Only Lecture for Meltdown 2012 Festival in London." *The Huffington Post.* July 30, 2012,

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/30/marina-Abramović-women-only-lecture_n_1720020.html (accessed online, Dec. 30, 2012).

Bruno, Paul. "Abramo-bits: Marina Abramović Teams up with Video Game Designer Pippin Barr to create 8-bit Video Games for Kickstrater Campaign." http://dirty-mag.com/v2/?p=15359 (accessed August 13, 2013).

Campbell, Christopher. "Interview: Matthew Akers on the Art of Making *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*." June 12, 2012. http://documentarychannel.tumblr.com/post/24983210378/matthew-akers-interview (accessed Sept. 12, 2012).

Chaban, Matt and Rozalia Jonanovich. "Marina Abramović Wanted to Open Her Performance Art Institute in Brooklyn, but Bushwick Was Too Toxic." *GalleristNY*. May 7, 2012. http://galleristny.com/2012/05/marina-abamovic-wanted-to-open-her-performance-art-institute-in-bushwick-but-brooklyn-was-too-toxic/ (accessed August 3, 2013).

Coelho, Ramon. "Everything you always wanted to know about the making of a video installation." http://vimeo.com/52665956 (accessed Jan. 25th, 2014).

Cotter, Holland. "Performance Art Preserved, in the Flesh." *The New York Times.* March 11, 2005. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/12/arts/design/12abromovic.html?pagewanted=all (accessed June 20, 2012).

_____. "700-hour Silent Opera Reaches Finale at MoMA." *The New York Times*. May 30, 2010. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/31/arts/design/31diva.html (accessed June 15, 2012).

Cristobal, Sarah. "Drawn Together." Photographs by Santiago & Mauricio. *V Magazine*, 83. Summer 2013. http://www.vmagazine.com/site/content/1004/drawn-together#!/1 (accessed Jan. 15, 2014).

Danto, Arthur. "Sitting with Marina." *The New York Times Opinionator*. May 23, 2011. http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/23/sitting-with-marina/ (accessed April 3, 2011).

_____. "Shirin Neshat," *BOMB* 73. Fall 2000. http://bombsite.com/issues/73/articles/2332 (accessed Feb. 17, 2012).

Dawson, Jessica. "Why the Art World Ignores Wives." *The Daily Beast*. March 13, 2014. http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/03/17/why-the-art-world-ignores-wives.html (accessed March 18, 2014).

Donadio, Rachel. "Bill Viola's Journey of Emotions." *The New York Times*. March 11, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/12/arts/international/12iht-Bill-Viola-A-Journey-of-Emotions.html?_r=0 (accessed March 17, 2014).

Duray, Dan. "Allow Me to 501(c)-3-Introduce Myself: On Jay and Marina's Pre-'Picasso' Meeting." *GalleristNY*. October 15, 2013. http://galleristny.com/2013/10/allow-me-to-501c-3-introduce-myself-on-jay-and-marinas-pre-picasso-meeting/ (accessed Nov. 15, 2013)

Ebert, Roger. "Chris Burden: 'My God are they going to leave me here to die?'" *Chicago Sun Times*. May 25, 1975. http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19750525/PEOPLE/71024001/1023 (accessed Dec. 12, 2012).

Fox, Dan. "Ten Notes on Marina Abramović's The Artist is Present." *Freize*. May 4, 2010. http://blog.frieze.com/ten_notes_on_marina_Abramovićs_the_artist_is_present/ (accessed June 15, 2012).

Garage Center for Contemporary Culture, Moscow. http://garageccc.com/en (accessed Feb. 1, 2014).

Genocchio, Benjamin. "Seeking to Create a Timeless Space." *The New York Times*. April 6, 2008. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/nyregion/nyregionspecial2/06artswe.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (accessed July 26, 2013).

Ghomeshi, Jian. "Marina Abramović is not Dead." Radio interview, Studio Q. June 3, 2013. http://blip.tv/q-tv/marina-abramovic-is-present-in-studio-q-6616544 (accessed Jan. 15, 2013).

Gingeras, Alison. "The Lives of the Artists." *Tate Etc.*, 1 (Summer 2004). http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/lives-artists (accessed Jan. 30, 2014).

Goldman, Andrew. "The Devil in Marina Abramović." *The New York Times Magazine*. June 13, 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/17/magazine/the-devil-in-marina-abramovic.html?_r=2&partner=rss&emc=rss&pagewanted=all& (accessed July 1, 2012).

Grau, Donatien. "Marina Abramović, An Intellectual Fashion." *AnOther.* December, 13, 2010. http://www.anothermag.com/current/view/680/Marina_Abramović (accessed Jan. 12, 2013).

Greer, Germaine. "Patron Saint of Lipstick and Lavender Feminsm." *Tate, Etc.,* 4. Summer 2005. http://www.tate.or.uk/context-comment/articles/patron-saint-lipstick-and-lavender-feminism (accessed July 25, 2013).

Hale, Mike. "Sugar and Spice and Vicious Beatings." *The New York Times*. March 10, 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/13/arts/television/women-bring-the-beatings-to-ncis-and-elsewhere.html (accessed Dec. 12, 2012).

Halpern, Jake. "Amma's Multifaceted Empire; Built on Hugs." *The New York Times*. May 25, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/26/business/ammas-multifaceted-empire-built-on-hugs.html?pagewanted=all (accessed August 7, 2013).
Hart, David. "Live Streaming, Marina Abramović: Crazy or Brave?" *Inside/Out, A MoMA/MoMA PS1 BLOG*. March 15, 2010. http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2010/03/15/live-streaming-marina-Abramović-crazy-or-brave (accessed June 12, 2010).

Hontz, Jenny. "Gunplay, as Art, Sets Off a Debate." *The New York Times*. Feb. 5, 2005. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/05/arts/05shoo.html?pagewanted=print&position=&_r=0 (accessed online, Jan. 3, 2013).

Janovic, Rozalia. "Joe Deutch, Artist Who Presented Russian Roulette at UCLA, Hits Marlborough Chelsea." *Gallerist NY*. June 22, 2012. http://galleristny.com/2012/06/joe-deutch-is-not-a-gun-person/ (accessed online, Jan 1, 2013).

Kappala-Ramsamy, Gemma. "Meltdown, 2012—Marina Abramović: 'Artists can do whatever they want." *The Guardian*. July 28, 2012. http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2012/jul/30/meltdown-2012-marina-Abramović-interview (accessed online, Dec. 30, 2012).

Kontonva, Helen. "Modern Nomads: Marina Abramović, Vanessa Beecroft, Shirin Neshat." *Flash Art*. July–September, 2007. http://www.flashartonline.com/interno.php?pagina=articolo_det&id_art=169&det=ok&title=MARINA-ABRAMOVIC-VANESSA-BEECROFT-SHIRIN-NESHAT (accessed March 23, 2011).

Levine, Abigail, Gary Lai and Rebecca Brooks. "Three Reperformers from 'Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present' Respond to the MOCA Gala Performances." November 28, 2011. http://theperformanceclub.org/2011/11/three-reperformers-from-marina-abramovic-the-artist-is-present-respond-to-the-moca-gala-performances/ (accessed Dec. 15, 2013).

Liftig, Anya. http://anyaliftig.com (accessed Feb. 1, 2014).

Lipsky-Karasz, Elisa. "Once upon a Time." *Harper's Bazaar*. March 2012. http://www.harpersbazaar.com/magazine/feature-articles/marina-Abramović-interview-0312#slide-1 (accessed June 20, 2012).

Lyall, Sarah. "For Her Next Piece, a Performance Artist will Build an Institute." *The New York Times*. October 19th, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/20/arts/design/marina-

abramovic-is-putting-her-name-on-a-center-in-hudson-ny.html?pagewanted=2&_r=0 (accessed Dec. 15, 2013).

"Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present: The Legacy of Performance." The Museum of Modern Art. June 2, 2010. http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/7401378 (accessed Jan. 20, 2013).

Marina Abramović Institute. http://www.marinaabramovicinstitute.org (accessed Feb. 1, 2014).

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. http://www.moma.org (accessed Feb. 1, 2014).

PACE. Jay Z's "Picasso Baby" Shoot at Pace Gallery. July 12, 2013. http://www.pacegallery.com/news/1912/jay-z-s-picasso-baby-video-shoot-at-pace-gallery-organized-by-jeanne-greenberg-rohatyn-directed-by-mark-romanek-hosted-by-andrea-glimcher (accessed Oct. 29, 2013).

Pearson, Jesse and Richard Kern. "Marina Abramović." *VICE*. October 31, 2010. http://www.vice.com/read/marina-abramovic-599-v17n11 (accessed Jan. 10, 2014).

Rao, Malilika and Amy Lee. "Marina Abramović on 'Art21,' Charles Atlas, and Her Plan To Save Performance Art." *The Huffington Post*. June 12, 2012. "http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/15/marina-Abramović-on-art21_n_1347380.html (accessed June 12, 2012).

Rosenberg, Karen. "Provocateur: Marina Abramović." *New York Magazine*. Dec. 4, 2005, http://nymag.com/nymetro/arts/art/15228/ (accessed online, Dec. 29, 2012).

Saltz, Jerry. "Genital Contact." *Artnet.com*. March 12, 2010. http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/saltz/marina-Abramović3-12-10.asp (accessed June 20, 2012).

_____. "In the End, It Was All About You." *The New York Magazine*. May 23, 2010. http://nymag.com/arts/art/reviews/66161/ (accessed June 20, 2012).

_____. "'Picasso-Baby' Live: Jerry Saltz Goes Face-to-Face with Jay-Z." *Vulture*. July 11, 2013. http://www.vulture.com/2013/07/jerry-saltz-face-to-face-with-jay-z.html (accessed July 11, 2013).

_____. "Saltz on Tilda Swinton in a Box and How Living Art Has Become MoMA's Crystal Meth." *Vulture*. March 25th, 2013. http://www.vulture.com/2013/03/jerry-saltz-moma-sleeping-tilda-swinton.html (accessed January 1, 2014).

Schor, Mira. “Looking for Art to Love, MoMA: A Tale of Two Egos.” *A Year of Positive Thinking*. May 8, 2010. http://ayearofpositivethinking.com/2010/05/08/looking-for-art-to-love-moma-a-tale-of-two-egos/ (accessed Jan. 20, 2013).

Sean Kelly New York. http://www.skny.com (accessed Feb. 1, 2014).

Stiles, Kristine and Paul Grobstein. “The Art Historian and Neurobiologist: A Conversation About Proprioception, the ‘I-Function,’ Body Art, and Story Telling?” *Serendip*, Bryn Mawr University. http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/bb/artneuro/ (accessed on-line, Dec. 14, 2012).

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york (accessed Feb. 1, 2014).

Swenson, Kirsten. “Marina Abramović.” *Art in America*. June 4, 2010. Accessible on-line, http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/marina-Abramović/ (accessed June 20, 2012).

Thurman, Judith. “Walking Through Walls: Marina Abramović’s Performance Art.” *The New Yorker*. March 8, 2010. http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/03/08/100308fa_fact_thurman?currentPage=3 (accessed Jan 9, 2013).

TMZ. “Tilda Swinton Sleeps in a Glass Box.” http://www.tmz.com/videos/0_tofwkiha/ (accessed Jan. 3rd, 2014).

Yablonsky, Linda. “Close Encounters: Dateline Manchester.” July 18, 2011. *Artnet.com* http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/yablonsky/manchester-international-festival-7-18-11.asp# (accessed July 25, 2013).

_____. “Artifacts: Marina the Magnificent.” *New York Times Style Magazine* (June 2, 2010) http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/02/artifacts-marina-the-magnificent/ (accessed June 19, 2012).