

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

' THE PRIVATE AND THE PUBLIC '

ASPECTS

OF

PERFORMANCE ART '

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

"Contemporary Art in Western Civilization has been essentially a private rather than a public art".

This statement was made by Lucy Lippard at her slide lecture on 'Art Outdoors, in and out of the Public Domain'

It is not the aim of this thesis to contest the sound knowledge of the prolific Ms. Lippard, but by quoting her above statement I merely wish to give light to what I believe is the general consensus of opinion regarding Contemporary Art.

The 'essentially private' contemporary art to which Ms. Lippard was referring concerned 'an art for sale, an intimate art of easel painting and objects to be owned', followed by the 'expansive and 'democratic gesture' of taking these objects out of the home and the gallery and putting them outdoors. This Ms. Lippard believed more often resulted in the 'false monument - 'private indoor art, enlarged and plunked down outside'.

The aim of this thesis is however to contest and question that 'general consensus of opinion which believes Contemporary Art (Performance) an essentially 'Private rather than a Public' Art.

*are you saying that  
Contemporary Art is always Performance?*

## SECTION 1

### The Private

Under Performance I shall discuss a certain area in which a large body of the works performed require or are based upon direct audience participation, and works in which the audience confrontation becomes the premise for the work.

These works are blatantly public. However in this section of my thesis I wish to discuss my own work. The initial prompting for this thesis arose from my experiences in a performance type area. For me the work was essentially a private dialogue both mentally and physically between myself and the material with which I was working.

The ongoing process within the work included a series of actions carried out and photographed without an audience. Initial reactions to these 'private actions' was that they were not made public, i.e. not performed in front of an audience, the artistic content being therefore questionable. However the intentions behind these works was to explore and investigate elements of time, space and the material with which I was working, glass. My intention was not to investigate or confront the audience, therefore audience participation was unnecessary at this stage in the evolution of the work.

In the final analysis collective information and documentation from my investigations were presented within an environmental situation, directly requiring the spectator to activate the space aurally, visually and mentally. My private actions had now become Public.





FIG. 1 MARGARET MAGEE GLASS/FOOT, DUBLIN 1981

The Private cont/d

In all of these actions and in a later work entitled 'To Clean 1', I experienced a sense of 'loss of self' and an atonement with my environment and my materials. One becomes so engrossed in one's actions that an awareness of an audience is non-existent (unless as I have said this is the basis of the work). But how and when does such private work become public ? The work becomes Public I believe only when a 'connection' is made between the work and the individual spectator. Whether the work is produced in 'documented' or in 'live' form is irrelevant once communication has been attained. 'Communication' as we know may occur on many levels once the spectator has 'experienced' or 'understood' the intentions and feelings of the artist.

To Clean 11

To Clean 11 was a complete reversal of intentions inherent in 'To Clean 1'. The second piece of work involved no documentation whatsoever, and was wholly concerned with confronting a public as opposed to the privacy of the first documented action. The 'loss of self' experienced through action in 1 was contrasted to the loss of self through audience in 11. Total awareness of an audience and a consciousness of both my own inhibitions and those of the spectator, having to deal directly with the spectators' queries and questions was a totally new experience for me. Alister MacLennan an artist whom I greatly admire, in a personal correspondence on the theme of 'The Private and The Public' believes that many works are privately executed





FIG. 2 MARGARET MAGEE. 'TO CLEAN 1', DUBLIN 1981

and only then become 'Public'. With regard to painting and sculpture one recognises that these works are produced in 'private' studios and then exhibited in 'Public places', 'galleries'. He feels that those exhibited works are the result of 'private feelings and thoughts, decisions and actions conveyed through the language of art'. Therefore the public 'sees the result of the creative process in action, rather than the creative process in action'

'When the artist is, no one is there'

Alister MacLennan 'Artwork'

With regard to the above statement I questioned the right of the artist to make such Private Art Public. Mr. MacLennan replied to that same statement :-

'I am referring to clarity of mind, while engaging in an action, not the cutting off of the audience but the dissolving of the artist's ego by cutting himself/herself totally off to the Performance while it's in process'

The seeming 'Privacy' of such actions are made public when the artist's actions devoid of self are experienced by the 'other'. The art is seen as a transformation from self to other through action, often violent, long enduring or 'sado-masochistic'.

In his essay on the 'Creative Act', Duchamp

'The one man movement, but a movement for each person and open to everybody'

William de Kooning



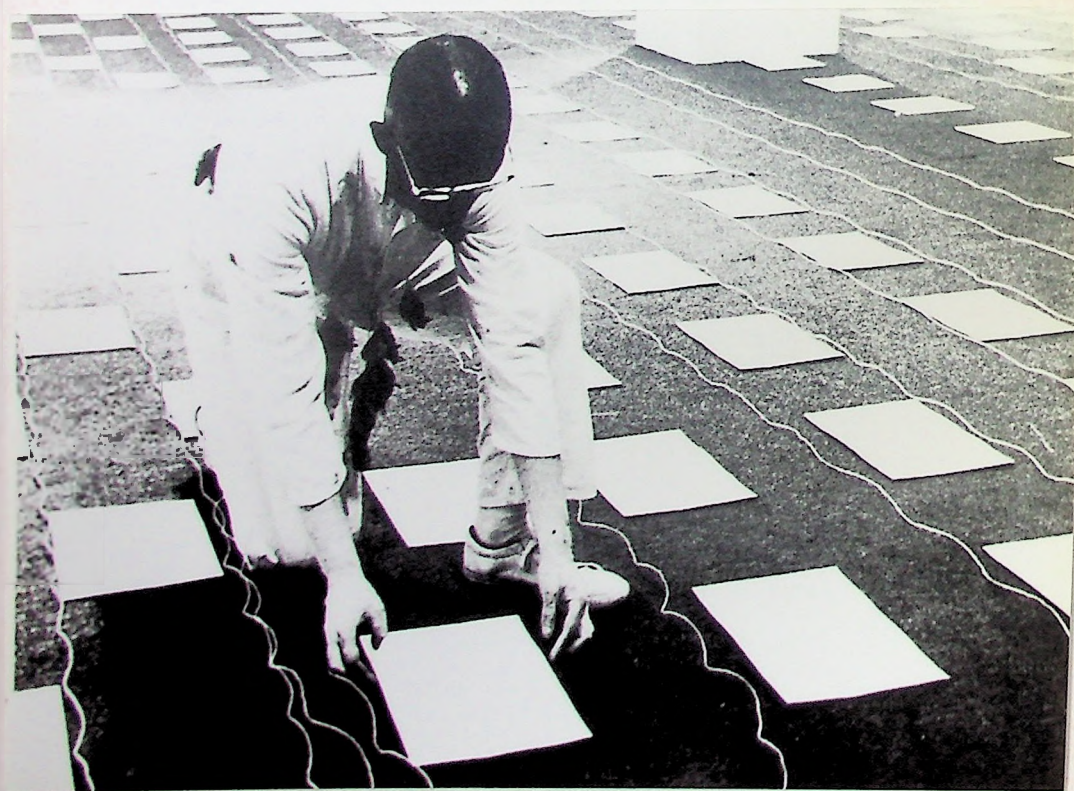
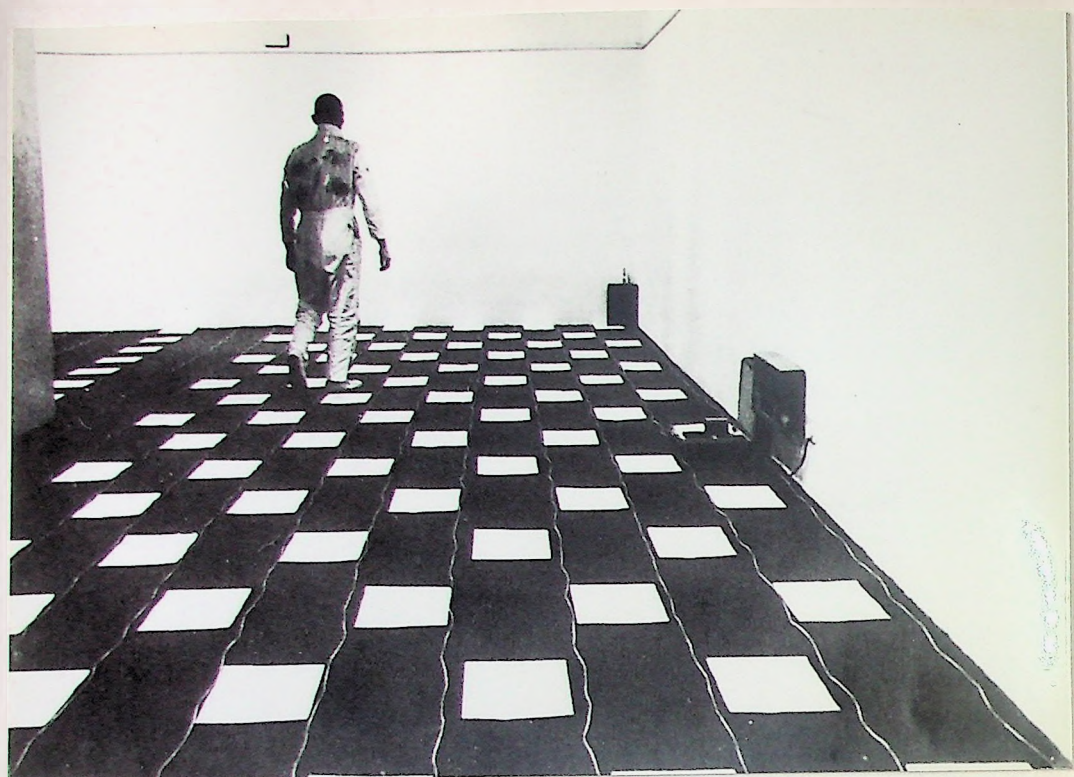


FIG. 3 ALISTER MACLENNON. 'MIRROR', DERRY 1980



considers the artist's actions as mediumistic (shaministic ?). In the creative art, Duchamp sees the artist's actions as going from intention to realization, through a chain of totally subjective reactions, his struggle towards the realization is a series of

"efforts, pains, satisfactions,  
refusals, decisions which also cannot  
and must not be fully self-conscious  
at least on the esthetic plane"

Duchamp 'The Creative Act'

At this stage the art is in a private/raw state ?, which must be refined by the public/spectator. The spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by 'deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus the spectator adds his contribution to the creative art'.

In Chapter 11 I shall deal with artists whose work have been dismissed somewhat as 'autobiographical narcissism' and self-indulgent (Gina Pane, Chris Burden and Vito Acconci) illustrating how and why these artists attempt to reach the 'other' and make their private work public. In my last Chapter I intend to conclude this thesis with an illustration of the artist as a social being, his artistic, practical, creative product a social product determined by/for socio-political structures. His 'product' not and 'isolated process' but one which embodies a notion of 'consumption'. The interdependency of product/consumer extended and applied to our understanding of private and Public.



## SECTION 11

1. What is meant by Public Art ?
2. Who are the Public and what role do they play ?
3. What are the needs of the Public ?

1. What is meant by Public Art ?

It is important first to differentiate Public Art from Art in Public places. Art in Public places is just that. Artworks bought for and by the public, for publically accessible places, outside the home and the museum.

Public Art traditionally has been regarded as an art solely made for the public, devoid of the artist's personality. Implicit in this art is the notion that this art embodies the social and the political values / beliefs of its audience. Traditionally this art's function was to commemorate great events or people. Therefore this Public Art required what we term as an 'opaque symbolism' easily understandable and recognisable to the majority of the populace.

Today the demands of Public Art ( though undoubtedly the endless ugly monuments continue to raise their heads in the name of the Public ) pose an entirely different set of requirements to the artist. In such an obviously pluralistic society of ours, an art which expresses the unifying social and political ideals of all the people is impossible to achieve. In addition, contemporary Art has tended towards an aesthetic of personal expression, and hence towards individualistic rather than a collectivist content. However

it is my argument that irrespective of this 'personal expression' and 'individualistic content' these works are none the less public. Also, though these works are not necessarily overt expressions of the public's socio-political ideologies these works do stand as significant in the eye of the Public.

2. But who are the Public and what role do they play ?

*I would question this assumption that art has an entirely passive role to play*

Throughout Art History the role of the public has been essentially that of the passive, contemplative spectator their sole function having more to do with a notion of a fashionable process of property ownership and investment. (This role may be traced back to the Renaissance idea of patronage.) While art remained bound in 'objecthood', therefore buyable/sellable, art was aimed at a so-called 'art educated moneyed elite audience'. It was to this audience that Marcel Duchamp presented the readymade. Art object no longer 'precious object'.

"When I discovered readymades I thought to discourage aesthetics. In Neo-Dada they have taken my readymades and found aesthetic in them. I threw the bottle rack and the urinal into their faces as a challenge and they admire them for their aesthetic Beauty"

Duchamp, 1962

The beginnings of 'Audience participation' may be traced directly back to the Futurists and the Dadaists. With the onslaught of the Russian Revolution came the energies that fired an immense cultural Revolution in all



aspects of the arts. Art could no longer sit passively on mausoleum walls, with cries from artists to 'paint the streets not the canvases'. The Futurists manifesto was to attack previously-held art values. In 1912, a futurist manifesto by poets and artists Burlyuk, Mayakovsky, Livishits and Khlebnikov was entitled

' A slap in the face to public taste'

The declared that 'life and art were to be freed from conventions, allowing for the limitless application of these ideas to all realms of culture'

Thus the stage was set for Performance. Performance at this time was used as a cutting edge against society. The performer was seen as exempt from societies normal behaviour, he was seen as the mad outsider. The freedom of thought and action licence was only permitted to the artist because his role was seen as utterly insignificant, more tolerated than accepted. Futurist manifesto was international, performances took the form of 'Futurist Evenings' and assumed the name of 'variety theatre', lucky in having no tradition and no conventional dogma. Futurist Manifesto encouraged performers to go out into the streets and theatres and introduce ' the fisticuff into the artistic battle'. Its intention was

'..... to destroy the Solemn, the Sacred, the Serious, the Sublime in Art with a capital A'

Various tricks were employed to infuriate the audience, double booking of auditoriums, coating the seats with

glue. Performers were encouraged to say and do whatever occurred to them on stage.

Audience participation took the form of booing and hurling missiles of potatoes, oranges and tomatoes at the performers. This response ensured the performers that the audience was 'alive and not simply blinded by intellectual intoxication'. Not surprisingly these evenings ended in arrests and convictions and jail sentences.

"Dada is a vision,  
Dada is to be lived,  
Dada demands no intellectual gifts of  
perception,  
Dada relentlessly shows up every logical  
concept association.....  
Dada is the most extreme negation of all  
cultural values,  
Dada is the most immediate means of  
expression in our formless timelessness  
and is so on purpose."

K. Schwitters. Holland Dada  
1974

Following the role of futurism, Dada is regarded as the first international artistic movement. Dada hailed the aesthetic of the banal, with its constant mutation of seriousness and jest. Dada's entertaining and provocative Cabaret Performances, were satirical and political. They reacted against a culture which produced the First World War. In the same way as the futurists, the Dadaist works of art only achieved perfection and completion with the raging participation of the spectator. This whole notion of the essentiality of spectator participation with regard to 'art's function was continued on a more serious level in



movements such as Fluxus, Happenings, Environmental Art. All required the spectator to actually enter and physically activate the space. Process art, body art all required an audience/spectator confrontation without which the work would not exist.

The whole political aesthetic behind this notion however, 'That everyone is creative and everyone can take part in the creation of a work of art' leads me to what I consider is the essential role of the Public/spectator today. Joseph Beuys illustrates this belief in all his actions, demonstrations and teachings. Beuys foresees the dissolution of the spectator to be replaced by the notion that 'Everyman is an artist' This concept I shall deal more specifically with in my third chapter.

### 3. What are the Needs of the Public ?

" ..... If Public Art is to indeed be Public,  
it is to fulfill the social needs of the Public"

But what are the needs of the public ? Are they merely the needs of an elitest audience, for an art-type investment ? Or are they the needs of a consumer society for buyable/sellable art ? For artists who have gone beyond the limitation of object making, artists involved in a Performance Area, there is the recognition of far greater needs.

*What is a  
value judgement  
which you need  
to justify*

Society the Public, however are often totally unaware of these needs and demands unconsciously imposed upon the artist. The recognition of these needs constitutes essentially what I believe is the role of the artist in today's society. Though the whole romantic bizarre outdated notion of the garret artist marginalized by society is absurd, the artist is obviously very much a part of society, with one exception He/She is allowed 'creative freedom' and 'artistic Licence'.

Often it is the artist who recognises the needs of his society and combats this through his artistic language. For example Gina Pane, whom I shall deal more specifically with in my second chapter feels she is 'answering' or 'relating' to the needs of what she believes is an 'anesthetized' society by injecting their unconsciousness with her pain and suffering. Chris Burden similarly attacks the comfortable habitation of his audience by invading their secure living-rooms through the media of television with T.V. hijacks and aeroplane shoot-outs. Burden questions the reality of life and death, constantly confronting it by putting himself into violent and often fatal situations.

Are these actions merely the private, self-indulgent ravings of mad men/women ?

Does not an anaesthetised society/Public 'need' to be frequently injected with these realities ?



Section 111

Performance Art

Essentially the most one can say about Performance Art in terms of a definition is Performance Art is Live Art by Artists. Performance Art encompasses all Life, permitting access and drawing freely from everything available, politics, history, sociology, psychology etc. etc. Fundamentally Performance Art resides upon the premise of time and space elements, reality and audience confrontation. To try and define or historically analyse Performance Art further would be a contradiction of the essence of Performance, which I believe is to defy categorization and definition. Performance Art staunchly refuses to be categorized and defined by critics/historians, refusing the criteria of value judgement and formal criticism sufficient in analysing painting and sculpture. Why ? Because Performance Art and artists reach out not only beyond the boundaries and the limitations of Art but beyond the limitations of itself.

Because Performance Art has more to do with the history of mankind than History of Art.

Performance Art has never been specifically a 'specialist' elitest, artistic language but has been an essentially vital means of mass communication. Through its immediacy and directness Performance Art reaches a far wider and greater audience than that audience comfortably surrounded by art gallery walls. It is this ability of Performance Art to reach beyond art limitations and the limitations

*It isn't a style  
as is the case with  
Sade, but this  
doesn't preclude  
the possibility of  
various definitions  
I think this whole  
paragraph is  
badly thought  
out.*

*hasn't all  
yet*

*this is  
arguable*

of the art-type audience that makes Performance Art a democratically powerful and vital socio-political tool. Performance Art from the Futurists has been regarded as anarchic. The expression of 'dissidents' attacking 'a complacent audience' and shocking them into reassessing themselves and the conventions of 'established Art'. Performance Art is not merely the product of this century and levels of contact may be drawn between the Contemporary Performance and the Primitive Ritual.

#### Performance Art as Ritual

"Rituals reveal values at their deepest level. Men express in ritual what moves them most, and since the form of expression is conventionalized and obligatory it is the values of the group that are revealed. I see in the study of rituals the key to understanding of the essential constitution of societies"

Monica Wilson 1954

Within Tribal life ceremonies were performed to alleviate almost any crisis of social conflict, and were essential in maintaining and restoring harmony within the community. Rituals were performed to express the need for universal harmony, a demand for mutual respect and understanding between man and his environment. Primitive Man, the Shaman was in a state of constant dialogue with his surroundings, and this is the essence of ritual. Is this not the essence of the modern Performance Artist ?

In his earlier works Joseph Beuys advocated that it should be possible for man to move towards a level of harmonies



where awareness of energies and invisible forces can be re-awakened. In his works he uses hermaphroditic figures, active and passive elements, body and soul, life and death as a ritual process

'to re-establish or point out the  
the already existing relationship  
between man and matter'

The invisible forces to which Joseph Beuys is referring in this context are the 'soul powers', lost by man through so called civilization. Man needs to be reconciled to these soul powers and spirituality. Joseph Beuys' works are a clear demonstration of the reconciliation of man and matter (animal). For Joseph Beuys the animal represents an enormous source of energy.

"they are fantastic entities and  
generators for the production of  
spiritual goods".

Animals, Joseph Beuys feels have preserved their 'soul powers', feeling powers and basic powers of instinct and orientation, which man has lost or underdeveloped. In "How To Explain Pictures To A Dead Hare", Beuys illustrates that even in death a hare has more sensitivity and instinctive understanding than some men with their stubborn rationality.

'Coyote' Rene Block Gallery New York, May 1974. In which Beuys saw nothing of America but the coyote, Beuys walked, talked, slept and ate with the coyote for an entire week in an enclosed space. The coyote respected and venerated by the Red Indian, but despised and persecuted by the

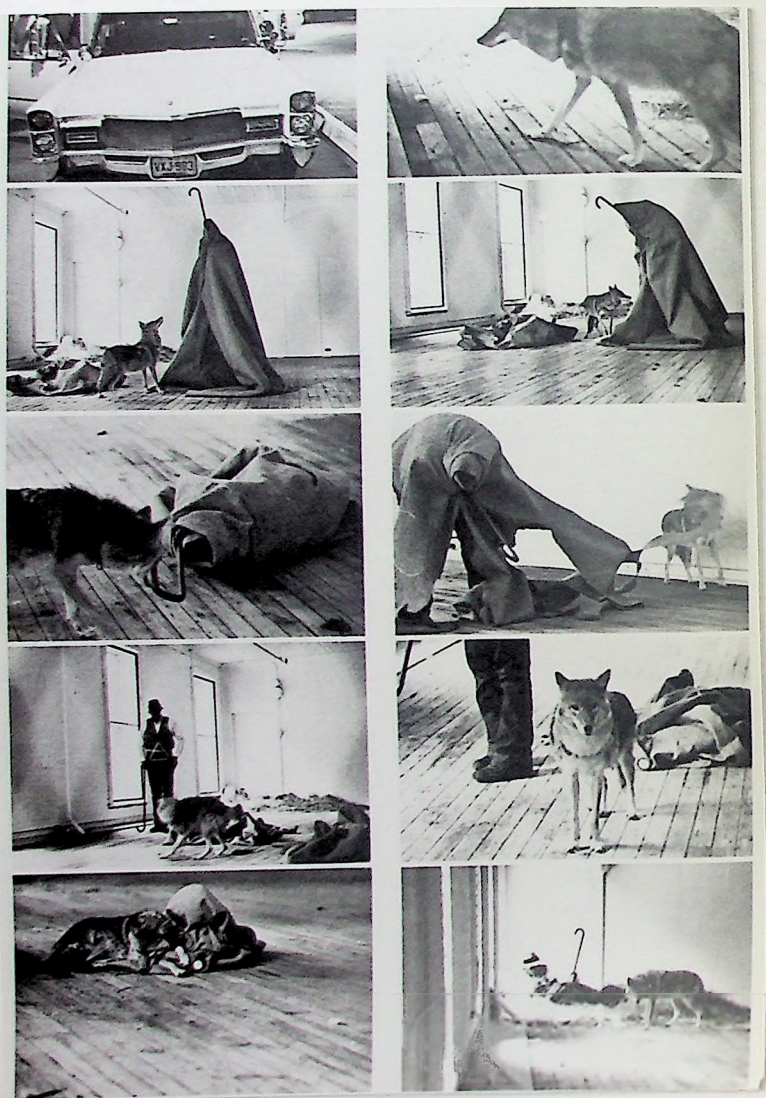


FIG. 4 JOSEPH BEUYS. 'COYOTE', NEW YORK, 1974



white man. Beuys uses the coyote as a symbol of the Red Indians persecution by the white man and the whole American trauma with the Indian. Beuys felt that by his own reconciliation with the coyote he was not only making contact but illustrating and showing an alternative to the psychological and spiritual trauma points of the United States.

'You could say that a reckoning has to be made with the coyote only then can this trauma be lifted.'

Joseph Beuys 'Coyote'  
Studio International 1976

## The Modern Ritual

Hermann Nitsch

The modern rituals of Viennese artist Hermann Nitsch, have been described as amongst the most violent performances in the world. His work is the embodiment of the modern ritual, re-evoking the ancient sacrificial rites of the Gods and Primitive Man. Nitsch himself refers his work back to the ancient God of abreaction Dionysus, the methods Nitsch himself employs to describe the disembowling of the animals is 'Dionysiac'. Nitsch performs aggressive rituals which last several hours during which slaughtered lambs are brought on stage and tied down as if crucified. The lambs are disembowled the entrails and blood are then poured over the human bodies of participants. The climax of the performance occurs when the human beings, along with the lambs are hung up and crucified, a total identification of man and animal. Blood and entrails are also manipulated onto stretched white primed canvas. Here Nitsch, makes reference to his descent from Jackson Pollock. He calls the paintings of him O.M. Theatre, 'action painting' and explains

' My painting is the visual (epic) part of  
the O.M. Theatre, portrayed on canvas'

H. Nitsch, 1963

Nitsch's Performances have been attacked 'for obscene exhibitionism' and his actions for 'verging on psychopathology



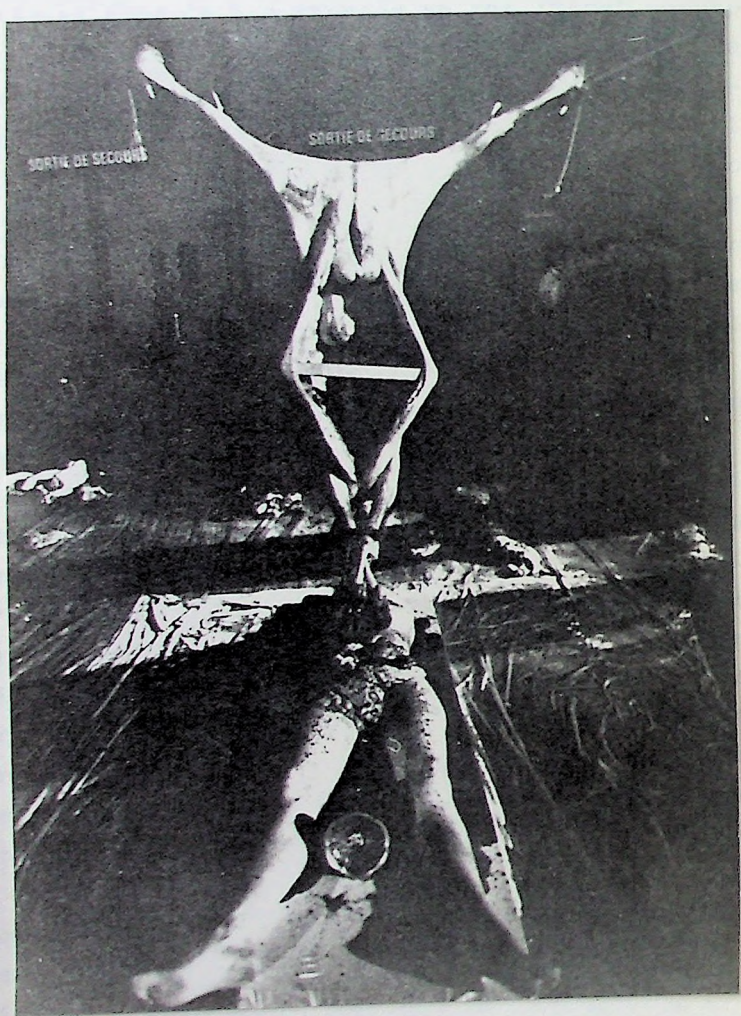


FIG. 5,6 HERMANN NITSCH. '48TH ACTION', PARIS 1975

and the neurotic manifestations of a sado-masochist'. Nitsch, on the other hand in his chapter on the 'Total conception of the 6 - Day O.M. Theatre Play' emphatically repudiates these attacks. Nitsch proposes his actions as philosophico-religious aesthetic rituals, that propose new laws for the 'existence of man'. Nitsch's actions are an open criticism of society, for having taken the responsibility of killing away from us, allowing butchers to kill out of sight. For early man killing was a natural instinct and a necessity of life. His descendant today is denied this instinct, and therefore his will to kill is repressed. Nitsch sees his role as an artist to 'liberate the spectator from passivity and inhibition, thus enabling him to attain insight into the phenomenon of violence'. Nitsch attacks the media and its immunization of society against violence, he attacks the 'barbarism which legitimises 'defensive' wars and the slaughtering of innocent people. Nitsch's actions have been severally criticised as blasphemous. His performances evoke images of The Last Supper, the Crucifixion, Transubstantiation, Resurrection and Redemption. But for Nitsch religion is a serious matter and he recognises his performances as an aesthetic way of praying. In his performances he uses symbols and images that are over 2,000 years old bringing them together with the symbols of today. Nitsch believes that Art can function as a substitute for religion and the slaughtering of the lambs as a symbolic substitute for human sacrifice. For Nitsch, his performances are didactic and therapeutic. They aim at 'liberating and purifying' the spectator in an attempt to 'encounter the unconscious'. Should a spectator find Nitsch's performances repellent, perhaps he still has to be liberated from the defective and the destructive taboos imposed upon us by the functionalism of our society.



CHAPTER 11

'PRIVATE ART, SOCIAL CONCERN'

## CHAPTER 11

### BODY ART

'The body is a part of every perception.  
It is the immediate past so far as it still  
remains present, in the present that flees away  
from it. This means that it is at one and the  
same time a point of view and a point of  
departure, a point of view and a point of  
departure that I am and that I also go beyond,  
as I move off towards what I must become'

J.P. Sartre.



## Chapter Two

### Body Art

Body art is an area in which the body is used as the 'Art Language'. Replacing the external art object, the body becomes objectified in itself. A culmination of a process in which the artist and the art object man and his materials merge to become a total entity. A unification of both subject and object. Because of this internalization process and the 'unlimited limits' of the human body as artistic material the products of this area have been attacked and rejected as the 'private, self-indulgent actions of psychopaths'.

*Her criticism  
doesn't relate  
to the reason*

It is true that 'body artists' draw strongly upon the experiences of their private lives, loves, hates, jealousies, fears, anxieties as artistic material but what artist from the beginning of time has not used their private experiences as a source of inspiration for their work and as a justifiable means to an end ?

In her article 'Bodylanguage' the Italian critic Lea Vergine strongly criticises the 'entire sphere of everything private' as artistic material, rejecting the 'freeze of these tiny private episodes' through the use of 'tape recorders, movie cameras, photos etc.

In her article, Ms. Vergine builds her argument upon her own personal value judgement of the artists work. Throughout the article, we witness what is apparently

an obvious contradiction between the critics assertions of what the artists intentions are, and those of the artists themselves. Finding her Art terminology insufficient in her attempt to classify and describe 'Body Art', Ms Vergine turns unjustifiably to borrow her terminology from the annals of Psychopathology.

'..... If we were interested in relations to perversions we could talk about fetishism, transvetism, voyeurism, kleptomania, paedophilia, necrophilia, sado-masochism, rupophobia, scathophagia. A search for psychotic symptoms would lead our attention to the aspects of the work connected to dissociation melancholy, delirium, depression and persecution manias'.

> (15)

Should Ms. Vergine wish to use psychopathological terms as a means of dismissal and as a method of classification for 'Body Artists' that is surely her prerogative and also that of the spectator/reader. However it is my intention in this chapter to illustrate that the so called sado-masochistic tendencies of artists, GINA PANE, CHRIS BURDEN, and VITO ACCONCI are not merely frenzied, private self-indulgencies but are the creative conscious, didactic and therapeutic actions of socially concerned artists.



## GINA PANE

Gina Pane the Italian artist living in Paris, feels that it was the 'technological developments' in art which 'pushed' her towards using her 'body as her artistic material'. Technology the tool of modern civilization 'is being used' she feels 'to determine man, making it impossible for him to experience his own conscience, and disabling him to express his problems in total liberty'. For this reason Gina Pane has attempted to formulate her own language, a universal language without idiom barriers. She has returned to what she believes to be 'the most primitive elements which seem more viable as a language, the use of milk, blood, fire, and suffering'.

In April 1971, in her own studio, Gina Pane performed what she calls 'Ascent'. This performance involved her climbing up and down barefoot an iron ladder with sharp protrusions. The performance lasted until she reached the limits of her own endurance. Through this action Gina Pane wanted to emphasise the fact that the artist's as well as man's relationships are perverted in his wish to achieve his goal. There is no mutual respect or trust. Every gesture is therefore inhuman, peoples sensibilities are 'automatically anesthetized and they are no longer aware of their actions'. In this performance Gina Pane underwent a great deal of pain and suffering in order to experience and illustrate to her public an ascent which was not anesthetized.

Auto-Portraits, performed at the Stadler was the first of her works to set forth her 'complete vocabulary' of milk, fire.



FIG. 7 GINA PANE. 'UNTITLED', 1964



blood and pain involving three actions 'The Conditioning', 'The Contraction' and 'The Rejection'. The first action involved the artist lying down on an iron bed beneath which flickered fifteen 25 cm. long candles. For half an hour she lay motionless trying to dominate her pain. Her second action took place in an adjacent room where slides of female hands applying nail polish were projected onto the wall. Her back turned towards her public, the artist began to cut her fingernails with a razor blade in private. While this action was taking place a video camera was focused upon the females in her audience. The third and final action of this performance 'The Rejection' involved the artist and milk as an antiseptic. The action commenced with the artist swallowing, gurling then rejecting and spitting out the liquid. As the action became more and more violent a wound in the artist's mouth re-opened and the blood became mixed with the milk. The performance ceased with the artist making direct eye to eye contact with her public.

For Gina Pane 'Auto-Portrait (s) was an attack upon women in society. In the razor action with the slides she is criticising women for remaining aesthetic objects in society, for not being conscious of themselves and for not trying to surpass their image. She urges women to go forward in a more conscious and rigorous fashion. Gina Pane however volunteers herself as a self-critic, and proposes that women

'are in a point in society where they must criticise themselves, taking into consideration their biological differences'.

In her third action milk is a food product but it is also the product a woman produces after childbirth to nourish her child. 'By refusing to nourish the child she is refusing and rejecting the child, knowing symbolically that society won't take responsibility for her child that society can't

give the child what its mother does and so the child becomes disturbed'. Thus Gina Pane sees milk related to childhood and the family. In her artistic works Gina Pane is rejecting the memory relationship of her childhood and her past. Through her work she is assuming her adult responsibilities and the responsibility for the liberty of her actions. Thus blood, becomes an element that replaces milk. The rejection however is not a refusal of the 'beauty of childhood' but an attempt on behalf of the artist to illustrate and feel the 'demarcation between the adult and the child'.

Gina Pane believes that if the artist has a social conscience, he feels his responsibility in the society in which he lives. She sees the role of the artist as a 'catalyst of social and moral change, because he has complete liberty of expression'. She recognises that the artist has the option of delving in 'autobiographical narcissism' but he has no choice in 'being responsible on a social level'.

In her own work Gian Pane recognises her actions as being self-portraits only in the sense that they are the 'portraits of others in general'. Her elements of communication are universal, they are not private or autobiographical.

'Je suis les autres'. (I am the others)

G. Pane 'Performance of  
Concern'



Chris Burden

Having read numerous interviews with Chris Burden what emerges is not an enlightenment of the artist's works, intentions, ideologies but an overwhelming annoyance at being no better informed than before reading the interview. What appears as conversation is almost 'monologue' and a seeming reluctance on behalf of the artist to 'inform and enlighten' the reader/spectator e.g.

LB : You don't see yourself as playing  
a part ?

CB : No

LB : Do you see the pieces as Performances ?

CB : Yeah, some of them are performances  
more than others

WS : Why is your work Art ?

CB : What else is it ?

WS : Theatre

CB : No it's not theatre, theatre is more  
mushy, you know what I mean ? Uhhh...  
it seems that bad art is theatre....  
Getting shot is for real.... (1) etc. etc.

Infuriating ! But is Chris Burden really as inarticulate and incapable of verbalizing his art as he would like us to believe ? Personally I believe it is all too easy to recognise Burden's 'silences' as 'defence mechanisms' for 'ideologies' that seemingly do not exist, hence dismissing Burden's actions as the 'nihilistic failings of a demented naif'

Artform (2)

Take Chris Burden's 'unenlightening interviews' into focus and compare them with the Documentation Chris Burden uses to illustrate his 'performances'. Looking at Burden's self-published Catalogue '71-73' what appears are not highly professional photographs of his once-off performances but photographs which are blurred, scratched, over or under exposed, accompanied by brief verbal descriptions that are equally less than adequate. Burden's Video-Tape compilation of his works, shown at the Feldham Gallery 1975 had similar 'shortcomings'. The Tape included a short film of Burden's internationally most notorious piece 'Shoot' performed November 19th, 1971, F. Space, Santa Ana, Calif., 'At 7.45 pm I was shot in the left arm by a friend'

The image was grainy it was a second generation tape and the sound of the 'shoot' on the sound track was partially lost amid the clamourings of the spectators. Are these instances mere presentations of a non-professional ? No, Chris Burden is deliberately establishing the limited function of Documentation with regard to his work. He is quite literally establishing the fact that the 'live' event is not subservient to its more durable and 'distributable complement', even more importantly, Burden is stating that the event was not undertaken merely to be recorded.

One may justifiably question why Burden bothers to record his works at all, that perhaps his work would endure only as a memory. However Burden discovered through his early experiences that second hand information often leads to 'widespread misrepresentation'; here lies the basis for his somewhat 'compromised stance'.

The 'widespread misrepresentation theory' is acknowledged when one asks 'What is Chris Burden's work about?' 'What does it entail' ? Without hesitation the misinformed voyeur



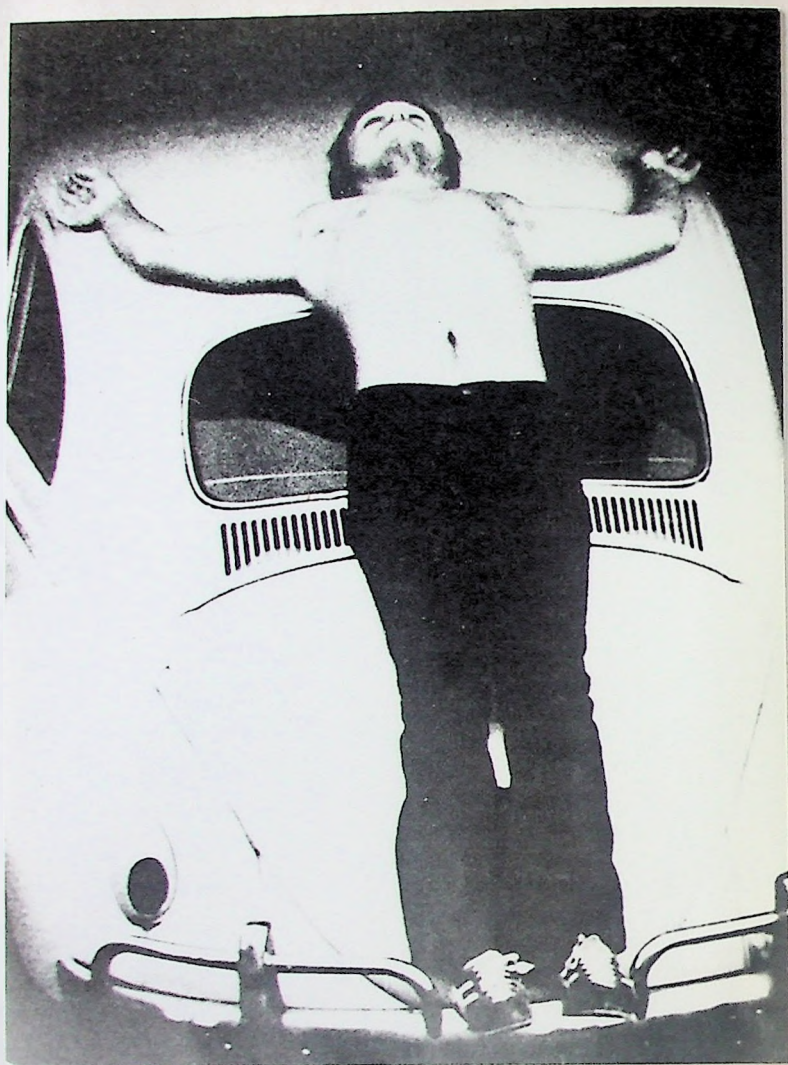


FIG. 9 CHRIS BURDEN, 'TRANSFIXED', VENICE, CAL., 1974

would answer 'Violence, risk, pain, death'. However on the contrary examining the totality of this artist's work one becomes aware not only of the 'violent' works (747) but also of the passive (White heat/White light). Comparing these two modes of work, the common denominator is not elements of pain and violence but elements of endurance and the desire to achieve control over the self and environmental situations.

Burden sees his work as a means of pre-empting fate. By setting up 'extreme abnormal situations' for himself he tests the capacity of his will. The outcome will either affirm his control over the situation or prove fatal. Up to this Burden's works have proved to affirm his responsibility 'for', and his power 'over' his fate. 'Chris Burden knows his limits and he limits his risks accordingly', thus forcing us, the spectators 'to question and re-affirm our own limitations'.

#### Bedpiece

February 18th - March 10th, 1972

Market St. Program. Venice Calif.,

'I had a bed put at one end of the room,  
and I stayed there for 22 days, I didnt  
talk to anyone'

#### Doorway to Heaven

November 15th, 1973

'At 6.00 pm I stood in the doorway of my  
studio facing the Venice Boardwalk, a few  
spectators watched as I pushed two live  
electric wires into my chest. The wires  
crossed and exploded, buring me but saving  
me from electrocution'



A few a large crowd, many, nizer of the show, knew what d when anyone at the open- to happen, he led them down ey were met by Burden's wife, ed door. The door led into a that was quite hot and pitch ie ray of light that extended top of the door and the door- a wall. Only one person was at a time. As they entered the and locked behind them. The alcove between two massive eplace upstairs. Burden was l and faintly illuminated by he was discovered, he intro- casually with each visitor for ed.

lly saw Burden. Their experi- of disorientation and trepida- and locked behind them, e encounter proved to be so it the effect on those left out- Word of Burden's presence quickly and scores of people ont of the boiler-room door. to do so, the few who did get y anything about what had fueling the crowd's fantasies. the basement were broken by in. The opening was totally Capitalizing on the drawing i, the tension between the d the strict limitations he him gave the piece its spatial ectacle that the crowd had len, based on what they knew s indeed provided, but they

ce, Burden had the active m director and the sponsoring unwitting, but completely the students. He did nothing r illegal. No one was injured. is force than the average rock- statue. And yet the manipula- if the work are obvious. We mber of questions: e justified in suspending our he material being worked is

, and under what conditions, her claim on our actions and

he "right" to exploit oneself lizing into the right to exploit other people?

relationship between artist and ltered by the removal of the

erical nature of this relation-



"747" January 8, 1971. "At about 8 a.m. on a bench near the Los Angeles International Airport, I fired several shots with a pistol at a Boeing 747."

den's tendency to treat him lated, objectified manner i logical), it is something that sympathize with. For one t of the almost overbearing in his work. He is not an ins think it is going too far to s: profound intuition of the (read: middle-class "cult of lute frame of reference. The proceeds apace, not just in everywhere one looks, from Zen to resource manager between nature and cultur taire fiction. Seen from popular morality is a thoro a canonization of species ditions grow more transpa technological power. It fo occupies a privileged place laws of his own making—i legitimizes the transfer of expedients to the nonhum where the extravagant dan the mildest feelings of guilt pletely untenable.

In one sense, Burden's w phor for human autocrac formerly exported conflicts. seen as a signal that indiv forcefully manifested, has t of historical impact, that "TI that no one can either unde only has meaning as an est another sense, it may be par Toynbee has called "rebarl pleasant intermediate stage the physical world. Perhap trends into Burden's work fixing narrowly on its techr cause it moves at such an e and speaks with such D temptation to do so is quite that Burden thinks he is t me to rethink the values by am deeply grateful. ■

Robert Horvitz is an ordinary housewife

1. Borrowed subsequently, from Burden by the Velvet Underground.
2. From a commemorative one signed on 8.1.
3. Bird.
4. From a lecture at the Rhode Island.
5. All subsequent gun shots during 1 hour "747" copyright 1971 by Chris Burden. All rights reserved. All charges against Burden were still pending. Above security, the F.B.I. to which he sent several shots at

FIG. 10 CHRIS BURDEN. '747', L.A. 1973

In all of his works I see Burden as attempting to attain a certain balance or equilibrium between polarities. Passive endurance (Bed Piece), instantaneous action (Doorway to Heaven), attraction (The Visitation) and repulsion (Transfixed). Egnited by these polarities the 'balance area' appears as a 'force-field' fused with electricity. This is the 'area' I believe inhabited by the spectator, this is the Public (s) ground where artistic intentions are 'fused' and 'connected' to the 'public'. Without this 'electricity' the work itself could not exist.

Burden himself is aware of

' An energy, a real electricity 'going on'  
between his actions and his audience'

'Ambiguity' I see as an essential element in Chris Burden's work, this is surely a seeming contradiction compared with the 'direct' immediacy of his actions and performances. I have already mentioned the effective ambiguity of Chris Burden's Interviews/Documentation ('less is more'), and also the 'ambiguous' but essential role played by the 'seemingly passive spectator'. But what of the even more ambiguous religo-socio-political implications in Chris Burden's work ? Again Chris Burden remains silent. The spectator is left to draw his own conclusions. Religious invocations may be drawn from such pieces as :-

Transfixed April 23rd, 1974, Venice, Calif., where Burden was literally crucified on the back of a Volkswagon, nails through his palms and engine roaring at full throttle.

Jaizu June 10th, 11th, Newport Harbour Art Museum, Calif. Burden dressed in white wearing dark sunglasses, sat for two days staring at seated spectators (one entered at a time). Is Burden playing at God or is he merely mocking himself or



the Western notion of God ? (Burden's glasses were painted black so he could not see the spectator)

In White Heat/White Light again we see Burden 'poking at religion'. Burden the unseen witness above, lies silently, inertly on a triangular platform built 10 ft. above the floor of the Feldman Gallery. Here Burden spent three weeks out of sight in 'solitary confinement' without exercise or food. Is this action symbolic or merely ironic that at the same time (February - March '75) the first two I.R.A. prisoners are in the seventh week of their hunger strike in the H. Block ? Is it mere coincidence that at the same time thousands are starving in East Africa and India ? Again the reader/spectator draws his own conclusions.

Vito Acconci

The Conceptual Performance

The Conceptual Performance is a term coined to describe an area of working in which Duchamp-like thought and behaviour is fused with an abstract reductivist, minimalist activity.

It is impossible to categorize the works of Vito Acconci whether they be 'presentations' or 'performances', however it is indisputable that Acconci bases the premise of his art works in an area recognised as 'Body Art'. On the other hand to solely define Acconci's work as Body Art is to undermine the powerful intellectual capabilities Acconci incorporates into his work. To call his work Body Art I consider insufficient, the term Conceptual Performance however is less limiting.

'All Art after Duchamp is Conceptual because  
Art only exists Conceptually ! '

Joseph Kosuth

'Conceptual Art (editor)

Parallels between Duchamp and Acconci are obvious. In the film 'Conversions' Acconci is seen tugging at his breasts, burning his hair from his chest, hiding his penis between his legs, attempting to transform himself into a female or at least into an androgyne.

Acconci himself in his photo-essay, 'Conversions, Avalanche' 1971, admitted that this film recorded a process parallel to the sexual multivalence between Duchamp and Prose Selavy.



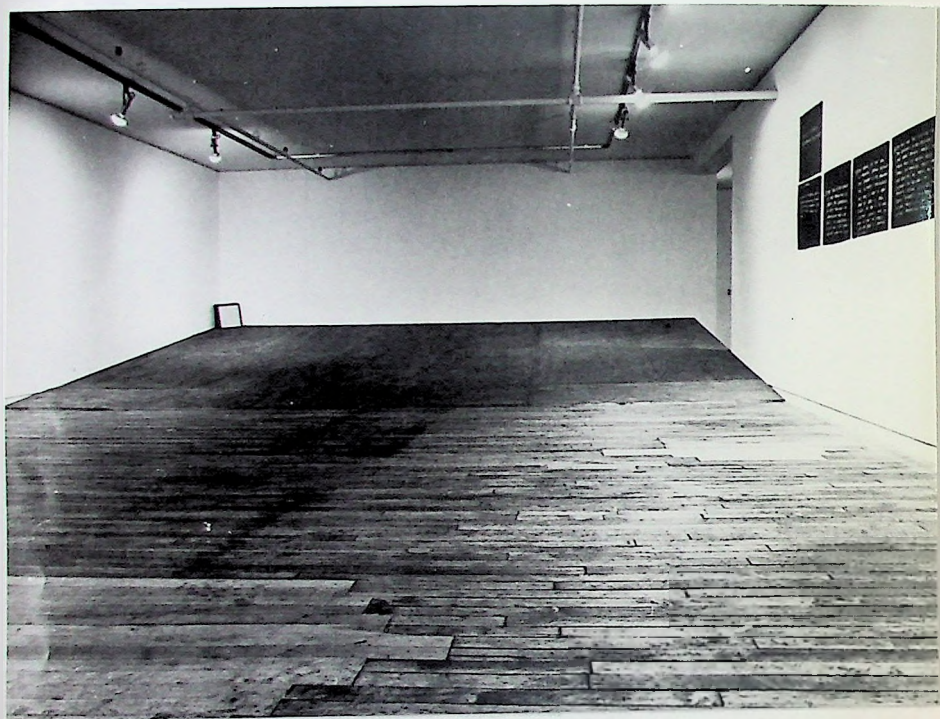


FIG. 11 VITO ACCONCI. 'SEEDBED', 1972

" ..... my work seems mainly concerned with what I guess could be called 'attention' or 'concentration'; like if I'm going to concentrate on my own body or a part of my own body, this intense focus on it, this intense channeling toward it is going to lead to a kind of turning in on myself, which is a kind of masochism. But these elements are just sidelines or by-products of this kind of concentration of attention. In the same way, if I'm concentrating on this other person or on my action with this other person, an exaggerated version of this will be going to be what people call sadism"

V. Acconci 'Conceptual Performance'

In this extract Acconci was talking about Seedbed. A work which takes the form of a ramp covering the floor of an entire gallery, underneath which Acconci spent two afternoons a week masturbating.

#### SEEDBED

Performance, Sonnabend Gallery NewYork January 15-29, 1971  
twice a week, six hours a day.

1. The room is activated by my presence underground, underfoot by my movement from point to point under the ramp.
2. The goal of my activity is to the production of seed - the scattering of seed throughout the underground area. My aim is to concentrate on my goal, to be totally enclosed within my goal.



3. The means to this goal is private sexual activity. My attempt to maintain the activity throughout the day, so that a maximum of seed is produced; my aim is to have constant contact with my body so that a maximum of seed is produced; my aim is to have constant contact with my body so that an effect of my body is carried outside.
4. My aids are the visitors of the gallery - in my seclusion, I can have private images of them, talk to myself about them; my fantasies about them can excite me, enthuse me to sustain - to resume my private sexual activity.

(The seed planted on the floor, then is a joint result of my performance and theirs).

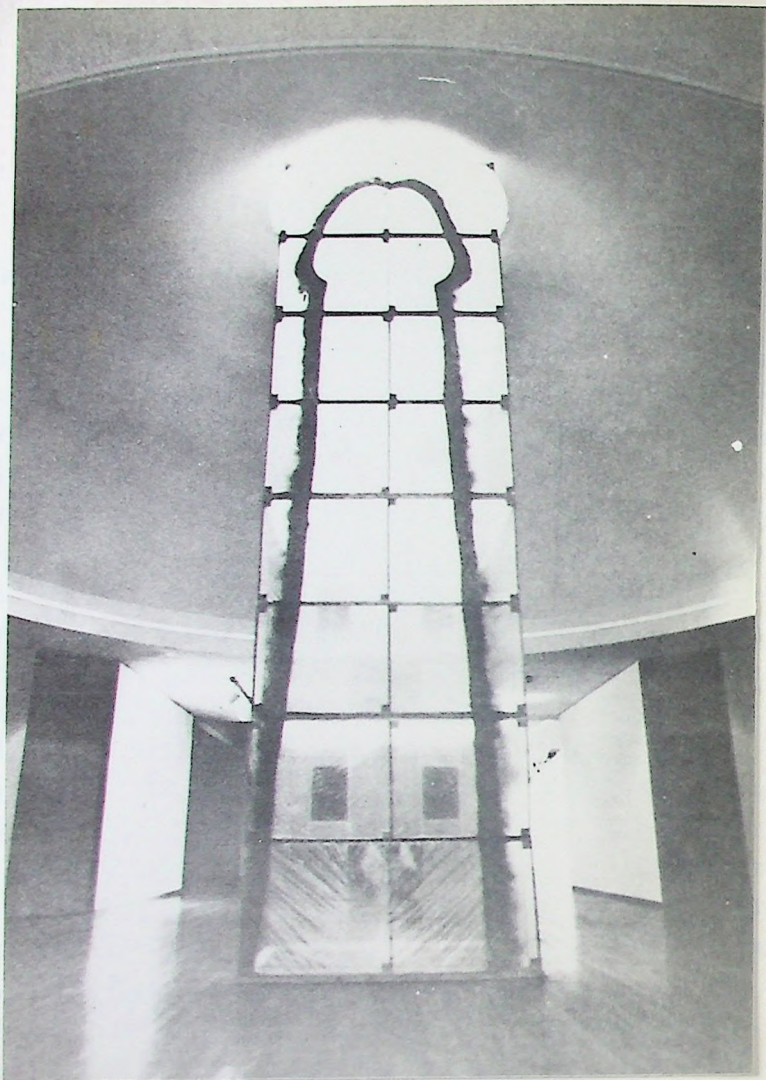


FIG. 12 VITO ACCONCI. 'HIGH RISE', OHIO, 1980



Acconci in his performances is able to handle the Conceptual in a way which expressed 'a closeness to the processes of the mind' as opposed to the 'experiences of the senses'. The 'experiences of the senses' employed by Vito Acconci become his subject matter and his material, engaging him in personal and solely individual territories. Acconci's work from the beginning points to the body as a system sweating and spermatic, fecal and salivating. Acconci's 'processes of the mind' engaging his bodily fluids, opposed the notion of the 'socially ideal'. The idealist Western philosophy that upholds 'cleanliness next to Godliness', repudiating and denoting ideas of the private the singular, the sexual, dirty and the unclean. Art's function was seen to reflect 'political engagement and social relationships', to reflect a perfect structure, thus its materials were cosmetized and embodying reflective surfaces, geometric figures, simple planes, industrial materials, mirrors, and above all order. All was designed to 'blind' the spectator. For Art to employ chance, chaos, the body, filth, imperfection was to reflect a less than perfect society. Thus Art could be viewed 'as a political weapon' and a danger to political power.

"To reflect on filth allows reflection on the the relationship between order and disorder, being and non being, formal and informal, life and death."

'Sigmund Freud Civilization and its discontents' Hogarth Press 1930

The best art works were considered to be those which subscribed to society's model. Society cannot afford to

have its self-image tarnished, so art must construct itself according to dominant social values. These dominant social values have no room for anti-social dirt. Vito Acconci recognises this anti-social dirt and feels the need as an artist to 'extract this social vicera through metaphorically sealing up his own body. 'All possible orifices, from his mouth to the glands, blocked, having first expelled all biles and bad blood'.

Vito Acconci is using the inside of the body as a metaphor, a territory of retension into which the artist escapes. The body (society) is a hiding place for 'dirt', 'filth', which must be expelled or 'thrown out'. This is a clear demonstration of Acconci's role as an artist and his need to rectify the discrepency between the idealistic cultural acknowledgement and our 'physical reality'.



CHAPTER 111

PRIVATE AS POLITICAL

### Private as Political

To say that 'All art is innately political' (3) is perhaps an understatement, especially in lieu of work being performed today. However should one try to 'define' or see what if any is the connection between art and politics, one immediately drowns in an endless forray of rhetorical arguments/discussions. In Performance however women have produced over the past decade some of the most powerful and innovative work to date. The influence of feminism and the Women's Movement on these artists cannot be denied or underestimated. Women have always been involved in art making, either directly or indirectly (curator, historian, critic etc. ) But either way the woman had to compete with sexist imagery and sexist ideology, any 'femaleness' had to be hidden to pass into the male defined art world. Performance art has (traditionally ?) been regarded as the art worlds medium of social confrontation. The lack of formal restrictions and its opposition to the 'establishment' enabled women to articulate their own rage at the oppressive structures of art and life. Judy Chicago in 1970 recognised that 'performance' can be fueled by rage in a way that painting and sculpture can't ' . Fueled by this rage feminist artists attacked their male counterparts and accused them of discrimination and of neglecting them and their rights as artists. As a reaction against the super cool intellectual art of the 60's and as a result of the 'rage' women introduced a revival of intense expressionism into art. Art now moved towards 'a collective individualistic' statement. Women undertook in their lives and in their art a commitment to the personal as political and to the particular as universal. Women explored, analysed and



investigated the fine edge between an artist's life and his/her art through the use of 'Autobiography'.

This new autobiographical area embodying the recreation of 'tiny private intimate episodes' of ones life into performance allowed women the freedom to deal with subjects that had hitherto been ignored by men and considered 'taboo'.

This undertaking of 'Taboo' subject matter as vital artistic material was an attack on a 'sexist established Art World' and constituted what was then regarded as 'effective' feminist art policy.

It is not within my capabilities nor within the confines of this thesis to launch into a critique of feminist political issues. However I merely wish to give light to what I consider has been and still is an essentially important movement with regard to the Public and Private in Art. Feminism is a blanket term used by 'critics' wishing to easily 'catagorise' or describe women and artists whose major concern is with womens experiences and womens consciousness. Obviously all women are not feminists, not all women's art is feminist art, nor does a feminist artist necessarily make feminist art. A 'feminist artist' may be a woman who believes and practices feminism outside her studio and thus comes to her work with a 'developed femist sensibility'. However this does not mean that her work should be called 'feminist'.

Suzanne Lacy in Moira Roth's article 'Autobiography, Theatre, Mysticism and Politics' 1979 defined feminist art :-

' At first we defined feminist art as all art which reflects a woman's consciousness but as our politics evolved some of us chose stronger definitions. For me, now, feminist art must

show a consciousness of womens social and economic position in the world. I also believe it demonstrates forms and perceptions that are drawn from a sense of spiritual kinship between women '

In this definition Suzanne Lacy clearly articulates current feminist theory and practice as the relationship between the overtly political ideologies and the spiritual kinship between women. This feminist theory obviously affects current feminist political practice and Performance, which may be outlined thus :-

1. Stress on the Personal Experience

Again the autobiographical personal subject matter and styles for dealing with this subject matter in art. Artist's recreating 'tiny private episodes' (4) from their lives into performances through the use of video, film, narrative, character, sound, music. Women began investigating and exploring the use of character as a way to publically expose their personal 'life material'.

Bonnie Sherk, a feminist artist who became a waitress in a restaurant called her employmnet there a Performance. The importance of the use of narrative and story telling expressed in an intimate and confessional type way, meant that artists could directly reach and set up empathy with a larger audience outside the 'art audience'.

2. The Democratization of Art

For feminists the democratization of art meant an exploration of the idea that everyone, artist and non-artist has the potential for creative expression.



### The Democratization of Art cont/d

Through their autobiographical work feminist artists attempted to erase the dividing line between art and life. Feminist performances may be seen as a continuation of abstract expressionism, closely aligned to happenings which themselves go back to futurist and Dadaist performances. Allan Kaprow, the early 'pioneer of happenings' was one of the first young artists to advocate the concept of 'life material'. Through his 'mundane performance activities' he attempted to put 'art into life' and 'life into art'.

#### 3. Audience Education

Feminist artists advocated 'social change' outside the feminist art circle. They recognised the need to 'educate' and raise the 'consciousness' of the general Public. Feminist programmes, study and talk groups along with the development of networks and communities were organized to the spiritual kinship between women. This 'spiritual' aspect of feminism advocated an abstract belief in the intense, emotional and mystical bonds among women, creating a womens spiritual community.

#### 4. The Personal as Political

The spectrum of personal as political feminism ranges from the more specific issues such as the fight against sexist imagery and sexist ideology in advertising and art to the protection of womens abortion rights and the ratification of ERA, to the concern over the growing violence against, and rape of women. When women



FIG. 13 SUZANNE LACY. 'FALLING APART', DEC. 1980



The Personal as Political    cont/d

got together in their consciousness-raising groups they began to notice how many of them had been raped. This they recognised as a political issue as opposed to a personal issue.

*paradox?* Suzanne Lacy, the feminist performance artist and theorist has been actively involved in a political campaign against violence against women, W.A.V.A.W. (5). She sees her work on violence as a clear instance of the transition from the personal to the political. 'Rape' she sees as the individual oppression of women through their bodies and an extreme expression of hatred for women. Lacy has collaborated with numerous feminist artists through her work and this is a distinctive aspect of much feminist art. In 1971 she collaborated with Judy Chicago, Sandra Orgee and Aviva Rahmani to perform 'Abultions'. Baths of blood, kidneys, thousands of eggs, yards of rope, chains, tied to organs and extended into the audience, together with a loop-tape of women telling about their experiences of being raped were used to illustrate the 'general territory of the existential conditions of womanhood'. The expressionist Dionysonic Ritual aspect of that work is reminiscent of Hermann Nitsch's modern rituals. Today feminist performance artists rely less on the gorey 'blood and guts' aspect and have adopted an increased rationalism making their performances more analogic. In 1977 Lacy created 'Three Weeks in May'. This 'performance structure' as she calls it focused on the exposure and critique of the incidence of rape in Los Angeles. The piece evolved out of a long struggle with issues of how to reach a larger audience about feminist concerns and also how to combine the hard-core politics of being a woman with strongly expressionist





FIG. 14 SUZANNE LACY. 'THREE WEEKS IN MAY', L.A. 1977



Suzanne Lacy cont/d

visions. Three Weeks in May was a large scale performance piece which involved the recording on a large map of the daily rape reports from the Los Angeles Police Department together with press appearances, lectures and the organization of Rape Prevention Groups. Through 'Three Weeks in May' Lacy discovered another important 'tool' of the feminist artist, the media, she found out how to work with mass media and why. Throughout the three weeks she constantly bombarded the media with news of and interviews with women concerned with rape. The media thus enabled her to reach a mass audience with the intention of raising the rape issue in the public consciousness.

Leslie Labowitz, is another artist who became actively involved with the media through her feminist performances. Working closely with the Political Organization 'Women Against Violence Against Women' Leslie Labowitz created a piece entitled 'Record Companies Drag Their Feet' August 1977, a performance specifically for a media news production. W.A.V.A.W. is an activist organisation working to stop the use of images of physical and sexual violence against women in mass media. 'Record Companies Drag Their Feet' as a performance was designed to communicate to a mass audience through mass media using primarily T.V. news broadcasts. Record album covers and the social responsibility of the recording industry provided the theme and story that attempted to make the connection between media images of women and the rising condition of violence against women in the real world.

August 30, 1977



RECORD CO



Leslie Labowitz cont/d

The performance took place at the sight of a huge kiss billboard, with a counter billboard of statistics on rape alongside. In front of the billboards a simulated record company's executive office was placed. The office was complete with a large gold record at the entrance together with desk and typewriting secretary. On the desk were telephones, stacks of money, album covers and buckets of red paint. The executives of the record company were portrayed by images of roosters. The roosters began the event by driving up and down Sunset Boulevard in a 'gold convertible' until the arrival of the media. The 'roosters' then began to perform cliches of firstly roosters, proud, strutting, arrogant and secondly executives talking on phones, counting money, shining the gold record, making advances to the secretary. They then began to hold up offensive record album sleeves to the media, nodding approvingly. At this stage women began to enter the set with signs stating

' I wish the Media would'nt insult,  
demean, dehumanize women by their  
images'

and

' This is a crime against women'

The red paint representing the 'blood money' made by the commercialization of sexually violent images of women' was being smeared and thrown around by the roosters. The finale occurred when twelve women unrolled a banner and draped it across the entire set, enclosing the roosters. The banner read 'Don't Support Violence Against Women'. The Press



FIG. 16 SUZANNE LACY AND LESLIE LABOWITZ 'IN MOURNING AND IN RAGE'

L.A. 1977



Conference took place in front of this last image. Both of these feminist artists were to later collaborate on 'In Mourning and in Rage', the theme again violence against women. The artists were helped by several women from the community on the development of the piece. 'In Mourning and in Rage' was intended to reflect not only the repressed rage which the women experienced inwardly but to reflect also an outward overt rage. In the piece the artists expressed a radical feminist political critique of how media was presenting the murders to its Los Angeles audience. The 'Hillside Strangler' case was one of many instances of such violence which the artists felt was singled out to become a sensationalist and sometimes exploitive media event. 'In Mourning and in Rage' attacked the media, and its myth of objectivity presenting no political perspective on the murders. 'In Mourning and in Rage' through its community of spiritual womanhood, not only raised the consciousness of the Public outside art against violence, against media exploitation and immunization, but was a clear demonstration of the active effectiveness of 'collectivist content' inherent in 'individual expression' and the personal as political.

*did it  
actually?*

Stuart Brisley

"To Do With Others"

To recognise English artist Stuart Brisley as a performance artist may be a correct assumption on our behalf, but not one that the artist himself would approve of. In 1976 along with Leslie Haslam at the 'Arte Inglese Oggi' 1960-67, Stuart Brisley rejected the 'Performance Art' label, suggesting it was inadequate, because an element of performance is intrinsic.

*These are interesting issues raised on this page which are not dealt with sufficiently but rather side-stopped & faded.*

'In making or doing and all art at some time involves it' (6)

In this statement Brisley and Haslam also expressed displeasure in the term performance as it signifies a relationship with theatre, inappropriate to visual art. It is not my intention to pass value judgement nor question the knowledge and experience of an artist whom I greatly admire and respect, but I would like to point out to my reader (she/he will make his/her own assertions) that it was the ability of performance art from the beginning to transgress the conventional and traditional boundaries of art, to flirt with theatre, music, in fact 'all life', that attracted so many artists to this area. Hence to criticise the relationship between performance and the theatre is to commit the grave error of 'confining' performance art and by extension to 'question' the unquestionably excellent theatrical type performances by such artists as Elenor Antin, Joan Jonas, etc. The relationship with theatre that Brisley finds so distasteful seems to result from his fears that 'art's relationship

*Is this the point?  
There is a difference between actor & writer, musician & composer...*





FIG. 17 STUART BRISLEY 'BETWEEN FLOOR AND CEILING' DUBLIN 1979

to painting and sculpture might be denied or minimized :  
This he feels also leads to the definition of a

"set of terms within the context of art,  
thereby establishing yet another  
level of confirmity with which to  
support the notion of the seperation  
between art and politics' (7)

Brisley continues from this argument to present his  
'Democratic Programme' in which he articulates his 'Political  
Dimension'. Brisley argues for an art that refuses to  
remain 'on the periphery', insisting that art is anachronistic  
without political commitment. He suggests that one of the  
prerequisites for the exposure of process through art  
is the political element. The exposure of process must  
however be consciously directed to other people at  
specific times and in specific places (the time dimension  
of performance art). Brisley states that if the activity  
decays to become one of the obvious aspects of 'decadent  
individualism' then the activity is "No more or less  
significant than other activities which have not transcended  
individuality to become common". Brisley thus belives that  
art must at all times involve the concept.

"To do with Others" (8)

Superficially, Brisley's performances or 'works' may  
seem to contradict this notion. One of the major themes in  
Brisley's works is the alienation of himself from his audience,  
and the confrontation of the effect this has on the individual.  
The 'alienated' represents a 'model' for society in general  
and Brisley's attack is levelled against the mechanics that



govern our society: brutality, anonymity, consumerism, greed, isolation, repression and class structure.

"In the society of men the truth resides now less in what things are than in what they are not. Our social realities are so ugly if seen in the light of exiled truth, and beauty is almost no longer possible if it is not a lie"

R.D. Laing 'The politics of Experience'

At the Royal Court Theatre 1972, Brisley attacked the 'class structure', and the monarchy by swallowing litres of water and retaining it while a throne was built for him on stage, finally Brisley spewed out the water to the sounds of the National Anthem.

Caroline Tisdall, art critic, sympathises with the notion of the alienated artist, and recognises the performance artist as being more exposed than ever before

" A performer cannot stand back and judge the finished object or vehicle of his thought before it goes out into the world. He or she cannot niggle or patch or wipe it out because there the thing is, placed in real time, and with the audience present at its making: A life dimension" (9)

Brisley's socio-political criticism of loneliness, squalor, repression, and alienation was portrayed in Brisley's



FIG. 18    STUART BRISLEY. 'Z1656395C'    LONDON 1972



Performance/Environment ZL 656395 C. Here Brisley presented himself in a pathetic state of squalor and filth, immured physically by his environment and metaphorically by the National Insurance No. he was given. The artist was 'transformed into a senile old age pensioner/prisoner immobilized and defenseless in a wheelchair, alienated through Social Filth and his incapacibilities. In Berlin 1973 Brisley alienated and exposed yet again, spent the ten greedy days of Christmas on a starvation diet (2 multi-vitamin pills, 1 glass of fruit juice, 1,000 cc. Vitamin C, 1 Dextrose Tablet) while sumptuous festive food was laid out in front of him thrice daily for ten days. The food accumulated decayed and Brisley spent the last day of his performance crawling through the repugnant rubbish.

"No one can begin to think, feel or act now except from the standing point of his or her own alienation" (10)

Brisley through his own personal alienation is exposing not only himself, but the 'pseudo events (Christmas) to which we all have adjusted with a 'false consciousness'. The artist however does more than merely 'reflect the decay around and within us' and not by a mere passionate cry of outraged humanity (11). Brisley sees his work as an attempt to break alienation and overcome it. For Brisley art is not an alienating activity, though the subject maybe. At the end of each performance Brisley emerges to 'meet' and 'confront' his audience yet again in the light of a different reality.

Joseph Beuys

"Everyman an Artist"

'Man alienated' is seen yet again at the core of Joseph Beuys art philosophy and the recurring theme of many of his drawings, teachings, actions and demonstrations. Beuys sees man as 'fundamentally aspiritual being' and that his vision of the world must be extended to encompass all the invisible energies with which he has lost and become alienated. When man recognises his alienation he must start to evolve new energies and for Beuys these are real and living substances, democratic forces of love, warmth and above all freedom. Beuys believes that man has become alienated from himself as a result of the separation between the 'economic sphere' and the 'cultural sphere'. In our capitalist society the emphasis is on the field of production, consumption and the circulation of goods. Man is given no time to think about what his actual needs are and for what ends he is actually working. The moment man realises that the production of goods must fill a higher task than just freeing man from his biological needs and raising his standard of living, he will at that time link the cultural realm with the economic. This is where the notion of Beuys' Free University is conceived with its purpose of 'setting free man's mental potential'. If man is given the privilege of one paid weekday in the working of the University that means that the worker for one day a week does not produce on the assembly line etc., and he can 'enrich his mind'. Thereby man becomes personally acquainted with the production process and its end, this



will enable him to understand 'from where and for what' industry produces goods through him. The worker will now be able to critically assert the worth of that production. In this way industry takes its place in culture, and the workers will become interested in the education of themselves to their spiritual opportunities and in the reconciliation of themselves to what they have lost.

"Only the human capacity for thought  
can bring new causes into the world,  
and these determine the future course  
of history" (12)

how ?  
Beuys sees 'thinking' and the power of thought as evolutionary and the human race is in a constant state of evolution. Through capitalism man has become unconscious of this and mans consciousness must be reawakened. Beuys' faith in this 'reawakening' and mans ability to emerge from the current crisis, brought about through western positivist, materialist and mechanic thought was presented by Beuys as the 'Energy Plan for Western Man' New York, Chicago, Minneapolis. In the outcome of this energy plan, Beuys advocated that a term like 'economics' could never be reduced to describe the production of simply physical goods. 'All forms of production are economics and all forms of production are creative' (13)

To represent his energy plan Beuys used his 'voice' in lecture form. Through using this lecture-type format, accompanied by visual diagrams (Beuys 'now famous Blackboard') Beuys attempted to illustrate that the voice is a vital



FIG. 19 JOSEPH BEUYS 'FESTIVAL OF NEW ART', AACHEN 1964



transmitter of energy and a direct means in the 'sculpting' of thinking forms.

For Beuys the word produces all images and is the key for all processes of moulding and organizing. The 'word' is the basis and the power of the whole understanding of language, the word for Beuys is the 'spiritual understanding of evolution'.

Beuys uses the spoken word as a vital and direct means of communicating to a mass audience.

"It is vital that humankind should slowly learn to speak, should come out of its dumbness and this applies above all to the man in the street"

But how can the man in the street with his insufficient and fundamental education clarify his thoughts into words and then free speech. This is the basis for Beuys attempts to found a 'Free University' of creativity. For Beuys, teaching is the supreme and major aspect of his work. Through his teaching Beuys wishes to show his students (man) new alternatives to all the systems imposed on us by our culture. The freedom of expression through art allows man the chance to assert his freedom against the determinisms imposed on him by society.

"Art should effectively transform peoples everyday lives." (14)

Through his experience in teaching, Beuys learned to despise the 'game plan' of accepting and rejecting students into the Dusseldorf Academy. For Beuys education is not a case

of first come first served. For Beuys education must mean equality. In July-August '71, Beuys takes 142 rejected students into his class declaring that the Art Academy and the whole nature of German Schools is in a predicament and that he will fight for the freeing of the total school system. Beuys' aim to challenge the entire education system in Germany (on which he is currently active) is the first step in the changing of our socio-political systems. In a letter to the 142 rejected students Beuys declared July-Aug '71

"As a result of a need of this direct nature, man is not only a social being, rather he is also in the greatest sense a free creative being"

Here is the point at which every art ultimately becomes political.

In his Manifesto on the foundation of 'Free International School for Creativity and Inter-disciplinary Research' Beuys recognises that each one of us has a creative potential which is hidden by competitiveness and success aggression, and that the intention of the school is to recognise, explore and develop this potential.

In this school Beuys proposes an investigation and an exploration of the 'creativity of the democratic'. The creativity of the democratic has been increasingly discouraged by the process of bureaucracy coupled with the aggressive proliferation of an international man culture. Political





FIG. 20 JOSEPH BEUYS 'EURASIA' 1966

creativity is being reduced to the mere delegation of decision and power. In Consumer Society, if powers of creativity, imagination and intelligence are not articulated then their energies become defective, harmful and damaging, finding outlets in corrupted criminal creativity. This is the contrast to Democratic Society. In Consumer Society criminality can arise from boredom and inarticulated creativity. To be reduced to consumer values is to see Democratic potential reduced to the occasional general election, is to be regarded as a denial of our basic human rights and a dismissal of Democratic Creativity.

What I have just outlined is predominately the socio-political philosophies of Joseph Beuys (I have dealt with a specific work by Beuys in the first chapter). However it is my opinion that the socio-political philosophies of the artist cannot be divorced from his art making and that they are the essential life material from which Joseph Beuys work draws its energy. Joseph Beuys is an artist whose whole life is an art work, in which his actions and objectives are only the 'islands that show above the surface.'

*Is this only true  
of Performance  
artists?*

'A real artist makes art the whole  
of his life, not apart'

From Statements Alister MacLennan  
1979.





FIG. 21 ELENOR ANTIN 'THE KING GREETES THE SEA' 1975

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

According to Karl Marx's theory of art, man's finest creative activity lies in his ability to 'Transform his material surroundings' (16). To transform means to 'make (est. considerable) changes in form, appearance, character etc.' Thus 'transform' may be applied to man's artistic creativity, from the beginning of time. The cave drawings of early primitive man, to the aspirations of the traditional sculptor, wishing to enhance and decorate his surroundings, through the conceptualists who physically and totally changed their surroundings, Michael Heizer 'Double Negative', Nevada, Robert Smithson 'Spiral Jetty', Salt Lake, Utah, to the numerous performance artists who assume character change, Elenor Antin 'The King' (1975), Adrian Piper 'Some Reflected Surfaces' (1976) and the very investigation of the transformation theory itself. For Joseph Beuys, 'Coyote' was a :-

"Transformation of ideology to the idea of freedom, and the transformation of language to a deeper understanding of its most potent evolutionary power, the transformation of Verbal Dialogue to Energy Dialogue" (17)



The transformation of 'material surroundings' however is a rather limiting notion, with regard to Contemporary Art. Today artists use the 'transformation of material surroundings' as mere metaphor, for their aspirations towards an all embracing socio-political change. (Re: The Social Concern of Artists in Chapter 11 and the political actions in Chapter 111).

Through their individual works these artists illustrate that their art is not only a concern for, but a result of socio-political structures.

'Art does not exist as an independent discipline'

Hadjinicolaou 1978

'The Social Production of Art'

Art is undoubtedly a social product. In accordance with 'art' or 'creative activity', all activity is a product of these socio-political, structural determinants and conditions. Thus we see that in this respect artistic creativity is no different in any relevant way from other forms of cultural/creative activity.

what other forms?

'The similarity between Art and Labour, thus lies in their shared relationship to the human essence, that is they are both creative activities by means of which man produces objects that express him, that speak for and about him. Therefore there is no radical opposition between art and labour'

Vasquez

'The Social Production of Art' 1977

Following Karl Marx theories the philosopher Vasquez recognises the non-distinguishable difference between practical creativity and artistic creativity, art and labour. If labour is not enforced or alienated then it is a free creative activity and cannot be distinguished from artistic creativity, both sharing 'common ground'. The 'common ground' between art and labour is obvious and indisputable but I believe that one must surely question the level of 'freedom' in 'practical creativity'.

2 | Indeed the era of 'enforced' or 'slave' labour has long gone but surely the mindlessness of much mass production today, tied to the chains of capitalism, encaptures and destroys the freedom of this creativity.

Artistic creativity on the other hand, has done much to free itself from the chains of consumerism, through land art, process art and performance art. The whole esthetic of the dematerialization of the art object has proved an attack on capitalism and art object = commodity. Joseph Beuys in his Manifesto for a Free International University, offers an alternative to free 'practical creativity'.

Here man is given the opportunity to spend one day a week unburdened from the task of mindless production. Man is thus open to an understanding of, from where and for what, industry produces goods through him. Thus freeing and enriching not only man's practical creativity but the entire economic culture.

The result of all creativity, artistic and practical is production, but production is not an isolated process nor

*maybe so  
but for this  
the only flawed  
system?*



is it an end in itself. Production implies consumption, the relationship between production and consumption is both an intricate and 'a complementary one' (18). Without the consumer there would be no need for a product and without a product there would be no need for a consumer. Thus productivity affirms its social character by requiring a (social) collective effort. This notion may also be extended to the individual producer or artist. The artist as a member of society produces art which is a 'product of society'. By extension the relationship between the artistic product (private) and the audience(public) must also be seen as interdependent and complementary. The artistic product may only achieve or realise its full potential through communication, which may occur as an act of recognition or understanding on behalf of the spectator, or 'the other'. Total communication with 'the other' I believe cannot be achieved without a 'loss of self' on behalf of the artist. A work of art is not merely an act of 'self' but an act in which 'self' is lost, to make a connection with the other, the public. In Chapter 11 we see how Vito Acconci is consciously and constantly trying to 'lose' himself through the most private of actions in order to communicate and reach the 'other'.

*I don't see  
why this is  
necessarily  
the case.*

- 'Turning in on myself,  
Turning in on myself'
- 'Get to me - Get at me - Get into me -  
Get through me'

- 'touching lightly and passing myself by'
- 'I can be made so private that I disappear'

V. Acconci 'Dirty Acconci'  
Artforum November 1980

Having established the interdependent producer/consumer, artist/audience, private/public relationship, let me now go a step further to investigate the motivation beneath the very act of 'creative production'. The basis I believe underlying all creative production is need, the need to express, to communicate, to effect, (change, transform. K. Marx). The creative product must respond to the needs of both consumer and producer, artist and public. Creative productivity is therefore a necessary result of human need (s).

"Work is the expression and fundamental condition of human freedom and its significance lies only in its relationship to human needs"

Vasquez 'Art and Social Production'

In Chapter 11, we see how Gina Pane feels she is 'relating' to the needs of an 'anesthesized society', combating this evil by injecting the consciousness of her public, with her pain and suffering. Joseph Beuys feels man needs to be reconciled with his lost spirituality. Through his own work



Beuys demonstrates this through a synthesis of the whole range of material and spiritual phenomena.

The attainment of 'spirituality' we see in Chapter 111, is also one of the major aspects of the feminist creative policy. The spectrum of spiritual feminism ranging from an all out literal adoration of the Great Goddess to a more abstract belief in the 'intense emotional and mystical bonds', among women, creating a woman's spiritual community.

*Is this proved?*

Throughout my thesis, indeed throughout the entire History of Art, the common 'need of artists', I believe has been the continual aspiration toward a dissolution of the dividing line between art and life. At no time have artists come so close to this realization than in performance art. How can the exuberance, the vitality, the immediacy, (indeed the impermanence) of life be captured and contained within a mere stretched canvas or expressed in cold marble or metal, for presentation in a clinical white gallery space. Performance art (live art by artists) with its premise in real time, and real space is an obvious physical manifestation of art = life. Where is the dividing line of art from life (V.V.) in Bonnie Sherks employment/performance. Indeed, Karl Marx and Vasquez theories of art and labour may be applied not only to Sherk's employment/performance, Art/Life, but effectively to all performances which transgress this line. (Ref : To Clean 1, 11. Chapter 1)

*Some would be happy to answer you.*

In conclusion I would like to remind my reader that the basis of this thesis was to repudiate and prove ineffective

the criticism of twentieth century performance art as 'a process of internalization, aspiring towards decadent, individual expression, rather than collectivist content', the art, a product of 'self-indulgent', 'sado-masochistic', 'psychopathological', 'blasphemous', 'obsessive maniacs', and 'nihilist naifs' etc. etc. (19)

I see twentieth century performance art as the 'therapeutic, didactic' art of artists who are not only socially concerned but politically active, producing art not only of/for themselves but art of/for society. A vital production, answering needs, effecting change, calling not only for creative spectator participation in their art, but encouraging and enacting the democratization of art, artistic/practical creativity for all. Are these the actions of socially and politically irresponsible and naive people? To say that twentieth century art tends towards 'individualist content' is indeed true, but oh what a paradox, the 'individualist expression' is an expression for all, as is Gina Pane's expression 'Je suis les autres' - 'I am the others', and Stuart Brisley's 'To do with others'. It is the same paradox inherent in the feminist philosophy 'the personal as political' and my own the private as public'.



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#### FOOTNOTES

1. Interview from a photocopy received from Gerry Cox.  
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2. Art Forum May 1976, Chris Burden, Robert Horvitz
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6. Arte Inglese Oggi, Studio International July/Aug 1976
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10. R.D. Laing 'The Politics of Experience'
11. R.D. Laing 'The Politics of Experience'
12. Joseph Beuys



FOOTNOTES CONT/D

- 13 Joseph Beuys 'Coyote' Studio International 1976
14. Joseph Beuys
15. Lea Vergine, Body Language, Art and Artists
- 16 Karl Marx, 'The Social Production of Art', Janet Wolff.
17. Joseph Beuys, 'Coyote' Studio International
18. Karl Marx 'Grundrisse' 1976. The Social Production of Art
19. Conglomeration of quotes from individual articles/interviews used throughout the thesis.