



---

"Presence" in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation

Author(s): Amelia Jones

Source: *Art Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 4, Performance Art: (Some) Theory and (Selected) Practice at the End of This Century (Winter, 1997), pp. 11-18

Published by: College Art Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/77715>

Accessed: 06/04/2009 10:38

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=caa>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



College Art Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Art Journal*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# “Presence” in absentia

## Experiencing Performance as Documentation

Amelia Jones

I was not yet three years old, living in central North Carolina, when Carolee Schneemann performed *Meat Joy* at the Festival of Free Expression in Paris in 1964; three when Yoko Ono performed *Cut Piece* in Kyoto; eight when Vito Acconci did his *Push Ups* in the sand at Jones Beach and Barbara T. Smith began her exploration of bodily experiences with her *Ritual Meal* performance in Los Angeles; nine when Adrian Piper paraded through the streets of New York making herself repulsive in the *Catalysis* series; ten when Valie Export rolled over glass in *Eros/Ion* in Frankfurt; twelve in 1973 when, in Milan, Gina Pane cut her arm to make blood roses flow (*Sentimental Action*); fifteen (still in North Carolina, completely unaware of any art world doings) when Marina Abramovic and Ulay collided against each other in *Relation in Space* at the Venice Biennale in 1976 (fig. 1). I was thirty years old—then 1991—when I began to study performance or body art<sup>1</sup> from this explosive and important period, entirely through its documentation.

I am in the slightly uncomfortable but also enviable position of having been generously included in this special issue. Presented, in the words of the editor, as a sort of oral history, the issue is based on the premise that one had to be there—in the flesh, as it were—to get the story right. I was asked to provide a counternarrative by writing about the “problematic of a person my age doing work on performances you have not seen [in person].” This agenda forces me to put it up front: not having been there, I approach body artworks through their photographic, textual, oral, video, and/or film traces. I would like to argue, however, that the problems raised by my absence (my not having been there) are largely logistical rather than ethical or hermeneutic. That is, while the experience of viewing a photograph and reading a text is clearly different from that of sitting in a small room watching an artist perform, neither has a privileged relationship to the historical “truth” of the performance (more on this below).

I have been accused on the one hand (by art historians) of not caring enough about “the archive” and artistic



FIG. 1 Marina Abramovic/Ulay, *Relation in Space*. Performed at Venice Biennale, 1976.

intentionality (why didn't I “get to know” Acconci before writing about his work so I could have a “privileged” access to his intentions) and on the other (by artists) of not placing their needs or perceived intentions above my own intuitions and responses. At least for me personally I find it impossible, once I get to know someone, to have any sense of clarity about her or his work historically speaking (that is, as it may have come to mean in its original and subsequent contexts). Once I know the artist well, I can write about her or his work in (I hope) revealing ways, but ones that are (perhaps usefully, perhaps not) laden with personal feelings and conflicts involving the artist as a friend (or not, as the case may be). Furthermore, as noted, such relationships—especially if they are not positive—increase

the logistical difficulties of writing and publishing on the work. The logistical problems are many: obtaining the documentation that is available; getting photographs to study and reproduce without blowing one's tiny bank account; writing about the work without becoming entrapped in the artists' usually fascinating but sometimes intellectually and emotionally diversionary ideas about what the work is (or was) about, and so forth.

It is my premise here, as it has been elsewhere, that there is no possibility of an unmediated relationship to any kind of cultural product, including body art. Although I am respectful of the specificity of knowledges gained from participating in a live performance situation, I will argue here that this specificity should not be privileged over the specificity of knowledges that develop in relation to the documentary traces of such an event. While the live situation may enable the phenomenological relations of flesh-to-flesh engagement, the documentary exchange (viewer/reader <—>document) is equally intersubjective. Either way, the audience for the work may know a great deal or practically nothing at all about who the performer is, why she is performing, and what, consequently, she “intends” this performance to mean. Either way, the audience may have a deep grasp of the historical, political, social, and personal contexts for a particular performance. While the viewer of a live performance may seem to have certain advantages in understanding such a context, on a certain level she may find it more difficult to comprehend the histories/narratives/processes she is experiencing until later, when she too can look back and evaluate them with hindsight (the same might be said of the performer herself). As I know from my own experience of “the real” in general and, in particular, live performances in recent years, these often become more meaningful when reappraised in later years; it is hard to identify the patterns of history while one is embedded in them. We “invent” these patterns, pulling the past together into a manageable picture, retrospectively.

I will sketch out the problematic of experiencing performance or body art from a historical distance through a series of case studies, which will be interwoven with a discussion of the ontology of performance or body art. All of this material forms the backbone of my book *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (forthcoming from the University of Minnesota Press), which argues that body art instantiates the radical shift in subjectivity from a modernist to a post-modernist mode. Making use of a feminist poststructuralism informed by phenomenology, I argue this by reading this transfigured subjectivity through the works themselves (specifically: the works as documentary traces, and this goes even for those events I also experienced “in the flesh”; I view these, through the memory screen, and they become documentary in their own right). I read body art performances as enacting the dispersed, multiplied, spe-

cific subjectivities of the late capitalist, postcolonial, post-modern era: subjectivities that are acknowledged to exist always already in relation to the world of other objects and subjects; subjectivities that are always already intersubjective as well as interobjective.<sup>2</sup> To the point, I insist that it is precisely the relationship of these bodies/subjects to documentation (or, more specifically, to re-presentation) that most profoundly points to the dislocation of the fantasy of the fixed, normative, centered modernist subject and thus most dramatically provides a radical challenge to the masculinism, racism, colonialism, classism, and heterosexism built into this fantasy.

### Case Study 1: Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll*, 1975

*In Interior Scroll, first performed in 1975, Schneemann performed herself in an erotically charged narrative of pleasure that works against the grain of the fetishistic and scopophilic “male gaze” (fig. 2). Covering her face and body in strokes of paint, Schneemann then pulled a long, thin coil of paper from her vagina (“like a ticker tape . . . plumb line . . . the umbilicus and tongue”),<sup>3</sup> unrolling it to read a narrative text to the audience. Part of this text read as follows: “I met a happy man, / a structuralist filmmaker . . . he said we are fond of you / you are charming / but don't ask us / to look at your films / . . . we cannot look at / the personal clutter / the persistence of feelings / the hand-touch sensibility.”<sup>4</sup> Through this action, which extends “exquisite sensation in motion” and “originates with . . . the fragile persistence of line moving into space,” Schneemann integrated the occluded interior of the female body (with the vagina as “a translucent chamber”) with its mobile exterior, refusing the fetishizing process, which requires that the woman not expose the fact that she is not lacking but possesses genitals, and they are nonmale.<sup>5</sup>*

*Movement secures Schneemann's momentary attainment of subjectivity (which coexists uneasily with her simultaneous situation as a picture of desire). The performative body, as Schneemann argues, “has a value that static depiction . . . representation won't carry”; she is concerned, she has said, with breaking down the distancing effect of modernist practice.<sup>6</sup> And yet, how can I, who experienced this work first through a series of black-and-white photographs published in Schneemann's More Than Meat Joy, then through a dissatisfyingly short clip in a video compilation of her work<sup>7</sup>—how can I speak of its disruption of the fetishizing effects of “static depiction”? I “know” this movement through the stuttered sequence of pictures, through the tiny fragment of performance on the videotape. I sit, still and quiet, and feel the movement pulse from picture to picture, along the slick surface of the magnetic tape.*

*The female subject is not simply a “picture” in Schne-*

mann's scenario, but a deeply constituted (and never fully coherent) subjectivity in the phenomenological sense, dynamically articulated in relation to others (including me, here and now in my chair), in a continually negotiated exchange of desire and identification. Schneemann plays out the oscillatory exchange between subject- and objectivity, between the masculine position of speaking discourse and the feminine position of being spoken. By "speaking" her "spokeness" already and integrating the image of her body (as object) with the action of making itself, Schneemann plays out the ambivalence of gendered identity—the fluidity of the positions of "male" and "female," subject and object as we live gender in post-Freudian culture.

Was (or, for that matter, is) there anything more "present" than Schneemann, in her seemingly fully revealed sexual subjectivity, in *Interior Scroll*? Would I have been able to experience her sexed subjectivity more "truthfully" had I been there (to smell and feel the heat of her body)?

One of the major conceptual and theoretical issues highlighted by body art as performance (which in this way, among others, is closely linked to the contemporaneous movements of Minimalism and Conceptualism), is that of the ontology of the art "object." Most early accounts of these practices made heroic claims for the status of performance as the only art form to guarantee the presence of the artist. Thus, in 1975 Ira Licht triumphantly proclaimed that bodyworks do away with the "intermediary" mediums of painting and sculpture to "deliver . . . information directly through transformation."<sup>8</sup> And, in the early 1970s, Rosemary Mayer claimed body art to be a direct reflection of the artist's life experiences, while Cindy Nemser described the "primary goal of body art" as "bring[ing] the subjective and objective self together as an integrated entity," which is then presumably experienced directly by the audience.<sup>9</sup> More recently, Catherine Elwes argued that performance art "offers women a unique vehicle for making that direct unmediated access [to the audience]. Performance is about the 'real-life' presence of the artist. . . . She is both signifier and that which is signified. Nothing stands between spectator and performer."<sup>10</sup>

I have already made clear that I specifically reject such conceptions of body art or performance as delivering in an unmediated fashion the body (and implicitly the self) of the artist to the viewer. The art historian Kathy O'Dell has trenchantly argued that, precisely by using their bodies as primary material, body or performance artists highlight the "representational status" of such work rather than confirming its ontological priority. The representational aspects of this work—its "play within the arena of the symbolic" and, I would add, its dependence on documentation to attain symbolic status within the realm of culture—expose the impossibility of attaining full knowledge of the self

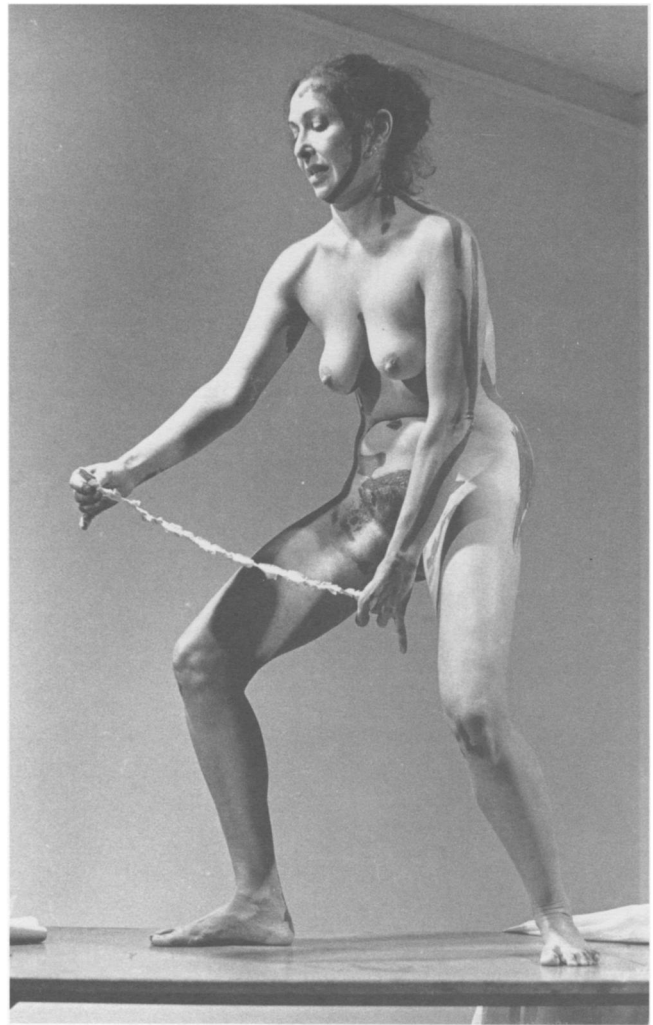


FIG. 2 Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll*, 1975.

through bodily proximity. Body art, finally, shows that the body can never "be known 'purely' as a totalizable, fleshy whole that rests outside of the arena of the symbolic."<sup>11</sup> Having direct physical contact with an artist who pulls a scroll from her vaginal canal does not ensure "knowledge" of her subjectivity or intentionality any more than does looking at a film or picture of this activity, or looking at a painting that was made as the result of such an action.

Body art, through its very performativity and its unveiling of the body of the artist, surfaces the insufficiency and incoherence of the body-as-subject and its inability to deliver itself fully (whether to the subject-in-performance her/himself or to the one who engages with this body). Perhaps even more to the point than O'Dell's suggestive observations is Peggy Phelan's insistence on the way in which the body-in-performance puts forward its own lack:

*Performance uses the performer's body to pose a question about the inability to secure the relation between subjectivity and the body per se; performance uses the body to frame the lack of Being promised by and through the body—that*

*which cannot appear without a supplement. . . . performance marks the body itself as loss. . . . for the spectator the performance spectacle is itself a projection of the scenario in which her own desire takes place.*<sup>12</sup>

14 Body art can thus be said to dislocate the modernist assumption of authorial plenitude (where the author, whose body is veiled but nonetheless implicitly male, is thought to be instantiated by the work of art and vice versa).<sup>13</sup> Body art flaunts the body itself as loss or lack: that is, as fundamentally lacking in the self-sufficiency (claimed by Elwes et al.) that would guarantee its plenitude as an unmediated repository of selfhood. The “unique” body of the artist in the body artwork only has meaning by virtue of its contextualization within the codes of identity that accrue to the artist’s body and name. Thus, this body is not self-sufficient in its meaningfulness but relies not only on an authorial context of “signature” but on a receptive context in which the interpreter or viewer may interact with this body. When understood in its full open-endedness, live performance makes this contingency, the intersubjectivity of the interpretive exchange, highly pronounced and obvious since the body’s actions can be interfered with and realigned according to spectatorial bodies/subjects on the register of the action itself; documents of the body-in-performance are just as clearly contingent, however, in that the meaning that accrues to this action, and the body-in-performance, is fully dependent on the ways in which the image is contextualized and interpreted.

Seemingly acting as a “supplement” to the “actual” body of the artist-in-performance, the photograph of the body art event or performance could, in fact, be said to expose the body itself as supplementary, as both the visible “proof” of the self and its endless deferral. The supplement, Jacques Derrida has provocatively argued, is a “terrifying menace” in its indication of absence and lack but also “the first and surest protection . . . against that very menace. This is why it cannot be given up.”<sup>14</sup> The sequence of supplements initiated by the body art project—the body “itself,” the spoken narrative, the video and other visuals within the piece, the video, film, photograph, and text documenting it for posterity—announces the necessity of “an infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary mediations that produce the sense of the very thing they defer: the mirage of the thing itself, of immediate presence, or originary perception. Immediacy is derived. . . . The play of substitution fills and marks a determined lack.” Derrida notes that “the indefinite process of supplementarity has always already infiltrated presence, always already inscribed there the space of repetition and the splitting of the self.”<sup>15</sup>

Derrida’s insight explains the equivocal position of the body in modernist and postmodernist art discourse. Within the modernist logic of formalism, the body of the

artist and of the interpreter—in its impurity—must be veiled, its supplementarity hidden from view. The formalist insists upon the “disinterestedness” of his interpretations and such disinterestedness requires a pure relation between the art object and its supposedly inherent meaning (embedded in its “form,” to be excavated by the discerning interpreter). The supplementarity of the body corrupts this logic. For the nascent postmodernists such as Nemser and Elwes who wish to privilege performance or body art as antiformalist in its merging of art and life, its delivery of the body/subject of the artist directly to the viewer, the body must be seen as an unmediated reflection of the self whose presence guarantees the “redemptive” quality of art as activism. I argue in my book on body art, however, that body art practices are never unequivocally anti- or postmodernist and certainly not guarantors of presence. Unlike formalist modernism, which veils the body of the artist to occlude its supplementarity (such that its transcendence—its masculinity—seems obvious and natural),<sup>16</sup> body art performances exacerbate the body’s supplementarity and the role of representation in momentarily securing its meanings through visible codes signaling gender, race, and other social markers.

#### Case Study 2: Yayoi Kusama’s Self-Portrait Photographs, c. 1960

*There she is, enacting herself as pinup on one of her vertiginous landscapes of phallic knobs (woman-as-phallus meets phallus-as-sign-of-male-privilege): naked, heavily made-up in the style of the 1960s, she sports high heels, long black hair, and polka dots covering her bare flesh (fig. 3). As Kris Kuramitsu has argued, this photograph “is only one of many that highlight [Kusama’s] naked, Asian female body. These photographs, and the persona that cultivated/was cultivated by them is what engenders the usual terse assessment [in art discourse] of Kusama as ‘problematic.’”<sup>17</sup>*

*Kusama plays on her “doubled otherness”<sup>18</sup> vis-à-vis American culture: She is racially and sexually at odds with the normative conception of the artist as Euro-American (white) male. Rather than veil the “fact” of her difference(s) (seemingly irrefutably confirmed by the visible evidence registered by her body), Kusama exacerbated it. (Intentionally? Would I have “known” had I been there for her public “performances” of self?) In a portrait of artists who participated in the 1965 Nul exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Kusama sticks out like a sore thumb: there she stands, front and center—among a predictably bourgeois group of white, almost all male Euro-Americans (dressed in suits)—her tiny body swathed in a glowing white silk kimono.<sup>19</sup>*

*Am I an object? Am I a subject? Kusama continues to perform these questions in the most disturbingly direct of ways, posing herself in 1993, dressed in polka-dotted fabric on a polka-dotted floor in front of a mirror reflecting a*



FIG. 3 Yayoi Kusama, *Self-Portrait*, 1962.

*polka-dotted wall (her installation Mirror Room and Self-Obliteration). Now, her pose and garb remove her from us, camouflage shifting her into the realm of potential invisibility (“self-obliteration”). She still can’t decide whether she wants to proclaim herself as celebrity or pin-up (object of our desires) or artist (master of intentionality). Either way, her “performance” takes place as representation (pace Warhol, she’s on to the role of documentation in securing the position of the artist as beloved object of the art world’s desires); she comprehends the “rhetoric of the pose” and its specific resonance for women and people of color. The pictures of Kusama are deeply embedded in the discursive structure of ideas informing her work that is her “author-function.”<sup>20</sup>*

Rather than confirming the ontological coherence of the body-as-presence, body art depends on documentation,

confirming—even exacerbating—the supplementarity of the body itself. Predictably, although many have relied on the photograph, in particular, as “proof” of the fact that a specific action took place or as a marketable object to be raised to the formalist height of an “art” photograph, in fact such a dependence is founded on belief systems similar to those underlying the belief in the “presence” of the body-in-performance. Kristine Stiles has brilliantly exposed the dangers of using the photograph of a performative event as “proof” in her critique of Henry Sayre’s book *The Object of Performance*. Sayre opens his first chapter with the now-mythical tale of Rudolf Schwarzkogler’s suicidal self-mutilation of his penis in 1966, a story founded on the circulation of a number of “documents” showing a male torso with bandaged penis (a razor blade lying nearby). Stiles, who has done primary research on the artist, points

out that the photograph, in fact, is not even of Schwarzkogler but, rather, of another artist (Heinz Cibulka) who posed for Schwarzkogler's entirely fabricated ritual castration.<sup>21</sup>

Sayre's desire for this photograph to entail some previous "real" event (in Barthesian terms, the *having been there* of a particular subject and a particular action)<sup>22</sup> leads him to ignore what Stiles describes as "the contingency of the document not only to a former action but also to the construction of a wholly fictive space."<sup>23</sup> It is this very contingency that Sayre's book attempts to address through his argument that the shift marked by performance and body art is that of the "site of presence" from "art's object to art's audience, from the textual or plastic to the experiential."<sup>24</sup> Sayre's fixation on "presence," even while he acknowledges its new destabilized siting in reception, informs his unquestioning belief in the photograph of performance as "truth."

Rosalind Krauss has recognized the philosophical reciprocity of photography and performance, situating the two as different kinds of indexicality. As indexes, both labor to "substitute the registration of sheer physical presence for the more highly articulated language of aesthetic conventions."<sup>25</sup> And yet, I would stress, in their failure to "go beyond" the contingency of aesthetic codes, both performance and photography announce the supplementarity of the index itself. The presentation of the self—in performance, in the photograph, film, or video—calls out the mutual supplementarity of the body and the subject (the body, as material "object" in the world, seems to confirm the "presence" of the subject; the subject gives the body its significance as "human"), as well as of performance or body art and the photographic document. (The body art event needs the photograph to confirm its having happened; the photograph needs the body art event as an ontological "anchor" of its indexicality.)

### Case Study 3: Annie Sprinkle, Post Post Porn Modernist, 1990–93

*Here's a performance I have seen in the flesh. Do I have some special access to its meaning or am I alternately distanced from/seduced by its embodied effects just as I would be through its documentation? (Note: I've also ingrained this piece, in other versions, into my memory by viewing photographs, slides, videotapes, and by talking to the artist.)*

*A sex worker, Annie Sprinkle moved into the art world with her 1985 participation in Deep Inside Porn Stars, a performance at Franklin Furnace in New York.<sup>26</sup> Since then, she has performed in art venues as a whore/performer turned art/performer, still with "clients" to seduce and pleasure; one of the effects of Sprinkle's merging of "sex work" with "art work" is the collapsing of class distinctions (from lower-class whore/porn star to the cultural cachet of artist).*

*She has also transformed her pornographic film career, moving into the production of self-help/"art" videos on female and transsexual pleasure.<sup>27</sup> Sprinkle's work is nothing if not about mediation. (Perhaps this is to be expected from someone who proffers her body regularly on the art and pornography markets; the body/self is most directly "given" and yet never really "there.")*

*Sprinkle's most incendiary performative act is part of her Post Post Porn Modernist performance; developed and performed over the last several years, the piece includes several different narrative segments. The most explosive moment occurs when Sprinkle displays her cervix to audience members: she opens her vaginal canal with a speculum and beckons audience members to file by and take a look, welcoming photography and videotaping. (It is, one senses, precisely through such acts of techno-voyeurism that Sprinkle can experience her own self-display.) Handing each spectator a flashlight to highlight the dark continent of the female sex, Sprinkle interacts with them as they file by (fig. 4).*

*Looping back to Schneemann's self-exposure of the female sex, this moment of display explodes the conventional voyeuristic relation that informs the aesthetic (where the female body is represented as "lacking" object of male viewing desire). Not only is the female sex in a general sense displayed—its "lack" refused; also put on view are the internal female genitalia, including the paradoxically invisible, unlocatable G-spot (a primary site of female pleasure). The cervix-viewing portion of Sprinkle's performance also, in Lynda Nead's terms, destroys the containing mechanisms of the aesthetic: as obscenity, Sprinkle's presentation "moves and arouses the viewer rather than bringing about stillness and wholeness."<sup>28</sup>*

*Or does it "arouse"? Sprinkle certainly knows how to give pleasure to her audience/clientele. She has been professionally trained to do so. It is difficult, in fact, to view Sprinkle's cervix in an unequivocally self-empowering way (to pretend to possess an unmediated, dominating gaze of desire). Sprinkle's sex looks back: the subject of viewing is confronted by the "eye"/"I" of the female sex.*

*This "eye"/"I" is fully contingent whether I view it "in the flesh" or "on the page." It operates as/through representation. For Sprinkle's body, in this particular scene distilled to the organs of her sex, is the image of Sprinkle as acting subject. I am no closer to "knowing" the "truth" of Sprinkle having seen and spoken to her than I would have been otherwise: She (re)presents herself to me as I sustain myself in a function of desire.<sup>29</sup> While Sprinkle can't illustrate herself as a full subject of pleasure and desire, she can situate herself in relation to us in such a way as to reclaim her own "look" (the gaze of her cunt), if only momentarily, from the voyeuristic relation. Sprinkle's performance of self points to the always already mediated nature of embodied subjectivity as well as the sexual pleasure that gives this subjectivity "life."*

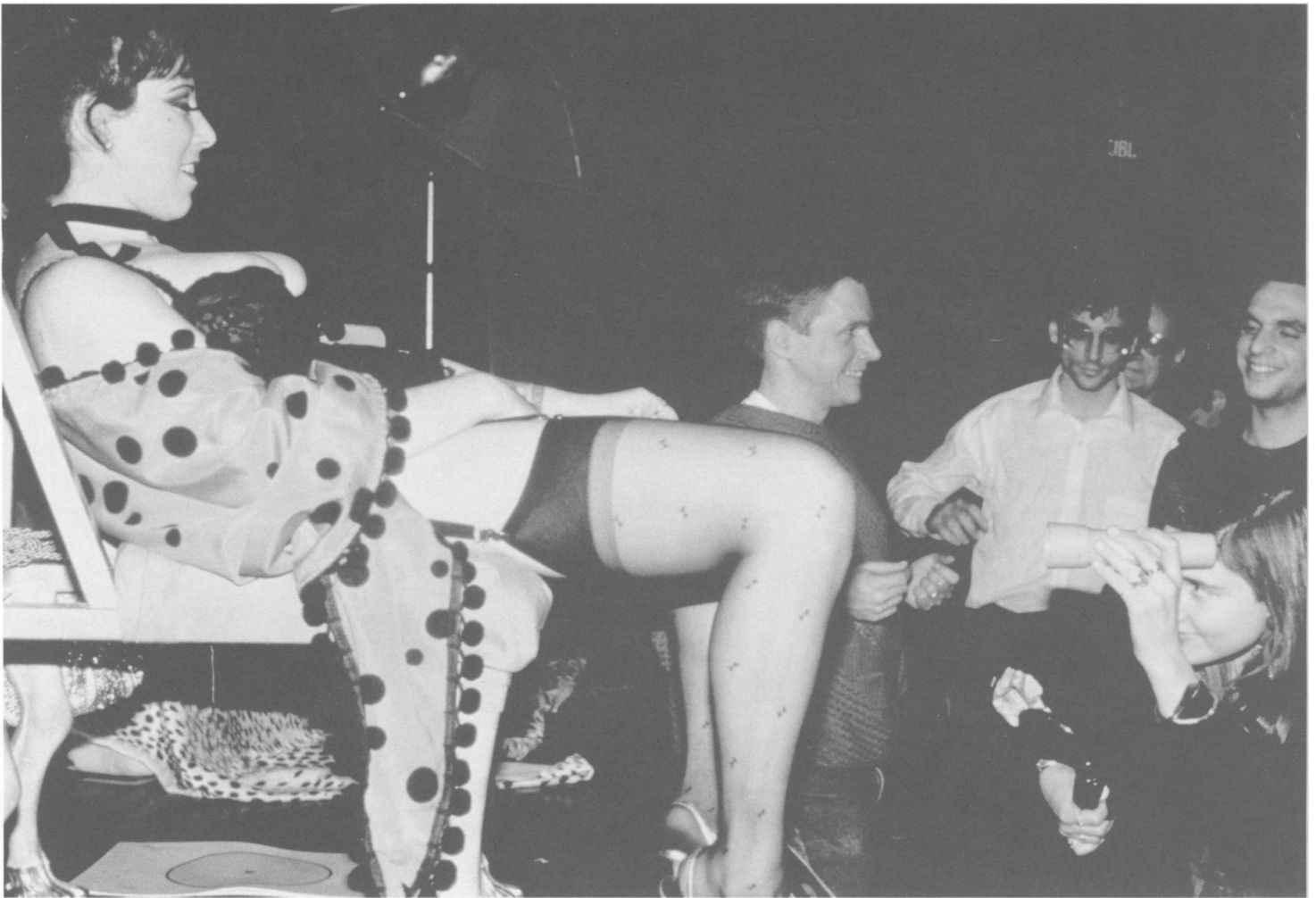


FIG. 4 Annie Sprinkle, "The Public Cervix Announcement," from *Post Post Porn Modernist*, 1990–93.

*In the final segment of Post Post Porn Modernist, Sprinkle takes on the archaic-goddess persona of "Anya" to bring herself to a twenty-minute long spiritual/sexual orgasm on stage. My first reaction on seeing this elaborately orchestrated performance of jouissance was to assert to my partner that she was faking it. My secondary response was to wonder why I needed to think that she was faking it. As Chris Straayer puts it, "Whether Annie Sprinkle is acting (and/or) experiencing orgasms in her performances cannot be determined by us"—and, I would add, this is the case whether we view the performance live or not.<sup>30</sup>*

In 1938 the Surrealist film actor, director, and playwright Antonin Artaud published his astounding collection of essays on performance called *The Theater and Its Double*. In his manifesto "The Theater of Cruelty," published in this collection, he articulates a passionate critique of realist theater, with its reliance on written texts and its "servitude to psychology and 'human interest.'"<sup>31</sup> The theater, rather, must draw on its own "concrete language" to "make space speak":

*We abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will become the theater of the action. A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action is engulfed and physically affected by it.<sup>32</sup>*

I return in closing to Artaud's vibrant text, radical in its own time, to stress the point that such a desire for immediacy is, precisely, a modernist (if in this case also clearly avant-garde) dream. In this fin-de-millennium age of multinational capitalism, virtual realities, postcolonialism, and cyborg identity politics (an age presciently acknowledged and in some ways propelled by the radical body artworks noted here), such a dream must be viewed as historically specific rather than epistemologically secure. Body and performance art expose, precisely, the contingency of the body/self not only on the other of the communicative exchange (the audience, the art historian) but on the very modes of its own (re)presentation. —

Notes

1. I use the term *body art* rather than *performance art* for several reasons. My interest in this work is informed by an embodied, phenomenological model of intersubjectivity; furthermore, the work that emerged during the period of the 1960s to the mid-1970s (before performance became theatricalized and moved to the large stage) was labeled “body art” or “bodyworks” by several contemporaneous writers who wished to differentiate it from a conception of “performance art” that was at once broader (in that it reached back to Dada and encompassed any kind of theatricalized production on the part of a visual artist) and narrower (in that it implied that a performance must actually take place in front of an audience). I am interested in work that may or may not initially have taken place in front of an audience: in work—such as that by Ana Mendieta, Carolee Schneemann, Vito Acconci, Yves Klein, or Hannah Wilke—that took place through an enactment of the artist’s body, whether it be in a “performance” setting or in the relative privacy of the studio, that was then documented such that it could subsequently be experienced through photography, film, video, and/or text.

2. Mark Poster discusses the multiplicity of the subject in the age of multinationalism and cyborg identity politics in *The Mode of Information: Poststructuralism and Social Context* (Cambridge: Polity Press and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), and *The Second Media Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995). On the body/self as simultaneously subject and object, see Vivian Sobchack, “The Passion of the Material: Prolegomena to a Phenomenology of Interobjectivity,” manuscript of an article forthcoming in Sobchack’s *Carnal Thoughts: Bodies, Texts, Scenes, and Screens* (Berkeley: University of California Press); published in German in *Ethik der Ästhetik*, ed. Christoph Wulf, Dietmar Kamper, and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994), 195–205.

3. Carolee Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works and Selected Writings*, ed. Bruce McPherson (New Paltz, N.Y.: Documentext, 1979), 234. Schneemann has performed *Interior Scroll* three times: in 1975 at Women Here and Now in East Hampton, Long Island; in 1977 at the Telluride Film Festival in Colorado; and in 1995 inside a cave as *Interior Scroll—the Cave* (with six other women). This reading of Schneemann’s piece is modified from my essay “Postfeminism, Feminist Pleasures, and Embodied Theories of Art,” in *New Feminist Criticism: Art, Identity, Action*, ed. Joanna Frueh, Cassandra Langer, and Arlene Raven (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 30–32.

4. Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy*, 238. The audience for its original performance was almost all female; see Moira Roth, “The Amazing Decade,” in *The Amazing Decade: Women and Performance Art in America, 1970–1980* (Los Angeles: Astro Artz, 1983), 14.

5. The first poetic descriptions in this sentence are from a letter sent to me by Schneemann (dated November 22, 1992), who encouraged me to revise my earlier, blunter readings of her work. Here is an example of my susceptibility to personal contact: I have been swayed by her powerful self-readings, changing my perceptions of the work. The term *translucent chamber* appears in *More Than Meat Joy*, 234.

6. Schneemann states, “my work has to do with cutting through the idealized (mostly male) mythology of the ‘abstracted self’ or the ‘invented self’—i.e., work . . . [where the male artist] retain[s] power and distancing over the situation”; in *Angry Women*, ed. Andrea Juno and V. Vale (San Francisco: Re/Search Publications, 1991), 72, 69.

7. The video, *Imaging Her Erotics*, was produced by Schneemann and Maria Beatty in 1995–96; the clip shown here is from the 1995 version of the performance. Schneemann informs me that all of the original footage of the earlier performances is in the possession of the documenter, who will not relinquish it for publication or study.

8. Ira Licht, *Bodyworks*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1975), n.p.

9. Rosemary Mayer, “Performance and Experience,” *Arts Magazine* 47, no. 3 (December 1972–January 1973): 33–36; Nemser, “Subject-Object Body Art,” *Arts Magazine* 46, no. 1 (September–October 1971): 42.

10. Catherine Elwes, “Floating Femininity: A Look at Performance Art by Women,” in *Women’s Images of Men*, ed. Sarah Kent and Jacqueline Moreau (London: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1985), 165.

11. Kathy O’Dell, “Toward a Theory of Performance Art: An Investigation of Its Sites” (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1992), 43–44.

12. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 151–52.

13. This marking of the body as absence is also exemplified in the photographic documents of Ana Mendieta’s later *Siluetas* series works, in which her body is enacted as *trace* (gash wounding the surface of the earth).

14. Jacques Derrida, “That Dangerous Supplement,” in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 154.

15. *Ibid.*, 157, 163.

16. It is Simone de Beauvoir, in her monumental 1949 book, *The Second Sex*, who links the dream of “transcendence” in Western aesthetics and philosophy to masculine subjectivity. Here, she reworks the dialectic between the self and other outlined by her partner, Jean-Paul Sartre (and more subtly transformed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jacques Lacan), with an awareness of the mapping of power through gender in patriarchy. Beauvoir rereads Sartre’s existentialist argument (in *Being and Nothingness*) that

the subject has the capacity to project himself into transcendence (the *pour-soi*) out of the fundamental immanence of the *en-soi*, arguing that the *pour-soi* is a privileged potentiality open only to male subjects in patriarchy. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949), trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970); see especially xxviii.

17. Kris Kuramitsu, “Yayoi Kusama: Exotic Bodies in the Avant-Garde,” unpublished paper submitted for Amelia Jones and Donald Preziosi’s Essentialism and Representation graduate seminar, University of California, Riverside/University of California, Los Angeles, spring 1996, 1. Kuramitsu discusses this photograph of Kusama at some length. I am indebted to Kuramitsu for introducing me to this aspect of Kusama’s oeuvre and for leading me to the best sources on the artist (see also Bhupendra Karia, ed., *Yayoi Kusama: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. [New York: Center for International Contemporary Arts, 1989]). I should note here too that it was the large number of photographs such as these published as advertisements in magazines like *Artforum* from the mid-1960s onward that initially sparked my interest in body art. I am especially interested in the role these images play in enacting the artist as a public figure: they are performative documents. The only audience for the “original” performance would have been the cameraperson and whoever else was in the room.

18. Kuramitsu, “Yayoi Kusama,” 2.

19. The other artists in the portrait include Jiro Yoshihara, founder of Gutai, Hans Haacke, Lucio Fontana, and Günther Uecker. See the labeled photograph in *Nul negentienhonderd vijf en zestig, deel 2 fotos* (Nul 1965, Part 2, Photographs), exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1965), n.p.

20. On the rhetoric of the pose, see Craig Owens, “The Medusa Effect, or, the Specular Ruse,” in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 191–200. The term *author-function* is, of course, derived from Michel Foucault’s “What Is an Author?” (1969), in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 113–38.

21. Kristine Stiles, “Performance and Its Objects,” *Arts Magazine* 65, no. 3 (November 1990): 35; Henry Sayre’s reading of Schwarzkogler’s work can be found in *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 2.

22. See Roland Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 44.

23. Stiles, “Performance and Its Objects,” 37.

24. Sayre, *The Object of Performance*, 5

25. Krauss, “Notes on the Index,” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 209.

26. See Elinor Fuchs, “Staging the Obscene Body,” *TDR (The Drama Review)* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 38–39. Chris Straayer stresses Sprinkle’s links to 1970s feminist performance works by Schneemann and Linda Montano. Sprinkle’s performance mentor, rather than her background as a sex worker. See Straayer, “The Seduction of Boundaries: Feminist Fluidity in Annie Sprinkle’s Art/Education/Sex,” in *Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power*, ed. Pamela Church Gibson and Roma Gibson (London: British Film Institute, 1993), 157.

27. Her films include *Linda/Les* and *Annie—the First Female to Male Transsexual Love Story* (1990), made in collaboration with Albert Jaccoma and John Armstrong, and *The Sluts and Goddesses Video Workshop, or How to Be a Sex Goddess in 101 Easy Steps* (1992), made by Sprinkle and Maria Beatty. See Linda Williams’s discussion of how Sprinkle maintains in her pornographic videos (and, I would add, her “art” videos) the “intimate address” to the “client” characteristic of the whore’s “performance.” Williams, “A Provoking Agent: The Pornography and Performance Art of Annie Sprinkle,” in *Dirty Looks*, 181.

28. Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality* (London: Routledge Press, 1992), 2.

29. This paraphrases Jacques Lacan, who writes of the subject “sustaining himself in a function of desire” in “Anamorphosis,” in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1978), 85.

30. Straayer, “The Seduction of Boundaries,” 174. See also Alexandra Juhasz’s discussion of Sprinkle’s extended performance of orgasm in her essay “Our Auto-Bodies, Ourselves: Representing Real Women in Video,” *Afterimage* 21, no. 7 (February 1994): 11.

31. Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1958), 90.

32. *Ibid.*, 96.

---

AMELIA JONES teaches art history at University of California, Riverside. Her recent publications include the catalogue for her exhibition at UCLA, *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago’s Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* (1996); her book *Body Art/Performing the Subject* is forthcoming from University of Minnesota Press.