

The live museum: from mausoleum to theme park

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: David Pérez is an artist and independent researcher. Master's degree in History of Contemporary Art and Visual Culture from the Museo Reina Sofía and the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, he completed the Macba Independent Studies Programme and graduated in Stage Direction and Dramaturgy from the Institut del Teatre. His work explores the lines of rupture of the neoliberal condition and the production processes linked to the body, subjectivity and territory. He is co-founder of Artefactum, a platform dedicated to creation and artistic research, and works with various cultural and educational institutions in Barcelona.

English translation, Neil CHARLTON

Abstract

This article explores the growing acceptance of the cultural framework of the live arts in contemporary art museums through the paradigm of the live museum. A trend that has spread over the last decade through exhibitions that add performance art and choreography to the portfolio of temporary exhibitions and parallel activities of many art institutions. The intangibility, temporality and direct interaction with the audience of these initiatives highlight new curatorial strategies that question the spatial environment of the exhibition, the objectual logic of the artistic work and the status of the archive as a document of history, placing the body and live action at the centre of the exhibition metabolism.

Taking these exhibitions as a starting point, the article reflects on the web of mediations and intermediations that have stimulated the museum's mortuary economy, linked to the memorial function of the mausoleum, towards a celebratory vindication of the experience associated with the recreational figure of the theme park. In order to explore this feature of the late-modern landscape, an approach to the performativity of live art exhibitions is posited, combining a topological reading of the museum's domiciliations with a biopolitical and performative reading that addresses the relationships that strain the exhibition medium with the experiential and cognitive regime of global neoliberalism.

Keywords: live arts, exhibition, cultural devices, museum mediation, curatorship, neoliberalism, globalisation, performativity, interaction, experientiality

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Live Art: Mapping of an Emergence

In the last decade many contemporary art museums have started to house exhibitions and events that, rather than confronting the audience with the artefacts of the history of art, locate the body and live action — of actors and spectators — at the core of the exhibition. This move of *the live* to the exhibition scenario implies a fundamental change with respect to the ontology of the exhibition apparatus and, in general, the metabolism of the museum inherited from modernity. If we take the connection that Adorno recognised between the museum and the mausoleum as definitive (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1962: 187; trans. 2008), we can only consider this anomaly of the *live museum* as a fabrication typical of the new cognitive and experiential regime of the global era.

In this context, contemporary art museums are immersed in a process of permanent restructuring to adapt to the demands for realisation, fluidity, immediacy, connectivity, adaptability and interaction that characterise neo-liberal economies.

Within what I will call the *interactive turn*¹ of contemporary art museums, the acceptance of the cultural framework of the live arts is embodied in a multitude of exhibitions that incorporate performance art and choreography into the portfolio of temporary exhibitions. It is a set of initiatives that use the presentation of re-stagings or *re-enactments* that displace the classic documentary rhetoric to recover the corporeal and experiential character of live actions. The temporality, intangibility, experientiality and interactivity that characterise these initiatives have led to the emergence of a wide spectrum of curatorial strategies that question the spatial environment of the exhibition, the objectual logic of the artwork and the status of the archive as a document of history. At the same time, museums have increased

1. By the interactive turn I mean the process of permanent adaptation of the cultural, organisational and technological structures of museums to the conditions of production, circulation and reception of culture within the new cognitive and intangible regime of globalised capitalism.

presentations, events, workshops, meetings and seminars that include live arts within their parallel activities.²

This new temporary consideration of the *exhibition event* is part of a broader process of cultural eventualisation. Here, the prevailing experience of art closes in on the short life of the curatorial event and the extemporaneous value of the artistic work to satisfy the norms of global consumption (Bauman, 1998: 21-34). In this respect, the production of events through temporary exhibitions and parallel activities has taken priority over the conservation of cultural assets. Thus, the value of cultural assets is not based so much on their auratic materiality or their historical representativeness as on their effectiveness as a cultural asset (Yúdice, 2003). In other words, on their ability to energise broad segments of the audience through the (re)production of events that contribute to developing new forms of subjectivity – intangible, temporary – and sociability – relational, affective – in the public sphere. An emphasis on the mobilisation of the public that, as we will see, runs parallel to the rhetoric of innovation that pervades the fields of culture, business and technology within neoliberal reason.

The projects referred to here range from milestones with a marked historiographic character, such as *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979* (Moca, Los Angeles, 1998) or *Life, Once More: Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art* (Witte de With, Rotterdam, 2005) to projects that explore re-appropriation, such as *Performance Re-Appropriated* (MuMoK, Vienna, 2006); including procedural exhibitions such as *Moments: A History of Performance in Ten Acts* (ZKM, Karlsruhe, 2012) or participatory exhibitions, such as *Move. Choreographing You: Art and Dance Since the 1960s* (Hayward Gallery, London, 2010), until a long list of retrospectives of performers and choreographers such as those of Tino Sehgal (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 2015), Yoko Ono (Malba, Buenos Aires, 2016), Maria Hassabi (MoMA, New York, 2016), Boris Charmatz (Tate Modern, London, 2015), Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker (Wiels, Brussels, 2015) or the celebrated *The Artist Is Present* (MoMA, New York, 2010) by the Serbian artist Marina Abramović.

In the context of Spain, this trend has also had considerable repercussion. Some of the earliest examples are *Retrospectiva* (2012), by Xavier Le Roy, and *Allan Kaprow. Altres maneres* (2013), both by the Fundació Tàpies in Barcelona. And projects by MUSAC, such as *Conferencia performativa* (2013), and several CA2M projects, such as *PER/FORM*. Further examples include: *Cómo hacer cosas con (sin) palabras* (2014), *Una exposición coreografiada* (2017) and the monographic exhibition *Dora García. Segunda vez* (2017), as well as the most recent *Esther Ferrer. Todas las variaciones son válidas, incluida esta* (2018) at MNCARS.

2. These activities take the form of periodical programmes such as Picnic Sessions (CA2M, Móstoles), Idiorritmias (MACBA, Barcelona), Estudio (MNCARS, Madrid), Radicantes. Danza y otras especies (IVAM, Valencia), Dancing Museums (Fundació Miró, 2021); occasional events such as Reactivar/reinterpretar (MNCARS, Madrid, 2012), Bailar sobre blanco (MACBA, Barcelona, 2014), Nits Salvatges (CCCB 2007-2010); and many live art public presentations and workshops.



Xavier Le Roy's retrospective (Fundació Tàpies, Barcelona, 2012). © Fundació Tàpies



Moments: A History of Performance in Ten Acts (ZKM, Karlsruhe, 2012). © Pietro Pellini



This Success or This Failure, by Tino Sehgal (Kunsten Museum of Modern Art, 2007). © Tino Sehgal



Allan Kaprow. Altres maneres (Fundació Tàpies, 2013). © Fundació Tàpies



Move. Choreographing You (Hayward Gallery, London, 2010). © Fredrik Nilsen



The Artist Is Present, by Marina Abramović (MoMA, 2010). © Jonathan Muzikar

Much of the debate that has arisen around these initiatives comes from their own genealogies and from the spatial devices where they have been shaped: the black box and the white cube³ (Bishop, 2018: 33). From the perspective that I am interested in outlining, approaches of disciplinary anchorage run the risk of overlooking the complex power relations between agents – curators, artists, managers and audiences –, practices, discourses and institutions that mobilise the exhibition environment, as well as the new conditions of the social, cultural and economic metabolism of neoliberal societies. In keeping with this consideration, it seems inadequate to me to reflect on the inclusion of performance art or choreography based on a disciplinary perspective without exploring the general conditions that have made the settlement of *the live* in the exhibition space possible and admissible.

With the intention of seizing the strategic dimension of the live arts in the cultural domain, I will partially rely on the reflections of Louis Keidan. For the founder of the Live Art Development Agency, the live arts are not a new discipline or a set of disciplines, but rather a cultural strategy that allows the inclusion of experimental processes and experiential practices that could otherwise be excluded from established cultural and heritage frameworks (Keidan, 2003). The diversity of artistic practices that come together under this umbrella includes their disciplinary positions and forms, but it enables us to place them in relation to the new subjective and experiential economies that have emerged around the creative industries and the development of cognitive capitalism.

Returning to Claire Bishop's arguments, many of the live art initiatives would have created a hybrid between the exhibition and theatre apparatuses, converging in a gray zone, where the spatial and temporal codes inherited from modernity give rise to mixed frames that, according to the author, are related to the new technological configurations of attention (Bishop, 2018: 22-42). With a markedly phenomenological viewpoint, Bishop associates the technological arrangements of the global network with the new forms of attention and the timing of the exhibition apparatus. Her perspective boldly poses the problem in technical terms, but it is subsidiary to a thought that enshrines a technological grammar based exclusively on the field of effectiveness. In this respect, my intention is to make the discussion more complex on the basis of (inter)mediations and transductions between technical data – the sphere of effectiveness –, economic data – the sphere of efficiency – and cultural data – the sphere of effectiveness – that coexist in the metabolism of the *live museum*. Through this exercise, I would like to introduce a wide-ranging reflection that, in the manner of Benjamin, starts from the “small moment” of the exhibition “to discover the crystal of the total event” (Benjamin, 1983: 463; trans. 2005).

3. Debates around performance art have concerned the politics of the event, the immanent and singular character of the action, the sublimation of presence, resistance to commercialisation or the return to the real as dominant tropes, while the insertion of choreographic practices has given rise to a set of debates that are less critical regarding its inclusion in the museum and more attentive to the opportunities that the exhibition offers to record a practice more neglected by the history of art. With a manifestly more introspective perspective, these projects reflect on the possibilities of iteration, re-appropriation, reactivation and reconstruction of dance archives through corporality.

If we accept Adorno's proposal as valid, the issue at hand could be formulated as follows: how has this idea of the live museum, which apparently fractures the sacred and mortuary economy inherited from modernity, been possible? What does this gray zone respond to, where the logic of the white cube and the black box combine to engender live galleries? How are the transformations in the modes of appearance of history that live art initiatives play out related to the new cognitive economies, the (re)folds between history and life, and the cultural metabolism of the global era? In the end, as we shall see, all these questions respond to a transhistoric conversation that has to do with the domiciliation of the museum as an archive of culture.

The Muses Exposed

*The dead are increasingly more unruly. Today they turn ironic, they ask questions.
I think they realise that they are increasingly the majority.*

Roque Dalton

In Greco-Roman tradition the word *museum* is linked to the whim of the muses. In its etymological sense, the museum is the temple of the muses or, more specifically, the mount of the muses.⁴ For Greco-Roman culture, the mounts are the sacred spaces par excellence: they are inhabited by that group of deities that are beyond men and life in the *polis*. If the deities are beyond the *polis*, in the infinitude of the mounts, the museums, as temples of the muses, appear on the threshold between the profane finitude of the city and the sacred infinitude of the mounts: they are the spaces of opening that renew and inspire life in the *polis* through the mediating arts of the muses. The muses are not exactly deities, they are beings of the interregnum, channels between the infinite and the finite, bridges that renew the cycles of the world in a gesture that reiterates and diffracts its creation.

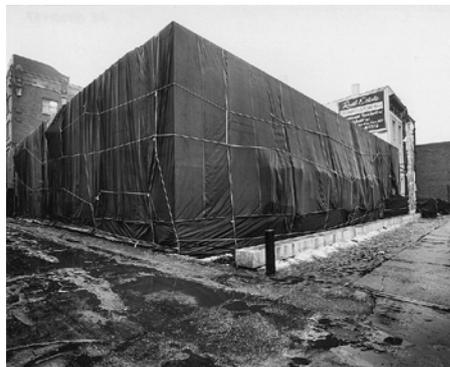
If we assume that in the West there are no mounts or gods to revere — transcendental foundations —, we only have this problem and this agonising question about us as tradition and as betrayal. There is only us: a genuinely anthropological, technical, political, historical and cultural problem. This does not mean, as we shall see, that the problem of the *us* cannot be taken up in transcendental or theological terms. Rather, it tells us that the question about (the) *us*⁵ comes in the caesura open in the archives of history. It is the

4. According to the Oxford dictionary, the word museum comes from the Latin *museum* and this, in its turn, from the Greek *moyseion*: "seat of the muses". Within Greek mythology the muses were nine beings who personified the arts and sciences. Antoine Meillet supports the hypothesis that the muse voice derives from the Indo-European root *men*, related to the Latin voices *mons* and *montis* — 'mount' —, which suggests that the muses were nymphs or deities of the mounts.

5. The problem of the *us*, at least, has two approaches within Western modernity: a political approach that leads us to the problem of the *polis* — or life in common — and a historical and cultural approach that takes us to the problem of the *arkhé* and tradition: the problem of the archive. In both cases, an anthropotechnical question arises that has to do with human (re)production. This problem has been taken up as the problem of humanisms by Peter Sloterdijk in *Rules for the human park: A response to Heidegger's "Letter on humanism"*, and also by Derrida in *Archive Fever*. In any case, here the question of what the *us* can say is, above all, the question of the world: its reproduction, its support and its renewal.

archive itself, as Derrida suggests, that poses the question as a mandate to continue renewing its future on the promise of infinity (Derrida, 1995: 44; trans. 1997). Because, in more concrete terms, as Michelangelo *manages* to say from the depths of the archive, no thought is born in us that does not bear the image of death. And since it is not unreasonable to think that a death — or a crime — could overshadow another death — or another crime —, the modern question for the museum — now as a temple of the problem *us* — will be about what deaths we should live with or, if you prefer, what deaths should matter for us. Such a perspective leads us inevitably to the problem of tradition, and to that early Nietzschean formulation of the usefulness and disadvantage of history for life (Nietzsche, 1874; trans. 2006). A mantra that continues to cast a shadow of suspicion over the museum: what archives and what stories should the museum bring to life for the life of any individual, people or nation? And what modes of relationship, as Nietzsche indicates, should we maintain with respect to the archive of history?

Based on this question about tradition, I would like to reconsider the contiguity between the sites of the museum and the mausoleum in the context of the critical studies of culture by the Frankfurt School. For Adorno, the museum machine is part of a dual death sentence: that of the museum as a school and as a factory. After the fascist drift of the European tradition and exiled in that protean land of the United States, what Adorno perceives is that, although the enlightened tradition does not save us from the barbarism of culture, the naive promises of innovation embodied by American society are also bearers of an evil that threatens to reduce the arts to the reproduction techniques of the cultural industries.⁶



Wrapped Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, 1968-1969.
© Estate of Christo V. Javacheff



Centro Georges Pompidou, *Paris*, by Piano and Rogers, 1977.
© Centro Georges Pompidou

If for the Kantian-based Enlightenment the museum is a school and, therefore, is linked to the aesthetic education of man (Schiller, 1795; trans. 1990), what begins to emerge with the consecration of industrialised societies is the paradigm of the museum as a factory (Comeron, 2007). In this dilemma between school — and European elitist culture — and industry — and

6. In this respect, Adorno's epistolary dispute with Benjamin is well known, for whom the era of technical reproducibility brings new promises of revolution that take shape around his precepts on montage and his reflections on history.

North American mercantile culture —, Adorno seems to condemn *in extremis* the monumental history of European tradition by throwing the museum into the consecrating space of the mausoleum. However, all of his later work is nothing more than an effort to resist the influxes of the cultural industries (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1962; trans. 2013). His position is paradoxical and has the unobtrusive virtue — almost to his regret, we might say — of keeping open all disputes on the question of museum mediation.

From the Nietzschean question between history and life or Arendt's hypothesis around mediation as renewal (Arendt, 1954; trans. 1996) to the more theological notes that John Berger leaves us on the relationship between the dead and the living (Berger, 2007; trans. 2011) and its implications with the allegorical and fractal procedures of Benjamin's montage, everything seems contained for modernity in that cemetery necropolis, between the threads of the dream and the awakening of a nocturnal and silenced modernity. Everything, as Benjamin would say, in its bifurcation and its two-fold conclusion as progress and barbarism. And much of this tradition supports the question of museum mediation as a zone of contact between the dead and the living. In that open interstice where conversations and contracts unfold between life and history, tradition and the future, infinity and finitude, continuity and the rupture of worlds. So, although we have chosen a *lesser moment*, what we find in the galleries of the live museum is a question that takes on an unusual density around the mediation of the museum. A dispute that, although we cannot deal with it fairly, does allow us to introduce the bipolar character of the modern condition in the caesura open between museum and theatre.

As reality-producing dimensions, time and space circumscribe the modes of operation of modernity. To the extent that objects fall from the side of space, the museum has a spatial economy while, by virtue of the modern idea according to which subjects appear in time, theatre has a temporal economy. This does not imply in any way that theatre does not produce spaces, it only indicates that theatre spaces are manifested as a function of the chronicle. However, in museums, time appears as an effect of the collection, as an interstice between the works or, more generally, as a difference between the domiciliation and arrangement of the objects in the gallery (Morey, 2014: 187-213). In this way, in modernity, the museum is constituted as an objectification apparatus that compiles the objects, materials and documents of what is to be considered as history. It is an apparatus for the production of historical truths that indicates what should be told as tradition and, therefore, as Groys suggests, that circumscribes the possibilities of the future as a difference in its surroundings (Groys, 1992; trans. 2005).

The association between the museum and the mausoleum is revealed by the complicity of the museums with power, and the sick obsession of the sovereign powers with reforming and building temples to perpetuate a sovereign order of tradition. In this respect, Adorno points out the sovereign condition that museums and theatres share as an ideological apparatus of the state, spaces for the consecration and production of collective identities linked to the interests of the government or the state (Althusser, 1970; trans. 1974). From this perspective, the museum appears as a device that fossilises

an order for the (re)production of life, to the extent that it sustains and perpetuates the history of the victors in the mode of sovereign tradition.

Theatre, in contrast, is an apparatus of subjectivation aimed at (re)producing the truth of experience. It has an eminently temporal character: it subjectivises the story through fable in order to convey a truth that, in the first place, is linked to the experiences of the subjects of the story and not to the objects. The truth of the theatre experience has to do with a well-known set of mirrors and duplications. It is by confronting myself with the *drama* — the action of the other — that a double truth reaches me: the truth of my own experience, in the truth of the existence of the other (Bakhtin, 1975; trans. 2000). Naturally, it is a contingent truth, a truth that arises from the time that makes us become subjects, from that deferred time of remembrance that always ends up revoking any figuration of the truth in the froth on the daydream. This otherness of the mirror is typical of theatre mediation in modernity. This does not imply that the modern museum cannot contain fictions, dramas or chronicles; it only indicates that its genuine operation is based on the exhibition, that is, on revealing — distancing — the drama or fiction, and not in its mimetic inversion.

If we think of art museums, it becomes immediately apparent that they are places full of fictions — potentialities of the world —, representations and narratives of all kinds. However, what defines the museum is not the works of art but the idea of the collection. It is not the particular *drama* of artists or spectators, nor even the collective dramas of history, it is the operation of forming combinations and exposing them to a retrospective viewpoint. The chronicle and the narrative are an effect of the collection. Museums form sets of works that make the past legible and constitute the truth of history on the surface of the objects that are bequeathed to us. Undoubtedly, their operation has a fabulating power, but the dramas and fictions of the museum aspire to be the space for the constitution of our present. Thus, in modernity, the museum is limited to the production of a type of properly historical fictions that have the will to bequeath to us — to ratify as truth — what was and should count for us as tradition and future — of tradition — through a complex arrangement of voids, continuities, discontinuities and ruptures on the surface of the archive.

From this perspective, the museum is once again seen as the reverse of life. From the tomb of the archive, life is nothing more than the constitutive exterior of the museum. It is its necessary, unattainable, contingent *outside*: the measure of the immeasurable. In its aim to objectify, the museum defends itself against life and, if it tells us about it, it is only through what has been withdrawn from life and placed in reserve (Groys, 1992: 15-38; trans. 2003). Within its bare, aseptic and closed rooms, the domiciliations of objects take on what Proust called a second-degree life; what, with Benjamin, we could call a passage of life: a stage between the means of life and death. The mortuary and extractive architecture removes certain objects from life — does it remove them or does it rescue them? — to produce life as an effect beyond its walls. In its opacity, the museum only affirms life as suspension: life in the background or posthumous life, where life itself outside the walls comes

to reveal itself as a radical difference of space and time: an otherness with respect to the archive (Groys, 1992: 15-38; trans. 2003). This is the nature of the museum's mediation: preserving and revealing to life its breath and inspiration in view of what is not really known. There are those who think that the museum only affirms the sovereign tradition, others prefer to think that its purpose arms the future as a difference, many others seem to be clear that this possibility must be manufactured socially, and there are those who have even affirmed, like Borges, that these compiling machines were only created so that men could get lost in their galleries (Borges, 1941). Among all the suspicions formed about the museum, Borges' has the particular audacity to open the senses, instead of closing them in explanatory reason.

So let us return to that oxymoron of the live museum to discern not so much the opposing senses — which seem clear — but the senses that find a more appropriate formulation in the playful complex of the theme park than in the sepulchral silence of the mausoleum. Because far from what has been set out so far, when we attend many *live art* shows, the exhibition apparatus appears as a fluid psychosomatic plot, driven by the times of realisation of the performers or the audience. In these exhibitions we enter a space where history is presented as a vivid, corporeal, energetic world, within a process of actualisation where all the polarities set out so far are combined with aberrant forms for the modern spirit.

Intermediate Zones: The Promises of Performativity

To explore the new modes of operation of the exhibition, we are going to focus our attention on the notions of apparatus (Déotte, 2012; trans. 2012) and device (Agamben, 2010; trans. 2014). To do this, I propose a reading guideline that involves relating the ecology of the exhibition environment with the new cultural metabolism. A reading that will lead us to explore the arrangements between the discourses of art, curatorial practices and new forms of institutionalism that collapse in the paradigm of the live museum and its total arrangement as a theme park of humanity. This proposal leads us to consider the way in which the *performative turn of intermedial practices*, the *experiential turn of minimal art*, the *discursive turn of curatorship* and the *relational turn of participatory practices* have helped broaden the grammars of the exhibition. And to how this opening has been displacing the exhibition as a space for the representation of history towards the procedural, phenomenological, experimental, dematerialised and participatory models that facilitate the passage to the cultural framework of the live arts.

Taken together, these four scenarios have made the exhibition space evolve through various models of efficacy. Such models bring together a large part of the exhibition grammars on which the discourses of the performativity of the exhibition circulate in our contemporaneity. According to Dorothea von Hantelmann, the notion of performativity in art puts into perspective “the contingent and elusive realm of impact and effect that art brings about both situationally — that is, in a given spatial and discursive context — and relationally, that is, in relation to a viewer or a public”

(Von Hantelmann, 2010: 25; trans. 2017). Therefore, performativity seeks to recognise and evaluate the reality-producing dimension of the arts and introduce it into the discourse to assess its effects. To understand its hegemonic position as evaluative discourse, it is appropriate to consider performativity — in the manner of Butler — as a domain in which power acts as discourse (Butler, 1999: 275; trans. 2007), driving the performance of the apparatus and the relationships between the agents based on the domiciliation of the enunciations that are consigned as effects, and the promises that are formulated around the reality-producing capacity of the arts — cultural efficacy.

According to these considerations, the elusive notion of *effect* turns out to be a contingent construction that depends on the arrangements and games of distribution between artistic practices — as visibilities —, the enunciations that verify them and the specific forms of institutionalism that unfold in the space of contemporary art. From this perspective, the discourses of performativity are not limited to verifying the effects of art exhibitions, but rather lead their performance in relation to the promises they formulate, organising competences of the arts based on models that play with cultural *efficacies*, business *efficiencies* and technical *effectivities* (McKenzie, 2001: 55-95)

Four Scenarios of the Exhibition

First, I would like to consider the body of work that Dick Higgins grouped under the category intermedia. A heterogeneous compendium of practices that had as its epicentre the Black Mountain College and John Cage musical performances, but also included action painting, environments, happenings by Kaprow or the Gutai Group, the audiovisual experimentations of Fluxus, performance art, mail art or part of conceptual art (Higgins, 1984). The intermedia thrust of the action introduced the studio model, which led the moment of action to the heart of the exhibition (Calderoni, 2007: 66-83) and questioned the representative and objectual logics of the gallery. In this respect, the *performative turn* of the *intermedial* practices would be at the base of an outbreak of paradigms that reshape the exhibition according to temporal and dematerialised logics — in the case of performance art and happenings —, environmental and procedural logics — in the case of environments and installations — or even, participatory logics through many of the Fluxus events.

Taken together, these proposals vindicated immediate modes of relationship with the audience. They broke the disembodied frame of the gaze and the illusionism of the performance, arousing a direct awareness of the observer in the encounter with art. This situation has been characterised — in relation to the heroic history of action painting and body art — as a *sacramental trinity*, which removes the body of the spectator by identifying it with the body of the artist and art (O'Doherty, 2000: 55; trans. 2011). In this respect, although it is true that the artist's body bursts into the gallery space through artistic action, the audience's corporeality would have emerged from certain positions on the literalness of the artistic object associated with minimal art.

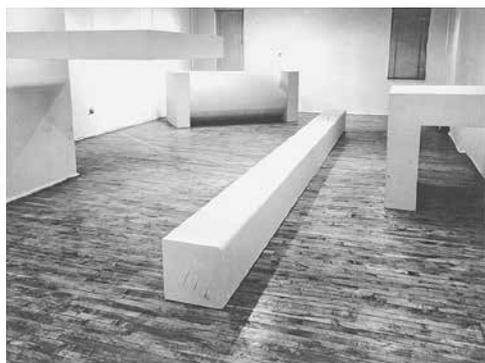


18 Happenings in Six Parts, by Allan Kaprow (Reuben Gallery, New York, 1959). © Fred W. McDarrah

As Dorothea von Hantelmann argues, minimal art would have introduced a phenomenological model into the grammar of the exhibition space, leading the viewer's experience to a topological awareness of their position in space (Von Hantelmann, 2014). According to Von Hantelmann, this phenomenological model would also question the historiographic model inherited from the 19th century, according to which viewers were subjected to the authority of history under a representative scopic regime. From this perspective, minimalist objects would have led the viewer's perception towards the exteriority of the space, and therefore introduced a situational dimension that, as Hal Foster points out, asks the viewer "to explore the perceptual consequences of a particular intervention in a given site" (Foster, 1996: 41; trans. 2001).

In this context, Michael Fried's criticisms of the literalness of the minimal object are well known, which, according to the author, leads the exhibition to an intermediate space of experience that he calls *theatricality* (Fried, 1968: 173-194; trans. 2004). From the logic of the specificity of the medium, Fried found scandalous, for modern sensibilities, the loss of autonomy of minimalist sculpture, which literally consecrated its artistic existence to dependence on an audience. In any case, theatricality introduces a reconsideration of the spaces of intermediation: the opening of the exhibition apparatus to an open and agonising space, where the modern status of the white cube and the black box enters a tense space of negotiation.

Another of the great criticisms of the minimalist operation is described by Rosalind Krauss. In "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum", Krauss argues that the regime of experience introduced by minimalism runs parallel to the reconfiguration of the museum on the alienating logics of industrial capitalism. From her perspective, the phenomenological subject of minimalism sacrifices the experience of history through the intensification of an immediate and fragmented experience, where the viewer finds no space



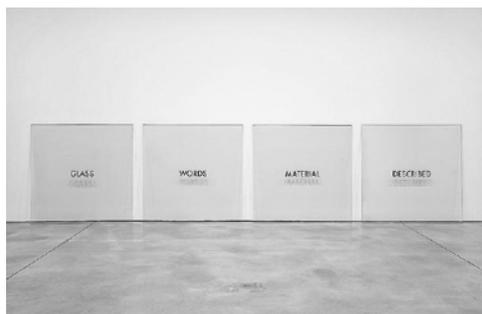
One-person exhibition, by Robert Morris (Green Gallery, New York, 1964).
© Robert Morris / Artists Rights Society

for reflexivity and otherness (Krauss, 1990: 3-17). Based on Krauss' arguments, Dorothea von Hantelmann has established a correlation between the experiential turn of art and the centrality that consumption and the production of experiences have acquired within our societies. To do so, the author takes up the theses that Thomas Schulze outlines in *The Experience Society*. According to Schulze, capitalist society unfolds a type of speculative economy that relies on the empowerment of desire and demand — and not so much of supply and need — based on the logics of intensification, spectacularisation and eventualisation of the experience (Schulze, 2005: 55-57). Although the most forceful in this respect has been Benjamin Buchloh, pointing out that the centrality of contemporary art museums is based on the assertion of a new financial order, “because this extraordinary miracle of the transformation from nothing into surplus value is on display perpetually” (Buchloh, 2009: 26).

With the outbreak of conceptual art and the emergence of curatorial mediation, this tendency to dematerialise the artistic object found a new thrust through notions such as concept or discourse. Within what has become known as the *discursive turn* of the arts, the exhibition apparatus is reshaped around the sign as a fundamentally linguistic space.⁷ In this respect, the strengthening of curatorial positions in the 1960s and the conceptual strategies of the 1970s would have revitalised art as the narrative of art, emphasising what with Mijaíl Bakhtín we could call the general scope of statements or enunciations. As Paul O'Neill notes, in this context, exhibitions are beginning to be perceived as powerful tools of subjectivation with which to act in the domain of discourses, relaunching the semiotic and archaeological models of the exhibition (O'Neill, 2012: 10; trans. 2012).

The decisive movement of this turn involves conceiving the collection as an archive, insofar as the archive de-hierarchises the corpus of art history, overturning the library order of tradition. The notion of the archive reveals the ethnocentric presupposition of the collection and the power structures that have shaped the discipline of the history of art and the modern museum through the determination of the performativity of the archiving gesture (Derrida, 1995: 24; trans. 1997). According to these ideas, the new museology

7. Artists such as Joseph Kosuth or the *Art & Language* group exemplify the way in which the gallery becomes a semiotic score by emphasising the reflective, analytical and linguistic functions of the concept of and discourse on art.



Glass Words Material Described, by Joseph Kosuth (1965). © Joseph Kosuth



Index 2 (III), Art @ Language (Documenta V, 1972). © Lisson Gallery

and institutional criticism consolidate the narratives of difference relying on Derridian deconstruction. From this perspective, the recourse to re-enactments within the cultural framework of the live arts participates in the general enthusiasm regarding archaeological models and the actualisation processes that reveal the possibilities of archives and cultural repertoires⁸ (Lepecki, 2010: 63-84; trans. 2013).

To complete this outline, we would like to end by considering the scenario of relational aesthetics.⁹ According to Bourriaud, relational practices put the sphere of human interactions into perspective, proposing art as a space for the production of forms of sociability. From the point of view at hand, this turn would have led to the entry of a series of community, participatory and collaborative models that define the exhibition environment as a social interstice or a meeting space “where these instantaneous collectivities are installed, governed by the degree of participation required of the viewer by the artist, the nature of the work and the models of the social proposed or represented” (Bourriaud, 1998: 15; trans. 2008). This consideration of the interaction not only implies an overflow of the notions of work and authorship, but also, through participation, shifts the viewer’s position to the realm of the actual production of the work.

Bourriaud’s sociology of art contrasts with the visions that define art as a fictional space that actively plays with forms of visibility and enunciation to reshape the *partage du sensible*. Strong criticism of the relational scenario has rained down from those latitudes. One of the most explicit was formulated by Jacques Rancière, pointing out that many relational practices are not only based on a consensual order of politics — and therefore police and conservative order, according to the author’s terms — but also that, by virtue of a supreme ethical logic, identify and suppress both the forms of art and the forms of politics (Rancière, 2004: 59-78; trans. 2004). Rancière’s

8. In this respect, André Lepecki’s ideas regarding the body as archive and the corporeal and affective potentialities of reincarnation are well known. For Lepecki, the desire to archive dance does not involve a nostalgic fixation on a past — as Foster suggests regarding the visual arts — but rather the liberation of the unrealised possibilities that the archive keeps in reserve. The central issue in this dispute is that the legibility of the archive is not based on an intentional and directed order, but on an accidental and contingent order. Thus, the subjectivism of many approaches to the archive runs parallel to the onanism of our contemporaneity.

9. The relational scenario was created around Nicolas Bourriaud’s considerations regarding some practices developed in the 1990s by artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija, Vanessa Beecroft, Philippe Parreno, Christine Hill, Pierre Huyghe or Henrik Plenge Jacobsen, among others.

considerations draw attention to the way in which the relational scenario defines art directly as a mode of social production, advocating the effectiveness of the art form and suppressing the mediating power of fiction.¹⁰



Universal Fantastic Occupation, by Július Koller and Rirkrit Tiravanija (Centre Pompidou, 2015). © Michel Zabé



VB68, by Vanessa Beecroft (Museum für Moderne Kunst, 2011). © Vanessa Beecroft

These four scenarios highlight what we could call the vocabulary of the performative in the exhibition and the models of efficacy that come to be found in the live museum as a theme park of humanity. A space designed according to immediate forms of interaction — where mediations tend to be suppressed through the transparency of the system —,¹¹ and the modern discretion that established a distance between subjects and objects is subsumed for the sake of a direct experience of time: the *real time* of the realisation. The paradox of this approach lies in the fact that the greatest promoters of the rhetorics of immediacy and transparency that surround the live arts are precisely those who, by position and profession, exercise the greatest control over the intermediation system. Thus, it is essential to analyse the leading role of curatorship from the 1960s to the present day.

Liveness: The New Museum Interface

As Paul O'Neill has pointed out, the increase, centrality and diversity of exhibitions run parallel to the priority that curators have given to the exhibition space as an instance of mediation and debate against the autonomous role of the works of art (O'Neill, 2012: 10; trans. 2012). In recent decades its attributions in the art system have only increased, extending the tasks associated with the arrangement of art archives towards tasks of socialisation, organisation, audience creation and educational approaches (Sternfeld and Ziaja, 2012: 21-24). Their polyhedral constitution within the art system is one more reflection of the dynamics that we have been proposing regarding

10. Rancière argues that supposedly critical art has been reduced either to artistic practices without a dissensual nature, or to others that suppress the function of art as a provider of visual devices, certifying the maxim that there is nothing to see. In this respect, Rancière's position closes on what he calls the aesthetic regime of the arts, where the notion of cultural efficacy cannot be directly translated into an effective politics of the media insofar as art rests on the production of fictions that displace the positions occupied by the forms of the visible, the speakable and the possible.

11. Within the rhetorics of transparency, mediation is perceived as an element loaded with negativity and an obstacle that should be removed for the optimal circulation of financial, symbolic and psychosomatic flows of global neoliberalism (Han, 2012; trans. 2013). From our perspective, the rapid dissemination of the cultural framework of the live arts is related to the demands of transparency implicit in the interaction models that ensure the vitality and full-time connectivity of the network society.

the fusion of the models of efficacy and efficiency. Thus, the prototypes of cultural efficacy are assembled, which we associate with the visions of the curator as a creator (Altshuler et al., 1994), and those of economic efficiency, which we associate with the curator as a facilitator of the new creative economies pointed out by Ferguson (Greenberg et al., 1996: 81-112) in the new technological framework of global art.

Most historians agree on locating the formation of curatorship in the live arts in the 1990s, within a moment of special visibility of the sector that Michael Brenson called *The Curator's Moment*. In this context, the work of the British Lois Keidan at the head of the Live Art Development Agency (LADA) and the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) is often pointed out as an essential contribution to the rapid spread of the live art category in the rest of continental Europe. In Keidan's words, live art "represents a challenge to received ways of doing, thinking and seeing, and a way of opening frontiers to any political, social or cultural agenda" (Keidan, 1999: 1). If we take this (pro)position seriously, live art does not emerge from a model of positive affinities and formal similarities between practices, but from a principle of non-identity, from a gap in the definition that sustains the myth of the transgressive liminality in its lack of definition as a cultural mediation strategy (Hoffmann, 2009: 101). According to this perspective, the live arts are not an artistic form but a kind of rhetorical and curatorial space that supposedly operates in the cultural and aesthetic margins, avoiding institutionalised recognition.

The implicit myth of the cultural liminality¹² of live art has been persuasively debunked by Philip Auslander in *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (2008). Auslander's study reveals the hegemonic position that the logics of liveness occupy within cultural discourses and practices, both in performative settings and in the media sphere (Auslander, 2008: 191-203). This consideration puts into perspective the idea that the supposed institutional subversion of live art as a cultural strategy is not an exception within cultural policies, but the same norm that is administered as a claim within the experiential rhetorics of neoliberalism and the logics of eventualisation of hypermediated cultures. At this level, vitality is clearly described as an ideological strategy associated with a set of meanings — experience, risk, intensity, authenticity, spontaneity, immediacy, transparency, etc. — that move culture within the habits of consumption and production of neoliberal reason (Laval et al., 2009: 142; trans. 2013).

Another example of this is the historical correlation between the advent of the live art cultural framework and labour policies in the British context around the creative industries. A socioeconomic programme based on the culturalisation of the economy that, among other things, enhanced life through the prominence of multiculturalism embodied in the work of the Young British Artists (Albarrán, 2019: 158-167). According to Gerald Raunig, the objective of

12. On the issue of liminality, it is interesting to note the role of this notion in the formation of Performance Studies and Cultural Studies. Based on Turner's developments, McKenzie proposes the term liminal norm to make explicit the normative function developed by the notion of liminality in Performance Studies, guiding the construction of the objects of analysis, the selection of cases, and the methodology itself in a kind of self-founding fantasy based on a supposed suspension of order (McKenzie, 2001: 51).

these policies was to push the logics of creativity and cultural innovation as one of the main economic and social assets of Cool Britannia (Raunig [et al.], 2013: 191-203). In this respect, as George Yúdice has shown, what lies behind this idea of culture is a new conception that departs both from the model of enlightening exaltation — Schiller — and the anthropological model of the way of life — Williams — to define culture as an available resource that, first and foremost, implies its management and administration. According to Yúdice, this process has folded art on an expanded conception of culture articulated on the basis of utilitarian criteria, which is represented as capable of solving and facing all kinds of problems (Yúdice, 2003: 26; trans. 2003).

In this respect, it is instructive to return to the extension of the powers of the curator. In this way, it is possible to capture the displacement of what Mick Wilson called the *Foucauldian moment in art* in relation to the hegemony of discourse, towards the question of the reception and interactive management of audiences. Rogoff has referred to this displacement as the *educational turn* in curating (Rogoff, 2008), while Beatrice von Bismarck understands it as the transition from curating to the curatorial (Sternfeld and Ziaja, 2012: 21-24). In both cases, the substance is a biopolitical conception of the cultural device that subsumes in terms of audiences the set of agents, operations, exchanges and interactions that take place around the exhibition.

The totalising adoption of the notion of audience in the field of art implies a substantial lack of distinction between the agents and the means of the exhibition — artists, curators, publics, etc.—: a field of intermediations reduced to the norm of permanent interaction in an artificial and controlled environment according to the model of the digital panopticon (Han, 2012; trans. 2013). Or, in other words, a musealisation of existence (Marchán Fiz, 2008: 138-157) through the extension of display and containerisation systems (Flórez, 2014), which process life immediately in the moment of its realisation. In this respect, many of the live art exhibitions begin to function as interfaces that connect and optimise the experience of the audience within a hyper-connected panoptical environment.



Your body of work, by Olafur Eliasson (Moderna Museet, 2015).
© Anders Sune Berg



Green Light Corridor, by Bruce Nauman in *Move: Choreographing You* (Hayward Gallery, London, 2010).
© Jonathan Hordle

If we return to the field of live art exhibitions, I believe that we are already in a position to understand why, in the new anthropotechnical configuration of the global era, the machinery of the museum jumps from the mausoleum to the theme park. As we have seen, live art exhibitions not only assimilate all the postmodern turns of the exhibition, but also crystallise the emergence of the paradigm of the live museum, where the exhibition begins to be seen as a space for energetic, corporeal, subjective and organisational processing of social relations through a de-limited notion of audience.

This new cultural metabolism requires an analytical orientation that reflects the shift of the exhibition apparatus towards the programmatic device of cultural government. In it, culture, business management and technology optimise an immediate, transparent experience without a hint of negativity for the recreation of the audiences. In its drive to museize existence, the new device of culture incorporates a biopolitical dimension – in cultural terms of audience and in political terms of agency – and zoological dimension – in technical terms of reproduction. This dimension, although it always fails and ruins its promises of fulfilment, aspires to assimilate life on the surface of the living, and no longer on the corpses, mummies, ruins or monuments of what was on the threshold of finitude. This is a new alliance that explains why the exhibition has become eventualised and volatilised, redefining the museum in complicity with the liveness shopping centre: the theme park. Not only in the livestock sense of the upbringing of humanity – Sloterdijk – or in the idealistic and pastoral sense – Heidegger, or in the teleological sense of the great silence of the dead – Berger –, but in the recreational and dystopian sense – meatily playful – which Pierre Klossowski ventured in *The Living Currency*. The school of the total spectacle: a great theme park where anyone can be converted into live currency.



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