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Inducing Knowledge by Enduring Experience:
The Function of a Postmodern Pragmatic Aesthetic
in Linda Montano's Living Art

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of Art and Design
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in Art History

by
Alisa A. Brandenburg
December 2004

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Dr. Vida Hull
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Keywords: aesthetics, art history, performance art, philosophy

ABSTRACT

Inducing Knowledge by Enduring Experience: The Function of a Postmodern Pragmatic Aesthetic in Linda Montano's Living Art

by

Alisa A. Brandenburg

In Has Modernism Failed? (1984), Suzi Gablik calls for a postmodern art that has preserved the values that modernism lost over the 20th century, stating that only through "direct knowing" may we be shocked out of *art-for-art's-sake*. In Art As Experience (1934), John Dewey similarly proposes that "thinking is a kind of doing," recommending an instrumental art in one's drive to better him/herself.

Contemporary artist Linda Montano challenges the status quo by exploring the nature of art beyond its material value. In her Living Art performances (1970-1986), Montano creates a postmodern pragmatic aesthetic that is conducive to the unique interchange between knowledge and experience.

Using descriptive analysis, this study investigates the functional relationship between postmodernism and pragmatics as an aesthetic in performance art. Particularly, it addresses how Gablik's theory and Dewey's methods provide a framework in which Montano's art may be discussed as instrumental to both self and society.

To Phil,

*for showing me that life
like skateboarding
'ain't no airbag landing'*

After this, we must live differently.

- R.M. Rilke
German poet

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CHAPTER 1
MORALITY, VALUES, AND TRADITION:
A POSTMODERN PRESCRIPTION

This thesis is characterized by an attempt to define, describe, and discuss the nature and function of one individual's aesthetic experience as it correlates to modern and postmodern art theory and philosophy. In modernism's embrace of a revolutionary commitment to the autonomy of the art object, it refuses a functional aesthetic that stresses the art object's purpose in relationship to its context. Kant's 'art for art sake,' in which appropriate judgments about a work are based upon the essential qualities of its form, more accurately identifies formalism—the theoretical foundation that characterizes modernist's approach to art that predominated 20th century art history, theory, and criticism.

The formalists' claim that works of art are autonomous is demonstrated in the theories of critics Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, both of whom explore the nature of art in order to extract the impure from the pure "and every effect that might conceivably been borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thereby each art would be rendered 'pure' and in its purity find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as its independence."¹ Furthering Greenberg's effort, Fried rejects anything that detracts from the work's absorption of itself, saying that "the concept of quality and value—and to the extent that these are central to art, the concept of art itself—are meaningful or wholly meaningful only within the individual arts. What lies between the

¹ Clement Greenberg, Art and Culture: Critical essays, Boston: Beacon Press, 1961, p. 36.

arts is theater.”² Modernism’s attempt to free art from any social or cultural context made room for radically innovate and experimental art, but in totally distancing artists from any social tradition or responsibility, modernism totally removed art from society.

By adopting the Kantian aesthetic that art should be valued for its own sake and not for any social purpose or cultural function, formalists adamantly opposed all instrumental notions of art: works of art should be judged not only on inherent aesthetic properties, but any contextual purpose or function it may serve is moreover considered a defect. Formalists strictly adhered to this contextless approach and transformed it into a standard methodology that critiques internal characteristics of a work as universal values much in the same way that other values like religious and intellectual are critiqued. Furthermore, proponents of art for art’s sake support the separation of such values as necessary to maintaining art’s purity that “we must have religion for religion’s sake, morality for morality’s sake, as with art for art’s sake . . . the beautiful cannot be the way to what is useful or what is good, or to what is holy; it leads only to itself.”³ This aesthetic of devaluing art that has a relationship outside the work itself—whether cultural, natural, moral, or political—began to break down when applied to developing, nontraditional modern artforms in which audiences are inherently connected.

The accepted tradition in art has generally been for the artist to visualize her/himself as both artist and audience in the artmaking process so the work may be planned according to the response anticipated from the audience. Only with modernism did artists completely dispose of traditional styles and techniques in order to start fresh; however, it is only now within today’s contemporary environment that the modernists’

² Michael Fried, Absorption and Theatricality, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980, p. 4.

aesthetic as negative becomes clear. That artistic expression has historically both influenced and is influenced by tradition indicates that artists don't just follow blindly or rebel carelessly against what went before them. Although art is the result of an innovation from or rebellion against a tradition, it must still be judged upon its own merit in its own time. On the other hand, a fresh recognition of tradition as moral, and therefore valuable, may reintroduce traditional notions of art as actually innovative and reactionary.

Morality, values, and tradition are complex issues when associated with art practices because they are understood in such a variety of interconnecting social and historical ways. Morality is generally defined as following traditional codes of behavior, being dutiful in accordance with virtue, and possessing values that contributes to being a productive member of society. Morality, values, and tradition are no doubt independent of one another but are often linked in aesthetic studies. Even though Kant's notion of the relationship between sense and reason is strictly dualistic, he writes that the "beautiful is the symbol of the morally good," suggesting that the aesthetic experience cannot be understood outside of our universal good human nature.⁴ Linking aesthetics to values provides a bridge for Kant to relate universal agreements to aesthetic judgements. Most modernists support Kant's of view morality as an autonomous value much like art and philosophy in which the aesthetic is not connected with the moral since it contributes to its own autonomy as well. Similarly, formalists view art as an autonomous domain whose effect of morality is simply an incidental feature to having an aesthetic experience.

Functionalists on the other hand stress the role of aesthetic experience in its ability to contribute to morality as a larger human concern. Art helps individuals realign

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.C. Meredith. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952, p. 79.

their assumptions about the world and reestablish their relationship with it as well as prepare them for other experiences in their lives. Not that art is necessary to achieve morality as a final goal, but aesthetic experiences do have advantages in seeking a higher good that other kinds of experiences do not: aesthetic experiences allow for reflecting upon life, sharing diverse experiences, and uniting for a common goal. Functionalists are interested in how art can potentially make one a better person and ultimately transform the universal morality of which we all possess. Conceptually speaking for example, art and morality are related based upon the broader definition of morality as necessary for living as a contributing member of society. In this sense, morality serves as a precondition to having an aesthetic experience as a means to becoming a better individual; thus, the aesthetic experience of art helps in promoting a more unified community. That art resolves certain fundamental tensions in our lives that involve morality demonstrates its cathartic powers of self-knowledge, -healing, and -growth.

Although morality and art are so often associated, it doesn't mean that morality is art's only purpose; however, it is the use of moral criteria in evaluating the value of art that continues to inform the question of morality's relationship to art. Tolstoy says that by placing morality and art in a unified, harmonious relationship, art becomes a human activity, one "in which one man consciously, by means of certain external signs hands on to others feelings he has lived through and in which other people are affected by these feelings and also experience them."⁵ He argues that true art must help to unite individuals universally and rejects artworks whose aesthetic is just based upon the mere pleasure of beauty, echoing Plato whose aesthetic includes only those works of art which foster virtues: "Art is a human activity having for its purpose the transmission to others

⁵ Leo Tolstoy, What Is Art?, trans. A. Maude. London: Oxford University Press, 1930, p. 44.

the highest and best feelings to which men have risen.”⁶ Breaking away from the strict Kantian formalist framework in which morality is removed, functionalists, like Tolstoy, embrace the notion that aesthetic experience is a necessary aspect of the moral life and furthermore that art is of central importance to one’s overall interpersonal development and well being.

This study is similarly functional, concerned with how artists treat aesthetic value along side other values such as morality, and adopts the view that aesthetic values make important contributions to understanding aesthetic activity as a self-rewarding and therefore self-justifying experience. By linking aesthetic values to moral values as conditions to living a better life, it embraces the broader notion that because aesthetic value is important in making aesthetic judgements, they must be protected and preserved. This study considers a work of art in terms of its potential morality, value, and tradition in enriching the audience’s engagement of and appreciation for aesthetic experience. Furthermore, it supports the notion that articulating aesthetic experiences requires an understanding of aesthetic judgements as involving practical knowledge, that is having the appropriate response and emotion called for in certain circumstances, and in particular uses the kind of thinking that dictates both moral and aesthetic judgements. Our aesthetic responses, like our moral practices, are guided by our human nature, and our aesthetic knowledge learned through cultural conditions. Therefore, it is this shared practical knowledge between artist and audience that forms the basis for communication involving aesthetic judgments that are influenced by the history of the work itself, what experience we bring to the work, and what is altogether learned about the work. All enhance the different systems of communication between artist and audience, from what

⁶ Ibid., p. 45.

was intended to what was received.

Postmodern art critic/theorist Arthur Danto, reflecting Hegel's notions of the end of art history, suggests that through its own development art reaches a stage at which it contributes to the goal of human thought which is the understanding of its own history.⁷ At the end of the 20th century, art as a history reached its end by achieving the goal of knowing itself; meanwhile, theory began to supercede art as consciousness became artwork, and the division between the object and subject was all but erased. The liberation of art from its history consequently detached it from human activity. Danto's aesthetic model represents a functional—albeit detrimental—view in which art's apparent end is demonstrated in the negative effect that modernism has had on art towards the end of the 20th century when art turned inward and became totally self-conscious, detaching itself wholly from social significance and cultural relevance. His claim that modern art faces a problem never faced before in the history of art—that because art's meaning has been revealed, it can no longer shock us, and anything may be considered art—indicates that as theory continues to behave as art, philosophy will continue to merge with art, traditional forms will continue to be destabilized, and the artworld will eventually dissolve.

Modern art critic Suzi Gablik and American philosopher John Dewey are in agreement with Danto that modern art is the most alienating art form in its history as well as the most directionless and pointless. Gablik suggests that because every generation perceives itself as facing the end of time, modernism's problem with art simply parallels social and historical problems. In Has Modernism Failed? (1984), she proposes an art that

⁷ Arthur C. Danto. After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, p. 126.

has retained the values, morals, and tradition that modernism failed to preserve over the course of the 20th century. Dewey views art as similarly rooted in its cultural context, but suggests art's universality in answering basic human needs and its potentiality in revealing life's deeper meanings. He proposes in Art As Experience (1934) a purposive art that manifests as a simultaneously creative and cognitive experience. Given that our needs change while our nature stays basically the same, Gablik and Dewey's suggestions together indicate that a new art will emerge for the betterment of both self and society only if artists attempt to experience knowledge directly through aesthetic activities.

Questioning what is possible in future art trends always depends on what has been achieved in art history's past; art is made possible by the context of its particular time and place, which is always anticipating the next new art. Works of art can only be identified and appreciated through their proper location within the art making traditions that generate the theories made about them. Artistic change thrives on current innovations in culture as well as achievements made in the past. Paradoxically, artists cannot bridge the gaps that separate them from their predecessors nor can they break free of their influence. Even when they set out to reject the styles and techniques of earlier artists, their work is in part significant based upon its relation with the past that retains relevance for having been rejected. When formalists embraced art for art's sake, art was forced to examine its fundamental character, consequently, modern art became so self-conscious that the distinctions between the definition of art and the philosophical questions regarding the nature of art merged as one and the same. Furthermore, questioning art's nature became art and only through this conscious continuation of evaluating its nature has it sustained.

Specific to this study is performance artist Linda Montano who questions the

traditional nature of art by manipulating cognitive processes such as attention, awareness, and mediation as a means to investigate publicly personal states of endurance, deprivation, and transformation. Using such strategies as mind/body alterity and time/space liminality as both object and subject in her Living Art performances, Montano tests her own aesthetic hypotheses, diminishing the distinctions between her art and life so thoroughly that one is unable to distinguish clearly where and when one ends and the other begins. This study is a result of further research regarding the relationship of Linda Montano's Living Art performances to Gablik's conclusions in Has Modernism Failed? and Dewey's aesthetics in Art as Experience. In particular, the methods used in this study involve a close reading of statements made in several interviews conducted with Montano during and immediately after her collaborative Art/Life One Year performance (1983-1984) with Tehching Hsieh. What Montano specifically says about her art as experience allows for the direct correlation of her aesthetic strategies to Gablik's postmodern theory and Dewey's pragmatic methods.

This thesis is not intended to be a traditional art historical study; instead, it demonstrates how the unique combination of a particular art historical theory and method of philosophy correspond to one individual's experience of art. In particular, the present study addresses how Gablik's theory and Dewey's methods combine to form a postmodern pragmatic framework in which Montano's performances may be discussed as they create a purposive aesthetic that is instrumental to both self and society. This study takes a functional view of Montano's art in which her performances are believed to serve metaphysical, psychological, and cultural functions, intended or unintended by the artist. Concerned less with the formal perfunctory features of her performances, it is more

interested in the functional role that art plays in Montano's life, serving both individual and social purposes. This study challenges the modernist's argument for an artistic value outside of function that fails to acknowledge the extent to which human concerns are attached to art, like morality, values, and tradition, which are dependent upon the role and function art serves in our daily lives.

This study views values such as morality and tradition as the kinds of tools involved in artmaking; in this manner, they become objects of attention, not just means to an end, and are treated as equally as the art itself. Such a functionalist view of aesthetic value is not just an appreciation of the function of an art object outside its purpose as art but includes an awareness of how those skills are exercised in creating art and thus see the potential of art as art itself. A functionalist aesthetic doesn't allow the work to supercede the skills, process, or value of the aesthetic experience; instead, it approaches art as a practical, everyday way to mediate one's appreciation of all art forms, especially a purposive art in which moral sensitivities develop and thereby help resolve social conflicts and restore personal relationships. Although social purpose is not art's only function, it greatly influences our assessment of and hence the value we attach to works of art. It is simply a fact that our social, cultural, and historical values can and do make themselves known in our responses to works of art.

This thesis is organized with the premise that more attention needs be paid to artists' statements made about their own work. It takes into specific account Linda Montano's expressions regarding her own artwork and acts as an integral look into how her particular discourse signifies the postmodern pragmatic aesthetic that characterizes her Living Art performances. Chapter 2 introduces modernism, postmodernism, and

aesthetics as they help establish Gablik's theory and Dewey's method as the framework to which Montano adheres in her performance art. Chapter 3 presents the description of Montano's statements made about her performance art, which help situate her art within the tradition of contemporary performance artists. Conceptual, performance, body, and autobiographical art are discussed as they parallel Montano's postmodern pragmatic aesthetic. Chapter 4 discusses the description of Montano's Living Art performances and delineates how the functional strategies used in her performance art create an environment conducive to the interchange between knowledge and experience. Chapter 5 presents the study's conclusions regarding the findings of a postmodern pragmatic aesthetic in one individual's performance art as social reform for personal freedom.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEMATA:

THE FUNCTION OF FAILURE AND ITS PHILOSOPHICAL FAUX PAS

Modernism, aesthetics, and postmodernism introduce this chapter, and relevant modern movements and artists are discussed throughout as they provide the context in which Suzi Gablik's theory of art and John Dewey's method of philosophy establish the framework wherein Linda Montano's performance art should be viewed. A thorough discussion of Gablik and Dewey allow for both a more functional description and more informed discussion of Montano's performance art as creating a postmodern pragmatic aesthetic.

Several characteristics distinguish the differences between modernism and postmodernism and their beginnings depend on which artists that contemporary theorists choose to highlight first. The terms "modern," "modernism," and "modernity" are too frequently and wrongly interchanged. While modern refers to an art that considers autonomy of the art object as stylistically primary, modernism refers to an artistic movement beginning with realism and ending with minimalism. The rise of modernism in Europe and America is characterized by an increase in succession of "isms" dedicated to a tendency toward non-representation abstraction that emphasizes a preoccupation for form primarily through line, shape, volume, space, color, and texture.⁸ Modernity, a relational term used in the arts to describe social and cultural tendencies in modern history, does not describe any one movement but more properly refers to the period beginning in the 18th century and the rise of 'modern,' nation states. To the modern

⁸Paul Wood and Charles Harrison. Modernism in Dispute, Yale: Yale University Press, 1993, p. 9.

artist, the notion of modernism lies in both the freedom to create in a new style and define what that means to his/her age. For the first time in history, artists were allowed to exhibit a personal cause in art as a means to reshape society primarily through art.

Political, social, and cultural changes in 19th century Europe led to dramatic changes in art, in particular giving birth to two conflicting views of modernity that continue to influence the art world today; one based on a belief in and support of the middle class (who represent reason and freedom), and the other based upon a disdain for the bourgeoisie as the enemy of culture (who represents romantic and radical). Critic/poet Charles Baudelaire, although he denounced material progress and industrialization, gave modernity its current impetus that beauty can be found and expressed in the heroicism of modern civilization.⁹ As the emphasis on the total autonomy of the art object and an insistence on individual perception began to characterize growing trends in modern art, upholding the Kantian notion of art for art's sake was wholly embraced throughout 20th century art and criticism.¹⁰

It is generally believed that a close relationship exists between aesthetics—the philosophy of art—and 20th century modernism. The term “aesthetic” was coined by the German social critic, Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762) in Meditationes (1735) to identify his theory of the beautiful as an independent philosophical movement. According to W. Eugene Kleinbauer, the aesthetician tries to learn the nature of art, to evolve a (nonhistorical) theory of art, to define such terms as ‘beauty,’ ‘aesthetic value,’ ‘truth’ and ‘significance.’¹¹ However, while Kleinbauer adds that the modern art

⁹ Lawrence Alloway, Topics in American Art Since 1945, New York: W W Norton Inc, 1975, p. 34.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 36.

¹¹ Donald Preziosi, The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 63.

historian “avoids such metaphysical speculation,” is it no longer true with postmodernism that “in much of the Western world . . . art history is non-philosophical;” in fact, “art history is molded by a philosophy of history—by an understanding of the generally divisions of history, the nature of historical periods, and the causes of historical change.”¹² Johann Winklemann (1717-1768), a countryman and contemporary of Baumgarten, similarly transformed the history of art when he first combined the terms “art” and “history” in The History of Ancient Art (1764), believing that art is the product of external forces, and that Greek art, which he valued above all, was the result of favorable geographic, climatic, and political circumstances.

Aesthetics as a modern art historical movement evolved from Kant’s art for art’s sake into a formalism that disassociated art from the ideas and values of its time and instead adhered to the notion that the only appropriate judgement of a work of art was one that responded to itself on its own terms. Later advanced by Baudelaire and becoming an almost religious conviction for 19th century artists and critics alike, Kant’s rally cry was heralded by formalists to uphold art’s purity, sanctity, idealism, and especially the artist’s indifference to issues of truth, nature, and culture.¹³ Clement Greenberg rose to prominence post WWII as the most important 20th century art critic in the United States, maintaining that the quality and purity in art reside in its assertion of the shape and flatness of the canvas and properties of paint. Speaking mostly to and about abstract expressionists, Greenberg promoted a formal aesthetic, believing that painters should never try to use representation or create illusion; rather they should “pursue the cultivation of their own medium, their own self-consciousness, and self-

¹² Ibid.

definition.”¹⁴ Postmodern critics and historians, on the other hand, generally reject Greenberg’s doctrines, especially his distinctions between high and low art and propose to go beyond restrictive claims for unity, identity, and purity of the art object and embrace the opposing principles of heterogeneity, hybridity, and impurity.¹⁵ Postmodernism is generally considered a new and distinct art movement; however, because there is an ongoing debate about whether postmodernism is distinct from or actually a continuation of modernism, postmodernism is considered simultaneously an antimodern movement contesting modernism. Fredric Jameson suggests that the movement from modernism to postmodernism may be seen as passing from a “deep” aesthetic of personal style to a “flat” aesthetic of multiplicity.¹⁶

Although postmodernists generally applaud the death of modernism, any definition of postmodern art depends on its characterization alongside modern art. In general, modern art, as it developed during the 19th and 20th centuries, became a conscious reaction to social and political change, especially as brought on by the Industrial Revolution. Over the course of the 20th century as modernism ushered in postmodernism, artists continued to think about art in new and innovative ways. From 1969 onward in the United States, postmodernism came to be associated with pop art, for example in the soft sculptural works of Claes Oldenburg who said “I am for an art that is political-erotic-mystical . . . I am for an art that embroils itself with everyday crap and

¹³ Robert Hughes, Nothing If Not Critical: Selected Essays on Art and the Artists, New York: Penguin, 1990, p. 94.

¹⁴ Clement Greenberg, “Modernists Painting,” Art and Literature, no. 4 Spring 1965 p.193.

¹⁵ Wood and Harrison, p. 16.

¹⁶ Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” 1982 in Foster (ed), Postmodern Culture, p.111.

still comes out on top.”¹⁷ Consistent with the antimodern movement of the 1960s, postmodern developments in fine art readily responded to the growing multicultural and pluralistic trends during the 1980s.

Where modernist aesthetics makes clear distinctions between fine, functional, and mass produced art, postmodernist aesthetics willingly embraces the art forms of popular culture that intentionally mingles high and low art. Reflecting instead on art’s context, postmodern aesthetic theory emphasizes as primary the uncertain, ambiguous relationship between art and our social and natural environment. Similarly, where modern aesthetics proposes a closed notion of a work of art as finished and complete, postmodern aesthetics privileges the process in art making, which invites spontaneous change and surprise.

While modern artists blend and mix media to unify, postmodern artists combine different media in order to multiply meaning and defy precise classification or singular categorization. Postmodern criticism today challenges the separation of art and its relationship with the social and political world that so negatively affected modern art. Predicting the influx of new and innovative postmodern art mediums, Helen Searing writes that “for most of the 20th century, space and rationalized structure have been considered important . . . now [i.e. the 1980s] the enclosing membrane again takes on weight, mass, figurative content, to create tangible boundaries which mark place and set up hierarchies of movement and activity.”¹⁸

In Has Modernism Failed? (1984), Gablik expresses a cultural concern for contemporary art’s social character, proposing that art’s current lack of purpose and

¹⁷ Claes Oldenburg, “I Am for an Art . . .” in Environments, Situations, Spaces, New York: Martha Jackson Gallery, 1961, in Stiles (ed) Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art, Berkley: University of California Press, 1996.

¹⁸ in Gregory Battcock, Idea Art, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1973, p.2.

direction is a direct result of modernism's detrimental effect on modern art. Gablik's main problem with art is that it is no longer good, godly, or even great, as witnesses in today's artist:

Who could ask for anything more? . . . If the modern artist once embraced modernism with hope, pride, and a crusading spirit of disobedience, at this stage of the day he seems to cling on with desperation, feeling indefinably sad and shoddy. . . it is from his unfitness that the contemporary artist draws his power. The mood has changed from vehemence to decadence to wary cynicism.¹⁹

Gablik's assertion the consequences of such effect on what is presently believed about the definition of art, its goals and purposes, suggest that modern art lost its ideals and values:

Models and standards from the past seem of little use to us. Everything is in continuous flux; there are no fixed goals or ideals that people believe in, no tradition sufficiently endured to avoid confusion. The legacy of modernism is that the artist stands alone. He has lost his shadow. As his art can find no direction from society, it must invent its own destiny.²⁰

Gablik's explanation of what makes modern art so strikingly different from prior traditions indicates the lack of faith in authority that modern artists demonstrated. Until the modern era, social and spiritual order defined art, and beliefs and hopes permeated most human activities. "Art and artists had always been imbued with a quasi-religious as well as moral and social mission," Gablik states, whereas "our own epoch is characterized by disbelief and doubt. Ideas that were once clear and satisfactory have become vague or irrelevant."²¹ Since the 19th century, the schools and/or styles of art that were classified hierarchically became all but dismissed in modern society because traditional categories of form and function served little or no use. Without guidelines, "the momentum of social change has altered not only the nature of art, but also the

¹⁹ Suzi Gablik Has Modernism Failed? New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984, p.114.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 115.

psychological drives and motivations of those who shape it.”²² In short, modernism directly opposes everything for which traditional values have always attempted to preserve.

Gablík’s idea of the necessity for a new art is not novel to postmodern concerns; even the modernists called for a new art, one that attempted to return control of the aesthetic to the hand of the artist. Because defenders of modernism like Greenberg claimed that art serves no one but the artist and bases its rules upon its own style, the notion of art for art’s sake not only introduced new aesthetic styles but more importantly invited in different conceptions of the traditional definition and nature of art. Because the modernists mistrusted science, technology, and advancement until the futurists embraced them as their own, they believed that truth could be found not in the real world, but by turning inward and concentrating on the psychological self. Freud’s Interpretation of Dreams (1900) was critically the most important influence on artists as a description of the unconscious and served as a vital resource for 20th century psychologists, who owe their history to Freud’s important discoveries about consciousness, ego, and psychoanalysis.²³

During the first half of the 20th century, proposals for a new art once buried in the fringes of avant-garde artists suddenly surfaced; new reactionary artists who experimented with any and every mode began asking questions about art, its nature, place, and permanency (or lack thereof). Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) pioneered the act of questioning the nature of art by making idea art or “readymades,” pre-existing and most often commonplace objects chosen by the artist and presented as “art.” Emphasizing

²¹ Ibid., 45.

²² Ibid., 40.

irony, doubt, and sense of play between the artist and object, especially the distance between art and audience, Duchamp made only slight changes or additions to everyday, household objects in which he elevated to the status of art. In his most notorious piece, Fountain (1916), Duchamp did away with all sense of aestheticism when he turned a urinal upside down and signed it “R. Mutt,” stating that he wanted to put art once again “at the service of the mind.”²⁴ What Duchamp had revolutionized in Fountain, and other readymades like Bottle Rack (1912) and Bicycle Wheel (1913), was the implicit critique of the linguistic nature of art that played out as an attack on the nature of museum exhibition and its institutionalizing effect, forcing both the viewer’s involvement and ontological questions about the nature of the art object itself. Such an assault on all fronts—the artist, art, and audience—secured Duchamp’s important place in art history, prompting Danto to write that “the story of the avant-garde in the 20th century, whether in America or Europe, seems largely to be the story of Duchamp.”²⁵

Led by Duchamp, dada (1916-1922) began as a short-lived avant garde splinter group founded by German actor and playwright Hugo Ball, and made up of French, German, and American artists who reacted to the hysteria and aftershock of WWI, in which most would have served but fled to Switzerland instead. Antinational and antimaterialistic, dada rejected reason and logic and instead embraced nonsense, political anarchy, emotions, intuition, and irrationality as an aesthetic although they did not unite by a common style but only by a shared rejection of conventions in art and thought, intending for their unorthodox techniques and performances to shock society into self-

²³ Alloway, p. 19.

²⁴ Marcel Duchamp, “The Richard Mutt Case” 1917, in Lucy Lippard, Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966-1972, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973, p. 67.

awareness.²⁶ Dada spread rapidly throughout Europe, but by the time it was displaced by the more popular surrealism (began 1924), any attempt to formalize a serious artistic rebellion faltered. Surrealists, though closely associated with dada, reacted against dada by attempting to resolve their predecessors' previous contradictions by denying all meaning in favor of artistic anarchy. Led by Andre Breton's ideas drawn up in "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1922), surrealists furthered dada's deconstruction of language and museum practices into outrageous political and communistic burlesque that paved the way for future conceptual artists.

Duchamp's readymade was at the heart of the art object for the surrealists who were also familiar with Freud's writing. Latecomers to the movement, such as Salvador Dali, Renee Magritte, and Jean Miro joined the cause in favor of automatism, a kind of creative "writing" generated in an unconscious way from hallucinations and dreams as a valid means of producing art. Both dada and surrealism, though relatively brief movements, had a more lasting impression in poetic and literary form, protesting profusely against the traditional primacy of visual arts. In defense of these early avant gardians' aesthetic, Duchamp said, "It was a way to get out of a state of mind—to avoid being influenced by one's immediate environment, or by the past: to get away from clichés—to get free."²⁷ Similarly attempting to free themselves from their past and do away with any and all rules that hindered their notion of an anti art, were the futurists (began 1909), an Italian reactionary group who called for the 'death' of art.²⁸ Combining

²⁵ Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 125.

²⁶ Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1991, p. 42.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism" in Harris and Wood (ed), Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1992, p. 146.

several different modern styles, futurism influenced other movements in their claim to be the sole innovators in bringing to art the industrial age's force of motion, noise, and power. Futurists' art celebrated all forms of violent struggle in their art, glorifying war, which they considered a purifying experience for both individual and nation. While WWI was a predominant theme in futurists' works, their propaganda for WWII demonstrated the movements' dedication to fascist totalitarianism.

The first American born art movement, abstract expressionism, gave rise to the artist/genius emerging post WW II in New York as modernism's totally self-possessed, self-reliant, ideal model. Greenberg was the main supporter and theoretician of abstract expressionism, bringing such artists as Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning into theoretical focus and artworld prominence. Like dadaists, surrealists, and futurists before them, abstract expressionists similarly reacted to the horrors of war, death, famine, and disease; however, rather than theories about form or composition, stream of consciousness and the subconscious played a larger, more directly accessible role in the abstract expressionists' aesthetic. Rosenberg wrote of de Kooning that he "discards all social roles in order to start with himself as he is, and all definitions of art in order to start with art as it might appear through him."²⁹ Attempting to universalize one's search for meaning through purpose, change, and transformation, abstract expressionists looked for the personal in the universal.³⁰ The artist now responded to art as an independent, pure creation that had its own inner logic, its own essence equaled only by his own:

The artist is not responsible to anyone. His social role is asocial; his only responsibility consists in an attitude, an attitude to the work he does. . . . There is no communication with any public whatsoever. The artist can ask no questions,

²⁹ Harold Rosenberg, The Tradition of the New, London and New York, 1962, p. 67.

³⁰ Greenberg, "After Abstract Expressionism, 1967, in Harrison and Orton, 1984.

and he makes no statement; he offers no information, message or opinion.³¹

Nearing the second half of the 20th century, historians, theorists, and critics alike began looking to the contemporary artist as a kind of spiritual medium who could potentially reveal art's deeper meaning.

By 1960, the developing contemporary trends of the day in which both the artist's relevance (e.g. pop art) and the object's materiality (e.g. minimalism) soon started to disappear while Greenberg inspired a new school of young critics including Michael Fried and Rosalind Kraus, who stood in direct opposition to this new aesthetic. However, what still remained important toward the end of the 20th century was the artist's process, not necessarily the finished product. For example, it was Jackson Pollock's action paintings that inspired happenings in the early 1960s in which the real nuances of anti art took flight, literally with Yves Klien, who doctored a photograph of his death-defying jump out of a window into space. Leap into the Void, near Paris, October 23, 1960 appeared on the front page of a newspaper that he created and distributed, eliminating the canvas altogether as an attempt to erase abstract expressionism's dynamic between the physical activity of the artist and its representation in paint. Allan Kaprow, a pioneer in the movement's theory, explains that a happening is "generated in action by a headful of ideas for a flimsily-jotted-down score of 'root' directions."³² Rather than extending the picture plane to include the viewer's peripheral as to incorporate him/her into the work, happenings included the audience by incorporating their direct participation. Kaprow's Words (1962) invited participants to add phrases to prewritten sentences, and in his Environment (1960), a multitude of old tires were strewn on the gallery floor requiring

³¹ Ibid.

the audience to participate in mental and physical actions. Wildly popular for a brief time, happenings influenced collaborative performances at Black Mountain College in North Carolina during the 1960s by composer John Cage, dancer Merce Cunningham, and painters Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. Embracing many of the revolutionary concepts and practices associated with happenings were fluxus, (formed 1962) a group of loosely associated American and German artists including Joseph Beuys who describe themselves as “a fusion of gags, games, Vaudeville, Cage, and Duchamp.”³³ Fluxus’ main purpose was to similarly deconstruct art’s cultural status and eliminate the artist’s ego altogether, while much of its activities, like that of happenings, involved single, spontaneous, and often humorous performances of music, theatrical gestures, movements, and scores of actions that constitute the individual’s everyday experience. Fluxus events stress multiple medias, printed documents, posters, and newspapers as its creative propaganda and although often requiring the participation of a spectator for completion, fluxus artists specifically attempted to disrupt the expected conventions of musical and theater performance by using nonconventional improvisation. Fluxus manifestos proclaimed its opposition to the “bourgeois sickness in intellectual, professional and commercial culture,”³⁴ and proposed a revolutionary anti-art characterized by eccentricity and amusement. Still thriving today, fluxus inspired future conceptual performing artists to believe that anything can substitute for art and anyone can produce it.

Pop art, like happenings and fluxus events, came as a reaction against abstract expressionism, particularly in defiance of Greenberg’s formalism. In their effort from

³² Allan Kaprow, “Untitled Guidelines for Happenings,” (c. 1965), in Assemblage, Environments, and Happenings, New York: Harry Abrams, 1966, p. 189.

³³ George Maciunas, “Letter to Tomas Schmit” (1964), in Stiles (ed), 1996, p. 726-727.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 728.

moving art from the artist's interior back to the external world of consumerism and capitalism, pop art was formally introduced in 1962. Works by the movement's forerunners, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg borrowed from commercial art, advertising, comic strips, and market packaging to portray objects from the everyday world and mass media as art.³⁵ While abstract expressionists claimed to be emotionally engaged with the subject of their art, pop artists claimed total detachment, which is paradoxical since pop art imagery is embedded in the very culture of its time. In particular, the emergence of pop art marks a philosophical change of direction from inward-looking existentialism and its ethical and philosophical concern with the individual's fate in an isolated, irrational, unpredictable, often hostile world to an outward-looking, progressive observation of the media-made material world.

Gablik explains that after WWII modern art began to serve the artist entirely in terms of self-promotion or self-preservation, indicating that art's social status became devalued in a modern culture: artists began questioning for whom or what purpose their artmaking served. Art no longer functions for any moral or virtuous purpose; freedom and responsibility became so dichotomous that artists established their identity only in isolation and alienation. The greatest moral challenge for the free artist today is in his/her attempt to preserve individualism in a traditionless society that does not value values:

Liberation and alienation are inextricably connected-reverse sides of the same coin. Beyond a certain point, freedom-like technological progress-is counterproductive: it defeats its own ends and becomes alienating. For artists to lose the sense of being members of a tradition which transcends both themselves and their contemporaries leads to demoralization.³⁶

Gablik argues further that only now may we begin to understand how tradition made a

³⁵ Alloway, p. 120.

³⁶ Suzi Gablik, Has Modernism Failed?, p. 104.

genuine avant-garde actually possible, demonstrating that rules provide the necessary resistance in which artists need to rebel. Rules are not choices; they are binding contracts that require us to act in a certain way simply for goodness sake. Modern artists have always been opposed to society's rules, seeking instead their own rules and standards. Modernists so embraced the notions of freedom and autonomy that theirs was the only logic to which they had to answer: "we now have whole generations of artists who doubt that it [art] was ever meant to be organically integrated with society in the first place."³⁷

Gablik repeatedly emphasizes the difficulty involved for any one tradition to flourish during a time when virtues were devalued, individual conceptions isolated, and practices unshared, suggesting that virtues are necessary to help balance a changing future. When modern artists reacted to their past in the name of total freedom, paradoxically, it deprived subsequent generations of artists any room to revolt. Today's artist struggles to respond to a past without a past. "The possibilities for stylistic innovation seem, to have reached a limit. Radical consciousness has been stymied. . . we no longer know what rules to follow, much less why we ought to follow them."³⁸ While modernism discouraged the artist from finding anything good or moral about his/her tradition, the modern artist submitted to self-discipline only begrudgingly. This exercise of discipline simply for the sake of a virtuous character we have lost in today's art.

Gablik explains that the modern artist had no reason to pass on a tradition because he/she made little attempt to either learn or preserve one, indicating that in order to be successful, a society must value tradition. Without tradition, there is little motivation to measure success or inspiration to be successful. Although success and failure are highly

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 119.

charged words, they have retained little meaning in today's art world. Traditional artists of the past depended on the transmission of skill and technique handed down from master to pupil. "Traditions set standards from which to draw practical guidance as to what is right and wrong; they generate stable and durable systems of relationship, which help to situate individuals in the social order and establish for them a network of social obligations and responsibilities."³⁹ By removing the standards by which art is measured, "the very question of what constitutes success or failure has to be an ambivalent one: it can only be judged by being measured against some valid conception of what a work of art is, and this is a conception we no longer have."⁴⁰ For the modern artist, there is no authority to rely upon or discipline to be received. Ironically, it is almost as if that the more freedom the artist experiences, the more stifled he/she feels. Obviously, individuality and freedom are the greatest rewards for the modern artist as well as a modern culture; however, insistence upon absolute autonomy for each individual leads to a self-destructive society: "The achievements of modernism have been too high a cost. Its renunciations of so much that is crucial to human well-being—in the name of freedom and self-sufficiency—are what will have failed us."⁴¹ It is not that modern art failed but modernism failed to preserve its traditions.

Conceptual art developed around the same time in the 1960s as a postmodern movement in which artists returned to Duchamp's concern with the idea of art as primary, not the object itself. Grounded in the aesthetics of happenings and fluxus events, the term applies to work in particular that either markedly de-emphasized or entirely eliminated a perceptual encounter with unique objects in favor of engaging its idea. For

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 125

example, when conceptual artist Douglas Heubler said, “The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add anymore,”⁴² he indicates on one hand that conceptual art is antimaterial and anticonsumer, but that on another hand, it is entirely an intellectual pursuit, disassociated from the notion of craftsmanship altogether. Following Duchamp’s anti-aesthetic, artist/theorist Joseph Kosuth said, “The art I call conceptual is based on the understanding of the linguistic nature of all art as propositions,” emphasizing that because the meaning of art is articulated cognitively on the brain, no visual perception is needed for art to be created or comprehended, thus doing away with object making altogether.

Overall, whether or not modernism has failed a generation of subsequent artists seems to depend on whether artists have taken too far freedom and liberation as the only goals for progress and success. Whether or not postmodern art now can develop a meaningful relationship with its past too depends on the contemporary artist’s belief in art’s moral and virtuous character. Gablik claims that a complimentary relationship between freedom and restraint would usher in an authentic art that may potentially help narrow the widening gap between postmodern tendencies and traditional art practices. Demonstrating that art’s remaining good may still be yet recoverable, she points out:

Modernism has moved us too far in the direction of radical subjectivity and a destructive relativism . . . Only when traditional rules exist, and one is used to expecting them, can one then enjoy breaking them. Tradition teaches wisdom, and the final lesson of modernism may be no more than this: that we need a fruitful tension between freedom and restraint.⁴³

Gablik recommends that simple and direct change in thought and action may provide the

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Douglas Huebler, “Untitled Statement (1968),” in Germano Celant, *Art Povera* New York: Praeger, 1969, p. 98.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 128.

best avenue to learning how to balance individuality and discipline, demonstrating that artists' actions are no longer as severely limited as they once were, nor are their social roles strictly defined. As a result, instead of forcing a break with their past, "artists may discover that the absence of radical art might provide a more innovative approach to the present problem."⁴⁴ If anything is to change, the best opportunities seem to be found in what we do constructively with the freedom that we now enjoy, and as a result, the liberties in which we engage.

Gablik's conclusions that a willingness to think or act differently about art begins with the knowledge obtained through direct experience requires the consideration of alternative worldview perspectives as a means to transform negative cultural conditioning. "Deliberately and soberly changing one's mind about the nature of truth and reality," is what's really counts, Gablik states, "because if we are ever to succeed at merging personal truth with social belief, a reconsideration of the purposeful functions of art begins with reconstructive thinking."⁴⁵ Gablik's question of whether or not modernism failed is less a question of degree and more one of how to alter basic dimensions of such categories in order to understand how we actually deal with success and failure in our daily lives:

Since immunity from the responsibility of tradition has itself become a tradition, perhaps we can go forward from the point we have reached by also going back, with a new knowledge of how form, structure, and authority sustain the spirit and enable us to live our lives with more vision; they are a necessary condition of our well-being.⁴⁶

Gablik's doubt of whether we can yet determine if postmodern artists are potentially creating something new or merely deconstructing their past brings these important

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

questions to the forefront. “The problem remains, she says, however, of sifting out that which is largely sensationalism geared to the media-machine from that which carries a genuine potential for developing a more luminous culture.” Gablik is hopeful that we might once again believe in art’s therapeutic qualities shows that a new art process is beginning to assert itself, which may in turn help art regain its spiritual dignity that “all has not been lost, and some potentiality, even from the shadows of Hitlerian evils,” will emerge again. Such a discovery seems to be art’s only saving grace.

Gablik’s recommendation for a new art closely mirrors American philosopher John Dewey’s (1859-1952) similar proposal for a different kind of innovative art. As a social critic and education theorist, Dewey made a significant contribution to pragmatic philosophy and indirectly had a profound influence on 20th century aesthetic theory. Aligning himself with the naturalist side of the pragmatist movement, he was characterized as a “natural empiricist” when he created a model of successful learning which posits as primary the individual constantly acting and responding to his/her environment in a continuous and developing pattern of experience.⁴⁷ In Experience and Nature (1925), Dewey’s model had evolved to account for how members of a community, rather than single isolated individuals, pursue through the use of symbol, expression, and communication, the ongoing project of directing experience towards fulfilling ends that gives experience its depth of value and meaning. Therefore, Dewey’s notion of knowledge and experience as integrally interactive was a radical departure from what he called traditional philosophy’s “spectator theory of knowledge,” which viewed knowledge as passively recorded facts and clear thinking the result of a correspondence

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 127.

between what we believe and what we know.⁴⁸ Instead, it signifies the shared social activity of symbolically-mediated behavior that seeks to discover the possibilities of our objective situations in the natural world for meaningful, intelligent, and fulfilling ends.

First, Dewey proposed that philosophy do away with classic dualisms, such as mind/body, thought/action, nature/culture, etc.. He viewed nature, culture, and experience as systems of developing transactions, void of sharp distinctions or discontinuities. Knowledge and experience are equally and fundamentally related: knowledge is a constructive, conceptual activity that guides and prepares us for future experiences within our environment.⁴⁹ Experience is a process in nature that embraces both desirable and undesirable potentialities as possible future interactions with the environment. Dewey especially objected to dividing facts from beliefs because it hindered authentic experience. He viewed scientific inquiry not necessarily as a purely analytical tool but as the useful, unrestricted kind of thinking that we should engage in all activities, both conceptual and creative. Heavily influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution, Dewey's form of instrumentalism helps characterize pragmatic philosophy's usefulness for dealing directly with our everyday experiences.

Dewey's conception of knowledge as experience demonstrates a dynamic relationship between problematic situations and potential resolutions. Cognitive experience, as opposed to aesthetic experiences, Dewey asserts, mediates all of our experiences. The cognitive experience is a developmental process of inquiry—from

⁴⁷ Thomas Alexander, "Educating the Democratic Heart: Pluralism, Traditions, and the Humanities," in The New Scholarship on Dewey, Jim Garrison, (ed.) London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995, p. 76.

⁴⁸ Thomas Alexander, "The Art of Life: Dewey's Aesthetics," in Reading Dewey: Interpretations for a Postmodern Generation, Larry Hickman (ed.) Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998, p. 19.

⁴⁹ John Dewey, Nature and Experience, 1925, p. 22.

recognition to articulation—that results in what Dewey called a “felt difficulty.”⁵⁰

Possible solutions/resolutions of the fragmented experience are worked out conceptually until a final reconstruction is transformed into a unified whole. This kind of evaluative, active exchange between thought and action, Dewey states, presupposes the kind of thinking and doing we do when we engage in aesthetic activities, which he refers to as “consummatory.”⁵¹ Such experiences, as opposed to cognitive experience, were for Dewey basic and irreducible. When the interaction of both individual and his/her environment come to be consciously experienced as a developing, evolving process, it results in Deweyan terms as a deeply meaningful consummatory experience. Having such an aesthetic experience is not instantaneous or timeless; it comes to an end as do all experiences, but the aesthetic experience is unique in that the relationship between individual and environment holds the promise of the experience of consummation.

Though Dewey wrote only one book explicitly devoted to aesthetics, Art as Experience (1934) remains one of the most original treatments of the topic, offering insight into the nature of Dewey’s general pragmatics and illuminating his concern for with the aesthetic dimensions of experience, outlined first in Experience and Nature (1925). The first few chapters in Dewey’s Art As Experience regarding the “Live Creature” clearly establish his philosophy of art, asserting that aesthetic experience is one of the most basic elements involved in human activities and making art is one of the most meaningful experiences in which humans can engage. It is important for Dewey to posit that the origin of art and the quest for aesthetic experience lay in the natural world of human action. “All deliberations, all conscious intent, grows out of things once

⁵⁰ Ibid., 37.

⁵¹ Ibid.

performed organically through the interplay of natural energies. Were it not so, art would be built on quaking sands, nay, unstable air.”⁵²

In Dewey’s aesthetic, he views art as the “ultimate human endeavor” and the “greatest intellectual achievement in the history of humanity.”⁵³ Art is a consciousness in which both individual and social goals meet and meld as instrumental in the individual’s drive to better him/herself through constructive, conceptual activities. “A conception of art that sets out from its connection with discovered qualities of ordinary experience will be able to indicate the factors and forces that favor the normal development of common human activities into matters of artistic value.”⁵⁴ Dewey’s pragmatic instrumentalism merges living and doing into a unified, harmonious continuum.

Art for Dewey is not found exclusively in museums or within material objects but in the possibilities and potentiality of human experience itself. Fine art on display in museums such as “Domestic utensils, furnishings of tent and house, rugs, mats, jars, pots, bows, spears,” Dewey argues, has only recently has been relegated “art.”⁵⁵ These things from the past—in their own time and place—were not considered art but were part of everyday events. Furthermore, we take special care and pride, Dewey claims, to preserve their aesthetic appearance so much that today “we hunt them out and give them places of honor in our art museums.”⁵⁶ By separating the idea of art from life, we not only mystify art, but we thereby fail to recognize the pervasive aesthetic possibilities of the experience of art. Similar to Gablik’s effort, Dewey insists that art needs to return to the scope of our everyday lives in order to save itself from destruction and us from moral decay. As

⁵² John Dewey, Art As Experience, New York: Minton, Balch and Co., 1934, p. 195.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 3

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.18

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.7.

museums segregated art from the activities of the people for whom it serves most, history has similarly separated high from low art and Art into the arts. Dewey's main social problem with modernism is that art is placed too much and too high upon a pedestal. Blaming the separation of fine from functional art on the failure to integrate process and product, he writes:

These things reflect and establish superior cultural status, while their segregation from the common life reflects that fact that they are not a part of the native and spontaneous culture. Art is remitted to a separate realm, where it is cut off from that association with the materials and aims of every other form of human effort, undergoing and achievement. When an art product once attains classic status, it somehow becomes isolated from the human condition under which it was brought to being and from the human consequences it engenders in actual life experience.⁵⁷

Dewey did not however believe that life itself should be a work of art. Nor does art function merely to serve life either; "It is the degree of completeness of living in the experience of making and perceiving that makes the difference."⁵⁸ Art simply has its own character and finding its origins lie in the capacity to develop our ordinary experiences into fulfilling aesthetic ends.

Dewey states that our experience of art becomes more finite the more it is rooted in direct, concrete activities and although theory may add to understanding and insight about art, knowing is only one aspect in which reality manifests itself. Knowledge simply loses meaning without unmediated, direct, daily experience. To locate the aesthetic in experience, one must begin with the kernels of our sense experience, what Dewey calls the scientist's raw data: "in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of

⁵⁶ Ibid., p 10.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 14.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens.”⁵⁹

Aesthetic experiences are directly related to our activities in the world as direct thinking and feeling participators, not as passive observers. Similar to Gablik, Dewey says that the aesthetic may be found in direct everyday observation: “the fire engine rushing by; the machines excavating enormous holes in the earth; the human fly climbing the steeple side; the men perched high in air on girders, throwing and catching red bolts.”⁶⁰ Yet aesthetic experiences may be quiet, private, and unconscious, such as in the “tense grace of the ballplayer . . . the housewife tending her plants . . . the spectator in poking the wood burning on the hearth . . .”⁶¹

Deconstructing art’s cultural character while reconstructing its social past, Dewey’s conclusions mirror Gablik’s by revealing that art’s place and reputation does not emanate from its inherent aesthetic nature but instead extends beyond itself as an object of matter and becomes a social object of cultural commentary:

Theories which isolate art and its appreciation by placing it in a realm of its own, disconnected from other modes of experiencing, are not inherent in the subject matter but arise because of specific extraneous conditions, however because art objects are so unconsciously a part of our life, the theorist assumes they are embedded in the nature of things.⁶²

Although the notion of an everyday art is generally unappealing to the average consumer and more often than not repulsive to the contemporary critic, one must surrender traditional aesthetic theory in order to give more undivided attention to perhaps what might be considered the unaesthetic. All in all, in an attempt to exhibit culture and values through art, we have inadvertently lost both.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 38.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p. 13.

Dewey's primary purpose is not to engage the economics or the characteristics of individual art works but simply to indicate that the theories surrounding as well as defining art actually obstruct its appreciation and comprehension that leads to misappropriations about its significant nature. Dewey is in agreement with Gablik that it is the art historian's/critic's lofty attitudes that have helped broaden the gap between art and life. "Critics today pride themselves upon the current popular notion of the separation of art from the objects and scenes of ordinary experience."⁶³ Dewey suggests that it should be the critic's priority to help renovate the relationship between objects and our experience of them; in fact, it is their specific task to restore the "continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience."⁶⁴ Art—fine or functional—and the everyday experience must rejoin or at least attempt to become indistinguishable again.

Consistent with his instrumentalism, Dewey's pragmatic aesthetic theory urges one to continually rethink and rework direct relationships in the environment in order to make everyday activities more responsive to aesthetic experiences. We shouldn't value the past for its own sake, like an art for art's sake, but value our histories for their role in developing and guiding present creative activities. "Inner harmony is attained only when, by some means, terms are made with the environment. Only when the past ceases to trouble and the anticipations of the future are not perturbing is a being wholly united with his environment and therefore fully alive."⁶⁵ The work of art is to be found in the life it has with the context of culture and communication and is distinguished from the physical

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

product itself: art is the direct result of the unmediated interaction between the object and the audience, becoming the meaningful integration of individual and aesthetic experience.

For example, Dewey's notion of expression, form, and works of art as creative acts treats the aesthetic experience as an ongoing relationship between the work of art and the audience. Expression is governed by the idea of communication, regardless for whom the art is made. Dewey views form similarly as dynamically temporal, historical, cultural, and developmental: form is not static, rather it gives organization to the work of art. Form is the process that creates, and "carries forward," the aesthetic experience. If art and life were to merge as an aesthetic experience in Deweyan terms, the possibility for a truly moral and potentially more authentic existence may be realized that would in turn enable us to deal more practically in the future with our ever-changing world. Dewey says that the existence of art is the concrete proof of this: "it is proof that man uses the materials and energies of nature with intent to expand his own life, and that he does so in accord with the structure of his organism-brain, sense-organs, and muscular system."⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 36.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

LINDA MONTANO: BECOMING AS IDEA AS ART AS EXPERIENCE

Using descriptive analysis, this chapter investigates Linda Montano's Living Art performances as a means to understand how her aesthetic in performance art employs Gablik and Dewey's postmodern pragmatic framework. Montano is situated within the history of performance art as a conceptual artist and is characterized within the tradition of postmodern performing artists who combine autobiographical techniques and their bodies in performance. Conceptual art is rooted in the Duchampian notion of art that the idea behind the art is more important than what or how it materializes. All planning and decisions are made beforehand while carrying out the idea only becomes perfunctory; although a conceptual work of art is generally considered finished as soon as the artist conceives of the idea, it is usually described as an intellectual activity involving language, documentation, and proposals, and is generally disassociated from fine art, based on Kosuth's notion of the nature of all art as linguistic propositions. Conceptual artists took their cue from Duchamp's readymades, which were intellectually rather than manually conceived, and continued to challenge how art was strictly defined by institutional ideologies presented within a given historical context. Stressing the role of the spectator and questioning the meaning of art simultaneously destroyed art's cultural meaning within conventional contexts. By rejecting the relationship between art objects and monetary value, conceptual artists helped further emphasize the primacy of the conception rather than the perception of art.

Conceptual art (began 1960s) emerged simultaneously in North America, Europe, and Latin America as a tool to critique the political and economic systems that sustained

western art by contributing substantially to the acceptance of photographs, musical scores, architectural drawings, and performance art as legitimate art forms on equal footing with painting and sculpture. The term “conceptual” art generally applies to artwork produced from the mid 1960s that either de-emphasized or totally eliminated the art object in favor of the idea behind the art, a notion that Lucy Lippard describes as the “dematerialization of the art object.”⁶⁷ Although fluxus artists designated their performance pieces as “concept” art, the term first achieved public recognition as a loosely definable but distinct art form in “Paragraphs on Conceptual Work” (1967) by Sol LeWitt⁶⁸ and especially dealt with by Kosuth in two influential articles “Art After Philosophy I and II” (1969)⁶⁹ who examined the role of artistic intention in relation to the meanings ascribed to the idea of the art object itself. In giving more importance to communicating the idea rather than to producing the object, conceptual artists began questioning the process of making art as a potentially alienating process.

As a movement, conceptual art first made its appearance in works such as Kosuth’s series Titled (Art as Idea as Idea) (1966-67), which are dictionary definitions of words presented as photographic enlargements.⁷⁰ A prime concern of certain conceptual artists was with the context in which the work was exhibited. In elevating the conception of the work above its execution, conceptual artists attempted to demystify the creative act of artmaking by joining the role of the artist and public alike as equally bringing meaning to the work. Seizing control away from institutions such as galleries and museums was achieved simply by artists not producing works as saleable commodities. Therefore, the

⁶⁷ Lucy Lippard, Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966-1972, New York: Praeger, 1973, p. 6.

⁶⁸ in Stiles, p. 837.

⁶⁹ in Battcock, pp. 70-101.

preference of temporary over permanent installments and written texts or documentation over finite objects encouraged the spectator or audience member to take a more active role in experiencing or participating in the art. An example of a well known conceptualized work is Robert Barry's 1969 show at the Art and Project Gallery in Amsterdam.⁷¹ He pinned to the front door a sign that read, "during the exhibition the gallery will be closed." No work by Barry was on view, no rooms were filled, and all that the artist presented was the assertion or proposition that an exhibition was happening. Suddenly, the experience of the art was not tied solely to artists but placed in the hands, or *minds*, of the audience.

Although performance art (began 1970s) also insists on the primacy of the idea of the art as opposed to the materialization or commodity of the object, it defies precise definition. Most closely associated to conceptual art, performance provided the most direct access to the artist's idea; the fact that it cannot be bought or sold gives it added importance as conceptual art. Early 20th century pioneers of performance art made pieces primarily as statements against the gallery system and the art market, whereas contemporary performance eventually became the ideal vehicle for a new generation of artists intent on creating a new aesthetic, independent of the art museum, gallery, or market. Performance art as a descriptive term was first used loosely by artists in the 1960s to refer to the many live music, dance, and theater events that evolved from happenings and fluxus in the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany. Whenever a certain school reached an impasse, artists turned to performance as a way of resolving problematic issues or venturing into new directions. For example, most of the dadaist

⁷⁰ in Stiles, p. 841.

⁷¹ Robert Barry, "Untitled Statement," Germano Celant, Art Povera, New York: Praeger, 1973, p. 115.

before they created art objects were poets or cabaret and theater performers. Similarly, many of the surrealists were poets before they began producing paintings and sculptures. Performance manifestos, beginning with the futurists, were written by artists who were attempting to find other means of producing art in the context of the everyday. Besides reassessing the nature of art and its relationship to culture and society, performance art has also been used to appeal to or shock large audiences whose participation was generally necessary or at least desired in the performance's completion.

As a reaction to the devastating effects of WWI, avant garde artists began creating performances that expressed the primacy of human subjects over objects. Weary of the limitations imposed by traditional art and in an attempt to bring art and life closer together as a means of creating a social statement, these early performance artists began using their bodies as narrative tools of investigation. Amplifying the role of process over product, they shifted from using representational objects to being presentational modes of action that extended the formal boundaries of painting and sculpture into real time and movement in space. Removing art from purely formalist concerns, they sought to reengage the artist and spectator by reconnecting art to the everyday material circumstances of individual, social, and political concerns. The term "performance" was originally adopted in the early 1970s to emphasize the fact that the work was made by conceptual artists and to distinguish such events from theater although its early history is related to entertainment, vaudeville, and cabaret.

As a conceptual activity, performance art varies from purely conceptual acts or mental occurrences to physical manifestations that may take place in private or public; an action might last a few moments or continue intermittently. Performances could

comprise simple gestures presented by a single artist or complex events and collective experiences involving widely dispersed geographic spaces and diverse communities. Performances may be transmitted by satellite and viewed by millions, appear in interactive laser discs, and take place in virtual reality; whereas the action may be entirely silent, absent of language, or inclusive of lengthy autobiographical, fictional, historical or other narrative forms. Performances could occur without witness or documentation, or they might be fully recorded in photography, video, film, or computers. Throughout the 1970s performance art continued to be essential in executing experiments in sculpture, dance, music, video, and film, allowing for the creation of multidisciplinary cross-over works as well as an overabundance of artists-run “alternative” spaces. Eventually, with the energy and excitement surrounding performance art, the art establishment responded and began exhibiting gallery- and museum-organized performances.

During the 1970s, performance took many different forms and styles, such as body art, which first emerged in the 1960s with Klein’s nude models writhing on a blue canvas in Anthropometries in Blue Period (1960).⁷² Based on the notion that the artist’s body is the artist’s primary material or aesthetic object, body art is an extension of conceptual art in that it rejects the goal of creating objects. Instead, body artists are primarily focused on using their own bodies as canvases as a way to communicate social politics, violence, and aggression in which they demonstrate the exploration of these formally through a series of actions or movements, or poetically through cultural metaphors. The term “acktionen” was used by German performing artists who disliked

⁷² Rosalee Goldberg, Performance Art: From Futurism to The Present, New York: Harry Abrams, 1988, p. 144, originally published as Performance Live Art From 1909 to the Present.

the correlation of performance art to theater or entertainment.⁷³ Joseph Beuys' (1921-1986) "aktionen" describes the mythological and metaphorical states of German culture in the 1960s in which he created the idea of "social sculpture," where everyone involved is both the artist and performer.⁷⁴ During the 1980s, Beuys talked of art as a means of reconstructing the entire social civilization. "Only from art can a new concept of economics be formed, in terms of human needs, not in the sense of waste and consumption."⁷⁵

Beuys saw the making of art as a religious, transcendent activity connecting artist and community. By dismissing clear, logical linear thought, which alienates people from their natural environment, he substituted a consciously intuitive mode of thinking about art. Besides using fat as a sculptural medium, he used animals including a horse, fox, swan, goat, coyote, and rabbit in his performances in which he made animal sounds to give a "voice" to animals unable to speak for themselves. "I see it as a way of coming into contact with other forms of existence, beyond the human one."⁷⁶ In Coyote (1974), Beuys spent a whole week, day and night, enclosed in a room of a New York City gallery with a coyote and a number of props, including a flashlight (representing energy) and the Wall Street Journal (representing capitalism and consumerism). Beuys associated the coyote with Native American spirituality, motivated by the importance to communicate higher consciousness.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 149.

⁷⁴ Joseph Beuys, "Not A Few Are Called, But Everyone," John Wheelwright (trans.), Studio International, London, vol. 184, no. 950 972, reprinted in Harris and Wood (eds), p. 903.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Beuys, "I am Searching For Field Character," Caroline Tisdall (trans.) in Art into Society, Society into Art, London: Institution of Contemporary Arts, 1974, p. 48, reprinted in Harris and Wood, p. 929.

At the same time, body artists began using acts of self-mutilation and masochism in performance art as a radically different way to communicate political and social statements as art. In Paris, Gina Pane (b. 1951) inflicted wounds on herself in a series of masochistic works in which she physically identified herself with the suffering experience in society at large.⁷⁷ In Los Angeles, Chris Burden (b. 1949) orchestrated acts of violence, such as being shot at with a gun and live ammunition in Shooting Piece (1971) and being dragged bare chested through broken glass.⁷⁸ Some masochistic body artists make private works and document them only afterwards, such as conceptual artist Vito Acconci (b. 1941), who has documented extraordinary experiments in self analysis and analysis of the body in space. “I think that when I started doing pieces, the initial attempts were much oriented towards defining my body in space. . . . Then there was a shift from me as say, margin, to me as center point, as focal point . . .”⁷⁹ In Following Piece (1969), he kept a careful record of his activities of randomly choosing and then following individuals until they disappear into private spaces. In Telling Secrets (1971), more performance than documentation, Acconci stood at the end of a New York City pier for an hour telling incriminating secrets about himself. In another experiment, Trademarks (1970), Acconci practices self inflicting pain by biting as much of his body that he could reach. To document this act, Acconci applied printer’s ink to the bitemarks and stamped them on different surfaces. Acconci’s actions mostly seem outrageous in his attention-getting stunts, but his efforts to engage in psychological investigations of the body help to broaden notions about the relationship of the artist to the audience as well as

⁷⁷ See Kathy O’Dell, Contract With The Skin: Masochism, Performing Art and the 1970s, p. 16.

⁷⁸ See O’Dell, pp. 1-16.

⁷⁹ Vito Acconci, “Steps into Performance (And Out),” in A A Bronson and and Peggy Gale (eds). Performance By Artists (Toronto Art Metropole), p. 28.

to his own physical identity.

Performance art seemed to climax when in the 1980s interest in being a spectator of, or participator in, the spontaneous happenings of the art world suddenly became popular in hollywood and on stage. Underground media darlings like David Byrne (b. 1949) and Spalding Gray (1941-2004) came to performance art on their own terms by writing, directing, acting, and often narrating their own work on stage and in film.⁸⁰ The autobiographical monologues of Byrne in True Stories (1986) and Gray, in Swimming to Cambodia (1984), emphasize the ambiguity between theater and performance as well as between artist and performer. This merging of performance and popular media placed increasing pressure on the performer to both retain his/her radical isolation from society and act as a vehicle for shaping new art ideas. For the first time in such an open-ended medium that defies precise definition, a movement of artists began working exclusively in performance rather than using it as a stepping stone to more mature work. In fact, performing artists at this time were beginning to build up a body of work that demonstrated the evolution of their conceptual art making. Soon, performance artists were showing retrospectives, had serious art-historical review, and could now be considered as having an art history. Despite such public acceptance, performance art remained in the 1980s dedicated to pushing the envelope and continued to defy place and product by breaking limits and conventions imposed on art activity.

More specifically reflecting the early days of happenings and fluxus events and in a particularly similar effort to Beuys' actions and Acconci's processes, are women's performances that involve body or autobiographical art. Excluded from formal art, and interested in the notion of an everyday aesthetic, women performers' techniques that

⁸⁰ Stiles, p. 693.

involve exposing and exhibiting their bodies appealed to feminist artists who were searching for a gender-based mode of communicating an aesthetic that appropriately linked their experience with their expression of it. This issue of one's identity associated with one's discourse was first investigated seriously by women linguists during the 1970s feminist movement when the theoretical notion that women speak a separate and distinct "women's language" flooded feminists' literature and criticism.⁸¹ However, because very few women made conceptual or body art, or those who did rarely classified their art as performance, their works were severely overlooked until a recent resurgence of feminist art theory in popular culture studies. Yet, there were a few women performing artists who were using their bodies in new and controversial ways that the art establishment could not help but notice.

Influenced by such confessional storytelling strategies like Acconci employs, women's autobiographical, body-centered art emerged in the early 1970s as a new direction for art that made women performance artists much more accessible and interesting to a wider public. For example, Marina Abramovic (b. 1946) created personal marathon performances that involved investigating endurance and psychic states.⁸² Laurie Anderson (b. 1947) and Adrian Piper (b. 1948) began creating spoken and written solo works of social commentary that immediately attracted attention outside of the art world.⁸³ Specifically, women's performances that involve communicating with their bodies are intended to explore the relationship between mind, body, and experience as a

⁸¹ See Alisa Brandenburg, The Sociolinguistics of Women's Language: An Ethnography of June Rostan's Hedging in Written Communication, MA Thesis, East Tennessee State University, 1998.

⁸² See excerpts from a dialogue with Marina Abramovic and Ulay, in "Marina Abramovic/Ulay: Relation/Works: 3 Performances," Innsbruck: Galeria Krinzinger, 1978, n.p. reprinted in Stiles, p. 758.

⁸³ see Laurie Anderson and Adrian Piper, Talking To Myself: The Ongoing Autobiography of Art Object. Bari: Marilena Bonomo, 1975.

means of challenging women's traditional representation. Especially important to these performances was how women artists carried out critiquing their own psyche using their own creative images and conceptual strategies. Much of their work was dedicated to communicating issues that addressed women's gender identity or sexual experience and how it manifests or breaks down in visual and verbal terms.

Carolee Schneemann (1942) pioneered women's performance as early as 1960 with her controversial erotic art. As an artist, writer, and filmmaker, Schneemann explores taboo-breaking art making as a source of and vehicle for knowledge. Investigating aspects of the unconscious by incorporating dance, film, poetry, painting, and sculpture into performance, Schneemann created hundreds of multi-media happenings. In her most well known work that employs a series of actions emphasizing intensive physical contact and risk, Meat Joy (1964) mingles blood, fish, chicken parts, and raw sausage with a racially mixed group of naked bodies including Schneemann's.⁸⁴ In Interior Scroll (1975), Schneemann stood naked in front of an audience and extracted a paper scroll from her vagina and read aloud from it text regarding the abstraction of the female body and its loss of meaning. Such radical exhibition of the female body demonstrates women artists' needs to communicate visually and verbally their perspective either in reaction to the establishment or in parody of the anti-establishment.

Valie Export (b 1940), a Viennese radical performance artist, similarly forwarded the feminist cause with her explicit body art and written manifestos predicting with vengeance the future of women's art. Working amongst the Viennese Aktionists, she

⁸⁴ See Carolee Schneemann, More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works and Selected Writings. Bruce McPherson. (ed.) New York: Documentext, 1979.

formulated her own philosophy that she called “Feminist Actionism,”⁸⁵ using the female body to critique the male gaze. Producing body art, performances, photographs, screenplays, films and installations, Export made important theoretical contributions to communicating a personal feminism in performance. She felt that it was important “politically to create art. I knew that if I did it naked, I would really change how the (mostly male) audience would look at me.”⁸⁶ As a way of getting undivided attention by communicating with her body, in one of her most documented works, Touch Cinema (1968), Export strapped on a box that enclosed her naked breasts, with holes only large enough that spectators could place their hands through but not see. She calls it the “cinema hall” where her body was the screen, “not for looking but for touching,”⁸⁷ a strategy that turns the mostly male audience gaze back on itself in which the artists’ subjects must instead withstand her gaze.

In a totally different form of body art yet with a similar intent is Mary Kelly’s (b. 1941) groundbreaking documentary art about women’s actual life experiences that have helped unite feminist theorists’ and artists’ goals in contemporary feminist art historical studies. Protesting conventional representations of women and even against some feminist’s notions of feminist images,⁸⁸ Kelly rejects any direct representation of women in her work and instead uses text and images to indirectly argue, expose, and explore issues of sexuality that interest her. In 1979, she exhibited the first part of her 165-part Post Partum Document, which she had begun in 1973.⁸⁹ The subject is her son’s early

⁸⁵ Valie Export, “Women’s Art: A Manifesto,” Neue Forum 228, January, 1973, p.47, reprinted in Stiles, p. 755.

⁸⁶ Valie Export, Angry Women, Andrea Juno (ed), p. 186.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Mary Kelly, Post Partum Document New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.

life from ages 1-5 and her relationship with him. Grounded in psychoanalytical theory claiming that gender is culturally-determined by social discourse, Kelly's conceptual documentaries are central to the study of feminist art.

Performing artist, Linda Montano (b. 1942) does not conform to the traditional feminists' body imagery and autobiographical strategies that defined these first generation conceptual/performing artists' strategies or techniques. Instead she combines postmodern theory with pragmatic philosophy to arrive at a less sexually explicit, gender-based and more physically-challenging and psychically-engaging performance art. Through endurance marathons similar to Acconci's and deprivation tests like Beuys', Montano seeks an almost religious discipline in her performances as a means to investigation the art object's traditional nature. By refraining from making objects and instead becoming the object, Montano uses performance to explore her own notions of the self as a culturally constructed conception. Her Living Art performances in particular demonstrate her aesthetic purpose for transactional transformation between herself and her immediate environment. As a performing artist for more than 40 years, Linda Montano has attempted to erase the lines of demarcation between life and art by using psychic states such as attitude, awareness, and intention as tools to transform her life into an art that has resulted in an assault on the very notion of its traditional status. Montano's performances redefine art from mere a consumer-driven, commodity-centered object to a vigilant "state of mind."

Using attention states, duration, and meditation as postmodern pragmatic strategies, Montano's performances attempt to break down the barriers between art and life through knowledge and experience. For example, in 1969 Montano showed live and

dead chickens in a gallery that inspired her alter ego the “Chicken Woman;” in 1973 she performed “Handcuff” during which she remained handcuffed to conceptual artist Tom Marioni for 3 days and nights; in 1975 she lived as different characters blindfolded in a gallery for 3 days without speaking. Of particular interest to this thesis is her most controversial piece: the year she spent tied at the waist with an 8 foot rope to artist Tehching Hsieh in which they never touched. Since then, Montano has written several books, produced numerous videos, and created hundreds of major performances. Today, she continues to balance her performances with teaching art at the University of Texas at Austin.

Linda Montano was raised with a strict Catholic upbringing, and even at an early age she recognized that authoritarian roles would continue to influence her art. “The women were the nuns whose job it was to ‘shepherd’ the children, and the men were the ‘priests’ officiating up on the podium, with altar boys serving them while they performed the ‘magic.’”⁹⁰ Although she initially wanted to be a priest, Montano’s childhood dream was always to become a nun. After spending a brief stint at the College of New Rochelle, she entered a convent at 21, becoming a nun neither for service nor spirituality but, admittedly, for self help: “I didn’t have a way to analyze my situation or communication my confusion. I just thought, ‘well, I’ll be able to travel and do good.’ I was so enthralled in thought that I stayed in that spiritual world for two years.”⁹¹ She seemed to enjoy the organized and limited freedom that the built-in rituals provided in being a nun; however, she lost sight of her identity which she tried to regain by becoming anorexic. Montano explains that controlling what she ate was the only way she could

⁹⁰ Linda Montano, “Interview with Andrea Juno” in Angry Women, Andrea Juno (ed), San Francisco: Re/Search Publications, 1991, p. 50.

express herself, describing it philosophically and aesthetically: “that was probably my first ‘body alteration.’ I went from 145 to 82 pounds. It was like performing, because I became very alert, very conscious, very in control, very empowered.”⁹²

Montano began questioning the nature of art, the art object, and in particular, the need for permanent object making altogether when in 1965 she earned a master’s degree in sculpture from Villa Schifanoia in Florence, Italy. While there, people began to take notice of Montano as a serious artist while her non-traditional work flourished, providing the foundation of the conceptual performances that would continue to influence her art. In one happening on the roof of the art school, Montano painted found objects and numbered them. The audience would come in, take a number, find the object corresponding to the number and add it to the existing non-frame that eventually became the sculpture. Montano confesses that these types of performances were mental and physical breakthroughs: “I was getting hot and excited-this was really wonderful-it wasn’t addressing my psychology then (as much as my later performances would) but I felt I was really living. I knew that if I got other people to look at me, then I would really be here. Once I found that out, it was if I had discovered this secret.”⁹³ Communicating with art was something that Montano felt that she wasn’t doing and couldn’t do until she performed publicly but it didn’t take long before Montano began developing her own alternative role models as art, in essence creating her own religion. She states,

I could modify my body and my psyche by creating ‘living sculptures’ (as it were) or ‘performances’ . . . I [was getting] applause for expressing my feelings-in a way that was possible for me . . . of course with all that I had to do more. I could

⁹¹ Ibid., 52.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 54.

start receiving the attention I used to give the saints. . . .⁹⁴

It was only after she began performing in front of an audience that Montano began to perceive herself conceptually as an artist who had a function separate from the art that she was trying to produce. Montano explains that she wanted to continue doing art that pushed boundaries by taking her beyond the limitations of her own imagination:

In Zen training they talk about ‘waking up’ and ‘paying attention’ and ‘playing with the mind’ . . . I want to be an artist with the same kind of alertness a brain surgeon would have performing microsurgery . . . I want that critical edge of awareness and surgical precision and I want to get it in this lifetime.⁹⁵

Montano has always had an openness to explore what other people consider taboo or inappropriate. But when she began performing publicly, her own evolutionary process of learning and growing began to reveal itself as an important goal in melding life and art: “I got addicted to the performing process—that’s where I was creative, truthful, abandoning ego. I was curing myself through exhibiting my existence publicly.”⁹⁶

Montano perceives her willingness to explore what others consider private as a personal evolution: a union between her private/public and personal/social selves. In her attempt to erase the lines of demarcation, she harmoniously began to merge art and life. In 1966, Montano returned to the United States and earned an MFA degree at University of Wisconsin where she first took on the persona of a chicken, worked with chickens, and did an entire happening with chickens. In a humorous but critical gesture, Montano believed that she was dealing directly with boundaries of the definition of art. In one performance, 3 chickens were presented in 3 large cages, while a chicken video continually played; 9 hand-tinted photographs of chickens were exhibited while Montano

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 53.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 52.

drove around the city playing chicken sounds from a loud speaker. More importantly, Montano's chicken performances raised critical questions about dualisms, private/public, feminism/individualism in her art and life by addressing alternative role models for women that are not necessarily "feminine."

In a series of experiments that allowed her to explore the physical, spiritual, and psychic spaces that are generally considered taboo, Montano began doing live performances with dead chickens; subsequently, the identity of her chicken persona crystallized: "Everybody who saw it was shocked . . . the 'Chicken Woman' was born . . . she was a nun, saint, martyr, plaster statue, angel . . . my totem and my twin."⁹⁷ To intensify these events, she would attempt to alter her consciousness with hypnosis, duration, sound, or repetition, Montano explains, to give her the freedom to seek what she self admittedly needed most "confidence, courage, stillness, endurance, concentration" in both her life and art.⁹⁸

Performing—getting attention by paying attention—was simultaneously satisfying and exhilarating for Montano. The duration of Montano's chicken performances depended on attention as transactual between she and her audience to attain her ulterior motive: problem-solving through creative, conceptual activities. For example, she confesses that she came to terms with feeling inferior through these performances, by focusing on "being good," which required the audience's participation: "the audience became a surrogate parent, friend, teacher. I could do this on my own terms . . . people would pay me to be me . . . to be alive . . ." ⁹⁹ Montano's chicken exercises led to her 1972 piece "Lying: Dead Chicken Live Angel" at Berkeley Museum, Berkeley, CA

⁹⁷ Ibid., 54.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

where for three days, from noon until 3 pm, Montano wore a blue promdress, tap shoes, a feather head band and wings spanning 12 feet while she laid immobile in a bed behind polyethylene curtains. Fig leaves covered the floor while a tape of bird sounds played in the background. Montano's curiosity about female imagery crystallized her whimsical fairy-like chicken tale that she calls her "time of silence," when only the audience spoke while a self-designated prince kissed her on the lips.

Montano's interest in communicating female imagery and representation, however, continued in "The Story of My Life" in 1973 at the San Francisco Art Institute, where Montano walked uphill on a treadmill for 3 hours a day over 3 days while telling the story of her life into an amplifier that echoed her voice. Montano confessed: "I wanted to get so deeply into myself that I would be able to get out of myself and know that it was just a matter of time before that would happen."¹⁰⁰ Like the "Chicken Women," Montano donned the blue promdress but dyed her teeth and attached a permanent smiling device on her mouth. A tape recorder hung at her waist playing bird sounds while a light shone on her face. A green carpet covered the ground on which a chair sat with her a family photo album. The piece was so physically exhilarating that she couldn't stop walking once the piece was over. The reason for the dyed teeth Montano explained came from the preceding day's appointment with her dentist when he embarrassed her by revealing with dye her dirty teeth. Always committed to experimenting with merging her life and work, Montano's Living Art eventually began to consume her every moment:

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Linda Montano, "Interview with Alex and Allyson Grey," High Performance, 27, 1984, p. 24, reprinted in Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art, Stiles (ed), p. 778.

I lived with different people and called that art. I lived in galleries, I was sealed in a room for five days as five different people . . . I would do a performance on a street corner for a day, or for 3 days . . . , or for a week live at home, and every minute would be art. I was just being in the ‘state of art’ which was really a state of meditation.¹⁰¹

In 1974, Montano became a Salvation Army bell ringer during the Christmas season after discovering that in public she enjoyed acting like different people. In 1975 at the Annual San Francisco Christmas Montano lived with artist Pauline Oliveros and called it “art.” They each had a separate environment where they laid motionless for long periods of time as a way to both merge with and submerge within their immediate surroundings. Yet Montano found it to be too confining and confusing, stating “Instead of feeling creative, human, and spontaneous, I felt like a harried hostess.”¹⁰² In 1975 at the Museum of Conceptual Art in San Francisco, Montano and Tom Marioni were handcuffed together for 3 days during which for 10 minutes a day a video documented the event. Montano says that she pursued this kind of performance in particular because it required disciplined but invigorating attentiveness almost immediately:

The time together became a study in movement and mutual signaling. We moved together immediately. As soon as the handcuffs were on, we started moving together. That continued for 3 days: going places, getting up, eating, changing, and going to the bathroom. Whatever we did was absolutely synchronized at all times.¹⁰³

Overall, Montano’s Living Art performances solidified questions that she raises about the differences between public and private spaces and about the relationship between being permissive in her work but conservative in her life.

Besides Catholicism, conceptual art, and philosophy, Montano performances are informed by a personal investment in art’s transformative qualities. When as a nun she

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 779.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 780.

developed anorexia, she immersed herself in art, becoming aware of the psychological/sociological effects that would continue serving as the foundation of her creative process. Montano says that the energy of a performance forces her to become more conscious, allowing her message to be more consciously controlled. Montano makes living her life the artwork, not necessarily in the process of the performance, but the intention of the performance is the art itself. “I once sent out an announcement to people that I’d be home for a week, and document all food, clothing, all dreams, all conversations, all phone calls, etc.”¹⁰⁴ In a sense, she never stopped performing or at least separated performing from living and all actions are seen as opportunities for higher consciousness: “I liked being in creativity all the time, I didn’t like the division that ‘this was art’ or ‘this wasn’t . . . I think Duchamp said that breathing could be the highest art . . . That’s really my goal.”¹⁰⁵ Montano explains that the purpose of her Living Art pieces is to allow artists to designate how to work and live together as a means to transform their life into art:

This time then becomes art to redefine relationships by living together in a marathon fashion after having drawn up a mutually workable contract . . . these activities, when documented and performed together as art, can change the values and personal vision of the artist . . . the artists may choose as much of this time as they think they need to transform and change themselves.¹⁰⁶

Montano enjoys the challenge of long-term performances in restricted environments that require physical and mental alertness because they allow her to reach a state of consciousness that makes her life seem more manageable. “I would endure things by

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Montano, Angry, p. 57.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 57.

taking them into my body, listening to my body, being blindfolded. And this became very satisfying-I wasn't running around looking for art."¹⁰⁷

Becoming like a conductor, Montano uses order, structure, and control as tools to orchestrate her conceptual notions of merging art and life, ones which are habitually acted out in performance as ritual: "I was focusing, creating all the rules. I was creating the scenario and being very one pointed . . . to distract me from myself."¹⁰⁸ For example, Montano genuinely attempted to explore altering consciousness by investigating the everydayness of routine actions in Art/Life One year Performance (1983-1984).

Montano and performing artist Tehching Hsieh wrote and signed a contract with witnesses present proclaiming that they would for a year remain tied at the waist to each other with an 8-foot rope, never touch, and be together in the same room the entire time. The event was framed by a ceremony in which Montano and Hsieh's heads were shaved, the ropes padlocked, the contracts signed for authenticity, and photographs taken to mark the event. Periodically during the year, they photographed themselves, kept a scrapbook, wrote in a journal, and tape recorded notes to document their activities, movements, and thoughts. Rather than focusing on what the artists did during the day (Montano taught some classes, Hsieh did some construction work), their documentation of the art superseded explanation of the experience itself. Documentation, in fact, constitutes a core aspect of the structure beneath the structure of the event. They both paid great attention to detail, exactitude of ritual, commitment to the rules, and execution of the piece, while Montano's ambitions as an artist were clear from the start: an avowed interest in learning how to live better individually and socially through lifelike works of art.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 58.

Inspired by the belief that Hsieh and she shared the similar goal of merging art and life, Montano states: “For many years I have been framing my life and calling it art, so that everything-washing dishes, making love, walking, shopping, holding children-is seen as art. I felt that it was important to be attentive all the time-not waste a second.”¹⁰⁹ Montano believed that she and Hsieh also shared similar art processes, stating that she literally “heard a voice” that said ‘do a one-year piece with him!’ Similarly, Hsieh’s interest in working with Montano grew when he discovered her familiarity with intensive performances involving endurance and abstinence. Until her collaboration with Hsieh and besides her work with Marioni, nothing Montano had previously done had ever been remotely so extreme—in terms of time and space. Being tied to Hsieh for a year seemed like the ultimate combination Montano had been searching for: spiritual and disciplined actions and movements in seclusion for all the world to witness.

Despite its everydayness, Hsieh and Montano were committed to endure what previous pieces similarly required: repetitive but confined actions within a limited but mobile space over an extended period of time. The duration of a year-long piece interested Montano because it has the organization and repetition of real time and space. Montano relates that in Art/Life, concentrating both on one’s environment and altering one’s actions require immediate and constant awareness. She was forced to remain alert and be attentive because the performance was so alien to her normal existence, demanding that Montano pay attention to one idea, not several. Being tied was so tedious and absorbing that she had to learn how to relearn everyday routines and habits that involve movement and coordination. “I found that I could do only do just that, because being tied is so potentially dangerous, the mind gets focused or else our lives are

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 62.

threatened.”¹¹⁰

Touching, or the lack thereof, was an important clause for Montano in her attempt to universalize the piece’s statement not about a couple, but about two individuals investigating interpersonal development and communication. Art/Life symbolized for her real pain and suffering—mental and physical—that individuals must daily endure: “the person tied to a bad job or a bad place or a bad marriage.” Problems of living together that arose during the year occasionally erupted in violence, obstructing the work’s completion and ultimately endangering its survival. At such close quarters, Montano and Hsieh were forced to express their needs and wishes that made conflict inevitable, which in turn provided more distance than did just not touching. Questions of morality and quality of alliance, issues of character, cooperation, compassion, and personal survival surfaced repeatedly within the work but were always worked out with a compromise between both artists, sometimes with a mediating third party. “Often,” Montano admits, “we would just have to sit it out, sometimes for three weeks, until the cloud of unknowing passed.”¹¹¹ For Hsieh, how to balance freedom and restraint while remaining tied to someone became his central theme, explaining the difficulty of maintaining his individualism as both artist and individual, he states:

There are cultural issues, men/women issues, ego issues . . . if we want to be a good human being and good artists at the same time, that’s one kind of clash and struggle. Also, if we want a relationship and independence at the same time, that creates a double struggle.¹¹²

Art/Life was a transformation for Montano who used conflict and resolution strategies to resolve daily insights about her private self. Montano says that she escaped

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Montano, Theories, p. 781.

¹¹² Hsieh, Theories, p. 781.

being tied by daydreaming and focusing on the future, viewing it as a kind of training ground for exploring other kinds of life issues. “That would keep me in a ‘job’ and alive and learning and active and plugged into a creative mindset or consciousness.”¹¹³

Art/Life forced her to become aware of her will power, specifically getting in touch with the limitations of her weaknesses as both artist and individual. Choosing not to have sex, Montano says that she discovered the benefits of abstinence, guilt, and sacrifice, which helped to reinforce her spiritual discipline. Besides training the mind, she says that her performances raise the level and quality of emotion in her life. “I feel as if I’ve dredged up ancient rages and frustrations this year and although I am glad that I went through them, I now feel that holding any emotional state for too long is actually an obsolete strategy.”¹¹⁴ Montano believes that everything she does is art, and as a result, is more comfortable in life, “fighting, eating, sleeping—even the negatives are raised to the dignity of art, it’s all part of the same picture.”¹¹⁵

In the end, it was clear that Art/Life had raised more questions than it answered, especially about real versus imagined experience in relationships. Individuality as it manifested through modified communication ultimately determined how the performance progressed until they were separated a year later. Specifically, Montano and Hsieh learned over the course of the piece that they had developed four ways of communicating with each other, which went quickly from verbal to non-verbal:

In the first phase we were verbal . . . talking about six hours a day. Phase two, we started pulling on each other, yanking on the rope. We had talked ourselves out, but yanking led to anger. In phase three we were less physical with each other and used gestures, so we would point when we wanted to go to the bathroom or point to the kitchen when we wanted to eat. Phase four, we grunted, and made

¹¹³ Montano, Angry, p. 63.

¹¹⁴ Montano in Jill Johnston’s “Hardship Art,” Art in America, September 1984, p. 174.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

audible, moaning sounds when we need to get somewhere . . . that was a signal for the other to get up and follow in the initiator.¹¹⁶

Although Art/Life served as an appropriate means to explore privately issues that forced social experiment, it did not end without painful, personal regrets. Knowing that the piece was coming to a close, both Montano and Hsieh admitted to returning to behaving normally, anticipating their independence and freedom away from the other. “It was as if we had surfaced from a submarine,”¹¹⁷ Montano confessed. While this piece aroused rage and anger, Montano learned that her goal is to become herself: “I’d been the bad girl in my art, Tehching Hsieh helped me touch the ‘Good Girl’ paradigm in me.”¹¹⁸ Performing Art/Life, Montano also learned that art might not be enough: “I needed more help than what I was giving myself . . . to give 100 per cent all the time. Usually in relationships I have thought, ‘I’ll open up tomorrow.’ Now I realize that life is short, and its ridiculous to waste time.”¹¹⁹ Integrating art and life as closely as she did with Hsieh in Art/Life taught her most that she wanted to continue integrating living and doing: “I love doing difficult strange things,” Montano says, “I’m really ballsy, really gutsy, and I’m really good.”¹²⁰ Overall, Art/Life represents for Montano a transactual way to prepare for transitions in her life and art such as waking up, letting go, and moving on.

In conclusion, regarding her particular experience as a woman, Montano’s outlook is positive that role models for contemporary women are improving and gaining acceptance. “. . . it’s really to our advantage to houseclean our interior soul, and have other people say, ‘That’s not so bad!’ or someone might say, ‘Oh wow, now let me show

¹¹⁶ Montano, Theories, p. 782.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Montano, Angry, p. 63.

you mine!”¹²¹ Montano claims that women now are allowed to make mistakes for the sake of healing, learning, and growing. “I’m finding that we can have it all; that we have permission to fall back, permission to be pre-women’s movement and pre-consciousness raising. Maybe that’s more important than ‘making it.’”¹²² Montano’s effort to integrate living and making art has become a model not just for women but for individual personal growth, understanding, and awareness within our environment.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

ONE REMOVAL TWICE REMOVED:

A POSTMODERN PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

The previous chapter described Linda Montano's statements as they characterize her artwork and how she develops a postmodern pragmatic aesthetic in her performance art. This chapter discusses how Montano's Living Art performances create an environment that is conducive to the unique interchange between knowledge and experience, demonstrating the potentiality for transforming contemporary art. Interpretations regarding the validity of Montano's performance art vary widely from questioning her intentions, sincerity, or authenticity to disbelief in her motives and motivation regarding her artwork. Of course to the average viewer, Montano's Living Art performances may at first glance seem absurd and perhaps further contributing to the 20th century avant garde's removal of art. However, Montano's faith in and commitment to the strict and stringent rules that required her undivided attention and surefire willingness to engage and endure indicate her seriousness and dedication to her art. The unyielding desire with which she completes her performances suggests perhaps the neurotic tendencies of a hysterical, religious zealot, but ironically, that's Montano's sincerest wish to fulfill.

In Has Modernism Failed?, Suzi Gablik's call for a new art that has retained the morality, values, and tradition that modernism failed to preserve over the course of the 20th century demonstrates that in its attempt to free art through a succession of removing the aesthetic from the experience of art, modernism liberated from art the very foundation that bore it. First, Duchamp and dada alienated their audience with readymades intended

to raise the status of the artist's selection of art by deeming anything the artist chose as art. By removing the institutionalizing effect that art objects tend to take as mere commodity for museum practices, these early avant garde revolutionized the perception of art in their questioning of the nature of art. Who decides what art is, where its placed, and what is ultimately determined about it changes greatly when art's context is not only removed but replaced with no context, like readymades in which the idea of the art not the manifestation or actualization of the art object reigns supreme as creating a new anti aesthetic. By forcing the viewers' cognitive involvement, Duchamp, dada, the surrealists, futurists, and other anti art fronts consequently alienated their viewers' participation and their ultimate engagement of the art object. To return to Gablik's original problem with modern art, that it might be considered immoral and without value, nevertheless signaled the beginning of the end for modern art in that the traditional status of the art object as material began to dissolve with artists removing from it any notion of an associated, historical, or traditional conception of art.

Perhaps it can be said that examples such as Duchamp's readymades lack a certain moral character and do not demonstrate an aesthetic that values beauty in a traditional sense; however, readymades and other anti art spoke the truth of the artist's intentions and reflect the radical and chaotic changes in how art came to be perceived and exhibited. The surrealists' further attempt to transform the art object into a more politically-active, socially-responsible, literary movement removed any traditional aesthetic attached to their art making ideas, further distancing the audience from their art. Dreamlike fantasies played out like grand narrative battle scenes as violent, sexual, and war-inspired symbolism flooded the surrealists' anti aesthetic, whose reduction of an art

form into a consciousness inspired similar anti art movements to reach beyond tradition means of expression. Regardless of whether surrealists, like dada, are considered immoral, it was their illustration of a world loosing moral ground and their depiction of such an effect that viewers mistook their aesthetic as angry, ugly, dirty, and vulgar. That these artists were simply mirroring society and culture demonstrates the power that values and morals have when absent or forgotten in the experience of art.

Many modern art movements developed under this notion of an avant garde aesthetic, always looking around the corner for the next new form in which they may express and expose themselves. Futurism, even more politically-motivated than its predecessors in cleansing, freeing, and ridding art of all that is aesthetic, really desired an art for art's sake but more a fascist art for totalitarian's sake. Moving even further away from its audience and patrons were abstract expressionists, who thought less about questioning the nature of the art object and more about responding to the process of artmaking as pure creation, unmediated by the outside world, focusing only on the artist's relationship with the experience of producing art. Still psychologically-driven, abstract expressionists extended dada, surrealists, and futurists' notions of giving art back to the artist, the aesthetic being in the process not the product of art, and furthermore created their own rules for artmaking that went against tradition, underground, and totally inside the consciousness of the artist. Although this may seem moral in a disciplined, religious sense and seems to value art for art's sake in a more pure sense, by doing away with tradition yet by staunchly adhering to the total autonomy of the art object, these anti artists were moving away from the need to demonstrate tradition such as human values by replacing with it aesthetic value. Overall, removing art's virtue—which would invite

the viewer in—from the traditional experience of art paradoxically distanced the art from the very audience it was attempting to reach by creating an anti aesthetic deemed immoral and whose values and tradition simply aren't visible.

Gablik reminds the reader in Has Modernism Failed? that the developments in modern art over the course of the 20th century are a sign of the growing dismay with the artworld in their constant succession of removing from art its authentic aesthetic. Minimalism, pop, and conceptual art, although maintaining different purposes for their anti aesthetic, still contributed in the effort to alienate their audience by totally removing the art object from both experience and perception. By making art that looked identical to mass-produced consumer products, pop and minimalist artists forced art out of the consciousness back into experience while remaining committed to the further removal of an aesthetic through total detachment from society. Conceptual artists similarly removed art from its viewership by totally removing any evidence of the art or artist, leaving only the residual idea of the art idea conceived by the artist yet unperceivable by the audience. Dematerializing the art object freed artists from the artmaking process not only by creating a noncommodity but also by decommercializing their art. Pop, minimalists, and conceptual artists alike all wished to free themselves from the act of making anything at all, again contributing to the succession of modernism's removal: removing the museum removes the commodity and the further removal of the art object removes the aesthetic.

Conceptual art by far took this removal and intellectualized their non aesthetic into a philosophical question that furthered the notion of an art that was wholly linguistic in the Duchampian sense, contributing to the further degradation of a tradition that once valued an art that valued morals and tradition. On one hand, conceptual art encouraged

the engagement of the art idea through the documentation, photographs, instructions, journals, interviews, etc, in which their art is exhibited; however, the communication of the experience of conceptual art on the other hand is generally left to the imagination of the viewer, alienating even further the very audience they wished to engage. Again such a paradox suggests modernism's failure to uphold traditional notions of artmaking as good, moral, and grounded in the tradition in which it continues to thrive. It seems that because traditional morals and values were no longer the keepers of modern art, it was this linguistic preoccupation with the notion of art as a proposition that furthermore perpetuated such an anti aesthetic. Art continued not because of its formlessness but because it became synonymous with philosophy, where form becomes idea. Similarly as futurist's manifestos became synonymous with war propaganda and abstract expressionists' larger than life, arena-like environments became synonymous with religion, conceptual art became synonymous with philosophy in which the philosophical questions regarding the nature of art continued to sustain it.

Ironically, as conceptual art notions led to the convergence of all art forms that focus on the philosophical boundaries that engage art, performance art led in the effort to communicate a developing aesthetic intended to engage in communication with their audience. Influenced by happenings and fluxus art, performance artists acted out conceptual propositions in front of live audiences or in private as a means to more closely engage a higher form of consciousness, either personally or socially. Performance art took on many guises and roles in contemporary modern art, combining not only a conceptual aesthetic with the physical movements implemented by early avant garde performing artists but including in their medium other artmaking techniques involved in

music, dance, drama, etc, mixing and mingling a new aesthetic in which communicating a message suddenly became revolutionary. While conceptual artists communicate an idea, performing artists attempt to communicate a message through as many different means as they can combine. Yet, performers were removing an aesthetic from artmaking but instead attempted to remove the boundaries that dictated materials and intentions, processes and theory, and specified meaning by implementing multiple styles and conditions and by flooding performances with so much, that only paying attention was possible. For example, even without an audience in some of Acconci's work, attention is demanded not just in recognition of the art idea but in the carrying out of the idea as action as art. It is this carrying out of the process of art, however, not necessarily the perception of the action that Acconci desires his audience to engage. It too may be said that performance artists suffer from a lack of morality, value, and tradition; yet, in their attempt to alter and thus improve the relationship between art and audience, even if alienating, demonstrates their empowerment to do so.

Perhaps this is an overstatement of Gablik's original intention, but clearly performance artists more than modernism's avant garde have the potential, even weighed against conceptual art, to be considered a 'total' art in that it incorporates visual, verbal, and manual systems of communication that are simply ignored or absent in other art forms. Although the difficulty in comprehending art's meaning or experience lies in the result of using a verbal construct to explain visual meaning that is comprehended both through verbal and visual means, performance art seems to create an atmosphere in which addressing art's environment lends to creating a new, independent art that has the

potential to align art's history, intentions, and audience expectations like no other medium.

Body and autobiographical performing artists took the notion of an unlimited frame and horizonless boundary to be a result of a world not at rest, an audience looking to relate, and a field of reference crucial to their aesthetic goal of engaging communication. That these performance artists succeeded at communicating intent, idea, form, subject, artist, object, and experience all through the message of their performance rooted in the visual, verbal, and manual systems of communication, articulation, and comprehension demonstrate that they simply got closer to their audience by inviting their participation, but even more so by making their message more engaging in both idea and correspondence of that idea. Either politically, personally, or psychologically, performance artists create a role for their audiences in which they fulfill both artists' goals and their audiences' unique universal interest not as the alienated viewer but as an engaging, participating, individual human being.

Needless to say this type of performance art appealed to women artists who used their gender and sex to push their feminine agenda of either patriarchal blame or satirical complicity with women's expected social role and public image. Essentially challenging centuries of misrepresentation, women looked to performance to rename and replace themselves independent of any conception of themselves as women outside their own personal identity. While most women performance artists employed sexually graphic means to express their aesthetic in the name of feminism or misogyny, Linda Montano, on the other hand, chose to work on other levels that express a feminist aesthetic without the feminism.

That Montano's Living Art answers Gablik's call for an art that values morals and goals by creating a postmodern pragmatic art indicates that her art is not an art for art's sake; instead it is a practical art, devised, planned, and executed exclusively for social and personal transformation. As a postmodern performing artist, Montano is less the 'artist/genius'—self-reliant and self-possessed—and more the 'artist/scientist'—disciplined, objective, and process oriented, who is grounded in a rule-governed aesthetic in which traditions are valued and standards upheld. Cognitive rules Montano designs as tools in which she mandates as a form of self-discipline while her contractual agreements serve as both recipe and ingredients, instrumental in balancing the freedom and restraint in which she strives for in her art, but only by adhering to such disciplined rules and fulfilling such purposive goals does she truly experience liberation. In merging art and life so closely, she obliterates the limitations and the boundaries of traditional dualisms and instead creates a spiritually-mediated art, rooted in reevaluating experience as a healing process of growth and change. Because Montano's performances function on personal, social, and aesthetic levels, her art may be said to be creating a new postmodern pragmatic aesthetic.

Dewey's findings in Art As Experience like Gablik's indicate that a real need exists for quality, purpose, and virtue to be restored to art. Gablik's condemnation of modernism for its failure to contribute any moral authority or virtue to art combined with Dewey's admonishment of an art for art's sake suggests that modern art's failure to preserve such social values as identity and purpose cost it its cultural credibility and meaning. Even in reactionary, anti art's efforts to renovate art, modernism's aesthetic in turn became aggressive, absurd, and demoralized as pointed out by Dewey, who similarly

found art to be suffering and in need of reevaluation and resuscitation in order to again become a viable force in reconstructing human life and well being. To summarize, Dewey asserts a practical art with an instrumental function, one expressed not in form or material but in experience, and one that attempts to merge art and life more closely intended for the higher good of the betterment of society.

Responding to Dewey's pragmatic aesthetic, Montano's Living Art performances demonstrate a commitment to practical, structured movements and ordered actions of daily routines and habits in order to provide an environment in which she is able to address her own interpersonal development. For example, Living Art's conceptual and intellectual performances involving endurance and deprivation that demand her to align her life and art more closely embrace the notion of art as experiencing constructive, conceptual activities, suggesting in Deweyan terms that her performances seek problem-solving techniques as strategies to reconstruct interactions with her immediate environment. In maintaining a postmodern pragmatic aesthetic, Montano creates an environment conducive to merging knowledge and experience, that is her art and life.

Montano's Living Art not only responds to Gablik's proposal for "direct knowing," her methods reflect Dewey's recommendation for an art as experience. Her attempt at knowing herself by engaging her environment more closely forces her to think and act differently about how she conducts her life and carries out her art. Montano values her strict Catholic upbringing, in which she learned to appreciate ritual and sacrifice, and her early art experiences—both positive and negative—that inform her performances with faith and hope, intended to transform future interactions with her environment. She also values her liberal arts college education as it informs her rejection

and reevaluation of traditional art methods and pursuit and development of non-traditional performances. That Montano's performances defy traditional museum practices, commodification, materialization, and visualization (except through photographic record) indicates that her aesthetic embraces the ultimate conceptualism: creating an art that cannot be preserved, destroyed, bought, or sold. Instead, her art acts as a vehicle for deeper consciousness that allows her to merge her own art and life within very ordinary experiences but under uniquely extraordinary circumstances. By embracing the act of setting boundaries and enforcing limitations in both her art and life and by strictly defining the parameters of her social role and representation, Montano gets closer in touch with engaging herself and her environment directly. Through organized movements and arranged actions, her performance art acts as scientific inquiry, delving into the realms of physical places as psychic spaces. Montano's art just doesn't function for life; nor her life for an art's sake; instead, it forces her to be a direct participator within her environment, extending her private identity of herself beyond her personal self. Although Montano's art may be misunderstood as self-indulgent or misrepresented an extreme attempt at art for art's sake, in her effort to rethink and rework her relationships cognitively and creatively, Montano's art aims at allowing herself to experience the individual spiritual transformation in which she seeks, personally, socially, and aesthetically.

Montano's Living Art creates an environment that is conducive to the interchange between knowledge of herself and experience in her immediate surroundings in which several themes may be traced throughout her performances that demonstrate a particularly pragmatic method of aesthetic design: harmony, transparency, unity,

attention, intention, attitude, balance, meditation, and transformation. Montano successfully fulfills her exploration of direct experience involving everyday practices that provide her with an immediate outlet to self-awareness and self-discovery. Essentially to indicate her attempt at direct knowledge of herself in her performances, Montano's mission statement for her Living Art should perhaps read like this: "to endure becoming, one must induce knowing," suggesting a different kind of reconstruction of the self: becoming an individual through a reconstructed cultural experience of individualism. Montano's art as experience is that such becoming, providing direct social interaction to enhance personal knowledge.

Specifically in attempting to merge her art and life so closely in Living Art, Montano mediates both a transaction and negotiation—a give and take—between self and society. Montano's performances enact an environment that investigates the nature of art as to discover and "test" its transformative qualities. In defying and broadening traditional notions of art, Montano embraces pragmatic strategies in her performances that allow her to address, define, and resolve interpersonal issues of growth, healing, and change. Particularly in collaborating with Tehching Hsieh in Art/Life, Montano challenges the limitations of human restraint and freedom as a means to explore the relationship between psychic and metaphysical states of fear and desire, hysteria and neuroses, and especially life and death. Merging art and life through the extreme conditions and extemporaneous circumstances that Art/Life required, Montano seeks knowledge of and experience in becoming better person and especially experience in becoming a better contributing member of society. Through conceptual actions and movements that both require and demand concentration, awareness, endurance, and

deprivation, Montano pushes the boundaries of art and the limitations of life while simultaneously uplifting the aesthetic of art as experience as both a constructive and creative activity. The effect of Montano's art may be this: performance art allows her the authentic potentiality of forming new relationships with her environment, not necessarily by renaming, revealing, changing, or owning it, but by decentering her past, personal experience as a means of recentering her future self in society.

In contrast to modernism's detrimental effect on art as posited by Gablik and Dewey, Montano's Living Art performances are moral, virtuous, and purposive. A certain positive attitude of hope and pride is communicated in her performances that are not so obvious within similar contemporary efforts, yet she remains revolutionary and reactionary to even both modern and postmodern aesthetic notions of art. Like her predecessors, her performances are also highly influenced by the innovations that dada, surrealism, futurism, happenings, and fluxus events brought but articulates a uniquely different aesthetic purpose. As a conceptual activity similar in intent to Kosuth's, Montano's Living Art succeeds at both regarding the idea behind the performance as primary in revealing meaning and defying the art object's permanency and commodification. She creates an art heavily influenced by early conceptual dada practices and embraces a Duchampian aesthetic but in a radically different way from those before her. Similar to Klein's performances, Montano's Living Art performances succeed in their basic premise at demonstrating an art through common actions and movements that characterize an everyday aesthetic, or lack thereof. As body or autobiographical art similar in intent as Beuys' and Acconci's, it succeeds in embracing the human subject as object by adopting and combining the techniques of mind/body

alterity and life/art liminality as performance art. It also succeeds at telling Montano's story by being and becoming Montano's art and life simultaneously. By possessing a certain crusading spirit of individuality that reflects her true end and purpose not found in the feminist aesthetic of women body artists, she is able to more closely reconstruct a socially-informed individualism as a means to synthesize a personal balance between art and life.

Although she is not considered a feminist per se, her art is frequently placed within the context of feminist art alongside body performance artists like Schneemann, Pane, Export, and Kelly. Montano's performance art inadvertently succeeds as feminist by turning inward to the self as a means of outwardly critiquing social/political issues. It however surpasses such an angry aesthetic as demonstrated by both first and second generation feminist performing artists. Rather than using a gender-based or sexually-charged aesthetic, Montano's performances are informed with a pragmatic philosophy: the primary concern for the individual and his/her role in society as an instrumental tool for democracy and education. As body or autobiographical art, Montano's Art/Life in particular intends to solve problems that require her total submersion into her own physio/psycho boundaries, limitations, and weaknesses. For example, on a psychological level in her collaborative Art/Life piece with Tehching, Montano wanted to transform her life into a kind of philosophical behaviorism; through intense routine and ritual, she resolved issues of mind/body as a means of acting out them out physically through spiritual meditation. On a cultural and social level, Montano wanted to teach herself to learn, communicate, and adhere to rules and standards more closely as a means to demonstrate the relationship between what people think individuals experience and

those actual experiences. In Montano's aesthetic attempt to experience art beyond its materiality and marketability in a functional and purposive way, the Art/Life piece simultaneously both defies modernists' tradition and challenges postmodern aesthetics.

In particular, Montano's Art/Life performance with Tehching demonstrates a postmodern pragmatic aesthetic that expresses different characteristics and tendencies than most contemporary performance and body artists. Montano's performances unlike both her male and female counterparts transmit a progressive and original relatedness to the audience that embraces the art process as therapeutic; Montano is willing to believe in an artmaking process for the simple sake of improving her life as a contributing participator in the ever-changing environment. A genuine potential for both artist and audience exists in Montano's aesthetic that provides for a more luminous experience of art which is sought and found eventually through the healing and spiritual effects that her art produces. In Montano's determination to renovate her life in Art/Life, her identity is both devotional and objective, framing the orientation of her experience. Rather than particularly masochistic or feministic, Montano's attention in Art/Life is to improving her attitude about developing her individuality, her dedication to pragmatic intentions, and the effects that her acute awareness of sacrifice and pain bring. Instead of deconstructing her flaws and shortcomings, Montano's Art/Life reconstructs negative into positive experience; in fact rather than dualistic, she is instrumental as both the object of her work and subject of her art and anticipates hope in restoring personal truth with social beliefs, accepting both success and failure as part of the evolutionary process of interpersonal development.

The effects of Montano's Art/Life lend an optimistic outlook for the future, suggesting that art may become both moral to advance the individual psychologically and virtuous to advance democratic societies. All in all, Montano's performances intend to both bring forth her and her audiences' knowledge and awareness and not take for granted the unique relationship between representations of our experiences and those actual experiences themselves. Montano's art demonstrates the combined effort, quality, and characteristics of a total, postmodern art, not only by opening and broadening the traditional postmodern notions of artmaking, but also by assaulting traditional notions of the art object and performance art in general. Through radical transformation, Montano attempts to achieve in Art/Life a virtuous and authentic character: she is truthful in her art, true to her intentions and its purpose, dedicated and committed to carrying out its completion, and meditative and wise in her decision-making processes. Montano's art offers a worthy alternative to modern art's aesthetic and even succeeds at challenging contemporary notions of postmodern aesthetics.

Montano experiences direct knowing in Art/Life—thinking as a kind of doing—by transforming the purpose of a pragmatic philosophy into an instrumental performance that merges art and life for the sake of dignifying the importance of the individual's place in society. Her purposive strategies are intended to serve as moral and valuable instruments in search of a fulfilling life. Because she is innovative and emancipatory, Montano has faith in her responsibility to carry out such endurance tests as legitimate aesthetic investigations. Montano's performances seek liberation and freedom but only through discipline, balance and moderation but only through deprivation, and truth and knowledge but only through radical transformation. Furthermore, Montano displays the

courage to embrace her private emotions publicly through transactual communication with her environment that seeks spiritual transcendence. A balanced, harmonious engagement with the everydayness of the environment that doesn't seek to alienate or encourage narcissism has the potential for creating a deeper understanding of the contribution that individuals makes to society. Montano's Art/Life demonstrates an attitude of willingness capable to endure restraint, suffering, and abstinence while withstanding physical and mental deprivation by enduring, pushing through, or holding out. Her attempt to focus acutely through meditating, concentrating, and paying attention to psychic states brings forth an awareness to transform and a willingness to act on the discoveries that it might reveal. Her desire to change socially as an individual is committed to balancing a private art with a social life. By embracing art on individual, social, and aesthetic levels of awareness, intervention, and action, Montano's performances have the potential to similarly transform contemporary art.

By demonstrating hope, courage, and love for the potential that such personal transformations bring through publicly transacted performances, Montano's Living Art pieces and especially her Art/Life collaboration with Tsieh both challenge and defy postmodern notions of a fractured and alienated past. That Montano's performances explore and discover how to balance the rational and emotional extinguishes the clear-cut divisions between art and life. A closer investigation of Montano's performance art provides perhaps a different approach to postmodern feminism; proposing a feminist aesthetic without the feminine may stress the ultimate feminism: the cultivation of individuality for the higher good and betterment of society. A new experience with

women's performance art might provide an alternative outlook on such individuality as a key social issue within today's ever-changing, cultural and natural environment.

In conclusion, Montano's belief and trust in the intensity and extremity that such performances like Living Art and Art/Life bring allow and force her to delve into her inner self, address her personal private issues through the limits and liminality of social and cultural conditions, resolve real problems through actions, and demonstrate a true becoming of herself as a cultural reconstruction by recentering her position in society. Montano's postmodern pragmatic aesthetic suggests that we should embrace in our everyday lives the mysteries of the unknown in order to learn how to live with uncertainty and ambiguity, achieve hope despite disappointment, desire by overcoming fear, and wisdom to combat ignorance. That Montano's performances bring liberation only through self-governed, disciplined principles suggests that there may indeed exist freedom in restraint and control in loss of power. Believing that within her performances she may fully embrace living a more artful life, she similarly challenges us in part to reinterpret, relive, and reside differently in our lives, at least momentarily. Montano's Living Art demonstrates a postmodern pragmatic aesthetic in which such self-conscious transformation is possible within a performance art that attempts to solve problems by reconstructing experience both cognitively and creatively simply for the sake of a higher purpose. All in all, Montano transforms data into skills, conceptions into actions, and art into life.

CHAPTER 5

FAITH, RITUAL, AND SACRIFICE:

A RECIPE FOR RECONSTRUCTION

The intent of this thesis is to demonstrate the functional relationship between postmodern theory and pragmatic methods as they form a framework in which the performance art of Linda Montano may be discussed. Using Suzi Gablik's conclusions in Has Modernism Failed? and John Dewey's aesthetics in Art As Experience, Linda Montano's Living Art performances were described according to their functional intentions as characterized in statements made by Montano. This study was expected to contribute to the understanding of one individual's use of postmodern pragmatic strategies in performance art and assess its potentiality to transform contemporary art. Specifically this thesis has examined the content and contextual characteristics of Montano's Living Art.

This study uses a descriptive analysis to help reveal the kinds of discourse that artists use when discussing their art. This thesis recommends that a functional consideration of artists' statements may lend fresh insight into how their visual aesthetic is actualized through their particular verbal expressions. Indirectly, it attempted to show that performance art as a conceptual activity is a legitimate art form and that Linda Montano's performance art demonstrates a 'total art.' As a result of inquiry, the description indirectly tested the validity of artists' statements as described in their ways of speaking about their own artworks. In the process of discovery, it reveals that a close reading of artists' statements about their own artwork demonstrate a unique relationship

between their expressions about their art and how the works themselves actually manifest.

The methods used reveal that the study of the relationship between artistic experience and expression benefit from a description of artists' aesthetic intentions. A consideration of artists' statements regarding their own work leads to an appreciation of the direct relationship that artists have with their art making practices. Devaluing artists' comments regarding their art simply ignores the very premise upon which art as experience for the artist is formed and functions. Furthermore, investigations that do not consider the artist's perspective relegate such analyses useless. The discussion of Montano's statements regarding her art reveals that although she demonstrates a postmodern pragmatic aesthetic that is uniquely fulfilled in her performance, more questions arise regarding how and why artists' rhetoric may be characterized as art and what transpires when artists verbally express a visual aesthetic in their artwork. Finally, this study recommends further investigations into the nature of the relationship between artists' aesthetic experiences and their own artwork as well as into the nature and function of artists' language as it is used to describe their art as experience.

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