

# DOING AS KNOWING

## JULIE HAMILTON

The body teaches us our way of being in the world. Through ritual habits and rhythmic routines—eating, drinking, smoking, working, exercising, sleeping, copulating, worshipping—we mark time by an accumulation of rituals, each a minor performance on life's stage. In this sense, all lived experiences, particularly patterned or ritualized, might serve as epistemological sources. If our physical involvement with the world shapes our perception of it (and ourselves), how then might deprivation and scarcity, especially when incorporated into various artistic practices, help inform or shape that understanding? Discipline gives the body parameters, conditioning it through repetitive action. Like training for the Olympics, or rehearsing for an orchestra recital, concentrated formation acts as a kind of structural limitation that harnesses both psychological and physiological energies, committing the self exclusively to one thing. In its very form, this kind of singular devotion is religious. Central to monastic practices in the history of both Eastern and Western religious traditions, *askesis* (or asceticism) prepares the self as a receptacle by seeking transcendence through various forms of abstinence and self-denial. In times of cultural indulgence and consumeristic saturation, asceticism enables the body's inherent self-emptying capabilities, cultivating deeper capacities for creativity and sustainability.

In his work *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty presents a phenomenological account of the body as a laboratory for receiving knowledge of the world through sense experience. He argues that *praktognosia* or "know-how" is the body's primary, somatic epistemology. Essentially, 'doing' is both prior to and formative for 'knowing.' These components, Merleau-Ponty posits, are the body's continual encounter of "indeterminate horizons" containing innumerable perspectives simply by inhabiting the world.

Taking this to be paradigmatic for performance art, in this article I employ the aid of art historian Kristine Stiles on the 'metonymy' of performance art. Stiles considers the grammar of the body to be interwoven with—not metaphorical of—the world, shaping its epistemology through embodied actions. Thus, the body as an active *subject* in visual art arguably surpasses the former *object* (e.g. painting, sculpture), expanding the socio-political-ethical dynamics of art, as well as its phenomenological dimensions.

From this interpretation, I engage Merleau-Ponty's insistence that we "perform afresh" in the world, employing his '*praktognosia*' as a hermeneutical reading for performance art. In particular, I will consider specifically selected works by Marina Abramović (b. 1946) and Lia Chavez (b. 1978). Both Abramović and Chavez employ ascetic disciplines, meditation practices, and habituated neurological training via hyperconsciousness in an endeavor to "perform afresh" the body's phenomenological epistemology through their art-making. For Abramović and Chavez, the body is a studio through which one *acts* in order to *know*. In their intuitive performances, these women exemplify phenomenological epistemology, bearing witness through their liturgical practices of the body's mystical and complex instinctive perception.

## PERFORMANCE ART: A BRIEF HISTORY

To situate the conversation between the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the particular performance pieces by Marina Abramović and Lia Chavez, allow a brief introduction to performance art. It is common to presume that performance art's earliest iterations lie in ancient theater and stage acting, with later manifestations in Futurism, Russian Constructivism, and Dada at the Cabaret Voltaire. However, performance art did not formally emerge as a canonical art form until the late 1950s and early 1960s, as the progeny of Action Painting's existentialism. In a post-World War II setting, performance art emerged as a response to the devastations of the Holocaust, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki. The threat of annihilation in this nuclear age heightened artists' awareness of the body's potential obliteration and subsequent need for preservation. Accompanying the geo-political context, the emergence of French existential philosophy, particularly in the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert

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Camus, influenced the intellectual and artistic culture of America—especially the New York School, where Action Painting was born.

The New York School artists understood Sartre's existential maxim "existence precedes essence" as a manifesto for a new kind of painting. Their work was more about *process* than about the meaning or *essence* of the work. In his painting *Cathedral* (1947), Jackson Pollock emphasizes both the subjectivity of the maker and the act of creation—direct and immediate—born out of influences from German Expression and American Indian Sand painting. Learning the term 'all-over painting' from his teacher Hans Hoffman, Pollock was interested in creating a record of the energy and dynamism generated through the *artistic process* on the canvas as a kind of artifact.

Performance art pioneer Allan Kaprow described Pollock as 'the great failure' in his essay "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" (1958) because Pollock drew attention to the work *itself* as an object, instead of the action events that his work captured.<sup>1</sup> Rather, Kaprow innovated artworks "generated in action by a heedful of ideas or flimsily-jotted-down scores of root directions" which he called 'Happenings.'<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Kaprow borrowed from Pollock's expressionism, transforming the gestures from *action painting* into *physical actions* in performance. Kaprow's work, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959), a dadaesque assemblage built in a structure of three "rooms" divided by plastic walls with simultaneous events occurring in each of the multiple rooms, invited spectators to be participants and contributors to the Happenings, soliciting the audience's engagement with the artist. These Happenings—collaborations between the performer and the audience—expanded into other types of performance work by Jean-Jacques Label and Joseph Beuys, as well as John Cage's scores, Wolf Vostell and George Maciunas's "Fluxes," Yves Klein's conceptual

works, and feminist performance pieces by Carolee Schneemann and Yoko Ono.

The atomic age's shift from abstract expressionist paintings into actions replaced the canvas with the body as the primary locus of artistic creativity. Stiles argues that these artists emphasized *process* over *artifact*, transposing "representational objects to presentational modes of action that extended the formal boundaries of painting and sculpture into real time and movement in space."<sup>3</sup> In this way, the nature of artwork shifted: art was no longer limited to formal objects but could now be incarnated in bodily performances, resulting in ephemeral actions. This medium not only allowed for a plurality of voices as the diversification of bodies increased, but the medium itself additionally critiqued the commercialism latent within the emerging global art market and the intrinsic limitations related to monetizing a *product* versus a *process*.

Stiles posits that the concept of 'metonymy' in performance art narrows the distance between the body and space, making art and life *appear* seamless.<sup>4</sup> Metonymy, in her usage, refers to the interwoven fabric of the body within the world that shapes its actions in the subject-object dichotomy. It is the body-in-motion—the dynamism in space and time—connecting the body to the world in a complex interwoven field. The body's visceral communication acts as a metonymic joint interconnecting the body within the space it inhabits. Metonymic knowledge is the body's somatic motor intentionality, breaking down barriers between art and life. This ability for art to exist *between* the traditional relationship of 'subject' and 'object' obfuscates the Formalist (as well as Greenbergian) notions of art's aesthetic aim towards Kantian 'disinterested contemplation,' as advocated by Michael Fried in his essay "Art and Objecthood" (1967).<sup>5</sup>

Attacking performance as a kind of anti-art, Fried distinguishes between 'theatre' and 'theatricality,' maintaining definitive limits to art's 'objecthood' by distancing the metonymic aspects of performance art into the arguably safer category of 'theatre.'<sup>6</sup> Following Kaprow's manifesto, Stiles contradicts Fried's distinction, insisting that the unique *advantage* of performance art is precisely its ability to be mistaken for reality, "forcing attention upon the aim of its ambiguities."<sup>7</sup> Performance art's tendency to blur formerly clear-cut historical definitions of what might be counted as "art" not only challenged the landscape of what art *could* be, but also favorably complicated the marketability and commercialization of art. Thus, performance art affords the body an opportunity to facilitate its nexus of meaning as a vehicle for revelation, whereby metonymy is the integrative component to hosting the body's *praktognosia* as artistic epistemology.

## **PRAKTOGNOSIA: MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL EPISTEMOLOGY**

The twentieth-century French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) provides a helpful and methodological syntax for discussing the body's *praktognosia* within performance art. In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty articulates that acting or 'doing' is epistemology or 'knowing' for a person on a visceral register. He writes:

The space and time which I inhabit are always in their different ways *indeterminate horizons* which contain other points of view. The synthesis of both time and space is a task that always has to be *performed afresh*. Our bodily experience of movement is not a particular case of knowledge; it provides us with a way of *access to the world* and to the object, with a '*praktognosia*,' which has to be recognized as original and perhaps as primary.<sup>8</sup>



Merleau-Ponty discusses the body's perception of the world or *praktognosia* as antepredictive—a mode of first and primary access without discursive thinking, a world that is “already there.”<sup>9</sup> This “way of access” or communion with the world is kinesthetic and metonymic: a body-in-motion within both space and time. The phenomenology of space is an ever-changing stage on which the body performs and discovers its ‘indeterminate horizons,’ exemplifying its “complex embeddedness to the world.”<sup>10</sup> *Praktognosia's* intuitive perception is contingent on its environmental setting, repetitively discerning motor intentionality amidst its shifting vantage points, where the synthesis of time and space are cyclically brought together within the body and “performed afresh.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, *praktognosia* is phenomenological epistemology, in which the body's metonymic *doing* is the primary perception and form for *knowing*. Knowing from doing presupposes that the actor does not have a *priori* knowledge of the act and is consequently a beginner. Such a methodology assumes that risk and self-discovery are primary factors in this form of epistemology.

The body's *praktognosia* is conditioned by practices that are written upon the body's history. Through repetitive formation, kinesthetic knowledge catechizes the body by way of habituation, informing it somatically. Ritualistic practices, as well as liturgical rites, follow this phenomenological pedagogy. Whether one is exercising a method in executing the perfect pour-over coffee, pitching a no-hitter, experiencing mutually satisfying sex, or chanting the sacred litany of the Mass, these bodily liturgies inform and reform the body's metonymic *praktognosia*.<sup>12</sup>

The integral connection of bodily know-how, from Merleau-Ponty's grammar, with performance art is the participation of flesh in the world. The flesh, he contends, is a sacramental presence, a ‘given,’ and way of communion not unlike the Eucharist.<sup>13</sup> Far from an abstract concept, transcendental idealism, or even an icon, it is *flesh itself*. Philosopher Richard Kearney contends that Merleau-Ponty navigates philosophical dualism in his phenomenological terminologies by adopting the religious taxonomy of the Eucharist, “revitalizing theological and sacramental idioms

in a post-metaphysical language.”<sup>14</sup> Calling Merleau-Ponty's ‘sacramentality of the flesh’ “a eucharistics of profane perception,” Kearney explains that the phenomenological understanding of the flesh entails “infinity embodying itself in daily acts of Eucharistic love and sharing: the word made everyday flesh.”<sup>15</sup> This incarnational language of embodiment is ideal for the phenomenological discussion of the flesh in performance art.<sup>16</sup>

Through his account of bodily know-how, Merleau-Ponty offers a philosophical antidote to the Western crisis of modernism, in which the Cartesian mind-body dualism has prioritized discursive reasoning over embodied praxis. Critiquing the binary errors of Intellectualism and Empiricism, while concurrently navigating Platonism and Idealism, Merleau-Ponty considers the body/mind/soul as an integrated unit, preserving its hybridity (or, in his coinage, ‘betweenness’) while resisting compartmentalization. This posture of incorporating “the cognitive in the carnal” forms a fruitful ground to discuss the performance works of Marina Abramović and Lia Chavez.

### MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ: PERFORMANCE AS EUCCHARISTIC PRESENCE

Considered the godmother of performance art, Balkan born (Serbian/former Yugoslavia) performance artist Marina Abramović has innovated and canonized formal methods of performance art, known as the “Abramović Method.” Influenced by both Happenings and the Fluxus scripts, Abramović's own explorations during the 1970s and 1980s engaged the body—often daring and even bordering on violent—ranging from shorter experimental performances to longer durational pieces.

For Abramović, these practices explored varying states of consciousness, cultivating pain-level tolerances and radical physical and emotional vulnerabilities with her audiences. Often employing extreme forms of asceticism, Abramović tested her limits to the point of physical and psychological exhaustion while processing her cultural memories and traumatic bodily experiences. She provoked discomfort in her audiences, challenging even the bounds of ethics regarding the extremes to which one should go for the sake of the performance.

While growing up in a Communist country with military parents, Abramović was reared under firm discipline and with strict expectations. Her *praktognosia* emerged through decades of ‘doing’ ascetic practices, continually discovering the boundaries of physical well-being and phenomenologically exploring her body's metonymic limitations through discipline and control. Drawing upon her Communist upbringing, Orthodox liturgy, and Tibetan Buddhist meditation, many of her works are inspired by folk culture, personal experiences, and social and political relativity. Above all, her live audience is the critical ingredient to sustaining her performances—like air to breathe.<sup>17</sup>

The *Nightsea Crossing* performances (1981–1987) with Ulay (then her artistic partner and lover) was a series of collaborative performances that challenged Western society's values through fasting, silence, and inactivity.<sup>18</sup> In response to their time dwelling among the Australian Aborigines in the desert, and influenced by that nomadic, ascetic, and ceremonial culture, Abramović and Ulay approached a host of museums around the world (a total of 22 performances over five years) with their performance piece *Nightsea Crossing*. Named for the psychological and subconscious “sea-crossing” the pair experienced during the course of the performances, Abramović and Ulay sat silently across from each other at a mahogany table—fasting, motionless, seven hours a day, as long as the museum allowed them to perform. From the museum's opening to closing (normally 10am–5pm), the couple sat as a tableaux vivant, present in their timelessness, without beginning or end.

Abramović's work is concerned with a paradox of Western society: an ever-present sense of nostalgic yearning for the past or impatience for the arrival of some future event, along with an inability to simply abide in the present. Considering herself a kind of bridge between Eastern ascetic practices and Western consumer culture, Abramović strips herself of luxuries—sustenance, rest, clothing, shelter—facing the challenge of having and doing nothing. By sacrificing comforts, she offers the public her vulnerability, acknowledging her body's perception and *praktognosia* as ‘already there.’ For Abramović, performance is about offering her audience this gift of presence to be received—a kernel of her humanity.



Marina Abramović revived the original concept of *Nightsea Crossing* for a three-month-long performance *The Artist is Present*, her retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art (2011).<sup>19</sup> Sitting in the mezzanine atrium gallery of MoMA from its opening until closing, daily, for the entire three months of the exhibition, Abramović performed a total of 716 hours. Like *Nightsea Crossing*, Abramović set two chairs facing each other with a table in the middle (removed halfway through the exhibition) but this time the audience was allowed to sit across from her—one at a time—for as long as they liked. In the exhibition documentary, Abramović highlights the most arduous task of the performance: maintaining a continual state of mind. She claims that holding simple actions for excruciating periods of time is cathartic, heightening her intuition of her audience. She arrives at a “full emptiness,” a phrase borrowed from the Tibetan language which Abramović employs to describe her performance state, which is *not* nothingness.

Dressed in flowing gowns resembling priestly vestments, her performance in MoMA is liturgical, symbolically akin to the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Merleau-Ponty’s sacramentality of the flesh is vivid in this artistic instance regarding the Eucharistic dimensions of her venerated human flesh, adored as people assemble within the museum, keeping vigil. Masses wait in line to receive the same “wafer” of her presence, a clear analogy

to the Real Presence within the Eucharistic Monstrance. As a “host” herself, Abramović recognizes: “It’s not about me anymore. Sooner or later I am a mirror of their own self.”<sup>20</sup> By extending to each person at her confessional the same treatment, her Communist sensibility of equality and regularity offered her presence anew with each sitter. That is, until Ulay, some thirty years after their original *Nightsea Crossing* performances together, sat across from her in MoMA as an audience participant. Having had a history of ‘horizons’ with his flesh that knows hers well, Abramović broke her concentrated gaze by shedding tears and reaching to embrace his hands, altering her composure for this exception. Her shaman-like communion with the world is born out of an affectionate love and reverence for the body’s sacramentality—be it the flesh of a stranger or a friend and former lover.

Marina Abramović has charted performance territory for new generations of artists to draw upon her methods and collaborate with other disciplines.

### LIA CHAVEZ: EMBODIED MEDITATION OF THE INTERIOR COSMOS

For New York-based artist Lia Chavez, the metonymic practices of the body have led her beyond performance work to explore embodied art by mining the caverns of *inner* space. Chavez works in a variety of media, ranging

from photography, installation, performance, painting, and collaboration with innovators in the fields of technology and science. Featured in the Venice Biennale, Frieze Art Fair, and the New York Armory Shows, among others, Chavez has exhibited extensively on a global platform. Educated at Oxford and Goldsmiths College in London, as well as with yogis in India, Chavez draws upon a wealth of authoritative and creative voices, ranging from theoretical academia and medieval mystics to embodied prayer practices from Eastern traditions and ancient rituals. Utilizing astronomical and neuroscience research collaborations, her multimedia explorations through the body contemplate the laws of the universe alongside the mystical and Divine Presence.

Chavez situates her performance work under the more specific category of ‘embodied art,’ a genre not yet vetted in art historical scholarship. A distinctive difference between *embodied art* and *performance art* is the necessity of an audience; embodied art does not require one because it is an artist’s interior exploration and performance *within* the body, unintended for an audience. Nevertheless, Chavez performs her work publicly, though her work need not *necessarily* be witnessed, often sharing it through social media platforms in real-time.

Referring to her body as a studio, Chavez explores interior space through extended-duration contemplative practices. Her embodied art is structured around listening, unifying the body and mind through breathing—requiring silence, stillness, and darkness. In silence, Chavez positions herself to receive her body’s inexhaustibly layered complex of experiences. This quiet place is generated through a disciplined posture of stillness, nurtured by prayer. Listening in this silent meditative place takes Chavez to a dark interior space, but one in which she encounters lavish optical light. By cultivating an embodied sanctuary within her body, Chavez witnesses and harvests mystical visions and luminous objects.

Chavez creates embodied art as a mode of her perception, employing her body’s *praktognosia* to assist scientific innovation. Her self-understanding of *praktognosia* is the fruit of her substantial risk-taking. By traversing her internal landscape, Chavez continually encounters ‘indeterminate horizons,’ at times visible through a chandelier of illuminating optics, in response





to her vulnerability. She relates: "Knowing by doing involves the admission that one does not know what they are doing before they do it. This is both childish and absolutely necessary for creativity."<sup>21</sup> Risk permits openness to discovery with the possibility for failure, since the work is not reduced to a procedural method. Operating from contingency, Chavez admits that her position is more akin to an instrument or prepared vessel—not unlike Beatrice's mirrors in Dante's *Paradiso*.

Like Abramović, Chavez is interested in the body's intuitive knowing and its subsequent unburdening when obstacles such as food, sleep, noise, and technological distractions are removed. What might be the possibilities of the body's perception and communication if given closely focused attention? Simone Weil's oft-quoted maxim that "absolute unmixed attention is prayer" is fitting for Chavez as she harnesses and modulates her consciousness, through forms of analytic and mindfulness meditation, yoga, and mystical prayer. Living on a strict dietary, exercise, and meditation regimen, Chavez orients her entire being around phenomenological perception. While her earlier academic studies attend to the writings of philosophers Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze concerning "the intelligence of sensation" (not unlike Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological perception), she discovered the *praxis* of performance art to be more epistemologically helpful than her theoretical ruminations.<sup>22</sup>

Commissioned by the Armory Show, Lia Chavez's *Luminous Objects* (2013) considers the aesthetics of inner space through durational meditation and its relationship to cosmology.<sup>23</sup> In physics, *luminous* objects are substances that generate their own light (such as the sun) compared to *illuminated* objects that reflect light (the moon). Without light, vision is impossible, since sight is dependant on light's ability to highlight and differentiate subjects in the brain. Through durational meditation, Chavez has discovered that a similar world exists in the interior realm if the body is conditioned to listen and see. She voyages not merely into exterior time-space, but within the uncharted landscape of her consciousness. By elevating the kinesthetic to the poetic, her beautifully executed performance pieces marry the microscopic to the macrocosmic, in matters of gamma-wave generation and string theory.

Chavez compares the artist's inner third eye to a camera lens, similar to that of the Hubble Telescope, in its ability to capture light and phenomena, magnified amid the darkened interior cosmos. In a prolonged state of sensory deprivation and gamma-wave meditation, which Chavez describes as "relaxed alertness" and "lucidity of the mind," ebullient visions come to her in the seemingly vacant and black backdrops of her mind. Ranging from the fibers of dark matter to turbulent structures of gasses, she expresses: "I am likely to experience concussive visions of the dynamic inner storm systems, cataclysms of radiance, vortices and fractal patterns, gyrating fibers of electricity, clouds of short-lived photons, cascading fire bolts and embryonic stars."<sup>24</sup> Through the process of opening the third eye, she witnesses the flow of consciousness parallel to patterns in nature.

Chavez's on-going collaboration with cognitive neuroscientists at Goldsmiths College in London has yielded innovative and groundbreaking results. Using scientific technology to document the wave generation in Chavez's cerebral cortex, neuroscientists are conducting a case study of her performance practices, providing original phenomenological data for science and art—an oft unholy union. Until recently, gamma-waves had been discarded as negligible by-products yet are now being regarded as mysterious "dark matter" in neuroscience. These are generated most effectively, states Chavez, "by a deep sort of meditation in which one centers the heart on Love."<sup>25</sup>

The *Luminous Objects* performance was continued in Lia Chavez's *PLETHORA* (2013) collaboration with Linnéa Spransy and Maggie Hazen.<sup>26</sup> In the tiny Soapbox gallery in Brooklyn, Lia Chavez meditated for two weeks, in six-hour increments after dark. Viewers from the surrounding neighborhood gathered outside the gallery to watch Chavez meditate, visible to the public by means of the exterior clear glass—a sliver of pulchritude on a dingy side street. Alone on the opening night, draped in a white goddess-gown with cascading folds and apollonian laurel headdress, Chavez began meditating in the bare gallery. Each night, Spransy and Hazen contributed to Chavez's performance through incremental installations, utilizing the walls and the floors of the constricted gallery. The conceptual thrust of *Plethora's* installations was to

depict imaginative representations of Chavez's luminous objects, encompassing and cascading around her very performance space. Spransy's delicate and time-intensive translucent drawings on frosted Mylar are motifs simulating Chavez's biomorphic theta-wave patterns and heartbeat rhythms. Hazen's floor installation is a collage of utopian and dystopian imagery based upon modular strategies of growth.<sup>27</sup> By the eve of the final performance, Chavez was enveloped in a pregnant space, filled from floor to ceiling with a plethora of visions, ripe for harvest.

The trio hosted a panel discussion at the exhibition's close, with Andy Warhol's collaborator Ultra Violet, considering the complexities of time and the body integrated within their collaboration. By intersecting both the chronological time of the exhibition and the systolic time signature of Chavez's biomorphic phenomena, the trio facilitated liturgical patterns for sculpting their environment. Yet it was Chavez's presence—her flesh—animating the surrounding constellations, a *cantus firmus* among the polyphony of voices.

## PERFORMANCE ART AND LITURGY: THEOLOGICAL POSSIBILITIES?

Maurice Meleau-Ponty's phenomenological epistemology is ordered towards liturgical practices in a religious language, particularly his eucharistics of profane perception. This grammar of discovering what is 'already there' as 'givenness' by enacting codified rituals is no stranger to the language of theology. In fact, it is the very syntax by which the Christian Church dramatizes her participation in the biblical narrative, by means of the liturgy. In his recent book *Decreation: The Last Thing of All Creatures*, theologian Paul Griffiths provides, an elegant account of time and the flesh, which shares meaningful resonance with liturgy and performance art.<sup>28</sup>

Griffiths lucidly configures cosmic time into metronomic and systolic paradigms: the former is chronological time, leading towards the grave, and the latter is the mystical time of the liturgy. Metronomic time is regular, ordered, measured, durational, the unrelenting tick-tock of decline and decay. Expounds Griffiths: "Metronomic time is time whether you like it or not, the heartbeat of a damaged but still beautiful cosmos, the hammer that knocks all coffin-nails firmly and finally home."<sup>29</sup> Systolic time, in contrast, offers the cure



or chemotherapy for metronomic time. Taking his cue from the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:29, that time after the Resurrection has been changed (systolated), Griffiths offers the physiological image of the heart's systole, pumping blood and providing life in rhythmic intervals, as a helpful metaphor. Griffiths affirms, "to call time 'systolic,' then, is to suggest that it is contracted, gathered, tensed, ready for life-giving action."<sup>30</sup> The paradigmatic account of such 'pleated' and 'folded' possibilities, he suggests, is reflected in the liturgy of the Mass in which the narrative of the Passion is reenacted and performed, by and for its participants, ad infinitum.

Both Abramović and Chavez have liturgically retimed their bodies in their respective performances, one acting as a kind of priest, the other a monk. *Praktognosia* has underscored their ability to discern the metronome's curse: humanity's addiction to novelty, frivolity, and distraction in its death-bound destination. Abramović and Chavez have discovered a temporary freedom from, and transposition of, this enslavement to the forces of time's unyielding march. Intentional or otherwise, these artists' ascetic practices and embodying states of consciousness become repetitive liturgical patterns. Meditation and altered states of consciousness have aided both women in battling time's merciless grip and consequential weight on both themselves and their audiences. Abramović desires to slow time, even pause it, encouraging her viewers to be *present* with her; Chavez, when meditating, perceives time's malleability and elasticity as a systolic portal into another dimension. Both Abramović and Chavez seek to transfigure the very nature of time in their performance art, utilizing its mercurial anomalies to their advantage.<sup>31</sup>

As vessels and mirrors, both women depend on and wait for an outside energy, an "other," the Divine Presence. Both artists acknowledge that they are drawing upon primordial, sacred, and cross-cultural practices, ordering their lives in rituals celebrated by sages and saints, through forms of scarcity and deprivation. However, it is their somatic openness to fresh possibilities and collaborations (which, of course, the liturgical structure makes viable), freeing both women from art's normative obsession with novelty. Thus, *praktognosia's* insight pioneers *innovation* from its metonymic knowledge absorbed through bodily liturgies in performance art.



Indeed, liturgy is the template for performance *par excellence*. For in liturgy, a drama is enacted onstage, motor intentionality is formed and performed by the catechized, and indeed, the synthesis of time and space are cyclically brought together within the body and "performed afresh." For Griffiths, the liturgy of the Mass participates in repetitive stasis of love and being loved in the beatific vision of God. Perhaps performance art's *praktognosia* is its liturgical 'knowing' that is 'already there,' engaging the eucharistics of profane perception in time and space, potentially nurturing, purifying—even healing—the flesh.

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#### ENDNOTES

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- 4 Robert S. Nelson, *Critical Terms for Art History*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 90.
- 5 Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood (1967)," *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 151-152.
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- 7 Schimmel, 231.
- 8 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2002), 141.
- 9 Maurice Merleau-Ponty and James M. Edie. *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on*

*Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 25.

- 10 Merleau-Ponty and Edie, 145.
- 11 Ibid., xi-xii.
- 12 While the term 'liturgy' has become revived in recent philosophical and theological scholarship, particularly in that of Stanley Hauerwas and James K.A. Smith, I want to bracket the terminology's use here to strictly Maurice Merleau-Ponty's syntax as a phenomenologist. However, I will later consider 'liturgy' in the syntactical use of Paul Griffiths in his explication of Catholic liturgy but will note the distinction.
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- 14 Richard Kearney, "Merleau-Ponty and the Sacramentality of the Flesh" in *Merleau-Ponty at the Limits of Art, Religion, and Perception*, ed. Kascha Semonovitch and Neal DeRoo (London: Continuum, 2010), 155.
- 15 Ibid, 147.
- 16 Maurice Merleau-Ponty is not a theologian nor a Christian apologist. While appearing to use theological terminology, he is strictly employing them as a phenomenologist.
- 17 Matthew Akirs, *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*, Documentary, Directed by Matthew Akirs and Jeff Dupre (London: Dogwoof Pictures, 2012), Film.
- 18 Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Nightsea Crossing*, 1984. Performance. Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia.
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- 26 Lia Chavez, Linnéa Spransy, and Maggie Hazen. *PLETHORA*, 2013. Performance. Soapbox Gallery, New York.
- 27 Linnéa Spransy, personal correspondence with author, August-September 2013.
- 28 Paul J. Griffiths, *Decreation: The Last Things of All Creatures* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), 55.
- 29 Ibid, 57.
- 30 Ibid, 58.
- 31 Of course it is their perception of time that changes, making the comparison to Griffiths's schema by way of analogy.