

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE AURATIC 'PRESENCE'



SURVIVING ARTS IN PERFORMANCE SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the disappearance of the 'auratic presence' and its implications within the hypermediated landscape of contemporary society, marked by commodified attention and fragmented realities. Drawing from Walter Benjamin's notion of the 'Aura,' it explores the erosion of authentic experiences amidst the proliferation of reproducible images and hyperrealities. Through the lens of performance art, the discussion highlights its role as a form of resistance against commodification and its potential to reclaim 'Presence' by fostering embodied, communal, and participatory experiences. By analyzing the dynamic interplay of images, rituals, and audience engagement, the essay underscores the transformative potential of performance art in counteracting the alienating effects of media saturation and reestablishing connections to authenticity, community, and the essence of existence.

INTRODUCTION

The power of images has always been seen as efficient - not solely to represent reality but also to present themselves as representations, "in assuming for us the force of the real" (Merrin, 2003). Already the first cave art portrayed one's own 'Image', representing one's presence at a certain time and space, stating: once reality was captured, by letting it go it has been linked with the expression of its impact on the person capturing it.

This, as the first fragment of storytelling, made art to be what Plato and Aristotle both argued. Their thinking about representative 'art' and 'life' is obscured by the assumed separation of the two as "different orders of reality: life is primary, art is secondary" (Schechner, 2020).

Drawing on their discussion, theorists have illustrated theatre and performance art - as the live form of arts - as mimetic representatives of social and individual actions and events of life.

However, in the tempestuous 1960s, this assumption - and with it, the role of the image - began to falter with the rise of postmodernity, marked by convergence and the "collapse of previously clearly demarcated realities, hierarchies, and categories" (Schechner, 2020). The rapid development of image-making techniques brought about the digital and virtual media age, spreading with increased velocity. In this new environment, the deconstruction of 'master narratives' left nothing for postmodern representations but fragmented, counterfeit, and bizarre inconsistency. As Schechner observed, "*The arts take a back seat because ordinary life is framed so artistically*" (Schechner, 2020). From the over-dramatization of news to attention-seeking, increasingly superficial advertisements, the media's mass-produced narratives inundate society with "fragmented stories and compressed dramas" (Schechner, 2020).

This media saturation birthed a new kind of 'image,' one that transformed human communication and storytelling and led to the emergence of hyperreality. As Ott and Mack assert, "*Stories are inevitably filtered through the symbols, and therefore the perspective, of the storyteller*" (Ott and Mack, 2014). In the digital age, the increasingly visual mass media has become "society's main storyteller," shaping both how people perceive reality and how they interact with it (Ott and Mack, 2014). Through this process, mass media has created simulacra of humanity itself - hollow copies without meaning, resulting in the disappearance of authentic human experience (Baudrillard, 1981).

This shift has commodified human attention, the most valuable currency in the unleashed turmoil of today's economy. Attention is extracted, not given, as people's wandering gaze is methodically stolen by advertisements, superficial content, and algorithmically engineered distractions. As Herbert Simon poignantly stated: "*a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention*" (Simon, 1971). The relentless competition for attention decreases the ability to experience genuine presence, as time spent immersed in hypermediated realities diminishes one's capacity to engage fully with actual life.

Amid this disintegration, Walter Benjamin's analysis of art in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935) becomes increasingly relevant. Benjamin lamented the loss of the 'Aura,' the unique presence and authenticity of artworks that were once embedded in ritualistic and ceremonial contexts. While he speculated that technology might democratize art and return it to a community-cohesive function, in practice, this promise has largely gone unfulfilled. Instead, the 'Aura' has been replaced by the 'brand' - a commodified marker of exclusivity and reliability. As the 'brand' becomes the new measure of value, the role of the artist shifts from mediator between the 'profane' and the 'divine' to creator of marketable, mass-produced images. (Lannon, 1996)

Breaking away from the traditions of theatre, performance art emerged to reflect the fragmented, compressed conditions of hypermediated postmodern life. By resisting commodification by representing an alternative perspective, it offers a more profound understanding of authenticity and 'Presence.'

Hence performance art seeks to reclaim what has been missing - not only the 'Aura' and the ability to experience 'Presence', but capturing a unique and unrepeatable aspect of reality.

/and what has been gradually missing from art creation: the community and the ritual of art creation.

CHAPTER I

- The Commodification of Attention -

"Performance Society"

Byung-Chul Han's concept of the "performance society" refers to a contemporary condition where individuals are pushed to continuously perform, optimize, and present themselves in a hyper-visible manner. This relentless drive to demonstrate one's worth is deeply embedded in the structures of late capitalism, where success is measured by one's productivity, visibility, and the ongoing act of "showing off." (Han, 2020) The phenomenon correlates with the overwhelming saturation of media, which floods the landscape with images and content, leaving little room for moments of stillness or genuine presence.

The media saturation of contemporary society, where endless streams of content replace meaningful interactions, is key to understanding Han's critique of the performance society. The postmodern collapse of traditional hierarchies - whether in art, politics, or everyday life - has given rise to a world where everything is mediated, curated, and commodified. In such a climate, the concept of authenticity becomes increasingly elusive, as everything is filtered through a lens of hypermediated imagery. What once might have been considered unique or profound is now merely another data point in an endless cycle of consumption and production. The inability to simply "be present" is a direct result of this pervasive media landscape, where attention itself has become a commodity that is bought and sold at the expense of true engagement.

Crisis of the Present

In a world constantly inundated with content, Herbert Simon's early identification of "information overload" now resonates more than ever: "the wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes." (Simon, 1971) This scarcity is the commodification of attention - our most precious and finite resource. As Michael Goldhaber and Georg Franck later argued, attention is the new currency. It has become a

valuable asset, accumulating and producing wealth for those who manage to capture it. Goldhaber viewed attention as a commodity that confers power and prominence in the digital age (Goldhaber, 1997). Franck went further, suggesting that attention functions as a kind of identity capital, shaping social and cultural production in profound ways (Franck, 1999). Hence people's scattered and 'exhausted' attention creates the ideal soil for mass-produced and overmediated images finding their way to shape their identity as the system dictates - creating the 'ideal consumer'.

The problem of mediated images correlates with the overperforming population: while the 'Presence' in particular is calibrated for the non-mediated (not reproduced) imagery, the problem is the increasingly shorter and unrhythmic attention span of people. However the latter determines the former: the information focused imagery of mass media products leaves no room for a short break, a moment of silence or the essential boredom. "*We don't have the freedom to be bored anymore*" (pmilat, 2014) - claimed Mark Fisher drawing on the alienating effects of consumer command' which portrays itself as a manufactured compulsion of unlimited online sharing, restructuring the reality perception of society.

However, attention in the performance society is not merely about quantity - it is about quality, too. As Davenport and Beck (2001) noted, attention is increasingly fragmented, and it is seldom devoted fully to any single task or moment. In the commodified landscape, time becomes the measure, but true engagement is often sidelined in favor of superficial interactions. This depletion of attention has a profound impact on how we experience the world, reduce and corrode our ability to be present. The rise of media platforms dedicated to selling attention - often to advertisers - has accelerated the decline of authentic experience, turning people into objects to be observed, their moments packaged as consumable goods.

For Byung-Chul Han, this state of affairs reflects a deep crisis in contemporary society. The act of performing - constantly striving to maintain visibility - diminishes our ability to truly be present. Rather than engaging with the world in a genuine way, we are pushed into a cycle of continuous performance, one in which authenticity and true connection become increasingly difficult to grasp. This performance-driven existence mirrors the increasing lack of meaningful rituals in our daily lives. As Han suggests, society is turning into a machine, an automated entity

that values output over presence, constantly moving forward without pausing to be in the moment.

Moreover, the disappearance of the "Aura," as explored by Walter Benjamin, connects to this issue. The "Aura" represents the unique temporality and spatiality of an artwork, which creates an authentic connection between the viewer and the object. In the performance society, however, the commodification of attention leads to the destruction of such authenticity. Media's proliferation of images and content replicates this "Aura," but it does so in a way that makes it reproducible, disposable, and stripped of the uniqueness that once defined it. This commodification mirrors Han's fear of becoming a machine - of losing the essence of being human in the face of relentless technological advancement and performance demands.

In opposition to this, performance art offers a form of resistance. It demands not just attention, but embodied engagement, a direct challenge to the commodified attention economy. Through active participation, performance art reclaims the possibility of genuine presence and invites the audience to re-examine their role within a media-saturated society. Rather than merely consuming content, the audience becomes part of an experience, reasserting the value of 'Presence' in an increasingly fragmented world.

Through Han's lens, society's focus on performance, visibility, and consumption underscores a crisis in our ability to truly experience life. By commodifying attention and transforming individuals into performance units, the very essence of 'Presence' is undermined. The struggle to remain present, authentic, and connected to the world is the central tension in the performance society, and it remains a key challenge for contemporary culture.

CHAPTER II

- The Role of Image in Hyperreality -

‘Image’ Beyond the Image

The concept of 'Image' reaches far beyond its optical character, touching on the essence of visual representation. As seen in ancient rock art, such as cave paintings from Africa, images serve as a form of cross-modality communication, where "acoustic signals are transformed into symbolic visual representations" (Miyagawa et al., 2018). This shift from sound to vision reflects the importance of visual representation in both communication and perception, suggesting that language itself has visual roots. The role of visual images, from the earliest forms of rock art, transcends mere representation and becomes a tool to communicate identity and essence. (Merrin, 2003).

Through these visual representations, everything that exists is assigned an ‘Image,’ which functions as its essence or identity. This concept aligns with Erving Goffman’s idea of the "socially constructed 'face'" (Schneider, 2008), where the face becomes a symbol of one’s identity, used in the "ritual of social exchange" (Schneider, 2008). These images form part of the broader narrative humans use to understand the world. The self is constructed through ‘Images,’ creating not only personal identity but a shared reality communicated through visual signs, gestures, and symbols. Humans, through the construction of images, engage with the world both visible and invisible, through both the perceptible and the imperceptible.

Heidegger’s thoughts describe our world as conceived through a collective ‘Image,’ a worldview that, in modernity, is both subjective and objective. People create their worlds through representations, which shape their actions and interactions with the world around them. This process links the material to the immaterial, establishing a worldview dependent on both sensory and conceptual representations.

From Traditional Images to Hypermediated Representations

Images, initially created as tools for communication - whether through ancient rock art or sacred rituals - have evolved into complex media constructions that shape how we understand reality. In the past, images were confined to particular contexts, often anchored in rituals and tangible experiences. Over time, the shift from these original, rooted images to the hypermediated representations we encounter today has dramatically reshaped our understanding of both the image and the world it represents.

Where traditional images had a clear and stable connection to physical presence - such as a painting in a church or a statue in a temple - hypermediated images have become detached from a singular, concrete reality. In a hypermediated world, images proliferate across digital platforms, often layered with multiple meanings, interpretations, and representations. These images exist not in isolation but in a constant state of exchange, reshaped by algorithms, social media, and digital technologies that allow for infinite manipulation, rendering them fluid and ever-changing. This constant reshaping leads to a collapse of stable boundaries between the real and the represented, as each image becomes one version of many possible iterations.

Thus, the transition from traditional images to hypermediated representations is marked by an increasing fragmentation of reality. Whereas traditional images functioned as relatively stable markers of identity, value, or belief, hypermediated images challenge these boundaries, often blurring the lines between fact and fiction, reality and simulation. (Baudrillard, 1981)

Erosion of the Authentic Experience

This hypermediated reality also signals the erosion of authentic experience and 'Presence'. Traditional images - such as artworks in their original context - had an 'Aura' that connected them to specific places, times, and contexts. Walter Benjamin famously described the 'Aura' as the unique presence of an artwork in its original setting, which offered an authentic experience of connection to its creation and significance. However, the rise of digital technologies and mass

reproduction has diminished this aura, as images are reproduced, altered, and shared across vast networks, detached from their original context.

As images become hypermediated, their authenticity is diluted. The once-direct relationship between viewer and artwork is replaced by a mediated experience, where the viewer often encounters images through screens, distorted by filters, or altered by social media platforms. The physicality of the image—its original, authentic form—becomes less important, as the image's presence is multiplied and recontextualized in ways that strip it of its original significance. This hypermediated environment thus erodes the sense of authenticity and presence, leaving us with a fragmented understanding of images that no longer serve as reliable indicators of truth, identity, or essence. The 'real' becomes more elusive, as hypermediated representations dominate our visual landscape, reshaping our connection to the world and to one another.

In summary, the evolution of images from traditional to hypermediated forms represents not just a shift in technology, but a deeper transformation in how we understand identity, reality, and experience. Where once images were embedded in specific contexts and rituals, they now float freely in the air polluted by their own endlessly reshaped and redefined traces. This transition, while offering new possibilities for communication and self-expression, also leads to the erosion of authentic experience and a deeper sense of presence, as the world we perceive becomes increasingly mediated by technology.

CHAPTER III

- Aura -

Migrating Aura: Reproduction and Cultural Significance

Walter Benjamin's concept of the 'Aura' - defined as the unique presence of an artwork tied to its original time, place, and context - forms a cornerstone of cultural theory in the 20th century. In his seminal essay, Benjamin argued that technological advancements, particularly those enabling mass reproduction, detach artworks from their ritualistic origins. While this transformation offers accessibility, it simultaneously results in a loss of the artwork's 'Aura' and its connection to authenticity.

However, Latour and Lowe's idea of the 'trajectory' extends Benjamin's argument, suggesting that the cultural relevance of an artwork is not entirely dependent on its original context. Instead, reproduction can sustain and even enhance an artwork's Aura by embedding it into a broader social conversation. They propose two dimensions to this 'trajectory': the primary trajectory, which involves physical reproduction, and the secondary trajectory, which refers to the historicization and mythologization of the artwork (Bartscherer and Coover, 2011).

For example, oral traditions like Homer's *Iliad* illustrate how repetition and reinterpretation allow the Aura to persist across generations. Through communal engagement, the audience becomes the custodian of an artwork's survival, reinforcing its cultural significance. This dynamic positions the audience as both participant and exhibitor, enabling the Aura to migrate and adapt to new contexts while retaining its essential quality.

Mana and the Potential to Be Auratic

The 'Aura' is closely linked to the concept of 'Mana,' as introduced by Marcel Mauss, which describes a spiritual force inherent in objects, environments, and beings. This life-force serves as the medium through which the Aura connects the 'Image' of an artwork to its audience. By

passing through Mana, the Aura establishes a bridge between the visible and the invisible, the material and the immaterial. (Mauss, 2005)

Importantly, Mana suggests that all objects and individuals possess the potential to be Auratic if situated within the appropriate cultural or ritual context. This aligns with Benjamin's assertion that reproduction does not obliterate the Aura but instead transforms it. As reproduction enables greater accessibility, it also invites new interpretations and reconfigurations, allowing both the artist and the audience to participate in the perpetuation of the artwork's Auratic presence.

Mimesis and Scripted Performances

The distinction between object-based and performance-based art forms highlights the varying implications of reproduction. Michael Taussig's concept of the 'mimetic faculty' - the human ability to replicate, transform, and reinterpret cultural forms - offers a lens to explore this dynamic.

In performance art, mimesis operates uniquely. Unlike static artworks, live performances resist precise reproduction. Turner's analysis of dance exemplifies this point: even a meticulously scripted choreography cannot replicate the original performance, as each iteration introduces interpretative variations. This 'asymmetry' between material and performative mediums underscores the ephemeral nature of performance art, where each re-enactment becomes an original in its own right. (Turner, 2005)

Additionally, Taussig's discussion of the Kuna figurines, which represent malignant forces in healing rituals, illustrates the power of symbolic representation. The figurines' effectiveness lies not in their physical accuracy but in their ability to capture the 'Image' of what they represent. Similarly, performance art relies on the audience's perception to convey its essence, transcending the physical limitations of the medium. (Taussig, 2018)

Improvisation: The Ephemeral Nature of Creation

Improvisation further accentuates the uniqueness of performance art. While scripted performances provide a framework, the actual art unfolds in the gaps between the score and its

execution. As Schechner notes, performers continually rearrange known materials, creating a dynamic interplay between structure and spontaneity (Schechner, 2020).

This fluidity is particularly evident in musical improvisation. Early jazz, for instance, possessed a peculiar Aura precisely because it lacked a written score. Its ephemeral nature made each performance an unrepeatable experience, intensifying its ritualistic power. Karl Coulthard's analysis of jazz underscores this point: the Aura of jazz arises not from its tangible form but from its capacity to evoke 'Presence' in its listeners (Coulthard, 2007).

In a hypermediated society, where everything is recorded and reproduced, improvisation resists commodification by asserting the irreplaceable nature of live, spontaneous creation. This resistance aligns with Benjamin's belief that the disappearance of mystery and incomprehensibility - qualities central to the Aura - diminishes the human experience.

Myth: The Distance Between the Profane and the 'Divine'

The Aura's persistence also draws from the mythological framework that mediates the relationship between the profane and the 'divine'. Claude Lévi-Strauss described rituals as cultural articulations of mythical thought, emphasizing their role in resolving the contradictions of human existence. By marking the distance between the known and the unknown, rituals reinforce the unapproachability of the 'divine' while simultaneously providing a pathway to connect with it.

Deviating from the spiritual correlation and focusing on the community-cohesion, in the context of performance art this dynamic manifests in the shared experience of creation. The artist, audience, and artwork converge in a participatory ritual, dissolving traditional boundaries. As Benjamin observed, "The Aura is the unique phenomenon of distance, no matter how close" (Benjamin, 1935). This paradoxical interplay of proximity and separation allows the Aura to thrive in performance art, where each moment is both singular and universal.

Through its reliance on 'Presence', improvisation, and symbolic representation, performance art redefines the Aura for contemporary audiences. It offers a space for sharing a moment as a community, reclaiming the authenticity and connection that hypermediated realities often erode.

CHAPTER IV

- Performance Art as Resistance -

Performative Rituals – Ritualistic Performances

Defining both performance and rituals proves challenging, largely due to the overlap in their definitions. These definitions place both concepts within a broad, nearly ‘all-encompassing’ category where rituals are performative and performances are ritualistic. As Schechner notes, “whatever one could ask of a performance one could ask of whatever is being studied ‘as’ a performance” (Schechner, 2020). However, when something “is” a performance, its “historical-social context, convention, usage, and tradition” (Schechner, 2020) come into play.

Émile Durkheim, the pioneering social scientist, recognized the kinship between rituals and dramatic representations, viewing them as a kind of communication between the “saint and the profane” (Durkheim, 2012). He described them as expressions of the sacred realm, grounding social and communal structures in religious beliefs. Rituals, in this context, serve as mechanisms for navigating transitions, hierarchies, desires, and taboos. Freud further explained that rituals function as forms of ‘drama therapy’, providing a space to manifest and resolve obsessions, thus alleviating internal or collective psychic conflicts (Freud, 1946).

Catherine Bell emphasized the theatricality and ‘self-similarity’ of rituals, noting that performances have the ability to “explicitly model the world” (Bell and Aslan, 2009), offering a reframed view of it. This creates a reflective distance between the performer, performance, and audience, enabling more objective contemplation of the subject matter. Through this reframing, both rituals and performances provide practical means of communication within a community, as well as with higher, ‘divine’ forces. This unity was embodied in the picture of performance art, responding to the diminishing relevance of traditional theatre in the fragmentation of postmodernity (Schechner, 2020).

Performance Art in General

Human beings have always performed in front of each other therefore performance itself, as an art form, is nothing new under the sun. However, around the corner of the 20th century the consideration of whether performance belongs under the umbrella concept of 'art' - in the category that until then was mostly limited to object-based works of art - began. Emphasising the fact, 'the body is political', the civil rights movements and second wave feminism of the 60s and 70s turned the human body to the core medium of the artistry of performance artists. As a result, with the ephemeral and process-oriented works, performance art somewhat stands closer to 'live fine art' rather than theatre. (Schechner, 2020)

Theorists - started with Walter Benjamin - have considered the major changes of mediums in art as a consequence of the notorious 'loss of the Aura', initiated by mechanical reproduction. This loss led to the 'crisis of the object' and, in response to the mechanically reproducible, object-based artworks, performance art emerged as a new mode of 'lifelike', frame- and form-breaking theatricality. Performance art extended the self-portraiture tradition in painting, transforming two-dimensional depictions into three-dimensional, performative self-portraits (Kaprow, 1966).

With the rise of functionalism and an emphasis on 'useful' performativity, performance artists - following Allan Kaprow's philosophy - rejected strict codifications of artistic boundaries in favor of exploring everyday life movements, emphasizing art for art's sake. This approach reflected a spiritual philosophy that sought open-minded, exploratory, and inclusive art communities, challenging the elitist exclusivity of contemporary art circles (Schechner, 2020).

By reinventing the 'stage' and removing barriers, performance art has the capacity to provoke intense emotional reactions from the audience by immersing them into the "theatre of the action" (The Art Assignment, 2016). The spectator and spectacle experience the piece together, inevitably forming a temporary community. Thus, performance art, with its increasing participatory nature, uses a human-centered medium to express 'objective' reality subjectively, while still making the message universally understood and relatable.

‘Here and Now’

Marina Abramović, one of the most prominent figures in performance art, is known for her brutal, self-challenging, and boundary-pushing work, with her body and ‘Presence’ as the core mediums of her art. While the body is an obvious central element, considering ‘Presence’ as a medium might raise some questions. Abramović defines ‘Presence’ as "the moment when the performer with his own idea steps in his own mental physical construction in front of the audience in a particular time" (Moma, 2010). This resonates with Benjamin’s concept, where each artwork "has a presence in time and space, a unique existence in the place where it happens to be" (Benjamin, 1935). Benjamin’s notion of "the unique phenomenon of distance" (Benjamin, 1935) aligns with Abramović’s concept of the “Here and Now” (Abramović, 2010), both describing a state bound to a unique, unrepeatable space-time location.

This ‘Here and Now’ moment transcends time, space, and context, showing how art surpasses its creation. The authenticity of the work is tied to its unique temporal and spatial existence, which is what makes it ‘authentic’. This authenticity depends on the ability of the work to exist beyond its immediate reality, proving that performance art has the potential to embody a ‘meditative state of mind’ and transcend ordinary experiences. In this meditative state, the ‘Presence’ emerges, as Abramović aims to “bring the performer and the audience in the same state of consciousness” (Abramović, 2010).

Similar to what Paul Celan describes as "concentration" in his poetry (Derrida, 2005), Abramović’s performances are a type of spiritual engagement, a focus on the present moment - what Celan refers to as a "gathered multiplicity" (Derrida, 2005). This concentration becomes a form of meditation, helping to achieve a ‘focused’ state of mind, which aligns with the ‘Aura’ - an intense state of presence within the ‘Here and Now’.

In this sense, Abramović’s performances serve as exercises in creating ‘Presence’. Her famous piece, where she leads the audience through the right method of drinking water, demonstrates this. While the act of drinking is simple, the key lies in the concentration on the present moment, with the mind and body working together in a meditative, unified experience. By doing so, the

audience becomes part of a participatory performance, contributing to the creation of ‘Presence’ (Louisiana Channel, 2013).

This process of ‘Presence’ creation mirrors the spiritual nature of rituals. By using objects or “Images,” rituals connect individuals to the ‘divine’, and meditation can serve as a deconstructive tool to move beyond pre-constructed ‘Images’ and fully experience the ‘Divine Presence’. In this way, performance art is not just a form of artistic expression; it becomes a method for reconnecting with the very essence of existence.

This approach is also evident in John Cage’s ‘4’33’ (Gann, 2010), a participatory performance that invites listeners to focus on the present moment. Cage’s composition, born without a single note, invites the audience to meditate on the nature of silence, attention, and presence, further reinforcing the notion that performance art, much like meditation, is about creating a space where the audience can be fully immersed in the ‘Here and Now’. This performance, in its silence, draws attention to the act of listening, reinforcing the importance of presence in art and the reclamation of the Aura through performance.

CHAPTER V

- Reclaiming Presence: Performance Art and the Audience -

‘Auratic Presence’

As previously discussed, the work of art does not inherently possess the Aura but rather passes through it. This suggests that any object has the potential to be Auratic, supporting Benjamin's argument that each Auratic thing is tied to a specific spatial and temporal location (Benjamin, 1935). Expanding on the concept of ‘distance’ in relation to the Aura, Benjamin presents the Aura as that unique distance - an intermediary that bridges the audience and the artwork. This ‘distance’ represents a quality of the Aura known as ‘Presence’.

Thus, neither the Aura nor the ‘Presence’ is confined to the object itself, which implies that the audience, too, brings their ‘Auratic Presence’ into the art experience. Additionally, the exhibition space holds its own ‘Auratic Presence’, influencing the positioning of both the artwork and the audience in this dynamic.

The ‘Presence’ we are discussing here can only exist in a community context where the audience is involved in the creation of the experience. This requires the overlap of the audience’s spatial, temporal, and contextual positioning with the artwork and the exhibition space to recreate a ritualistic atmosphere. If the audience remains absent, the artwork and the exhibition space alone retain their ‘Presence’ within their Aura, while the audience would not be able to access it. In this case, the audience’s ‘Presence’ would reflect a different ‘Here and Now’, potentially disconnecting them from the original experience.

Consequently Benjamin’s concept of the ‘loss of the Aura’ seems partially accurate. While the Aura remains, especially in the face of reproductions, its quality of ‘Presence’ and the opportunity to experience it have diminished due to the increased reproduction of images.

Performing Audience

Performance art, now a permanent fixture in the art world, serves as a platform for artists to challenge commercial forces, offering a space for self-expression outside the often oppressive market system. Yet, In the context of the institutionalized art world, the ‘Abramović brand’ has come under scrutiny, revealing a presumed contradiction in her performance *The Artist Is Present* - as Amelia Jones claimed in her critique.

As we discussed earlier, ‘Images’ in art function as representations of one’s identity, signs of one’s essence. According to Jones, in Abramović’s performance the ‘Image’ she projects serves merely as an external presentation of herself rather than an authentic representation of her ‘Presence’. By claiming to embody the ‘Presence’ of the artist, Abramović creates an environment that is sterile and artificial, situated within a museum setting that mirrors this disconnect. This work exemplifies what is known as hyper-performance, functioning as a simulacrum rather than an authentic presentation of the artist’s ‘Presence’ (Jones, 2011).

In contrast to Abramović's performance art, Rirkrit Tiravanija’s work provides a clear example of Bourriaud’s notion of relation art, which prioritizes intersubjective relationships over independent optics. Tiravanija’s practice often demands the physical presence of the viewer, bringing them into the moment in ways that disrupt the typical art consumption model. One of his best-known participatory pieces, *Pad Thai* (1990), first shown at the Paula Allen Gallery in New York, revolved around the act of cooking and sharing a meal with visitors in the gallery space.

While this performance, like Abramović’s, took place within an institutionalized context, Tiravanija’s piece reintroduces the ordinary actions of cooking and eating in a space where such activities are typically restricted. In doing so, he revives the original purpose of performance art: to engage the audience in a communal and participatory experience. Hence the boundaries between artist and audience dissolve, allowing for a deeper, more communal exchange. As the audience is invited to share a meal, an act is created, transcending the traditional observer role, engaging them directly in the creation of the artwork. This form of art makes it clear that art is not just something to be viewed but something to be experienced, participated in, and co-created.

Claire Bishop has noted the challenges of critiquing such works, which rely on direct audience participation. This observation aligns with our previous discussion on the exclusivity of modern art, which often maintains a mystique to distance the 'Image' of the art piece, the audience, and a so-called 'higher realm'. However, through *Pad Thai*, Tiravanija removes the elitist barriers that contemporary art often erects, offering a more inclusive, community-oriented experience of art creation. While it may be debatable whether the audience fully experienced 'Presence' during this piece, Tiravanija succeeded in reintroducing the communal function of art, ensuring that neither the critics nor the audience were left wanting, both figuratively and literally (Bishop, 2005).

This contrasts sharply with hypermediated art forms, where the audience is often distanced from the work. Hypermediated experiences, such as digital or mediated art, often involve layers of technology or media that can obscure the genuine presence of the artist or the audience. The mediated distance between the viewer and the artwork tends to reduce the sense of immediate, physical presence that is essential to performance art.

Performance art, on the other hand, emphasizes bodily presence, time, and space, fostering a genuine, embodied connection that hypermediated forms often lack. The authenticity of the 'present experience' relies on the physical engagement of the viewer, allowing for the creation of a moment that is authentic, irreplaceable and cannot be reproduced.

CONCLUSION

A definitive conclusion to the discussion above is nearly impossible, given the intricate interconnectedness of the subject matters and their far-reaching implications. Consequently, the proposal presented here is a stepping stone for further research, aimed at continuing this discourse within an expanded framework. The paper set out to investigate the principal branches concerning the cultural, aesthetic, and spiritual significance of performance art - an art form that occupies a unique position within the overperforming landscape of contemporary society.

Performance art, by preserving the life-representative characteristic of theatre, offers a critical reflection of the increasingly fragmented and compressed reality of our world, burdened by the saturation of overdramatic media products. Yet, its unique strength lies in its - although limited - ability to create 'Presence.' This feature - an antithesis to the commodifiable and profitable nature of contemporary media - places performance art in a challenging position within the art market, which thrives on visibility and quantifiable output.

At its core, performance art offers more than just a display of talent or creativity - it focuses on ordinary movements, not for their cultural value, but for their intrinsic worth. This quality reveals performance art's main potential: being a tool for inclusivity, community cohesion, and the revival of 'ritualistic aspect' of art creation.

However, this form of art creation, rooted in authenticity, has been increasingly submerged under the waves of commodification, commercialization, and the rise of 'brand culture.' Despite claims of 'inclusion,' brand culture's very nature is exclusionary, often marginalizing what does not conform to its commercial demands. This tension underscores the increasing vanishing of authenticity within contemporary society, as performance art is faced with the dilemma of maintaining its integrity in a commodified world.

As we examined performance art in relation to the diminishing authenticity of modern times, we encountered a phenomenon tied to the distance between the known and the unknown: the Aura. This concept, central to the historicization of objects and experiences, plays a crucial role in defining what is authentically present. While 'Presence' contributes to the authenticity of an

experience, it is the Aura that shapes how something is historicized, thus influencing how it is understood and remembered.

The maintenance of the Aura largely depends on the audience's ability to engage in the present moment. It is their capacity to experience what is unfolding that determines the authenticity and the historicity of anything deemed 'Auratic,' whether it be an image, a performance, or a mass media product. In this way, representations - shaped through various media platforms - determine how we understand and experience the world, thus influencing the very process of historicization.

However, as media infiltrates every aspect of the social and cultural landscape, its pervasive influence inevitably alters the ways in which individuals represent themselves. The power of the media landscape, as it continuously shapes our self-image, raises the most pressing concern: the increasing difficulty in experiencing reality itself. In a world saturated with hyperreal, overmediated imagery, the true essence of being present is gradually disappearing. Without presence, the creations humanity generates risk becoming ephemeral, consumed in increasingly fleeting moments, demanding ever-shorter attention spans until there is no attention left to give.

In the face of this existential crisis, performance art - by virtue of its embodied and present-centered nature - emerges as a site of resistance. It challenges the commodification of attention, offering a space where genuine presence can be reclaimed, by establishing a site for the communal experience of art. However, the central question remains: Can anything - performance art included - achieve cultural and social relevance, and ultimately find historical survival, without being represented in some form of media?

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