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**The Transnational Performative Archive:
Documenting, Archiving and Curating Performance Art**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

The ephemeral nature of live performance art poses significant challenges to its documentation, archiving, and curation, leaving critical gaps in its representation within art history and institutional collections. These challenges are further complicated as performance art circulates across transnational contexts, raising essential questions about how performance archives can capture the essence of live works while fostering meaningful audience engagement. This thesis explores how performance art archives can transition from static repositories to dynamic, participatory spaces, enabling intercultural dialogue.

This interdisciplinary and transnational study draws on gallery, library, archive and museum (GLAM) studies, visual arts, as well as theatre and performance studies, to explore innovative archival and curatorial practices to address the inherent ephemerality of performance art. The inquiry employs autoethnography, participatory action research, and practice-based research methodologies to document contemporary performance artwork presented at the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival in Chengdu, China. The creative component of the research inquiry involved presenting a selection of these works to audiences in New Zealand as part of the exhibition *Flow: Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition*.

The thesis argues that audience participatory curatorial strategies and collaborative documentation practices can transform traditional archives into performative, living entities that engage audiences as active participants. By integrating audience experiences, these archives generate new, embodied knowledge, fostering intercultural exchange and expanding the scope of traditional documentation. The concept of the transnational performative archive is advanced as a curatorial strategy that shifts conventional approaches to archiving by emphasising the significant role of audience engagement in the construction of cross-border collaborative performance art archives. Unlike traditional archives which are often seen as static repositories of the past, the transnational performative archive is a dynamic process that evolves through intercultural interactions, reinterpretation, and audience engagement. This study contributes to the field by advancing the framework of the transnational performative archive, promoting how interdisciplinary and audience participatory strategies can enhance the representation and understanding of performance art across cultures.

Key words: Performance art, Documentation, Archival practices, Audience engagement, Transnational research, Curatorial strategies

Introduction

I was born and educated in Tianjin, China, where I trained in Fine Arts at Tianjin University of Commerce. During my undergraduate studies, I first encountered performance art in an experimental art class, when the lecturer asked us to work in pairs, stand face to face, press our noses together, and gaze directly into each other's eyes. This seemingly simple exercise became my first embodied experience of the expressive power of performance art—the intensity of proximity, the vulnerability of the body, and the unspoken dialogue that unfolded without words. This early exposure highlighted the potential of performance art to unsettle conventional exhibition practices and planted the seeds of my long-term interest in its transformative potential. Alongside my studies, I worked with major art institutions including Pace Beijing Art Gallery, Red Brick Art Museum, and the Beijing Contemporary Art Foundation, experiences that gave me first-hand insight into large-scale curatorial practices and also shaped my awareness of how performance art can challenge institutional boundaries.

Motivated by these encounters, I pursued an MA in Art Museum and Gallery Studies at the University of Leicester in UK, where my dissertation on post-war contemporary art in Lebanon further deepened my recognition of performance art's ability to negotiate trauma, memory, and collective histories. I also worked at Open Eye Gallery in Liverpool, which consolidated my curatorial skills in an international context and sharpened my thinking about archives, audience engagement, and the ethics of cultural mediation. Growing up in a cultural context where artistic expression is often constrained by political and institutional forces, I became increasingly aware of how performance art might function as a space for resistance, negotiation, and intimate expression. This awareness led me to critically examine not only how performance art is produced but also how it is remembered, and more specifically, who has the authority to record and define its legacy. This background has informed my research interests, which underscore this doctoral inquiry and lie at the intersection of performance, documentation, and the archive—particularly in relation to roles often excluded, such as audience engagement.

Research for this inquiry began with fieldwork at the UPON International Live Art Festival in Chengdu, a rare platform in China dedicated to performance art documentation and archiving. I was invited by the festival's director, Zhou Bin, to attend and conduct research on documentation, which granted me direct access to artists, performances, and the behind-the-scenes processes of archival practice. During my time at UPON, I explored a range of contemporary documentation methods—including photography, video, textual description, re-enactment, and sensory elements such as smell and sound—and began to conceptualise ways to integrate audience responses into the archive. These methods formed the foundation for what I define as a 'performative archive': one that does not merely preserve but continues to generate meaning. The second phase of my research took place in Aotearoa New Zealand, where I curated the exhibition FLOW at Massey University. This exhibition presented the performance art documentation created at UPON and tested strategies for activating these materials through curatorial design and audience interaction. By relocating the archive across national and cultural contexts, the project sought to explore how performance art archives can be opened up, re-performed, and transformed into collaborative, transnational spaces of engagement.

Our traditional engagement with performance art archives often involves looking at blurry black-and-white photos, reading textual descriptions, or watching video clip documentations in museums and galleries through glass showcases. These documents often fail to capture the full essence of the performances and inevitably contain multiple losses and additions (Jones et al., 2009), as well as being disconnected from the context of the live presentation (Coogan, 2011). This inadequacy creates a gap in preserving the dynamic aspects of performance art, leading to archival practices that may misrepresent or overlook the live experience. This inquiry is framed by key research questions exploring the nature of performance art and the relationship between live performance and its documentation and archiving. What contemporary methods are being used to document performance art? And in what ways can contemporary curatorial practices be used to activate performance art archives to make these works accessible to new audiences? And what approaches might be used to better preserve and represent performance art across transnational contexts? This study investigates collaborative documentation as an innovative method for capturing performance art, integrating audience experiences directly into the archival process. It further examines how audience participatory curatorial strategies can transform static archives into dynamic, interactive spaces that generate new knowledge about performance art, audience engagement,

and the cultural contexts influencing interpretation. The sections that follow outline how these central research questions have informed the development of this inquiry.

What contemporary methods are being used to document performance art? To address this first research question, I travelled to Chengdu, China to attend and document the key contemporary performance art presented at the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival. As part of this creative research, I explored a range of methods including audience oral memory, written text, photography, videography, etc. This research study critically evaluates the effectiveness and limitations of these methods with a focus on how they contribute to constructing a more comprehensive and dynamic performance art archive. Through the analysis of audience engagement in the documenting process, the inquiry explores the role of collaborative documentation in which audiences contribute to the creation of the archive. This thesis proposes that this approach challenges established paradigms by recognising personal experiences and subjective interpretation as valid and enriching additions to the archive. It argues that performance art archives could be understood not merely as static remnants but as dynamic, performative, and participatory spaces. This approach, in turn, contributes to the establishment of the concept of the transnational performative archive, which emphasises the role of intercultural dialogue and collaboration in shaping and reinterpreting archives, offering a framework for more inclusive and transnational relevant understandings of performance art.

In what ways can contemporary curatorial practices be used to activate performance art archives to make these works accessible to new audiences? Through the analysis of the curated exhibition *Flow - Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition* at Massey University in Auckland, New Zealand, I seek to reveal how this innovative transnational archival exhibition transforms static archives into dynamic spaces of engagement. The transnational approach at the centre of this research emphasises collaborative documentation, in which audience contributions – shaped by their unique cultural contexts – expand the archive meaning and relevance, highlighting how cultural and geographical shifts influence interpretations of performance art. Through the audience interaction, the archive becomes a site of co-creation, evolving into what I term the transnational performative archive. This approach positions performance art archives as a living entity enriched by diverse cultural perspectives, bridging cultural and geographical divides. The thesis argues that this methodology fosters new understandings of performance art, demonstrating the potential of

interdisciplinary and transnational practices to enrich contemporary archival and curatorial strategies.

This thesis combines methods including autoethnography, multimodal discourse analysis, participatory action research, qualitative observation and practice-based research to explore innovative ways for documenting performance art and to present audience participatory curatorial practices in performance art archives. Autoethnography allows for a reflective and personal exploration of my own experiences as both a participant and a researcher.

Participatory action research involved collecting and analysing audience documentation of their experiences with performance art, with the goal of democratising the archive by incorporating the audience's contribution. Qualitative observation involved documenting live performances and audience interactions at the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival, capturing the real-time dynamics of performance art. Multimodal discourse analysis was utilised to examine how audience-generated documentation combined to shape a richer understanding of the performance art archive. Practice-based research serves as the driving force informing this study, facilitating the exploration of audience engagement in the documentation process and contributing to the concept of collaborative documentation. The transnational nature of this project further enriches this investigation, as it involves experimenting with innovative, audience participatory curatorial practices that activate performance art archives and engage audiences across different national contexts. The ultimate goal is to construct a transnational performative archive that generates embodied knowledge that is accessible to a wider audience. Together, these methodologies provide a comprehensive framework for exploring how performance art can be documented, preserved, and reinterpreted with the focus on the critical role of audience engagement and transnational aspects in shaping the archive and history.

The Evolution of Chinese Performance Art

This section will provide a brief overview of the evolution of Chinese performance art. While not an exhaustive historical account, it aims to give readers a glimpse into the early development and characteristics of Chinese performance art. This historical context traces significant shifts in concepts and practices between the early and current periods of Chinese performance art to provide a background for the subsequent analysis of the contemporary documentation practices and the role of audience engagement in enriching performance art

archives. The emergence of Chinese performance art, notably during the *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition in 1989, represents a pivotal moment in the development of this artistic movement. By detailing this pivotal event, we can better appreciate the trajectory of Chinese performance art, from its initial suppression by the government to its current prominence through various performance art institutions and festivals.

On the morning of 5 February 1989, the *China/Avant-Garde* modern art exhibition was announced to open at the National Art Gallery in Beijing (Figure 1), marking the first dedicated display of avant-garde art in China. On the opening day, Xiao Lu, a young artist, stood in front of an installation piece and fired two shots at a mirror reflecting herself. The gunshot caused a commotion in the gallery, leading to police intervention and the closure of the exhibition in the afternoon. *Times* magazine featured the title “Egg-Hatching, Gunshots, Condoms” on its cover, reporting on the *China/Avant-Garde* modern art exhibition (cited in Liu, 2009). The performance art displayed during this exhibition marks the inception of Chinese performance art’s historical journey.

Figure 1

'China/Avant-Garde Exhibition' – Invitation, 1989.



Note. Invitation from *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition* (1989), Lu Peng Archive. Courtesy of Lu Peng and Asia Art Archive. Retrieved from:
<https://aaa.org.hk/en/collections/search/archive/lv-peng-archive--1989-china-avantgarde-exhibition--beijing/object/chinaavant-garde-exhibition-invitation>

During the *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition*, artist Wu Shanzhuan performed his piece *Da Shengyi*. Wu Shanzhuan displayed advertisements on small blackboards in the exhibition hall, promoting 400 kilograms of giant shrimp inside two wooden crates (Liu, 2009). The advertisement included the following explanation (translated into English):

Dear customers,

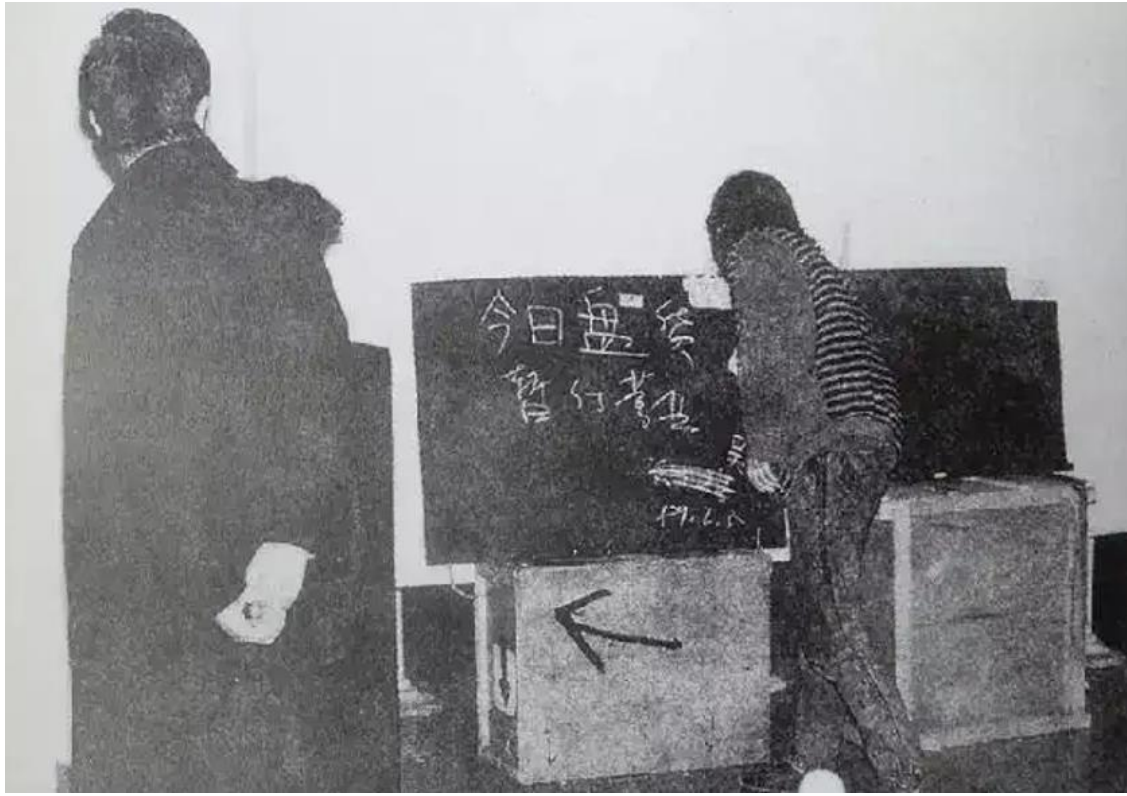
As our entire nation celebrates the Year of the Snake, in order to enrich the spiritual and martial life of the people of our nation's capital, I have brought from my

hometown of Zhoushan the highest-quality export shrimps (to be sold to the domestic market). Venue of display and sale: National Gallery of Art. Price: 9.5 yuan per catty. Hurry while supplies last. (Wu Shanzhuan, cited in Acret & Lau, 2005).

The newspaper he used to wrap the shrimps in was an art newspaper featuring news about his art exhibition. As he sold the shrimps, he explained to the gathered crowd that this was “portable art.” Before long, the organisers questioned him, and they decided to confiscate Wu Shanzhuan’s shrimps. However, he produced a letter of recommendation, providing that the shrimps were artistic items for the exhibition. Eventually, he was fined 20 yuan (in the Chinese currency RMB) and ordered to stop selling the shrimps. Despite buying the shrimps wholesale for over 800 yuan, he only made around 100 yuan from the sales. Wu Shanzhuang then posted the letter of recommendation and the fine notice on the blackboard, writing with chalk, “inventory today, business temporarily suspended (今日盘点, 暂停营业)” (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Wu Shanzhuan. *Da Shengyi*, 1989



Note. Wu Shanzhuan, *Da Shengyi*, 1989, performance at *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition*, National Gallery of Art, Beijing, China. Retrieved from:

<https://www.ccartd.com/news/detail/2023-1/133177171370000000.shtml>

Another notable artwork in the *China/Avant-Garde* modern art exhibition was Zhang Nian's performance, which occupied a corner of the second-floor gallery. Seated on a straw mat surrounded by eggs and encircled by banners and printed images (Figure 3), Zhang's performance was designed to disorient and provoke visitors, forcing them to make a choice: observe quietly, engage in conversation to understand his intentions, or navigate around him with polite detachment (Liu, 2009). Adding to this sense of uncertainty regarding the appropriate interaction, Zhang wore a makeshift sign stating, "*No theoretical debate during my floating egg performance, lest it troubles the next generation*" (p. 42). Zhang's performance humorously acknowledges his symbolic role as an avant-garde figure – he sits apparently "hatching" the next wave – highlighting the ambiguous understanding of the avant-garde movement.

Figure 3

Zhang Nian. *Hatching Eggs*, 1989



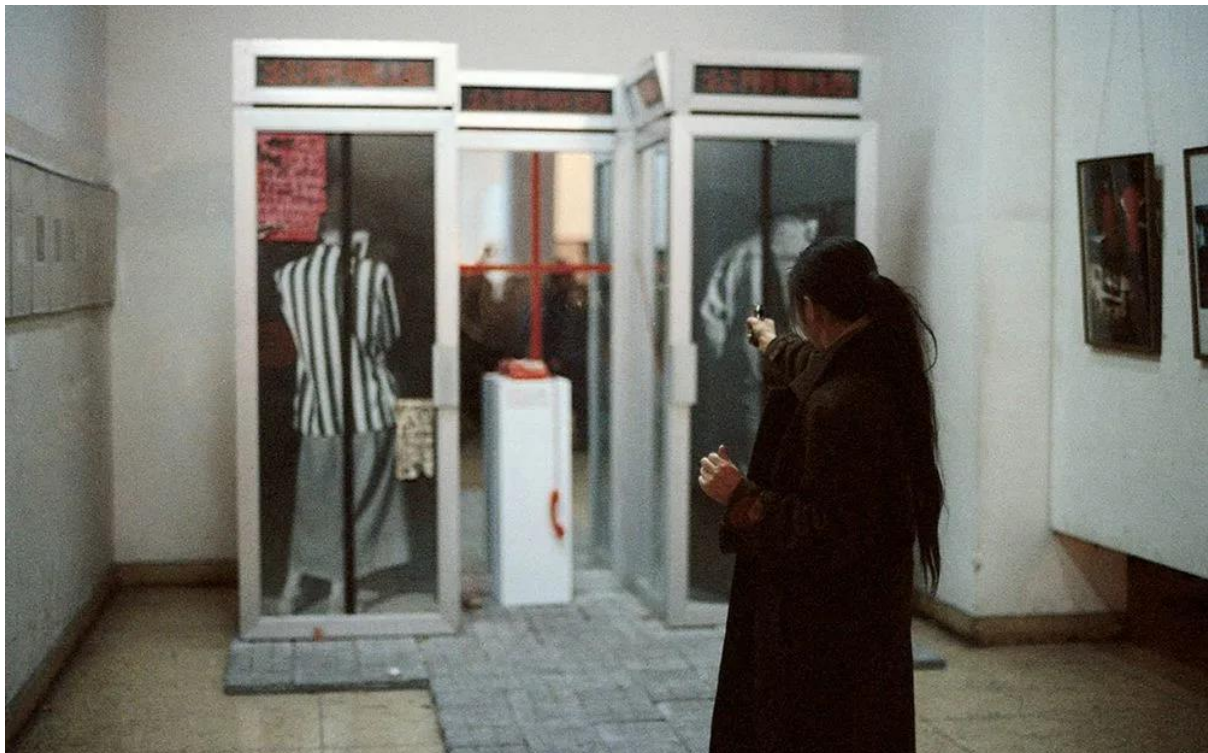
Note. From “Zhang Nian, *Hatching Eggs*, 1989, performance at *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition*, National Gallery of Art, Beijing, China.” Retrieved from:

<https://www.cafa.com.cn/en/news/details/8332386>

The chaos that ensued at the *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition was triggered by the two gunshots fired by artist Xiao Lu. Xiao Lu's art installation *Dialogue* was prominently displayed at the entrance of the exhibition on the east side, consisting of two aluminium telephone booths featuring backlit photographs of a man and a woman making phone calls inside (Figure 4). Between the two booths was a glass mirror, and in front of it sat a red telephone with the receiver hanging mid-air, symbolising a lack of 'dialogue' or communication. Xiao Lu appeared dressed in a black overcoat with her waist-length hair tied in a ponytail. Around 11:10 a.m., with a tense and slightly apprehensive expression, Xiao Lu lowered her head and quickly pulled out a handgun (Wang, 2023). She fired two shots, one hitting the glass mirror and the other grazing the edge of the aluminium frame and hitting the glass. The sound of the gunshots quickly reverberated globally, drawing international attention to the exhibition (Liu, 2009).

Figure 4

Xiao Lu. Dialogue, 1989



Note. From "Xiao Lu, *Dialogue*, 1989. Performance and Installation, *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition*, National Gallery of Art, Beijing, China." Retrieved from: <https://www.mplus.org.hk/en/collection/objects/seven-sins-7-performances-during-1989-chinese-avant-garde-art-exhibition-2017357/>

Over 30 years later, discussions about this exhibition and its works have not concluded, nor have definitive conclusions been reached. Regarding the brief clues to the development of contemporary Chinese art, the *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition arguably stands as an extremely significant moment and an indispensable event (Tong, 2012). The emergence of performance art in China during the 1980s was not random but a targeted artistic phenomenon. Initially, the avant-garde art scene in the 1980s was centred around traditional painting. However, the notion of ‘anti-art’ emerged as a response to and critique of these conventional painting styles, with many artists feeling that traditional painting lacked the dynamism and impact required for avant-garde expression. This shift led to the exploration of unconventional art forms such as ready-mades, installations, and conceptual art, ultimately paving the way for the adoption of the body as medium in performance art.

However, performance art in China has experienced significant changes in recent years. From being initially rejected by the public and subject to government intervention, more and more art institutions are now beginning to accept performance art. Meanwhile, there are also art festivals focusing on this specific art form, such as the Taoxichuan Performance Art Festival, the Xi’an Gu Yu Performance Art Festival, the Shanghai Cement Park Live House, the UPON International Live Art Festival, and the Wuhan Fei Chuan Live Art Festival. These emerging performance art platforms not only enhance the visibility and influence of this art form in China but also provide opportunities for the future development. Particularly, the UPON Performance Art Archive plays a crucial role in preserving and promoting performance art in China. Since its establishment in 2008, it has also planned an international live art festival every year, and now it is in its eleventh year. The UPON Performance Art Archive emphasises that it is not just static document repositories, but a dynamic incubator that promotes current practices and future directions of performance art. As a non-profit art institution, it focuses on collecting and presenting performance art systematically, and organising forums, exhibitions, lectures, workshops and publications to foster professional exchange and practical engagement.

Overall, this section’s introduction to the evolution of Chinese performance art provides a context for understanding early characteristics of the field and helps to further explore the curating of performance art and its archives later in this thesis.

Overview of Performance Art

To thoroughly explore the complexities of documenting and archiving performance art, it is essential first to understand the nature of the medium itself. Performance art has a rich history and evolving practices that present unique challenges for preservation and audience engagement. This section provides a brief overview of the definitions and terminology of performance art as discussed by various scholars in the field, laying the theoretical foundation for this thesis. This foundation is crucial to frame the subsequent research questions and arguments, particularly those concerning the debates around documentation and archiving, as well as innovative archival approaches. Performance art is notably difficult to define (Avgitidou, 2023). In this thesis, however, I refrain from providing a definitive definition of performance art to avoid limiting the diverse interpretations and potential inherent in performance. As such, this section offers some broad descriptions to better contextualise the art form.

Similar to other visual arts, performance art is typically created by artists drawing from personal concerns, interests, and aspirations, rather than following pre-written scripts or directions from others. The artist themselves executes the performance with the body being a fundamental component of the art form. Unlike traditional theatrical productions, performance art relies less on elaborate stage setups (Carson, 2004), although objects used may take on symbolic, ritualistic, or unconventional roles within the performance (Avgitidou, 2023). Performance art is often responsive to its presentation context, whether spatial, social, or political in nature (Avgitidou, 2023). This context is dynamically shaped during the live and spontaneous interaction between performers and audiences, forming the essence of the performance itself.

Terminology associated with performance art has evolved alongside the historical progression of the medium. In addition to 'performance art', terms like 'happening', 'body art', 'action' and 'live art' have also been utilised to describe various innovations in the field. Alan Kaprow, who coined the term 'happening', has expressed some regret regarding its use, suggesting that its purpose was to distance the art form from established entities like theatre and sports (Kirby, 1965). Despite this, Kaprow did not reject the widespread adoption of the term but rather questioned its superficial use as an event that primarily aimed to loosen inhibitions. He later introduced the term 'activity' and created Activity Booklets with

instructions for participants, further exploring the interactive nature of these artistic events. The term ‘happening’ extends beyond artistic contexts, reflecting the inherent ambiguity present in many performance definitions. This ambiguity is not universally viewed negatively by performance scholars; instead, it is seen as a result of the inherent conceptual ambiguity within the art form (Gallie, 1964 in Carlson, 2004).

The term ‘body art’ has been widely used historically and continues to be used today (Avgitidou, 2023). It signifies the central importance of the body in performance art, emphasising the artist’s body as both the medium and the site of expression. Body art has become prominent during the ‘historical’ performances of the 1960s and 1970s, as RoseLee Goldberg (1998) explores body art in relation to artists like Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, Carolee Schneemann, and others, situating its emergence in the early 1960s. Alongside ‘body art’, descriptive terms like ‘endurance art’ also surfaced (Goldberg, 1998), referring to performances in which artists pushed the limits of their physical endurance, often enduring pain, exhaustion, or extreme conditions as part of their artwork. One notable example of endurance art is Tehching Hsieh’s *One Year Performance (1980-1981)*, which will be further explored in the following section of this introduction under ‘Curation’¹.

Since the 1970s, ‘live art’ has emerged as another prevalent term which emphasises the live and dynamic nature of the medium. According to Goldberg (1998), ‘live art’ is particularly popular in the UK. Many performance artists have a deep interest in exploring the concept of time, leading them to reconsider how we perceive, experience, and interpret it. Although ‘time’ is a common theme in performance art discussions, categorising practices solely based on time is challenging due to its close association with the idea of “live” art. The term ‘live’ traditionally signifies a specific set of characteristics related to being in the present moment and the immediacy of presence. As Hoffmann (2012, p.37) states, ‘time’ plays a crucial role in defining this ontology. Rather than focusing narrowly on the fleeting nature of events or their concentrated intensity, durational performances emphasise an extended temporal framework that can span hours, days, weeks, or even years (Hoffmann, 2012). These prolonged durations often require significant endurance from both performers and audience members. The extended nature of durational performances can make them seem endless, uncontainable, and somewhat chaotic (Lehmann & Jurs-Munby, 2006). This sense of excess

¹ See Page 29.

and unpredictability pushes these performances beyond mere processes or events, creating an art form that exists concurrently with life itself, as noted by Heathfield (2009).

Performance art, both in its abstract conceptions and specific manifestations across history and contemporary practice, can often, though not always, carry political undertones. In some instances, it is associated with actions that highlight its potential to engage with political issues – such as challenging, questioning, scrutinising, revealing, confronting, and transforming. This political aspect is particularly evident in certain works and movements, such as Futurism and Dada, which adopted public, radical, and oppositional stances against conventional art and societal norms (Heddon & Klein, 2012). However, not all performance art is inherently political, and these associations vary depending on the work and context.

Chapter One will delve deeply into the key components of performance art, as the multifaceted realm of it is explored. The chapter will show that this dynamic and politically charged medium is not confined to the live moment but extends its impact through documentation. The following section introduces some of the key considerations in the scholarship regarding the documentation and archiving of performance art. The transition from live enactment to documented narratives opens a gateway to explore the nuanced complexities and critical significance of performance art archives.

Performance Art Documentation and Archiving

The relationship between live performance art and its archival documentation has been widely debated among scholars, driven by concerns about the ephemerality of this art form and its historical underrepresentation in art history. Amelia Jones (1997) initiated this discourse by underscoring the reliance of performance art on documentation for recognition within cultural contexts. In her article *Presence in Absentia*, Jones confronts the challenges posed by inadequate documentation of performances from the 1970s, hindering comprehensive understanding due to limited records and the impossibility of experiencing past performances physically. This scarcity of documentation is partly attributed to the perceived outsider status of 1970s performances within the traditional art economy, coupled with the emphasis on conceptual art's detachment from tangible artefacts. The emergence of this phenomenon sparked debates in ontology and phenomenology regarding performance art archives.

Over the past three decades, the discourse on documentation has evolved into a multidisciplinary debate spanning historical, cultural, and information science domains, interacting with performance and art practices, and more recently engaging with computer science (Dekker & Giannachi, 2022). Performance studies have been central to discussions surrounding the intricate relationship between documentation and performance. Peggy Phelan (1993, p.146) asserts that performance “cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations”, presenting a foundational scepticism towards the possibility of fully capturing the essence of performance through documentation. Phelan’s argument reveals that the inevitable ephemeral nature of performance art poses a challenge to the documenting of performance art. However, Philip Auslander (2006) offers a different perspective. In his analysis of Yves Klein’s *Leap into the Void* (1960), Auslander argues that documentation can extend beyond mere recording to become integral to the performance itself. Auslander’s exploration hints at the potential for documentation to serve not just as a record but as an active component shaping the interpretation and reception of performance art.

Discussion about the relationship between live performances and its documentation raises broader questions such as representation and authenticity. As Jones (1997) argues, comparing documentation to the “original” performance is not feasible, since neither archival records nor live witnessing provide a complete truth about performance art. The live nature of performances, combined with limited audience size, remains a defining aspect of performance art today.

However, in recent years artists recognise that documentation serves not only as a communication tool but also as a means of shaping their identity in contemporary contexts. Artists today understand the significance of documentation and its role in representing their work for future generations (Avgitidou, 2023). While some artists caution against betraying performance’s essence through documentation, Briet (1951) argues that there is no singular original event to reproduce, questioning the moral imperative to preserve the past. The resurgence of performance art and its integration into institutional settings relies on the interconnectedness of its present manifestations and historical roots. Suzanna Briet’s influential publication *What is Documentation?* (1951) remains a significant milestone in understanding documentation as a form of cultural production. Drawing on semiotic analysis and building upon earlier concepts regarding the value of documentation and documents,

Briet proposed that a document is a “concrete or symbolic indexical sign preserved or recorded for the purpose of representing, reconstructing, or conveying a physical or intellectual phenomenon” (1951, p. 10).

Documentation, such as recordings and photographs capturing performance actions, whether witnessed live or recorded by photographers for future reference, not only validates the live experience but also contributes significantly to our collective perception of performance within the visual arts realm. Initially serving as press images, then evolving into historical records, and eventually being regarded as artworks themselves, these performance art documentations blur the lines between staged performances and documented realities, becoming integral parts of the cultural archive. As traces of these performances, this documentation material not only enriches the visual archive of art history but also plays a role in the ongoing process of its cultural reignition, continually evolving through its reception and interpretation.

The debate around how performance art should be documented and preserved extends to the role of archives, which both preserve and shape narratives by determining what is included or excluded. An alternative perspective proposes embodied knowledge and memory preservation as a way to empower agency, highlighting approaches like the repertoires that prioritise live experience over traditional archival methods (Taylor, 2003). This ongoing dialogue reflects the complexities of preserving and interpreting the multifaceted history of performance art.

Exploring the theoretical underpinnings of archives and documentation, Derrida’s *Archive Fever* (1996) offers a foundational perspective by tracing the term ‘archive’ to its Greek origin ‘Arkhe’, signifying both a beginning and an order of law. He emphasises that the archive’s function goes beyond mere content preservation; it also shapes and determines the events it archives. Derrida connects our desire to preserve the past with Freud’s concept of the death drive, echoing Foucault’s perspectives on archives as formations that govern what is remembered or forgotten (Foucault, 1969). Rebecca Schneider (2011) expands on this by positioning performance as a form of living memory, transmitted through embodied practices and emotional resonance. While acknowledging the archive’s structuring power, Schneider critiques its potential to obscure authentic memory, highlighting the value of contemporary

performance re-enactments as dynamic archival practices. Together, these perspectives invite a rethinking of archives as active agents in memory-making and cultural preservation.

Building upon these conceptual foundations, Matthew Reason observes a 'moral ambition' in the language used to advocate for a performance archive, noting performance must be 'saved' or 'rescued', as part of our 'heritage' or our 'legacy', and must not be 'lost' (2003, p.84). In *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003), Diana Taylor introduces the concept of the repertoire as an alternative method of documenting performance. She argues that the archive, seen as a repository of unchanging materials, contrasts with the embodied and ephemeral nature of performance. Taylor (2003) advocates for the repertoire, which she describes as embodying memory, requiring presence, and allowing agency by reconstituting meaning through embodied acts rather than a static object.

Hal Foster's perspective adds a layer of dynamism to the discourse, emphasising the transformative potential of archival materials in generating novel interpretations and emotional connections with the past. In *The Archive Impulse* (2004), he discusses how artists engage with archives not to provide a definitive interpretation of the past but to create new interpretations. He emphasises that the fragmentation, partially inherent in these artistic endeavours, not only shapes how the past is represented but also offers a new way to emotionally connect with the past. Kathy O'Dell also contributes to this discussion, focusing on how viewers of performance photographs experience a bodily reaction, leading to a 'narrative-in-reverse' effect (1997, p. 74). These scholars' discussion of performance art documentation reflects the importance of capturing the experience rather than simply documenting the performance itself. As Avgitidou (2023) states that the aspects of valuing personal accounts, subjective experiences, and fragmented documents within the archive are valued as a means of creating legitimate forms or a record. These discussions demonstrate that documentation is not merely a static record but a dynamic force that bridges past, present and future artistic expressions. With its ever-changing nature, it helps us understand the paradigm shift in documentation, expanding its scope beyond preservation to encompass its role as a medium for creativity, reinterpretation, and historical continuity within the landscape of art and culture.

The increasing institutionalisation of performance art and the diverse practices of documenting have attracted considerable attention to the archives that are preserved. Dekker and Giannachi (2023) emphasise the multifaceted nature of documentation, highlighting its

diverse creation and utilisation across various roles and purposes. Conservation professionals play a crucial role in generating documentation to comprehend and analyse art projects, using it for future preservation, restoration, or presentation needs (Dekker, 2022). Curators view documentation as a tool to contextualise and elucidate aspects of an art project, often adhering to conventional models of institutional authority and disciplinary knowledge. Marketing departments use documentation for promoting and clarifying art events, while educators utilise it to illustrate and enhance artistic significance (Dekker, 2022). Furthermore, artists themselves are actively involved in creating and documenting their work, and sometimes integrating documentation into other presentations or transforming it into entirely new art projects. Thus, the surviving documentary material from a performance not only serves as visual evidence of the event but also allows us to interpret the material as a potential indicator of its future forms, including as an image, a trace, and an object (Clausen, 2017).

In the next section, I will explore the potential role of the audience as a central element in shaping and enriching the process of archiving performance art. It introduces the idea that documenting audience engagement is essential to creating a dynamic participatory archive that captures diverse perspectives, and can be seen as a contemporary mode of knowledge production that makes performance art archives more vivid by incorporating different creative inputs.

Defining Audience Engagement in the Archive

Capturing the audience's emotions, experiences, and engagement in performance art has consistently posed a significant challenge for archivists documenting live moments and events. The audience remains a silent majority in the history of performance art – much talked about but rarely heard (Muller, 2010). Helen Freshwater (2009) argues that the audience's presence is essential for a performance to exist. Despite the undeniable importance of the audience, it is remarkable that scholarly research focused on performing arts audiences and their interaction with archives remains both a contentious and underdeveloped area of academic study.

While the artist's intention and the audience's perspective have traditionally been central to performance documentation, recent years have seen a shift towards documenting the audience itself, focusing not only on what the audience observes but also on their actions

(Giannachi, 2017). According to Elligott (as cited in Giannachi, 2017, p. 184), there was an early interest in the ‘participatory activation’ of museums that actively engaged the audience. This shift reflects the increasingly active role of the audience in the co-production of artwork. Allan Kaprow traced the participatory role of the audience to Jackson Pollock’s action painting (Kaprow, 1993), noting that with and after Pollock, viewers became more integrated into the artwork, which in turn became more of an environment. This implies that a painting or installation can be seen as a form of documentation of the action that created it, encompassing both the artist’s actions and the audience’s reactions. Stuart Comer, Chief Curator in the Department of Media and Performance Art at Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), highlights in an interview that he does “not actually see a radical difference in terms of the indexicality of a photograph of a dance or a performance, versus a Jackson Pollock painting or any other number of ways that movements are traced and recorded” (cited in Giannachi, 2017, p. 186). Art historian Amelia Jones, writing about body art approximately 50 years after Pollock, argued that the “introduction of the body into (or ‘as’) the work of art in relation to an embodied spectator” represented a significant departure from modernist beliefs (Jones, 2008, p. 155). Consequently, curators like Annie Fletcher, Chief Curator at Van Abbemuseum, view documentation as encompassing not only the relationships between artists and their work but also between the artists, the works, and the public (cited in Giannachi, 2017, p. 187). This emphasis on participation signifies a change in how museums perceive documentation. It is no longer solely a method for preservation, exhibition, or reactivation but also a means of exploring the history of a work’s reception and co-production, illustrating how the audience’s engagement with a work evolves over time.

Questions regarding audience engagement inherently prompt a fundamental inquiry into the nature and function of audiences. Blau defines the audience as “a constructed consciousness, an initiated body of thought and desire” (1990, p. 25). But Stanislavsky underscores that performing without an audience is “like listening for an echo in a place without resonance” (cited in Blau, 1990, p. 255). This insight highlights that one of the primary roles of the audience is to provide resonance and meaning, yet surprisingly little research is dedicated to this hermeneutic endeavour (Walmsley, 2019).

Walmsley (2019) suggested that audience research often suffers from vague terminology that perpetuates ambiguity and impeded scholarly cohesion. As Josephine Machon (2013m p. 98) notes, the term ‘audience’ itself is a ‘vexed term’. The term ‘audience’, rooted in Latin from

‘audire’, to hear, suggest “a group of passive listeners, who simply engage their ears at one step removed from performance” (Walmsley, 2019, p. 6). However, the term lacks a gerund, making it challenging to succinctly describe the specific activity that audiences actually participate in. In contrast, ‘spectator’ includes a gerund (spectating) and the related noun ‘spectatorship’, emphasising the act of observing or viewing (Walmsley, 2019, p. 6). Yet, its Latin origins (‘spectare’) reduce audience engagement to the deployment of senses, portraying audiences as distant voyeurs who observe performances from afar. Similarly, terms like ‘theatre’ (from the Greek ‘theatron’, a place for viewing) frame the audience experience within the context of passive spectatorship (Walmsley, 2019).

Audience studies scholars have increasingly coined new terms to articulate the dynamic engagements of audiences. John Fiske (1992), for instance, borrowing from cultural studies, introduced the neologism ‘audiencing’ to characterise the active engagement of being an audience member. Reason and Londelof later adopted this term within performance studies and provide a detailed definition:

‘Audiencing’ describes the work of the spectator. It describes acts of attention, of affect, of meaning-making, of memory, of community. A focus on audiencing recognises that attention is a constructive or performative act, that spectators bring performances into being through the nature of their variously active, distractive or contested attention. (2016, p. 17)

‘Spectatorship’ does not align with Walmsley’s perspective due to its implication of passive observation from the sidelines without active participation. Therefore, he introduces the term ‘audiency’ to encompass the broader concept of active audience engagement and its theoretical exploration (2019, p. 8).

Alongside ‘audience’, the term ‘participation’ stands as another core concept driving the focus of this thesis. Despite the exponential increase in the use of the term ‘engagement’ in arts marketing and cultural policy literature over the past two decades (Walmsley, 2019), few authors have endeavoured to provide a comprehensive definition or differentiate it from related concepts such as ‘participation’ and ‘involvement’ (Brodie et al., 2011). Audience participation as an artistic strategy has traditionally been associated with experimental, political, and pedagogical theatre existing on the fringes of established theatre culture.

However, this is no longer the case. Over the past two decades, there has been a significant increase in theatre and performance practices that involve the audience in various ways, making audience participation ‘mainstream’ (Berg, 2020). According to Reason (2015, p. 271), audience participation is a fundamental aesthetic and structural component of performances, driven by artists’ and companies’ intentions to redefine the performer-spectator relationship and encourage a more active form of audience engagement.

Lynne Conner offers a practical yet insightful definition of ‘engagement’, likening it to the operation of gears that enable a mechanism to function (2013, p. 37). She suggests that audiences engage in the process of artmaking when they feel they are a vital part of its mechanism. Similarly, Steven Tepper defines engagement as ‘to interlock’ or ‘involve’ (2008, p. 363). Tepper’s definition presents a post-structural view of the audience, seeing them as participants who engage actively with art – interpreting it in new ways, adapting it to their personal contexts, blending various styles and genres, and providing their own critiques (Tepper, 2008). As Walmsley argues, theoretical definitions converge on the idea of engagement as a psychological process aimed at fostering intimate, meaningful, and enduring relationships with audiences by involving them in interactive, immersive, and interpretative experiences. This process empowers audiences and generates deep connections by making them an integral part of the art-making process. Consequently, engagement is seen as both “a strategic management process and a sociocultural benefit” (2019, p. 12).

In this thesis, I have chosen to emphasise the term ‘engagement’ to describe the role of the audience. While both ‘participation’ and ‘engagement’ are valid terms, engagement more accurately reflects the depth and quality of interaction that I aim to explore. Engagement encompasses not only the involvement of audiences but also their emotional and intellectual investment in the process. It highlights the transformative potential of their contributions, viewing audiences as integral to the creation, interpretation, and preservation of performance art.

Documenting audience experiences is both a significant challenge and an exciting opportunity for the development of performance art archives. This thesis explores the importance of capturing diverse narratives and highlights the critical role of the audience’s voice in the documentation process. My aim is not to provide an authoritative final assertion about how the works were created, but to explore how performance artwork might be

documented to preserve as many perspectives as possible. Audience response and memory are crucial to this thesis because incorporating these perspectives ensures that understanding of the work is not solely reliant on the viewpoints of art, theatre, or performance critics. This research emphasises the role of audience engagement in the documentation process, yet descriptions of their experiences in their own words rarely appear in the documentary record. Chapter Three will present a case study analysis based on audience-generated documentation materials that I collected during the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival in 2023. Recording and gathering these materials during the festival became an integral part of the exhibition I curated *Flow – Chinese Performance Art and Documentation*. The next section introduces some of the unique challenges and opportunities for curating and exhibiting performance art, particularly as these works circulate across transnational contexts. It begins with a case study analysis of an exhibition of contemporary Chinese artist Tehching Hsieh to highlight that the exhibition archives in the form of texts, photos, and videos might work to disconnect the archive from the documented performance artwork. In order to avoid the presentation feeling static and restricted, the next section will explore how curation can convey the energy and vitality inherent in performance art.

Curation

The complex relationship between live performance and its documentation raises critical questions about how these archives are represented and understood within museum and gallery contexts. This section begins with a case study analysis of the 2013 UCCA Beijing exhibition *Tehching Hsieh: One Year Performance 1980 - 1981*, highlighting key concerns surrounding the complexities and tensions inherent in preserving, presenting, and interpreting performance art archives within an institutional framework. By introducing this exhibition, I aim to address key considerations regarding how performance art archives can be presented within the museum and gallery spaces without compromising the vitality inherent in the original performances. However, this study does not aim to provide a historical overview of the field of curation. Instead, as discussed in Chapter Four, it seeks to highlight the key role of transnational curatorial strategies in the activation of performance art archives through exhibition and audience engagement. This is achieved by offering a brief overview of the fundamental terminology related to curating and its development within the framework of performance art and archival practices. Through further examination of the position of performance art and its documentation, as well as the potential of transnational curatorial

practices, this research seeks to explore the innovative ways that can activate and expand the accessibility of a performance art archive for wider audiences.

Exhibition: Tehching Hsieh: One Year Performance 1980- 1981

From 28 June to 15 September 2013, UCCA Beijing curated and presented the exhibition *Tehching Hsieh: One-Year Performance 1980 - 1981* (Figure 5). The exhibition showcased the works of one of the world's most significant performance artists and his foundational influence on Chinese performance art post-1989. The exhibition featured a complete installation of one of his most iconic works, *Time Clock Piece* (One-Year Performance 1980 - 1981), where the artist punched a time clock every hour throughout the entire year. This installation was displayed in the long gallery of UCCA, along with posters and statements related to his other four *One-Year Performances* and the *Thirteen-Year Plan*.

Figure 5

Tehching Hsieh: One Year Performance 1980 – 1981, exhibition view, 2013



Note. Photo by UCCA Center for Contemporary Art Beijing. Retrieved from: <https://ucca.org.cn/en/exhibition/tehching-hsieh-one-year-performance-1980-1981/>

Tehching Hsieh was born in Taiwan in 1950, and is arguably one of the most distinctive and significant artists globally, with a profound and influential impact on the development of contemporary Chinese art. As a trailblazer in the field of contemporary art, his works

continue to inspire reflection and discussions within academic circles. Renowned for breaking down the distance between art and life, Tehching Hsieh's five *One-Year Performances* conducted between 1978 and 1986 enriched the core concepts of late capitalist mechanisms — existence and surveillance, production and control, discipline and obedience (Heathfield, 2009).

Figure 6

Tehching Hsieh: One Year Performance 1980 – 1981, installation view, 2013



Note. Photo by UCCA Center for Contemporary Art Beijing. Retrieved from: <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/DgUxBdmGZBUA8A>

The exhibition *One-Year Performance 1980 -1981* showcased a poster, an artist's statement, witness statements, a record of missed clock-ins, a time clock machine, 366 timing cards, a 16mm film, 366 frames of film stills, and a set of self-designed 'work clothes' (Figure 6). These items were neatly arranged on the walls of the exhibition hall, and artifacts such as the work clothes worn by Tehching Hsieh during the performance and paper records of witness's voices were well-preserved in glass display cases within the exhibition hall.

This presentation prompts several critical considerations regarding the exhibition's implications: What constitutes the exhibited content of performance art? How does the presentation of an archive of performance art differ from traditional historical

documentation? Where does the intrinsic essence of the performance artwork manifest within this narrative? These questions highlight the unclear positioning of performance art archives within galleries and museums. Exhibiting performance art archives in the form of texts, photos, and videos seems to have become a fixed form, but these forms may work to disconnect the archive from the documented performance artwork. This approach exemplifies what Phelan (1993, p. 146) has described, that the performance itself is not captured; the recording of it becomes “Something other than performance”. While the attempt to capture and preserve invisible traces is laudable, the results are not satisfactory. Conventional modes of display often struggle to convey the dynamism and vitality inherent in performance art, leading to a portrayal that can feel static and constrained. Addressing these issues is crucial for exploring innovative curatorial practices that can better activate and expand the accessibility of performance art archives for diverse audiences.

The next section explores these issues as they relate to the ways performance art has been situated in museums and galleries. It begins by examining the challenges and opportunities in documenting and curating performance art, with an emphasis on how transnational curatorial practices foster cultural exchange and audience engagement.

Performance Art in Museums and Galleries

As performance art evolved and the discussions of its documentation and archive grew, museums and art institutions became increasingly interested in this unique art form. According to Foucault’s analysis of museum practices, museums and art institutions play a role far beyond merely displaying archives; they function as dynamic spaces for shaping memory and generating knowledge (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Bennett, 1995). Therefore, museums do not just passively present knowledge but actively shape the way people perceive and understand it. Kotz (2005) comments on performance art documents, arguing that these documents play a role in affirming the value and ideological impact of performance art in traditional art spaces such as galleries and museums. The development surrounding this shift reflects the interest of art institutions, including museums and art fairs, in promoting and collecting performance-based art practices (Clausen, 2017).

Ayerbe (2018) has conducted interviews with collection managers in museums and galleries. The interviews attempt to deal with the presence of performance art in collections, the type

and nature of this presence and the status of the performance-related objects in collections. Ayerbe (2018) wonders whether certain galleries and museums see performance art as a work of art itself, and the way it materialises as a mere remnant. As the outcome of these interviews, Ayerbe asserts that museums and galleries want to avoid calling performance-related pieces documentation and tend to define them as “works with a creative process or works that have some performance elements in their background or their creative process” (Ayerbe, 2018, p. 3). On the other hand, in terms of the museum’s assets, interviewees argued that “there is no difference between performance art and performance art documentation and Ayerbe (2018, p. 3) suggests that this seems to “blur the boundaries between archive and collection, between document and work of art”.

In the case of the Reina Sofia Museum, Lola Hinojosa insists that it is not relevant where a piece is stored, whether in the collection or in the archives, since, in her view, it has the same value (Hinojosa cited in Ayerbe, 2018). The only difference lies in the ways in which it is disseminated and publicised. When a piece is part of the collection, it is typically on display for the public, contributing to the museum’s exhibition narrative. On the other hand, when a piece is consigned to the archives, it might not be physically exhibited but is preserved for research, documentation, and potential future display. In essence, the distinction lies not in the inherent worth of the artwork but rather in its accessibility and visibility to the audience.

More and more art historians, museum conservators, and curators recognise that historical performances are often encountered solely through documentation (Jones, 1997). This recognition led curators to repurpose documentation, which had initially been integrated into museums for acquisition and conservation purposes, for exhibitions and presentations (Sant, 2017), but which are now being used as a means of knowledge production and creative exploration. Documentation began to be viewed not only as a record or remnants of past events but also as a tool for future-oriented initiatives (Dekker & Giannachi, 2022).

The integration of performance art into museums has spurred significant transformations in documentation, conservation, and exhibition strategies. Giannachi (2023) posits that depending on its placement within a museum, documentation can serve as a record in the archive, an exhibit in the collection, or a mode of engagement on social media. Museums now orchestrate the historicisation, value creation, and spectacle of art through documentation. Some art institutions or museums aim to exhibit performance archives using

a representational approach, yet the nature of performance art's temporality presents challenges for researchers and curators alike. To break free from these constraints, this thesis proposes that transforming performance archives exhibitions into dynamic experiments can be a game-changer. Audiences can creatively engage with performance art archives, co-creating new interpretations and narratives of performance works that go beyond just hanging on a wall or being displayed in glass showcases. This approach goes beyond the traditional concept of archives and redefines the way knowledge is produced in this field. As interactive and participatory artworks become more popular in museums, the focus has shifted to recognising the dual role of the audience – not just as a passive spectator, but also as an active participant and co-creator.

Transnational Curating and Archiving

This section focuses on the term transnationalism and its application and potential in the context of performance art archiving and curation. As discussed previously, the challenges of documentation and curation, as well as the pivotal role of the audiences, also prompt an exploration of how performance art archives might transcend cultural and geographical boundaries. Introducing the perspective of transnationalism may help create opportunities for meaningful cultural dialogue and audience engagement, fostering connections that transcend geographic and cultural divides, thereby generating new knowledge. Korsberg, Saro and Seppala (2020) propose that transnationalism has emerged as a key concept in 21st century theatre and performance studies. It can be understood as the movement of goods, services, cultural practices, artworks, and individuals across borders. This can encompass collaborative art projects, international touring of performance works, or the sharing of archival practices across cultural contexts. For many artists, working beyond national borders is an integral part of their practices, whether through global collaborations, cross-border travel, or engagement with international trends and discourses. In my research inquiry, transnationalism provides a framework for examining the social and cultural dynamics between China and New Zealand. The core benefit of transnationalism to this inquiry is its potential to foster cross-border exchange, where performance art archives can facilitate cross-border communication and engage with new audiences from different regions. Chapter Four will focus on how transnational participatory curatorial practice might encourage cross-border dialogue and foster innovative ways of representation and engagement that deepen audience understanding

of performance art and its archives. Here, I offer a brief overview of the term to provide the theoretical context for the inquiry.

The terms ‘international’ and ‘transnational’ are often debated and sometimes used interchangeably. Reinelt (2008) defines ‘international’ as involving multiple nations and implying cooperation or negotiation among these national entities. Conversely, Saunier (2013) views ‘transnational’ within the field of international relations as the study of non-state actors that operate across national boundaries, such as transnational advocacy networks. Generally, ‘international’ denotes formal connections and collaboration between large entities like nations or states, whereas ‘transnational’ describes similar interactions and networks but between informal agents (Korsberg, Saro, & Seppala, 2020).

The term ‘transnationalism’ first appeared in the United States in 1919 within discussions on migration and identity (Korsberg, Saro, & Seppala, 2020). Beyond international relations and migration studies, Saunier (2013) explains that ‘transnationalism’ in cultural studies serves to describe, analyse, and even forecast the dynamics of a multipolar, multicultural, and post-national world. This approach, whether economic, social, or cultural, focuses on the connections, circulations, and relationships that transcend borders, applicable to nearly any subject, from goods to ideas, people, and artworks. In the context of this thesis, transnationalism provides a lens through which to observe curatorial practices to explore how performance art and archival practices in China and New Zealand reflect and bridge the unique social and cultural dynamics of these regions. As Tietenberg (2022) argues, curatorial work has the power to bridge cultural divides, challenge the primacy of national politics and boundaries, and foster an understanding of both historical and contemporary connections between cultures, thereby creating a shared foundation for dialogue.

While transnationalism provides a framework for understanding the movement of performance art archives beyond national boundaries, it is important to differentiate this from the concept of transculturalism. The two terms are often used interchangeably, yet they carry distinct implications. Transculturalism, as coined by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s, refers to the phenomenon of merging cultures. The term encompasses more than simply the acquisition of another culture or the transition of one culture to another (Ortiz, 1995). Diana Taylor explores the significance of this transition in her discussion of transculturation, observing that it is a “shifting process” and as such is constantly in flux and

often manifests in a “circulating pattern of cultural transference” (1991, p. 93). To this end, the concept of transcultural suggests a process where cultural distinctions dissolve over time through integration and synthesis, involving fusions and transformation of cultures into a new entity. However, this notion does not align with the focus of this research inquiry. Rather than theorising cultural exchange through a focus on the notion of transcultural, this thesis focuses instead on the broad notion of transnationalism, which does not assume cultural fusion but rather highlights the interactions and exchanges that occur across national and cultural boundaries while maintaining distinct cultural and national identities. Drawing on the concept of a transnational turn in memory studies, Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney (2014) suggest that the term ‘transnational’ is well-suited to capture the complex, layered, and multi-directional interactions involved in cultural dynamics. Following this, the concept of transnational allows this research to acknowledge the national contexts while also highlight the capacity of cultural production to go beyond them. The transnational curatorial approach allows archives not only to record past events but to actively shape audiences’ experiences by engaging with the archive – creating a collective, transnational memory that evolves with each presentation (Clausen, 2006; Dekker, 2022). Transnational participatory curatorial strategies could serve as a dynamic resource by viewing the archive as an evolving entity that not only documents but also actively reshapes itself through audience engagement. The concept of the transnational also provides opportunities for reinterpretation and adaptation across different cultural contexts.

In discussing the potential of transnational performative archives, this study also considers their role in fostering intercultural dialogue. The term intercultural is often used in diverse disciplines, including anthropology, communication studies and performance studies, and remains a contested concept. In relation to theatre practice, Patrice Pavis (1996, p.8) defines ‘intercultural theatre’ as the creation of “hybrid forms drawing upon a more or less conscious and voluntary mixing of performance traditions traceable to distinct cultural areas”. Later, he suggests that intercultural performance is more appropriate to indicate an openness to diverse cultural traditions in performance (Pavis, 2010). This aligns with the nature of transnational performative archive, which are not static collections but dynamic spaces where archives are engaged with, activated, and reinterpreted in new cultural contexts. John Martin argues that the intercultural performance is “not one style, not one thing; it is an ongoing process of meeting, cross-pollinating and producing new and relevant work for its surroundings. As long as peoples and cultures meet there will be new ideas, new ways of communicating and

creating” (2004, p. 4). Similarly, Paul Allain and Jen Harvie argue that the term interculturalism describes interaction which confronts and/or combines the practices of one culture with those of one or more others (2014, p.164). In this vein, Erica Fischer-Lichte (2009, p. 399) vividly employs the phrase “interweaving cultures in performance” to refer to the concept of intercultural exchange.

This study employs the term intercultural to describe the process of interaction and exchange when performance art archives from China are viewed, activated, and reinterpreted by audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds in New Zealand. Intercultural engagement acknowledges the distinct cultural perspectives of audiences while emphasising the dialogues and collaborative processes that emerge when this transnational performative archive is shared, circulated and reinterpreted, reactivated. The presentation of archival materials from the UPON International Live Art Festival in China to audiences in New Zealand exemplifies this dynamic exchange, where diverse cultural understandings inform new interpretations into a new hybrid form, the intercultural potential in this research highlights the coexistence and negotiation of multiple and dynamic cultural viewpoints within the transnational performative archive. By fostering active audience engagement, the intercultural dialogue expands the ways performance art archive is constructed, understood and reimagined.

Thus, by adopting a transnational approach, and by incorporating intercultural perspectives, this study aims to explore whether transnational curatorial practices can effectively bridge cultural divides and promote shared narratives across borders, allowing performance art archives to be culturally and materially expanded, activated and connected to a wider audience. As these archives circulate and are reinterpreted, they accrue layered meanings, becoming vehicles for cross-cultural engagement and shared memory creation. This notion aligns with archival theorist Angelika Menne-Haritz’s (2001) viewpoint that archives should evolve from mere repositories of information to active facilitators of memory creation. Menne-Haritz observes that while archives do not store memory, “they offer the possibility to create memories” (p. 58). This study aims to explore the potential of transnational performance art archives as dynamic platforms for promoting cultural exchange, preserving the vitality of performances, and enhancing public engagement. Rather than positioning archives as static repositories, this research investigates how they might evolve into participatory spaces where audiences actively engage with, reinterpret, and contribute to the ongoing life of performance art.

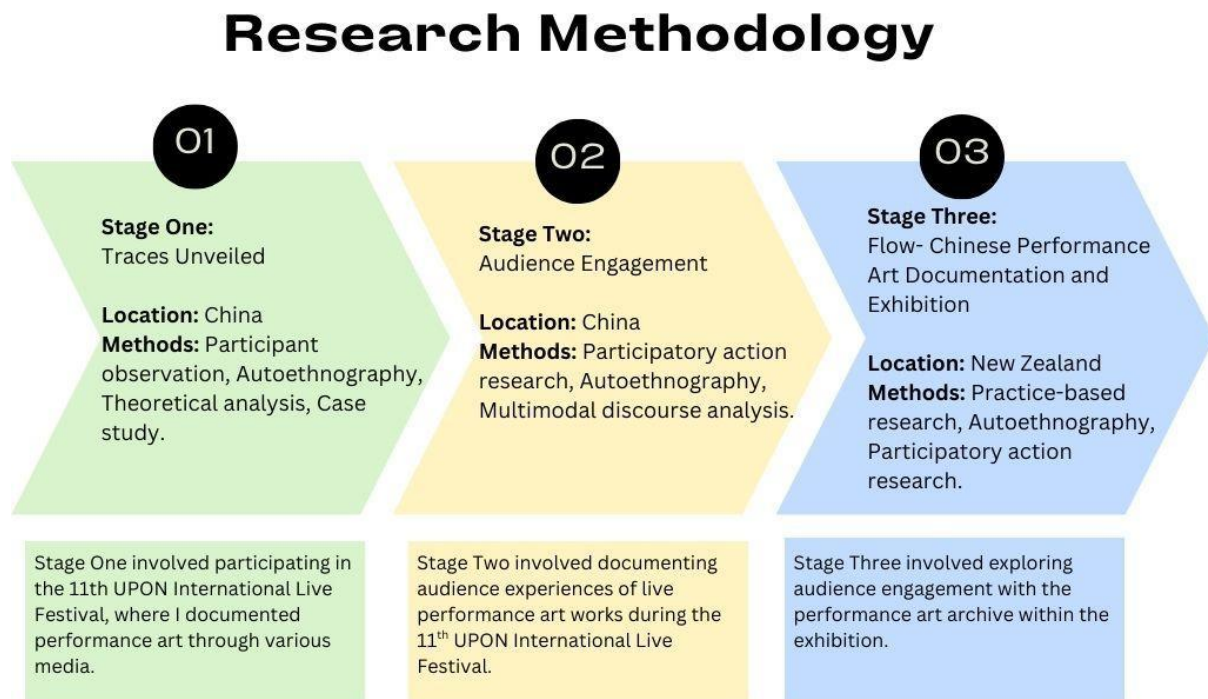
Research Methodology

This research project was divided into three distinct stages as shown in Figure 7. The first stage involved participating in the 11th UPON International Live Festival in Chengdu, China, where I documented performance art through various media, including video, photography, audience oral memories and written descriptions. The research methods used in this stage included participant observation and autoethnography, which aimed to capture the dynamic nature of performance while developing a theoretical framework for the documentation of performing arts and facilitating a process of participatory archiving. The second stage involved documenting audience experiences of live performance art works during the 11th UPON International Live Festival, using participatory action research (PAR), autoethnography, and multimodal discourse analysis. This stage explored an innovative approach to documenting performance art, focusing on the role of audiences in creating knowledge and challenging the traditional documentation paradigm. In the third stage, it involved the practice-based research, autoethnography, and PAR to explore the audience engagement with the performance art archive in the exhibition. The practice-based research focused on curating the archive into an interactive exhibition that gave audiences the opportunity to participate in the narrative of a performance art archive. The autoethnography allowed me to reflect on my experiences as a curator, while PAR involved observing and analysing how audiences who engaged with the exhibition could activate the performance art archive.

In summary, this thesis employs a multifaceted methodology including autoethnography, PAR, practice-based research and participant observation. Autoethnography provides a reflective and personal perspective, integrating my role as research, curator and participant. PAR engages audiences in the creation of documentation, encouraging the production of shared knowledge. Participant observation enriches the study by documenting performance art at the festival, contributing to the development of a dynamic and inclusive performance art archive. Practice-based research provides the practical guidelines for the transnational archival exhibition, transforming the audiences into active contributors through the engagement with the archive. Together, these methods form a comprehensive approach to understanding performance art documentation, while promoting more participatory and inclusive archival practices. The next section outlines in more detail the different stages and methods used in my research inquiry.

Figure 7

Research Methodology Flow Chart



Note. This flow chart illustrates the three stages of the research process.

Stage one: *Traces Unveiled*

The first stage of my research involved traveling to Chengdu, China, to participate in the 11th UPON International Live Festival. My primary objective was to document the performance art presented at the festival through various methods, including video, audio, photography, audience oral memories, written descriptions, etc. This stage aimed to narrate the understanding of performance art documentation and to develop and explore new ways for creating a broader and more accessible performance art archive. Participant observation played a key role in this stage enabling me to immerse myself in the festival and observe performances, audience interactions, and the overall atmosphere firsthand. Participant observation is a qualitative research method where the researcher not only observes the members of a group or community but also participates in their activities. This method has long been a cornerstone of anthropological research and is now widely used by researchers in various disciplines. As Musante (2015) explains, participant observation involves the

researcher taking part in daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events, learning both the explicit and tacit aspects of their life and culture. Through this method, I was able to document the spontaneous and dynamic nature of live performances, capturing real-time reactions and emotions of both artists and audiences.

Bernard (2017) describes participant observation as a “strategic method,” where one or more of its elements can be chosen depending on the research question (p. 257). It “puts you where the action is and lets you collect data – any kind of data that you want, whether narratives or numbers” (Bernard, 2017, p. 343). By positioning myself as a researcher within the performance space, I gained a rich and comprehensive record of each performance art piece. Documenting the artworks through notes, videos, and photographs allowed me to collect valuable data, which I later analysed and exhibited as part of my larger doctoral study.

Autoethnography is a key methodological approach in this stage, allowing me to blend my personal experiences and reflections as both a participant and researcher. According to Ellis et al. (2011), autoethnography ‘seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)’. This approach provided an insider’s perspective, capturing my dynamic and subjective engagement with festival performances. My personal experience at the festival led me to move away from theoretical considerations towards more practical and experiential approaches to archiving and curating. This experience informed my creative research project *Traces Unveiled* (2023), which documents performance art at the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival in China, focusing on the potential and limitations of documentary practices while laying the foundation for a more participatory and inclusive archival process.

Ethical considerations were also an important part of this research. O’Reilly (2012) noted that engaging deeply with people’s lives – asking questions and analysing their behaviours – requires careful consideration of ethical issues. The Massey University Human Ethics Committee approved this research project as a low-risk one with the primary purpose of investigating the challenges and opportunities of archiving and documenting performance art. Participants in this data collection phase (both audience members and artists) provided informed consent for their experiences and performances to be archived and documented during the 11th UPON Live Arts Festival. In addition, to protect the privacy of audience members, festival organisers coordinated with participants to provide verbal notifications,

written signage, and the option to wear masks and sunglasses if they did not wish to be identified or photographed. Written informed consent was also provided to audience members who actively participated in performances at the festival.

This research phase also includes theoretical analysis to differentiate between documents and archives, exploring ontological and phenomenological perspectives on performance art documentation. Engaging with existing scholarly works, I integrated perspectives from theorists such as Phelan, Auslander, Kaye, Levin, Schechner, and Reason to situate my research within the broader academic discourse. This analysis provides a solid theoretical framework to support the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

To illustrate these theoretical discussions, I conducted a case study analysis of selected performance artworks from the festival. This method allowed for an in-depth examination of specific instances of performance art documentation, highlighting the diversity of documenting methods employed and their respective strengths and limitations. Through comparative analysis, I evaluated these methods – including photography, video recording, text, concept, smell, objects, and re-enactment – interpreting and understanding the nuances of their application. By integrating these methodologies, this stage lays the groundwork for a comprehensive exploration of performance art documentation. It blends personal reflections with observations, advancing understanding in both the theoretical and practical dimensions of the field.

Stage two: Audience engagement

The second stage involved the documenting and analysing of the audience's experience of live performances using a combination of PAR, autoethnography, and multimodal discourse analysis. Reason (2010) argues that audience experience is an intersubjective act, involving kinaesthetic empathy with the movements and presence of individuals in the performance space. This perspective emphasises that audiences are not passive observers but actively engaged with the performances through embodied experiences. As Reason (2010) argues, observing an audience's physical and physiological response to the performances added an affective aspect to the research, contributing to a more holistic understanding of their engagement.

In this study, PAR involved both passive observation and active engagement with the audience. According to Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (2015), PAR is a scholar-activist research approach that unites community members, activists, and scholars to co-create knowledge and foster social change. It is inherently collaborative, iterative, and often unpredictable, prioritising the expertise of those directly experiencing the issue being studied, and relationships are central to this process (Cornish, Breton, Moreno-Tabarez, 2023). During this stage, I invited participants to share their experiences of the performances in an unstructured way, facilitating their articulation of personal interpretations and reactions to the live artworks. By analysing the performance art documentation generated by the audience, this approach sought to integrate these materials into the broader performance art archive, enriching our understanding of performance art narratives. This collaborative approach enabled the inclusion of often-overlooked audience perspectives in the archive, thereby challenging the traditional, authoritative paradigm of performance art archives, which are typically shaped by institutional photographers and academics.

By reflecting on my interactions with the performance work and the live audience, the autoethnography added depth to the research, capturing emotional responses that are overlooked in traditional archival and audience studies. Ellis et al. (2011, p. 13) argue that in writing autoethnographies, researchers “strive for evocative, aesthetic, and profound descriptions of personal and interpersonal experiences”. Autoethnography was utilised throughout the research process to reflect on my own experiences as researcher and participant.

Multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA) was applied to analyse the creative audience-generated documentation, such as sketches, oral memories, and textual descriptions. As Jewitt (2009) argues, MMDA facilitates an examination of how these multiple modes – such as images, gestures and text – interact to create an integrated and nuanced understanding of communication. By applying MMDA, the study aimed to further explore the potential possibilities of audience-generated documentation as part of performance art archive. The combination of these methods, PAR, autoethnography, and MMDA, provided a comprehensive guideline for Chapter Three to explore audience engagement in the performance art archive.

Stage three: Flow – Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition

The third stage of this research inquiry involved curating the performance art archives collected at the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival in China into an exhibition in New Zealand and inviting the audience to engage with and activate these archives. This took the form of an exhibition entitled *Flow: Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition (Flow)*, which is detailed in Chapter Four. This stage focused on using audience-centred, innovative curatorial strategies to invite the audience to participate as co-creators of performance art narratives, moving beyond the traditional role of passive observers. While practice-based research methods were central to this stage, autoethnography and PAR were also employed to deepen the understanding of how the audience interacted with the curated archives.

In this stage, practice-based research methods were directed towards exploring curatorial practices as a research activity to assess their effectiveness in activating performance art archives. The basic principle of practice-based research is that not only is practice embedded in the research process, but research questions arise from the process of practice, the answers to which are directed toward enlightening and enhancing practice (Candy & Edmonds, 2018). This form of research is attractive to creative practitioners because, by closely aligning with existing practices, it provides a means of exploration that can extend work on a personal level and contribute to broader horizons (Candy & Edmonds, 2018). As Candy et al. (2021) argue, creative practice is not merely about generating new works; it is also about the transformative effect of the creative process on underlying ideas, leading to the evolution of new insights. This integration of curation as a form of creative practice contributes to ongoing debates on how performance art archives can be represented, activated, and made accessible to broader audiences.

In the context of performance art archives, museums or art institutions aim not only to display archives but also to engage in a process of memory shaping and knowledge creation. Bjerregaard (2019, p. 1) notes that museums and exhibitions are seen as ‘laboratories’ or ‘experiments’, making the museum a site that represents the world’s transformations to produce its own specific effects. The examination of museums through a Foucauldian lens (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Bennett, 1995) reveals that museums aim not only to present knowledge but also to influence how understanding is formed. Positioning exhibitions as research aims to unearth new generative potentials for museum studies, thereby striving to transform museums into research institutions. If we consider the performance art archive

exhibition as a dynamic experiment, it can serve as a model beyond traditional archive perspectives. Therefore, Bjerregaard (2019, p. 13) suggests that the status of exhibitions as research should not be seen as “an end product” but as part of a “larger process”. If we used to think of exhibitions as conveying discovered things in the most easily understandable and attractive way, this new approach prompts us to see exhibitions as “a bridgehead” (Runia, 2006, p. 21) to identifying new questions and means of communication. According to Holmes (2022), exhibition practice-as-research activates knowledge by intertwining performance and museum scholarship. This interdisciplinary approach highlights how performance practice-as-research enriches museological explorations and activates knowledge through exhibition practices.

Through the analysis of such audience participatory exhibitions, this research investigates how embodied practices shape both performance art archives and the experiences of present participants. As Bjerregaard (2019, p. 4) suggests, if we consider exhibitions as “knowledge-in-the-making” rather than as platforms for disseminating established insights, museums become more appealing to researchers and audiences alike. This stage employs the experimental curatorial exhibition *Flow* to explore the potential role that audiences may play within the archives.

In addition to practice-based research, PAR and autoethnography methods were employed to gain deeper insight into the audience’s engagement with the archives. PAR entails observing and interpreting audience interaction and experiences within the exhibition space. Data collection occurred through direct observation, informal conversations, and feedback from participants. Autoethnography involved reflecting on my own experiences as a curator and researcher, documenting my thoughts, experiences and discoveries throughout the process. This approach added a critical and attractive perspective that enriched the analysis of the exhibition.

By integrating practice-based research, PAR, and autoethnography, this stage offers a complex understanding of the dynamic interaction between curation, audience engagement and the evolving nature of performance art archive. The examination of audience involvement, along with my personal reflections as a curator, emphasises the interconnectedness of practice and research, revealing new perspectives on the potential of performative, innovative, and participatory curatorial practices.

Ethical considerations were a key aspect of this curatorial project. The *Flow* exhibition was approved as a low-risk project by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. The primary aim was to activate the performance art archive through audience participation, contributing to a broader understanding of performance art and developing new theoretical and practical frameworks for sustainably accessible knowledge. Data were collected from the audience's interaction with the archives, with the exhibition space and audience engagement documented through photographs for academic research purposes. All audience members were informed of the project, and participants were provided with informed consent forms outlining the nature of the project, potential risks, and benefits. Anonymity or pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of all participants.

Structure of the Thesis

In addition to Introduction, this thesis comprises four chapters. Chapter One examines the terminology associated with performance art, touching upon key elements such as the body, time, audience, and politics, and referencing potential case studies from renowned artists both from China and abroad, including Tino Sehgal, Tehching Hsieh, He Yunchang, Zhang Huan, Ma Liuming, Marina Abramovic, Pyotr Pavlensky, and Zhou Bin. The aim of this chapter is not to provide a comprehensive definition of performance art, but rather to offer an overview of performance art by exploring its multifaceted dimensions within a broader context. I begin the chapter by acknowledging the challenges in defining performance art, as highlighted by scholars like Johnson and Westerman (2017), and recognise its inherent fluidity and boundary-pushing nature. Tracing its origins to the avant-garde movements and its evolution into live art, I delve into the complex relationship between performance art, live art, and body art. I navigate the historical roots of performance art, its resistance to commodification, and its rebellious nature, drawing parallels to Dadaism and other critique-based art movements. Through diverse perspectives and thematic frameworks such as time, body, politics, and audience engagement, I aim to sketch out the significance of performance art while addressing the challenges of documenting and curating its ephemeral nature within museum and gallery settings.

Chapter Two delves into the intricate challenges of documenting performance art, drawing from my experience at the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival in Chengdu, China in

October 2023. In this chapter, I select specific performance artworks from the festival, which are categorised and analysed according to different documentation methods, facilitating a critical understanding of documentation and archiving of performance art. In addition, this chapter's conceptual analysis of object and reenactment also draws on Marina Abramović's *Rhythm 0* and her *Serven Easy Pieces* in 2005. The chapter begins by acknowledging the view of performance art as inherently ephemeral and irrecoverable (Phelan, 1993). However, the chapter also considers the notion that performance art leaves traces and detritus (Auslander, 2006; Kaye, 1994; Schechner, 2017; Reason, 2006), which challenges the dichotomy between documentation and disappearance. This provides an entry to discuss the relationship between the ontological and phenomenological debates of performance art and its documentation which were particularly prominent in the 1990s. In the chapter, I critically examine various media used in performance art documentation such as photography, videography, written records, audience oral reports, and the symbolic significance of performance objects. By analysing these media and their functionalities, the chapter emphasises the dynamic nature of performance art archives and their role in bridging past and future experiences.

Chapter Three explores the innovative potential of audience engagement in the process of documenting performance art, emphasising how an audience contributes to the construction and perception of performance art archives. This chapter presents a critical examination of the way in which audiences actively contribute to the documentation of performance art through creative ways such as sketches, descriptive texts, and oral memories. By analysing the audience-generated documentation from the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival, including works by Tang Guo, Mao Zhu, and Shao Ye, this chapter explores how these creative inputs challenge traditional archival paradigms and enrich our understanding of performance art. The discussion highlights the value of including audience voice into performance art archives, arguing for a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the diverse and subjective nature of audience experiences.

Chapter Four delves into the conceptualisation of the exhibition *Flow: Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition* and explores dynamics of curating performance art documentation. This transnational research project highlights the innovative curatorial strategies, interactive displays and decentralised narrative approaches employed in the exhibition to challenge the conventional notion of archival representation. This chapter also

discusses how the exhibition invites the audience to become active participants in shaping the ongoing narrative of performance art history. Through a comprehensive analysis of performance art documentation within the exhibition, including works by Xu Meiyu, Li Joy, Shi Mengxia, Zhang Yiy and Sun Zhenyu, the study delves into the nuanced dynamics of audience reception, engagement levels, and interpretation potential of archival materials. Additionally, it showcases the potential of interdisciplinary research bridging performance art with galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAM) and curation research, emphasising the role of the exhibition as research in generating new knowledge about performance art archives. By challenging traditional notions of archival displays and embracing non-linear narratives, this chapter argues that *Flow* exemplifies a paradigm shift in curatorial practice that might pave the way for future interdisciplinary and transnational research in the field of performance art archives.

Chapter One: Components of Contemporary Performance Art

Introduction:

This chapter provides an overview of the multifaceted dimensions of performance art, a dynamic and provocative medium that continually pushes the boundaries of conventional artistic norms. As Johnson (2017) and Westerman (2017) point out, defining performance art is a source of difficulty for scholars in the field, as any definition limits the seemingly inherent fluidity and flexibility of the medium. The term ‘performance art’ was coined in the United States in the 1960s, emerging from the highly conceptual field of the ‘avant-garde’, as an unconventional art form focused on the creation of an event rather than an artefact (Sandström, 2010). According to Coogan (2011, p. 2), “the body, venue, audience, and event” are the four pillars of performance art, which are accompanied by temporality and instability. Understanding these dimensions is crucial for addressing the complexities of documenting, archiving and curating performance art. In the following sections I explore aspects of these dimensions to provide a conceptual vocabulary that might facilitate a discussion of the documentation, curation and archiving of performance art.

This chapter does not attempt to provide an exhaustive definition of performance art. Rather, it seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of its key components, setting the stage for a more comprehensive discussion on how to document and curate its unique characteristics. The chapter begins by delving into the dynamic and temporal nature of performance art through case studies featuring Tino Sehgal and Tehching Hsieh. The chapter then moves to consider the body and its central role by analysing works from He Yunchang, Zhang Huan, and Ma Liuming. The chapter then considers the audience and their active involvement through examples of work by Marina Abramović. The last theme that the chapter considers is the political dimensions of performance art which are investigated in cases involving Pyotr Pavlensky and Zhou Bin. By analysing these renowned case studies from China and abroad, this thesis explores the dynamic interrelationships between the artist’s body, temporal dimensions, political narratives, and audience engagement in performance art from multiple perspectives. This multifaceted approach is essential for addressing the challenges of documenting performance art, particularly through ontological and phenomenological frameworks. This approach helps shift considerations beyond fixed definitions of performance art encouraging contemplation and understanding of the field based on the themes explored in individual works. Furthermore, this approach provides a useful overview

of key elements that scholars and curators might consider when exploring the curation of performance artwork within museum or gallery settings.

Definitions of Performance Art: The Past, The Present and The Foreseeable Future

The historical origins of performance art can be traced back to the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century (Avgitidou, 2023). Wilson (1997) attributes the beginning of performance art to a specific moment on July 8, 1910, when the Italian Futurist painters and poets threw eight hundred thousand copies of their Manifesto *Against Passeist Venice* from the clock tower above Piazza San Marco onto the heads of citizens below. During the 1970s and 1980s, performance art emerged as a predominant cultural activity in the United States, Western Europe, and Japan (Carlson, 2004). During its inception, primary practitioners in the United States did not exclusively draw from theatre traditions; rather, their work evolved from new approaches and practices within the realm of experimental visual arts (Carlson, 2004). This artistic evolution, rooted in the visual arts backgrounds of many pioneering practitioners such as Allen Kaprow, shaped the early landscape of what we now recognise as performance art. By the early 1990s, performance art shifted to being referred to as live art, signifying a move towards the immediate, immersive, and interactive (Heathfield, 2004). Performance art, live art, and body art share a complex relationship, described by Johnson (2017, p. 5) as a “push-me-pull-you” relationship. While they have much in common, performance art can be understood as a precursor to live art and part of contemporary live art practice (Kaye, 1994). According to Klein (2012), performance art, or live art as it was increasingly referred to, was both of the present and part of history, ephemeral and able to be exhibited, defying categorisation and yet inhabiting a category all its own.

Performance art is presently facing a challenging situation, characterised by the difficulty in establishing a clear and definitive definition. Goldberg (2004, p. 177) points out, this is art that has “sprung from an enormous stockpile of interdisciplinary dialogues between film, theatre, sculpture, painting, actions, and rock and roll”. Expanding on this perspective, Ferdman and Stokic (2020) subsequently provide a more encompassing and comprehensive explanation, asserting that performance art embodies continually expanding forms, including hybrid arts, dance, music, sound, installation art, scenography, visual arts, and participatory

social art. Therefore, the nature of performance art is characterised by its complexity and diversity; paradoxically, this very ubiquity and inclusivity make it challenging to precisely define and categorise as a discipline. Zhou Bin, a Chinese performance art artist and the creator of UP-ON Performance Art Archive, stressed in an interview on June 13, 2023:

I like the fact that performance art cannot be defined. Performance art has undergone significant changes since its inception, constantly absorbing influences from different fields such as literature, philosophy, painting, sculpture, dance, theatre, and even installation art. Performance art has always remained in an open state, continuously absorbing and expanding. This can also be seen as a sense of insecurity, which prevents artists from finding a fixed coordinate, because performance art is always experimental. It is an ever-changing artistic medium, and I believe this is a kind of vitality. Although it is controversial, it is irreplaceable in contemporary art.

Avgitidou (2023) also wisely advises against the pursuit of an all-encompassing definition for performance art. In discussions about performance art, necessary clarifications become paramount. As Ayerber (2018) notes, performance art is commonly understood as actions unfolding within a specific time and space, a consensus widely acknowledged within the realm of this field. The essence of performance art lies in its celebration of form and process over tangible products (Carlson, 2004). From a broader perspective, performance art is often perceived as a radical form of experiential art. Lambert privileges the importance of firsthand experience suggesting that “you had to be there” is a crucial aspect of performance art events (2000, p. 94). Scholars and theorists of ‘live art’ have long focused on the experiential aspects. However, attributing the significance of performance solely to its momentary occurrence might overlook the lasting impact it can have.

Owing to the absence of standardised creative methods and implementation contexts in performance art, coupled with its origins as a resistance to the commodification of artistic products and opposition to capitalism, performance art is often regarded as a form of rebellious art. Its contentious nature is evident because it typically stands in opposition to mainstream culture, thereby sparking controversy. As Elif Özel (2022) proposes in ‘Performance art as a tool of rebellion’, performance art is likened to Dadaism as it constitutes a criticism-based art movement. Dadaism’s response to the senselessness of prevailing art movements mirrors performance art’s critique against established societal

norms. The cornerstone of performance art lies in its deviant nature. For example, in Chris Burden's 1971 piece *Shoot*, the artist asked his assistant to shoot his arm with a 22-caliber firearm, offering a critique of the escalating violence in society (Burden & White, 2007). Berghuis (2006) suggests that controversy may indeed constitute an integral aspect of performance art, particularly in works that focus on public behaviour and political issues.

In the subsequent sections, I will explore performance art through various thematic frameworks, including time, the body, politics, and audience. These thematic threads hold significant implications for curation and documentation. As performance art often defies conventional artistic norms, curators face the challenge of preserving its essence and experience. The ephemeral nature of live performances necessitates innovative documentation methods to capture the experiential aspects, making curation a delicate balance between preserving authenticity and ensuring accessibility for future audiences.

Time: Liveness, Temporality, Duration

This section explores the intricate relationship between time and performance art, emphasising how time emerges as a fundamental component of the art form. It delves into how performance art integrates the conventional notions of time, liveness, and temporality, examining the role of these concepts in shaping the experience and understanding of performance art. The discussion also addresses the implications of time's fluidity, ephemerality, and cultural construction within performance art, and how these aspects influence documentation, commodification, and the preservation of such art forms.

Additionally, the section considers the impact of durational practices, like those of Tehching Hsieh, in pushing the boundaries of how time and endurance are perceived in the context of artistic expression.

Time emerges as an indispensable component in the complex realm of performance art. The term 'live' traditionally signifies a specific set of ontological parameters, encapsulating an occurrence in the present moment – embodying the essence of immediacy. As Hoffmann (2012) describes, the concepts of 'time' and 'live' are key lexicons of performance art. 'Time' serves as an intrinsic dimension within this ontology. The essence of being 'live' is inherently intertwined with temporal considerations. The temporality of 'time' becomes the

focal point of the presentness characterising performance art, forging essential connections with curation and documentation practices. In performance art, time is not merely a backdrop but a dynamic element that defines the live nature of the performance. The interplay between time and the 'live' aspect underscores how temporal considerations shape the experience and documentation of performance art, illustrating its importance beyond a static or conventional perception.

Time, as conceptualised in performance art, is not a fixed entity but a flexible and culturally constructed dimension that shapes and influences the experience of live performance. According to Hoffmann (2012), time is defined as a continuum or span of ongoing existence, which establishes a spatial metaphor for time as an expansive domain, pathway, and enabling container within which live events unfold. This definition highlights that time is not a rigid and fixed construct but rather flexible and elastic. This flexibility is crucial in performance art, where time is seen as an elusive and malleable aspect of live performance, subject to diverse interpretations and experiences. Hoffmann (2012, p. 38) argues that time serves as a 'container' for existence, enabling varied forms of live engagement. Similarly, Etchells et al. (2000) suggest that time is not inherently unified or linear but is a societal construct shaped and narrated by cultures. Consequently, performance art embraces this malleability of time, allowing for diverse temporalities and fostering alternative perspectives on the relationship between time and value (Hoffmann, 2012). This understanding underscores the transformative potential of performance art in reimagining time, revealing its capacity to challenge and expand traditional frameworks of artistic and experiential engagement.

In the United Kingdom, performance art has on occasion served as a synonymous term for both live art and time-based art. This confluence underscores the pivotal role of time in the endeavour to distinguish live art from conventional artistic mediums such as painting, sculpture, and dramatic literature. Significantly, the precarious ontological nature of live art constitutes a central challenge to established norms governing display, ownership, institutionalisation, and historical canonisation (Hoffmann, 2012).

The dynamic progression of time contributes to the ephemeral nature of performance art, signifying its evanescence, as articulated by Phelan:

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being [...] becomes itself through disappearance (1993, p. 146).

Phelan directs her attention to the immaterial and non-representational nature of performance, emphasising the act of embracing ephemeral, performed gestures to supersede autonomous, representational art objects. While the shift from tangible objects to fleeting acts may not overtly address 'time', Phelan's argument concerning the ontology of performance is rooted in a particular understanding of the relationship between art and capital. The critique of late capitalism's impact on the value and perception of performance art is illuminated through the examination of ephemerality's effectiveness, also emphasising Phelan's argument on the ontological relationship between art and capital. As Hoffmann (2012, p.43) notes, "the efficacy of ephemerality has also been invoked as a critique of the privileged status of the exchangeable art commodity, as well as the alienated conditions of subjectivity particular to late capitalism." Phelan contends that capitalism has a craving for 'reproductive representation' (1993, p. 148), and that contemporary western theorists struggle to comprehend and engage with the inherently non-productive and non-representational qualities of performance art. This impermanence makes performance art more susceptible to perceptions of having no lasting value or substance. This issue is significant as it directly affects the documentation and archiving possibilities of performance art works, raising concerns about preserving an art form that resists easy commodification and representation in traditional terms.

Tino Sehgal deliberately rejects conventional documentation methods, emphasising the ephemeral and intangible nature of his performances (van Saaze, 2015). This challenges traditional norms of art commodification and raises critical questions about the complexities of collecting, preserving, and monetising performance art in the face of its inherently transient qualities, while also revealing the unique dynamics of collecting and presenting performance art in institutional settings. In response to such criticisms, Phelan (1993) advocates for the recognition and appreciation of what is lost, emphasising the importance of

learning not just the meaning but the value of what cannot be reproduced or witnessed again. This persistence is particularly important given that performance works from the 1960s are now highly sought after in museums and galleries. Artists have also challenged the limits of ephemerality's resistance to capitalist forces. The artistic endeavours of Tino Sehgal have served as a critique of the complex interplay between the commodifying influences of the art market and the endeavour to resist capitalist pressures related to ownership and the enduring value typically associated with masterpieces. In 2008, a remarkable event unfolded in the realm of performance art acquisition: artist Tino Sehgal sold his performance artwork *Kiss* to the Museum of Modern Art in New York for \$70,000 (Biesenbach, Goldberg and Wilson, 2009). Diverging from conventional collection practices, Sehgal adamantly refused any documentation of his work, including photos, videos, recordings, press releases, and even abstained from signing any physical documents with collectors. Instead, he relied solely on verbal agreements witnessed by lawyers or notaries. This marked a truly "immaterial art" collection, wherein the museum acquired the qualification and rights to reenact the piece. At the time, the museum's director, Glenn D. Lowry (cited in Kitamura, 2010), regarded this acquisition as "one of the most complex and challenging" endeavours they had undertaken. This underscores the special irreplaceability of the presentation of performance art due to its inherent "live" nature. Nevertheless, truly "immaterial" works within the art market are a minority. Tangible records serve as a means to transport future audiences back to the ephemeral experiences that can no longer be witnessed firsthand, allowing them to contemplate the critique and outcry behind the absurdity and eccentricity of performance art. Simultaneously, these records provide an alternative interpretation of the artist's creative process, detached from the live performance.

According to Diego's (2017) description of Tino Sehgal's work *Selling Out*, a young man in the gallery turns his back to the viewer and begins swinging his jacket in the air, gradually taking off his clothes until only a pair of underwear remains. The climax of the performance was marked by the sudden shouting of the slogan "Tino Sehgal, Sold Out, 2007". Regarding his work, Sehgal described it as a provocative act. In an era characterised by information overload, Tino Sehgal employs intangible forms to create ambiance and context. The fundamental elements of his creations involve the spoken word, language, the process of movement, and audience participation, devoid of any textual scripts, handwritten records, catalogues, or images, indicating that his creations cannot be documented in any manner.

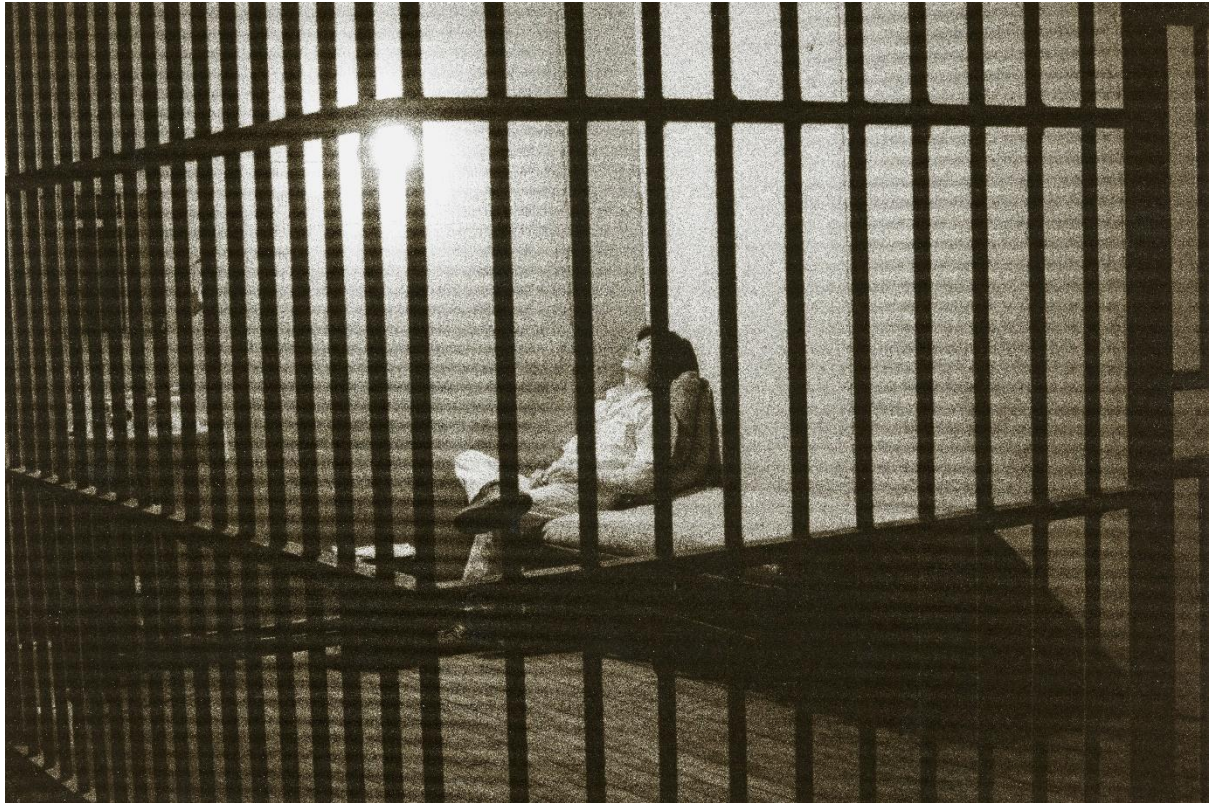
This method of artistic expression endows his work with a fleeting nature while concurrently resisting the ongoing influence of the commercialisation of art. When we attempt to collect and monetise performance art, the effort might seem like trapping fireflies in a jar and witnessing their demise. When performance art loses the presence of the performer's body, the real-time reactions of the audience, and the specific spatial context, the evanescent sense of experience becomes challenging to reproduce in tangible records and fragments. Even in repeated reenactments, the inevitable shifts in time and space will inevitably cause the original work to undergo transformations.

Another important feature impacting on time and liveness is the duration of performance art works, which may range from a few hours to weeks, months or even years. For instance, Tehching Hsieh's durational artistic practice, marked by extreme periods of confinement and self-imposed constraints, challenges conventional perceptions of time and endurance, prompting a profound exploration of the interplay between life, time, and the physical constraints of the human body.

Tehching Hsieh is a Taiwanese American artist who works and lives in New York. He was born on 31 December 1950 in Nanzhou, Taiwan. In 1974, he sought asylum in the United States and was granted amnesty in 1988. From 1978 to 1986, Tehching Hsieh performed a series of durational performance art works. Durational performance art involves a lengthy period of time during which the performer engages in specific actions or behaviors. The concept of time is a central focus in Hsieh's work, which prompts a series of concerns encapsulated in the quote: "Life is a life sentence, life is passing time, life is freethinking" (Hsieh, quoted from O'Donnell, 2014, p. 3). This fundamental credo runs through all his works, shaping their underlying concerns.

Figure 8

Tehching Hsieh. Cheng Wei Kuong. One Year Performance 1978 – 1979 (1978- 1979)



Note. Paper poster, artist statement, black and white photographs, and cotton uniform, dimensions variable. M+, Hong Kong. [2013.462]. © Tehching Hsieh. Image courtesy of M+, Hong Kong. Retrieved from: <https://www.mplus.org.hk/en/collection/objects/one-year-performance-19781979-2013462/>

The Cage Piece (Figure 8) began on the last day of September 1978. Hsieh built an 11.6 x 9 x 8 ft (3.54 x 2.74 x 2.44 m) wooden cage in his New York studio, where he ‘imprisoned’ himself for one year in a cage. The cage was sparsely furnished including a bed, a washstand, a toilet, a mirror and a lamp in a small space of ten square meters without natural light. Hsieh had extremely limited freedom of behaviour – he could not talk to anyone, neither read nor write, nor listen to the radio or watch TV. His friend and assistant for this piece, Cheong Wei Kuong, brought him food and photographed him daily. Lawyer Robert Projansky inspected the cage to insure it was secure and no one could escape (Heathfield, 2009).

Prominent in Hsieh’s performances are the self-imposed constraints of long periods of time, which conspire to lead audiences and critics to make assumptions about the artist’s

superhuman endurance. As Heathfield (2009, p. 13) puts it: “These works were unparalleled in terms of their use of physical difficulties over extreme durations and in their absolute conception and enactment of art and life as simultaneous processes.” While this may be true, the term ‘endurance’ may limit the richness of an artist’s work and potential connections to other areas of artistic practice. Hsieh’s performances not only exemplify the stamina exhibited in the confrontation between body and time but also represent a more direct dialogue with time. Time is not simply used as a tool or medium in his works, but rather his artworks become “a sentient witness of time” (Heathfield, 2009, p. 11). This enables him to embody and explore time on a physical and spiritual level. Meanwhile, his work provokes us to think about the nature of time and how we spend it. Hsieh (cited in Heathfield, 2009, p. 334) has provided some answers to these considerations of time through his artistic practice: “It does not really matter how I spend time: time is still passing. Wasting time is my basic attitude to life; it is a gesture of dealing with the absurdity between life and time.”

The Body

This section delves into the role of the body in performance art, analysing its significance as both a medium and a site of resistance through the case studies of performance art artist He Yunchang, Zhang Huan and Ma Liuming. To use the artist’s body as a medium for the creation of performance art is undoubtedly one of the most common approaches in field/medium (Tong, 2012). The artist’s own body language is the most vivid presentation of the individual. In this section I focus on three artists who are both prominently associated with works that transcend routine activities to push the boundaries of the body, often exposing it to extreme risks or substantial physical discomfort. They explore how the body emerges as a powerful and provocative medium, challenging societal norms, cultural taboos, and the boundaries of physical endurance. These artists have redefined the role of the body in art, using it not only as a canvas but as a critical tool for exploring complex themes of identity, societal constraints, and the relationship between the self and the world.

On October 10, 2010, He Yunchang conducted a performance artwork named *One-Meter Democracy* (Figure 9, 10, 11) at the Maoran Studio in Cuigezhuang Township, Chaoyang District, Beijing. The artist chose to make a 1-meter-long incision on the right side of his body, extending from below the collarbone to just above the knee, with a depth of 0.5–1 centimetre (Xue, 2018). The entire process, without anaesthesia, was assisted by a physician.

Prior to the surgical cut, a simulated democratic voting procedure was employed to decide whether the artist should proceed with the act. Over 20 people, unaware of the nature of the performance, participated in an anonymous vote, resulting in 12 in favour, 10 against, and 3 abstentions. The completion of the work stirred strong reactions within the art community. While some openly criticised its effectiveness online, He Yunchang remained unfazed. He consistently challenges the limits of the body, exploring the boundaries of the physical self. In these almost self-flagellating bodily acts, the boundaries of art are also continually questioned and challenged. The body and flesh become He Yunchang's most crucial and only medium in his artistic acts.

Figure 9

He Yunchang. One Metre of Democracy, 2010



Note. Image courtesy of the artist and White Rabbit Collection, Sydney. Retrieved from: <https://explore.dangrove.org/objects/1031>

Figure 10

He Yunchang. One Metre of Democracy, 2010



Note. Image courtesy of the artist and White Rabbit Collection, Sydney. Retrieved from: <https://explore.dangrove.org/objects/1031>

Figure 11

He Yunchang. One Metre of Democracy, 2010



Note. Image courtesy of the artist and White Rabbit Collection, Sydney. Retrieved from: <https://explore.dangrove.org/objects/1031>

He Yunchang, born in 1967 in Yunnan, China, and a graduate of Yunnan Arts School, is acclaimed as China's most daring performance artist. He Yunchang (cited in Wang, 2014) suggests: "I have been doing 'performance art' for over a decade. What is 'performance'? Simply put, if a person jumps from a table to the ground, it might be child's play. If someone jumps from the tenth floor to the ground, it is suicide. However, if a person repeatedly jumps from a table to the ground, it might be performance art." Each of He Yunchang's works poses extreme challenges to the body and endurance.

In 1999, on February 14th, He Yunchang executed the work titled *Dialogue with Water* (Figure 12), utilising a large crane for the artistic performance. Suspended upside down from the crane, he was placed in the middle of a river. With a knife, He Yunchang cut the flowing river, leaving a 'scar' over 30 centimetres long. The entire act lasted half an hour.

Throughout the process, He Yunchang made incisions 1 cm deep on each forearm, allowing

blood to flow directly into the river. Despite perceptions of him as eccentric, steadfast, and unconventional, not conforming to popular trends or societal norms, He Yunchang, undeniably, uses his body to embody and bring to life spiritual dimensions (Wang, 2014). Behind his extreme and crazy endeavours, there lies a pursuit and safeguarding of self-soul.

Figure 12

He Yunchang, Dialogue with Water, 1999



Note. Retrieved from: <https://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2013/october/27/the-extreme-performance-art-of-he-yunchang/>

An increasing number of artists employ the body as a medium or canvas for their performance art, underscoring the significance of the ‘body’ within the field. In the words of Carlson (2004, p. 111), in its initial manifestations, performance art predominantly and often explicitly focused on the movements of the body. The term “body art” subsequently emerged, often functioning as complementary nomenclature to performance art and continues to be in use today (Avgitidou, 2023). The inaugural issue of the California magazine *Avalanche* in 1970 presented a survey of recent “Body Works.” These works, alternatively labelled as

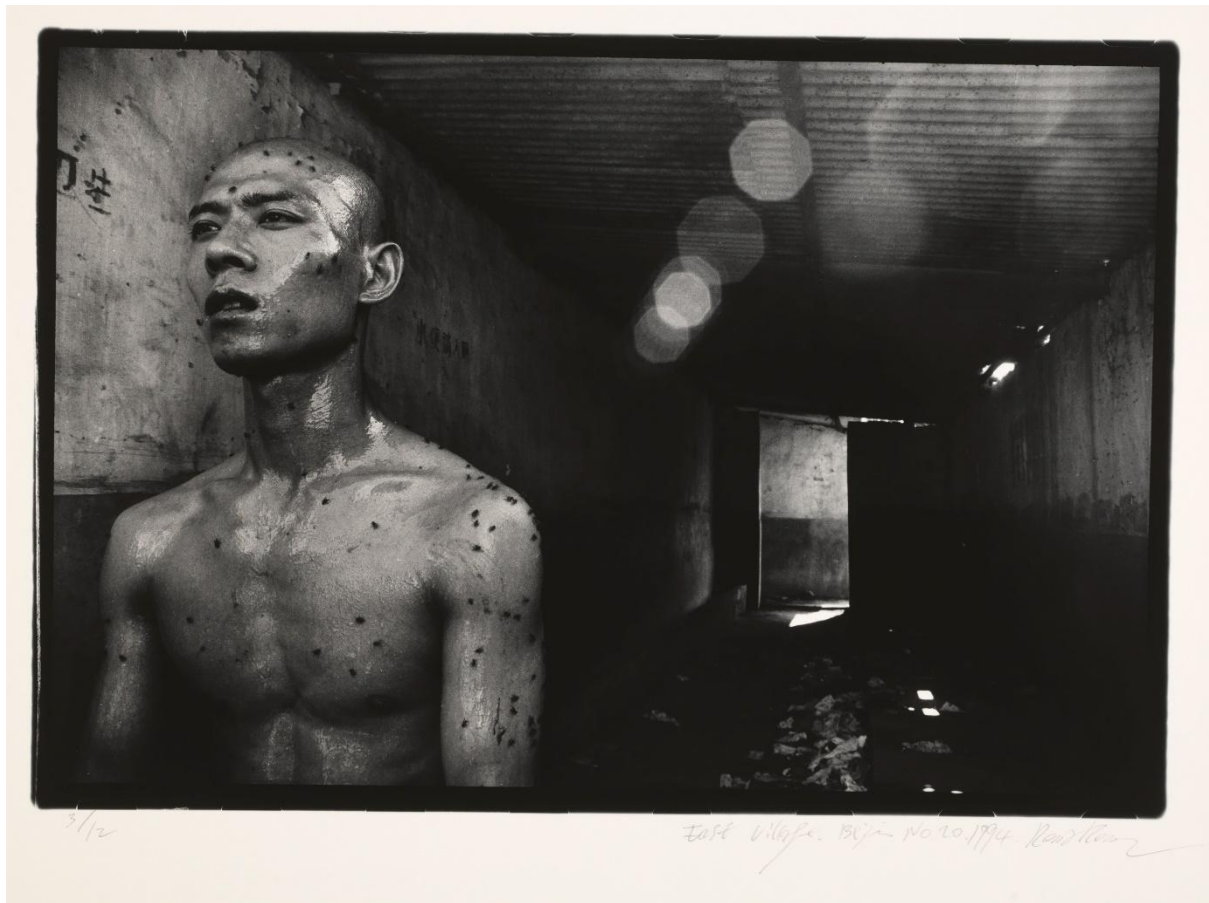
actions, events, performances, pieces, or things, showcase physical activities, routine bodily functions, and both common and unconventional manifestations of physicality. The artist's body assumes a dual role as both the subject and object of the artwork. RoseLee Goldberg (1998) discusses body art in connection with the works of Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, Carolee Schneemann and others, situating its emergence from the beginning of the 1960s. Following the reshaping of the global landscape after World War II and the gradual formation of the social backdrop of the Cold War, Western body artists liberated themselves from the rationalism that had dominated Western thought since the 17th century. They drew inspiration from Nietzschean philosophy, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body, Bataille and Deleuze's art theories, and Derrida's structuralist theories. Grounded in these philosophical foundations, various forms of body-oriented performance art were developed. Examples of these kinds of art works include Yves Klein's *Anthropometry* and *Leap into the Void*, which utilise the human body as a tool for artistic creation. Marina Abramović's *Rhythm 0* represents a social experiment within the realm of performance art. These works often amalgamate sensory stimulation from all senses, employing the body's unique expressive capabilities to rebel against traditional art forms. They blur the lines between excitement, curiosity, and discomfort, offering viewers ambiguous signals of bodily liberation and the ineffable passion of life.

Zhang Huan is also an international artist who used the body as the creative material. In his renowned artwork *Twelve Square Meters* (Figure 13), he covered himself with fish oil and honey, sitting in a filthy public toilet in Beijing's Dongcun for one hour (Lee, 2013). This not only attracted swarms of flies greedily hovering around him but also created an extremely uncomfortable and even nauseating sensation. In reality, the artist emphasised the living conditions of some people at the bottom of society. Zhang Huan's "*Twelve Square Meters*" uses his own body as a creative medium to test the limits of physical and psychological endurance, exploring the relationship between the body and the mind. Zhang Huan said:

I had discovered that my body could become my language, it was the closest thing to who I was and it allowed me to become known to others. I had been struggling with how to move from the two-dimensional to three-dimensional, and then I discovered this new vehicle, my body. It was never for any political or social or cultural commentary. Rather, it was a kind of personal necessity. It allowed me to express some very deep emotions coming from many different places (Goldberg, 2009, p. 19).

Figure 13

1994 No.20 (Zhang Huan. '12 Square Metres'), 1994, RongRong



Note. Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper; © RongRong. Image courtesy of Tate.

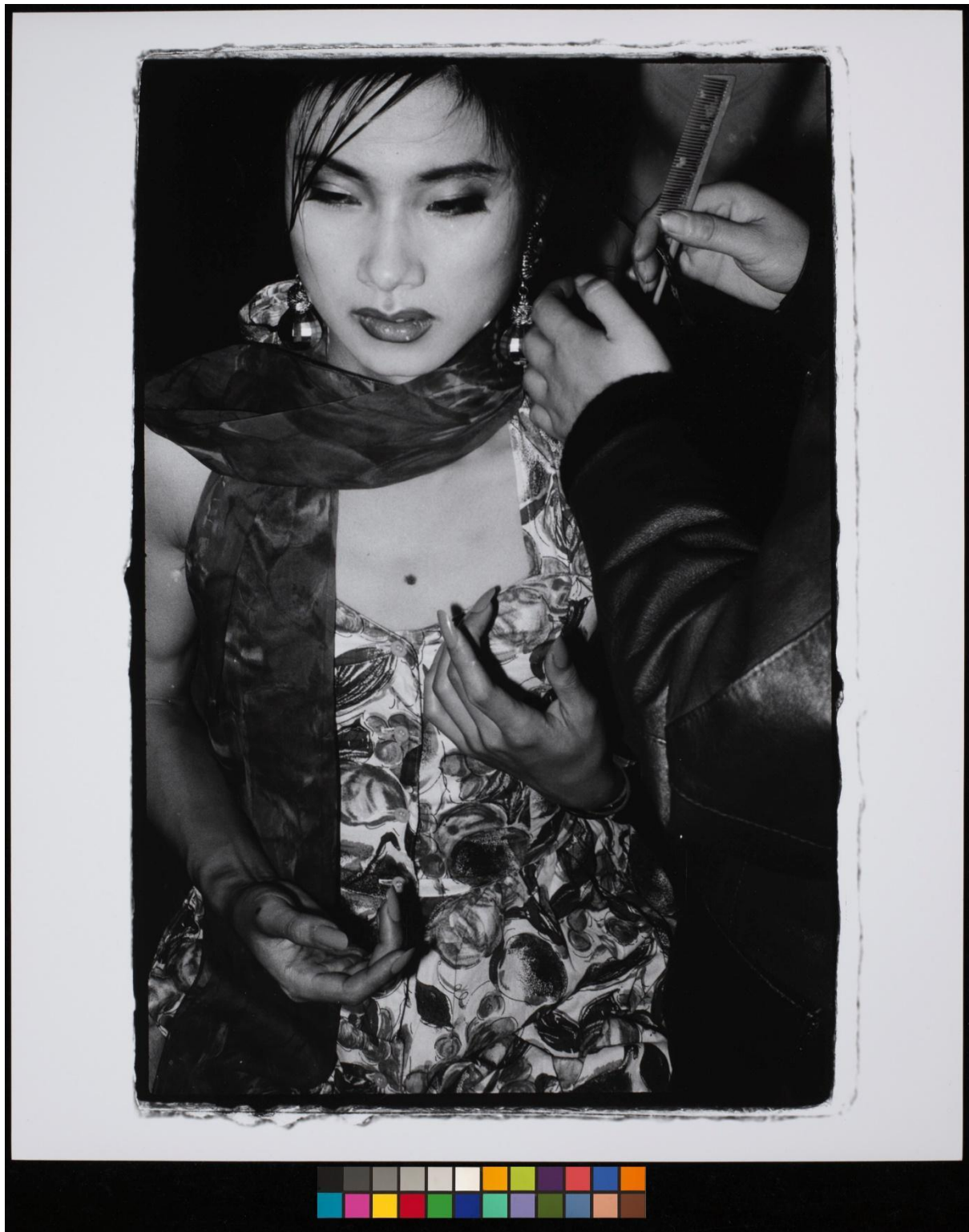
Retrieved from: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rongrong-1994-no-20-zhang-huan-12-square-metres-p82598>

Ma Liuming was also one of the earliest artists to explore the medium of body in performance art in China. In his youth, Ma Liuming had a handsome appearance, a slender figure, and strong feminine features. At the end of 1993, he very accidentally realised that his mixed appearance of “both male and female, hermaphroditic” could serve as a condition for creating performance art (Zhijian, 1999, p. 74). Consequently, he began a series of performance art works called *Fen Ma Liuming* (Figure 14). The initial works in this series involved cross-dressing performances, quickly transitioning to nude performances with interactive elements involving the audience. In June 1994, Ma Liuming was arrested in Beijing’s Dongcun for creating *Fen Ma Liuming’s Lunch* (Figure 15) and was detained for two months before being deported back to his hometown on charges of “engaging in obscene

performances under the guise of art” (Zhijian, 1999, p. 74). After 1996, Ma Liuming conducted live interactive performance art under the title *Fen Ma Liuming in XXX* in art galleries and museums in various countries, including Japan, the Netherlands, Canada, the United States, Germany, and Switzerland. He invited people of different genders, ages, nationalities, and races to take photos with him, and even took a large dose of sleeping pills to put himself in a completely unconscious state, allowing the audience to freely manipulate him. Ma Liuming’s performance art expressed artistic reflections on universal phenomena in epistemology, such as the divide between appearance and essence or the concealment of reality by illusion. It also profoundly revealed the absurdity, confusion, and uncertainty of life.

Figure 14

Ma Liuming. Fen Ma Liuming, 1993



Note. On paper, Print. Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper. Copyright reserved. Image courtesy of Tate. Retrieved from: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/liuming-fen-ma-liuming-p81261>.

Figure 15

1994 No. 46 (Ma Liuming, 'Fen-Ma Liuming's Lunch')



Note. Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper. © RongRong. Image courtesy of Tate.

In the 1990s, Chinese performance art entered a period of maturity and prosperity (Tong, 2012). Art historians have classified and summarised numerous Chinese performance art pieces into various themes. In my view, performance art, especially when the artist personally uses their body and presence as media, revolves around the artist as the subject. The underlying themes often revolve around the relationships between the artist and self, the artist and society, and the artist and nature. Due to the artist's body being the most familiar and easily controlled object, many performance artists are passionate about exploring the relationship between spirit (or subjective will) and the body (or life existence). It is worth noting that many Chinese performance artists, when expressing the contradictions between their spirit and body, often resort to forms of nudity, self-torture, and self-harm. Such works

tend to be the most attention-grabbing and are often highly controversial. While we can categorise performance art based on themes, each artist's creation is not limited to a single theme, and the meaning of a piece may be ambiguous or open to interpretation. Additionally, even if an artist intends to convey non-sociological themes, the adoption of nudity can be perceived as a betrayal of societal behavioural norms, i.e., legal and moral standards, leading to intervention by law enforcement and societal resistance. This is due to the strict prohibition of nudity in Chinese social customs and cultural traditions. According to a *Taipei Times* article from October 5, 2017, Chinese performance artists in the past two decades include Ma Liuming, whose explicit explorations into sexual identity ran counter to a ban on public nudity (Reuters, 2017).

In summary, the exploration of the body in performance art underscores its profound role as both a medium and a subject, pushing the boundaries of traditional artistic expression and societal expectations. Across different cultural and artistic contexts, artists have continually engaged with the body as a critical element in performance art, using it as a means of expression, exploration, and discovery. The works of He Yunchang, Zhang Huan, and Ma Liuming exemplify how performance art can transcend conventional limits, using the body to probe deep questions of identity, social critique, and existential meaning. Their performances, marked by their extreme physical and psychological demands, not only challenge the norms of art but also provoke critical reflections on the human condition. As performance art continues to evolve, the body remains a central element, driving innovative approaches and compelling dialogues within the art world and beyond.

Audience

In performance art, the role of the audience is both pivotal and contentious, serving as a dynamic element that can significantly shape the artistic experience. This section delves into the complex interplay between audience and performance art, examining how audience participation can influence, and sometimes even redefine, the boundaries and meaning of the art form. By discussing Marina Abramović's *Rhythm 0* and Tehching Hsieh's performance work, this section seeks to explore the diverse ways in which audience engagement shapes the essence of performance art.

In 1974, Abramović enacted her performance artwork *Rhythm 0* (Figure 16). She placed herself in front of the audience and provided a variety of objects for the audience to use, ranging from gentle items like roses and honey to aggressive ones like knives and firearms (MacRitchie, 1996). She explicitly stated that the audience could do whatever they wanted to her during the performance. In the initial hours, the audience was cautious in their interactions with Abramović, mostly watching without taking action. However, as time passed, some audience members became increasingly invasive: they tore off Marina's clothes, wrote "END" on her forehead with lipstick, poured a glass of water over her head, stabbed her with rose thorns. The performance ended when two men pointed the loaded gun at Marina (MacRitchie, 1996).

Figure 16

Marina Abramovic. Rhythm 0, 1974



Note. 35mm slide projection (black and white and color, silent), assorted objects. Duration variable. Courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly Gallery. Retrieved from: <https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/243/3118>

During the performance, the audience was clearly divided into two factions, one attempting to harm her, while the other tried to protect her. This level of audience engagement brought the work into a highly complex realm of human nature and power dynamics. Abramović's

Rhythm 0 demonstrates how audience participation significantly influences the meaning and expression of performance art. The audience's actions not only reflect their own emotions and desires but also demonstrate a yearning for power and control. Through audience participation, the work transcends a mere display of performance art and becomes a collectively created live experience.

The audience's participation also imbues *Rhythm 0* with deeper social and political significance (MacRitchie, 1996, p. 30). As audience members, people are no longer passive observers but become creators and catalysts of the artwork. They shape the work's meaning and value through their own actions and choices, turning it into a platform for conveying social significance and reflection. Abramović's work illustrates the importance of audience engagement in performance art. Audience engagement enriches the work's content and meaning, transforming performance art into a more dynamic, interactive, and participatory art form. Through audience engagement, the artwork establishes a connection with the real world, evoking resonance among viewers. In *Rhythm 0*, Marina was effectively communicating emotions and cultural themes through direct eye contact and physical interactions with her audience in her works. Consequently, such audience involvement transforms performance art from a unidirectional act into a co-creative art experience, involving the viewers in the creative process. Empirical research has shown that 'liveness' is a compelling factor driving audience engagement in performance art (Walmsley, 2019). This aspect, also valued in theatre audiences (Reinelt, 2014), allows viewers to coexist with performers, experiencing spontaneity and uncertainty, akin to the immediacy of events. The audience plays an integral role in this process.

According to Hantelmann (2014), the 'experiential turn' in art, and the emphasis on the experiencing subject that accompanies it, reflects the economic and cultural changes in Western bourgeois-industrial societies during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Carlson (2004) argued that the attention given by critics like Fried to the art object shifts to an attention to the art experience, a shift implied in the very concept of performance, but, like the concept of presence, approached in a quite different way by poststructuralist and postmodernist theorists. Hantelmann (2014) suggests that during the 1960s, minimal art brought about a significant shift in the relationship between the object and its viewer, as well as between art and its value. This shift was based on the idea of prioritising the experience

one has with and through the object, rather than its representational meaning. As a result, the visual arts began to focus more on the situatedness of the viewer. This consciousness of the viewer's surroundings helped to introduce a situational focus in the visual arts. Among the effects of this new orientation is a shift outward from the early performance focus upon the performing body to the more general performance situation, including of course the audience's experience in a sense of contingency, time, and situation. As Charman and Dixon (2021) suggest, the audience itself is in a constant state of dynamic construction, and in the interpretation/participation/experience of the performance, no one remains in a fixed position.

Performance art's live experience immerses the audience in genuine physiological, emotional, and cognitive responses, such as increased heart rate, sweating, nausea, dizziness, fascination, empathy, and anxiety (Fischer-Lichte, 2008). As observed by experiential researchers, this direct participation in the performance and proximity to the artist's creative process contribute to the outstanding quality of live performances (Walmsley, 2019). The audience can experience the performance in person, feel an intimate connection with the artist, and witness art creation and stage performance up close. Martin Barker (2006) identifies seven essential aspects of liveness in performance art, encompassing physical co-presence, simultaneity, direct engagement without technological mediation, a sense of the local environment, interaction with performers, interaction with the audience, and intensified experiences through any of these elements. These aspects collectively define and enhance the live experience in performance art.

Thus, live performances are often described by the audience as providing an almost intoxicating sense of immediacy. This liveness significantly heightens the audience's emotions, creating a sense of ownership over the chosen art form (Walmsley, 2019). Increasingly, performance artists explore audience participation, and some scholars even label it as a "corporeal turn" (Reynolds & Reason, 2011). For instance, Reason (2010) views audience experience as embodied, wherein the audience does not merely observe and listen to the performance but engages with it using their entire bodies.

Nevertheless, abandoning the participation of live audiences is a strategy in performance art aimed at resisting the audience-centric art paradigm of cultural consumerism, emphasizing the spontaneity and purity of the art creation. By presenting a different viewing experience

from traditional art consumption models, performance artists encourage the public to contemplate the essence and meaning of art. However, the debate over audience engagement in performance art is intertwined with the concept of performance documentation. Some theorists, however, challenge the importance of audience engagement in performance art, with Philip Auslander (2008) being a prominent critic. He claims that the inevitable distance between performers and audience, both literally and metaphorically, obstructs the latter's desire for communication. The live performance places audiences in the presence of the performers, making them yearn to unite together. However, the live performance also inevitably frustrates this desire, as its occurrence presupposes a gap between performers and the audience (Auslander, 2008).

When considering performance art without the presence of a live audience, it is worth delving into the significance and implication of its possibility of documentation. Some theorists associate the liveness of performance art with its authenticity, leading to questions about the veracity of performance documentation. Auslander (2006) believes that the authenticity of performance documentation lies not in its relation to the original event on the surface, but rather in its connection to the viewer. Perhaps its authority is phenomenological rather than ontological. The purpose of most performance art literature is to allow more audiences to appreciate the artist's work. Auslander (2006) argues that performance art is constituted through its performative documentation. The initial presence of the audience may be essential for the performers, but it is merely an incidental factor of the documented performance. In this sense, it is not the initial presence of the audience that makes an event a performance art piece; rather, it is framed as a performance through the very act of the event being documented (Auslander, 2006).

A case in point is Tehching Hsieh's performance art, wherein the artist challenges the traditional understanding of the audience's role and significance. In his approach, the audience is no longer a necessary condition for the execution of the performance; instead, they become 'distant observers.' Tehching Hsieh's works challenge the traditional understanding of the audience, often emphasising themes of time, endurance, and self-isolation (Heathfield, 2009). No one can 'see' the extra parts in the documentation of his works such as "*The Cage Piece*" "*Punch the Clock*,". Through his works, we can witness the aspect of performance art that does not require the presence of an audience. Hsieh's works

express his ideas and emotions through persistent self-isolation. The audience can only understand these works through media reports and the artist's descriptions rather than participating in person. These works emphasise introspection and reflection on the individual rather than interaction with the audience. He does not seek the audience's attention and applause but focuses more on expressing his inner thoughts and exploring art.

Renouncing the involvement of live audiences in performance art remains a contentious and thought-provoking approach, triggering ongoing debates about the role of audiences and their absence in this form of artistic expression. This strategy is often employed to resist the prevailing art paradigm, which revolves around audience consumption, and instead, emphasises the pure essence of the artwork. However, it does pose certain difficulties for audience research while simultaneously unlocking new avenues for the public's imagination and reinterpretation of the art. This departure from conventional norms challenges both artists and spectators, fostering a deeper exploration of the boundaries and possibilities within the realm of performance art.

We are often told that performance art is important because it “activates the audience” in a so-called democratic manner (Ward, 2012, p. 10); otherwise, the audience would apparently be bound by the passivity of modernism or manipulated and shaped by the artists. Regarding the role of the audience, performances typically exist in a dual experience, with Burden (cited in Ward, 2012, p. 12) referring to the “primary” audience as those present at the time and the “secondary” audience as those who read about it later. However, I maintain a sceptical stance towards Burden's viewpoint, as whether an audience is considered “primary” or “secondary” largely depends on the artist's expectations and artistic expression needs in implementing the work. Audience engagement can encompass both sensory experiences in a live setting and cognitive experiences through reflection and imagination.

The presence of an audience in performance art does not have an absolute answer, as evident in the cases of Marina Abramović and Tehching Hsieh, which undoubtedly exert pressure on the concept of the audience and performance art. Alternatively, we can choose to embrace the inherent “uncertainty” of performance art itself, as emphasised by Di Matteo (2021, p. 200): “What matters is the process of ‘thinking’ about the performance”. In conclusion, the significance of audience participation in performance art remains a subject of ongoing

exploration and contemplation. The role of the audience, whether present at the live event or engaging with the documented performance, is not fixed and can vary based on the artist's intent and the individual's own interpretation. Embracing the uncertainty and complexities of performance art allows us to appreciate the thought-provoking and transformative nature of this art form.

Politics

This section explores the political dimension of performance art, analysing how performances embody, critique, and engage with political themes. Through the case studies of Pyotr Pavlensky and Zhou Bin, this discussion highlights the ways in which performance art challenges authority, disrupts dominant narratives and engage audiences in acts of political reflection.

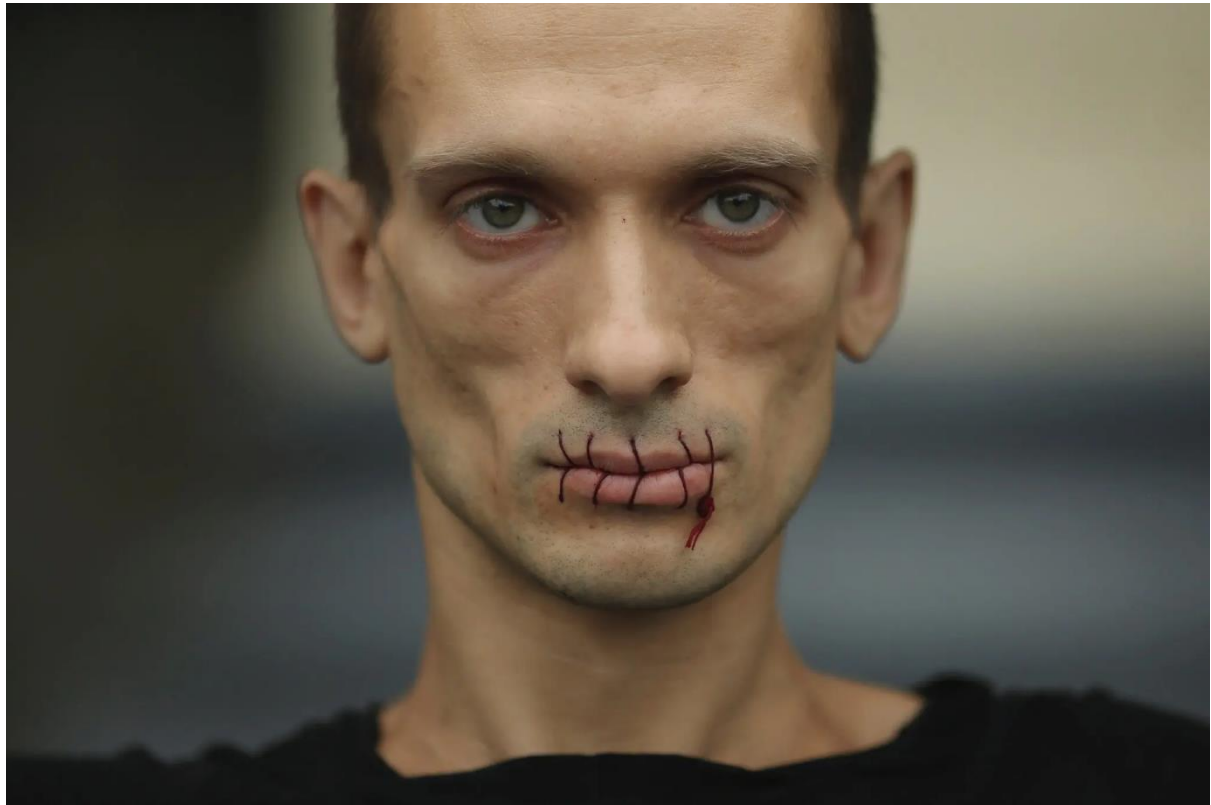
If performance art becomes commonplace in a society over time, it will be impossible for it to stir an ethical or political reaction. (Anatoly Osmolovsky, n.d.)

Pyotr Pavlensky, a Russian artist, has emerged as one of the most extreme performance artists to date, utilising extreme acts of performance art as a form of political resistance. Within his artistic philosophy, Pavlensky views performance art as a medium, with self-harm serving as a method to strike against politics. "My aim has always been to be inconvenient and uncomfortable for everyone," he said (cited in Higgins, 2020). On July 23, 2012, Pavlensky executed his work *Seam* (Figure 17) in St. Petersburg, Russia, where he sewed his mouth shut to express support for three members of the Pussy Riot band, who faced criminal detention for their "punk prayer" activity. Holding a large sign in front of St. Petersburg's Kazan Cathedral, Pavlensky inscribed, "Pussy Riot's performance is an enactment of the feat of my Lord Jesus in Matthew 21:12-13!" Pussy Riot, a feminist informed punk arts collective in Russia, had been arrested in February of the same year for staging a "punk prayer" concert in front of Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral, verbally attacking Putin and Patriarch Kirill I. Two key members were sentenced to two to three years of imprisonment. Following Pavlensky's hospitalisation, he faced a 15-day detention. "With my mouth, I demonstrated the situation of contemporary artists in Russia, living in a climate of propaganda prohibition,

tightening censorship, and the ban on public speech in contemporary art,” he declared (cited in Higgins, 2020).

Figure 17

Pyotr Pavlensky. Seam, 2012



Note. Photo credits: @pyotrpavlensky, @femen_official, @free_petr. Retrieved from: <https://www.zirartmag.com/2021/06/02/art-and-activism-the-subversive-actions-by-petr-pavlensky/>

Another of his works, *Carcass* (Figure 18), implemented on May 3, 2013, adjacent to the legislative council building in St. Petersburg, depicted Pavlensky lying naked within a spiky wire mesh for nearly 20 minutes, silently protesting the city’s legislative institution. The naked body enclosed in the wire cocoon, limited in movement, symbolised the gradual restriction of societal activities (Nordgaard, 2016). Pavlensky suggested that it was turning people into timid, cautious cattle, only able to work, consume, and procreate. This action aimed to oppose laws suppressing civic actions, intimidating the populace, and imposing legal restrictions on non-governmental organisations. This artwork received the Václav Havel Creative Dissent Award, acknowledging those who “with courage and creativity challenge

injustice and live in truth as creative dissenters” (Nordgaard, 2016). Pavlensky has arguably become a presence in the global art scene, continually influencing Russian politics.

Figure 18

Pyotr Pavlensky. Carcass, 2013



Note. Photo credits: @pyotrpavlensky, @femen_official, @free_petr. Retrieved from: <https://www.zirartmag.com/2021/06/02/art-and-activism-the-subversive-actions-by-petr-pavlensky/>

The significance of political and social content, intricately linked to the importance of language in contemporary performance art, has not only transformed the landscape of present-day performance but also reshaped perspectives on its historical evolution (Carlson, 2004). This section explores certain conceptions of politics that help to deepen understandings of performance art.

Scholars of performance history began acknowledging that during the mid to late 1960s, various political demonstrations included consciously performative elements. Still, they were

not initially associated with performance art at its inception, given its original emphasis on non-discursive activity. Simultaneously, artists in performance art explored the political dimension in their creative endeavours. Rancière (2010), in his analysis of art and politics, aligns the political act with the aesthetic act, viewing both as means of disrupting consensus. In his study of the aesthetics of social movements, Tucker (2010, p. 7) argues that:

Aesthetics can be transformative and transgressive, ‘defamiliarising the world’ and inventing a sense of new political and social possibilities. Like its sister activity play, it can take to the streets, parks, and other public venues and inform a vision of social life that opposes capitalist and bureaucratic instrumental reason in favour of a qualitatively different social, political, and personal world.

Moreover, performance art, with its live immediacy, embodiment of ideas, and potential for audience engagement, serves as a powerful and adaptable medium for political engagement, allowing artists to break traditional boundaries and activate reflections. Notably, various manifestations of politicised contemporary performance art, like feminist performance, have roots in a legacy of performative political activism, exemplified by movements such as the civil rights movement in the United States (Preciado, 2009). Performance art functions as a connective tissue between imagery and emotion through the embodiment of actions (Juris, 2008). It stands as an embodied form of expression that embraces participatory dynamics, transcends physical settings, prioritises the body over external tools, embraces unpredictability, and employs verbal and bodily languages to facilitate narratives, pedagogical elements, and richly symbolic content. Importantly, the political potential of performance art is dual-pronged: firstly, it acts as a staged reflection on the society in which it unfolds (Turner, 1987), and secondly, it cultivates an embodied sense of agency among performers and participants alike (Juris, 2008).

Zhou Bin’s performance piece, *Sensitive Word*, staged in Beijing in June 2010 (Figure 19), serves as a poignant commentary on the restrictive nature of China’s censorship system and the lack of freedom of speech (Tong, 2012). The choice of the term “sensitive” is deeply rooted in the strict censorship apparatus prevalent in China, where certain words and topics are deemed sensitive by the authorities. The repetition of the word in the performance until it becomes strange and inarticulate symbolises the stifling effect of political censorship on free expression (Tong, 2012). This artwork exemplifies the impact of China’s political censorship

on freedom of speech. The fifteen-minute mark, where the utterances seem to spin out of control, and the subsequent emergence of uncomfortable sensations such as nausea and vomiting after twenty minutes, highlight the psychological and physical toll of living under such restrictive political conditions.

Figure 19

Zhou Bin. Sensitive Word, 2010



Note. © Zhou Bin. Image courtesy of the artist.

In the broader context of early Chinese performance art, artists often employed the body as a canvas and medium, incorporating elements such as nudity, violence, and self-harm. However, due to the ideological constraints of the authorities, the use of the body in such

explicit ways became highly restricted (Zhang, 2014). Chinese performance artists, including Zhou Bin, appeared to navigate their exploration of political issues with caution, subtlety, and restraint. This stands in contrast to the approaches taken by Russian performance artist Pyotr Pavlensky and Western counterparts, who may engage in more overt and confrontational methods. Despite the nuanced and discreet nature of their expressions, Chinese performance artists, including Zhou Bin, maintain a strong focus on political issues and resistance. In another piece titled *Following* (Figure 20) in 2009, Zhou Bin tracked an ant in Tian'anmen Square, attracting the attention of undercover and uniformed police. This performance, while seemingly innocuous, effectively replicated power dynamics between the artist and the state (Dong, 2010). As commented by Martin (2015), Zhou Bin emerges as a Chinese performance artist who adeptly balances the political and poetic aspects of his work.

Figure 20

Zhou Bin. Following, 2009



Note. © Zhou Bin. Image courtesy of the artist.

Politically engaged performance artists strategically design their performances to address issues such as social impediments or the discomfort of living conditions. Their artistic

endeavours are infused with a sense of appropriation, denunciation, and resistance, reflecting a mood often characterised as ‘perturbed’ (Pagnes, 2011). In these times of unconditional crisis, where conventional artistic entertainment and creative diversions may seem less justified, the politically engaged performance artist perceives their actions as both necessary and inevitable. In contemplating performance art, it is pertinent to view it as a praxis actively seeking radical gestures that forge a symbiotic connection between the self and the external world – comprising both the performer’s corporeal presence and its perceptual reception. This perspective underscores performance art as a distinct realm, one characterised by its exhaustive, extreme, and experimental nature. Crucially, it carves out a unique space for itself, intrinsically tied to the intricacies of life and the comprehensive network of interactions within a societal framework. As posited by Andrea Pagnes (2011), the very existence of performance art, marked by its inherently subversive qualities, renders it inherently political. Within the context of activism, performance art goes beyond mere representation, transforming into a political act executed by artists (Serafini, 2018).

According to Gluhovic et al. (2021, p. 3), both politics and performance encompass “a repertoire of scenarios, embodiments, gestures, repetitions, and rhetorical and improvisational strategies through which a political event reveals its theatricality and a theatrical performance foregrounds its politics”. The performance and politics both emphasise the creation of “symbolic acts” and the use of “an affective register” to inspire and engage their audience (Gluhovic et al., 2021, p. 3). Meiling Cheng, a professor of Dramatic Arts in Critical studies at the University of Southern California, discusses in her article Politics of performance/performance of politics: White Paper Revolution and Chinese performance art, the massive street protests raging in China and its diaspora in late 2022 (White Paper Revolution), and interprets these protests as “performative” (2024, p. 63), as protestors aimed to publicly display their actions (Schechner, 2017). In her analysis of the relationship between performance and politics, she argues the performative snippets arising from the WPR (White Paper Revolution) were “microperformances”, highlighting their dual role as acts of engaged politics and distinctive performance fragments, and that these microperformances have meaningfully contributed to the evolving history of Chinese performance art. Cheng also states that “performances had appeared so frequently in the WPR demonstrations implies (sic) that Chinese performance art has transformed from its previous sociocultural status as an extreme, individualistic artistic medium into an

acculturated method for political agitation” (2024, p. 64). She further contends that Chinese performance art has shifted from the margins of the art world to a significant position within the “sociocultural mainstream” (p. 65).

In short, performance art’s distinctive realm is intricately woven into societal dynamics. Within this landscape, the act of documenting these performances may help to capturing pivotal moments and providing a way to convey embedded political messages to a wider audience. This process extends the impact of these performances far beyond the confines of a live event. Through curation and documentation, politically engaged performance art may gain the ability to leave a lasting imprint, facilitating the widespread dissemination of socio-political commentary.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has explored the complex and multifaceted dimensions of performance art, with a focus on its key components: the body, time, audience, and politics. By examining the transformative role of the body in performance art, we have seen how it serves as both a medium and subject, pushing the boundaries of artistic expression and societal norms. The concept of time, particularly through the lens of liveness and temporality, has revealed how ephemeral and durational performances challenge traditional notions of artistic experience and documentation. Audience engagement has emerged as a pivotal element, reshaping performance art from a one-sided expression to a co-created experience, emphasising the dynamic relationship between artist and viewer. Lastly, the political dimension of performance art has been examined through the works of artists like Pyotr Pavlensky and Zhou Bin, who use their performances to critique social structures and provoke thought. Through these explorations, this chapter lays the groundwork for understanding the challenges of documenting and archiving performance art.

Transitioning to the next chapter, which explores the documentation of performance art, it becomes evident that an ongoing and critical dialogue is essential. The collected documentation, ranging from photos and videos to audience oral memories and written descriptions, will be analysed as a valuable repository contributing to the continuous discourse surrounding performance art. This extensive archive serves not only as a record of

past performances but also as a resource for future analyses and interpretations. Furthermore, the role of curation in shaping and preserving the narrative of performance art documentation is being challenged such as how museums and galleries could present these ephemeral artworks within broader artistic and cultural contexts.

Chapter Two: Navigating Ephemera: Creating Performance Art Archives

Introduction:

This chapter explores both the theoretical and practical aspects of documenting performance art. Theoretically, it provides an overview of key concepts such as ‘document’ and ‘archive’ and the ongoing debate between ontological and phenomenological perspectives on the documentability of performance art. Rather than taking a definitive stance between these two perspectives, the chapter aims to emphasise the close relationship between archival records and live performance art by analysing both viewpoints. Practically, the chapter delves into the documenting methods I employed during my fieldwork in Chengdu, China, where I participated in the UPON International Live Art Festival. The core issue addressed here is how to effectively document performance art, exploring the limitations and possibilities of contemporary documentation techniques. Through an analysis of the documentation methods used at the UPON Festival, this chapter highlights the effectiveness and potential of different documentation medium. By reflecting on archives and documentation methods, this chapter lays the foundation for the central argument of the thesis that performance art archives should not be understood merely as static remnants but as dynamic, performative, and participatory spaces that contribute to cultural exchange and foster ongoing creative dialogue.

The question of how to document performance art has been discussed extensively in scholarship. Performance art’s reliance on ontology leads to it being seen as something disappearing and irrecoverable (Ayerbe, 2018). Most famously, Phelan (1993, p. 146) delineates the life of performance to the present: “performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representation”. Performance art is a live event and for many artists it is inappropriate to record their thoughts for posterity; as the performance artist Marni Kotak said: “a performance itself cannot be collected, because, as life, it can never be truly contained. The ephemerality of a performance can never be taken away regardless of any attempt to commodify it; it just is” (Kotak, 2012, as cited in Ortiz, 2012). But documenting performance art can provide us with a window into moments from the past that cannot be recreated. Documenting performance art not only involves the writing of history and the establishment of a canon but also contains the connection between the ephemeral and the permanent (Kaye, 2018).

Despite the orthodox/established view that defines performance art in relation to ephemerality, various scholars advance the view that performance art is not enacted without leaving traces (Levin et al., 2002). In the process of doing performance art, the existence of the artist her/himself has produced signs and marks. As Kaye (1994, p. 6) points out, performance art has much to say about “traces”, the relic, recording or document that remains after the “event”. Similarly, performance studies scholar Richard Schechner (2017, p. 17) has noted that despite its ephemeral nature, performance art can still leave behind a lot of “stuff”; these things are not the performance art itself but can represent the performance artwork. Matthew Reason (2003, p. 82) calls what remains of the performance “detritus” and while these relics are distinct from the events they record, they reiterate, extend, and change what Phelan (1993, p. 146) has called “the life of the performance”.

Predominantly, performance art works have been documented through photos and anthology records, but such performance art archives have many shortcomings. As Jones et. al., (2009, p. 166) explain: “the temporal nature of performance art causes tension: the fear of loss leads to an urgent desire to counter this through documenting, while the loss inherent in this process leaves many dissatisfied with the outcome”. The representations that are usually created, such as photographs and drawings, are often discounted as inadequate and unfaithful. Archivists face this quandary, particularly when documenting live moments and events, raising important questions such as how to best capture the mood or experience of the audience, or reflect what it meant to take part in a performance artwork for audiences.

Meanwhile, the presentation of performance art archives could be misleading; it is not always clear, for example, if archival materials stem from rehearsals or specific re-performances or even if they simply reflect ideas that were discounted (Jones et al., 2009). These discounted aspects could include alternative concepts, movements, or props that, for various reasons, did not align with the artist’s vision or were deemed impractical, aesthetically unsatisfying, or incongruent with the intended message. Yet even if we look at it from a very narrow perspective, these records still provide us with an access point through which we can glimpse fleeting works of art. It is important to note that these access points may contain a variety of losses and additions, since the representation from performance art to its archive can never be identical (Jones et al., 2009).

While performance theorists have consistently argued that the nature of performance changes when it is documented, it is crucial to recognise that the documents themselves hold significance beyond being incomplete remnants of live events. The preservation and management of performance documents over time, ensuring their accessibility through systematic archives and collections, require professional attention as a distinct practice. The process of documenting performance not only allows artists to gain a different perspective on their own work but also enables audiences to recollect specific images and sounds from performances they have personally witnessed. Furthermore, individuals who did not have the opportunity to experience the original performance can engage with these documents to reconstruct their own understanding of the events or use them as a means of accessing knowledge that would otherwise be inaccessible to them and their peers (Sant, 2017).

Instead of viewing the archive as a static record of past live events, it can be seen as a repository of materials imbued with the potential for future live acts. This perspective, as articulated by Kershaw (2008, p. 42), suggests that the “degree of ephemerality in documentary transmission may, paradoxically, have the potential to resuscitate something of the ‘live’”. In this view, the function of a document shifts from mere preservation to considering how it contributes to generating future acts. This understanding of documentation in performance art allows for a re-evaluation of the live aspect of performance, highlighting how current acts can bring the past to life for audiences.

As Jones et. al., (2009) state, the records we create can only provide clues to this past reality. The challenges posed by archiving performance resonate strongly in the concerns of digital archivists, as digital records are inherently performative, only coming into existence when the correct code executes the data to render a meaningful output. How we capture a fleeting presence, which only occurs when we bring several elements together at the right time and in the right way, will become a key challenge for all archivists (Jones et al., 2009). Perhaps we should look outside our disciplinary frame of reference to consider alternative perspectives on the future of the archive.

The chapter is divided into three sections. Section One provides a brief overview of the distinction between the document and the archive within the academic framework, laying the foundation for understanding the archival processes discussed later. Section Two focuses on

the ongoing debates surrounding the relationship between performance art and its documentation, particularly from ontological and phenomenological perspectives. The aim of this section is to downplay the dichotomous struggle between documentation and disappearance that arises from the ephemeral nature of performance art. This inquiry sidesteps this dichotomy by viewing performance art as part of our culture and heritage. As Reason (2003, p. 84) argues, “performance must be ‘saved’ or ‘rescued’, it is part of our ‘heritage’, our ‘legacy’, and must not be ‘lost’”. Section Three explores the effectiveness of various documenting methods, including photography, video recording, text, concept, smell, objects, and re-enactment, referencing case studies collected from the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival in China, 2023. This section delves into a critical interpretation and analysis of these performance artworks and their documentation through the classification of different documenting methods. While this chapter provides a detailed analysis and interpretation of performance art and its documentation, aspects of audience memory and experience, such as eyewitness testimony and oral memory, will be discussed in the next chapter.

Overview of the Record, the Document and the Archive

To lay the groundwork for examining the conceptual and pragmatic relationships between performance art and its documentation, it is essential first to review how documentation and the archive have been framed as both objects and notions. This section aims to provide an overview on what constitutes the record, the archive and the document. Distinguishing clearly between documenting and archiving is fundamental to the overall argument.

Documenting refers to the intentional – or sometimes unintentional – capturing of live performance in any form, thus producing documents that can be utilised during various stages of a performance work. In contrast, archiving involves the process of curating these documents to ensure their long-term preservation (Kolokythopoulou, 2019). Archival studies are, therefore, a crucial component of this thesis, as they offer the tools needed to understand the nature of documents and archives, thereby enabling a better analysis of them within both theoretical and practical frameworks.

In traditional archival science, archives and records are distinct entities. Records serve as evidence of legal and business transactions, generated, received, and preserved by institutions or individuals (ARMA, Records Management Explained, n.d.). Once a record no longer

serves its immediate purpose, it is typically disposed of. A document is a collection of information, it can come in physical or digital form. A document is usually an everyday collation of information. It can be a shopping list, a memo, an email or a short hand-written note. A document tends to be part of an ongoing project. It describes some small part of a greater plan. A document can be revised often, altered until it has turned into the final version of itself. In contrast, archives consist of organised collections of items deemed to have long-term informational value. According to Alexandra Walsham (2016), while records are utilised for immediate needs, archives are maintained for future generations. Another differentiation lies in the fact that records primarily involve language, whereas archives can encompass material culture items, akin to museum collections (Kolokythopoulou, 2019).

However, the distinctions between a record and a document are not always explicit. The term “record” is often described as something straightforward – a basic object like a memo, letter, photograph, or electronic file – that requires no further explanation (Nesmith, 2006, p. 262). In this context, a document can be seen as the container that holds the informational content considered the record. In the realm of performance documentation, scholars generally prefer the term “document” over “record” (Kolokythopoulou, 2019). This preference arises because “document” can encompass a wider array of informational materials, including physical objects, that are related to or produced by a performance work.

Based on its etymological origins, a document can be defined as “any results of human efforts to tell, instruct, demonstrate, teach or produce a play, in short to document, by using some means in some ways” (Lund, 2010, p. 741). This definition highlights the active process involved in creating documents, emphasising the conscious effort to communicate the information they contain. One of the earliest reflections on the nature of the document is Suzanne Briet’s 1951 article *Qu’est-ce que la documentation*. Without dismissing the evidential quality of documents, Briet emphasises the criteria that allow something to become a document. She explains that a document is “any concrete or symbolic indexical sign [indice] preserved or recorded toward the ends of representing, of reconstructing, or of providing a physical and intellectual phenomenon” (2006 [1951], p. 7). Therefore, a document involves recognising an object’s capacity to validate, demonstrate, or reactivate a past event. For an object to have indexical value, it must point to other things, meaning it is not an isolated entity but derives meaning from its context. Briet argues that an item becomes

a document only in relation to other material, emphasising that documents are not autonomous proofs. Thus, according to Briet (2006 [1951], p. 7), the constitution of a document arises from and within broader socio-cultural production. At the end of the document lifecycle, if a record is deemed historically significant, as having enduring value, and thus a permanent retention, it will then be transferred to the archives.

Achille Mbembe (2002) characterises archives not solely as repositories of information, but as entities imbued with a specific role. This role involves the organisation, selection, and regulation of perceptions of reality, functioning as evidence of existence and truth. Similarly, Robert Berkhofer (1995) contends that the contents of archives reflect societal power dynamics, both historically and contemporarily. Mbembe (2002) further elaborates on the concept and states that it is often overlooked that not all documents are intended for archiving.

Within any cultural system, only certain documents meet the criteria of ‘archivability’ [...] Archives emerge through a process that transforms select documents into items deemed worthy of preservation and storage in public repositories, where they are accessible through established procedures and regulations. The archive [...] fundamentally entails acts of discrimination and selection, ultimately endowing privileged status upon specific written records while denying such status to others (p. 19-20).

The archive is a multidimensional concept, encompassing both “the site where out-of-use files are stored for future knowledge as well as the files themselves” (Kolokythopoulou, 2019, p.25). An archive refers to records of enduring historical value; these records are kept because they have continuing value to the creating agency and to other potential users. They are the documentary evidence of past events. They are the facts we use to interpret and understand history (Laura Millar as cited by SAA). In the context of an organisation, ‘archive’ refers to the place where both working and historical documents are maintained and organised into collections (Cox, 2000). As sites, archives protect objects that provide various informational items, which can be used to structure our understanding of the past (Kolokythopoulou, 2019).

Additionally, archives are framed as collections of documents selected for permanent preservation due to their value as evidence or as resources for historical or other research (UK National Archives, 2016). Diana Taylor (2010) describes the archive as:

An authorised place (the physical or digital site housing collections), a thing/object (or collection of things – the historical records and unique or representative objects marked for inclusion), and a practice (the logic of selection, organisation, access, and preservation over time that deems certain objects ‘archivable’) (p. 4).

This means that archives are governed by specific systems of selection, categorisation, and preservation, making them complexes that materialise by incorporating information in the form of documents. In this context, Sue Breakell differentiates between a collection and an archive (2008). She notes that while a collection is merely an accumulation of materials, an archive involves the curation of records to ensure they complement each other and highlight specific facts (Breakell, 2008). Thus, the process of creating an archive entails a conscious, deliberate, and systematic approach to selecting and cataloging documents, organising them into meaningful groups.

While archival practice aims for objectivity, Sue Breakell argues that even in institutions like the Tate Archive, archivists “aspire to a democratic facilitation” (2008, p. 14). However, this process inevitably involves biases. At its essence, archival work revolves around decision-making: determining what to preserve – what is deemed significant to remember – and how to preserve it – how the information within documents will be remembered.

In summary, the distinctions between the record, the document and the archive, underscore the complexities involved in preserving and interpreting performance art. Documenting captures the ephemeral nature of live performances, creating documents that serve various purposes during the performance’s lifecycle. In contrast, the power of the archive lies in its ability to shape collective memory and knowledge through selective preservation and categorisation, it is a systematic process of curating these documents to ensure their long-term preservation and contextual organisation. The archive functions as an institution that dictates what will be remembered and how. It exercises control over the production of knowledge both now and in the future by selecting which documents to include, what to

exclude, and how to organise them. This process encapsulates the intentions and motivations of the practitioners or institutions responsible for creating and managing the archive. This perspective is crucial to my research on performance art and the audience engagement in the documentation in Chapter Three, and curation in Chapter Four, where I explore how such archival practices influence the understanding and preservation of performance art history. The following section will begin by examining how the relationship between performance art and its documentation has been analysed through the lens of the ontological and phenomenological aspect.

In Debate: Ontological VS Phenomenological

This section explores the intricate relationship between performance art and the documentation of performance art, aiming to unravel the ontological and phenomenological debates surrounding the existence of performance art. It also draws on several iconic case studies, including those by Yves Klein, Chris Burden and Vito Acconci, as they are frequently discussed in the literature due to their status as pioneering work. The purpose of this study is not to take a definitive stance between ontology and phenomenology. Instead, it aims to underscore the close correlation between archival records and live performance art by analysing these two theoretical perspectives. Additionally, it seeks to highlight the significance of archival documentation in the research practices of performance art.

According to Grau et al. (2012), performance documentation encompasses all materials utilised or generated throughout a performance, spanning those employed in preparation, media utilised during the actual performance, and all resulting recordings. Historically, performance theory maintained a resistance to the documentation of performances, contrasting it with the value placed on the immediacy of presence and actively discouraging any form of recording (Phelan, 1993). However, a notable shift occurred in the 1990s, marked by an embrace of a phenomenological approach to documentation. This new perspective acknowledged that documents could serve as a means of performance and knowledge production. The primary objective of documentation is to furnish evidence of the actual occurrence of an event, creating a link to the live moment and ensuring accessibility for future audiences and researchers.

In 1993, Peggy Phelan (p. 147) wrote that ‘performance’s only life is in the present’; that it ‘cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so it becomes something other than performance’. Westerman (2017, p. 7) characterised Phelan’s theory as the ‘absence model’ of performance, which privileges what is no longer present once the performance concludes, positing that performance exists solely within that void. According to Phelan (1993), performance is the art form that most profoundly comprehends the generative possibilities of disappearance. Performance flashes into existence, only to vanish – it is fleeting, ephemeral, and its power and possibilities reside in this inevitable evanescence.

In the performance art spectatorship, there is an element of consumption, and Phelan (1993, p. 148) notes that “there are no leftovers, the gazing spectator must try to take everything in. Without a copy, live performance plunges into visibility – in a maniacally charged present – and disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control”. It is precisely because of performance art’s resistance to the cyclical economy of the art market that it becomes susceptible to questioning its value and essence. However, the characteristic of being unreserved and unrecordable has, for a period, granted performance art an advantage in terms of independence from large-scale art reproduction in technology, economy, and language. In Phelan’s view, the identity of performance and its ensuing power are ensured through a negative relationship with media. Performance is not a photograph, not a video, not even subsequent written records, or the aggregation of memories originating from the act, as they only represent partial approximations of the thing itself – mere ripples generated by the thing but not entirely identical (Westerman, 2015). For her, performance is a non-singular art form, transcending mediums like photographs and videos. Performance is instantaneous. At the same time, Phelan also points out that performance critics must realise that “the labour to write about performance (and thus to ‘preserve’ it) is also a labour that fundamentally alters the event”. This is because the description itself cannot reproduce the object; instead, it aids in our efforts to rearrange and reassert what has been lost. Whether one believes that performance art is based on disappearance or representation, these definitions ultimately lead us to become lost in the vortex of ontology. Perhaps we should reduce the pursuit of its ontological origins and focus more on the many natures of its becoming (Heathfield, 2012). In simpler terms, we

should seek and depict the vitality of performance art and its documentation rather than considering vitality or liveness as its only life.

Auslander presents a starkly contrasting perspective to Phelan's view. For him, "documentation does not simply generate image/statements that describe an autonomous performance and state that it occurred: it produces an event as a performance" (2006, p. 5). In other words, the previously considered insufficient and vague archives of performance art, whether as a few photos, text, or videos, can now be understood not only as fragments describing performance art but also as tools for shaping our understanding of the performance that occurred. They are not just meant to prove the existence of the live moment in performance art but rather to delineate our comprehension of the performed art, as it leaves imprints in the evolution of world culture (Foucault, 1970).

Auslander illustrates his argument through the case of Yves Klein's *leap into the void* (1960)². This black-and-white photograph captures the moment when Klein leaps off a two-story building. However, in reality, Klein did not fall to the ground but was caught by a group of people holding a cloth, a detail omitted through darkroom manipulation. Auslander states, "The image we see thus records an event that never occurred apart from the photograph itself" (2006, p. 5). In his view, it is the photograph that creates the performance, and as such the documentation is performative. If no one had taken these photos of Klein as he made the leap, the performance would have been lost in an instant. It is precisely because of the performance art documentation that we can prove the occurrence of performance art. It is argued that this constitutes the performativity of the documentation itself, and that performance art is constituted through the performativity of its documentation.

Auslander challenges Phelan's ontological argument by juxtaposing Klein's Leap with Chris Burden's equally iconic *Shoot 1971*³ – both aiming to convey the performative nature of documentation. In *Shoot*, Burden himself is shot in the arm by a rifle-wielding shooter, capturing the tense moments before the bullets were fired. The photo shows Burden standing against a blank white studio wall, the shooter ready and aiming, with Burden subsequently

² Yves Klein, *Leap into the Void*, 1960. Photo: Shunk-Kender. Source: Roy Lichtenstein Foundation and Yves Klein, ADAGP, Paris. <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/features/between-action-and-image>

³ Chris Burden, *Shoot*, 1971. <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/features/between-action-and-image>

being hit in the arm. Auslander emphasises the distinction between the factual occurrence of events and the realistic effect created in the final representation. It appears as if Klein leaps recklessly, just as Burden is shot. For Auslander, this effect serves as the performance venue. He concludes: “It may well be that our sense of the presence, power, and authenticity of these pieces derives not from treating the document as an indexical access point to a past event but from perceiving the document itself as a performance that directly reflects an artist’s aesthetic project or sensibility and for which we are now the present audience” (2006, p. 9). Whether it is Klein leaping into the void or Burden being shot, the documentation of these two performance art pieces constantly reveals its performative nature. Simultaneously, these records also effectively help us understand the context in which the works unfold. As Amelia Jones noted in 1998, a performance event requires photos to confirm that it actually happened, and it becomes a work only through its documentation. Under U.S. copyright law, a work is considered a work only if it is furnished in one copy. Live performances exist only for the audience at the time of performance, are not recorded in any written form or technical means, are not protected by copyright law, and are difficult to claim or define as intellectual property (Grau et al., 2012).

In addition, Auslander (2006) also mentions Vito Acconci’s work *Photo-Piece* (1969) to further illustrate the performative nature of performance art documentation, and that performance art is constituted through its documentation’s performativity. In this piece, Acconci’s verbal description is: “Holding a camera, aimed away from me and ready to shoot, while walking a continuous line down a city street. Try not to blink. Each time I blink snap a photo” (Quoted from Auslander, 2006, p. 4). The archive of this piece is supplemented by twelve black and white photographs that capture the streets of Greenwich, New York City (Auslander, 1997). Auslander (2006) asserts that the photographs produced by Acconci have the traditional function of performance documentation because they provide conclusive evidence that he carried out the work. But in fact, it did not show and record Acconci’s performance. The photos recorded were part of the performance, not photos of Acconci’s performance. From the photos, the streets were empty and there were no bystanders as spectators. What is more, the only thing onlookers see is a person walking and taking pictures: they have no way of understanding that they are watching a performance. Therefore, it is only through recording that his performance exists as a performance.

In contemplating Peggy Phelan's seminal absence theory juxtaposed with Philip Auslander's presence model, it is discerned that an outright dichotomy between these opposing viewpoints may not be imperative. While Phelan's perspective effectively safeguards performance art from assimilation into the commercial exigencies of the art market, she also asserts that the ephemeral nature of performance art offers immediate and poignant affective encounters for the audience. However, in recent years, artists, spectators, institutions, and archivists alike, have demonstrated an increasing inclination towards recording ephemeral performances in diverse formats. This signifies a departure from Phelan's categorical stance, as the act of recording is no longer confined to a faithful reproduction of the original work. Rather, fragmented archival representations emerge, affording glimpses into the creative ideation of performance artists from bygone years.

Michael Kirby pioneered performance documentation in the late 1950s. He recognised the importance of documenting performance for both present and future purposes (Auslander, 2014). Kirby started with written descriptions of Allan Kaprow's *Happenings*. He considered performance documentation to be a performative act in itself because it could bring together the diverse performance practices of the New York avant-garde, creating a cohesive scene. Furthermore, Kirby was among the first to conceptualise performance documentation as a distinct and self-aware form of discourse. By capturing the fleeting nature of performance art, documentation makes it possible for current work to be accessed by a wider audience and creates a record for future study. Kirby's use of the term "tomorrow's past" highlights the importance he placed on documenting performances for future audiences and historical preservation, rather than for immediate consumption or publicity (1971, p. 3). The primary aim of performance documentation was to make these ephemeral events available to future generations who would not have had the opportunity to witness them firsthand. For Kirby (1971), the ultimate goal of performance documentation was to create a document that could effectively convey the essence of the original performance, allowing the reader to experience it vicariously.

Kirby's belief that documentation can convey a similar experience to that of an original performance challenges contemporary attitudes towards performance documentation, which tend to emphasise the difficulty of creating an accurate representation of a live event. While performance documentation serves as a substitute for the original performance, it is often

viewed as separate from the performance itself. Matthew Reason (2006) points out that this perspective is paradoxical, as the very transience of live performance is what drives the desire to preserve it through documentation. As a result, we demand documentation of performances while simultaneously distancing it from the original event. Kirby's approach avoids this paradox by treating performance's ephemerality not as a defining feature but as a limiting condition that prevents avant-garde performances from reaching wider audiences and attaining greater historical and cultural significance. Rather than emphasising the transitory nature of performance, Kirby (1971) prioritises the value of preserving it for future audiences, suggesting that this outweighs the importance of maintaining its ephemerality.

At the same time, some artists are also actively involved in exploring the relationship between performance art and its documentation. Amalia Ulman's work defies traditional models for separating a performance from its document by merging the two as a narrative stream doled out bit by bit on the social media platform Instagram. This confounds the normal sequential understanding of performance and documentation, deploying a set of forms that mixes action and image, life and art, in ways that echo and possibly further extend the formal logic of works. Ulman herself believes that:

When the audience look at the image and they react and that is when the performance really happens. When they realise it is a 'work', and it's older, that is the archive of the performance. But materially it is the same image, it just functions on different levels (Cited in Westerman, 2018, p .7).

The generative function of archives allows performance as a means of historical research, facilitating an interactive exchange between spectators and the past. Dunne (2015) contends that archival records are intricately linked to the creation of live performances. By exploring the significance of documents in the practice of performance, Dunne (2015, p. 3) argues that archival materials have the capacity to "act as the genesis for live acts". In the subsequent sections of this chapter, through an active engagement with archival practices, I endeavour to explore the potentialities inherent in various forms of performance art archives. This exploration is driven by a commitment to diversify archival records, providing researchers with richer and more comprehensive materials to delineate the evolution and development of performance art. Through an examination of diverse archival media, I seek to present the

multifaceted nature of performance art history, emphasising the pivotal role archives play in constructing this historical narrative.

Traces Unveiled: Documenting Practice at the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival

The question of how to document performance art has been a subject of widespread debate. The mediums through which documentation of performance art unfold are diverse, dominated by methods such as writing, photography, and videography: no single approach has established itself as the de facto standard (Jones et al., 2009). These diverse archives serve different purposes – some are factual, involving lists and data, recording specific details of when and where a performance occurred, while others are performative or even misleading. Scholars and artists in the field tirelessly experiment with various methods to capture performance art, enabling others to observe or experience it (Jones et al., 2009). As performance art has persisted in the art scenes of both the East and the West throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries, its emergence, as Heathfield (2012) notes, is invariably accompanied by robust evidential and epistemological impetus. From the manifestos of Futurism and Dada, the scores and instructions of Fluxus and Conceptual art, remnants of body artists, to performance scripts of experimental theatre and the testimonials and digitised traces of contemporary live art artists, performance art is always marked by its appearance in textual, photographic, or other mediated forms. Through these documenting mediums, the vitality of performances is reiterated, extended, and transformed. As Taylor (2003) claims, performance functions as an important act of transfer, conveying social knowledge, memory, and identity through repetition.

By examining the documentation I collected from the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival, various performance artworks will be analysed, and documenting methods will be applied to explore their potential in enhancing accessibility for future audiences, as shown in Table 1. The performance artworks that will be analysed include Xu Meiyu's *Pair Painting Practice* and *Group Painting Practice*; Osamu Adachi's *Bullshit Job*; Eric Scott Nelson's *Empty Vase*; Zhang Yiy's *1 Hour Closer*; Li Chaoliu's *What's in the Sky?*; Li Joy's *Hunter*; Wang Xiyue's *Anataman*; Sam Trubridge's *Night Walk*; Yeonjeong's *Re'Formance I: Semiotics of The Kitchen*; and Katja Schenker's *Dress*. These works will be examined through the themes of photography, video recording, text, concept, smell, objects, and re-

enactment. Although this section primarily focuses on the works documented at the festival, the analysis of object and re-enactment still includes some classic cases of Marina Abramović, aimed at providing readers with a more comprehensive understanding of those documenting medium.

Table 1

Documenting Practice at 11th UPON International Live Art Festival

Documenting Practice at 11th UPON International Live Art Festival						
Artist	Nationality	Artwork	Duration/Location	Documenting Method	Est visitors	Comments
Xu Meiyu	Chinese	<i>Group Painting Practice</i>	10 minutes / Nongyuan Art Village	Photography	30	Photos capture the essence of captivating moments
Osamu Adachi	Japanese	<i>Bullshit Job</i>	20 minutes/ Guang Hui Art Museum	Video	50	Offer a more comprehensive view of the performance process
Eric Scott Nelson	American	<i>Empty Vase</i>	10 minutes/ Guang Hui Art Museum	Video	40	**
Zhang Yiy& Sun Zhenyu	Chinese	<i>1 Hour Closer</i>	30 minutes/ A4 Art Museum	Text	50	Provides theoretical and personal insights that may contain omissions
Li Chaoliu	Chinese	<i>What's in the Sky?</i>	10 minutes/ Guang Hui Art Museum	Concept	30	Conceptual elements have the potential to resonate across different times and cultural backgrounds
Wang Xiyue	Chinese	<i>Anataman</i>	20 minutes/ A4 Art museum	Concept	40	**
Li Joy	Chinese	<i>Hunter</i>	15 minutes/ Nong Yuan Art Village	Smell	35	The documentation of smell in this performance becomes a potent vehicle for memory creation.
Xu Meiyu	Chinese	<i>Pairing Painting Practice</i>	10 minutes/ Guang Hui Art Museum	Objects	30	Objects becoming powerful reminders of the shared experience and the connections forged between artist and audience.
Sam Trubridge	New Zealanders	<i>Night Walk</i>	20 minutes/ In the fields outside the Chengdu Nongyuan Art District	Reenactment	40	Allowing for new insights and discoveries with each iteration.
Katja Schenker	Swiss	<i>Dress</i>	20 minutes/ Guang Hui Art Museum	Reenactment	40	Reinterpretation in a new context
Yeonjeong	South Korean	<i>Re'Formance I: Semiotics of The Kitchen</i>	30 minutes/ Guanghui Art Museum,	Reenactment	30	**

Note. The table summarises performance works analysed in this thesis and the documentation methods applied.

This thematic approach will aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and limitations of different documentation methods in capturing the essence of performance art, thereby exploring how these methods might enhance accessibility and engagement for future audiences. In terms of the structure of this section, I will commence by examining the still photograph, noting its efficacy in capturing ironic moments while acknowledging challenges related to authenticity and subjective selection by the photographer. Additionally, I will discuss video as a medium capable of capturing the

enacted process of performance art, including its dynamic elements such as sound and audience. Concerning text, I will analyse the metaphors utilised within performances and the potential and readability of these texts as archived documents. Documenting concept-focused performance artworks, distinct from visual and auditory documentation, will possess the potential to resonate across different eras and cultural backgrounds. When analysing the use of smell in performance art and its archival role, I will emphasise how the smell integrated with the work becomes an effective tool for memory creation. Finally, I will analyse the use and generation of objects in the process and aftermath of performance art. These objects often transcend their inherent roles, acquiring a certain spirituality or serving as extensions of the artist's body. In discussions about re-enactment, the potential for exploring the repeatability of fleeting events and delving into additional possibilities within performance archives will become apparent.

Photography

On October 24, 2023, Xu Meiyu enacted her performance art piece *Group Painting Practice* (Figure 21, 22) at the Nongyuan Art Village, Chengdu, China. In this performance piece, the artist invites five audience members to collectively hold a pen for 10 minutes, delving into themes of collaboration and resistance within the artistic realm. Xu Meiyu transforms the creative process into a collective experience, challenging traditional notions of authorship and personal expression. Participants engage in a silent dialogue marked by subtle power dynamics and mutual cooperation. The physical act of painting serves as a metaphor for broader themes of negotiation and compromise, as individuals navigate their roles in the creative process. The interplay between cooperation and resistance is evident, exposing the complexities inherent in collaborative artmaking. Xu Meiyu provided a written description of the work:

In this mechanised theatre, multiple individuals hold a pen to create art, delving into the subtle dynamics of invisible power, revolving around the delicate balance between cooperation and resistance (Xu, 2023).

Figure 21



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Merely reading this statement may not fully capture the collaboration and resistance between the artist and participants during the creation process. Through the photograph, one can distinctly perceive the strength and eagerness with which each individual grips the pen, as illustrated in Figure 21. As Schmitt (1976) argues, photo documentation is a more effective medium than written text for documenting contemporary practice, emphasising that written text falls short in documenting contemporary practices now more concerned with “process rather than product” (p. 376). Echoing a similar argument, Sam Trubridge, the organiser of New Zealand’s renowned live art festival, *Performance Arcade*, suggests that photo

documentation is preferable to video in many cases. He posits that photos capture the essence of captivating moments, whereas video recordings often miss nuances, particularly in performances occurring in dark theatrical spaces, where the audience's perception differs significantly from what is portrayed in videos (2023, Interview).

Figure 22

Xu Meiyu. Group Painting Practice, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

As Büscher (2007) asserts, photographs hold a symbolic significance in the context of the history of performance art. The choices made by artists and journalists in selecting and disseminating photographs profoundly impact the public's perception of performance art and its historiography. These images are considered representative depictions, playing a crucial role in constructing and visualising historical narratives. Additionally, they serve as rich evidence of the cultural, aesthetic, and social contexts of specific periods. Furthermore, the most well-known and abundant visual representations of early performances are often photographs, which were typically published in magazines, newspapers, or catalogues,

especially when we think about the early performance art artists such as Marina Abramović. These images, whether individual pictures or sequences, have permeated the collective consciousness and have become the primary reference for performances, even surpassing the experiences of those who attended them. Over the decades, these photographs have condensed the essence of performances into a selection of spectacular moments, repeatedly portraying them. The work on the visual archive for performance art from the 1960s and 1970s is closely associated with photographers who saw their role as documentary in nature.

However, despite the widespread acclaim for photography in the realm of performance art documentation, it has faced increasing scrutiny in recent years, particularly concerning issues of authenticity and the subjective choices of photographers. In traditional performance art events, cameras often focus solely on the artist or performer, neglecting to capture the interactions between the artist and the audience (Saisto and TEHDAS, 2019). Questions arise: Did the event truly occur (fact or fiction)? Was it solely staged for the camera? Or is it a meticulously crafted illusion of a genuine action?

In a 1974 interview, Peter Moore discussed his approach to prioritising documentation, emphasising his commitment to doing justice to the artist's intent rather than imposing his own perspective (Argelander & Moore, 1974). Moore deliberately refrained from photographing photo sessions and rarely captured images during rehearsals. Instead, he positioned himself among the audience during performances, aiming to blend in and remain unobtrusive. Opting for a camera that produced minimal noise and working without flash to avoid distractions, Moore considered himself an observing viewer. His photographs often framed other audience members, accentuating their presence in the documentation. Kirby echoed a similar sentiment, proposing that documentation of performance art through photography should prioritise objectivity, intending to create a visually accurate record of the original work rather than reflecting the photographer's interpretative or creative vision (as cited in Auslander, 2014).

Figure 23

Xu Meiyu. Pair Painting Practice, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

In the archives I collected from the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival, it is evident that some photographs do not objectively document the performance artworks. Instead, it appears that the photographers integrated their own aesthetic and compositional considerations into their shots. In Figure 23, the photographer captured the artists and participants gripping pens yet overlooked the presence of other spectators at the scene. While it is an aesthetically pleasing photograph, it must be acknowledged that without additional

images for research and understanding, it may be deemed an ‘incomplete’ documentation of the performance art.

Joseph Raven, the Executive Director of Defibrillator performance art gallery in Chicago, underscores the role of photography in encapsulating the ephemerality of performance art. According to Raven, the transience of performance is associated with photography. He notes, “When we look at a photograph, we never question whether we are feeling or experiencing the same thing we might have felt at the moment we were present” (Raven, as cited in Ortiz, 2012). This perspective highlights that a photograph merely captures a fleeting moment without the need to assess its quality or preparedness; it is a snapshot that allows people a glimpse into the past. In some respects, a photograph may possess greater potency, as moments stored in the mind can sometimes be more enriched than those experienced in reality, such as more susceptible to adulteration by memory which can alter aspects of the experience each time memory is recalled. To further understand and analyse the effectiveness of audiovisual archives in performance art, the next section will elucidate the potential and limitations of video as a medium for documenting performance art through case studies.

Video

On October 21, 2023, Osamu Adachi implemented his performance art piece *Bullshit Job* (Figure 24) in a hall at Guang Hui Art Museum in Chengdu. He tied a rope around his hands, with the other end of the rope attached to the handrail of the stairs leading to the second floor in the hall. He sat in the hall, holding a time counter in his hands.

Figure 24

Osamu Adachi. Bullshit Job, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Afterward, he took off his shoes and started running in the hall. It seemed like he was still counting. During this process, as he ran farther, the rope in his hands began to affect the surrounding audience. Some tried to jump over the rope, and others attempted to avoid touching it. It appeared as if the artist was searching for something, running outward and then returning to his seat and ringing a bell. The performance lasted for 30 minutes. In the end, he ran out of the exhibition hall. At the entrance to the art museum, he threw away the rope, took out a match from his pocket, lit it, and then forcefully threw it on the ground, saying, “*BULLSHIT JOB.*” The performance concluded.

Video 1

Osamu Adachi. Bullshit Job, 2023



Note. Video courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

<https://vimeo.com/921822706>

In the case of Adachi, the documented photographs offer glimpses of fleeting moments throughout the entire performance, complemented by explanatory text that constructs the narrative of the performance for the audience. However, certain elements are missing. I contend that this particular work is more aptly suited for video documentation. The video (Video 1) captures the entirety of Adachi's artistic process, and due to the unique nature of his work involving interaction with the audience, the video reveals nuanced aspects such as audience reactions when the rope comes into contact with them during his movements. Additionally, the video provides insights into the artist's emotional fluctuations throughout the entire process. These intricate elements are challenging to capture adequately through singular photographs alone.

Marsh (2008) asserts that video and performance art evolved concurrently and engaged in mutual interaction starting from the late 1960s. While these two mediums may appear

distinct, their interrelationship is fundamental for the inclusion of performance art in the annals of art history. During the 1970s, performance art frequently emphasised its ‘liveness’ and immediacy, yet it consistently found mediation for a broader audience through the mediums of photography and video. The ‘real time’ attributes of video were often deemed more effective in capturing the immediacy of the live event (Marsh, 2008).

Moreover, under certain conditions, video documentation excels in capturing the processes, sounds, and other dynamic elements of performance art, including interactions with the audience. It can offer a continuous narrative, allowing viewers to witness the entire process or highlight moments of a performance. As Jill Orr argues, the single-camera view falls short of recreating the live experience: “The camera’s viewfinder has no peripheral vision, so it records a flattened reality [...] the time-based image comes lifeless” (Orr, as cited in Marsh, 2008).

Videos can capture the dynamic and lively nature of performance art processes, as also demonstrated in the case of the performance artwork *Empty Vase* performed on October 21, 2023, at the Guang Hui Art Museum in Chengdu. In the work, Eric Scott Nelson led the audience to a narrow corridor on the first floor of the museum (Video 2). In attendance at the performance, I remember how he undressed and placed some roses on the floor. Next, he lay naked on the ground, picked up a rose with his foot, and peeled off its petals in the air with the other foot. He then used the stem of the rose to continuously rub against his head. Midway through the performance, his head had already started bleeding.

Video 2

Eric Scott Nelson. Empty Vase, 2023



Note. Video courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

<https://player.vimeo.com/video/921863291>

Some of the spectators were bewildered while others experienced a sense of fear. Notably, the artist deliberately created a narrow corridor, intending to limit the movement of the audience due to the substantial crowd. Having personally attended the live performance, I find that recounting the experience in live performance and watching the video evoke almost identical sensations for myself. Despite the absence of a crowd or ambient noise when viewing the video alone, the discomfort is still palpable for me. This aligns with Marsh's (2008) assertion that video provides a more comprehensive understanding of performance experiences compared to selectively chosen photographic stills used by artists or professionals to depict the event. Even through watching the video, we can easily sense a certain sense of constriction, unease, and tension similar to the live experience, even feeling concerned about the artist's actions, especially when he repeatedly rubbed the thorns of the rose stem on his head. However, it must be acknowledged that the video recording still lacks something, unable to provide the "being there" feeling. However, Büscher (2007) emphasises that the focus of discussion should no longer solely revolve around the retrieval or irretrievable loss of performative authenticity. The connection between performance and its

remnants should not be seen as a relationship between an original and replicable document but rather as a medial transformation.

Film or video can be seen as a unique form of arrangement as it portrays the duration and dynamics of a performance in a linear manner (Büscher, 2007). Babette Mangolte highlights the distinctions between photography and film. She explains that photography “deals with how to compose a space” (2007, p. 32) and emphasises the iconic moment of a performance work. However, it cannot communicate a concept of time or duration and necessarily suppresses the process character, which is the relationship between performers and audience. As Santone (2008) contends, photography as a medium for documenting performance art is considered inadequate because, as a static medium, it cannot effectively capture time-based artistic expressions. According to Mangolte (2007), recording a performance with a static camera does not provide an adequate portrayal of the experience.

Büscher (2007) argues that when examining the documents or traces of performances, it is important to consider their nature as medial transformations. This means that the technical, aesthetic, and discursive aspects of these documents need to be taken into account. Instead of merely being seen as a necessary prerequisite for use, their medial nature should be recognised as a fundamental condition for contemporary interpretations and contextualisation. When working with or studying audio-visual recordings in a performance archive, it is crucial to acknowledge the discourse surrounding documentaries and photography, as they reflect on the relationship between the object being documented and the resulting image.

The use of video documentation as a medium for capturing performance art offers distinct advantages in the archival process. Video allows for the comprehensive recording of the entire performance, capturing nuances in movement, expression, and interaction that may be missed in still photographs or written descriptions. It provides a dynamic and immersive experience for viewers, allowing them to witness the unfolding of the performance in real time. The readability of audio-visual artifacts within a performance archive depends on the complementarity and interplay of different media formats. A single documenting medium inevitably involves certain losses, additions, and inherent limitations. Only when multiple documentation is combined can the essence of performance art be captured. The next section

will analyse the use of text in performance art works and its potential as documentation through case studies.

Text

On October 23, 2023, Zhang Yiy presented her artwork *I Hour Closer* (Figure 27) in the experimental theatre at A4 Art Museum, Chengdu, China. Prior to commencing the performance, she distributed a written text to each audience member (Figure 25, 26), and this text has been preserved as a documentation later on.

Figure 25

Zhang Yiy & Sun Zhenyu. *Artist Leaflet of 1 Hour Closer (Chinese)*

《更近一时 1 hour closer 》

视频，行为

张潇月&孙震宇

2023

此次展览的作品以第一人称视角的视频记录方式，以捕捉整个行为过程。两位艺术家皆拥有多年的海外生活经历，虽然在当今高度互联的时代，为长期旅居海外的个体提供了便捷与国内亲友联系的途径，然而，时差依然作为一道无法逾越的抽象鸿沟，深刻地影响着跨国界之间人与人之间的联系。

中国与德国之间的六小时时差为研究的起点，沿着每十五经度时差递增或递减一小时的原则，两位艺术家分别同时从桂林和慕尼黑出发，朝对方方向行进 7.5 度经度，以试图逐渐消解他们所在地的物理时差。通过这一行动，二人所在地之间的物理时差缩短一小时。

在现场艺术家将两个中国和德国时间的时钟用锤子敲碎，再用手缓慢的把两个时钟各拨快（慢）半个小时，直至两地的时差缩短一个小时，随着钟声敲响，结束行为。

张潇月，1990 年生于陕西，现生活工作于德国柏林。2013 年毕业于中央美术学院雕塑系，获学士学位。于 2019 年于德国杜塞尔多夫美院取得大师生学位。“陈述故事，再隐藏故事。”她的作品经常以一种退后的方式，去呈现一个凝视般的现场。

她是 2019 年德国 Hogan Lovells 艺术奖一等奖的获得者，她的作品在 k21 美术馆（2020，杜塞尔多夫，德国）；达卡艺术现场（2019，达卡，孟加拉国）；伊萨卡（2018，蒙特普奇亚诺，意大利）；壳（2018，BigCi，悉尼，澳大利亚）；文化之夜（2018，门兴格拉德巴赫，德国）等地展出。

www.zhangyiy.com

孙震宇，1992 年出生于中国黑龙江，2018 年毕业于中央美术学院壁画系。现学习于慕尼黑美术学院。作品以行为和影像为主。影像作品通常利用偷拍视频的形式，展现了他对社会现象与消费主义的反思。

Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Figure 26

Zhang Yiy & Sun Zhenyu. Artist Leaflet of 1 Hour Closer (English)

<1 Hour Closer>

Video, Performance

Yiy Zhang & Sun Zhenyu

2023

It's captured in a first-person perspective video format to document the entire process. Both artists have extensive experience living abroad. In today's highly interconnected world, bridging the gap between those who reside overseas and their homeland is facilitated by various means. However, the time difference persists as an abstract barrier that profoundly affects the connections between individuals across international borders.

Using the six-hour time difference between China and Germany as a starting point, the two artists departed simultaneously from Guilin and Munich, traveling 7.5 degrees of longitude in each other's direction, incrementally adjusting their local time difference by one hour. Through this performance, the physical time difference between the two locations was reduced by one hour.

In the live performance, the artist will smash the two clocks of Chinese and German time with a hammer, slowly move the two clocks forward (back) for half an hour, until the time difference between the two places was shortened by one hour, end with the bell.

Yiy (Xiaoyue) ZHANG, (b.1990) was born in Shaanxi, China. She currently lives and works in Berlin, Germany. She graduated from Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing with Bachelor degree (2013) and then studied at Ecole nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Paris (France), Akademie der Bildenden Künste Munich (Germany), and from Dusseldorf Kunstakademie (Germany) with Meisterschülerin (Prof. Gregor Schneider) in 2019.

"Show a simple thing, tell a story, hide the story". Yiy Zhang's works demonstrate profound humanistic concerns with a calm and dignified gesture, and her reflections on the current era and history. She won the 1st prize of Hogan Lovells Art Prize in 2019. Her recent project includes: K21 Museum (2020, Dusseldorf, Germany); "Dhaka live artbiennale" (2019, Dhaka, Bangladesh); "Ithaka" (2018, Montepulciano, Italia); "The Shell" (2018, Bilpin, Australia); "KulturNacht" (2018, Monchengladbach, Germany).

www.zhangyiy.com

Zhenyu Sun was born in 1992 in Heilongjiang, China. He graduated from the Mural Painting of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2018. Now studying at the Munich Academy of Fine Arts. His

works are mainly performances and videos. The video works usually use the form of hidden camera, showing his reflection on social phenomena and consumerism.

Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Figure 27

Zhang Yiy. 1 Hour Closer, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Through written text the audience are provided with precise information about various aspects of the performance. In Zhang Yiy's work, the text offers the social and creative background information for audiences, without any ample room left for the audience's imagination before the performance commences. In fact, based on my firsthand experience at the live event, I can attest that without the textual introduction I would have felt quite disoriented. The theatre space was enveloped in darkness, with distant walls projecting two videos from a first-person perspective, depicting individuals on different modes of transportation. Meanwhile, at the centre of the performing area, the artist wielded a hammer, smashing two timepieces on the ground. The performance unfolded for 30 minutes until the immediate chime of a bell.

Text used in live performances often employs metaphors and symbolic language that invite audience interpretation and engagement. This textual layer adds depth to the performance by conveying abstract concepts, emotions, and narratives that may not be immediately apparent through visual or auditory elements alone. The use of metaphorical language in performance

text stimulates intellectual and emotional responses, encouraging audiences to reflect, interpret, and connect with the artistic themes and messages.

Moreover, text as a documenting medium for performance art offers several advantages that complement other forms of documentation. One key advantage is its ability to convey important background information to the audience. Through written descriptions, program notes, artist statements, and critical essays, text provides context, historical significance, and thematic insights that enhance the audience's understanding of the performance. In the next section, the focus will be on the conceptual aspects involved in preserving performance art works.

Concept

On October 22, 2023, artist Li Chaoliu implemented his work *What's in the Sky?* (Figure 28, 29) in the plaza at Gate C of the Guang Hui Art Museum. When all the audience gathered on the plaza, attracted by the name of the work, everyone kept looking up at the sky or discussing what the piece was about.

Figure 28

Li Chaoliu. What's in the sky? 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Suddenly, there were some sounds coming from the second-floor terrace of Gate C, resembling bird calls intermittently. Then, a halo appeared on the ceiling of the terrace, and everyone saw the artist continuously jumping up, attempting to touch the halo on the ceiling. However, the halo kept moving slightly, and the artist kept jumping until he was exhausted. Finally, he stood at the edge of the terrace, threw down a black paper airplane, and then left, concluding the performance.

Figure 29

Li Chaoliu. What's in the sky? 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

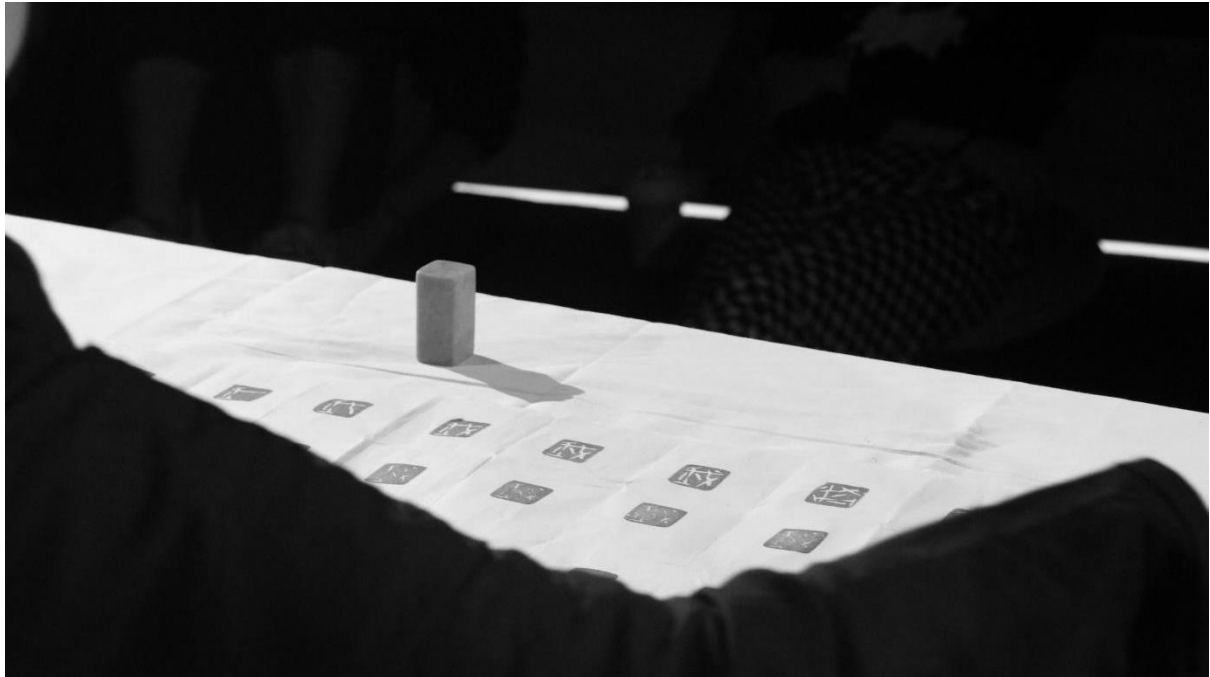
Li Chaoliu's performance is a conceptual exploration that transcends traditional notions of performance art. Focused on the concept of perception, the artist strategically distances himself from the audience, creating an intriguing dynamic. The very title, prompting spectators to gaze skyward, becomes a catalyst for shared contemplation and dialogue. The intermittent bird calls from the second-floor terrace enhance the atmospheric quality, creating an ambiance of uncertainty and intrigue.

Through the discussion with the artist, I found that he relentlessly attempts to touch the moving halo through continuous jumps symbolising a metaphorical pursuit of understanding (Figure 29). The climactic moment, marked by the artist standing at the terrace's edge and releasing a black paper airplane, carries profound symbolism. It signifies a moment of revelation, departure, or the acceptance of the limitations of knowledge. The documentation of this performance should emphasise the conceptual underpinnings rather than the visual-audio documentation. By documenting this conceptual journey, the work invites audiences to delve into the complexities of cognition, challenging them to confront the transience and ambiguity inherent in the pursuit of understanding and delve into the realms of philosophy and epistemology.

Another example of a performance art piece exploring concepts can be found in Wang Xiyue's work. By analysing the utilisation and expression of these concepts within the artwork, we can better understand and archive the piece. On October 24th, 2023, artist Wang Xiyue enacted her performance artwork *Anataman* (Figure 30, 31, 32) at A4 Art museum Chengdu, China. The intention is to depict the journey from non-existence to existence to regression into nothingness. A long table is set with a single stone placed at its centre, the toolkit by its side, while the performer sits in stillness, awaiting the arrival of the audience. An entire piece of paper is spread out in the middle of the table. The performer begins by carving "I" (我) into the stone and imprinting it onto the paper. After carving the character "I" (我), it is polished, continuing until the stone is entirely smooth. In quiet contemplation, the paper is then folded, and the performer ignites it using a pottery bowl. After a moment of stillness, the artist stands and removes her coat, exiting the space. This performance seeks to convey the transformation from nothing to something, leaving behind a trace of the self and ultimately returning to the void.

Figure 30

Wang Xiyue. Anataman 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Figure 31

Wang Xiyue. Anataman 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Figure 32

Wang Xiyue. *Anataman* 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Wang Xiyue's performance art piece *Anataman* is a conceptual journey from non-existence to existence that eventually regresses into nothingness. The act of carving the character "I" (我) onto the stone becomes a pivotal moment in the conceptual trajectory. It symbolises the emergence of self, the assertion of identity, and the imprinting of one's existence onto the canvas of reality. The subsequent act of polishing the stone until it achieves smoothness suggests a continuous refinement and contemplation of the self, reflecting an ongoing process of self-discovery and introspection. The folding and ignition of the paper signify a transformative moment, where the constructed identity is consumed by flames, symbolising the transient nature of existence and the inevitability of dissolution. As the artist exits the space after removing her coat, it symbolises a return to the void or

nothingness, completing the cycle of existence. Through these symbolic gestures and ritualistic action, *Anataman* prompts viewers to contemplate the ephemeral nature of life, the construction of identity, and the eternal cycle of creation and destruction inherent in the human experience. In conceptual terms, *Anataman* articulates a nuanced understanding of the self, its fleeting journey through existence, and the cyclical nature of creation and dissolution. It prompts viewers to contemplate the impermanence of identity and the profound implications of transience, inviting them to engage with the metaphysical dimensions of the human experience.

In the realm of performance art, scholars and artists often prioritise the documentation of visual and auditory artifacts, using these documents to reconstruct past live experiences. However, the conceptual analysis of the works is frequently overlooked. People seem primarily interested in understanding what happened. Through the cases of Li Chaoliu and Wang Xiyue, it becomes evident that exploring concept-driven works encourages a shift in focus towards conceptual understanding. The analysis of these concepts become crucial for retaining the essence and intellectual depth of the works.

The significance lies in acknowledging that, unlike visual or auditory impressions, conceptual elements have the potential to resonate across different times and cultural backgrounds. They become threads connecting performances to broader dialogues about identity, existence, and the essence of life cycles. By recognising the importance of conceptual analysis, we acknowledge that the knowledge and philosophical dimensions elevate performance art beyond mere spectacle, fostering a deeper understanding that transcends the temporal boundaries of live performances.

Smell

On October 24, 2023, artist Li Joy implemented her work *Hunter* (Figure 33) in the Nong Yuan Art Village, Chengdu, China. The artist provided a written text explaining aspects of her work:

In my arms, transparent and graceful tendrils extend from the elbows, adorned with miniature lanterns commonly seen in night fishing and jingling bells. In this movement, I amplify the extension of my body's vitality, allowing the tremors and sounds produced by the slender limbs to visually

manifest the ripples of my bodily movement. At the same time, a fragrant stream flows from my right wrist, cascading down along the fingertips, its mysterious origin unknown to others. As I gracefully stroll through the space, I engage in a dance of interaction with the audience. Droplets fall onto their bodies, our hands briefly clasp in fleeting moments, and the liquid glides over their palms, all while the intoxicating fragrance permeates the air. The initial inspiration for this performance came from a desire to emulate the grand crystal chandeliers and decorations in the lobby of the Grand Lisboa Hotel—a symbol of wealth and fragility intertwined with enchanting charm (Li, 2023).

Figure 33

Li Joy. Hunter, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

In the immersive performance piece *Hunter* by artist Li Joy, the incorporation of smell adds a unique and distinctive layer to the sensory experience. The artist introduces a fragrant stream flowing from her wrist, a mysterious olfactory element that becomes an integral part of the performance. The documentation of smell in this performance becomes a potent vehicle for memory creation. As droplets fall onto the bodies of the audience, and their hands briefly clasp, the lingering fragrance serves as a sensory imprint, anchoring the experience in the participants' memories. The documentation of this interaction becomes a testament to the

immediacy of performance art, where the audience is not just a passive observer but an active participant in the creation of sensory memories.

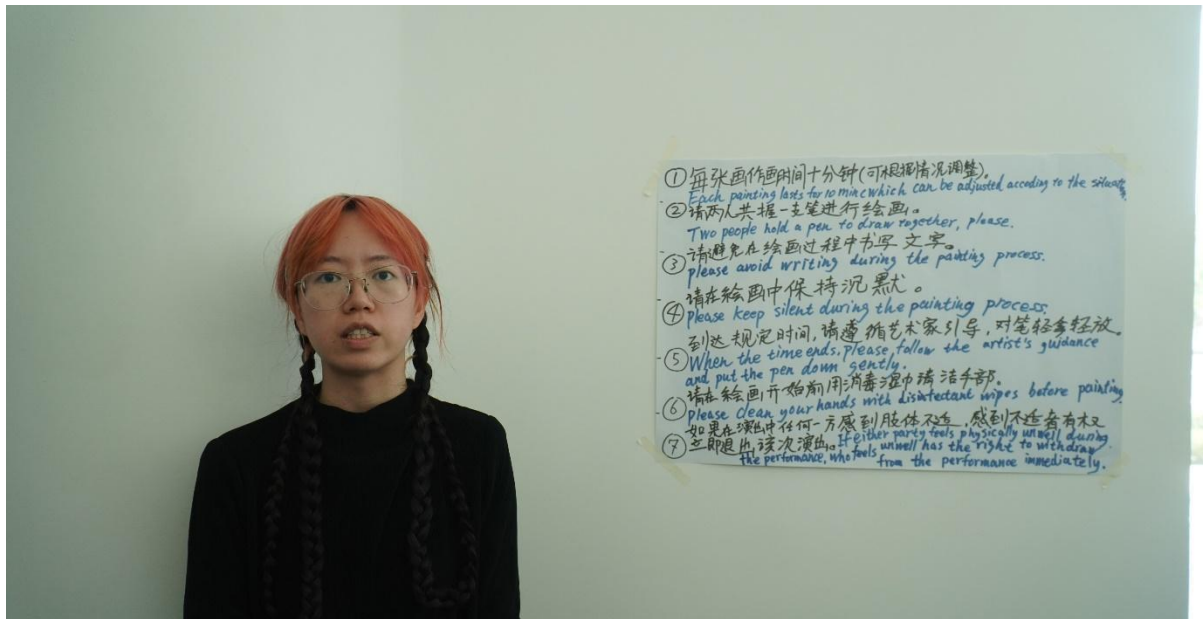
Li Joy incorporates scent into her performance art, posing challenges for both its documentation and archival preservation. To enable future audiences to experience the scents used by the artist during live performances, I have negotiated with the artist to obtain samples of some of “these perfumes”. These perfumes will be displayed to the future audiences in the experimental curatorial project illustrated in Chapter Four. In this context, audiences will be invited to take a sniff and write down their descriptions of the scents, along with any thoughts or stories it may evoke. This audience engagement aims to enrich the archival dimension of Joy’s performance art work. By doing so, the documentation aims to preserve not just the visual or auditory components but also the nuanced and evocative quality of scent as well as the audience memories, allowing future audiences and researchers to understand and experience a more comprehensive representation of the original performance. The next section will delve into the analysis of the objects used in performance art works, or generated during the implementation of the work, examining its documentation role.

Objects

On October 22, 2023, artist Xu Meiyu staged her work, *Pairing Painting Practice* (Figure 35) at the Guang Hui Art Museum in Chengdu, China. She set up seven instructions (Figure 34) and then invited a member of the audience to draw with her.

Figure 34

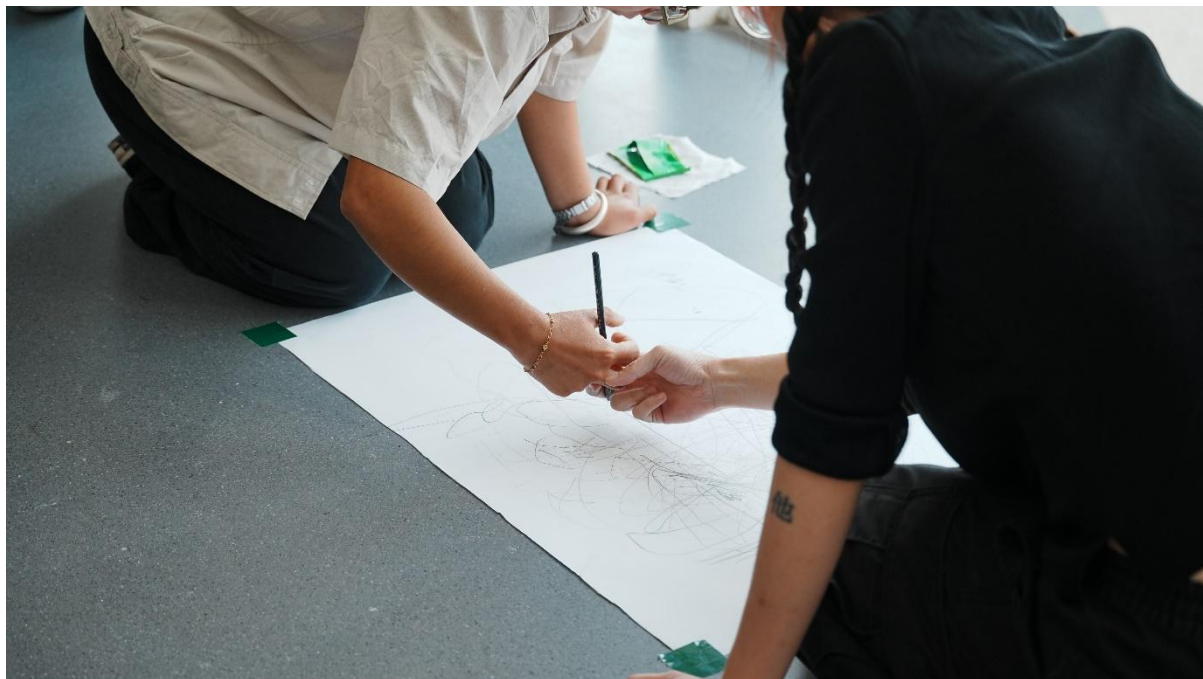
Xu Meiyu. Pair Painting Practice, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Figure 35

Xu Meiyu. Pair Painting Practice, 2023

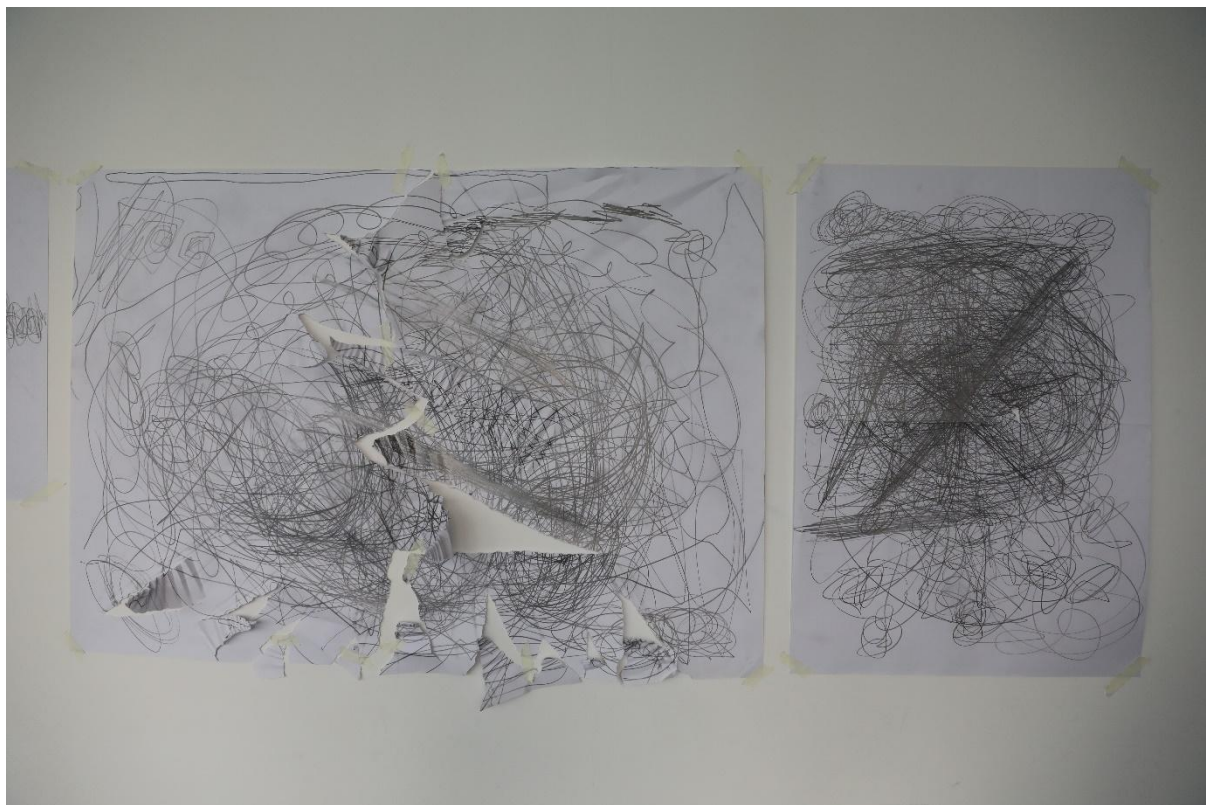


Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Pairing Painting Practice by artist Xu Meiyu offers a unique exploration of collaboration and resistance within the realm of art. By inviting an audience member to join her in a painting exercise, Xu Meiyu transforms the act of creation into a shared experience, challenging traditional notions of authorship and individual expression. The unconventional grip on the pen underscores the performative aspect of the interaction, emphasising the physicality and intimacy of the collaborative process. Throughout the 10-minute duration, participants engage in a silent dialogue characterised by subtle power dynamics and mutual cooperation. The physical act of painting becomes a metaphor for broader themes of negotiation and compromise, as both individuals navigate their respective roles in the creative endeavour. The tension between cooperation and resistance is palpable, revealing the complexities inherent in collaborative artmaking.

Figure 36

Xu Meiyu. Pair Painting Practice Performance Art Documentation



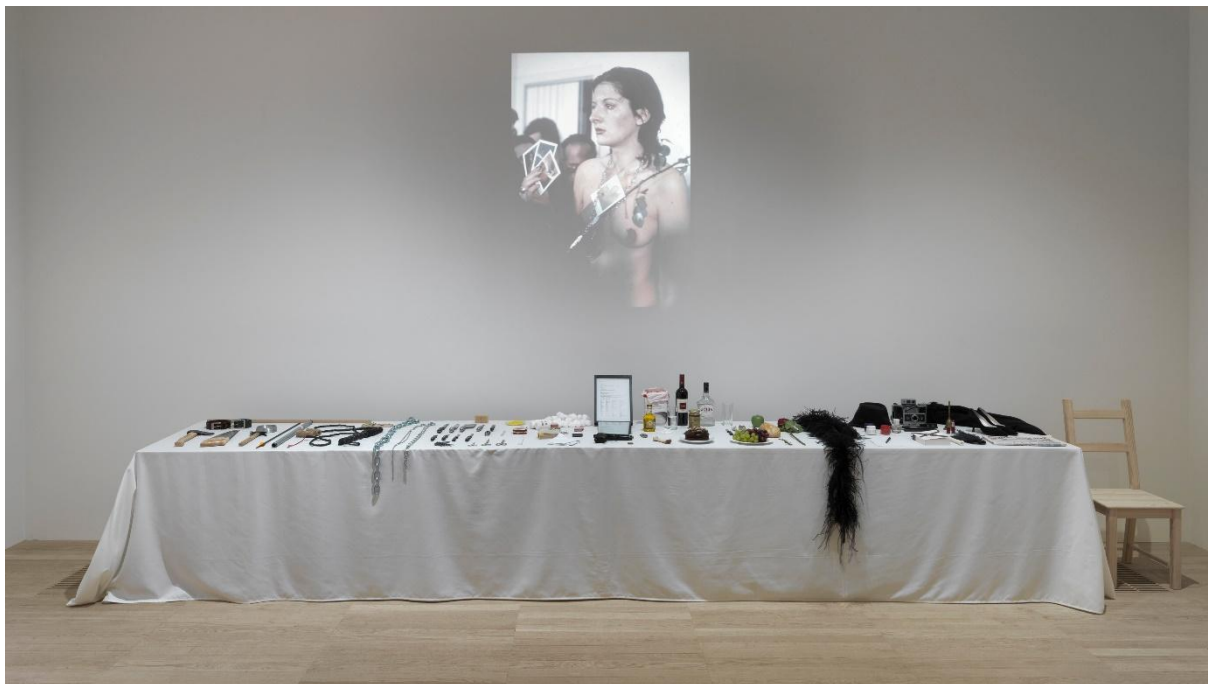
Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Upon completion, the resulting paintings (Figure 36) serve as tangible artifacts of the performance, capturing the energy and emotion imbued within the collaborative process.

Unlike photographs or videos, these paintings offer a unique glimpse into the ephemeral nature of live art, preserving not only the final outcome but also the journey of creation itself. As objects imbued with the traces of human interaction, the paintings transcend their status as mere documentation, becoming powerful reminders of the shared experience and the connections forged between artist and audience. It is evident from the image that we can sense and associate the trajectory of the balance and tension of power between the artist and participants during the execution of the artwork, leading to the torn and tattered state of the paper. This is an intriguing attempt by the artist to visualise the process of performance art implementation and produce artifacts.

Figure 37

Marina Abramovic, Rhythm 0, 1974



Note. Installation. Table with 72 objects and slide projector with slides of performance and text. Overall display dimensions variable. © Marina Abramovic. Image courtesy of Tate. Retrieved from: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/abramovic-rhythm-0-t14875>

Objects have featured prominently in the history of performance art; they often possess a certain special power – a performative and mnemonic quality. To some extent, these objects can possess autonomous characteristics while also serving as carriers of memory. Among the numerous performance art documentation materials, noteworthy ‘objects’ used in

performance art works include the props, knives and guns used by Marina Abramović in *Rhythm 0* (1974) (Figure 37). These objects possess qualities of reminiscence. As artist Sam Trubridge mentions in an interview: “the objects around a performance are powerful because they carry a charge or a spirituality. Sometimes, they are just as powerful as the artwork itself, and they continue to perform in different ways, much like why people love to collect shoes worn by Elvis Presley during his concerts” (Interview, 2023). It seems that the objects used in performances are imbued with a status similar to ‘relics’ in Catholicism and Buddhism. These objects can evoke memories and serve as triggers to develop people’s associative abilities. To achieve this, artists must infuse the objects “with a charge” to “transmit energy” in a manner similar to how relics touched by saints are believed to carry spiritual power (Gygax, 2010). In this context, the objects used in performance art become more than just props; they acquire a symbolic and transformative value.

As Gygax (2010) suggests, the use and generation of objects in performance expand the potential of the performance art archive and serve as precise memory loci. Dorothea Rust considers these objects as “extensions of the body,” with her body being seen as an “extension of the material” (Rust, as cited in Grau et al., 2012, p. 33). Additionally, artifacts of the object/material present the nature of fluidity (p. 62). This is because the materials or objects used or generated in a performance do not automatically constitute archives but gain their status based on the background or significance attributed to them by relevant agents and theorists.

In the past few decades, discussions about performance art archives have evolved. Today, the primary focus is no longer on the completeness and authenticity of archives. Instead, people are accessing performances through various means to convey knowledge and information. Although this knowledge and information are fragmentary, they still contribute to the understanding of the performance. In a sense, it can be said that archives extend the life of a performance. It is important to emphasise that we always need to consider the context to understand a work, as the information conveyed by any individual document is limited. In the next section, I will analyse performances that were re-enacted during the festival, examining the effectiveness of re-enactment as a method for documenting performance art.

Re-Enactment

On October 19th, 2023, New Zealand performance artist Sam Trubridge embarked on the reenactment of his work *Night Walk* (Figure 38, 39), in a new location, in the fields outside the Chengdu Nongyuan Art District, continuing his exploration of nomadic states and landscape interactions. Sam wrapped himself in a giant black plastic bag, and with the assistance of staff, he used an air pump to inflate the bag until it was fully filled. Then he began to move within this sphere. For Sam, this was a unique experiment, as he had never before implemented a piece in a field, which was scattered with some garbage, corn stalks, weeds, and animal faeces.

Figure 38

Sam Trubridge. Night Walk, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

The performance lasted for about 20 minutes, and as Sam continued to move within the sphere, the outer layer of plastic film quickly became riddled with holes. Consequently, the once-round black sphere gradually deflated. From the perspective of the audience, Sam seemed to be struggling forward within this deflating black sphere. The performance attracted not only artists and scholars from the field but also many local residents (Figure 39), and even delivery workers couldn't resist stopping to watch.

Figure 39

Sam Trubridge. Night Walk, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

The original concept of *Night Walk* is a series of performance walks conducted as blind navigations in various locations, as part of the artist's ongoing study into nomadic states. The work maps the landscape through a negotiated passage through each terrain by the artist walking inside a large inflated sphere made from black plastic rubbish bags. As the journey proceeds, elemental forces and surfaces work at the thin plastic – thus transforming the confident architecture of the globe into a shredded artifact of the performance (Trubridge, 2023). Each walk is conducted as an act of blind passage, producing a dialogue with the terrains that it encounters. Surfaces, materials, spatial qualities, rhythms, and other movement

systems are imprinted upon the fragile black membrane: a dark intrusion creating alternative, non-linear, nomadic narratives in relation to landscapes. The condition of blindness reveals tensions between the body and the geological, geographic, cultural, technological, and architectural terrains that are encountered.

By reenacting *Night Walk* in different locations, Trubridge not only revisits the original concept but also reshapes it to fit the context of each site. The act of reenactment becomes a process of reinterpretation, allowing for new insights and discoveries with each iteration. Through his embodied engagement with the landscape, Trubridge navigates a dialogue between the physical and conceptual realms, exploring the intersections of human presence and environmental forces.

Crucially, the documentation of these reenactments serves as an important record of Trubridge's artistic journey, capturing the evolution of *Night Walk* across time and space. Through photographs, videos, and written accounts, Trubridge preserves the sensory experiences and conceptual explorations inherent in each performance, ensuring that the essence of the work is captured and shared with audiences beyond the immediate site of enactment. Each reenactment adds depth to the ongoing conversation with the surrounding landscape, embodiment, and the nomadic experience, enriching our understanding of the interplay between art and environment.

Meanwhile, in addition to analysing the performance art works that explore the concept of re-enactment and documentation methods at the festival, the classic case of Marina Abramović, who uses re-enactment as a medium and practice for documentation, is also worth revisiting. Her iconic exploration of re-enactment provides valuable insight into this method of documentation. Marina Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005) explores the concept of re-enactment, by addressing the challenge of documenting performances from a critical early period, where limited documentation relied on testimonies and partial photographs. Abramović's exploration challenges traditional notions of documentation and preservation, raising questions about the possibilities and limitations of re-enactment and archival practices in capturing the essence of live performances.

From 9-15 November 2005, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum presented *Marina Abramović: Seven Easy Pieces*, featuring seven consecutive nights of performances in the Frank Lloyd Wright Rotunda from 5 pm to 12 am. Marina Abramović, a pioneer in the use of performance as a visual art form since the early 1970s, has consistently centred her work around her body as both subject and medium. The early works were defined by her endurance, as she explored the physical and mental limits of her being, enduring pain, exhaustion, and danger in the pursuit of transformation. In *Seven Easy Pieces*, Abramović re-enacts seminal performance works by her peers from the 1960s and 70s, including Bruce Nauman's *Body Pressure* (1974); Vito Acconci's *Seedbed* (1972); VALIE EXPORT's *Action Pants: Genital Panic* (1969); Gina Pane's *The Conditioning, first action of Self-Portrait(s)* (1973); Joseph Beuys' *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965). The exhibition also included work by *Abramović* herself, including *Lips of Thomas* (1975) and *Entering the Other Side* (2005). The project addressed the challenge of limited documentation for most performances from this critical early period, often relying on testimonies from witnesses or partial photographs. The artists highlight that the first performances were not even recorded, as many of these early practitioners believed that any documentation (video or photos) could not replace the authenticity of the real experience of 'being there' live in the early 1970s. However, later Abramović notes how their attitudes shifted: "We felt the need to leave traces of events for a larger audience" (2007, p. 9). This exploration questions the possibility of re-enacting and preserving an art form inherently ephemeral in nature.

Body Pressure is a conceptual and performance art hybrid created by American artist Bruce Nauman in 1974.⁴ The work invites the audience to become performers, with a pink poster providing a series of instructions. The performer or viewer is instructed to press "as much of the front surface of your body [...] against the wall as possible", then to "press very hard and concentrate [...] think how various parts of your body press against the wall, which parts touch and which do not" (Nauman, 1974).

⁴ Bruce Nauman, *Body Pressure*, 1974. Photo: Friedrich Christian Flick Collection, Centre: Jacob Birken. <https://www.warmenhoven-venderbos.com/body-pressure-conceptual-performance-art-by-bruce-nauman/>

On November 9, 2005, Abramović re-enacted Bruce Nauman's *Body Pressure*, pushing her body forcefully against a glass wall.⁵ This action was repeated every five minutes for seven hours from 5 pm to midnight. During the performance, a pre-recorded announcement by Abramović was played while her facial expression remained static (Takac, 2020). Nauman chose a wall to emphasise the artist's inability to see the other side (Takac, 2020), while Abramović opted for glass. In Abramović's re-enactment of Bruce Nauman's work, she did not merely replicate Nauman's piece. As Santone (2008) notes: Marina Abramović specifically plans and incorporates differences into the work, recording variations in a voiceover as she reads the text. This repeated performance with variations reflects her open interpretation of Nauman's text. Indeed, these reinterpretations of performances can be seen as echoes of a specific moment in the past, rather than comprehensive reproductions of the original works. This raises important considerations in relation to the concepts of replication and repetition.

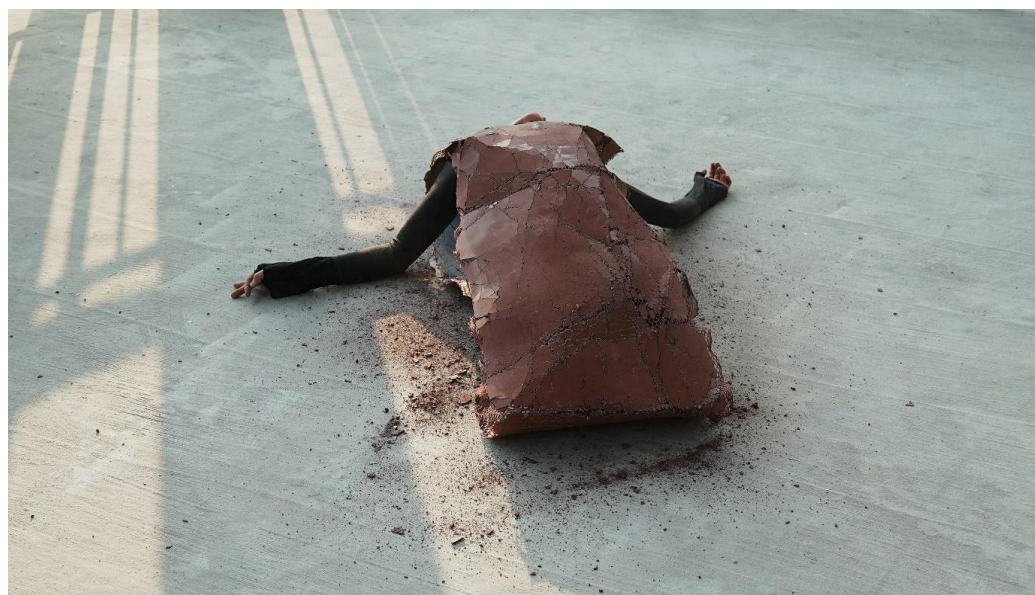
Another Artist, Katja Schenker, from 11th UPON International Live Art Festival also explored the concept of re-enactment. On 22 October, Zurich performance art artist Katja Schenker reenacted her work *Dress* (Figure 40, 41) at the Guang Hui Art Museum in Chengdu, China – a work that enacts a transformative experience that transcends temporal and spatial boundaries. Despite originally being performed on 15 April 2023 in Zurich, the essence of the performance is reincarnated through reenactment, inviting audiences to engage with its timeless themes and evocative imagery once again.

In the live performance at Guang Hui Art Museum Schenker walks in a concrete garment ensnared within a pristine fishing net. The artist wears a skirt made of fishing nets and concrete. Through a series of movements such as shifting, twisting, bending, and more, the skirt continues to break and fracture. The artist explains that as she moves, the concrete's surface begins to crack in harmony with the net, with certain fragments falling to the floor, symbolising the transient unity of the tangible and the ephemeral. This could be also seen as a metaphor for the constraints and limitations imposed by societal structures, breaking free and expressing resilience through the performance.

⁵ Marina Abramović, *Reenacts Bruce Nauman's Body Pressure at The Guggenheim*, 2005. <https://www.widewalls.ch/magazine/marina-abramovic-seven-easy-pieces-guggenheim>

Figure 40

Katja Schenker. Dress, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Figure 41

Katja Schenker. Dress, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Through the reenactment, Schenker's performance becomes a dialogue between past and present, Zurich and Chengdu, as well as the individual and the collective. As she navigates the space ensnared within a skirt crafted from fishing nets and concrete, Schenker embodies the tension between fragility and strength, permanence and transience. Each movement, whether shifting, twisting, or bending, echoes the original performance, yet carries with it the nuances of the present moment.

The reenactment of *Dress* serves not only as a replication of a past event but also as a reinterpretation in a new context. By adapting the performance to the Guang Hui Art Museum, Schenker invites viewers to reconsider the work's themes of constraint, resilience, and liberation within the framework of a different cultural and spatial landscape. The cracks and fractures in the concrete skirt, symbolising the breaking free from societal structures, take on new significance as they unfold in Chengdu, resonating with local audiences in ways that may differ from the original Zurich performance. By revisiting and reimagining "*Dress*" in a new setting, Schenker extends an invitation for audiences to participate in a shared journey of contemplation, transformation, and renewal.

Re-enactment is a term that has become more and more popular in art, theatre and performance fields in the late 20th and early 21st century (Schneider, 2011). The purpose of archiving and documenting performance art is not only to write about history but also to re-use it so that the audience can feel the experience of the performance art work again. Schneider (2011) emphasises the relationship between re-performance and live performance, suggesting that re-enactment is possible to expand our understanding of performance art. Julius (2021) also notes the importance of re-enactment, suggesting that performance does not always disappear completely, but can become a more permanent entity maintained by re-performance. Julius compares the differences between the term *re-performance* and *re-enactment*. The term re-enactment implies an intentional attempt to recreate past performances as accurately as possible, yet the term re-performance includes performances that do not necessarily repeat the performance movements of the original (Julius, 2021). As Sasse (2020, p. 1) states: "working artistically with re-enactments of performances can explore the repeatability of ephemeral events". Neither re-enactment nor re-performance can

define and bridge the distance from the past, but it still has a positive impact, although “the act or thing that is copied (or reconstructed or re-enacted) will never be quite the same as the emulated act or thing on which it was supposedly modelled”, this situation creates opportunities to undermine or critique underlying models and ideologies (Kalshoven, 2012, p. 77).

The artist Lv Desheng and director Zhou Bin provide interesting insights into Marina Abramović’s series of re-enactment. Lv Desheng sees these re-enactments more as a form of education in art history aiming to introduce the era of performance art to new audiences. They are not merely reproductions, nor do they represent entirely new artworks, lacking artistic breakthroughs and innovations. Some works, like Richard Long’s *A Line Made by Walking* (1967), may not require re-enactment as they were simple actions, such as walking back and forth in a field. However, some re-enactments indeed transform into new artworks, surpassing the original in certain aspects. This phenomenon is intriguing because, unlike theatre and dance, it does not usually seek refinement through repetition (Interview, 2023).

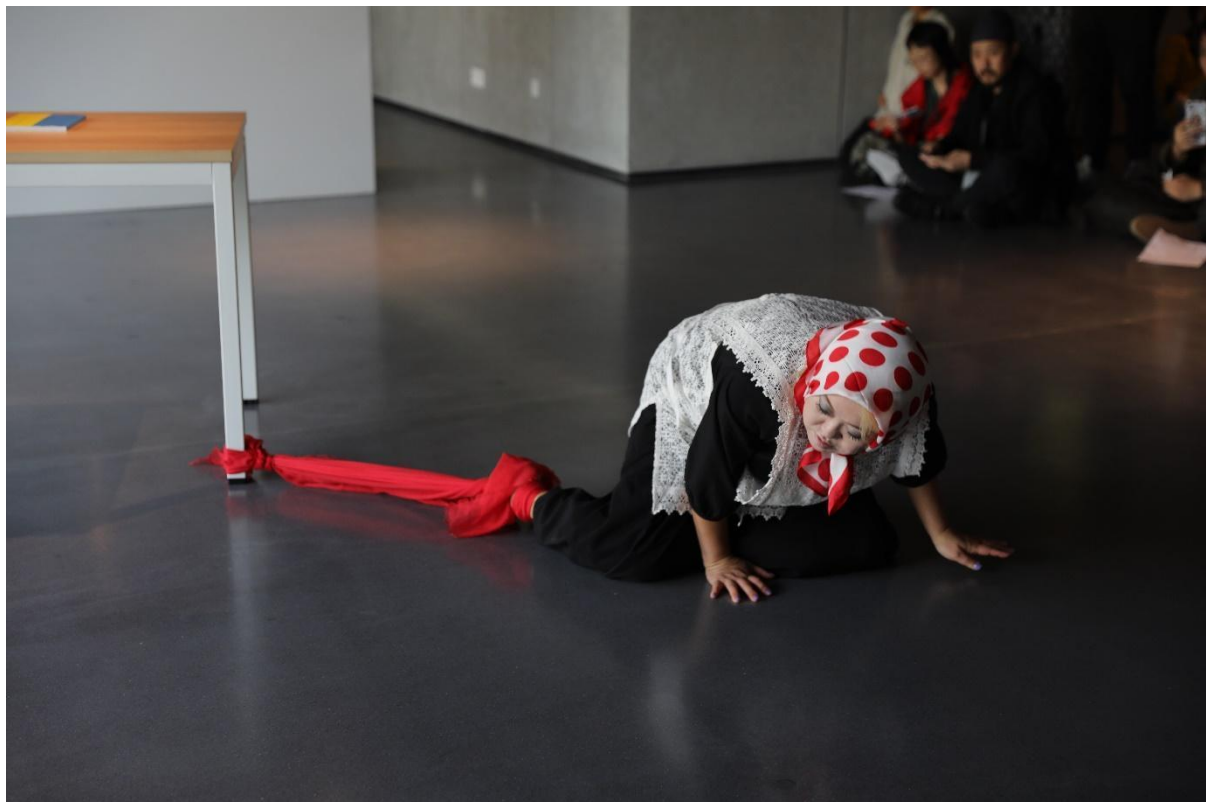
Zhou Bin, director of the UPON Performance Art Archive in China, expresses reservations about re-enactment. He emphasises that performance art occurs in specific times and places, with the execution of a work being embedded in the social and environmental context of that time. Secondly, re-enactment involves repetition, a concept more commonly associated with theatre or dance. For Zhou Bin, conceptual performance art pieces have already conveyed their ideas after the initial execution, making re-enactment unnecessary and lacking in creativity. He considers re-enactment only in cases where external factors significantly disrupted the original presentation of a work.

For Marina Abramović (2007), the only true method of documenting performance art is to reenact the work itself. However, it is important to note that whether a work can be re-enacted depends on various factors. Nonetheless, to some extent, re-enactment offers a dynamic and living document as a solution to the vanishing of the past. It allows for the re-experience of a work in a time-based, body-based, and fleeting medium, presenting new opportunities for memory (Santone, 2018).

On 22 October 2023, Yeonjeong performed her work *Re'FormanceI: Semiotics of The Kitchen* (Figure 42, 43) in the tea area on the first floor of the Guanghui Art Museum, Chengdu, China. Her performance lasted approximately 30 minutes during which a table was placed in the centre of the dining hall containing various props she had prepared in advance. The letters A to Z were woven throughout her entire performance. She wore a white lace apron and a red and white polka dot headscarf, taking out items such as a can of beer, a can of gum, a cup of water, and a piece of red fabric from her pocket. She then stood on a high kitchen counter, interpreting the meanings of A to Z through each item. For example, she would loudly exclaim “B” for “Beer” and “W” for “WAR,” and so on. When she reached “N,” she took out red lipstick, drew the letter N on her face, then forcefully opened her mouth with both hands, producing the sound of N.

Figure 42

Yeonjeong. Re'FormanceI: Semiotics of The Kitchen, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Figure 43

Yeonjeong. Re'Formance I: Semiotics of The Kitchen, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Semiotics of the Kitchen (1975) is a pioneering piece in feminist art history created by Martha Rosler, challenging traditional gender roles and domestic expectations through a symbolic exploration of kitchen utensils. Yeonjeong's reenactment of this iconic performance pays homage to Rosler's original while infusing it with her own interpretation and contemporary context. Yeonjeong's reenactment of *Semiotics of the Kitchen* by Martha Rosler can be viewed as a reinterpretation and homage to Rosler's seminal work. While *Semiotics of the Kitchen* is a feminist critique of traditional gender roles and domestic labour, Yeonjeong's

performance appears to explore similar themes of language, symbolism, and the performative nature of everyday objects.

In *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, Martha Rosler uses kitchen utensils to symbolise the oppression and confinement of women within domestic spaces. Through her exaggerated gestures and the alphabetical progression of items, Yeonjeong similarly transforms mundane objects into symbols of communication and expression. However, while Rosler's performance is marked by a sense of frustration and rebellion against societal norms, Yeonjeong's interpretation appears to incorporate elements of playfulness and whimsy.

The use of props such as a can of beer, a cup of water, and red fabric in Yeonjeong's reenactment may evoke the domestic setting and gendered associations present in Rosler's original performance. However, Yeonjeong's actions, such as drawing letters on her face with lipstick and attempting to drag the table forward while tied to it with the red fabric, introduce a sense of individual agency and subversion. These gestures may suggest a more light-hearted approach to challenging established norms and conventions.

Overall, while both performances share thematic elements related to language, symbolism, and gendered spaces, Yeonjeong's reenactment offers a contemporary reinterpretation that infuses Rosler's critique with elements of humour and personal expression. Through her playful exploration of the alphabet and everyday objects, Yeonjeong invites viewers to reconsider the significance of domesticity, communication, and agency in the context of contemporary society.

This section has analysed the potential of different media for documenting performance art. However, when these archives are exhibited in museums and gallery spaces, new challenges arise. The positioning of performance art archives in these spaces can be ambiguous, sometimes carefully curated as collections and other times made available as archival documents for public access. Therefore, it is worth further exploring how audience engage in shaping and interpreting this documentation.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter establishes a foundational understanding of archives and the documenting methods for performance art. Documenting involves capturing live performances in various forms, producing materials that serve different functions throughout the performance life cycle. Archiving, however, refers to the systematic process of curating and preserving these documents for long-term access and historical value.

This chapter discussed the ontological and phenomenological debates regarding performance art and its documentation which were particularly intense in the 1990s. Phelan argued that the essence of performance art lies solely in the present moment and cannot be captured or preserved in any way. On the contrary, Auslander contended that the performative nature of performance art is constituted by its archives, and the existence of these archives serves as evidence of the occurrence of performance art. Rather than advocating for a binary choice between these perspectives, I have emphasised the importance of performance art archives for future audiences and scholars. By examining Michael Kirby's pioneering documentation practices, I have demonstrated how these archives serve as vital tools for preserving the essence of live performances, providing the foundation for continued engagement and scholarly inquiry.

Through my practical documentation project at the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival and further analysis of different documenting methods I employed – including photography, videography, written texts, and oral memories – I have illustrated that each medium offers distinct functionalities in performance art documentation. Photography captures frozen moments, while video can offer a more comprehensive view of the performance process, while written documentation provides theoretical and personal insights that may contain omissions. When combined, these diverse forms of documentation enhance the generative potential of performance art archives, transforming them into dynamic spaces for ongoing engagement and knowledge creation. This aligns with the concept of the transnational performative archive, which will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Four. While performance art archives inherently aim to connect with the live moment, they no longer merely serve as substitutes for events or as evidence of what occurred. Instead, they function as vehicles for knowledge creation—whether through photographs, texts, recordings, re-enactments, or audience participation—bridging the present with the past and the future.

Building on the dynamic, ever-evolving nature of performance art and its documentation, the next chapter will focus specifically on the role and significance of the audience in the documentation and archiving process. The chapter aims to show how traditional paradigms might be challenged by inviting the audience to actively participate in shaping the narrative of performance art history.

Chapter Three: Collaborative Documentation: Engaging Audiences in Performance Art Archives

Introduction

This chapter explores my efforts to find innovative documentation methods that provide opportunities for audience engagement, experience and creativity in the process of documenting performance art. This chapter explores the concept of collaborative documentation, where multiple participants – including audiences, artists, curators, and others – contribute to the creation and preservation of records or archives related to a performance. It will examine how this approach contrasts with traditional documentation methods, which often rely on a single authoritative voice, typically that of the artist or a professional documentarian. Through collaborative documentation, the diverse perspectives and experiences of all involved are recognised, potentially leading to a richer, more nuanced archive that reflects the multifaceted nature of live performance art. The chapter will also consider how this method highlights the significance of collective memory and participatory culture, focusing on the role of audiences not just as passive observers but as active co-creators in the archival process. This chapter aims to explore the possibilities of audience engagement in the documentation and conservation of performance art, reflecting on these emerging practices and contributing to the development of documenting methods that accommodate future research and exploration. As recent studies have revealed that audiences have frequently been systematically “cynically, sidelined, undermined, and alienated” (Walmsley, 2019, p. 2), this chapter, therefore, is guided by the imperative to advocate for the voice of audiences, the inquiry will examine the viability of public engagement in preservation practices and explore how such practices might benefit performance art conservation.

This chapter will explore specific cases from the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival in Chengdu, China, 2023, highlighting how audiences creatively engaged in documenting their experiences through sketches, artistic texts, and oral memories. These case studies are not intended to be comprehensive examples of audience creativity in performance art documentation, but rather to serve as a starting point for inspiring artists, archivists, and researchers to consider the potential of audience engagement in the documentation process. The chapter will examine how such involvement can foster experiential creativity and challenge traditional archival paradigms. By addressing the importance of audience engagement, the chapter aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on performance art documentation. It proposes that actively involving audiences in the documentation process can lead to more dynamic and comprehensive archives, capturing a fuller representation of the performance art experience.

While the previous chapter explored the documentation of performance art, this chapter focuses on the critical yet challenging task of capturing the audience's emotions, experiences, and engagement in live moments and events. Understanding and documenting the audience's role is essential for comprehensively preserving the essence of performance art. As Zangwill (1999) noted, "knowledge of the audience would thus seem to be central not only to the practice of the performing arts, but also to arts scholarship" (p. 315). However, the audience remains a silent majority in the history of performance art – much discussed but rarely heard (Muller, 2010). As Dunne (2015, p. 50) notes, there are limitations to the generative potential of archives because they overly rely on the 'authenticating function' of archival documents. This is understandable as audiences are rarely asked about their experiences and feelings, thus frequently being overlooked. In recent years, the lack of agency for the audience has become a focal point of attention, as scholars gradually realise that archives do not entirely represent the past but rather generate narratives and interpretations for historians and researchers. Because audiences lack a platform to express their firsthand experiences of witnessing performances, the voices of archivists and research scholars become more authoritative than those of the original participants. Historians and researchers often function as unconscious readers, consistently reading materials they have never personally experienced, creating a more objective distance from the material.

As the number of performance art and time-based art events has increased, preservation practices have increasingly focused on preserving the audience's perspective (Kolokythopoulou, 2019), attracting significant attention from scholars (Freshwater, 2009; Giannachi, 2017), Vivian van Saaze (2015) argues that for works whose activation – and augmentation – depends on audience engagement, it is essential to involve audiences in the documentation process. According to Muller (2008, p. 3), although capturing audience perspectives can be partial and challenging, these accounts are valuable for forming subjective interpretations of a piece because they highlight the participants' role and their place in the “interaction, systems, and generative processes” of the artwork.

Given the ephemeral nature of live performance, practitioners focus on recording methods that aim to accurately capture the live events. The most established approaches to live performance documentation are photographic or video records, with oral and textual descriptions being used less frequently. Collections and exhibitions of live performance documentation primarily feature visually oriented documents. Museums may also display tangible remnants used in the live performance, like props and costumes. These items serve to demonstrate that the live event occurred, representing the artist's presence and contribution, whether through their vision or corporeal presence (Kolokythopoulou, 2019). What the audience witnessed and experienced has been lost. Somlingski (2011) states that, in this cultural field, an array of critical positions and theoretical paradigms often occlude the participatory and have yet to adequately acknowledge how the audience might experience creativity and occupy the role of artist. Caroline Heim (2010) similarly observed that the active role of the audience has been significantly “undervalued” in contemporary practice, as they have often been treated as “a homogeneous mass incapable of creativity” (p.1) or as lacking a “unique personality” (p. 21), recognising that audiences are “living, dynamic and heterogeneous” and contribute “crucial meanings” to performances. It is evident that the meaning produced within an archive is shaped by both the documents it preserves and those it omits. This underscores the importance of incorporating the audience's voice in performance art archives.

In the evolving landscape of performance art, traditional roles of artist and audience are undergoing a profound transformation. As Bishop (2023) describes, the artist is increasingly seen not as an individual creator of discrete objects but as a collaborator and producer of situations. The artwork, traditionally viewed as a finite, portable, and commodifiable product,

is now reconceived as an ongoing or long-term project with an indeterminate beginning and end. Concurrently, the audience, once regarded as mere “viewers” or “beholders”, is now repositioned as co-producers or participants (Bishop, 2023, p.2). Reason adds that “the unthinking, unblinking eye of passive consumption can only be countered by ensuring that spectators are actively processing and evaluating their experiences and, as a result, become cultural producers of meaning” (Reason, 2013, p. 110).

The evolving role of the audience in performance documentation reveals that performance is not solely defined by the live event, nor is documentation merely a retrospective process. Instead, performance undergoes significant transformations through the continuous reinterpretation of its documentation over time. Each act of documenting an audience’s reception can generate a new history of performance, where works are perceived as dynamic processes and networks rather than static products (Giannachi, 2017). Stuart Comer highlights in his interview that a work may take “multiple forms through its history.” To access these histories, Comer suggests considering the “audience as archive” (cited in Giannachi, 2017, p.187). Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor supports this view, proposing that viewing the audience as an archive involves the documentation of intangible practices, including behaviors, which can provide an alternative performance history “based on memory, events, and places rather than just documents” (Taylor, 2008, p. 91, 101). This alternative documentation approach would capture the relationships not only between artists and their audiences but also among different versions or interpretations of a work.

Helen Freshwater advocates for a cultural studies approach to audience research, emphasising that a more embedded approach highlights the individual positionality inherent in the audience experience. Cultural studies are characterised by rejecting the notion of “the audience” as a singular or homogeneous entity, instead engaging detailed interrogations of diverse and sometimes unexpected responses and adopting an ethnographic approach to the cultural conditions informing an individual’s viewing position (Freshwater, 2009, p. 28). Audience-generated documentation of performance can expand and facilitate revisiting and understanding the work in various ways, with audience memories of performance art being underutilised resources. Wishart (2018) underscores the necessity of considering the central role of audience experience in receiving and transmitting narratives that have been overlooked. Audience oral memories, which utilise the actual words and voices of those who witnessed history, document people and topics previously absent from historical records. This

approach also addresses the historical imbalance in performance art archives regarding the types of information that are recorded, valued, and made available for future generations.

These approaches place the audience at the centre of the documentation process, thereby implicitly interpreting a work as a social network of activities. This perspective suggests that documentation, much like performance, should encompass the various phases of these activities, with stakeholders from each phase revealing diverse aspects of the work through documentation. Ultimately, both performance and documentation consist of structures, involve practices, and lead to transference and documentation consisting of structure, involving practices, and leading to transformations, with each part capable of activating a whole that remains elusive, ephemeral, and ungraspable, much like life itself (Giannachi, 2017).

The recognition of audience-generated documents as a form of performance art documentation, which is useful for revisiting and expanding live performances in the present and future, indirectly acknowledges that documentation can originate from amateur sources as well as professional ones (Kolokythopoulou, 2019). Tiina Peil notes that recent practices involve non-specialists in producing knowledge, identifying this approach as part of what is commonly termed the “authorised heritage discourse” or institutionalised heritage politics (2014, p. 259). Joanna Bucknall and Kirsty Sedgman, writing in 2007, emphasise the value of documenting the audience experience and also note that performance documentation often excludes amateur voices or the audience’s perspective.

This chapter analyses the creative engagement of audience members in the process of documenting performance art and how this contributes to the concept of collaborative documentation and the construction of an inclusive performance art archive. It examines the innovative practices of documenting audience during the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival in Chengdu, China, 2023, and proposes that audiences can be regarded as co-documentarist of performance art. The analysis delves into specific cases observed and collected during the festival, including case studies from Tang Guo, Mao Zhu, Shao Ye, Alastair Mcleman, Brian Patterson, Shi Meixia, Zhu Fadong and Julie Monot. These cases exemplify the diverse ways in which audiences creatively produce sketches, artistic subjective texts and oral memories to capture the essence of the artworks they encountered. Each case study in this chapter is founded on my reflections on collaborative efforts with

audiences to explore the intrinsic value of cultural engagement, address questions surrounding theorising audience engagement, and gather meaningful creative documentation for archival purposes. These inquiries collectively contribute to advancing new perspectives on audience engagement in performance art and archival research. By examining these cases within an academic framework, this chapter seeks to contribute nuanced insights into the dynamics of audience engagement in performance art documentation. It aims to challenge traditional notions of documentation by highlighting the active role of audiences in shaping and enriching the archive of performance art history. It invites scholars and artists into the process of shaping and enriching the archive of performance art history. It invites scholars, artists and archivist in this field to rethink the established notion of the performance art document and the paradigm of its archives. It argues that audience engagement in contemporary practices generates collaborative documentation, providing innovative ways for audiences to ‘presence’ themselves in the archive and enabling a richer, more dynamic revisitation of past live performances as they continue to unfold.

Sketches: Capturing Moments in Ink and Imagination

In the dynamic realm of performance art, the role of the audience extends beyond passive observation to become an integral part of the documentation process. This section explores how audience-generated documentation – such as sketches and personal reflections – contributes to the understanding and preservation of ephemeral artworks. By examining specific instances of audience engagement, such as the creative interpretations of Tang Guo’s and Mao Zhu’s performances, it highlights the significance of collaborative documentation. This approach not only enriches traditional archival methods but also provides a deeper insight into the subjective experiences and personal meanings that shape our understanding of live art. Through these contributions, it challenges conventional documentation practices and advocates for a more inclusive and nuanced archival process.

On October 21, 2023, at A4 Art Museum in Chengdu, China, artist Tang Guo enacted a performance art work named *History is the trap of the scene, and the scene is the pie of history* (Figure 44, 45, 46). In the work, the audience gathers around the artist who is sitting on a large pink piece of fabric in the middle of which is a square mater of white canvas. Upon this canvas, diminutive materials are meticulously arranged by the artist, slowly coalescing into iconic masterpieces from art history. These include representations of Warhol’s *Banana*

(1966), Fontana's *Concetto Spaziale, Attese* (1960), Yayoi Kusama's *Ladder to Heaven* (1929), Eliasson's *The weather project* (2003), Joseph Beuys's *Explaining pictures to a dead hare* (1966), Yves Klein's *Leap into the void* (1960), Marina Abramović's *The Artist is Present* (2012), and John Cage's *4'33"* (1952). After these materials are assembled, the artist gracefully lifts the white canvas, bundling all the miniature creations into a parcel left at the centre. Then the artist takes the parcel and slowly exits from the pink fabric; at the same time, on-site staff help the artist raise and fold the pink fabric over the audience. The audience, who remain in the central space, are wrapped and encased to form a "pie", an event for everyone to experience and interpretation.

Figure 44

Tang Guo. History is the Trap of the Scene, and the Scene is the Pie of History, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Figure 45

Tang Guo. History is the Trap of the Scene, and the Scene is the Pie of History, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Figure 46

Tang Guo. History is the Trap of the Scene, and the Scene is the Pie of History, 2023



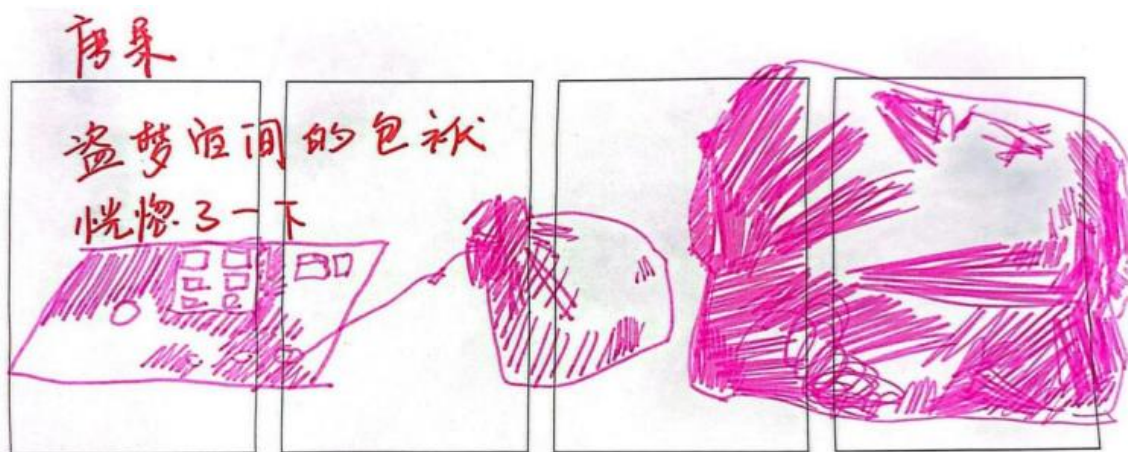
Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

After the enactment of Tang Guo's performance art piece, I randomly approached an audience member at the scene. I handed her a piece of paper and invited her to describe her

experience of Tang Guo's work using a few summary words. To my surprise, she chose to interpret her memory and experience of the performance through a sketch. In Figure 46, the audience member used a pink pen, which corresponded with the pink fabric used by the artist in the piece. She depicted several key moments from the performance, from the initial arrangement of items by the artist on a flat surface, to the packing of these items by the artist, and finally to a large, irregular bundle representing the audience members being completely enveloped in the pink fabric prepared by the artist. The Chinese text in the upper left corner can be translated as "Like the inception of a dream, momentarily caught in a reverie."

Figure 47

An audience member shares her experience of Tang Guo's work History is the Trap of the Scene, and the Scene is the Pie of History, 2023



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

In this instance, the audience member's experience is documented. I assert that the process of the audience engaging in the documenting process as co-documentarists, creating traces of their personal experiences and exemplifying the concept of collaborative documentation, highlights the value of audience-generated documentation as a vital component of the

archive. Collaborative documentation emphasises the importance of actively involving audiences in documenting performance art, thereby enriching traditional archival methods with diverse personal insights and perspectives. This approach not only broadens the scope of performance documentation but also deepens our understanding of how audiences engage with and interpret art. As Kolokythopoulou (2019) points out, these by-products can fulfil various functions in performance documentation both during and after the performance. For the works with strong ‘participative intent’, documenting “the behaviours of artwork and audience” is paramount (Graham, 2016, p. 77). Although these sketches do not provide direct and relatively objective information like photographs, videos, or descriptive text, they represent a creative approach to documenting and archiving performance art. Radbourne et al. (2013) contend that gathering audience reflections on their current and past arts experiences is valuable for identifying aspects of creative engagement, self-expression, and self-actualisation among attendees.

To allow audiences to immerse themselves in these works and uncover their narratives, my dual role as a researcher and participant involves capturing their interactions. Audiences not only play a role in the unfolding live performance but also in how this moment is documented. The persistence of information about audience engagement as traces after the performance concludes offers a means to understand a past work from the audience’s viewpoint and potentially gain insights into the live execution of a piece. This potential is particularly valuable when considering that conventional documentation methods using photos and videos may not capture subjective audience experiences effectively. Audience-generated content offers alternative ways to perceive a performance. Alongside other documentary materials, the audience’s input adds another dimension to the archival record of a piece, originating from and thus tracing participants’ actions and, crucially, their experience (Kolokythopoulou, 2019, p.125) Although we acknowledge that “one person’s experience may be quite different from another’s” the aim is to measure the dimensions or attributes of the audience or visitor experience rather than focusing on the specific details (NEF, 2010, p.11).

The audience’s contributions to live performance documentation and archives provide valuable evidence of the event and its experiential essence, addressing a key challenge in documenting time-based art forms. The innovative documentation of Tang Guo’s work by the audience member illustrates how collaborative documentation can challenge and expand

traditional recording and archiving practices. These audience-generated documentation-reflecting personal memories, experiences, and perceptions of the live performance play a significant role in creating an emotional connection that transcends temporal, spatial, and mediatic boundaries. As Staniškytė (2018) highlights, when effectively employed, open performance practices have the potential to ignite individual creativity and engagement. Unlike the static and impersonal nature of photographs, videos, official brochures, artist statements, or critics' articles, these personal and subjective accounts embody a dynamic and vibrant quality. This approach to collaborative documentation enriches the archival process by providing a unique perspective on the experiential dimension of the work. Integrating audience-generated documentation can capture and convey the essence of performance art in a way that is both distinctive and deeply engaging, offering new insights for future audiences and scholars.

Another notable instance of audience engagement in the process of documenting performance art can be examined through the work of Mao Zhu. On October 21, 2023, Mao Zhu enacted her work *Diary* (Figure 48, 49) at the experimental theatre space of Chengdu Guang Hui Art Museum during the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival. Drawing inspiration from a collection of receipts and invoices she gathered during her time in Switzerland, Mao Zhu attached them to the score of a music box. The performance tool was placed in a dark room with vertically arranged tables, each adorned with small lights that created a corridor of light. Mao Zhu sat at one end of the room, with observers naturally standing on both sides of the tables.

Figure 48

Mao Zhu. Diary, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Figure 49

Mao Zhu. Diary, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

In the dimly lit space, Mao Zhu initiated her performance by slowly turning the music box's lever. As the lever rotated, the music box played the score covered in receipts, creating irregular perforations in the sheet music. Mao Zhu's creative process combines intentional and random sounds to convey her emotions. The entire piece lasted approximately thirty minutes, with the audience immersed in the soothing and tranquil music. Some spectators observed intently, others closed their eyes to listen, and some even reclined beneath the tables. According to the artist statement, she explores the time theme in this performance by using the receipts collected over a period of time. Attaching the receipts to the score of a music box implicates the passage of time, as she said the time is the "keeper of the heavens, the transient voyager through all things" (2023).

I observed a particular audience member during the artist's performance who chose to lie down under a long table. Initially, I was quite puzzled by this behaviour, but through a conversation with her, I learned that the sound of the artwork was a meditative and healing

experience for her. After the performance, I specifically invited her to describe her experience on paper.

Figure 50

An audience member shares her experience of Mao Zhu's work Diary, 2023



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

According to her, “This is a sketch, but it captures the sound of the artwork and my feelings” (Figure 50). She used a comic strip format to depict four scenes from the artwork. According to her description of the sketch, the first panel depicts the dark environment around the long table. She explained that she is a very introverted person and felt a sense of fear amidst the crowded scene, symbolised by the chaotic lines she drew near the table, expressing both the darkness of the scene and her fear of the crowd. The second panel describes the square music box used by the artist. She felt that while this music box was mundane in everyday life, it seemed to possess a magical quality during the performance, as if time froze in the sound it produced. The third panel illustrates the artist implementing the artwork, sitting at the table and operating the music box. Since she was lying under the table during this scene, it was her imagined moment, with scattered lines in the background representing the sounds of the scene. The final panel describes the music sheet covering the receipt and the perforations that appeared after passing through the music box.

The audience member’s explanation transformed what would have been merely a sketch into a profound reflection of the artwork’s impact on her. Her narrative infused the sketch with layers of meaning and emotion, allowing me to vicariously experience Mao Zhu’s artwork through her perspective. This encounter underscored the vital role of audience experiences in the documentation and preservation of performance art, highlighting their ability to imbue archival materials with a deeper sense of significance and connection. According to Walmsley (2019), participatory methods like sketching, painting, and singing offer opportunities to express cultural value and impact in their own terms, utilising nonverbal formats that align with the object of research. Matthew Reason (2010) further argues that creative responses to a performance can foster a dialogue between an audience member and their artistic experience; for instance, drawing can be “disruptive, creative, and intuitive”. Iain Robertson’s 2016 book *Heritage from below* discusses individuals’ narratives, interpretations, and dissemination of historical events. The term “from below” shifts the focus away from institutional perspectives to highlight the significance of ordinary, personal, and amateur viewpoints. It emphasises everyday narratives and explores how these narratives can contribute to a dynamic exploration of heritage. Robertson values people’s perspectives and historical interpretations, acknowledging their marginalised status and limited power. He argues that practices utilising documents reflecting the voices of ordinary people can serve as a cultural resource for expressing counter-hegemonic ideas. Applying Robertson’s ideas to audience-generated documents, we see a parallel in how such content challenges traditional

methods of documenting live performances. It underscores the importance of including diverse perspectives in documenting and interpreting cultural events.

Audience-generated documents provide insight into each audience member's role within a live performance, their unique engagement methods, and their individual experiences. This content contributes to understanding how the performance unfolded for each person and how it transformed into a broader artwork. Kolokythopoulou (2019) argues that such audience-generated documents are integrated into the creative process of the performance, indicating their presence beyond official archival standards. Unlike conventional archival expectations, which typically rely on documentation by artists or professional documentarians, audience-generated documentation adds a layer of complexity and richness to the documentation of live events. This approach exemplifies the concept of collaborative documentation, where the audience's creative documentation contributes significantly to the archival process.

Through the audience member's creative documentation of Mao Zhu's artwork, we recognise the potential value of this practice. This documentation can be viewed as a form of collaborative documentation, offering an audio reenactment of the performance, as illustrated by the chaotic lines emerging in the background. This approach challenges the traditional preference for photography, video, and text in performance art archives. By capturing the audience's subjective descriptive expressions, this form of documentation addresses the challenges of preserving the ephemeral and experiential aspects of live performance.

Audiences reinterpret and narrate the most challenging aspects of preserving live elements in performance art – namely, their own experiences – through subjective descriptive expressions. By embracing such collaborative documentation, we not only recognise the profound impact of individual creative agency but also advocate for the democratisation of the art sphere. This approach challenges the conventional reliance on static documentation forms like photography, video, and text, offering a more nuanced and participatory record of the performance. In the next section, the artistic text provided by an audience member is examined as another example of collaborative documentation. This exploration unveils the intricate layers of memory and imagination, demonstrating how such contributions shape and enrich our understanding of performance art.

Weaving Words into the Fabric of Memory

On October 22, 2023, Shao Ye enacted his performance artwork named *Box* (Figure 51) at A4 Art Museum, Chengdu, China. The artist statement emphasises the confinement of the darkroom's visuals and the boundless expanses of perception. It endeavours to recreate a sense of uncertainty and instability.

Figure 51

Shao Ye. Box, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

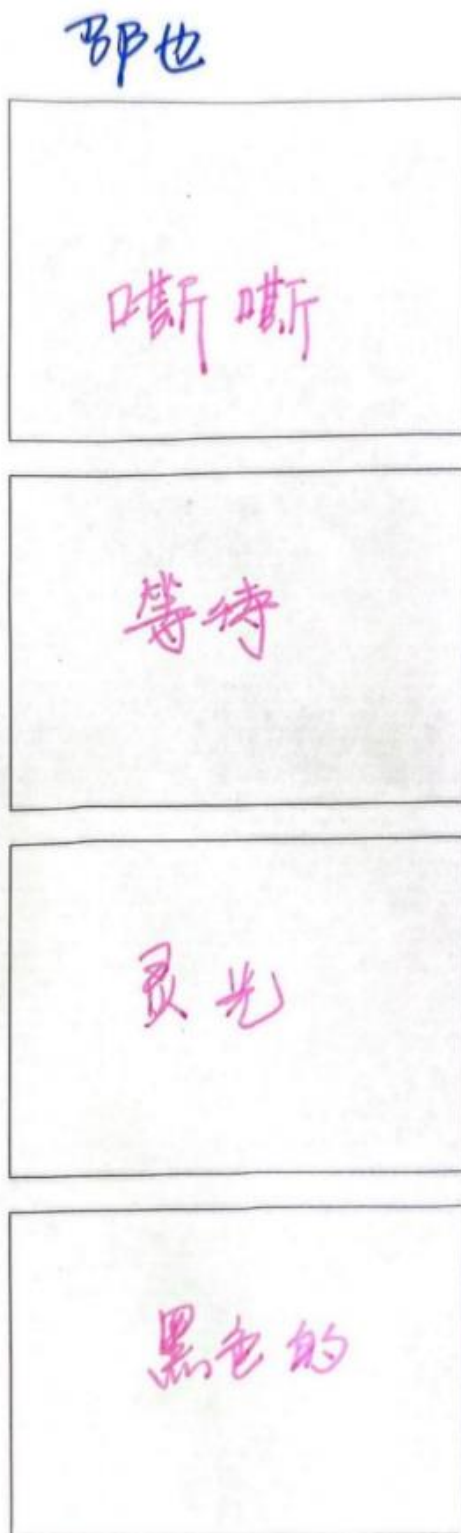
The artist crafted an immersive experience that delves into the interplay between confined visuals and expansive perception. Positioned at the centre of the room, Shao Ye engaged in the art of folding paper, setting the stage for the audience's entry. As the artist rose and moved toward a small darkroom behind, spectators were restricted from following. Subsequently, the lights within the exhibition hall were extinguished, leaving the audience positioned at the entrance of the darkroom where Shao Ye had entered. In the dimly lit space, observers could only catch glimpses of the room's interior, featuring the artist's chair and clothing. The auditory element played a pivotal role as the audience heard the continuous tearing of tape, contributing to a sense of suspense. As the room's illumination gradually diminished, the performance unfolded in an orchestrated interplay of sound and visuals,

concluding with the room plunged into darkness. As the artist initiated the performance by tearing tape in the darkened room, the deliberate and repetitive sound became a sonic anchor, isolating the artist from the audience. This auditory isolation, coupled with the diminishing light, established an atmosphere of suspense and uncertainty. The audience, positioned outside the room, had to rely on the tearing sounds to construct a mental narrative of the artist's actions, engaging their auditory imagination. The temporal dimension was heightened as the sound progressed alongside the gradual darkening of the room, creating a synchronised and evolving sensory encounter.

The integration of sound in Shao Ye's immersive performance not only enhanced the richness of the audience's experience but also held significant value in the context of archiving such artistic works. The documentation of sound, particularly the continuous tearing of tape, could guide the audience through a sensory journey. This auditory element not only complemented the confined visual cues but also invited the audience to engage their auditory imagination, constructing a narrative of the unfolding performance. As the art festival neared its conclusion, I reached out to an audience member who had witnessed Shao Ye's performance, asking her to encapsulate the essence of Shao Ye's work using four words (Figure 52).

Figure 52

An audience member shares the experience of Shao Ye's work Box, 2023



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

The words the audience member chose –嘶嘶 (hissing), 等待 (waiting), 灵光 (enlightenment), and 黑色的 (black)—offer a distinctive and evocative portrayal of the performance. Although this is a textual documentation, the audience member’s choice to use the term 嘶嘶 (hissing) to signify the pronounced sound of tape tearing, accentuated the auditory dimension central to the artwork. 等待 (waiting) suggests a deliberate temporal pacing that builds anticipation, fostering a sense of suspense for both the artist and the audience. 灵光 (enlightenment) introduces the idea of moments of clarity or revelation, contributing depth to the overall experiential narrative. Lastly, 黑色的 (black) underscores the predominate visual element of darkness, highlighting the intentional use of limited visibility in Shao Ye’s performance. The selection of words by the audience member offers a unique and intimate perspective on Shao Ye’s performance, showcasing the power of audience engagement in documenting artistic experiences. Unlike traditional methods reliant on professional or academic descriptions, this approach invites individuals to actively engage with and construct the narrative, experience, and memory of the performance artwork. By incorporating audience contributions, the documentation process evolves into a collaborative endeavour, enhancing the understanding of the artwork through a spectrum of diverse viewpoints and subjective interpretations. This collaborative documentation approach underscores the value of audience-generated content in capturing the multifaceted essence of performance art. Smith (2017, p. 5) argues that these performative and interactive texts explore a mode of learning termed “enactive knowledge”. It reminds us not to become lost in static and authoritative archives but to utilise the creative explorations of the audience to

reconnect with the contemporary world and gain a deeper understanding of the embodied experiences.

This collaborative documentation practice holds significant value as it elevates the voices and experiences of audience members, democratising the process of knowledge production within the realm of performance art. According to Aleida Assmann (2009, p. 184), text plays a central role as an “immortalising medium” and an “aide memoire”, as the process of writing and inscribing text involves allowing it to be read as a medium and metaphor of memory. By foregrounding the audience’s texts and perceptions, the documentation transcends mere description, evolving into a dynamic process of co-creation and meaning making. Each word selected by the audience member becomes a node in a collective narrative, reflecting the multiplicity of perspectives and emotions elicited by the artwork. George Dickie argues in *Art and the aesthetic – An institutional analysis* that, “there cannot be an instance of creativity without an artefact of some kind being produced” (1974, p. 49). This artifact not only substantiates the creative process but also contextualises it in time and space, assigns meaning and significance, and acknowledges its creator. In the realm of live performance, documentation serves as this artifact. Since live performances are transient, documentation plays a crucial role in making performances accessible for discussion, analysis, and viewing beyond their original occurrence (Reason, 2006).

In recent years the focus of performance documentation has shifted towards capturing not only the artist’s intentions and the audience’s perspective but also emphasising the actions and engagement of the audience itself (Giannachi, 2017). This approach aligns with the concept of collaborative documentation, which challenges conventional notions of expertise and authority by recognising the validity of personal experiences as valuable contributions to artistic discourse. The active involvement of the audience in the documenting process serves as a form of creative practice, offering diverse perspectives that enrich the history of performance art. In the next section, we delve into the audience’s oral memories to experience the performance through their voices.

Oral Memories: Voice of Experience

Oral memories as personal recollections and reflections from those who have experienced the art firsthand, offer a distinct and invaluable dimension to performance art documentation.

These subjective accounts offer rich insights into the emotional and intellectual responses elicited by performances, revealing aspects that visual records alone may miss. By integrating oral memories into the analysis, we gain a deeper understanding of the audience's interaction with the art, exploring their personal interpretations, emotional reactions, and the nuanced ways in which performances resonate with different individuals. This section delves into how oral memories enrich the documentation of performance art, using cases from 11th UPON International Live Art Festival to illustrate the profound impact and diverse perspectives of audience experiences.

On the morning of October 21, 2023, Julie Monot performed her piece *Haunt* (Figure 53, 54, 55) at Guang Hui Art Museum. The performance lasted for about 3 hours, during which Julie, along with her partner (another performer), changed into different outfits and appeared randomly in various corners of the art museum.

Figure 53

Julie Monot. Haunt, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

According to Monot's on-site description of the concept of her work, she said:

In this unconventional space, I intend to conjure forth five nearly spectral personas, inhabiting this realm like apparitions from another era. My aim is to evoke a dual presence for the audience, crafting an underlying, captivating tension through its poetic allure (Monot, 2023).

Figure 54

Julie Monot. Haunt, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

The documentation of Julie Monot's performance piece *Haunt* not only captures the spectral personas crafted by the artist but also serves as a unique window into the interactive dynamics between the performers and the audience. The photographs, notably Figure 55 and

56, freeze moments of the audience's reactions, depicting expressions of fascination, curiosity, and intense gaze. This departure from traditional performance art archives, which predominantly focus on the artist's actions, challenges the norm by recognising and elevating the significance of the audience's role in the performance. These key moments of audience engagement become crucial in understanding the impact and reception of the performance.

Figure 55

Julie Monot. Haunt, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Despite the widespread acclaim for photography in the realm of performance art documentation, it has faced increasing scrutiny in recent years, particularly concerning issues of authenticity and the subjective choices of photographers (Curran, 2015). In the traditional

performance art, cameras typically prioritise the artist, often overlooking the audience, which raises concerns about the authenticity of the event.

At the exhibition venue, I randomly invited an audience member to recall her experience with Julie's artwork. She said:

[Original Language]

一开始我只是觉得艺术家和她的助手两个人她们的装扮很酷，似乎她们将人的身体的部分放大了，比如身上长了很多手、或者胳膊被延长了、耳朵被放大了。我并不觉得她们像幽灵，因为在那个美术馆的空间内，她们很显眼，尽管她们移动的很快，稍微走神一会就不在了。这一点还挺有趣的，不像很多艺术家就在一个相对固定的空间内表演。另外我印象深刻的是，那天在美术馆内有一些小孩子，她们会离艺术家很近，有时候作为成年人，好像内心设置了一个安全距离，或者很多的社会规范告诉我们不要去太接近，然而小孩她们可能感到很好奇，那个场景让我印象深刻就是一位小朋友坐在艺术家对面她们在对视，离得很近。

[Translation]

At first, I just thought the artist and her assistant looked cool in their costumes, as if they had enlarged parts of the human body, like having many hands or elongated arms, or enlarged ears. I didn't necessarily think of them as ghosts, but in the space of the art museum, they stood out, even though they moved quickly and would disappear if you looked away for a moment. That was quite interesting, unlike many artists who perform in relatively fixed spaces. Another thing that struck me was that there were some children in the museum that day. They would get very close to the artist, and as adults, we often have this internal safety distance or many social norms telling us not to get too close. However, the children seemed curious, and one scene that really stuck with me was a child sitting across from the artist, looking at her from very closely (Anonymous, 2023, translated from Chinese).

The audience member's recollection highlights the personal thinking provoked by Julie's artwork, leading to reflections on consent, agency, and social responsibility in participatory

art. This emphasises the importance of oral memory in understanding artistic experiences and the varied perspectives contributing to their meaning. Incorporating oral memories alongside visual documentation enriches the analysis and preservation of performance art. As Muller (2010) states, audience oral memories of performance art should address the gap in experiential documentation by recording many different perspectives on a work. These oral memories would offer how the artworks existed in experience and would necessarily widen our understanding of the relationship of performance art and its social and cultural context.

As Dunne (2015) notes, he never intended for the audience to fully recreate their past experiences; archives and memories cannot offer a complete and detailed representation of the past. Instead, they are fragments of the past that can be continuously rearranged. Oral memories, as vibrant elements in the archive, continuously reinterpret the past. They provide invaluable insights into emotional and intellectual responses evoked by performances, offering nuanced understandings beyond visual documentation's limitations. The tone of voice, attitude and the emotion of the speaker, the memory lapses and self-correction, are all vital parts of oral memories, which situate the account related by the speaker.

Understanding the audience's oral memories of Julie's work reveals their experience and intellectual responses to the art piece, exploring the thoughts around consent, agency, and social responsibility in the art-based context. In contrast, oral memories of Alastair McLennan's performance highlight intense emotional reactions and profound personal reflections of audience members. These audience oral memories serve as a gateway to relive the live performance and their interpretive experiences, often imbued with intense emotions, as evidenced by the audience recollections from Alastair McLennan's performance.

On October 17, 2023, from 14:00 to 16:00, Alastair McLennan performed his work *In Still* (Figure 56, 57, 58, 59) at Chengdu Guang Hui Art Museum.

Figure 56

Alastair McLennan. In Still, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

In my recollection, shredded paper is arranged diagonally on the site, concealing numerous black leather shoes. Three chairs are placed on top. Alastair walks barefoot around the performance installation he created, moving from the leftmost chair to the rightmost chair. On the rightmost chair, there is a bucket of white flour. Suddenly, he picks up a handful of white flour and sprinkles it over his head, covering his face with a thick layer of flour. Then he walks to the leftmost chair and picks up a coat he has made, adorned with paper strips attached by paperclips. The ambient sound includes whale song that resembles the sound of a

crying child, creating an unsettling atmosphere for the audience. Next, he puts on sunglasses with a single lens and a frame with two ribbons—one red, one blue. Afterwards, he wears a helmet made of numerous plastic eyeglasses, stacked haphazardly to form the helmet. Hanging from the helmet is a burnt and damaged doll. Following this, he picks up a tree branch with his left hand, with a few strands of hair hanging from the branch's end. In his right hand, he holds other burnt dolls, then begins to swing them continuously in front of the audience, mimicking the actions of painting. The performance lasts for 30 minutes, during which he takes out some paper strips from his pockets and hands them to the audience. Finally, he removes the helmet and throws many paper fragments into the air, concluding the performance. The audience sat quietly, surrounding Alastair's works. Some were too scared to approach, while others shed tears silently.

Figure 57

Alastair McLennan. In Still, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Figure 58

Alastair McLennan. In Still, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Figure 59

Alastair McLennan. In Still, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Recent scholarship in theatre and performance studies often neglects sustained attention to spectator research, which delves into what audience’s experience, how they derive meaning, and their emotional responses to performances and how they come to value “assisting at performance” (Reinelt, 2014, p. 337). The depth of audience engagement and their interpretive contributions significantly enriches our understanding of performance art.

Audience memories provide insights beyond mere documentation; they illuminate subjective responses and emotional resonances that performances evoke.

An attendee recounted her experience of Alastair's performance.

[Original Chinese]

在那个空间里面，当他把那些衣服穿上，就还没开始表演，然后我就会开始觉得有点想哭，不知道为什么，尤其是他把面粉从头上浇下来的时候，就会觉得有点想哭。他播放的那个背景的声音很像海洋里面，反正就是又像是婴儿的声音，又像是宇宙的声音，又像是那种异世界或者是超出三维世界的一些生物发出的声音的感觉。然后他把一些道具挂在身上，还有眼镜啊什么的，然后拿着两支笔就是在那儿缓缓地挥舞，然后掏出东西给给路过的人，每个掏的还不一样。其实我是比较调皮的那种，如果是换成别人做这个作品，我觉得我很有可能就跑去捣捣乱。但是我觉得现场的观众大家都好，坐在旁边，我觉得那种感觉就很治愈，后来我从他手里拿到了一个字母是 **q**，是我自己的名字里面的一个字的首字母。然后我这会儿在想他的作品，其实你看这个他就很像是一个魔法师，或者是像一个萨满的那种感觉，然后又是很温和很温柔的那种感觉。

[Translation]

In that space, when he put on those clothes, before the performance even began, I started to feel like crying, for no apparent reason. Especially when he poured flour down from his head, I felt like crying. The background sound he played was like the ocean or a baby's sound or the sound of the universe, as well as the sound that creatures from other dimensions or beyond the three-dimensional world might make. He hung some props on himself, including glasses, and waved two pens slowly while giving something to people passing by. Each item he gave was different. I'm actually quite mischievous, and if it were someone else doing this, I might have been tempted to disrupt it. But I think the audience at the scene was very nice, sitting there. I felt that the atmosphere was healing. I later received a letter from him with the letter "q," which is the first letter of my own name. Now, as I think about his work, he really

looks like a magician, or a shaman, and very gentle and tender (Anonymous, 2023, translated from Chinese).

The oral memories of the audience member provide a valuable and distinctive dimension that enhances the documentation of Alastair McLennan's performance, adding subjective and emotional layers to the visual and textual records. According to Radbourne, Glow, and Johanson (2013), audiences often articulate their experiences in emotional terms, attributing unique personal qualities to the performance based on their intrinsic needs and pursuit of authenticity and spiritual significance. In the attendee's recollection, emotional reactions and personal reflections offer insights into the emotional impact of McLennan's work. Spontaneous emotional responses, such as moments of tearfulness, contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how the performance resonated with the audience. This section underscores the importance of these experiences by discussing their values and implications employed to capture their nuances. Many audience members perceive these encounters as unexpectedly liberating and unconstrained (Radbourne, Glow, & Johanson, 2013).

Moreover, the attendee's description of the background sound and the transformative atmosphere offers an immersive perspective, connecting auditory experiences with the visual elements. This contributes to a more comprehensive documentation that goes beyond the visual aesthetics, capturing the multi-sensory nature of the performance. These memories are actively narrated and interpreted through oral descriptions, emerging as a potential form of documenting performance art, weakening the authority of textual, photographic, and video archival materials by imbuing memories with subjectivity (Dunne, 2015). Another compelling example that underscores the audience's profound emotional engagement with performance art is detailed below.

On the afternoon of October 17, 2023, at Chengdu Guang Hui Art Museum, Brian Patterson performed his work *Once upon a time* (Figure 60, 61, 62) by dragging a clock with a red rope, drawing circles in place, swinging, and lighting a circle of candles.

Figure 60

Brian Patterson. Once upon a time, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Brian dragged the clock with a red rope around the venue, starting to spin it rapidly. Later, he used his feet to step on tape, moving forward and forming a square. Next to it he wrote *“Thinking of you my red flame”* with water.

Figure 61

Brian Patterson. Once upon a time, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Finally, the red thread wrapped around the beams hung the clock, obscuring Brian's face, and he covered the clock with sticky notes. After blowing out each candle one by one, Brian took off his shoes and socks, held them in his hands, and spun around to acknowledge the audience.

Figure 62

Brian Patterson. *Once upon a time*, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Dominic Johnson’s exploration of meaning production in performance art emphasises the intricate chemistry among the artist’s body, materials, and the audience (Johnson, 2017). In Brian’s performance, this interplay is further nuanced by the deliberate addition of text, specifically the phrase “*Thinking of you my red flame,*” introducing an additional layer of meaning to the artistic expression. Lloyd’s perspective (2020) contributes to this discourse, asserting that performance art finds its essence in the creation and utilisation of text. The

incorporation of words, as discussed by Ross (2014), extends beyond conveying information, often introducing a complexity of messages within the artwork. Brian's use of text in the performance aligns with this idea, presenting an opportunity for the audience to engage with and interpret the layered meanings generated by the combination of text, bodily movements, and visual elements. This deliberate fusion of text into the performance deepens the artistic experience, inviting viewers to grapple with a range of emotions and interpretations.

Apart from the textual elements uniquely embedded within his performance, the significance of audience oral memories lies in their ability to convey emotional experiences and nuanced insights that are not readily apparent through visual documentation alone. This is exemplified by an audience member who recounted her experience of Brian's performance.

[Original Language]

我觉得前面他好像悼念他的妹妹，因为我是艺术节的工作人员，我之前跟他聊过，他在现场写了一句话，可能就是因为他妹妹过世了，然后那天刚好是她生日，他点了蜡烛，然后还有钟，有一个吊钟，然后就是最后他把自己的鞋脱在手上，然后朝着人群转动的时候，那一刻我有点感动，很想哭，其实我对他的作品没有太多就是解读，就是最后的时候有点想哭。

[Translation]

I think in the beginning, he seemed to be mourning his sister. I know that because I am a staff member of the festival, and we talked before. He wrote a sentence because his sister had passed away, and that day was her birthday. He lit a candle, and there was a clock and a pendulum clock. Finally, he took off his shoes and spun toward the audience. At that moment, I felt moved and wanted to cry. Even though I didn't have much interpretation or understanding of his work, that moment made me want to cry (Anonymous, 2023, translated from Chinese).

The audience member's vivid recollection of Brian's performance provides valuable insight into the emotional impact and personal connections forged during the artistic event. The performance, characterised by symbolic actions such as lighting candles, incorporating a clock, and the use of text, becomes an act of commemoration. The emotional resonance is palpable as the audience member shares a touching moment of feeling moved and nearly

shedding tears during the culmination of the performance. This emotional resonance adds depth to the documentation, emphasising the ability of performance art to evoke genuine and heartfelt reactions. It also highlights the power of symbolism and personal narratives in performance, as the artist's actions become a conduit for shared experiences and connections, expanding the scope of the artwork beyond its immediate visual elements. This oral memory, therefore, becomes a valuable part of documenting the affective dimensions of Brian's performance. While Brian's performance evoked personal reflections and emotional connections through symbolic actions and textual elements, Shi Mengxia's piece prompted playful and interactive engagements, such as attempting to intercept a security guard and observing playful interactions with children, as illustrated in the audience oral memory below.

On October 22, 2023, Shi Mengxia implemented her work *The Train Has Arrived* (Figure 63, 64) in the experimental theatre space of Chengdu Guang Hui Art Museum. The theatre space was pitch-black with no chairs, just an entirely black space. Before the performance began, the staff advised the audience not to sit on the floor and encouraged them to move freely.

Figure 63

Shi Mengxia. The Train Has Arrived, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Subsequently, the sound emerged – it was a very familiar sound, an announcement from the Chengdu subway. The artist held a portable speaker playing the sound of the Chengdu subway, not in standard Mandarin but in the local dialect of Chengdu. The artist continuously ran within the theatre space, stopping whenever the announcement signalled that the train had arrived. Additionally, she invited one of the art museum’s security guards, to take the role of an assistant with a flashlight to indicate the artist’s position with the beam of light.

Figure 64

Shi Mengxia. The Train Has Arrived, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

In the ongoing process of the work, some audience members spontaneously chased after the artist and organised themselves into a network, attempting to intercept the “train.” Two children also chased and intercepted the artist and her assistant. Most of the audience, however, chose to stand in place without much movement, fearing injury in the darkness. In this work, both resistance and cooperation were achieved through the different reactions of the audience.

In terms of the use of sound, Shi Mengxia’s performance, *The Train Has Arrived*, creates a multisensory experience for the audience by incorporating the familiar sound of the Chengdu subway announcement. By using a portable speaker to play this sound in the local Chengdu

dialect, the artist not only evokes a sense of place but also adds an element of authenticity to the performance. The sound of the subway announcement serves as a central motif, guiding the artist's movements within the darkened theatre space and signalling moments of action for both the artist and the audience. The use of sound in this performance not only adds to the immersive nature of the experience but also triggers memories and associations for the audience members. Once the sound document of performance is archived, this unique audio recording will have an impact across different cultures and periods, precisely because of the historical context implied by the Chengdu subway announcements. For those familiar with the Chengdu subway system, the sound of the announcement may evoke memories of their daily commute or other experiences associated with public transportation. This sensory connection to familiar sounds heightens the audience's engagement with the performance and contributes to the overall understanding of its archive.

An attendee recounted her experience of Shi Mengxia's performance.

[Original Language]

石梦霞的作品就还是挺好玩儿的，就是那个保安大哥特别的敬业，就一直在走，一直在追，然后我开始想去挡一挡，结果不小心被打到了鼻子，我差点我感觉我鼻血都被打出来了，就闪到边上去了。然后我看到两个小孩就一直在跟那个保安玩。我觉得就是这个中间明明灭灭的这些灯，然后站着人，有些就排着队去跟着走，有些就去捕捉保安，阻挡保安，有些要去围住石梦霞，反正这中间还是这里面还是有一点好玩，就是算是一个比较体验感比较足的沉浸式体验的那种感觉吧。我比较喜欢这种沉浸式的体验。

[Translation]

It was actually quite fun. The security guard was very professional, always walking and chasing. At one point, I tried to block him but accidentally got hit on the nose. I thought my nose might start bleeding. So, I moved aside. I saw two kids playing with the security guard. The blinking lights and people standing in the middle, some were in line, some were following, some tried to capture the security guard, some tried to block him, and some tried to surround Shi Mengxia. There were various playful interactions. It was like an immersive experience, and I liked it (Anonymous, 2023, translated from Chinese).

In terms of audience oral memory, the attendee recounts her playful and interactive experience of the performance. Her memory of attempting to block the security guard, getting accidentally hit on the nose, and observing the playful interactions between the security guard and the children demonstrates how individual experiences become intertwined with the collective memory of the performance. The attendee's description also emphasises the sensory aspects of the performance, such as the blinking lights and the immersive feeling of being surrounded by various playful interactions. At the same time, this attendee's oral memory is also an audio document, incorporated into the work's archive.

Overall, sound is an indispensable element in this performance art piece. The recorded announcements from the Chengdu subway not only impact the audience's sensory experience in real-time during the performance but also serve as a "document" that is preserved to help construct the complete archive of the work. This highlights the importance of sound as a recording element and its impact on audience perception and engagement, aligning with the broader discourse on the significance of documentation in capturing and conveying the experience of performance art.

Another instance highlighting audience engagement using oral memory in the process of documenting performance art can be seen in Zhu Fadong's piece *Remake* (Figure 65), which took place in the small theatre of A4 Art Museum in Chengdu on October 23, 2023. He stood in the centre of the stage with cheerful music playing live, then lifted his shirt to reveal to the audience that he had affixed an image on his chest. This image portrayed a frontal view of a woman from the collarbone to the abdomen.

Figure 65

Zhu Fadong. Remake, 2023



Note. Images courtesy of the artist and UPON Performance Art Archive.

Later, he took off his shirt and took out a pen from his pocket, starting to doodle on the image affixed to his body. Then he invited the audience to come on stage, and everyone used acrylic pens to doodle layer-by-layer on the artist's body until his entire body was covered in drawings. Zhu Fadong's performance presents a thought-provoking exploration of body autonomy, audience engagement and feminist themes. The act of affixing an image of a woman's body onto his own chest symbolises the objectification and societal pressures placed upon women's bodies. By inviting the audience to participate in doodling on his body, he transforms his own body into a canvas, blurring the boundaries between artist and audience.

The audience engagement aspect of this performance is crucial as it emphasises the collective engagement and collaboration in the artistic process. Through the doodling on the artist's body, it demonstrates the creative act and creates a shared experience where everyone plays a role in shaping the final outcome. Additionally, *Remake* delves into feminist themes by highlighting the objectification and commodification of the female body. By affixing an image of a woman's body onto his own and inviting the audience to come to doodle, Zhu Fadong confronts the audience with the inherent contradictions and complexities of gender

norms and societal expectations. The following excerpt is from a recording provided by an audience member during the festival, where she narrates her memories of participating in the artwork *Remake* by the artist Zhu Fadong.

[Original Chinese]

他站在舞台中央，胸前贴着一张女性身体的照片，欢快的音乐在现场响起。随后他从口袋里拿出一支笔，在贴在身上的照片上开始涂鸦。并且邀请观众上台，大家开始用丙烯笔在艺术家的身体上一层又一层地涂鸦，直到他的整个身体被绘满。我没有上台画。当我看着很多的观众上台参与，与艺术家互动，每个人似乎都很开心，好像在发泄一样，伴随着现场的欢快的音乐，我感受到了某种不舒服。让我想到了一些互联网暴女性的事件，也让我想到了哲学家汉娜阿伦特所说的一句话好像是：雪崩的时候，没有一片雪花是无辜的。

[Translation]

He stood in the centre of the stage with a photo of a female body affixed to his chest, while cheerful music played in the background. Then, he took out a pen from his pocket and began doodling on the image attached to his body. He invited the audience onto the stage, and everyone started doodling layer by layer on the artist's body with acrylic pens until his entire body was covered in drawings. I didn't join them on stage. As I watched many audience members participate, interacting with the artist, everyone seemed happy, as if venting. Along with the lively music, I felt somewhat uncomfortable. It reminded me of some incidents of online harassment against women, and it also made me think of a quote by the philosopher Hannah Arendt, something like: "when an avalanche occurs, no snowflake is innocent" (Anonymous, 2023, translated from Chinese).

This audience member's oral memories, which capture the emotional response and deep reflection provided by the live performance, is indispensable as part of the archive because it goes beyond what traditional visual documentation can offer. While photographs or videos may only capture the visual aspects of the performance, they often fall short in conveying the thoughts, feelings and interpretations experienced by audiences. Theoretically, each audience member may have their own unique interpretation of a performance; these interpretations often converge around culturally informed perspectives and positions. Bial (2002) argues that

performances are diverse and subject to debate, highlighting how audience member's ethnic and cultural backgrounds heavily influence how they interpret them.

The audience member's oral memory of *Remake* sheds light on the discomfort and unease provoked by the performance, prompting deeper reflections on issues of consent, agency and social responsibility within participatory art practices. It underscores the value of incorporating oral memories and personal experiences alongside visual documentation in the analysis and preservation of performance. As Dunne (2015) notes, he never intended for the audience to fully recreate their past experiences; archives and memories cannot offer a complete and detailed representation of the past. Instead, they are fragments of the past that can be continuously rearranged. The audience's involvement in oral memories becomes a vibrant element in the archive. The explanations they provide, their emotions, and their subjective descriptions offer new insights into performance art, indicating that oral memories provide a continuous reinterpretation of the past. Following this, Dunne (2015, p. 59) suggests that we should not view archives as the final destination or endpoint of live performances but rather as "a habitat full of potential" for future live performances.

Audiences' engagement with the performing arts encompasses a wide range of cognitive, sensory, aesthetic, emotional, and spiritual responses to live performances (Walmsley, 2019). Despite theoretical debates, empirical studies underscore the unique qualities of live performances across various art forms. There is a growing consensus that live performance has the ability to construct fictional worlds where audience members can explore their inner selves and undergo emotional or spiritual rejuvenation or transformation (Walmsley, 2019). By delving into oral memories, we gain access to personal reflections, interpretations, and critiques that enhance our understanding of a performance's impact. As Plato (as cited in Assmann, 2009, p. 185) once pointed out, the significance of oral transmission and the authenticity of the conveyed information are unparalleled.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has delved into the innovative potential of audience engagement in documenting performance art, emphasising the transformative contributions of audiences to the construction and enhancement of performance art archive. A key contribution of this chapter is the concept of collaborative documentation, which highlights the active role of the

audience and the transformative audience-generated documentation in shaping the performance art archive. This collaborative documentation approach challenges established paradigms by acknowledging personal experiences and subjective interpretations as valid and fresh additions to the archive. Through this creative discovery, audience members become co-documentarists of performance art, offering valuable insights not only about the performances but also providing us with an innovative way to understand archival methods and audience engagement.

By analysing these four creative documentations collected from the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival, this chapter reveals how audience engagement can deepen our understanding of performance art. Sketches capturing the audience's experiences with the works of Tang Guo and Mao Zhu, as well as descriptive texts and oral memories related to Shao Ye's work, underscore the importance of audience engagement in both the creation and preservation of performance art archives. As the audience's experiences of performance are multifaceted and often overlooked, it raises the complexity and difficulty of capturing these experiences. The act of audience engagement itself is not always clear-cut, and researchers must explore the nuances of the relationship between the audience and the performance. It may seem impractical to capture every audience member's response, and indeed, selectivity is integral to both research and archiving practices. However, preserving non-expert and audience accounts can shed light on the intricate nature of live performance. Audiences are diverse, with individuals who may react and recall experiences in varied ways. This diversity does not compromise accuracy but rather offers insights into how audiences interpret what they see and the diverse methods of archival practice that emerge from these interpretations. Each personal archive reflects aspects of the audience member—their preferences, values, and interests. None of these personal recollections can be considered 'complete' or 'neutral', mirroring the fragmented and subjective nature of human memory. Meanwhile, the archive, like memory, is inherently limited; it can capture aspects of events removed from their direct impact. Therefore, these audience-generated creative documentations can be collected into the archive in order to expand the cognition of performance art works and their history.

This chapter aims to reveal the mysterious and intriguing experiences of audiences in performance art by analysing collected audience-generated documentation such as sketches, oral memories and descriptive texts, providing a creative and innovative approach to question traditional archival paradigms. It also positions audience research as a crucial element in the

field of performance art, documentation and archiving, and encourages scholars and artists to consider applying this method to future research and artistic practice. As Walmsley (2019) points out, with the rise of participatory culture, co-creation, and collaborative research, the voice of the audience has become increasingly powerful, fundamentally changing their role in research concerning them. Despite the recent, more rigorous exploration of the importance of audience response and engagement in performance work (Wishart, 2018), it is noteworthy that this discourse remains an emerging framework that has not yet been fully addressed.

In the next chapter I focus on the innovative, audience participatory curatorial strategies in the analysis of the exhibition *Flow - Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition*. It will highlight the importance of audience engagement in the performance art archive exhibition, and propose the concept of the transnational performative archive, in providing audiences with dynamic and participatory experiences.

Chapter Four: Curating the Transnational Performative Archive

Introduction

This chapter explores the conceptualisation and curation of the exhibition *Flow- Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition*, held from 2-11 March at Massey University Student Centre, Albany, New Zealand, with opening hours from 9:30 AM to 4:30 PM. The exhibition attracted an estimated 50-100 visitors per day, comprising approximately 60% Massey students, 25% Massey academic and administrative staff, and 15% external visitors. It examines how transnational curatorial strategies shape the presentation of performance art archives and the role of audience engagement in activating these archives. By bringing Chinese performance art documentation to a New Zealand context, the exhibition investigates how archives can act as bridges between cultural contexts, fostering participatory experiences that generate embodied knowledge. The study highlights the transformative potential of transnational curatorial practices in turning static archival displays into dynamic, contextually rich sources of engagement.

In *Flow*, audiences were invited to immerse themselves in the ongoing narrative of performance art history, contributing to the construction of a transnational performative archive that evolves through their engagement. The exhibition integrated multiple elements, including photography, videography, written descriptions, press releases, and oral memories, to create a multisensory archive. By blending the cultural expressions of Chinese performance art with the perspective of a transnational audience, the exhibition sought to enhance accessibility and prompt intercultural dialogue. This interdisciplinary study linked performance art with GLAM and curatorial research, contributing to the discourse on audience-centred and participatory approaches.

This chapter explores the transnational dimension of curatorial strategies and their potential to democratise access to performance art archives. By challenging the traditional top-down narrative of archives, this approach creates inclusive spaces where diverse voices can contribute to reshaping performance art histories. In doing so, transnational curation not only bridges cultural divides but also disrupts power dynamics inherent in the production and preservation of cultural knowledge.

While notable works have been analysed comprehensively, the role of the audience in these events remains under-theorised, necessitating further investigation. This is particularly acute when one seeks to comprehend those works aiming to engage the audience through more direct means of participation. As Holmes (2022, p. 2) notes,

Exhibition curation offers an ideal historiographic methodology for those interested in audiences; it can be used to focus curatorial attention on historic audience experience by inviting today's audiences to historically reimagine the past by connecting it to their own lived experience.

The exhibition *Flow* intentionally avoided the traditional museum practice of installing barriers, such as glass or “do not touch” labels, between the audience and the archive. This open approach encouraged direct interaction, allowing the audience to physically engage with the materials. By removing these barriers, the exhibition aimed to create a sense of presence and authenticity, enabling visitors to experience the archive as an accessible and dynamic entity rather than as a distant or untouchable relic.

To explore the concept of a transnational performative archive, this chapter will analyse *Flow* through three key themes: ‘Curating’, ‘Activating’ and ‘Creating’. First, it will examine the potential of transnational curation as a practice-based research method in performance art archiving. Then, it will explore how performance art archives can be activated through audience engagement, focusing on materials from five Chinese performance artists showcased in the exhibition. Finally, it will investigate how audience engagement with the archive contributes to the creation of a transnational performative archive capable of generating new knowledge. Drawing from observations and materials collected during the exhibition, this chapter will demonstrate how participatory curatorial practices can transform performance art archives into dynamic space that transcend cultural boundaries.

Arrangements between stakeholders were established prior to the commencement of documentation and exhibition activities. I obtained both verbal and written agreements from the participating artists and the organisers of the UP-ON Festival to document the performance works, ensuring that all parties were informed of how the resulting materials would be used for both curatorial and academic purposes, with appropriate credits and copyright acknowledgements. Audience engagement activities were entirely voluntary, and participants were notified—through exhibition signage and consent prompts—that any

creative responses, including text, drawings, or oral stories, might be incorporated into the research. The documenting practice in Chengdu, China (4000027712), as well as the subsequent exhibition in Auckland, New Zealand (4000028542), were reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee as low-risk projects. The final archive, comprising images, audience responses, exhibition layouts, and other materials, will be preserved in both digital and physical formats within my doctoral research archive, while digital copies have also been offered to the participating artists and the UP-ON Festival for inclusion in their own archival collections.

Curating Performance

The transnational performance art archive exhibition *Flow* (Figure 66) featured artists and archival materials from my participation and observation at the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival in China. The spatial arrangement of the exhibition (See Figure 67), illustrates the placement of archival materials and interactive stations designed to foster audience engagement. As both curator and researcher, my aim was to challenge conventional narratives in performance art documentation by creating an interactive and participatory experience that might offer audiences in New Zealand an opportunity to engage with contemporary Chinese performance art and to contribute to enriching the archives. This exhibition sought to explore how transnational dialogue, and collaboration can shape new approaches to performance art curation and audience engagement.

Inspired by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of flow, I aimed to transform static archives into dynamic spaces that fostered meaningful interactions between individuals and events. Csikszentmihalyi describes flow as a state of deep involvement in an activity where one's ego disappears, time seems to pass quickly, and every action or thought seamlessly follows the previous one, as if it were part of a continuous, spontaneous process. This state of being fully absorbed allows individuals to utilise their skills to the fullest extent. Framed by the concept of flow, archives no longer simply represent external entities; instead, they become continuously connected spaces that might facilitate unique dialogues between individuals and events. The archival materials from five Chinese performance artists evolved into dynamic and participatory elements shaped by the audience.

Figure 66

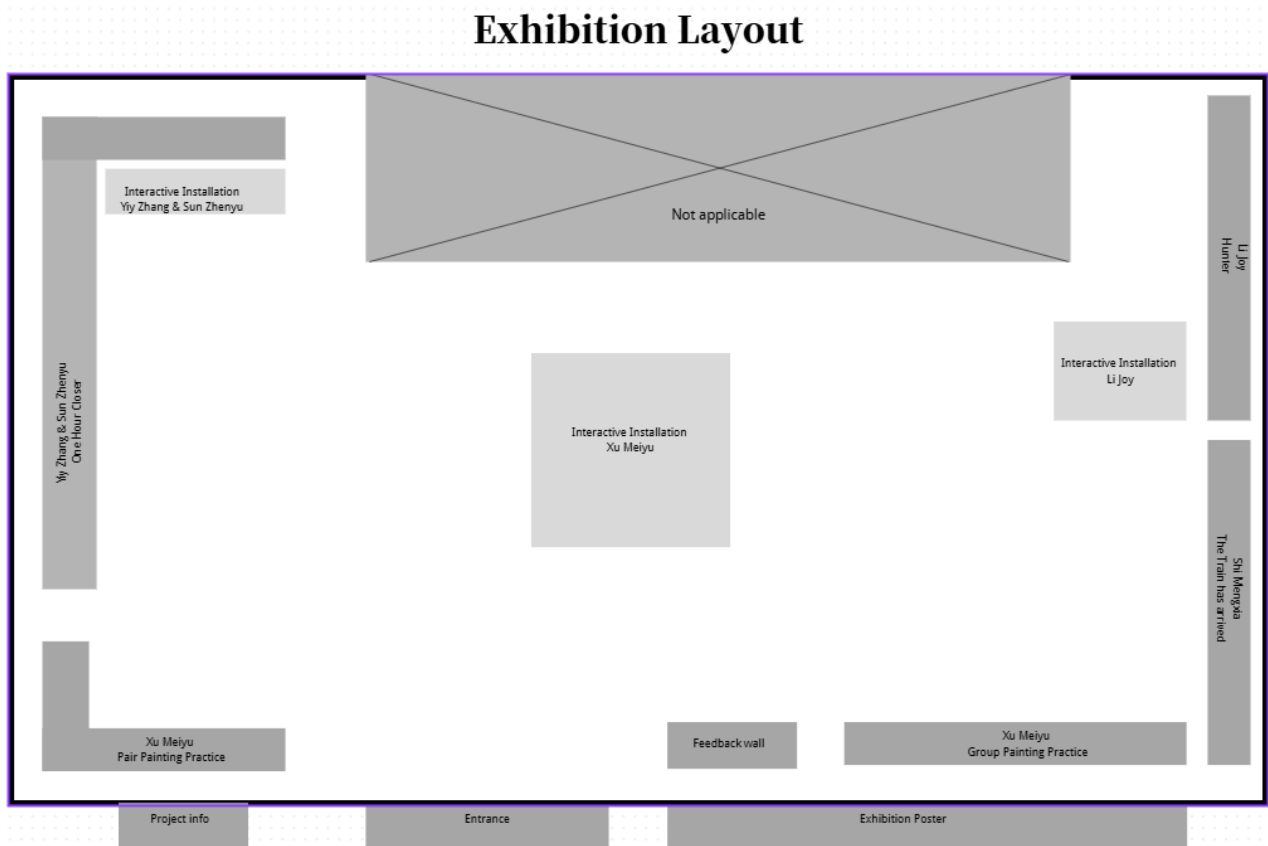
Flow – Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition Poster, 2024



Note. Design by Liu Tingyu.

Figure 67

Layout of Flow – Chinese Performance Art and Documentation exhibition



Note. The diagram illustrates the spatial arrangement of artworks and audience engagement areas.

The exhibition showcased video, photographs, audience oral memories, written descriptions, and interactive installations, presenting a diverse array of media to present the artists' creative processes and works. It is worth mentioning that there were no formal, comprehensive descriptions or explanations of each displayed performance art piece from curator or academics. This approach invited audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds to craft their own narratives to foster a transnational dialogue with the archive. The transnational aspect of this project added significant value by enabling audiences from different national contexts to contribute their unique perspectives and interpretations to the archive. In this section, I will explore the evolving role of curation, particularly in relation to performance art and its archival practices. I will also examine how the ephemeral nature of performance art has led to a shift in curatorial approaches, emphasising the integration of

documentation as a key tool for engaging audiences and reinterpreting the relationship between objects, performances, and viewers.

Curating, as defined by Lind (2012), refers to the technical practice of making art accessible to the public. It is not limited to organising exhibitions but encompasses a broader range of activities that extend beyond the confines of traditional art institutions and their programming or educational frameworks. This expanded understanding, often referred to as “curating in the expanded field” (p. 6), positions the curatorial role as multifaceted, integrating functions such as critique, editing, education, and fundraising. Beyond these roles, Lind (2012) argues that curation emerges as a methodology – a way of thinking and operating that fosters dialogue and challenges conventional structures. The curatorial role seeks to generate friction, encourage dissent and provoke new ideas through the relationships it fosters between objects, people, places, and ideas, making it a transformative and relational practice that transcends traditional boundaries.

The term curation was once reserved for museum professionals, but in recent years museums have shifted their focus from simply displaying artworks to emphasising the immersive experience of the exhibition (Persohn, 2021). This has led to a growing interest in art forms such as performance art, which are inherently performative and experiential. However, performance art, as an ephemeral art form, has long been neglected by traditional museum galleries and art institutions, resulting in the underdevelopment of its curation and archival practices. This issue was highlighted in the analysis of Tehching Hsieh’s performance art archive exhibition at UCCA, discussed in the introduction of this thesis. Typically, the archival materials of performance art are treated as remnants of live works, displayed in glass cases with detailed background information. As museums increasingly shift from offering passive viewing experiences to promoting interactive, participatory art forms (Dobrzynski, 2013), performance curation has emerged to provide audiences with a more immediate and direct way of engaging with art (Adewole, 2018). This shift has sparked new discussions about how performance art and archives can be curated to allow for audience engagement and reinterpretation.

Performance curation in museums has evolved into a multifaceted practice that transcends traditional representation, merging process, product, artist, and spectator to create more dynamic and participatory experiences. Peterson (2017) highlights how this approach

redefines the relationship between these elements, fostering an inclusive and interactive framework. Lind (2012) further explains that “the curatorial involves not just representing but presenting and testing; it performs something here and now instead of merely mapping something from there and then” (p. 103). This collaborative framework involving performance and curatorial practices enhances audience engagement and interaction (Darwin-Gitonga, 2023).

Additionally, this curatorial approach provides a foundation for activating performance art archives, enabling them to be explored and reinterpreted in ways that resonate with contemporary audiences. Finbow (2017) notes that performance has been strategically used to mediate exhibitions and enhance visitor experiences. Dunne-Howrie (2020) describes how modern museums utilise theatrical means to enrich visitor engagement. Groys (2018) asserts that museums not only stage events but also explore their boundaries and structures, focusing on the relationship between the event and its documentation:

The art museum not only stages events but also is a medium for investigating the eventfulness of the event, of its boundaries and its structure [...] The investigation[‘s] focal point is [...] relationships between the event and its documentation. (p. 20)

In contemporary art museums, which prioritise visitor engagement and experience, curation plays a key role in facilitating cultural exchange by connecting individuals, artists, institutions, and artworks. While cultural mediation is a comprehensive term covering a wide range of activities and participants, as Moersch argues, it broadly focuses on “the process of gaining and negotiating knowledge ... through exchange, reaction and creative response” (2015, p. 4).

As performance art archives increasingly become a permanent part of museum collections, curators are exploring creative and participatory ways to activate these materials within exhibitions. Finbow (2017) highlights the evolving role of performance documentation, noting its dual function in supporting live performances and facilitating audience engagement. Comprehensive performance documentation is particularly critical for including repeatable live artworks in exhibitions, allowing curators to recreate experiences and make them accessible to museum visitors. This evolution signifies a shift, as performance art transitions from a peripheral practice to becoming integral to experimental and participatory curatorial practices.

The incorporation of performance art archives into museum practices has also prompted the development of innovative curatorial strategies. Pineda (2019) argues that performance curation, while still an emerging field, requires rigorous engagement and critical exploration to address its complexities. A primary challenge in curating performance art archives lies in how to reintroduce audiences to the unique, ephemeral and powerful experiences of performance art while further encouraging audience interaction. Darwin-Gitonga (2022) highlights that such exhibitions reinterpret the performativity within objects, moving beyond traditional interactions between the body and the audience. This performativity refers to their ability to evoke actions, emotions, or narratives, transforming static materials into active participants in the exhibition's dialogue with the audience. These approaches also introduce temporal and spatial shifts, offering new possibilities for artistic expression and interaction with archival materials.

In summary, this section has explored the development of curation in performance art and archival practices. The next section will highlight the crucial role of transnational curatorial strategies in exhibition and audience engagement, emphasising their potential ability to activate performance art archives in a collaborative way.

Activating the Archive

The exhibition *Flow* aimed to explore the crucial role of audience engagement in presenting performance art archives, broadening the scope of artistic practice, and making past performance art experiences more accessible to contemporary audiences. Kurz (2018) has highlighted the predicament faced by performance art archives, where most of the time, we can only find textual descriptions or accompanying images related to these performances. This indicates that 'something' happened, leaving people to speculate about what the performance might have been like, as outlined in the previous section. This section will explore case studies of audience engagement with performance art archives, specifically focusing on how the archives presented in the exhibition *Flow* may have facilitated transnational interactions. I will introduce the conceptual model of the transnational performative archive, highlighting how the exhibition encouraged audiences from diverse cultural contexts to connect with, interpret, and actively participate in the reinterpretation of performance art. By examining how audiences engaged with the presented archives, I will

demonstrate how these archives become dynamic spaces for reinterpretation and reimagination. This process not only activates the archive but also bridges historical works with contemporary experiences, offering new perspectives on performance art through cultural exchange. I will argue that the exhibition’s emphasis on audience engagement and transnational perspectives highlights the potential of the performative archive to foster deeper and more inclusive dialogues, allowing multiple cultural narratives to coexist within the archive. Table 2 summarises the artworks presented in the *Flow* exhibition, the documentation and presentation methods employed, audience responses collected, and audience engagement level. This overview provides context for the subsequent discussion of audience engagement and archive activation.

Table 2

Flow – Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition: Artworks, Presentation mode, and Audience engagement

FLOW – Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition			
Artwork	Presenting mode	Audience Responses Collected	Engagement Level
<i>Pair/Group Painting Practice</i>	Photos, Videos, Interactive Installation (Timer, Paper, Pen, Artist instruction)	15 drawings, 1 spontaneous performance, 5 feedback	High
<i>Hunter</i>	Photos, Videos, Interactive Installation (Infusion devise with performance smell)	20 written descriptions	High
<i>The Train Has Arrived</i>	Photos, Videos, Audience oral memories	5 feedback	Moderate
<i>One Hour Closer</i>	Photos, Videos, Artist statement	2 feedback	Low

Note. The table summarises the works presented in the *Flow* exhibition, the modes of documentation presentation, audience responses collected, levels of engagement.

The exhibition featured two significant performance art archives collected from Chinese artist Xu Meiyu (Figure 68, 69). The first piece, titled *Pair Painting Practice*, took place on October 22, 2023, at the Chengdu Guanghui Art Museum in China. The second piece, *Group Painting Practice*, was held on October 24, 2023, at the Chengdu Nongyuan Art Village in China. The exhibited archive of Xu Meiyu’s work includes photographs, videos, artist statements, audience memories and interactive installation.

Figure 68

A photo captured the exhibition space of Flow -Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition, 2024



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

In both performances, participants collaboratively wielded pens, symbolising the complex dynamics of collaboration and conflict. This action reflects the fluidity of power relations within collective creation, where shared tools can unify participants while also revealing subtle tensions. The performances highlight the dynamic nature of collaborative artistic processes, emphasising the shifts in power and differing perspectives that emerge. The artist

invites audiences to reflect on these interactions, fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in collaborative art practices.

Figure 69

A photo captured the exhibition space of Flow -Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition, 2024

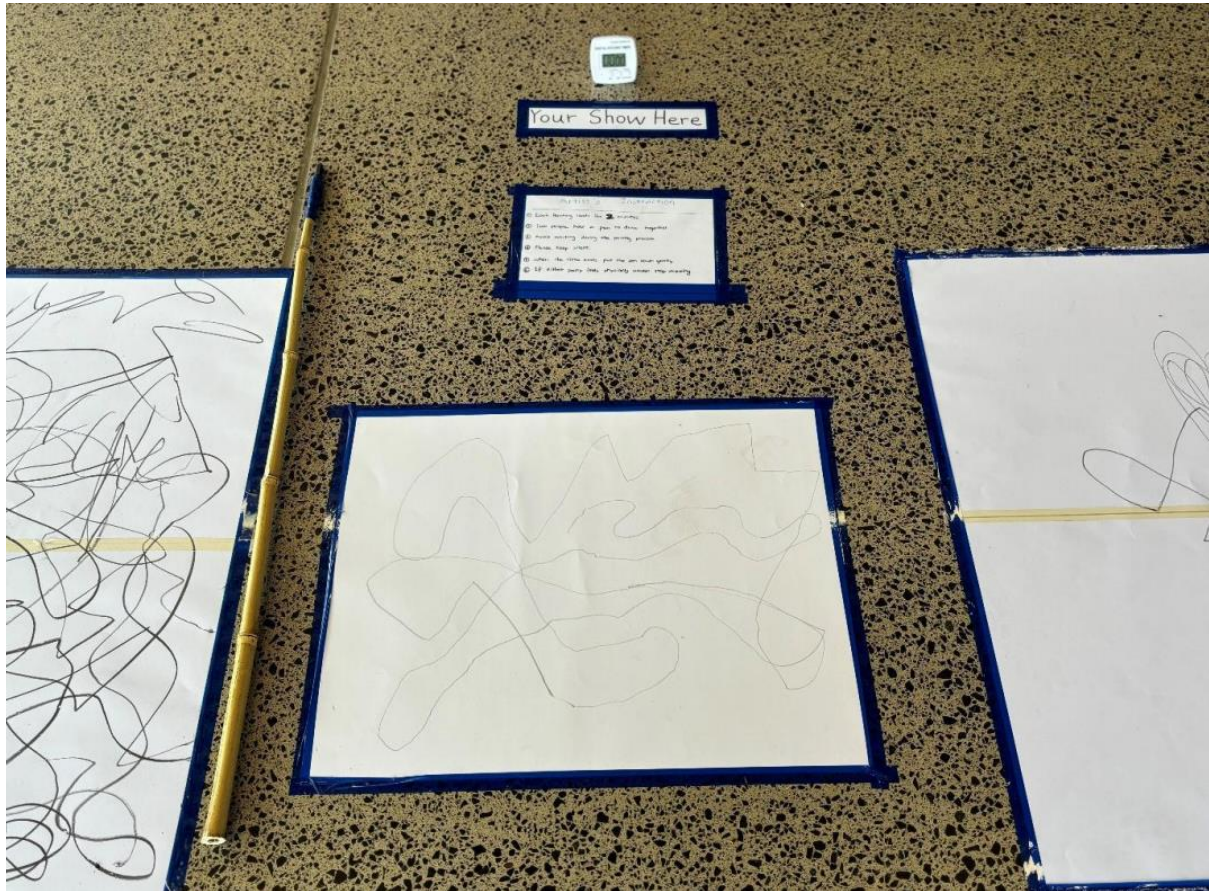


Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

Apart from displaying photo and video documentation of Xu Meiyu's two performance art pieces in the exhibition space, an interactive installation was also placed in the middle of the space. This installation was designed based on the artist's original performance art pieces. The ground is marked with artist instructions for the implementation of this embodied experiences, as shown in Figure 70.

Figure 70

A photo captured the installation in Flow -Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition, 2024



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

On March 8, 2024, two Chinese exchange students entered the exhibition space (Figure 71). They were classmates studying construction together. They were very proactive in asking questions and mentioned that they had never seen Chinese performance art in New Zealand before, expressing a keen interest in the field. I introduced them to the theme of the exhibition and the archival materials on display. Even before I invited them to participate in the interactive installation on the floor, they eagerly asked if they could “play” with it. The use of “play” reflects a shift in contemporary museum practices, where playful engagement fosters creativity and deeper audience connections. This approach aligns with trends in institutions like MoMA, which emphasise interactive installations to transform museums into dynamic spaces of exploration and participation (Simon, 2010).

Figure 71

A photo captured the moment when audience members actively participate in the installation of Xu Meiyu's archive in the exhibition Flow -Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition, 2024



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

From Figure 71, we can see that the audience participants held the pen with a lot of force and had smiles on their faces, indicating that for them, it was more of an entertaining experience. From their participating process and the final presentation of their experience, it was evident that due to their familiarity with each other, the entire drawing process was relatively harmonious without any significant conflicts. In Figure 72, one person is attempting to write in English while the other resists, seeming unsure of the other person's intention, wanting to follow along but maintaining scepticism. After they finished exploring the exhibition, I asked them about their thoughts on the exhibition and interaction with the archive. They said that it was an interesting experience, unlike traditional archival exhibitions. They also felt that through participating with the archive, they gained a clearer understanding of the artist's creative intent.

Figure 72

A photo captured the audience-generated documentation in Xu Meiyu's performance art archive, 2024



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

On March 4, 2024, some sociology students, accompanied by their teacher, visited the exhibition space. Following the instructions provided by the artist displayed on the floor, they picked up the pen to participate with this performative experience (Figure 73). One of the female students kept her eyes closed throughout the process, feeling her own strength being influenced by the forces exerted by others. Three other female students were squatting, while one male student stood, as he held the pen at its highest point, making it easier to control its direction. Interestingly, I noticed that none of them seemed to have a specific idea of what they wanted to draw.

Figure 73

A photo captured the moment when audience members actively participate in the installation of Xu Meiyu's archive in the exhibition Flow -Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition, 2024



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

In contrast to the facial expressions and grip strength analysis of the two participants I previously discussed, these four participants appeared more harmonious. They did not exhibit joyful or aggressive expressions; instead, they were focused on feeling, observing, experiencing, guiding, and listening. After completing the experience, they all smiled.

According to an anonymous audience member who participated in this performance:

It was amazing. With my eyes closed, I could feel the constant pulling and tugging by others, which left a deep impression on me. Often, in our society, we are easily

subjected to criticism and judgment by others. I've never before understood the people around me in this way. (Anonymous, personal communication, 2024).

On March 6, 2024, some visitors in the exhibition hall, who were strangers to each other, participated together in the interactive installation by holding the pen (Figure 74). Unlike the previously analysed groups where most participants were squatting, this group of five participants were all standing. They were smiling, but it was evident that because they were strangers and did not know each other, they did not seem to consciously seek control over the pen; instead, each person was observing. After the experience, I immediately asked one of the five female participants about her thoughts. She expressed, "I felt very awkward. I didn't know what to do, and I felt like the person next to me was constantly pulling the pen. My mind was blank, and I have no idea what to draw".

Figure 74

A photo captured the moment when audience members actively participate in the installation of Xu Meiyu's archive in the exhibition Flow -Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition, 2024



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

These cases provide valuable insights into how performance art archives can be curated to foster audience engagement, particularly through a transnational lens. By observing how different groups of participants – ranging from familiar classmates to strangers – interacted with the installation, we gain deeper understanding of how social dynamics, emotional

responses and power relations are shaped by participants' transnational background. Cultural differences in attitudes toward collaboration, individualism, and the role of art can significantly influence how participants engage with the archive, highlighting the ways in which cultural contexts shape the interpretation of the work. These interactions emphasise the potential of the transnational performative archive to bridge cultural divides, offering a dynamic, cross-cultural platform for dialogue and reinterpretation. Through such engagement, the performative archive not only becomes a site for collaborative meaning-making but also enriches our understanding of how diverse audiences contribute to the evolving narrative of performance art across borders.

This active engagement with the archive reflects the core concept of the transnational performative archive. As participants interact with the archive, they move beyond mere observation; they become co-creators, contributing to the archive's ongoing evolution and embodying its dynamic, participatory nature. The perceptual pathways opened by such experiences may leave a lasting impact, as participants form embodied connections with the performance art archive and with one another. Unlike conventional archives, which prioritise preservation and objectivity, the transnational performative archive emphasises interaction and collaboration, inviting audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds to contribute to its continuous transformation. This framework draws on key concepts from existing literature, bridging archival processes with the dynamic, cross-cultural engagement of performative practices, offering a space where diverse voices and perspectives can collectively reshape and reinterpret the archive.

Within current literature, scholars such Borggreen and Gade (2013) propose that the concept of *performing archives* refers to both the process by which humans create and engage with archives, and the way archives themselves shape history, influencing human beings while structuring and giving form to our thoughts and ideas. This approach invites a critical examination of fundamental issues in performance studies, on how to engage with the rich repository of contemporary performance art and practices to keep them present in the here and now, as well as how to understand the disciplinary dynamics and performative forces at play in the processes of documentation and archiving (Borggreen & Gade, 2013). Panos Kouro (2012) suggests the concept of *performative archiving*, emphasising a shift from traditional static archives to dynamic, real-time models that are facilitated by digital platforms. In his framework, the archive is no longer a fixed entity but an evolving,

participatory space where the public actively contributes to its content and structure. This shift reflects a transition from the conventional archival focus on preservation and stability to a more fluid, collaborative approach. Kouros (2012) argues that in this digital, networked form of archiving, the archive is continuously redefined by the interactions between human agency and digital systems, allowing for ongoing contributions and reinterpretations. This real-time evolution fosters a participatory model, where the boundaries between the archive and its users blur, facilitating a dynamic and decentralised exchange of knowledge.

In contrast, my understanding and interpretation of the performative archive is more aligned with a fusion of the concepts put forward by Borggreen, Gade, and Kouros. In this thesis, I propose the concept of *transnational performative archive* not only signifies a dynamic, evolving and living process, but also represents a form of transnational and cross-cultural collaboration. It embodies an archive that is performative in nature. The introduction of this conceptual model may help us bridge cultural divides and expand traditional research within the specific context of performance art, offering new perspectives in the field. While Kouros highlights the technological and participatory aspects of performative archiving, my argument stresses how diverse cultural perspectives – especially in the context of performance art -- are central to the archive's development. In my framework, the transnational performative archive is not solely shaped by technological interactions but also by the cultural, social, and historical contexts that audiences bring to the archival material. This transnational approach emphasises how the involvement of audiences from different cultural and national backgrounds enriches the archive through varied interpretations and meanings. Rather than viewing the archive merely as a public space for contribution, I position the transnational performative archive as a site for intercultural exchange, where performance art archives become platforms for reinterpreting history, engaging with multiple narratives, and co-creating knowledge across borders; most importantly, it is performative.

The exhibition also featured archives of another Chinese performance artist Li Joy's work entitled *Hunter*. In this performance art piece, the artist integrated smell into the sensory experience, adding a unique layer to the audience's experience. The artist let aromatic liquid flow from tubes fixed to her wrist, making this elusive olfactory element an essential part of the performance. In the original live performance art piece, the artist danced continuously and then dropped water droplets onto the audience's bodies or hands. Sometimes, the artist briefly held hands with the audience, leaving behind an unforgettable scent as a unique

sensory imprint, firmly embedding the experience in participants' memories and continuously flowing in the live audience's experience.

In the exhibition *Flow*, the archive of *Hunter* not only displayed the photographs, videos and artist statement, but I also collaborated with the artist to install an interactive installation labelled "Performance Smell" (Figure 75). The instructions on the wall encouraged audiences to open the switch, take a drop of perfumed water on their hands, sniff it, write down their thoughts, and then stick their notes on the wall. This simple infusion device invited the audience to experience the smells from Joy's performance art piece. The inclusion of this scent in the exhibited archive made it a dynamic element, bridging the gap between past and present, enhancing the performative nature of the performance art archive, and shaping a multidimensional artistic experience for the exhibition's audience.

Figure 75

A photo captures the audience engagement with the installation of Li Joy's archive in the exhibition of Flow – Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition, 2024



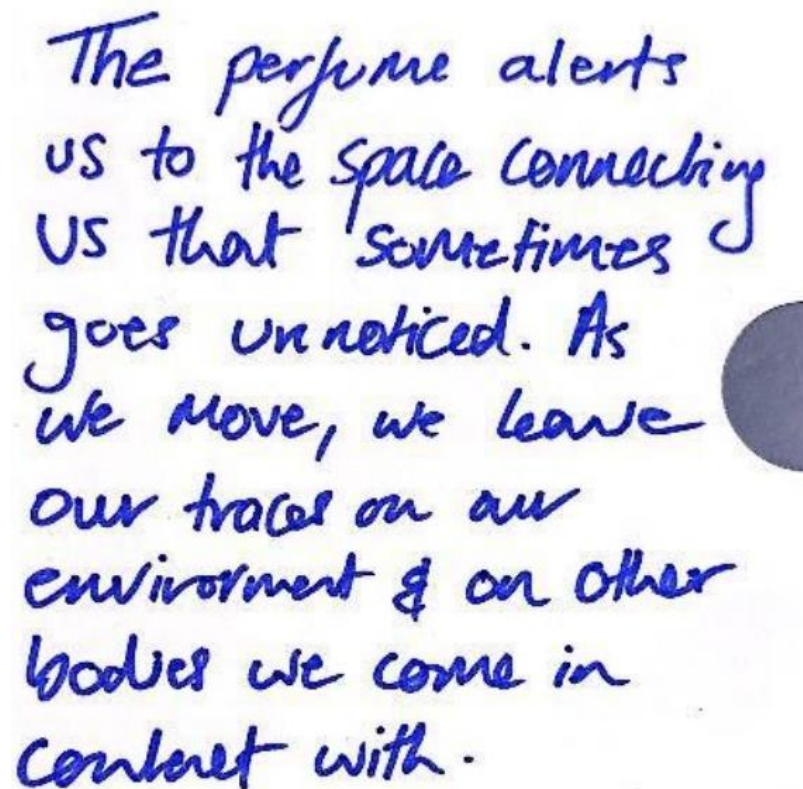
Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

The interactive installation received enthusiastic responses from many audience members, who wrote down memories sparked by the scents they encountered (Figure 76). Thus, within the exhibition space, a synergistic interaction was facilitated for the audience between the materiality and the ‘imagined past’ versus the ‘experienced present’. The concept of singular

material records no longer existed, as the remnants of the past were ‘discovered by new audiences’ in some way, allowing us to ‘smell’ meaning from them.

Figure 76

A photo captures an audience member’s response to the smell installation of Li Joy in the exhibition of Flow – Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition, 2024



The perfume alerts
us to the space connecting
us that sometimes
goes unnoticed. As
we move, we leave
our traces on our
environment & on other
bodies we come in
contact with.

Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

“The perfume alerts us to the space connecting us that sometimes goes unnoticed. As we move, we leave our traces on our environment & on other bodies we come in contact with.”

The feedback from this audience member regarding the olfactory interactive installation not only highlights sensory experiences but also underscores the potential of the performance art archive to contribute to knowledge production on a transnational scale. By engaging with the installation, the audience member became aware of the interconnectedness of spaces and the traces left behind, showcasing how artistic experiences can lead to deeper insights and understanding. This feedback contributes to the growing body of data on how audience engagement with the archive can facilitate knowledge production by stimulating sensory

perceptions and prompting reflections on spatial connections and individual impacts across cultural and social landscapes. It emphasises the role of audience engagement in creating meaning and contributing to the generation of knowledge within the realm of performance art archive exhibition, fostering a dynamic dialogue among diverse participants and enriching the transnational discourse on performance art.

As Williamson (2013) points out, a good exhibition pays attention to both what is displayed and what remains unseen. The best exhibits tell a story, and curatorial decisions guide the public in using the items to find answers. This reveals the ongoing discussion about the roles of archivists and curators. Moreover, by inviting the audience to participate interactively, curator offer them the opportunity to re-experience performance art pieces that they may not have witnessed firsthand. Through engaging with the installations set up by the artists and curator, where they hold the same pen as their friends or strangers, the present audience gains insights into the conceptual framework behind the artist's work. This interaction fosters a transnational dialogue, as participants from diverse cultural backgrounds bring their own interpretations and experiences to the archive. Such experiences not only help the audience construct a more comprehensive narrative of performance art history but also embody the essence of the performative archive, demonstrating how art can bridge cultural divides and promote a shared understanding of artistic practices across different contexts.

In other words, each activation signifies changes in the relationships between its constitutive elements. This is a dynamic that encompasses not only the exhibition but also the display installations, space and institution and related discourses, and the various individuals involved: artists and curators, audiences, museum directors, critics, theorists. These relationships are continuously reconfigured and reorganised, shaping the spatiotemporal structure of the exhibition. Hence, they possess their own "anachronicity" (Nagel & Wood, 2010), making them witnesses of the contemporary but also having the potential to act across different periods and link them together.

Based on these characteristics, exhibitions offer a means to rethink and re-narrate history while also exposing the performativity of the archive. The performative archive not only preserves past performances but actively engages with the present, continuously reshaping itself through audience engagement, thereby forging new connections across time and space. Although only a few theorists, artists, and curators have fully explored this concept, it

challenges traditional notions of how performance art archives are displayed and activated within art spaces.

Effective documentation in performance art plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between past performances and future audience experiences, extending the impact and lifespan of the original works. Finbow (2017) states that documentation in the context of performance art transcends mere record-keeping for museums; it becomes a strategic consideration for re-enacting works in the future. Chatzichristodoulous (2014) also considers the implications of performance art documentation as experiences within the museum, where value comes from the audience being exposed to an experience, rather than an object. She suggests that museums are ‘failing to grasp the importance of live experience as a core element of every performance practice’ (p. 52). Despite initial concerns about devaluing documentation, she suggests that in specific instances, the boundaries between liveness and documentation blur, resulting in the creation of live documents and the performance of documentation as a live experience. As Auslander proposes,

no documented work of performance art is performed solely as an end in itself: the performance is always at one level raw material for documentation, the final product through which it will be circulated and with which it will inevitably become identified (2022, p. 31).

This viewpoint highlights the importance of intentional documentation in connecting past events with current and forthcoming audiences. By leveraging documentation to prolong the lifespan of a performance, future audience experiences become equally significant as those of the present. While the performance itself is grounded in the present moment and the audience’s immediate presence, purposeful documentation shifts focus to anticipate the impact on future viewers and how it can deliver past experiences to them.

Such performance art archival practices with a focus on the transnational audience engagement operate on traces of the past and act as an active mediator between the past, future, and present. As Pineda (2019) points out, the fluidity of curating performance visions is not about aimless or necessarily postmodern contemporary debates but rather about a rooted fluidity capable of self-awareness of ideas, trajectories, and new directions it is taking. It is both flexible and grounded, more akin to the absent and the underlying than the materially present. The curatorial practice of *Flow* in this study reveals that viewing and

participating in the performance art archive actually has a dual effect: it reveals some information to present audiences while also reminding them “what is absent from the archive: the past ‘as it was then’” (Dunne, 2015, p. 39). However, the archive is not the “past” but rather forms of time remnants that constitute the material afterlife of the past. Yet, this afterlife is not a “whole” afterlife but a “fragmented to be supplemented” afterlife (Dunne, 2015, p. 39). Performance art archives, like memories, are “fragments of a vanished whole” (Millar, 2006, p. 114). This perspective invites a transnational dialogue, as the fragmented nature of performance art archives resonates with diverse cultural narratives and practices. It allows for a plurality of voices and interpretations, reflecting the varied contexts from which audiences engage with these archives. It is through the continuous reinterpretation and reassembling of these fragments that the transnational performative archive emerges – a concept that underscores the performativity of the archive itself. This transnational performative archive is not static but actively engages in a constantly evolving process of knowledge production, shaping and reshaping our understanding of the past in the present, while fostering cross-cultural connections and enriching the collective narrative of performance art.

However, not all performance art archives are suitable for curatorial practices that involve audience engagement. The exhibition *Flow* also showcased the archive of another two performance art pieces: *I Hour Closer* by Zhang Yiy and Sun Zhenyu (Figure 77) and *The Train Has Arrived* by Shi Mengxia (Figure 78). In the display of these two works, although there was no direct interaction, the audience still contributed to the evolving narrative of the performance art archives in their own unique ways, engaging with the materials and interpretations presented.

Figure 77

A photo captured the exhibition space of Flow – Chinese Performance Art: Documentation and Exhibition, 2024



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

Zhang Yiy and Sun Zhenyu's artwork *1 Hour Closer* was implemented on October 23, 2023, at the A4 Art Museum in Chengdu, China. It was a thought-provoking exploration of the concept of time and its impact on interpersonal relationships. The performance was

documented in a first-person perspective video format, delving deep into the complex dynamics of bridging the time gap between individuals separated by international boundaries. During the festival, the artist Zhang Yiy played the recorded video of an earlier stage of the performance behind the stage, while simultaneously standing at the centre of the stage, holding a hammer in the centre of the stage, smashing two clocks, and continuously adjusting the time hands. This action symbolised a tangible effort to overcome temporal barriers. The performance concluded with the sound of a bell, marking a symbolic moment of time fusion. This artwork encapsulates the essence of flow by showcasing the fluidity of time and human endeavours to transcend temporal limitations. It emphasises the ongoing dialogue between individuals across borders and highlights the resilience and creativity inherent in bridging temporal and spatial divides. The artists aimed to reveal profound reflections on the challenges posed by time differences, especially in a world increasingly interconnected yet constrained by abstract barriers. Zhang Yiy and Sun Zhenyu's rich experiences living abroad added depth to their exploration of how time differences affect interpersonal relationships and connectivity. In *1 Hour Closer*, the theme is based on the six-hour time difference between China and Germany. The performance symbolically traverses a journey spanning 7.5 degrees of longitude in each direction, gradually adjusting the local time difference by one hour, aiming to bring two distant locations closer in time. In this exhibition, not only were videos of Zhang Yiy and Sun Zhenyu's original performance showcased, but also photos of Zhang Yiy implementing the artwork on-site, the clocks she smashed, gloves worn, and the hammer she used were displayed.

Although the curation strategy and implementation of Zhang Yiy's archive did not include interactive installations, my observations and conversations with an audience member demonstrate the knowledge-producing capacity of performance art archives and their inherent performativity. Amille (not their real name), an academic visitor from Germany, caught my attention as many visitors were initially drawn to interactive installations and videos in the exhibition space. However, Amille stood still for quite some time in front of *1 Hour Closer*. She asked me why there was no introduction or background information for the works in the space, and I explained that this was an experimental exhibition project that aimed to explore whether audience engagement in the enhancement of archives could create new narratives in the history of performance art, rather than presenting static authoritative archival documents. She was surprised by the exploratory nature of this exhibition project, mentioning she had never seen an exhibition without artwork introductions. During our conversation, I

asked her why she was interested in this piece; she mentioned that although the piece lacked interactivity compared with others displayed, she still engaged in a dialogue with the artist through “reading” the photos, videos, and the artifacts on the floor. She felt the artist’s exploration of time, space, and the body. Amille even picked up the hammer and gloves used by the artist from the floor, symbolically engaging with the artwork. Amille’s feedback highlights that even without direct audience participation, performance art archives can stimulate audience reflection and emotional resonance, leading to the generation of new knowledge and understanding. Peterson (2017) argues that different modes of perception utilised provide an opportunity for individuals involved in performance narratives to explore elements of curated events that extend beyond cultural boundaries, rather than being preoccupied or overshadowed by the specific cultural context of a particular event.

Artist Shi Mengxia’s artwork *The Train Has Arrived* embodies the concept of flow through dynamic interactions between the artist, audience, and environment. The pitch-black performance space, devoid of chairs, serves as a stage for sensory experiences, with movement and sound as central elements. The familiar Chengdu subway announcement, presented in the local dialect, creates an immediate and localised sense, immersing the audience in an experiential journey. The artist runs and moves among the audience in the dark space, holding a speaker, while an assistant with a flashlight follows the artist’s footsteps, creating a play of light beams. Guided by the subway announcement, whenever the recording plays “The train has arrived,” the artist and assistant stop and turn off the lights. The flickering of lights and soundscape immerse the audience in an atmosphere of anticipation and unease.

Figure 78

A photo captured the exhibition space of Flow -Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition, 2024



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

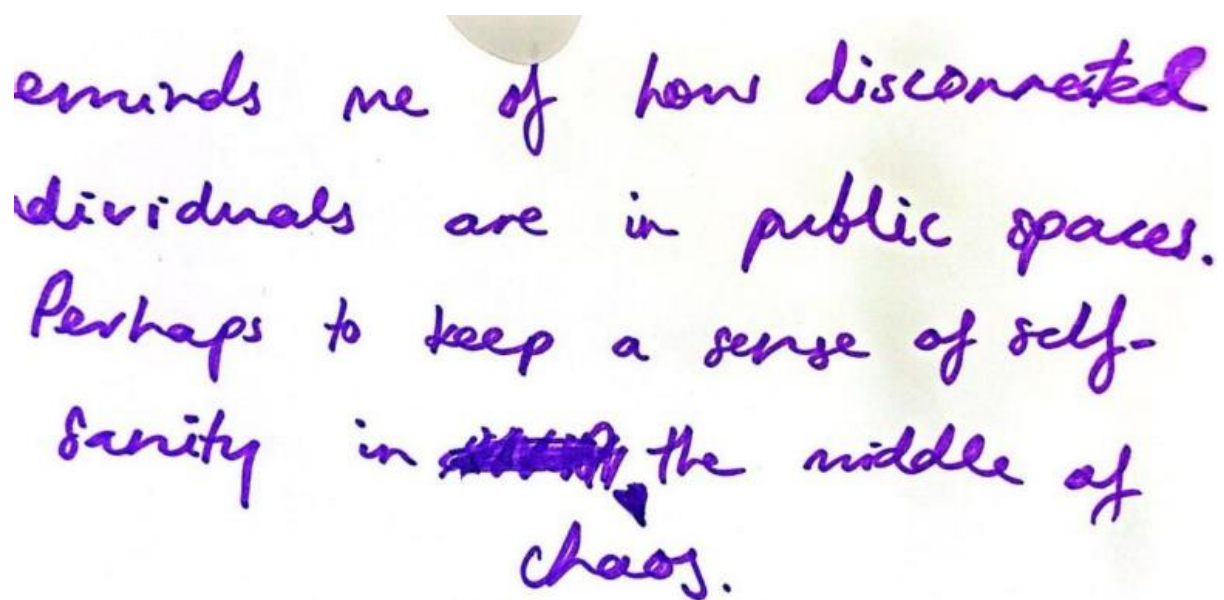
Audience reactions vary, with some spontaneously chasing and intercepting, while others remain cautiously still. Overall, *The Train Has Arrived* creates an experiential environment where movement, sound, and human responses blend together, inviting participants to experience flow within the dark performance space. The display of this artwork's archive did not include interactive installations due to space constraints. However, surprisingly, the audience still interacted with the archive to some extent by viewing photos and videos, thus constructing a unique narrative for the work. I remember one afternoon, a young man in the exhibition space was drawn to the photos of *The Train Has Arrived*. He praised the photographer who captured the artwork, mentioning how the photos appeared mysterious, sophisticated, and captivating with their strong black-and-white contrasts.

Additionally, there was an audience member who wrote down their interpretation of this piece on a card placed nearby: "Reminds me of how disconnected individuals are in public spaces. Perhaps to keep a sense of self-sanity in the middle of chaos" (Figure 79). This interpretation demonstrates how the audience connects the archive with their personal

creative thinking and emotions. It also highlights the performance art archive's potential to provoke deep reflection and emotional resonance. As mentioned earlier, not all performance art archives are suitable for curatorial practices centred on the strategy of audience engagement. In this exhibition, Shi Mengxia's work *The Train Has Arrived* and Zhang Yiy and Sun Zhenyu's artwork *1 Hour Closer* did not receive much attention from the audience. When considering how to display performance art archives in a way that encourages audience engagement, it is essential to incorporate the unique characteristics of each work.

Figure 79

A photo captures the audience's response with Shi Mengxia's archive The Train Has Arrived in the exhibition of Flow – Chinese Performance Art: Documentation and Exhibition, 2024



reminds me of how disconnected
individuals are in public spaces.
Perhaps to keep a sense of self-
sanity in ~~the~~ the middle of
chaos.

Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

The representation of performance art archives faces the urgency of research and experimental exploration. As Dunne (2015) suggests, archival records are closely intertwined with the creation of live performances. By exploring the significance of documents in the practice of performance, Dunne argues that archival materials have the capacity to “act as the genesis for live acts” (p. 3). The generative function of archives enables performance to become a means of historical inquiry, fostering interactive communication between audiences and the past. Those who advocate for ephemerality as intrinsic to performance often overly rely on comparing live events to reproducible archival artifacts. Such studies often overlook

thoroughly investigating the impact of live events on audiences and underestimate the importance of archival practices in art history and audience research (Dunne, 2015).

I aimed to produce an on-going and self-reflective practice-based enquiry by developing an understanding of how the archives of performance art can be activated through audience engagement. Dominic Johnson (2017) explores the interplay that generates significance, emphasising the synergy among the artist's physicality, the materials involved, and the audience. Often words and images function in an initially informative manner. However, in art works, they can also convey mixed messages (Ross, 2014). I share a similar position to Anderson (1995), who wanted an audience to be surprised, to question, or to laugh as the documentation is juxtaposed, evoking reactions and reinterpretations without explaining everything clearly. Integrating practice-based investigations into the performance art archive curatorial experiment allows participants to actively contribute to the interpretation and narrative of a work and history, a process that many curators may not have experienced. This audience engagement with the performative documentation aspect of curation can lead to heightened sensitivities and enriched experiences in the artmaking and knowledge production process. Grant (2002), proposing his argument which is rooted in Heideggerian philosophy, emphasises that true presence and time revelation occur in the living moment of performance, which is oriented towards the future rather than being a static present. This dynamic interplay between past reflections and future possibilities in performance underscores the depth and transformative potential of the performative experience.

With the current interest in curating performance art archives, relying solely on collections or library systems to preserve art history seems to lead to boredom, passivity, and a sense of absence. Activated performance art archives hold special significance, influencing how they are viewed, experienced, and interpreted across different cultural contexts. In the exhibition *Flow* audiences are encouraged to reinterpret, participate, and narrate their own thoughts on the archives in multiple ways. This type of "collaborative and performative" curatorial strategy differs from the reenactments popular in the early 2000s; it critically explores memory and how audiences integrate performance art archives into art history and individual narratives. This transnational performative archive can be presented multiple times to different audiences in different contexts and narratives, thus exploring its transformative potential. The performative archive serves not only as a means for viewers to engage with the performance artwork but also as a platform for exploring and broadening the scope of the

archive itself. This performativity suggests that the archive is not a static reference to an original performance but a dynamic entity that evolves in value through revisions and evaluations by diverse individuals. This concept aligns with Clarke's earlier notion that due to the dynamic nature of live art, "it is necessary for its archives to remain open to adaptation, to the inclusion of new performance inventions, practical knowledges (sic) and creative forms of documentation" (Clarke, 2008, p. 172). Therefore, the transnational performative archive represents a living, evolving entity, continuously reshaped by the contributions and interactions of its audience.

Overall, this research project aims to create an interface for audiences to access performance art archives, constructing a distributed practice model. Audiences can view, participate in, and interact with archival materials in the exhibition space, challenging the traditional "Do not touch" signs commonly seen in museums. These archival materials seem to exist simultaneously as both present and absent, bridging the gap between tangible artworks and intangible performances. They unfold in time within the imagination of the audience, creating events as another lifecycle of performance art pieces. They are intertwined with the present audience, cultural, and social contexts, evoking elements of incompleteness and participation in the exhibition space, encouraging participants to engage beyond mere visual appreciation of objects. While these archival materials undeniably point to past performances, in this exhibition, audiences were encouraged to look to the future. By engaging with these archives, audiences in New Zealand contributed their unique cultural perspectives, deepening their understanding of Chinese performance art. This interaction fosters a dynamic, transnational dialogue that reshapes the artwork's meaning, transcending its original cultural context and allowing for a richer, more diverse interpretation across boundaries. These materials have the potential to become performative, but this potential is realised only when we actively engage with the archives in the present, using our imagination to collaboratively create new meanings and connections. This interactive approach not only democratises the access to performance art archives but also fosters a sense of community and shared experience among diverse audiences, reflecting the fluidity and interconnectedness of contemporary cultural practices.

As a transnational performative archive exhibition involving multiple participatory elements, *Flow* was not limited to traditional object-oriented curatorial practices. Instead, through the combination of documentations and audience engagement, it activated past performance art

and its archive to a certain extent, providing an environment for documentation to convey meaning and performances to enhance public awareness. In our interpretation of the performative archive, no one stands in a fixed position. It is reorganised, bounced back, and retold.

In the next section, I will further explore how transnational performative archives facilitate knowledge production, with a particular emphasis on embodied knowledge emerging through audience engagement.

Creating Knowledge and Performativity

Archive (sic) offers a potential site for engagement that even the most comprehensive scholarly critique or artistic reimagining can never fully exhaust. (Roms, 2013, p. 37)

Due to the multifaceted nature of performance art and its archives, their development, research, and potential for knowledge production extend far beyond initial perceptions. This section emphasises that audience engagement transforms the archival space into a site of active participation and knowledge production which I argue can be conceived as a transnational performative archive. This suggests that the archive is no longer a static, authoritative space but rather a place filled with possibilities and potential.

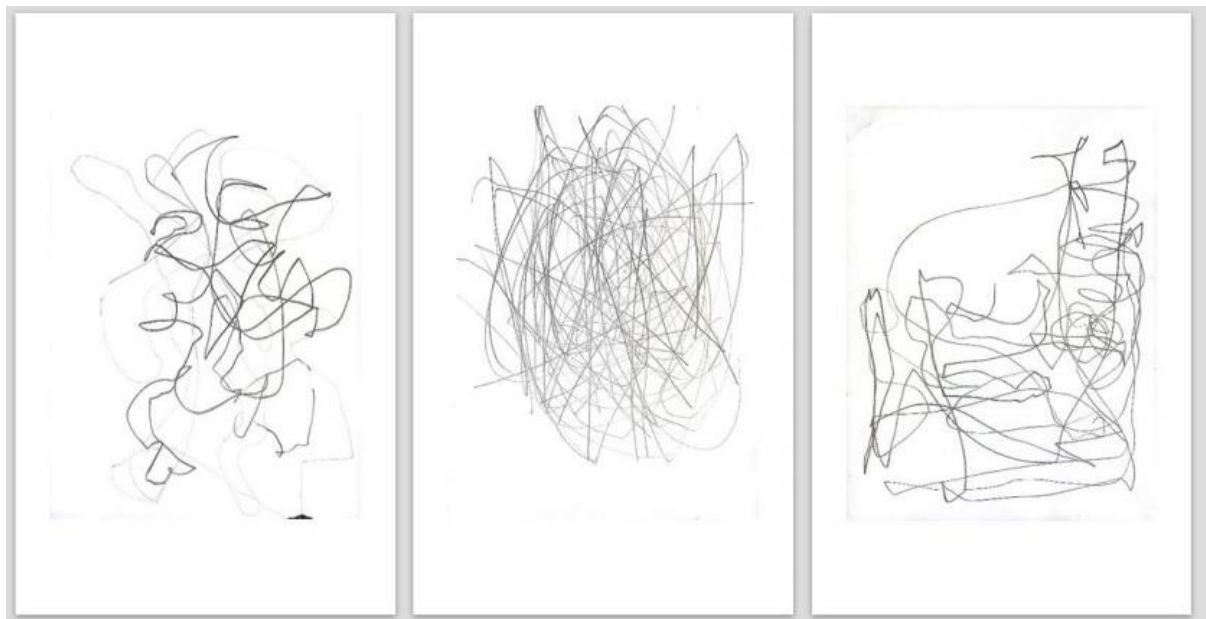
The exhibited archive of Xu Meiyu's *Pair Painting Practice* and *Group Painting Practice* explores the intricate balance between cooperation and resistance. In this section, I will specifically focus on and analyse the material generated by their engagement, namely the drawings or graffiti left by the audience.

When entering the exhibition space, audiences constructed their initial imaginations and narratives about the archival works by observing photos and videos. Subsequently, they encountered numerous sheets of blank paper, a pen, a timer, and an artist's instructions placed prominently in the centre of the space. Xu Meiyu's visual documentation and interactive installations provided audiences with a collaborative partnership, encouraging them to co-create the performance experience through engaging in narratives and active participation in the interactive installations.

Initially, audiences enjoyed observing the archives on the walls and screens. However, they quickly started interacting with other participants through the installations, immersing themselves in the artist-designed experiences. This interaction created a virtual third space where the possibilities for creativity are limitless (Gould, 2018). Keywords that can be deduced from these interactions (Figure 80, 81) include ‘chaos’, ‘conflict’, ‘resistance’, ‘following’, ‘confusion’, ‘peace’, among others. The drawings that they made represented archive materials generated by different audiences through the interactive installations, serving as tangible evidence of the archive’s performativity. This process demonstrates how the archive is not merely a repository of past events but an active, evolving entity that continues to be shaped by audience engagement.

Figure 80

A photo captured the audience-generated documentation in Xu Meiyu’s Performance art archive, 2024



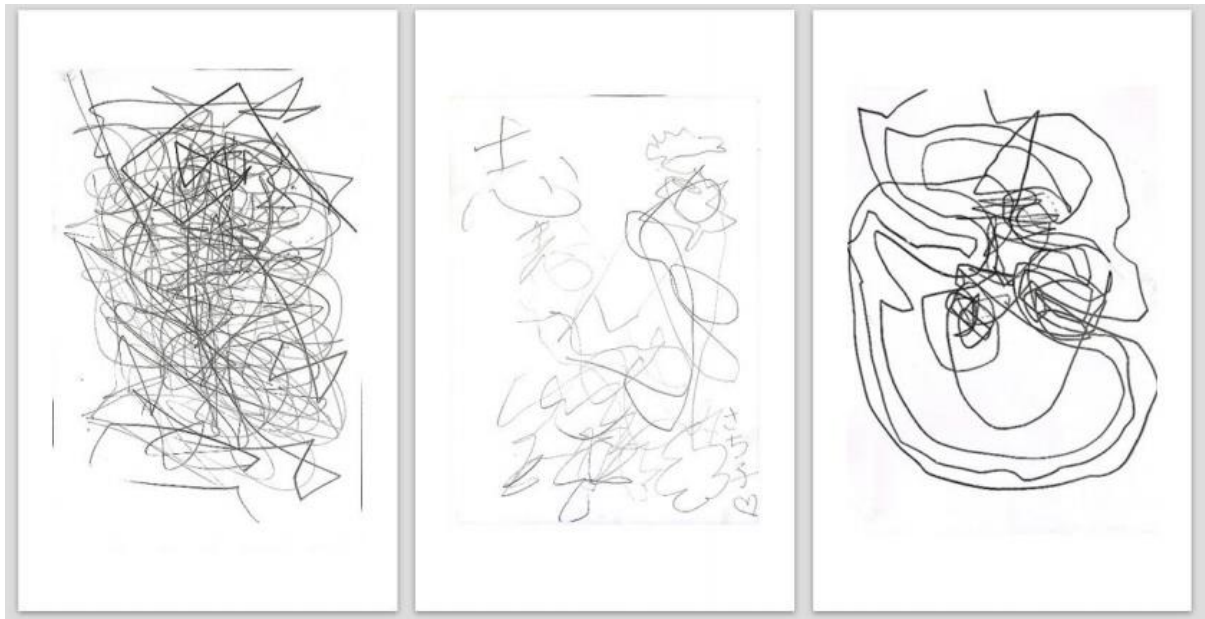
Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

Such archival interactive practices become a ‘communication event’, emerging from the encounter between present audiences, past performances, and current archives. Therefore, as Rye has stated, the role of documentation is to give performances “a life beyond its original manifestation, thus making it available to a broader research community” (2003, p. 115). The participatory installations in Xu Meiyu’s performance art archive serve not merely as passive displays but as dynamic platforms, activating archival materials into tangible

experiences. By encouraging active engagement through interactive installations, these archival representations transcend traditional archive boundaries, evolving into living, continuously developing entities – pointing to the nature of performative archive. Audience engagement in these cases illustrates the repetition and reactivation of the performance experience, a key aspect of practice-based research investigations.

Figure 81

A photo captured the audience-generated documentation in Xu Meiyu's Performance art archive, 2024



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

The interaction between observation, interpretation, and meaning making is crucial in understanding performance art archives. According to Thomas (2000), the brain uses acquired assumptions to create meaning from visual stimuli, thus making the act of observation significant as it integrates text and imagery into a unified experience (Kress, 2003). Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) further underscores the importance of the audience's role in interpreting artworks, suggesting that their engagement connects the artwork to the broader external world (Lebel, 1959). Therefore, the significance of such interactive installations in the exhibition and research of performance art archives will be hard to overlook, as discussed by Counsell and Wolf (2001), where artworks attain a full existence through someone's interpretation, encapsulating the meaning and experiences derived from our comprehension of the work.

Xu Meiyu's performance art documentation, combined with interactive installations, facilitates profound audience engagement and interpretation. This approach transforms static documents into dynamic, interactive experiences, embodying the concept of "embodied documentation" – archival materials that come to life through active audience involvement. This idea resonates with the concept of embodied cognition, which Nagatomo (1992) defines as knowledge gained not only through bodily experiences but also through sensory interactions. Hanna (1980) further describes embodied cognition as the continuous flow of sensations and actions in individual experiences. By incorporating bodily involvement as a cognitive space, performance art archives create immersive environments where audiences actively engage with and interpret performance art narratives. This approach not only highlights the importance of audience engagement in performance art archives and exhibitions but also emphasises that archives should be activated, expanded, and reinterpreted to fully capture their potential.

On the afternoon of 3rd March, 2024, an associate professor from the School of Social Work, accompanied by over thirty undergraduate students, visited the exhibition. They observed other visitors engaging with Xu Meiyu's interactive installations. Inspired by the scene, the associate professor and her students noticed additional pens on the table and spontaneously initiated a performative act. They used their fingertips to balance two pens horizontally between them, experiencing the power dynamics between two individuals, thus presenting a striking extension of the performative archive within the exhibition context (Figure 82, 83). This impromptu performance illustrates the potential of archival materials to explore complex social themes and dynamics. It showcases the transformative knowledge production capability of performative archives, engaging participants in interactive exploration and validation of their dynamic nature.

Figure 82

A photo captured the audience's impromptu performances in Flow – Chinese Performance Art: Documentation and Exhibition, 2024



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

Figure 83

A photo captured the audience's impromptu performances in Flow – Chinese Performance Art: Documentation and Exhibition, 2024



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

The growing emphasis on participation as a creative stance is evident in various performative, situational, and dialogical artistic practices (Smolinski, 2011). This impromptu performance initiated by the audience adds layers of interpretation and engagement beyond the predefined interactive installations. From an academic perspective, this spontaneous performance can be analysed through the lenses of audience agency and participatory art practices. Participants making decisions to create their own performances within the exhibition space reflect their interpretations and responses to the art on display, emphasising the interactive and dynamic nature of contemporary art exhibitions where the audience becomes active contributors to artistic dialogue. Furthermore, this impromptu performance touches upon the concepts of embodied knowledge and experiential learning. Through bodily engagement with the pen and exploration of the power balance between two individuals, participants embody and internalise the themes and concepts presented in the exhibition. This

experiential learning process deepens their understanding and connection to the art, transforming them from mere spectators into co-creators of meaning. As John Dewey (1934) posited, artworks are experiences, not passive observations but subjective experiences. In a broader sense, this spontaneous performance highlights the potential of art exhibitions in fostering meaningful interactions and transformative experiences among participants. It demonstrates how art inspires creativity, critical thinking and personal reflection, transcending traditional boundaries of artistic expression and engaging diverse audiences actively. This engagement is particularly significant in a globalised world, where cross-cultural exchanges enrich the understanding of art, allowing for varied interpretations and interactions that resonate with different communities.

The exhibition *Flow* displayed another piece of performance art archive titled *Hunter*, which invited the audience to write down memories inspired by the scent of the artwork using an olfactory interactive device. This device is a simple infusion set where viewers can approach and open the switch of a perfumed water bag themselves, allowing a drop of water with the scent of the performance art piece to fall onto their hand for them to smell. It was an intriguing experiment as memories associated with scents are often unique. Although the current audience could not directly experience the artwork's scent through physical contact with the artist on-site, this simple interactive device offered them the opportunity to engage with the artwork's scent, bridging a cultural and temporal encounter. Below, I have excerpted some writings from audience members about the scent (Figure 84, 85, 86):

Figure 84

Photos captured the audience's response of Li Joy's performance installation in Flow – Chinese Performance Art: Documentation and Exhibition, 2024



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

Figure 85

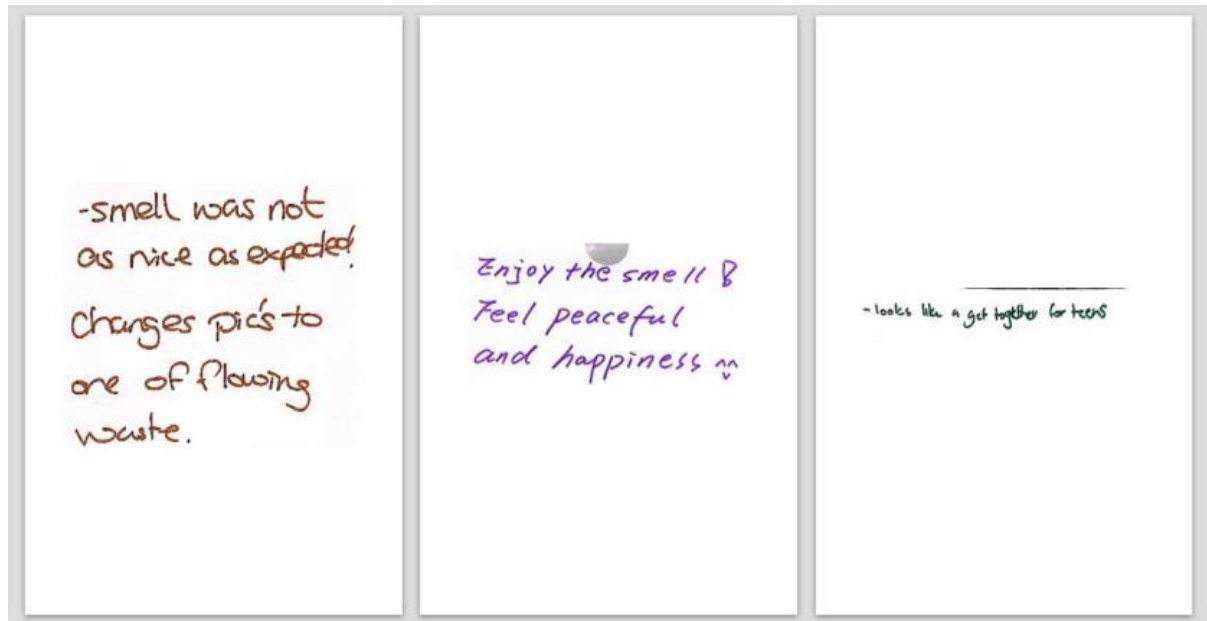
Photos captured the audience's response of Li Joy's performance installation in Flow – Chinese Performance Art: Documentation and Exhibition, 2024



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

Figure 86

Photos captured the audience's response of Li Joy's performance installation in Flow – Chinese Performance Art: Documentation and Exhibition, 2024



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

The audience's diverse and personal descriptions of their experiences with the interactive scent installation reflected their varying understandings and emotional responses to it. For instance, some described the scent symbolising beauty and tranquillity, such as “garden-like”, while others found it unpleasant, too sweet, or even likened it to flowing waste, showcasing subjective perceptions and evaluations of the scent. These descriptions indicate that smell significantly influences the audience's emotional experiences and mood states, also revealing how individual interpretations of scent may differ based on personal experiences and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, one audience member stood in front of the interactive installation for quite a long time, choosing to write an ‘agree’ on another's card (Figure 84). Overall, these personal reflections contribute to a collective understanding and appreciation of the performance art archive, highlighting how audience engagement activates and enriches the experience of the performance art archive, ultimately leading to the generation of new knowledge and perspectives. As Taylor (2003, p. 32) notes, this kind of scenario, referring to the complete embodied response to a performance, typically operates through ‘reactivation’ rather than ‘duplication’. Instead of being a mere copy, the scenario embodies a sense of recurrence or ‘once-againness’.

The audience's descriptions of the scents triggering memories and emotional responses (Figure 87, 88, 89) demonstrate their subjective interpretations and emotional resonance with the artwork. For instance, some mentioned childhood memories, family traditions, or even travel experiences, indicating how these individualised emotional experiences allowed the audience to connect their emotions with those conveyed by the artwork, thereby deepening their understanding and cognition of the piece. The audience's experiential descriptions of the scents can be considered as an embodied experience, as they reflect how the audience engaged with the artwork through senses and emotions, resulting in embodied sensations and experiences. The theoretical analysis of this interactive and performative aspect of the exhibition can be further explored through theories of embodied perception and participatory aesthetic theory. The embodied perception theory emphasises how individuals construct their understanding and experiences of the world through interacting with it using their bodies. The audience's descriptions of scents reflect their emotional and memory experiences generated through sensory engagement with the artwork, transcending mere visual observation to encompass embodied experiences through sensory participation. Defining the noun 'experience' as "the apprehension of an object or emotion through the senses or mind" and the verb 'experience' as "to participate in personally" (Joy & Sherry, 203, p. 259). In this context, we address the connection between embodiment and audience experience to elucidate the contours of aesthetic experience – not just as a process of bodily thinking but also how the body influences our logical thinking about art.

Figure 87

Photos captured the audience's response of Li Joy's performance installation in *Flow – Chinese Performance Art: Documentation and Exhibition, 2024*



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

Figure 88

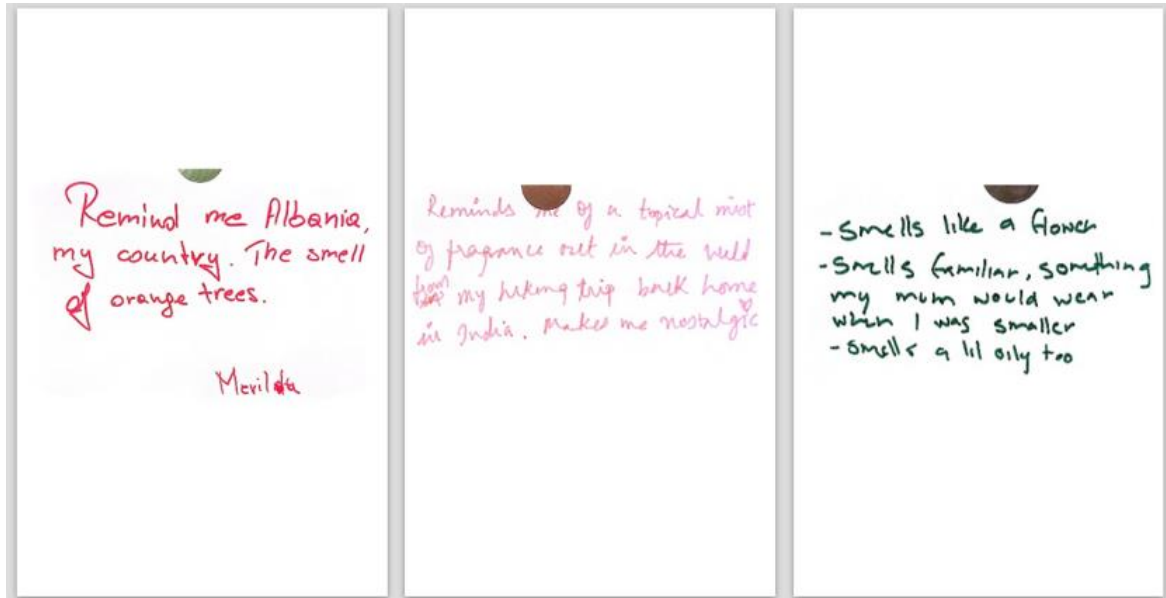
Photos captured the audience's response of Li Joy's performance installation in *Flow – Chinese Performance Art: Documentation and Exhibition, 2024*



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

Figure 89

Photos captured the audience's response of Li Joy's performance installation in *Flow – Chinese Performance Art: Documentation and Exhibition, 2024*

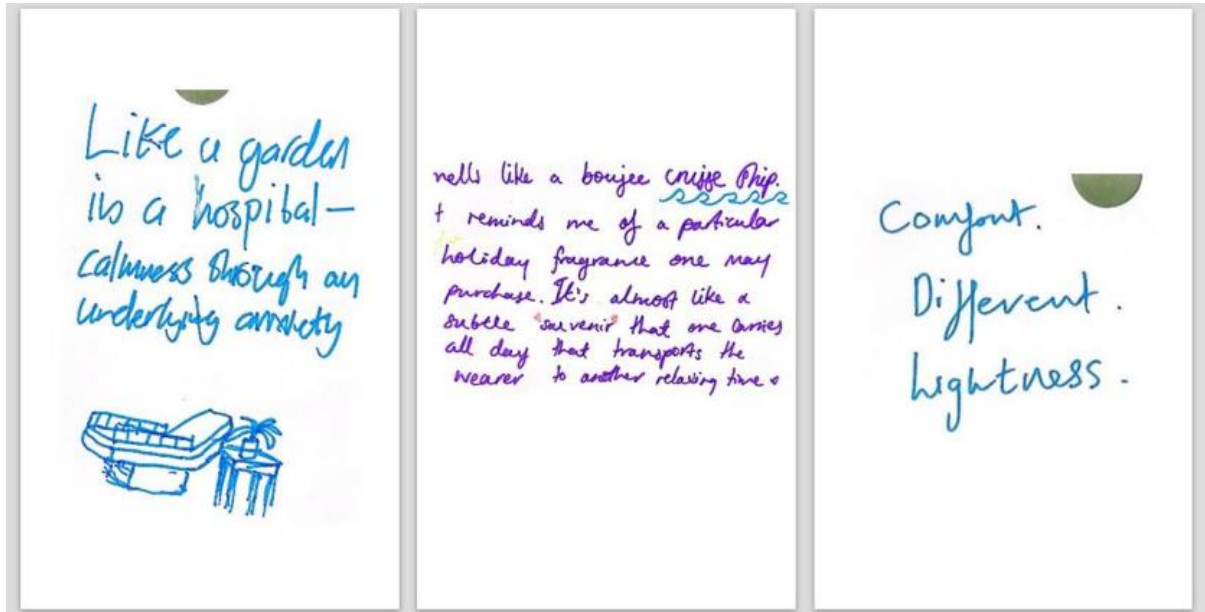


Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

The audience's descriptions of the smell reflect both their understanding and emotional responses (Figure 90) to the themes conveyed in the artwork. Some participants mentioned feelings of anxiety, peace, happiness, and other emotions, which resonate with the artistic expressions in the work, showcasing the audience's emotional engagement and interpretation. Furthermore, the audience's descriptions of the smell also reflect their aesthetic evaluations and emotional experiences of the artwork. Some audiences expressed their love, discomfort, and even thoughts on the symbolic significance of the smell. As Brinck (2018) states, the theory of participatory aesthetics focuses on the aesthetic experiences and emotional engagement that occur when the audience actively participates in artworks. The audience's engagement with the olfactory interactive installation in *Hunter* is not just a sensory experience but also an active participation and emotional exchange with the artwork. This interactivity enables the audience to have embodied experiences and support their understanding of the art.

Figure 90

Photos captured the audience's response of Li Joy's performance installation in *Flow – Chinese Performance Art: Documentation and Exhibition, 2024*



Note. Photo: Liu Tingyu.

When combining the audience's writings about the scent with the olfactory interactive device in the *Hunter* work, we can see that the individual subjectivity of the audience's experiences and emotional responses are reflected and extended by the interactive device. The memories and emotional reactions triggered by the scent reflect their individual cultural backgrounds and unique experiences. As Warr (2003) suggests, the concept of multiple audiences includes the introduction of a third audience that actively contributes to the network of performance documents originating from the initial performance. This dynamic involves not only the immediate audience engaging with the work through documentation but also subsequent audiences who add their interpretations to the performance art archive. Each audience occupies a distinct temporal position relative to the original performance, offering diverse perspectives and potentially different value assessments. Thus, the significance of the performance extends beyond its original moment and documentation to encompass the temporal context of those engaging with the document, enriching the narrative and impact of the performance art archive.

The performative archive's transformative potential lies in its capacity to extend the impact of an artwork by connecting contemporary audiences with the experiences of past performances. Performativity, as initially described by philosopher J.L. Austin (1975), refers to utterances that do not merely convey truths but enact changes in the world, such as the act of pronouncing a couple married. Judith Butler (1990) further developed this concept to describe how identity and social constructs, such as gender, are continuously produced through repeated performative acts. Within the context of the performative archive, this theoretical framework redefines archival materials as dynamic entities that gain meaning through ongoing engagement and interpretation. Just as performative utterances actively produce their effects, the performative archive functions as a site where interactions with archival materials generate new knowledge and meaning.

The performative archive challenges traditional notions of archival authority, illustrating that meaning is not fixed but evolves through interactive processes. Martina Ruhsam (2012) highlights that documentation extends beyond mere dissemination to actively perpetuate the impact of the artwork. She argues that performance moments and their documentation form "a complex interplay of presence and absence, of past and present, that cannot be further investigated by dividing things into works of art and documentary objects" (p. 406). This perspective underscores the fluidity between performance and its documentation, suggesting that both exist as intertwined processes rather than separate entities.

Kathy O'Dell (1998) expands on this transformative potential by emphasising the active role of documentation in creating new experiences for the audience. She observes that when viewing a photograph, "this chain of experiences, working backward in time, subtly locks the viewer into a metaphoric complicity with the photographer/viewer, as well as with the performer" (p. 14). Through its documented state, performance art enables current audiences not only to acknowledge past performances but to engage with and participate in their ongoing life (Finbow, 2017).

Artists like Kira O'Reilly also underscore the continuity of performance through its documentation. O'Reilly (2001) notes that documenting an event is essential as it gives the work another life in subsequent contexts and publications. Her perspective aligns with Ruhsam's (2012) view of avoiding the separation of performance and documentation. Together, they suggest that performance persists through its remnants, memories, and objects,

transitioning into a different but continuous form of existence. Documentation, therefore, becomes a crucial medium for the evolution of the performative archive, bridging the temporal gap between past performances and their reinterpretations by contemporary audiences.

Meiling Cheng (2012) in her exploration of Chinese time-based art, delves into the role of documentation. She posits that documentation transcends being a static archive or a mere blueprint for reenactment; instead, it becomes a virtual experience of the performance itself, almost as if it were live. Cheng describes this transformational role of documentation as ‘the deus ex machina that intervenes to transform the once-lived into the again-alive’ (p. 175), highlighting how the document is integrated into the active experience of the performance, departing from its previous characterisation as a static representation. Allen (2010) echoes Cheng’s perspective by emphasising that documentation becomes a performance space in itself, dynamically interacting with viewers and enabling them to engage with the creative process behind the performance. This expanded view of documentation not only captures the performance but also enriches the audience’s understanding of the broader performance artwork and its creative evolution.

The participatory mode of archives requires participants to become active agents in historical interpretation and knowledge production. In this exhibition, audiences are not passive observers; instead, they contribute to creating narratives that allow others to engage with past performance art through their active involvement, documentation, interactive dialogues, and ongoing discussions. Over the nine-day exhibition period, I gathered concrete evidence demonstrating that the potential of performance art archives extends far beyond traditional expectations. It revealed the performativity of the archive, showcasing its transformative potential through each participant’s subjective experience and interpretation of the performance art pieces. Analysing these performative archives redefines the ontology of performance art, moving away from issues of disappearance and transience. The archival participatory mode enables the public to gather in a space beyond the physical, critique their community’s development, and begin envisioning alternative narratives of collective memory. As Ashley (2019, p. 80) suggests, “museums should move away from presentation with its implication of vested authority and knowledge boundaries, towards exchange using community dialogue and ongoing construction of meaning.”

In summary, this section explores the dynamic nature of performance art archives, highlighting how audience engagement transforms archival spaces into sites of active engagement and knowledge production, thus creating a transnational performative archive. Through interactive installations and participatory experiences, audiences co-create narratives that bridge past performances with present interpretations. This process not only challenges authoritative narratives but also democratises the archival process and generates new embodied knowledge. Meskimmon (2020, p.152) argues that “knowledge is contingent, and conclusions reached are at best staging posts en route to further conversations.” In this chapter we have witnessed how the interactions between transnational curating, audience engagement and the concept of transnational performative archive have revealed that contingency can be a source of creativity. By embracing transversal dialogues that acknowledge differences, we prompt the transformative potential of imagination, fostering dynamic solidarities. This approach allows us to sustain the processes of knowing, imagining and experiencing performance art and its archive in a way that is expansive and continually evolving.

Chapter Conclusion

Flow- Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition potentially marks a significant milestone in the exploration and innovation of curatorial practice of performance art archives. This transnational exhibition did not provide complex background information on the exhibited works but rather invited the audiences to write and construct narratives about the works through their imaginative interaction with the archive. This approach arguably injects vitality into performance art archive exhibitions that may be muted or lacking in performance representation. The analysis of audience engagement to enrich the archive provides evidence to build the concept of the transnational performative archive. This inquiry has explored the potential, accessibility and participatory nature of performance art archives through what is termed a practice-based research method in curating. *Flow* embodied the interrelatedness of curatorial research and archive practice, connecting performance art, museum studies and audience studies, promoting unique perspectives into the knowledge creation process.

This chapter primarily explored how experimental curatorial practices can connect performance art archives with a broader, transnational audience on both material and cultural

levels to maintain the vitality of performance art, activate archives, and encourage audience engagement. However, the absence and inadequate display of performance art archives in museums, galleries, and art institutions pose both challenges and opportunities for such research. The continuous development of curatorial and institutional methods indicates that exploring the interactivity and participatory aspects of performance art archives is a worthwhile and promising direction for future research. The curation of the exhibition *Flow* clearly revealed that exhibitions centred on audience engagement with performance art archives can generate ongoing, reflective, creative, and new performative and embodied knowledge, highlighting the potential of the performative archive to expand and enrich our understanding of performance art.

In analysing the exhibitions of five Chinese performance artists and their archives, this chapter has explored the significance of interactive installations, dispersed narrative approaches, and audience engagement in challenging traditional archive displays and transforming exhibition spaces into dynamic, co-creative environments. By facilitating the reinterpretation of unexperienced performance art pieces for New Zealand audiences, employing narrative strategies, and enhancing artistic experiences through spatial design and audience engagement, *Flow* transcends the role of static archive display. It becomes a platform for ongoing dialogue, inviting audiences to actively engage with exhibited performance art literature and contribute to the continuous narrative of performance art history. The exhibition's dispersed curatorial approach not only redefines the presentation of performance art archives but also opens up new avenues for discussion and exploration among practitioners, archivists, and curators.

This chapter demonstrates that the participatory potential of performance art archives shifts the role of audience from passive observation to active engagement. The documentation of Xu Meiyu's two works, *Pair Painting Practice* and *Group Painting Practice*, along with Li Joy's documentation of her work *Hunter*, presented in interactive installations, provided audiences with a comprehensive experience within the engagement with the archive. Participants wove their narratives into the structure of archival materials, bridging cultural, temporal, and emotional gaps. This dynamic exchange promotes embodied cognition, sensory participation, and emotional resonance, deepening audiences' understanding and connection to artworks. The interactive and performative elements of the exhibition highlight the transformative power of audience engagement, creating a space that inspires creativity,

critical thinking, and personal reflection. By analysing these interactions from the perspectives of embodied perception and participatory aesthetics, profound communication and emotional exchange were revealed between audiences and artworks, elucidating the potential and significance of performativity of the performance art archives. However, this chapter illustrates that not all performance art archive material is suitable for curatorial practices focused on audience engagement. For instance, Shi Mengxia's *The Train Has Arrived* and Zhang Yiy and Sun Zhenyu's *1 Hour Closer* did not capture much attention from audiences.

My findings in this chapter are based on the evaluation of the performativity of performance art archives, audience reactions, and levels of engagement, to evaluate the extent to which archives can be activated to generate new knowledge. I have analysed the role of audiences as readers, co-creators, and narrators of performance art history, through viewing and engaging in performance art archive exhibitions; as well as the role of performance art archives as mediators and memory storages to encourage and attract broader audiences; and how the background and design of performance spaces and curatorial strategies affect audience understanding. My cyclical methodology emphasises ongoing reflection on curatorial practice and audience engagement. This study has challenged the conventional understanding of the past as a fixed, concrete moment, emphasising the fluidity of historical narratives, identities, and cultural boundaries. By creating an unconventional, experimental space that explores innovative ways to unite ideas, artworks, and audiences, it has subverted traditional power dynamics within curatorial practices. Through this approach, the study has critically examined and disrupted the assumptions of related disciplines, demonstrating the potential for a more dynamic, participatory curatorial framework.

As a generative event, the exhibition provides a space for reflecting on the role of performance art and its archive. I argue that the presentation of performance art archives shapes public imagination and future engagement by viewing audience participation as a means of activating archival documents. The meaning of these documents is determined by the audience, which challenges the static nature of archives and emphasises their performative quality. This exhibition marks not the end, but the beginning of an ongoing process. The past, preserved in documents, becomes contemporary as audiences and researchers interpret it subjectively, making the past alterable and its future uncertain.

The Transnational Performative Archive: Conclusion and Possibilities

This thesis has addressed two primary research objectives: 1) exploring contemporary methods for documenting performance art; and 2) investigating how curatorial practices can activate these archives to engage wider audiences. By participating in the documentation practice of the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival in China, this research examines various documenting methods, including photography, videography, text, audio recordings, and audience oral memories, revealing the possibilities and limitations of each method in capturing the ephemeral nature of performance art. Notably, the collaborative documentation generated by audiences captures live performances from a subjective and creative viewpoint, enriching the overall understanding of performance art works and challenging traditional archival paradigms. Moreover, this study emphasises the transnational context by collecting documentation from the festival in China and presenting it in the *Flow* exhibition in New Zealand. This transnational approach reveals audience engagement can activate performance art archives and generate new, embodied knowledge across national divides. The innovative audience-centred curatorial strategies developed here advance the concept of the transnational performative archive, paving the way for new methods of engaging with and presenting performance art archives. This dynamic and participatory model for archival presentation can be continually adapted and developed across diverse cultural contexts worldwide.

In summarising the key findings of this research, several critical insights and contributions to knowledge emerge. First, the conceptual exploration of performance art within this thesis has underscored the multifaceted nature of the medium and the complexities inherent in its documentation. This thesis established that performance art is inherently undefinable, resisting rigid classifications and embracing a dynamic interplay of elements such as the body, time, audience, and politics. Second, the thesis advocates for a re-conceptualisation of archives from passive repositories to dynamic, performative spaces that facilitate the interplay between past performances and future interpretations. By engaging with both ontological and phenomenological perspectives on the documentability of performance art, this thesis has underscored the intertwined nature of archival records and live performances, suggesting that each informs and shapes the other. Thirdly, on a practical level, the thesis has drawn on my participation in documenting performance art during the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival in Chengdu, China, and highlighted that different

documenting media – such as photography, videography, and re-enactment – each of which capture unique aspects of live performances. Photography captures specific moments within the continuous timeline of a performance, while video documents the entirety of the work’s duration. Written documentation encompasses various forms such as artist manuscripts, statements, press releases, and critiques by art theorists. The physical ‘objects’ utilised or produced during live performance art carry profound symbolic significance, acting as mnemonic devices for the artworks. Reenactments conducted under specific conditions offer audiences a chance to relive experiences akin to the past.

A fourth critical insight evidenced by this thesis is the innovative potential of audience engagement in documenting performance art, emphasising the transformative role of audience-generated documentation in shaping performance art archives. By analysing creative contributions such as sketches, oral memories and written texts collected during the 11th UPON International Live Art Festival, the thesis introduces the concept of collaborative documentation. This concept involves integrating audience-generated documentation into the archival process, redefining traditional documentation practices, and highlighting the active role of audiences in shaping performance art archives.

Finally, the curatorial practice examined through the *Flow- Chinese Performance Art Documentation and Exhibition* underscores the transformative impact of audience engagement on performance art archives. This transnational approach, which brought performance art documentation from China to New Zealand, demonstrates audience engagement can shift a performance art archive from static displays to dynamic, participatory experiences. The audience-centred curatorial strategies were evidenced in various sensory experiences, such as an olfactory installation linking a specific scent to a particular performance, enhancing sensory immersion for audiences. Additionally, audiences were invited to contribute their thoughts and reflections on cards, which became integral components of the evolving archive. In Xu Meiyu’s work, audiences were encouraged to experience the original performance through an interactive installation, subsequently producing drawings and reflections that shaped the archive. Furthermore, some audience members spontaneously performed within the exhibition space, artistically expressing themselves and highlighting the dynamic nature of the archive. These interactions underscored the exhibition’s capacity to activate performance art archives through active engagement. However, the journey through planning and executing the *Flow* exhibition also

presented challenges, such as ethical considerations, exhibition space constraints, and the visual design of exhibition materials. By engaging the audience in interactions with the archive and incorporating their contributions into its ongoing evolution, this approach redefines the archive as a dynamic and living entity. This transformation challenges traditional archival practices and expands the ways in which performance art history is documented, understood and expanded. The concept of transnational performative archive, as articulated in this study, represents a means of knowledge production through audience engagement, highlighting a shift from static authoritative spaces to a dynamic, participatory environment. This underscores the transformative potential of curatorial practice in contemporary archival methodologies and performance art historiography, paving the way for further interdisciplinary research and exploration.

This research makes a substantial contribution to the field, particularly through its transnational scope. It provides new insights into the complexities of documenting ephemeral art forms, focusing on the crucial role of audience engagement in shaping and activating performance art archives. The concept of collaborative documentation helps recognise the often-overlooked voices of audiences in traditional archival practices. By incorporating audience experience into performance art archives, this study expands the scope of documentation, challenges conventional archival methods, and promotes the democratisation of performance art archives. This transnational research which involved presenting performance art documentation collected in China at an exhibition in New Zealand, tested the effectiveness of audience-centred curatorial strategies in activating performance art archives. It underscores the role of audiences as co-narrators of performance art history, illustrating how their interactions with the archive transform it into a dynamic, evolving transnational performative archive that continues to generate new knowledge. These findings not only prompt a re-evaluation of how performance art archives are shaped and presented but also highlight the value and potential of transnational and interdisciplinary perspectives in the fields of performance art, archival studies and curation.

Recognising the limitations of this research, the transnational focus on China and New Zealand may not fully represent the diverse cultural contexts of other regions, potentially affecting the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, the reliance on audience-generated documentation introduces subjectivity, which may impact the consistency and reliability of the data. Despite these limitations, the research provides valuable insights into the innovative

exploration for documenting performance art and highlights the significance of audience engagement in transforming traditional archival practices. These findings contribute to a deep understanding of performance art, archive and curation.

Future research can build on these findings by continuing to explore novel methods for documenting performance art and expanding investigations into audience engagement. Further studies could examine the potential of digital solutions, such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), in preserving and presenting performance art in a wider context. These technological advancements, which offer promising avenues for enhancing the documentation and experience of ephemeral art forms, may provide new models for capturing and engaging with the dynamic and immersive nature of performance art.

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