

2012

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Delegated Performance: Outsourcing Authenticity

CLAIRE BISHOP

Let's begin with a generalization: one of the most conspicuous manifestations of the "social turn" in contemporary art since the 1990s has been the hiring of nonprofessionals to do performances. This stands in sharp contrast to a tradition of performance from the late 1960s and early 1970s in which work is undertaken by the artists themselves; think of Vito Acconci, Marina Abramović, Chris Burden, and Gina Pane. If this tradition valorized live presence and immediacy via the artist's own body, in the last two decades this presence is no longer attached to the single performer but instead to the *collective* body of a social group.¹ Although this trend takes a number of forms, some of which I will describe below, all of this work maintains a comfortable relationship to the gallery, taking it either as the frame for a performance or as a space of exhibition for the photographic and video artifacts that result. I will refer to this tendency as "delegated performance": the act of hiring nonprofessionals or specialists in other fields to undertake the job of being present and performing at a particular time and a particular place on behalf of the artist, and following his or her instructions. This strategy differs from a theatrical and cinematic tradition of employing people to act on the director's behalf in the following crucial respect: the artists I discuss below tend to hire people to perform *their own socioeconomic category*, be this on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, age, disability, or (more rarely) profession.

Much of this work has not been addressed or analyzed in depth by art historians or critics, so the position outlined below forms a response not so much to existent writing but to the reactions that this work repeatedly elicits—both from the general public and specialist art world—at conferences, panel discussions, and symposia. One of the aims of this essay is to argue against these dominant responses and for a more nuanced way to address delegated performance as an *artistic* practice engaging with the ethics and aesthetics of contemporary labor, and not simply as a micro-model of reification. I will begin by outlining three dif-

1. Of course there are exceptions, such as Cildo Meireles's hiring five "bodyguards" to watch over his flammable sculpture *Fiat Lux* for 24 hours (1979), or Sophie Calle hiring a detective to follow her (*Detective*, 1980). The difference between these and more recent examples is one of degree: the extent to which the identity of the hired laborer becomes a central and visible component of the work of art.

ferent manifestations of this tendency, and the different performance traditions they draw upon: body art, Judson Dance and Fluxus, and docudrama.²

A Provisional Typology

My first type of delegated performance comprises actions outsourced to non-professionals who are asked to perform an aspect of their identities, often in the gallery or exhibition. This tendency, which we might call “live installation,” can be seen in the early work of Pawel Althamer (working with homeless men in *Observer*, 1992, and with female guards for the Zachęta exhibition *Germinations*, 1994), or Elmgreen & Dragset’s hiring, variously, gay men to lounge around in the gallery listening to headphones (*Try*, 1997) or unemployed men and women to be gallery guards (*Reg[un]arding the Guards*, 2005). It is telling that this work developed primarily in Europe: its light and playful tone marks a decisive break with the more earnest forms of identitarian politics that were so crucial to American art of the 1980s.

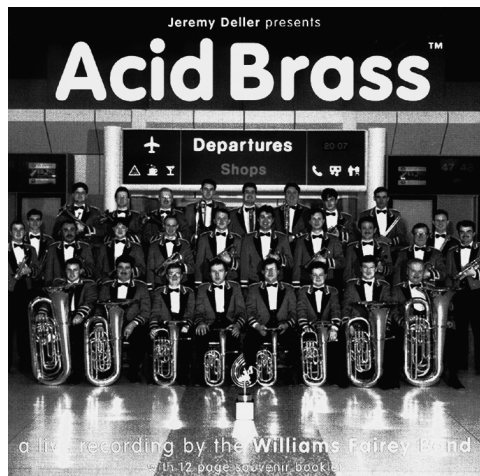
Consider, for example, one of the earliest examples of this tendency, by Maurizio Cattelan. In 1991, the Italian artist assembled a soccer club of North African immigrants, who were deployed to play local matches in Italy (all of which they lost). Their shirts were emblazoned with the name of a fictional sponsor, RAUSS: the German word for “get out,” as in the phrase *Ausländer raus*, or “foreigners out.” The title of the project, *Southern Suppliers FC*, alludes to immigrant labor (“suppliers” from the south), but also to the trend, then hotly debated in the Italian press, of hiring foreign footballers to play on Italian teams. Cattelan’s gesture draws a contrast between two types of foreign labor at different ends of the economic spectrum—star soccer players are rarely perceived in the same terms as working-class immigrants—but without any discernible Marxist rhetoric. Indeed, through this work, Cattelan fulfils the male dream of owning a football club, and apparently insults the players by dressing them in shirts emblazoned RAUSS. At the same time, he nevertheless produces a confusing image: the word RAUSS, when combined with the startling photograph of an all-black Italian football team, has an ambiguous, provocative potency, especially when it circulates in the media, since it seems to blurt out the unspoken E.U. fear of being deluged by immigrants from outside “fortress Europe.” *Southern Suppliers FC* is a social sculpture as cynical performance, inserted into the real-time social system of a soccer league.³ Francesco Bonami therefore seems to ascribe a misplaced worthiness to the project when he claims that Cattelan aimed

2. I will not be addressing reenacted performances, although they often cover similar territory (see, for example, the recent retrospectives of Marina Abramović at MoMA and Tania Bruguera at the Neuberger Museum of Art, both 2010, or the European tour of Allan Kaprow’s “Art as Life,” initiated by Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2006). Re-enactment, like delegated performance, has accelerated with the institutionalization of performance art and facilitates its collectability. For a good summary of re-enactment see the catalogue *Life, Once More* (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 2005).

3. Cattelan’s other works of the 1990s also revolve around a displacement of the artist’s identity: *Super Noi*, 1992, for example, comprises fifty drawings of the artist based on descriptions given by his friends and acquaintances and drawn by police composite portrait sketchers. Here the acts of both description and production are delegated to a kind of artist whose skills are not typically valued on the contemporary art market.

“for a democratic new way to play the artist, whilst remaining central to the work as the coach and manager of the teams.”⁴ At most, the collaborative process of *Southern Suppliers FC* could be said to share the performance limelight, but it is highly directorial and far from straightforward in its political message.

Cattelan turned to sport as a popular point of reference, but music is a more frequent focus of collaboration. Swedish artist Annika Eriksson’s *Copenhagen Postmen’s Orchestra* (1996) and British artist Jeremy Deller’s *Acid Brass* (1997) both invited workers’ bands to perform recent pop music in their own respective idioms. The Copenhagen Postmen’s Orchestra played a song by the British trip-hop group Portishead, while the Williams Fairey Brass Band (historically connected to an aircraft factory in Manchester) interpreted a selection of acid house tracks. Eriksson’s event resulted in a five-minute video, while Deller’s has become numerous live performances, a CD, and a diagram elaborately connecting these two forms of regional working-class music. Beyond the aesthetic frisson of mixing two types of popular music, part of the appeal of both projects lies in the fact that the artists employ real bands. These are not actors hired to play electronic music on brass instruments, but “genuine” work-



4. Francesco Bonami, in *Maurizio Cattelan* (London: Phaidon, 2003), p. 58.

Top: Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset. Try. 1996.
Middle: Maurizio Cattelan. Southern Suppliers FC. 1991. Courtesy of the Marian Goodman Gallery.
Bottom: Jeremy Deller and the Williams Fairey Brass Band. Acid Brass. 1997.

ing-class collaborators who have agreed to participate in an artistic experiment—a rather formal one in the case of Eriksson (the camera remains static throughout the video), more research-led in the case of Deller.⁵ The musicians perform their public personae (determined by their employment and strongly linked to class) and come to exemplify a collectively shared passion (in this case, performing music) and recurrent theme in both artists' work. These follow the trend for light and humorous ways in which delegated performance in Europe in the '90s is used to signify class, race, age, or gender. Their bodies are a metonymic shorthand for politicized identity, but the fact that it is not the artist's own body being staged means that this politics can be pursued with a cool irony, wit, and distance.

A rupture with this mood arrived in 1999 with the performances of Spanish artist Santiago Sierra. Prior to 1999, Sierra's work comprised a forceful combination of minimalism and urban intervention; over the course of that year his work shifted from installations produced by low-paid workers to displays of the workers themselves, foregrounding the economic transactions on which the installations depend. There is a clear path of development from *24 Blocks of Concrete Constantly Moved During a Day's Work by Paid Workers* (Los Angeles, July), in which the workers are not seen but their presence and the fact that they are paid are made known to us, to *People Paid to Remain Inside Cardboard Boxes* (G&T Building, Guatemala City, August), in which the low-paid workers are concealed within cardboard boxes, a metaphor for their social invisibility. The first piece in which the participants were rendered visible is *450 Paid People* (Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City, October), which led to a work that continues to be inflammatory: *250cm Line Tattooed on 6 Paid People* (Espacio Aglutinador, Havana, December). Many of these early performances involve finding people who were willing to undertake banal or humiliating tasks for minimum wage. Sierra's works are stripped of the light humor that accompanies many of the projects mentioned above, since they frequently take place in countries already at the disadvantaged end of globalization, most notably in Central and South America. Consequently, he has been heavily criticized for merely repeating the inequities of capitalism, and more specifically of globalization, in which rich countries "outsource" or "offshore" labor to low-paid workers in developing countries. Yet Sierra always draws attention to the *economic* systems through which his works are realized, and the way these impact the work's reception. In his work, performance is outsourced via recruitment agencies, and a financial transaction takes place that leaves the artist at arm's length from the performers; this distance is evident in the viewer's phenomenological encounter with the work, which is disturbingly cold and alienated. Unlike many artists, Sierra is at pains to make the details of each payment to the workers part of the work's description, turning the economic context into one of his primary mediums.⁶

5. Significantly, Deller's collaboration has now become part of the Fairey Band's repertoire and features on their website. See faireyband.com (accessed May 15, 2012).

6. In each of Sierra's publications, works are documented with black-and-white photographs, the artwork title, a brief caption that explains where and when the performance took place, and information about how much the participants were paid. Sierra's more recent work is more sensationalist and does not foreground the question of remuneration.

In its emphasis on the phenomenological immediacy of the live body and on specific socioeconomic identities, we could argue that this type of delegated performance is heavily indebted to the body-art tradition of the late 1960s and early '70s. At the same time, it differs from this precursor in important ways. Artists in the '70s used their *own* bodies as the medium and material of the work, often with a corresponding emphasis on physical and psychological transgression. Today's delegated performance still places a high value upon immediacy, but if it has any transgressive character, this tends to derive from the perception that artists are exhibiting and exploiting other subjects. As a result, this type of performance, in which the artist uses other people as the material of his or her work, tends to occasion heated debate about the ethics of representation.⁷ Duration, meanwhile, is reconfigured from a spiritual question of individual stamina and endurance to the economic matter of having sufficient resources to pay for someone else's ongoing presence.

A second strand of delegated performance, which began to be introduced in the later 1990s, concerns the use of professionals from other spheres of expertise: think of Allora and Calzadilla hiring opera singers (*Sediments, Sentiments, Figures of Speech*, 2007) or pianists (*Stop, Repair, Prepare*, 2008); of Tania Bruguera hiring mounted policemen to demonstrate crowd-control techniques (in *Tatlin's Whisper #5*, 2008); or of Tino Sehgal hiring university professors and students for his numerous speech-based situations (*This Objective of That Object*, 2004; *This Progress*, 2006).⁸ These performers tend to be specialists in fields other than those of art or performance, and since they tend to be recruited on the basis of their professional (elective) identity, rather than for being representatives of a particular class or race, there is far less controversy and ambivalence around this type of work. Critical attention tends to focus on the conceptual frame and on the specific activities or abilities of the performer or interpreter in question, whose skills are



Allora and Calzadilla.
Stop, Repair, Prepare. 2008.

7. A frequent point of reference is the "ethnological spectacles" shown at the World's Fairs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as the *village nègre* at the 1878 and 1889 Paris World's Fair. Such events propagandized the imperial mission of France and were formative in generating enthusiasm for "primitive" art. See Burton Benedict, "International Exhibitions and National Identity," *Anthropology Today* 7, no. 3 (June 1991), pp. 5–9. Benedict notes that "the whole of the Exposition Coloniale in 1931 was a theatrical performance" (p. 7).

8. Here we could also consider the Berlin-based performance group Rimini Protokoll and their use of "experts in everyday life" as the basis for performances such as *Soko São Paulo* (2007, using Brazilian policemen), *Airport Kids* (2008, using children who have lived in three or more countries), or *Deadline* (2003, which included a crematorium employee, a forensic doctor, a stonemason, and a florist).

incorporated into the performance as a readymade. That the work has an instruction-based character, which—along with the fact that many of the performers in these works are Caucasian and middle-class—has facilitated the repeatability of this type of work, and enhanced its collectability by museums.

The best-known example of this tendency is unarguably Tino Sehgal, who is adamant that his practice be referred to not as “performance art” but as “situations,” and that his performers be referred to as “interpreters.”⁹ While his insistence is somewhat pedantic, it nevertheless draws our attention to the scored nature of Sehgal’s work, and to its relationship with dance: as every critic of his output has observed, the artist was trained in choreography and economics before turning to visual art. *This Objective of That Object*, for example, places the viewer within a highly controlled experience: as you enter the gallery, five performers with their backs turned to you urge you to join in a discussion on subjectivity and objectivity. The performers tend to be philosophy students, but their semi-scripted dialogue comes across as somewhat depersonalized and rote, and any contribution you make to the debate feels self-conscious and hollow, since it is impossible to alter the work’s structure; you are free only to assume your role within it. (If you remain silent, the performers wilt onto the floor until a new visitor enters the gallery.) Although Sehgal makes a point of renouncing photographic reproduction, his works seem actively to tear apart any equation between being live and being authentic; indeed, the very fact that his work runs continuously in the space for the duration of an exhibition, performed by any number of interpreters, erodes any residual attachment to the idea of an original or ideal performance.

A less well-known—and less gallery-based—approach that deploys similar methods can be found in the conceptual performances of Spanish artist Dora García. Several of her early performances explicitly allude to avatars and surveillance (such as *Proxy/Coma*, 2001) but her most compelling projects blur into the outside world and can potentially last for years, as in *The Messenger* (2002). In this work, a performer (the “messenger”) must deliver a message in a foreign language that he/she does not understand—but to do so he or she must search for someone who can identify and understand that language.¹⁰ The performer is entrusted with the task, and it is important to note that García—like Sehgal—is a meticulous recruiter: *The Beggar’s Opera* (2007) required one performer to play a charming beggar in the streets of Münster, while *The Romeos* (2005) involved hiring handsome young men to establish seemingly spontaneous conversation with visitors to the Frieze Art Fair.¹¹ This form of “invisible theater” operates less to raise con-

9. By using this term, Sehgal does not intend any reference to the constructed situations of the Situationist International.

10. See doragarcia.net for a log of each iteration of *The Messenger* as it happens.

11. Visitors were made aware of the performances thanks to a large poster displayed in the fair, although the casual observer would never know the outcome of these encounters. The piece was based on the memoirs of a former East German spy who had used attractive young male agents to seduce lonely female secretaries in Bonn as a means to access confidential information.

sciousness (as in the Augusto Boal model) than to insinuate a moment of doubt and suspicion into the viewer's habitual experiences of city life.¹² García often strikes a careful balance between an open-ended score and the performer's interpretation of her instructions. If Sehgal's works are self-reflexive and cerebral, encouraging the subjective contribution of the audience, then García's are less visibly participatory and seem to reinforce doubt and unease.

Sehgal and García exemplify a type of performance that emphasizes simple instructions, which are carried out in a manner that allows for individual variation and a quotidian aesthetic. As such, they evoke several precursors from the 1960s and '70s. Boal's "invisible theater" seems an immediate point of refer-



Dora García. The Romeos. 2008.

ence, but neither artist would subscribe to his political agenda; another would be the task-based participatory instructions of Fluxus.¹³ With their emphasis on everyday gestures, clothes, and movements as the basis for choreographic invention, works performed at Judson Dance Theater are perhaps the closest precedent, especially Steve Paxton's walking pieces from the mid-1960s. One of them, *Satisfyin' Lover* (1967), was first performed with forty-two dancers, and comprises three movements only: walking, standing, and sitting.¹⁴ Paxton's score is structured into six parts, in each of which the performers walk a certain number of steps and stand for a certain number of counts before exiting, at roughly thirty-second intervals. He describes the pace of walking as "an easy walk, but not slow. Performance manner is serene and collected"; the costumes are "casual."¹⁵ As Yvonne Rainer observes, "It was as though you had never seen ordinary people walk across a space. It was highly revelatory."¹⁶ Judson Dance finds its direct lin-

12. García has acknowledged the influence of Augusto Boal, but rejects his assumption that art should be politically useful. Email to the author, December 22, 2010.

13. Consider Alison Knowles's *Make a Salad* (1962) or *Shoes of Your Choice* (1963): in the former, the artist makes a large salad for the audience to consume; in the latter, she invites people to hold up their footwear and tell the audience about it.

14. *Satisfyin' Lover* has also been performed with as few as thirty and as many as eighty-four people. Forty-two was the number of "friends" that the choreographer had during a residency in Salt Lake City. (Steve Paxton, email to author, June 21, 2010.) For a full score and instructions to performers, see Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University, 1987), pp. 71–74.

15. Steve Paxton, *Satisfyin' Lover* (1967), in Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, p. 74. See also Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962–1964* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 137; Jill Johnston, "Paxton's People," *Village Voice*, April 4, 1968, reprinted in Jill Johnston, *Marmalade Me* (New York: Dutton, 1971), p. 137.

16. Rainer, cited in Chrissie Iles, "Life Class," *Frieze* 100 (June–August 2006).

eage in contemporary choreography such as Jérôme Bel's *The Show Must Go On* (2001), which makes use of everyday movements to literalize the lyrics of pop songs. Several of these strands come together, albeit in a more professionalized



Martin Creed. Work No. 850. 2008.

manner, in Martin Creed's *Work No. 850* (2008), in which professional sprinters ran the eighty-six metres of the Duveen Gallery at Tate Britain at fifteen-second intervals; the artist compared the pauses between these sprints to the rests in a piece of music, reinforcing the connection between choreography and daily life.¹⁷

A third strand of delegated performance comprises situations constructed for video and film; key artists might include Gillian

Wearing, Artur Żmijewski, and Phil Collins. Recorded images are crucial here since these examples frequently capture situations that are too difficult or sensitive to be repeated. (Here it should be reiterated that my interest is not in artists working in a documentary tradition, but on works where the artist *devises* the entire situation being filmed, and where the participants are asked to perform themselves.) Depending on the mode of filming, these situations can trouble the border between live and mediated to the point where audiences are unsure of the degree to which an event has been staged or scripted. Because the artist assumes a strong editorial role, and because the work's success often relies on the watchability of the performers, this kind of work also tends to attract ethical criticism both from over-solicitous leftists and from the liberal and right-wing media.

They Shoot Horses (2004) by the British artist Phil Collins is a striking example of this tendency. Collins auditioned and paid nine teenagers in Ramallah to undertake an eight-hour disco-dancing marathon in front of a garish pink wall to an unrelentingly cheesy compilation of pop hits from the past four decades. The resulting videos are shown as a two-channel installation, in which the performers are projected to more or less the same size as the viewers, creating an equivalence between them. Although we don't hear the teenagers talk, their dancing speaks volumes: as the gruelling day continues, their performances shift from individual posturing to collective effort (increasingly daft moves by way of generating mutual entertainment). At several panel discussions about this work, I have heard members of the audience raise concerns about the artist's "exploitation" of his

17. Creed, cited in Charlotte Higgins, "Martin Creed's New Piece for Tate Britain: A Show That Will Run and Run," *Guardian*, July 1, 2008. Creed's *Ballet (Work No. 1020)* (2009) involves five dancers restricted to using the five core classical ballet positions, each of which is ascribed a musical note.

performers—for example, by not listing their names in the credits.¹⁸ Yet the point of Collins’s project is not to create an exemplary instance of artistic collaboration, but to universalize his participants by addressing multiple genres of artistic and popular experience: the portrait, endurance-based body art, reality television (and its precursor in Depression-era dance marathons, to which his title alludes).¹⁹ It is also a deliberately perverse approach to site-specificity: the Occupied Territories are never shown explicitly but are ever-present as a frame or *hors cadre*. This knowledge colors our reception of the banal pop lyrics, which seem to comment on the kids’ double endurance of the dance marathon and the political crisis in which they are mired. In subjecting the teenagers to an onslaught of Western pop, Collins plays an ambiguous role: both ally and taskmaster, he depicts them as generic globalized teenagers; the more usual media representation of Palestinians is that of victim or fundamentalist (hence Collins’s use of the “usual suspects” backdrop, akin to a police lineup).

18. For example, at “Art in Politically Charged Places” (Photographers Gallery, London, December 13, 2004) and “Public Time: A Symposium” (Modern Art Oxford, May 25, 2006).

19. Sidney Pollack’s film *They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?* (1969) follows a handful of characters competing in a dancing marathon held during the Great Depression. The film foreshadows a contemporary culture of reality television, in which the participants’ quest for fame and financial success seamlessly dovetails with commercial exploitation.



Phil Collins. They Shoot Horses. 2004.



Artur Żmijewski. *Them*. 2007.

Artur Żmijewski's *Them* (2007) offers a more troubling narrative, less concerned with portraiture than with the role of images in reinforcing ideological antagonism. The artist set up a series of painting workshops for four different groups in Warsaw: ladies from the Catholic Church, young socialists, young Jews, and Polish nationalists. Each group produced a symbolic depiction of its values, which were printed onto T-shirts worn by each member of the group in subsequent workshops. Żmijewski then encouraged each group to respond to each other's paintings, altering and amending the images as they saw fit. The first gestures were gentle—such as cutting open the door of a church, to make the building more open—but became more violent, culminating in an explosive impasse: painting over an image entirely, setting fire to it, and even assaulting the other participants by cutting their T-shirts or taping over their mouths. As in many of Żmijewski's videos, the artist adopts an ambiguous role, and it is never clear to what degree his participants are acting of their own volition or being gently manipulated to fulfil the requirements of his preplanned narrative. The action unfolds with apparently minimal direction from the artist, who nevertheless establishes the structure of the participants' encounters, records the escalating conflict between them and edits this into a narrative. Following the first screening of this work in Warsaw, many of the participants were angry at this pessimistic representa-

tion of the workshops as ending in an irresolvable antagonism.²⁰ However, artists like Żmijewski are less interested in making a faithful documentary than in constructing a narrative, grounded in reality, that conveys a larger set of points about social conflict. *Them* offers a poignant meditation on collective identification and the role of images in forging these identifications, as well as a harsh parable about social antagonisms and the facility with which ideological differences become hardened into irresolvably blocked patterns of communication.

The genealogy for this type of performance work is complex. On the one hand it bears a strong relationship to the contemporaneous emergence of reality television, a genre that evolved from the demise of documentary TV and the success of U.S. tabloid TV in the 1990s.²¹ Like reality television, it also has roots in a longer tradition of observational documentary, mock-documentary, and performative documentary that emerged in the 1960s and '70s.²² Although Italian Neorealist cinema, particularly the later films of Roberto Rossellini, incorporated nonprofessional actors in secondary roles in order to stretch the prevailing boundaries of what was then considered realism, the singularity of contemporary artists' approaches is more comparable to that of idiosyncratic film auteurs like Peter Watkins. Watkins's early work used nonprofessional actors, handheld cameras, and tight framing as a way to address contentious social and political issues, such as the consequences of nuclear attack in his 1966 film *The War Game*.²³ He is an apt point of reference for contemporary artists, and not just for his subject matter and use of amateur performers: firstly, his films exceed the conventional length of mainstream cinema and can be extremely long (eight hours in the case of *La Commune*, 2001), and secondly, he frequently configures the camera as an agent or performer within the narrative, even when the story is set in a period prior to the invention of

20. See the transcript of this discussion in Claire Bishop and Silvia Tramontana, eds., *Double Agent* (London: ICA, 2009), pp. 99–106. Żmijewski is clear about his authorial role: "You can say I decide where the plot is to begin—and life takes it from there. Only this means a loss of control, or only partial control over the course of events. Therefore the answer is that things always get out of control—I do not know what the film is going to look like, I do not work with actors that imitate reality. I have no script. My protagonists are unpredictable and their behaviour is beyond my control. . . . It is a voyage into the unknown. There is no plan—no script—I do not know where the trip ends." Żmijewski, in "Terror of the Normal: Sebastian Cichocki interviews Artur Żmijewski," *Tauber Bach* (Leipzig: Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, 2003), p. 112.

21. Annette Hill, *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 17. Hill notes that "reflexivity, performance, and the boundaries between fact and fiction are all hallmarks of reality programming" (p. 20).

22. For a discussion of these categories, see Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight, *Faking It: Mock-Documentary and the Subversion of Factuality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001). Observational documentary emerged from 1960s "direct cinema" (U.S.) and cinema vérité (France) and from "fly on the wall" television (U.K.) in the 1970s. See Hill, *Reality TV*, p. 20.

23. Watkins describes the process of recruiting participants, which has more in common with visual art than traditional film casting, in Alan Rosenthal, "The War Game," *The New Documentary in Action* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 151–63: "You have to get to know the character, and you have to pull him into the communal thing of making films. . . . [W]hat holds them might possibly be my personality, but it certainly has to do with what you have impressed on them as the meaning of the subject" (p. 159).

film; the conceit of *La Commune*, for example, is that the protagonists are being interviewed for a television report on the events of 1871 as they are taking place.

We can see from this rapid overview that what I am calling delegated performance in all its contemporary iterations (from live installation to constructed situations) brings clear pressures to bear on the conventions of body art as they have been handed down to us from the 1960s. Contemporary performance art does not necessarily privilege the live moment or the artist's own body, but instead engages in numerous strategies of mediation that include delegation and repetition; at the same time, it continues to have an investment in immediacy via the presentation of authentic nonprofessional performers who represent specific social groups. If body art in the '60s and '70s was produced quickly and inexpensively (since the artist's own body was the cheapest form of material), delegated performance today, by contrast, tends to be a luxury game.²⁴ It is telling that body art takes place primarily in the West, and that art fairs and biennials were among the earliest sites for its popular consumption. Jack Bankowsky has coined the term "art-fair art" to designate a mode of performance in which the spectacular and economic context of the art fair is integral to the work's meaning, and against which the artist's gestures provide a mildly amusing point of friction.²⁵ Many of his examples are delegated performances, with the Frieze Art Fair as a significant incubator for this type of work: consider Elmgreen & Dragset's doubling of the booth of their Berlin gallery Klosterfelde, complete with identical works of art and a lookalike dealer (2005); Gianni Motti's *Pre-emptive Act* (2007), a policeman meditating in a yoga position; or numerous performances staged by Cattelan's Wrong Gallery, such as Paola Pivi's *100 Chinese* (1998–2005), 100 identically dressed Chinese people standing in the gallery's booth.

Whereas once performance art sought to break with the art market by dematerializing the work of art into ephemeral events, today dematerialization and



Peter Watkins.
La Commune
(Paris, 1871). 2000.

24. Performance was "a democratic mode, where young artists who did not have access to art galleries or enough money to produce studio art for exhibition could show their work quickly to other artists in the community." (Dan Graham, "Performance: End of the 60s," in *Two-Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham on His Art*, ed. Alexander Alberro (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), p. 143).

25. Jack Bankowsky, "Tent Community," *Artforum* (October 2005), pp. 228–32.



Paola Pivi. 100 Chinese.
1998–2005.

paid upwards of \$2,500 for a ticket.²⁷ Although this project seems to be a clear example of Abramović entering the domain of self-parody (apparently unwittingly), I would like to maintain that not all examples of delegated performance should be tarnished with the label of “art-fair art” or “gala art”: the better examples offer more pointed, layered, and troubling experiences, both for the performers and viewers, which problematize any straightforward Marxist criticism of these performances as reification.

rumor have become two of the most effective forms of hype.²⁶ Performance excites media attention, which in turn heightens the symbolic capital of the event—as seen in numerous covers of *The Guardian*’s annual supplement to accompany the Frieze Art Fair, but also the recent controversy around Marina Abramović’s “human table decorations” for the LA MOCA gala: eighty-five performers were paid \$150 to kneel on a rotating “Lazy Susan” beneath the tables, with their heads protruding above, staring into the eyes of diners who had

Performance as Labor and Pleasure

As I have indicated, the repeatability of delegated performance—both as a live event or as a video loop—is central to the economics of performance since 1990, enabling it to be bought and sold by institutions and individuals, performed and re-performed in many venues.²⁸ It is not coincidental that this tendency has developed hand in hand with managerial changes in the economy at large, providing an economic genealogy for this work that parallels the art

26. As Philip Auslander has argued, “Despite the claim . . . that performance’s evanescence allows it to escape commodification, it is performance’s very evanescence that gives it value in terms of cultural prestige.” Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 58. He continues: “Even within our hyper-mediatized culture, far more symbolic capital is attached to live events than to mediatized ones.”

27. Yvonne Rainer authored a letter of complaint to LA MOCA, denouncing this “exploitative” and “grotesque spectacle” as reminiscent of Pasolini’s *Salò* (1975). See “Yvonne Rainer Blasts Marina Abramović and MOCA LA,” *The Performance Club*, thepformanceclub.org/2011/11/yvonne-rainer-douglas-crimp-and-taisha-paggett-blast-marina-abramovic-and-moca-la (accessed April 27, 2012).

28. The Tate appointed a performance curator in 2002, while MoMA created a Department of Media (as a breakaway from Film) in 2006, which changed its name to the Department of Media and Performance Art in 2009. The Pompidou Centre has never had a curator of performance, nor considered it as a possible department, since it has always come under the administration of Contemporary Art. Bernard Blistène, email to the author, August 17, 2010.

historical one outlined above. “Outsourcing” labor became a business buzzword in the early 1990s: the wholesale divesting of important but noncore activities to other companies, from customer-service call centers to financial analysis and research. With the growth of globalization, “offshore outsourcing” became a term that refers—with not altogether positive connotations—to the use of hired labor and “virtual companies” in developing countries, taking advantage of the huge differences in wages internationally. Business theorists present outsourcing as a tool for maximizing profits; in the U.S., this led to some controversy as outsourcing was perceived to threaten domestic employment figures (as well as security). For those skeptical of globalization, outsourcing is little more than a legal loophole that allows national and multinational companies to absolve themselves of legal responsibility for unregulated and exploitative labor conditions. It is strange and striking that most U.K. guides to outsourcing emphasize the importance of *trust*: companies give responsibility for some aspect of their production to another company, with all the risks and benefits that this shared responsibility entails. In the light of the present discussion, it is telling that all of these textbooks agree that the primary aim of outsourcing is to “improve performance” (understood here as profit). But there are also important differences: if the aim of outsourcing in business is to *decrease* risk, artists frequently deploy it as a means to *increase* unpredictability—even if this means that a work might risk failing altogether.²⁹

Noting the simultaneous rise of outsourcing in both economics and art in the 1990s is not to suggest that the latter phenomenon exists in complicity with the former, even though it seems telling that a boom in delegated performance coincided with the art market bubble of the 2000s, and with the consolidation of a service industry that increasingly relies upon the marketing of certain qualities in human beings.³⁰ Both performance and business now place a premium on recruitment, and in many cases the work of finding suitable performers is delegated to the curator, who now finds him- or herself becoming a human-resources manager (negotiating qualifications, shifts, and contracts). Although unique qualities are sought in each performer, these are—paradoxically—also infinitely replaceable: since contemporary performance increasingly tends to be on display for the duration of an exhibition, shift-work becomes necessary. There is less emphasis on the frisson of a single performance, even while the impact of the live remains: performance enters “gallery time” as a constant pres-

29. For the exhibition *Double Agent* (ICA London, 2008), Mark Sladen and I attempted to commission a new work from Phil Collins. His proposal, *Ghost Rider*, involved hiring a ghostwriter to write a feature on ghostwriters, which would appear in *The Guardian* newspaper, signed by Phil Collins. The resulting article was considered unsuitable by Collins in both tone and content, since the ghostwriter had decided to try to mimic the artist’s language and vocabulary, and the feature did not go to press.

30. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello have referred to the extraction of profit from the intangible uniqueness of a given place, person, or service as the “commodification of the authentic.” Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 444. For a promotional take on the issue, see James Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine II, *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School, 2007).

ence, eight hours a day for the duration of an exhibition, rather than being assigned to a few intense hours (as is customary with “theater time”). Presence today is arguably less a matter of anti-spectacular immediacy (as was the case during the 1960s) than evidence of precarious labor, but artists are more likely to sustain this economy than to challenge it.

If I seem to be overstressing these economic changes, it’s because they not only provide the contextual backdrop for contemporary art but also affect our reception of it. Financial transactions have become increasingly essential to the realization of delegated performance, as anyone who has organized an exhibition of this work can corroborate: contractual wage labor for performers is the largest outgoing expense in such shows, which operate with an inverse economy to that of installing more-conventional art: as Tino Sehgal points out, the longer a steel sculpture by Richard Serra is on display, the cheaper the cost of its installation becomes, whereas Sehgal’s own works cost more for the institution the longer they are exhibited.³¹ But despite the centrality of economics to delegated performance and the impact it has upon our understanding of duration, it is rare for artists to make an explicit point about financial transactions; usually such arrangements tend to be tacit. Unlike theater, dance, and film, where there are long-established codes for experiencing a performer’s relationship to labor, contemporary art until recently has been comparatively artisanal, based on the romantic persona of the singular (and largely unpaid) artist-performer. It is only in the past twenty years that performance art has become “industrialized,” and this shift—from festival to museum space, mobilizing large numbers of performers, unionized modes of remuneration, and ever larger audiences—means that contemporary art increasingly exists in a sphere of collaboration akin to that of theater and dance, even while it retains art’s valorization of individual authorship. (There is no serious market, for example, for signed photographs of theatrical productions.)

One of the most successful exhibition projects of recent years has addressed this intersection of performance and the economy head on: the itinerant three-day exhibition *La Monnaie Vivante* (The Living Currency) by the French curator Pierre Bal-Blanc. The first iteration of this continually changing performance experiment began in Paris in 2006; subsequent versions have been held in Leuven (2007), London (2008), Warsaw (2010), and Berlin (2010).³² Most of the works exhibited are delegated performances, drawn from a diverse range of generations (from the 1960s to today) and geographical locations (from Eastern and Western Europe to North and South America). *La Monnaie Vivante* places visual art performance into direct conversation with contemporary choreographers interested in the “degree zero” of dance, such as Compagnie les Gens d’Uterpan (Annie Vigier

31. Tino Sehgal, in a discussion at the ICA, London, November 19, 2004.

32. Each version also experimented with a different venue: a mirrored dance studio (Paris); a theater (Leuven, Warsaw, Berlin); a gallery (Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall).



Installation view of La Monnaie Vivante at the Tate Modern. 2007. Photographs by Sheila Burnett.

and Franck Apertet) and Prinz Gholam. Curatorially, *La Monnaie Vivante* is distinctive in presenting performances as overlapping in a single space and time (a combination of exhibition and festival); this format forges an intense and continually shifting proximity between the different performances, as well as between performers and viewers, who occupy the same space as the works and move among them. At Tate Modern in 2008, for example, performances of varying duration took place on the Turbine Hall bridge, ranging from a six-hour live installation by Sanja Iveković (*Delivering Facts, Producing Tears*, 1998–2007) to fleeting instruction pieces by Lawrence Weiner (shooting a rifle at a wall, emptying a cup of sea water onto the floor). This led to some sublime juxtapositions, such as Santiago Sierra’s *Eight People Facing a Wall* (2002) as the backdrop to Tania Bruguera’s *Tatlin’s Whisper #5*, which in turn circled around six dancers holding poses, and salivating onto the floor, choreographed by Vigier and Apertet.

The title of Bal-Blanc’s exhibition is taken from Pierre Klossowski’s enigmatic and near impenetrable book of the same name, published in 1970, in which he argues for a troubling mutual imbrication of the economy and pleasure (*jouissance*), rather than perceiving them to be separate domains. The “living currency” of his title is the human body. Building on his analyses of Fourier and Sade (most notably in “Le Philosophe-Scélerant,” 1967),

Klossowski's text is organized around the premise that industrial mechanization introduces new forms of perversion and pleasure.³³ Klossowski defines perversion as the separation that occurs as soon as the human is aware of a distinction between reproductive instincts and pleasure ("voluptuous emotion"): this first perversion distinguishes the human from the mechanical, the functional from the nonfunctional, but it is subsequently appropriated and contained by institutions as a way to organize the processes of production toward specific and highly policed ends.³⁴ As such, industry engages in a perverse act (reducing human actions to a functional tool, fixated on doing only one thing) while at the same time expelling as perverse everything that overruns and exceeds this functional gesture. Klossowski argues that art (which comes under his category of *simulacre*) is thought to die in this domain of excess because it is not functional, but in fact art should also be seen as a tool, since it is compensatory and creates new experiences ("*l'usage, c'est-à-dire, la jouissance*").³⁵ Klossowski pressures the dialectic of use and non-use, breaking down this distinction to argue that the functional and the non-functional, industrial processes and art, are *both* libidinal *and* rational, since the drives ignore such externally imposed distinctions. Humans are "living currency," and money is the mediator between libidinal pleasure and the industrial/institutional world of normative imposition.

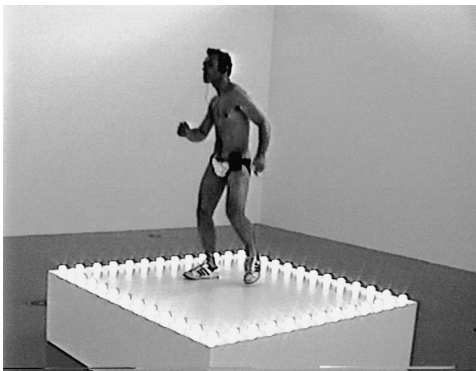
Using this to interpret performance art, Bal-Blanc argues that the whole impulse to produce "open form" in the 1970s is an inversion or reversal of the industrial system, which is itself a form of perversion.³⁶ Artists today are therefore redefining transgression by making a dual appeal to the reification of the body on the one hand, and to the embodiment of the object on the other—two poles that he sums up in the evocative quasi-oxymorons "living/object" and "inanimate/body." It is no coincidence that delegated performance makes up the majority of works exhibited in *La Monnaie Vivante*, but Bal-Blanc places these paid bodies alongside the performance of conceptual-art instructions (such as Weiner's) and more obviously participatory works (such as Lygia Clark's *Caminhando* [1963], or Franz Erhard Walther's steel *Standing Pieces* of the 1970s). These works blur the difference between many types of participatory art, as is reinforced in the photographic documentation of *La Monnaie Vivante*, in which more recent types of so-called "exploitative" art are placed next to earlier work, reminding us that the dancers of, say, Simone Forti's *Huddle* (1961) are also being paid for their bodily

33. Klossowski refers to Sade's *La Nouvelle Justine*. D'Esterval can only sleep with someone if that person also agrees to be paid. Valuing one partner (to the exclusion of thousands of others) is a kind of financial transaction. See Pierre Klossowski, *La Monnaie vivante* (Paris: Editions Joëlle Losfeld, 1994), p. 62.

34. In other words, since the advent of industrialization, "voluptuous emotion" is no longer tied to the auratic artisanal object, but attaches itself to the superficial, mass-produced commodity, which allows emotion to be externalized and exchanged, but always through the institutional norms of the economy.

35. Klossowski, *La Monnaie vivante*, p. 12.

36. Pierre Bal-Blanc, in Elisabeth Lebovici, "The Death of the Audience: A Conversation with Pierre Bal-Blanc," *e-flux journal*, February 13, 2010, available at e-flux.com (accessed May 15, 2012).



Top: Installation view of La Monnaie Vivante, at the Sixth Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, 2010.
Bottom: Pierre Bal-Blanc. Contrat de travail, 1992.

labor. This juxtaposition of generations and types of work (participatory, conceptual, theatrical, choreographic) is also staked as an engagement with *interpassivity* (rather than interactivity), because this is the dominant mode installed by mass media and an information society. Bal-Blanc argues that all the works he exhibits show the way in which individual drives are subordinated to economic and social relations, and how these rules are parsed in the entertainment industry's laws of transmission and reception ("interpassivity reveals what interactivity conceals, an admission of dependence on the user; interactivity, by contrast, gives the impression that the subject masters his language").³⁷ In other words, interpassivity is the secret language of the market, which degrades bodies into objects, and it is also the language that artists use to reflect on this degradation.

It is not unimportant that Bal-Blanc's development of this project was rooted in his own experience performing for two and a half months in Felix Gonzalez-Torres's *Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)*, 1991. In this work, a scantily clad male wears headphones and dances upon a lightbulb-studded, minimalist podium for at least five minutes a day for the duration of the exhibition.³⁸

37. Pierre Bal-Blanc, "Notes de mise en scène: *La Monnaie Vivante*," p. 5; pdf available at cacbretigny.com (my translation).

38. First shown in Gonzalez-Torres's exhibition *Every Week There Is Something Different* (May 2–June 1, 1991, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York), *Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)* was subsequently installed at the Hamburger Kunstverein, where Bal-Blanc took on the role of go-go dancer.

Bal-Blanc's feeling of depressed subjection after a month of performing this work raised a number of questions for him that were only answered when he later encountered the performances of Santiago Sierra.³⁹ Like many of the artists in *La Monnaie Vivante*, Sierra seems to use perversity as a meditation on the degree to which social and economic institutions assure the triumph of perversion. For Bal-Blanc, the difference between works of art and capitalism is that artists appropriate perverted power *for themselves*, in order to produce reoriented and multiple roles (as opposed to the singular roles of industrialization). As such, they propose new forms of transgression, and prompt a *secousse* (jolt) in the viewer. As Bal-Blanc suggests, in delegated performance two types of perversion confront each other face to face: the perversity exercised by institutions and presented as a norm, and that employed by artists, which by contrast appears as an anomaly.

Perversion and Authenticity

Klossowski arguably provides a bridge in French theory between Bataille and Lacan and a subsequent generation of thinkers, including Lyotard, Baudrillard, and Foucault, who take from him, respectively, the ideas of libidinal economy, the simulacrum, and institutional discourse. For Klossowski, Sade's sexual perversions work against all normative values and structures, both rational and moral, but it is hard to ascertain Klossowski's relationship to the system he describes.⁴⁰ Klossowski's interest in the human body as "living currency" seems to be a meditation on how subjects may come to pervert and thereby enjoy their own alienation at work, but his invocation of industrialized labor also seems rather dated. *La Monnaie vivante* was published in 1970, at the moment of transition between what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello identify as the second and third spirits of capitalism: from an industrialized model of labor, organized by management, in which the worker feels exploited and unrealized, to a connexionist, project-based model, structured by networks, in which the worker is arguably even more exploited but feels greater fulfilment and autonomy. To the extent that the third spirit of capitalism is marked by elaborate forms of self-exploitation (rather than a monodirectional, hierarchical flow), Klossowski's understanding of the way we find perverse pleasure in labor is perhaps even more relevant.

39. Of all the people I have spoken to who have appeared in delegated performances, it is striking that Bal-Blanc is the only one who didn't enjoy his time performing. The usual reaction is one of enjoyment in the face of a new experience. As Joe Scanlan notes, participants' enjoyment often extends so far as to preclude critical engagement with the works that they appear in, resulting in a kind of Stockholm syndrome whereby they are grateful to their artistic captors and unable to admit the relative lack of returns on their labor invested in the work of art. See Joe Scanlan, response to Don Byrd, letters page, *Artforum* (September 2010), pp. 54, 56.

40. Klossowski's second edition of *Sade mon prochain* (*Sade My Neighbour*, 1947) revises his earlier reading of Sade in line with his post-Catholic outlook. In the later revision, he views Sade's sexual perversions as universally oppositional, rather than being a secret affirmation of God. See Ian James, *Pierre Klossowski: The Persistence of a Name* (Oxford: Legenda/European Humanities Research Centre, 2000).

Following Klossowski's logic, it is as if the delegated performance artist puts him/herself in a Sadean position because he/she knows from experience that this exploitation and self-display can itself be a form of pleasure.⁴¹ From this perspective, it is only doing half the job to point out that delegated performance "reifies" its participants. From a Sadean point of view, this reading doesn't establish the occult pleasure of the participant in exploiting his subordination in these works of art, nor does it account for the evident pleasure of viewers in watching him/her. This interlacing of *voyeur* and *voyant* is at the core of Pierre Zucca's quaintly perturbing photographic vignettes accompanying the first edition of Klossowski's publication (in which two men and a woman engage in sadomasochistic acts), and is essential for rethinking the stakes of delegated performance for both the audience's visual pleasure and that of the participant. (The most brutal image of this reciprocal pleasure recently is Sierra's two-channel video *Los Penetrados* [2010], showing a near-industrialized array of anal penetration between couples of different races and genders.)

Klossowski's writings therefore invite us to move beyond the impasse of certain intellectual positions inherited from the 1960s: on the one hand, arguments that society is all-determining as a set of institutional and disciplinary constraints (Frankfurt School, structuralism), and on the other, arguments for the perpetual vitality and agency of the subject that continually subverts and undermines these restrictions (poststructuralism, Deleuze and Guattari). Rather than collapsing these positions, Klossowski requires us to take onboard a more complex network of libidinal drives that require perpetual restaging and renegotiation. This tension between structure and agency, particular and universal, spontaneous and scripted, *voyeur* and *voyant*, is key to the aesthetic effect and social import of the best examples of delegated performance.

Although the artist delegates power to the performers (entrusting them with agency while also affirming hierarchy), delegation is not just a one-way, downward gesture. The performers also delegate something to the artist: a guarantee of authenticity, through their proximity to everyday social reality, conventionally denied to the artist, who deals merely in representations. By relocating sovereign and self-constituting authenticity *away* from the singular artist (who is naked, masturbates, is shot in the arm, etc.) and *onto* the collective presence of the performers, who metonymically signify a solidly sociopolitical issue (homelessness, race, immigration, disability, etc.), the artist outsources authenticity and relies on his performers to supply this more vividly, without the disruptive filter of celebrity. At the same time, the realism invoked by this work is clearly not a return to modernist authenticity of the kind dismantled by Adorno and poststructuralism. By setting up a situation that unfolds with a greater or lesser degree of unpredictability, artists give rise to a highly directed form of authenticity: singular authorship is put into

41. "It would never occur to the sadist to find pleasure in other people's pain if he had not himself first undergone the masochistic experience of a link between pain and pleasure." Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: Zone Books, 1989), p. 43.

question by delegating control of the work to the performers; they confer upon the project a guarantee of realism, but do this through a highly authored situation whose precise outcome cannot be foreseen. In wresting a work of art from this event, the artist both relinquishes and reclaims power: he or she agrees to temporarily lose control over the situation before returning to select, define, and circulate its representation.⁴² Authenticity is invoked, but then questioned and reformulated, by the indexical presence of the members of a particular social group, who are both individuated *and* symbolic, live *and* mediated, determined *and* autonomous.

At the same time, the phenomenological experience of confronting these performers always testifies to the extent to which people relentlessly exceed the categories under which they have been recruited. Using “amateurs” is essential in this regard, for it ensures that delegated performance will never assume the seamless character of professional acting, and keeps open a space of risk and ambiguity (comparable to the history of chance operations throughout twentieth-century art). That this amateurism nevertheless provokes a sense of moral outrage betrays the extent to which institutional perversion has been internalized as fully normal, while that of the artists comes across as unacceptable. The logic is one of fetishistic disavowal: I know that society is all-exploiting, but all the same, I want artists to be an exception to this rule. When artists make the patterns of institutional subordination that we undergo every day both visible and available for experiential pleasure, the result is a moral queasiness; and yet the possibility that this might also be a source of *jouissance* and a “tool” is precisely the point of Klossowski’s disturbing analysis. What becomes thinkable if the pleasure of reification in these works of art is precisely analogous to the pleasure we all take in our own self-exploitation?

Performance in Context

It should be clear by now that I am trying to argue for a more complicated understanding of delegated performance than that offered by a Marxist framework of reification or a contemporary critical discourse rooted in positivist pragmatics and injunctions to social amelioration, all of which reduce these works to standard-issue questions of political correctness. The perverse pleasures underlying these artistic gestures offer an alternative form of knowledge about capitalism’s commodification of the individual, especially when both participants and viewers appear to enjoy the transgression of subordination to a work of art. If one is not to fall into the trap of merely condemning these works as reiterations of capitalist exploitation, it becomes essential to view art not as part of a seamless continuum with contemporary labor but as offering a specific space of experience where those norms are suspended and put in service of pleasure in perverse ways

42. In general, much more attention needs to be paid to the modes in which this representation is figured—whether huge Cibachrome prints, in the case of Vanessa Beecroft, or short documentary videos in the case of Żmijewski—rather than dismissing artists out of hand for exploitation.

(to return to Sade, a space not unlike that of BDSM sex). Rather than judging art as a model of social organization that can be evaluated according to preestablished moral criteria, it is more productive to view the conceptualization of these performances as properly *artistic* decisions. This is not to say that artists are uninterested in ethics, only to point out that ethics is the ground zero of any collaborative art. To judge a work on the basis of its preparatory phase is to neglect the singular approach of each artist, how this produces specific aesthetic consequences, and the larger questions that he or she might be struggling to articulate.⁴³

And what might these larger questions be? Artists choose to use people as a medium for many reasons: to challenge traditional artistic criteria by reconfiguring everyday actions as performance; to give visibility to certain social constituencies and render them more complex, immediate, and physically present; to introduce aesthetic effects of chance and risk; to problematize the binaries of live and mediated, spontaneous and staged, authentic and contrived; to examine the construction of collective identity and the extent to which people always exceed these categories. In the most compelling examples of this work, a series of paradoxical operations is put into play that impedes any simplistic accusation that the subjects of delegated performance are reified (decontextualized, and laden with other attributes). To judge these performances on a scale with supposed “exploitation” at the bottom and full “agency” at the top is to miss the point entirely. The difference, rather, is between “art-fair art” and work that reifies *precisely in order to discuss reification*, or that exploits *precisely to thematize exploitation itself*. In this light, the risk of superficiality that occasionally accompanies the reductive branding or packaging of social identities in a work of art (“the unemployed,” “the blind,” “children,” “brass band players,” etc.) should always be set against the dominant modes of media representation in opposition to which these works so frequently intend to do battle.⁴⁴ This, for me, is the dividing line between the facile gestures of so much gala and art-fair art and those more troubling works that do not simply take advantage of contemporary labor conditions but trouble our relationship to them through the presentation of conventionally underexposed constituencies. It is true that at its worst, delegated performance produces quirkily staged reality designed *for* the media, rather than paradoxically mediated presence. But at its best, delegated performance produces disruptive events that testify to a shared reality between viewers and performers, and which defy not only agreed ways of thinking about pleasure, labor, and ethics, but also the intellectual frameworks we have inherited to understand these ideas today.

43. For example, a distinction can be made between those artists whose work addresses ethics as an explicit theme (e.g., Żmijewski’s *80064* [2004]), and those who use ethical discomfort as a technique to express and foreground questions of labor (such as Sierra) or control (Bruguera).

44. As Phil Collins’s *Return of the Real* (2006–7) makes so abundantly clear, reality television depends upon the merciless shoehorning of participants to fit stereotypical characters in clichéd narratives whose predictability is designed to attract lots of viewers.