

THE PROCESS OF PERFORMER PRESENCE AND AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION DANTO CRITICISM ON MARINA ABRAMOVIC “THE ARTIST IS PRESENT”

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ABSTRACT

Marina Abramovic is an artist whose work is astonishing same as her life. She uses her body as main subject and media of her art. This Serbian artist living in New York, rose to fame in mid 70s through her creative performance which were created collaborating Oley, German artist. When they finished working together after 23 years, Marina Abramovic kept on her work alone and eventually became the most famous female performance artist who was the person that converted performance to an institutionalized shape of art. Her performances are personal and physically and emotionally are overt and risky. In her performance, this artist put commonplace actions as criteria to be able to reveal their hidden power through this. She believes that an artist should suffer because the best works will be manifested through pain. Pain brings transfiguration with itself and artist's spirit will excellence. Prominent indexes in her performances include the relationship between artist as performer and audience, physical tolerance and mental concepts facilities. One of the most famous performances of her is called “the artist is alive” which had been proposed in New York modern art museum in 2010 in seven hundred and thirty six hours (during three months). Arthur Colman Danto, American Philosopher and contemporary art critic also participated in mentioned performance, an excellent master or philosopher who is considered as one of the most famous theoretician in field of art. This performance is the longest history performance and the most alive show which is held in this museum up to now. In current article, mentioned work will be analyzed. The question is that what the goal of mentioned artist is about performing this work and what concept is hidden beyond this performance.

Keywords: *Marina Abramovic, Arthur Danto, conceptual art, performance art, investigating “the artist is present”*

INTRODUCTION

No other art influential movement may have the power of conceptual arts now or even in future to attract a significant number of artists through a wide recall and maybe no art same as conceptual one can integrate with daily life of people in various communities. Conceptual art's doors are open for coming and going and this freedom will be the main essence of the each original art. The relationship of artist, artwork and audience will be developed in conceptual works and relying on his individual logic, artist takes advantage of direct statement and language facilities in nature and life and in many cases, in addition to the nature of objects, political, social and technologic realities will form his work's subject. In this relationship, audience and sometimes artist himself are considered as parts of the whole work of art and its meaning. Nowadays in conceptual artworks, performance art, installations, video part and many other conceptual art media are easily combine with each other and create a new environment which can't be found in academic typing.

RESEARCH HISTORY

Relating to conceptual art and its various branches such as performance art and body art, there are many studies and researches that some of them are English and the others are translated into Persian such as Daniel Marzona in book conceptual art (2011), Lordana Parmezani in book “twentieth century riots”, movements, theories, schools and tendencies (2010) and Howard J. Smagola in book “contemporary tendencies in visual arts (2002). Some pages are also allocated to new art subject in some of related papers to art and there are some researches about conceptual art, the way of its forming and its various branches. The newspaper “Tomorrow art” also is one of those newspapers which have proposed valuable information related to contemporary art. In spite of this, related to the last performance work of Marina Abramovic which is considered as the longest history performances, there aren’t any direct researches.

METHODOLOGY

This article is based on analytic-descriptive method and collecting data method is librarian one using written or digital references. Internet has been used for collecting the sample of works.

CONCEPTUAL ART MOVEMENT

Conceptual art can be considered as a movement in contemporary art which has developed its principles and methods and used other art achievements and methods for achieving its goal which is that very transmitting ideas. In fact after this movement the idea of holding visual exhibitions was promoted after this movement because from painting form and 2D works proposed on surfaces, visual art has achieved 3D spaces and constantly was testing spaces, methods and facilities of all other branches of art (Stango, 1977: 257).

The expression of conceptual art was first used in America in 1961. Henry Flynt the artist of Fluxus movement used this expression with the same name in an article (1963) to mention a kind of art, an art which its distinctive feature is that very method which works with languages. Some years later, the expression of conceptual art was replaced with the art of concept. This expression was invented by Sol Lewitt. In his articles namely “some information about conceptual art” (1967) and “some sentences about conceptual art” (1969), he drew wider range of people’s attention to this expression and could help them for better perceiving of this concept (Marzona, 2011: 8).

Parmezani says:

It is obvious that conceptual phrase can refer to numerous aspects of modern art- from definition of neoclassical artist, Anton Raphael Mengs about “painter, philosopher” to Marcel Duchamp prepared works but modern art generation conceptualism included other definitions as well (Parmezani, 2010: 159). The years of 1960s was the time of looking for reality and recognizing their soul for many artists. In parallel with theoretical and practical challenges in art structure, they used various investigations in “self-knowledge” that a significant part of that was concentrated on body subject. The result of these experiences was a new genre of conceptual art that considered body the material of art work so was literally famous as body art. Back body art appeared in the shape of critical and protesting art and continued more in a path of a new empirical approach and a media heresy in art. An important part of primary experiences was performed as performance and alive in front of audiences. But later performances were mainly shown using mediating media such as photo, movie, and video for people.

PERFORMANCE ART

“a type of show” in order to propose modern art images and even advertise social thoughts and political beliefs which has been common since twentieth century occasionally, some people call it “alive art”. Being alive is its main characteristic that is performed in front of audience and sometimes with their participation or actors, dancers and professional players accompany performer. Other factors such as postcard, neon lamp, picture and slide are maybe used in this type of show. Previous samples of performing art were with futurism, constructivism, dada and surrealism. Since years after Second World

War till now in America and Europe, various and more particular forms of art have been emerged. Events, art and physical action, earthy art and conceptual art are linked with that (Pakbaz, 2007: 652).

Performance art is a proposal which is given to audience traditionally as inter-major. There is a possibility that performance is written in advance and is organized full accurately or vice versa it is proposed accidentally, with participation or lack of participation of audience. Performance art can happen everywhere or location and every time. Actions of a person with a group of people form work's framework in a particular time and place.

More than other kinds of dramatic arts, performance art is defined with the presence of one performer (artist), audience (people who are watching) and performer's action. In dance art, when a dancer performs dance, the existence of audience isn't necessary. In theater art, actors don't need audience but performing art will stop without the presence of audience and only converts to action.

Howard J. Smagola in book "contemporary tendencies in visual arts" discusses as below:

"Performing art and video were admired as the precursors of a new era in beginning of 70 decade, an era where shapes had played an important social and aesthetic role. Authorities believed that using empirical media, visual arts will move their old dependency to the objects' materiality and join audience more direct than before. Through intensified reality of a live event, more groups of people are available and it will have wider and more comprehensive effect on the whole of audiences" (Smagola, 2002: 327)

In fact younger group of present artists used to consider audiences as a partner in artwork not an opponent. The origins of the history of performance art of the twentieth century refer to the Futurists of early years of century. "Philipo Martinetti, a member of this group, held a performance of particular events in Trieste Italy in 1910 and six years later, Dadaists performed several shows in Voltaire Cabaretin Zurich" (Ibid, 328)

Performance cannot be only defined as a particular structure or work. All forms and media are under the service of artists from video to photo and from statue to painting and lightness. No story is defined in performance. In fact the art of performance is a "cocktail" art that has been born in 1960s as a result of several art branches such as painting, video, music, dance and theater. The artists of this era use the components of visual, audio, performance arts and also traditional ceremony and commonplace for their performance and body is also considered as an artistic tool.

In his article namely "On art, action and measuring", Arthur Danto has responded to some of questions in the field of art subject. To answer this question that if performance art is really art, Danto says:

"Before answering this question, we have to determine what the art is or how it is defined; the oldest theory in west about art can be found in republic tenth book. Plato defined art there as imitation. Then he announced that using mirror, achieving a complete imitation is very simple. His purpose is showing that art belongs to the territory of reflection, shadows, dreams and hallucinations. He as following divided world based on three degrees of reality. The highest reality can be found in a territory that he called it "ideas", that is objects' form or shape. Ideas are received by mind. Next degree of reality is related to common objects, similar things which a carpenter makes. Artist only knows how an object seems same as the way he creates it in painting or drawing. The knowledge of carpenter is more than artist's knowledge. The beds which are made by him get and maintain sleeping bodies. The highest knowledge belong to people who achieve the idea of constructing bed and how they can keep body and the least important knowledge -if it can be considered as knowledge- is related to artist's ability in painting the picture of beds that shows only appearance. This famous plan of world and its degrees of reality was made clearly to put the art in his place, it means that hallucination, dreams and shadows territory is a useless creature in terms of knowledge and awareness" (Danto, 2010: 1).

Following that Danto says that he mention this subject in article “The philosophical disenfranchisement of art” and it shows that why philosophers tend to use art slightly; he says several utterance of Plato emphasized the inferiority of art and political message of republic is that philosophers whose territory is their ideas should be king. Danto says: “imitation theory which is the name of this attitude toward art has a power also and Aristotle considers scenarios and epics in “Poetics” as imitating from events and occurrences. Nothing had been recorded from ancient performances, the ones which might have been difficult and represented the power and resistance of performer. But performance isn’t an imitation from an action but it is action itself. Art and reality get united in it. In mid-1913 and 1917, Marcel Duchamp proposed some ready-made objects that the most famous one was fountain and showed men restrooms. In 1964, Andy Warhol showed some copies similar to cargo cartoons. An artwork and a cargo box can seem exactly similar to each other, so what is their difference? What is the difference in sitting in front of somebody in a performance and merely sitting in front of somebody? Artwork has meaning, it is related to something and involves that meaning” (Ibid: 2)

As it was mentioned before in performance art, artist’s media and tool is his body that sometimes naked or stuck in very dangerous situation. As Danto states, “what distinct performance art from other arts is the presence of artist’s body. This presence will appear with artist. Separate artist’s body from art then you will see that the holiness which performance has will fade”. (Ibid)

MARINA ABRAMOVIC

Marina Abramovic was born in November 13th 1946 in Belgrade, Serbia, lives in New York; she has started creating performance art professionally from the beginning of 1970s. Through 3 decades of activity, she tries to show herself as “The mother of performance art”. She is perfect performer and is considered as one of art pioneers. Marina Abramovic proposed her works in forms of installation, performance and video art. Her works investigate the relationship between performer, audience and body’s limitations. Her performances rely on physical ability and she pays attention to commonplace in her works. Many of her works are considered as one of the most dangerous ones. In performing her works, she relies on audiences’ participation and company and used her body as her work’s tool and subject (www.wikipedia.com).

The performance of this artist has two aspects: body and pain

In answering this question that what has caused that risk and pain concepts are parts of her works, in an interview with “Art Monthly” magazine, she says:

Pain subject is generally attractive, we are usually afraid of pain, of death and torturing that all of these have been always one of the most primary conflicts of human. Many artists have worked on this subject with different methods and ideas. It has been always attractive for me to know how traditional and ancient people applied this subject in their ceremonies and customs during history. Its reason in history isn’t masochism but there is a simple reason for that and it is facing pain, for getting rid of fear and meanwhile enter a new stage of awareness, I couldn’t have this risk taking in my own life but I get a kind of energy from audience on the scene that gives dare to face dangers, through this way I swipe away my fear (www.artmonthly.co.uk).

A REVIEW ON ARTIST’S WORKS

Some of primary works of Marina Abramovic which are mostly from the most dangerous ones of her performances not only get audience’s participation but also inspires their potential violent.

“Marina Abramovic in Belgrade created a work namely “Rhythm O” in 1974; she let audience who gathered in Naples gallery to bother her for 6 hours. Till third hour her cloths had been cut by razor and her skin had been injured as well, a loaded gun was pointed at her head that caused a fight among her torturers and because of that frightening interruption happened in work. In 1975, another performer artist

became partner for her who is called Uley and they both together tested the relationships of pain and resistance between themselves and audience. “Imponderable” was a performance where these two stood in front of each other nakedly across from framework; people had to enter exhibition place through the remaining small gap between the two bodies. In another work namely “relation in movement” Uley drove a car for sixteen hours in a small circle while Marina –she was in car too- counted the number of rounds by him but peak point of artistic skill of their common resistance was performance “The lovers, The Great Wall Walk” (pic 1). In this performance that lasted 90 days, Abramovic from the eastern end of the Great Wall of China and Uley from west end of wall started walking to the center in order to meet each other and in intersection they cut relationship and finished their partnership” (Goldberg, 1988: 165).



Picture 1- Marina Abramovic, “The lovers, The Great Wall Walk”, performance, 1988
Source (weidemann, 2008, 130)

In Venice Biennale 1997, this artist could get golden bear award through proposing one of her most important works namely “Balkan Baroque” (pic 2). The main subject of this performance was bitter memories that were rooted in her nationality and had gained a new subjectivity as the result of Bosnia war. Through a video installation, some pictures of artist and parents were shown in this performance and simultaneously, she was sitting beside a mass of cow bones and her environment was surrounded by Copper containers full of water. For 4 days, she had to wash and clean 2500 kilos of cow’s bones (5500 pounds) and at the time of doing this, she sang some folklores of her mother tongue (Weidemann, 2008: 129).



Picture 2- Marina Abramovic, Balkan Baroque, Venice Biennial, 1997
Source: (Weidemann, 2008: 129)

This artist now wants to establish an art center specialized in performance art in Hudson of America which will be called the institution of Marina Abramovic.

INVESTIGATING AND ANALYZING THE WORK OF “ARTIST IS PRESENT”

In 2010, MOMA museums, held a complete exhibition of professional history of Marina Abramovic, great lady of performance art, for three months. This was the first time in the history of this museum that a complete exhibition was allocated to the professional path of an artist.

This famous performance artist is in his 60th decade of her life and so it isn't strange that most of her works have been re-performed by young people. The work which was performed by her was called “the artist is present”. In this performance she used to sit in museum's hall every day and people could sit in front of her without talking to her.

Some of people who were present in this performance evaluated it shocking. In this performance artist and artwork are completely combined with each other (picture 3).



Picture 3- Marina Abramovic, the artist is present, performance in MOMA museum in New York, 2010
Source: (Lucy Smith, 2011: 41)

James Westcott states in an article which he published in New York Times (August 18th, 2011) following this performance: in face to face confrontation, eye contact causes absolute presence and spirit refinery (many people out of 1400 ones who were sitting there cried) but when it is proposed online it converts to obsessive categorizing and the game of recognizing famous people while live performance involved transmitting thoughts in a deep and dizzy form, when it was observed online, it was addictive and alienation” (Lucy Smith, 2011; 44).

Edward Lucy Smith in an article namely ego representation about this work says:

“This kind of attitude to herself is sadly familiar for contemporary interpreter or art critic. Huge ego of many contemporary artists always seek to find an opportunity to occupy all possible space and even get wider, a path that led to present space has started from a point totally before present era. In fact this kind of attitude had been existed in an era before we call it modern”. (Ibid, 40)

Through performing the artist is present which is considered as the longest performance of history has left relatively deeper effect than her previous works, an effect that isn’t flown from violent anymore, there isn’t anti-art spirit in it and it works with emotion. “This was a performance that involved the imagination of anybody who was interested in contemporary art, moments full of spiritual interaction As Danto states. Each one of us during our lives, how many times experience such this thing? (www.cupblog.org/p=1891). This performance in common days lasted seven hours and on Fridays 10 hours and Marina Abramovic looked at 1565 people’s eyes during continues performance in New York modern art museum and what interesting is that most of them after looking at her eyes had cried!

Arthur Danto was present in above performance and one of people who sat in front of Marina Abramovic in New York modern art museum and interacted in this performance. In an article namely sitting with Marina after presence in above performance, he says:

“Because of my role as a philosopher and critic who is an artist, I am often asked that what the meaning of new work which is designed for such this situation is? This work consists of Marina who is sitting on a chair in a hall of museum while across from her there is an empty chair which is ready for everyone who likes to sit there in anytime. This performance caused that this museum is placed on the edge of artistic experience winner. An experience that was successful in any aspects.

As a witness of the creation this work, I had accepted to write an article based on above performance. Since I use wheelchair now, a person took my wheelchair across from Marina and picked up empty chair. My turn started as a part of artistic work. Marina looked beautiful in a dark red dress; a dress that its edges reached to the ground and made a circle and her black hair was braided to one side. I didn’t have any idea to do what except keeping silent in a special atmosphere that was between me and her. This performance was similar to a dialogue between two deaf people, communication was in another level. I dared and moved my hand as the symbol of hello that as respond Marina slightly smiled (picture 4).

At this time something interesting happened, Marina slight angle bent her head to one side, stared at me and meanwhile she seemed to enter another mood. I was out of her staring sight, her face looked bright but it wasn’t bloodshot. She entered an atmosphere that formerly called it performing mode. It was same as magical trance. Her ability in entering this mode is one of her talents as a performer and this is what enables her to pass her difficult physical work in her famous performances. The question was that how long it was supposed to be there? I thought that I could sit there for a long time, for one moment I thought all of my sickness has gone. It seemed as if I was in skies and with God. After passing 10 minutes I thought this is unfair to keep people waiting. I shook my hand and someone took me out of there (Danto, 2010: 3).



Picture 4- Marina Abramovic, the artist is present, MOMA museum in New York, 2010
Arthur Danto and Marina Abramovic
Source: www.opinionator.nytimes.com

About her work, Marina Abramovic says:

In my idea, the most important and attractive part of this performance is trying to communicate with audience. This project was an important opportunity for me to communicate my audience interactional. This kind of personal communication makes the experience utterly different. The other point which was totally important in my point of view was the location of performance in museum building. The place I used was placed in the heart of museum and it was exactly the point that visitors passed there to get floors or other halls of museum and this sense of continuous motion around this permanent silent, made this work particularly attractive.

This work needed high spiritual and physical preparedness. It seemed simple but sitting on a chair without movement for 7 continues hours, is very difficult. To do this determination is very important, because it makes you resist, not move and go on. Here there is an extraordinary event. When body perceives that you aren't supposed to move, pain will fade and a kind of experience forms out of body, it seems poetic but it is real. It seems as if you leave your body. Pain comes back again, but you have to try and keep on. It took me two years to prepare myself for this performance.

What used to happen to the audience was extraordinary also. Some became uneasy or angry because so long they were waiting for their turn; some became hallucinated or draw their attention to themselves. Anyway after six or seven minutes were entered to another dimension that sound faded on it. So I faded there too as if they become mirror of themselves, their inner feelings manifested. I heard the sound of crying several time. When I saw the museum's guards came and stood in line on holiday to participate in this program was one of my most shocking experiences during execution of this project. The longest time that somebody sat in front of me was seven hours! That person comes back again and 31 hours sat. There were people, who had no idea of performance art and visited the museum just as a tourist, but something was changed within them and it was so important for me. Performance art has a strange power, not just on the artist's life but on the lives of those who experience it. But only very long performances have this power because if performances are one, two or even five hours, there is still possibility to pretense and role-playing of artist. But the performance which lasts three months turned in to real life.

Finally after seven hundred and thirty-six performances chairs were removed and remained just a mark of them that identifies the place in the hall. Later, people came and kissed the marks. I do not know why, but this scenes were too shocking (www.artmonthly.co.uk)

Danto believes that «Possibility to sit with Marina, led people to this idea that one can do more than in different face in facing with an artwork and can be a part of an artwork, for the time he wants or can. He said the artist's presence was treasure that in honor granted and Marina created intimacy with her presence which in terms of importance, needs nothing beyond of her. This was a time for spiritual exchange.» (Danto, 2010:2)

One of the concepts which is raised and found special place whether in art criticism or in artistic creation in recent decades is concept of "audience" and even his priority and interaction in artwork creation.

Artists of interaction art produce their artwork by various and different trends but their common goal is engaging the audience by artwork, being in the context and changes it. Interaction art don't want concept-removing but want the audience explore a concept and rebuild it.

A question that is raised for audience during the interaction by artwork encourages him to think about the artwork and may offer new insights to him.

In studied artwork we see that audience finds a dignity of the artist, collaborated with him in creation and performance of artwork and by his physical presence against artist, the artwork is formed.

Another feature of "The artist is present" performance is silence and stillness, an emotional silence and stillness which are achieved by looking only. Artist sits on a chair by a long robe and looks. Looks that may have separated time each one, one minute, one hour or more. In this performance, people open their eyes like a door which closed on their souls, despite the inactivity and freezing and a sense of intimacy and emotional relationship is formed by looking to artists' eyes, and now this question arises that why do people avoid looking in to each other's eyes?

Fully presence in the moment can be the purpose and idea of this performance, neither the past nor the future. But presence in the present is about starting "current time" and "now" also in artist and audience of "The artist is present".

Human always thinks about the past and future and less time spent in present. Performance is created at the same moment in time and position, in fact. Audiences by sitting on a chair, in front of the artist and looking up his eyes don't look at him in fact because artist acted as a separation and preservatives and a mirror and audiences reflected their feelings on themselves and receiving all of these feelings.

CONCLUSION

Conceptual art implies on various type of art that the idea of art is more important than means of expression and final artwork. Conceptual art movement as a movement along side other artistic movements of the sixties which has been manifested to priority the intended concepts of the artist on the way of providing it, covered other parallel art movements by broader sense and affected many artistic movements after that and artworks presentation of artists severely, such that it can be noted performance art, body art and installation.

Performance art was born from collision of some art branch such as painting, video, music, dance and theater. Artists of this field use from elements of the visual arts, audio, performance and ritual and daily life for their performance and body considered as an artistic tool in this form. Marina Abramovic, the great pioneer of performance art began using the body as subject, media and object in her artwork of the seventies. She is remembered as "artist of pain" because most of her artworks appear hurt seeking somewhat. She analyzes testing the limits of body stability and resistance against time in her performances.

It can be said that this artist has reached to an unattainable give and take with participants by creating her last performance, "The artist is present" and cause them to react which are the deepest human feelings. Something that perhaps nowadays human does not matter to it, a human as Abramovic, does not look to other human eyes. Artist prepares herself in this performance for hard experiences and showing his existence to others and achieve to self-awareness by raising the risk of his experience. Suffering from the performance plays an important role in her creativity. Suffering is an experience of death. This suffering is evidence of the desire to live and reminds the artist that she is alive.

At "The artistis present" performance, front seat of artist is empty and audiences, whether viewers' exhibitions etc. are inseparable part of the artwork and they involved in the creative process of this performance, now performance has found an interactive properties because the artwork is formed by physical presence of audience against artist's. The concept of this performance is lack of movement and physical stability in addition fluidity of mind .The features and goals of this performance are stillness and silence on the performance, presence of artist and audience in the present neither in the past nor the future and stay, tolerate and resistance to suffering.

Arthur Danto, philosopher, theorist and art critic of Nation magazine and author of several books and articles in the field of analytic philosophy, philosophy of art and contemporary art, was among the witnesses of creation of this artwork and has contributed in the above performance. He participated in artwork's exhibitions of contemporary artists and has written on many catalog of artworks' exhibition and has brought many philosophical and artistic ideas in to public issues. Participating in the above performance is described as an amazing experience for himself and a dedication of the artist by Danto, A deep thanks and hard artwork which has been transferred to people who are sitting in front of the artist. Time for intellectual exchange which is achieved by sharing the presence of each other.

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