

LAKE FOREST COLLEGE  
Senior Thesis

The Theory and Practice of Archetypal Meta-Specifics  
in Installation Performance

by

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Steven Galovich  
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**I would like to dedicate this project to all those who have pushed me along the path of my development as an artist. This particularly includes the people who have helped me develop as a Theater practitioner.**

**Among many others I would especially like to thank: My parents, my older brother, my younger sister, Mrs. Ambrosini, Mr. Mae, Mr. Reed, Mrs. McCracken, Mrs. Lebergott, and of course my many friends but especially Ms. Cooper.**

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# Table of Contents

<b>Part I – Introduction/Background.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Theater.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Performance Art.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Installation</b>	
<b>Art.....</b>	<b>11</b>
	<b>Part II – Installation</b>
<b>Performance.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>The Audience as an Uncontrolled Locus</b>	
<b>of Meaning in Installation</b>	
<b>Performance.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Boundlessness.....</b>	<b>2</b>
	<b>2</b>
	<b>Part III – Theory in Practice/</b>
<b>Implementation.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<i>Skewed Vision.....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>The Sandbox.....</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>WWTMD?.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>CIV SIM</i>	
<i>RAVAGE.....</i>	<i>37</i>
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>42</b>

## **PART I**

### **INTRODUCTION/ BACKGROUND**

If you make art for yourself and just keep it in a closet so no one else can see it than you are not an artist.

-Alfredo Jaar (paraphrase from Lecture)

The whole point of my work really, in terms of writing, is to question connections. People say, 'C'mon, just say what you mean,' which to me seems like such a bizarre thing to say. I've always felt that if I could say it, I would just write it down on a piece of paper and stand on the street corner and hand it out. I wouldn't make songs or pictures I wouldn't bother.

-Laurie Anderson

It seems now that it's very important to affirm the imagination, mental freedom, creativity, and following your own path. All of these qualities can get lost very easily in the society that we live in. ...I think that what art can do is to slow you down enough so that you really become more aware of reality. ...And it gives you a little bit of space to--let go of the habitual ways of--of dealing with seeing and hearing and experiencing things.

- Meredith Monk

As an artist I try to communicate my experience in life to my audience but some aspects of human experience cannot be expressed through ordinary words. "It is because of the inadequacy of ordinary words that people turn to poetry, and because of the inadequacy of other forms of daily communication that they turn to music, dance, art, sculpture, and the entire range of symbols and metaphors [available to art]."<sup>1</sup> However, expressing oneself is a form of discourse, a dialogue. For me as an artist it is of primary importance to facilitate discussion. I feel that it is the artist's duty/calling to use the power to question/highlight reality vested in them in a way that affects the audience most.

From an early age I chose theater as a way to let out my artistic spirit. As I came to study it more, I came to appreciate, understand, and subsequently exploit its ability to affect the audience. For a while I thought that acting in a play was the most immediate<sup>2</sup>, most pure artist/audience relationship. If one defines the actor and the artist as one and the same thing, and as an actor one can feel the impact one's art makes on one's audience immediately, then acting (theater in general) is the least mediated of art forms. Since then, I have found that it could be considered the most obtuse and muddled of relationships, if one considers the roles of the whole of the creative team: director, designer, etc. In spite of this, there is still something to be said for the immediate response that the actor gets as an audience of his/her own performance. This of course leads to arguably the least mediated of all performance types: performance art, where "Unlike Theater the performer *is* the artist."<sup>3</sup> In performance art the artist and the audience are in direct contact and therefore direct dialogue.

"Non-Performative"<sup>4</sup> visual art, such as drawing, collage, painting, photography, sculpture, etc. also occupied my time as a tool of my artistic expression. Unlike theater where the performer's body is a reflection of our own body and therefore has an immediacy when speaking of the human condition and our relationship to it, visual art has always been for me an arena where intellectual issues usually unrelated to survival in the world get played out. This is where complex philosophical and aesthetic issues (both distinctly human

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<sup>1</sup>Edwin Wilson, The Theater Experience, (New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc, 1998), 32.

<sup>2</sup>The notion of immediacy is a necessary and fundamental quality of art. Immediacy refers to the actual or imagined distance in the relationship between the artist and the audience. The more immediate a work of art the better the line of communication and the more successful it is.

<sup>3</sup>Rose Lee Goldberg, Performance: Live Art since 1960, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998), 8.

<sup>4</sup>This category label is debatable. Whether or not this other type of art making is performative is one of the many arguments that I will expand upon in the body of the thesis.

constructs) can be explored. Of course there are crossovers: theater that is distinctly aesthetic and visual art that is distinctly kinesthetic and concerned with issues of the human condition and empathy (such as destruction art, abject art, etc.<sup>5</sup>).

In general such art seemed to me to lack the immediacy of performance. Then I discovered installation art. Without intellectually grasping it, in learning about installation art, I could feel its performative potential. There is something much more immediate (and very theatrical) about installation art. Through exploring this medium I gradually learned to exploit its performative potential. I also discovered that all visual art has a performative potential, and seems to me it is most successful when it exploits this potential. If visual art has performance potential. Then surely performative art has static visual potential<sup>6</sup>. This is how I came to my current aesthetic. I am most satisfied, in accomplishing my goals as an artist when working in a mode called Installation Performance: a "healthy" mixture or usage of both types of art that I have subsequently come to understand as one whole.

## **Theater**

Theater has the advantage of a formally and artistically devised "scape." Theater allows for "magic" to happen. Edwin Wilson explains in detail:

Theater operates on the level of symbol, metaphor, and dreams. Beyond its use of

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<sup>5</sup>Destruction and Abject art are labels for a category of "Non-Performative" visual art but also sometimes performance that distinctly deals with the human body and its relationship to the world. Destruction art specifically deals with the issues of "survival" in an atomic/apocalyptic age. Abject art specifically deals with the human body, especially the residue it leaves as we live our lives and eventually die.

<sup>6</sup>Some examples of this would be tableaux vivant, live sculpture, and even something like Robert Wilson's theater of images. The main point here is that performance need not always be about performing it can also concern itself with issues traditionally assigned to "non-performative" art, like balance and static movement.

symbols, and metaphors, however, one could say that a theater performance as a whole is a metaphor for a segment of life. When an actress stands on stage dressed as Joan of Arc, she does not say, 'I am going to act *like* Joan of Arc'; that is she does not use a simile. Rather by her presence she proclaims, 'I *am* Joan of Arc.' In the same way the theater program does not say, 'A room designed to look like the dauphin's palace.' It says simply 'The dauphin's palace.' Everything we see in a theater - an entire performance, including the action and the scenery- can be considered a giant metaphor.

When this metaphor succeeds, we see before us a complex creation which mirrors life. It takes us inside our subconscious and lets us laugh at ourselves or look at our deepest fears. At such moments we suspend disbelief; theater is undeniably real, even though we are not extrinsically part of the action. Such is the power of imagination.<sup>7</sup>

This suspension of disbelief is what allows theater magic to happen. This magic allows us not only to believe realistic portrayals of everyday life, but it also allows for any figment of the imagination to become real on stage. Wilson describes in more detail:

A sense of being haunted by the past can never be portrayed in a simple description as vividly as it can be by a figure like the ghost of Hamlet's father, or Banquo's ghost appearing before Macbeth. ...Theater offers an opportunity to present these inner truths - reality that is realer than real. ...The argument for [this kind of]

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<sup>7</sup>Edwin Wilson, 31.

non-realism is that the surface of life - a real conversation, for instance, or a real room in a house - can never convey the whole truth, because so much of life occurs in our minds and imagination.<sup>8</sup>

Theater is not only a way to represent our imagination but a way to represent the actual reality that we experience, or realities because though there may be some actual objective reality that exists out there, every single human being who interacts within it experiences it subjectively, consequently we each live in our own version of reality.

In order for all this imaginative reality to work, the creation of an environment where the suspension of disbelief can happen is primary in Theater. To this end, all of the elements that make up theater are subservient to this goal. Since actors are usually the primary vehicles for this suspension of disbelief, then all of the varied elements are also subservient to the actors. What this means of course is that as elaborate or artistic as a set design gets, its merit as art has to be lesser than the sum of the parts that make up the particular production. If the set had merits on its own as an artwork or as a technological marvel, then of course it would be vying for attention from the audience. This, of course, would undermine the whole goal for the suspension of disbelief, because an audience member that is wowed by the wondrous set is not paying any attention to the intricately constructed reality in front of them. You can't appreciate the whole if you are too distracted by the parts to even notice there is a whole.

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<sup>8</sup>Edwin Wilson, 32.

## Performance Art

Performance art is the most direct way for an artist to affect their audience. This is where we take out that final artifice of trying to keep up the suspension of disbelief that is so necessary for theater to work, and everything is what it is. Martha Wilson explains:

"Performance art in my view is the opposite of theater, which holds, according to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'the willful suspension of disbelief' as its objective. ...In general, performance artists remind their audiences: *There is no artifice here; this is happening now, in 'real' time.*<sup>9</sup> Actual Reality is key, not only what is happening is real but who is performing is real also: "Unlike Theater the performer *is* the artist."<sup>10</sup> The performers are portraying not characters, but themselves. This is immediacy at its most effective. The artist's message is moving directly from the artist to their audience.

As a result of this immediacy, Performance Art is often used as a tool for exploration and change in art. In fact, Rose Lee Goldberg argues in her book Performance Art that historically the main purpose of performance art is "as a weapon against the conventions of established art. ...Whenever a certain school [of art]...reached an impasse, artists have turned to performance as a way of breaking down categories and indicating new directions. ...Performance has been a way of appealing directly to a large public, as well as shocking audiences into reassessing their own notions of art and its relation to culture."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Martha Wilson, "Performance Art – (Some)Theory and (Selected) Practice at the End of This Century," Art Journal, (Winter 1997), 2-3.

<sup>10</sup>Rose Lee Goldberg. Performance Art.8.

This directness of performance art is fascinating. A piece like Chris Burden's *Shoot* is an excellent example of this directness/immediacy. There is no way to represent that particular experience through film or the "magic" of theater or any other means except to be there. But this directness also brings with it ethical concerns. This is true because not only was this a traumatic experience for some of his audience members, but he deliberately "staged" this performance to comment on precisely the ethical responsibility of his viewers (and in the process make them feel guilty for not stopping him).

Not only can performance art bring with it ethical concerns, but this kind of focus on reality makes it very limiting as an artwork. There is a time and a place for this kind of intellectual exercise, and while it can cause people to examine their reality, cause them to think, and the piece can even extend intellectually beyond the confines of the gallery as Chris Burden states "My art is an examination of reality, ...my art functions on a higher reality,"<sup>12</sup> and I would even argue that all performance art can function in this way, but it is still lacking as art. Performance art is limited in the fact that it presents only one view of reality, only one kind of it, even if it is a kind of hyper-reality. *Shoot*, is so rooted in this one kind of reality it does not allow for alternate ones to exist. It does not allow for magic, for a reality where supermen exist who are not harmed by bullets, or one where guardian angels exist who whisk away the bullet right before its moment of impact. I find this very limiting. These other realities here are just as important as they are when used in the context of theater.

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<sup>11</sup>Goldberg, 7-8.

<sup>12</sup>Chris Burden and Jan Butterfield, "Chris Burden, Through the Night Softly," Arts Magazine (March 1975): 68.

## **Installation Art**

Installation art shares with theater and performance art its direct ability to affect an audience and its need for an audience to complete it as an artistic act. Even so, it is not performance, it is not live art, it is a visual "non-performative" art. There is something to be said for this kind of aesthetically pleasing, or intellectually stimulating "non-performative" art. This kind of art has the power to explore balance, and color, etc. intellectual issues in a non-immediate setting. As much as it contains movement and "speaks" to the audience there is a level of removal between the audience and the artwork because the artwork does not exist in real time with the audience. Even some "performative" visual work is usually a record of the performance that created it. (One possible exception would be my *Imag-e Tim-e scape Nois-e* installation - where the artist's performance was absent - but the audience themselves completed the performance.) Through installation art it is possible to explore the traditional/intellectual issues of visual art, but without the need to support the artifice of a theater character, and without the need to support the performer. How then is it different from traditional visual art, from painting and sculpture?

Installation is site-specific. Unlike a painting or sculpture that is complete in itself and can be "easily"(intellectually not necessarily physically) transported from one spot to another, installation exists as a complete work only in relation to the specific site where it is situated and sometimes only in conjunction with the existence of a real live audience.

"There is always a reciprocal relationship of some kind between the viewer and the work, the work and the space, and the space and the viewer. One could argue that these

qualities define many artistic practices."<sup>13</sup> This is especially true of performance art, and true of theater both rely heavily on the space that contains them and the audience that perceives them. This is why "To refine the definition further, therefore, one might add that in creating an installation, the artist treats an entire indoor space (large enough for people to enter) [or any space as long as it is defined] as a single situation, rather than as a gallery for displaying separate works. The spectator is in some way regarded as integral to the completion of the work."<sup>14</sup>

"The essence of Installation art is spectator participation, but the definition of participation varies greatly from one artist to another, and even from one work to another by the same artist. ...In each of these situations, the viewer is required to complete the piece; the meaning evolves from the interaction between the two."<sup>15</sup> I would agree with this statement but only after further clarification. The essence of installation is site specificity. An installation has to use the space around it. One specific example of this is my own piece *Remnant*. It could not exist without the gallery space and the remnants of the exhibit that it contained before it. If I had moved that exact piece and reproduced it in another gallery, complete with hooks in the walls, tape, and pencil markings it would cease to be an installation and move into the realm of sculpture. This would occur because then the gallery would resume its function as a place to show art and cease to be a part of the art; cease to be a place from which the installation grew and of which it was a part.

This said however, site-specific does not have to adhere strictly to defining a physical

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<sup>13</sup>Julie H. Reiss, From Margin to the Center: The Spaces of Installation Art (London: The MIT Press, 1999), xiii.

<sup>14</sup>Reiss, xiii.

site. This is where the fact that the meaning of an installation is constructed somewhere in the realm between artist, artwork, and audience becomes extremely relevant. This is what ultimately defines Installation, it has to be site specific, but the definition of site is plotted along the intersection of socio-political, artistic, physical, and personal background planes. In this way site specific can refer to the specificity of the physical site (gallery, museum, basement, walkway, etc.) or the specificity of the ideas that the work conjures up or that the audience brings with them to view the work. Each specific altering the manner and the coordinates on the plane of the constructed meaning.

## **PART II**

### **Installation Performance**

Theater, performance art, and installation art all have one thing in common: their direct effect on the audience. This translates into the feeling of immediacy that a viewer experiences, my ability to affect my audience as directly as possible. But this is not the only reason that I draw on all three of these art practices, this is just an element that all three have in common, each of them also have individual strengths and weaknesses out of which I pick and choose and draw on to make the most powerful, thought-provoking and immediate art that I can.

The "live" aspects of theater and performance art and to some extent installation art are instrumental in my work. Live art is hard to ignore. The presentation of another human

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<sup>15</sup> Reiss xiii.

being gives the artwork immediacy. If the human being performing is the artist him or herself then this is the most direct connection an artist can ever experience with his audience. This is important because art is an act of communication, and in live art the success of this act is almost always immediately verifiable. This direct connection of course is most viable in performance art. But my installation performances are also informed by performance art's historical ability to question art practice and even reality, to experiment with new techniques. Unfortunately, performance art is limiting also in the fact that it is so real, it hardly has the ability to escape reality and present something beyond it.

This is where my theater background and practice comes in. As I said before, in theater the suspension of disbelief by the audience allows for all sorts of magic to happen on stage. "Theater is a two-way street - an exchange between performers and audience - and this is nowhere more evident than in the creation of *illusion*. Illusion may be initiated by the creators of theater, but it is completed by the audience."<sup>16</sup> This exchange allows not only illusion that mirrors real life to happen on stage but it also allows the imagination to reign free and this also can become real.

However, for the magic of theater to happen for the "theater as metaphor" to succeed, all of the elements of theater must be subservient to "the suspension of disbelief." This is a very limiting aspect of theater. This means that the many components of a production, the sound, the costumes, the set design, even the reality of action on stage are limited, they cannot reach their full potential as art pieces as they would be out of the context of theater.

The set of a production in actuality is very similar to a site-specific often architectural

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<sup>16</sup>Edwin Wilson, 26.

installation. In fact installation art and set design share a lot of history<sup>17</sup>, except that the set is limited in its ability to exist as a stand-alone work of art. This is where my fascination and use of installation art principles comes in. Installation, explores many of the same issues as performance, but in a purely formal experience and without the presence of a live performer. Installation art uses objects and ideas to explore notions of realism, of a real encounter, just as performance art does with performers, but it can also explore the notions of metaphor and a hyper-reality through symbolism of the individual objects being used just as theater does with characters. In installation performance then, the performers and the characters they portray are just as important as the aesthetic and intellectual properties of the arrangement of objects around them. Installation performance negates the potential hierarchy implicit in a theater production.

Another argument for performance installation is that it has the advantage of having very little chance or none at all of becoming stagnant. Visual art, painting, sculpture, because they change very little over time (at least not on action from the artist perhaps as a result of decay or entropy) have the potential to become meaningless as art objects. By meaningless I do not mean, they are worthless, nor am I encouraging collectors to burn their Van Goghs, nor am I diminishing their value as important examples of an artist's particular style, or as historic references both for art historians, critics, artists, and historians, I am simply relating that they have the potential to diminish in immediacy. Art may cease to be immediate, or even understandable since it may pertain to some instance in the past. Performance and site-specific installation are always immediate because they are always

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<sup>17</sup> This common history includes but is not limited to Futurist and Bauhaus ventures into entire performances

transient or directly relating to their surroundings. This is also an argument for why this kind of art should not be documented: over time a vast gap grows ever larger between the immediacy of the actual event and the immediacy of the recorded event.

Most importantly, all three, art practices that inform my own have one key, defining, component that is necessary for them to exist: an audience. In many ways this is a defining component of all art, in fact it is a defining component of any communicative act. However there is one significant difference in the way that the audience operates in performative art and the way it operates in "non-performative" art. In both it is necessary for the receipt of the "message" that is being broadcast by the artist. But the audience serves a special role in performative art work, it is not only a necessary component of the completion of the communicative act, but it also plays a critical role in the definition of the actual message itself. The irony of this lies in the fact that even though the audience is one of the critical elements of the artwork, it is also the element that the artist has the least control over.

### **The Audience as an Uncontrolled Locus of Meaning in Installation Performance**

Through careful choosing of my material I try to steer the audience in a particular direction. But in reality I have very little influence. This is true even in a "finished" work like a painting where the meaning is mostly prefabricated in the actual object and is waiting to be simply lifted out of it or has to be decoded a bit. As an artist, I have little control over a viewer's own experience and past, over the viewer's own subjective experience of reality,

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that compose solely of moving set pieces and no actual living performers.

and consequently I have little control over their interpretation of the work. This issue is intensified in a kind of art like installation performance where the locus of meaning is actually being constructed somewhere in the symbolic space between artist, artwork *and* viewer. Not only is the meaning constructed but in many cases the actual piece is also becoming more complete with the addition of an active viewer. In such a case it seems like the artist should just give up and not try to imbue the work with any meaning. It seems like any kind of communication through this kind of audience-dependent art is futile. In fact some critics deny the possibility of any art being communicative. Ernst Gombrich, in his essay "The Visual Image: its place in communication" notes the lack of cohesiveness between VanGogh's intention for *Bedroom at Arles* and the interpretation of that piece by random "subjects", concluding "Not that this failure of getting the message speaks against the artist or his work. It only speaks against the equation of art with communication."<sup>18</sup> What a blow to art! The whole purpose of art is to communicate! The artist is attempting a dialogue with the audience, if this attempt isn't even an act of communication, what's the point?

To make matters worse and to illustrate this point even further, it is possible to make a work of art that has meaning for the audience without consciously putting any meaning into the work. All one has to do is put together a random assemblage of images and objects and let the audience construct a meaning. The best example for this is the "untitled" performance art piece I performed for Chris Reed's Twentieth Century Art class. In it I projected a sequence of familiar images, superimposed on this I walked through the space dressed in an

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<sup>18</sup>Ernst Gombrich, "The Visual Image: its Place in Communication." In The Essential Gombrich, edited by Richard Woodfield. London: Phaidon, 1996.; Gombrich does not argue that art does not affect its audience, he is simply stating that this phenomenon cannot be called communication.

eccentric costume, additionally displaying text by unrolling a spool of paper. Afterwards, I questioned my audience as to the meaning of the piece and many people had quite viable explanations as what I was trying to communicate. Unfortunately, they were all wrong because in fact I was not trying to communicate anything at all except that the audience fills in meaning into a work art even if there is none. The reason there wasn't any message was because I had collected all of the elements randomly and displayed them randomly also. People are still fooled, by this convincing display when looking at the documentation photos of this performance online.<sup>19</sup> They look at photo after photo, desperately trying to construct some meaning, only to be disappointed when they come to the last page to find that any "meaning" they found was a hoax. It would seem after all that perhaps cohesiveness in audience response really is as impossible as Gombrich stated. It would seem that the best we can expect from art are some random emotions aroused in the audience.

Having said this, it does not necessarily follow that artists should abandon all control, thought and artistic intent. As stated above, the artwork still has to come from somewhere, there is still something that the artist was trying to communicate. In the above example, one might have been alerted to the fact that this was not a cohesive work of art as the emotional response it aroused in the audience was quite varied. If this had been a "real" performance, it would have been a failed act of communication, as there seemed to be little consensus among the audience as to what actually was going on. Even though I collected and presented random items in a seemingly pointless display/performance, I actually had an ulterior agenda

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<sup>19</sup>Reference: [math.lfc.edu/~korkyjj/art](http://math.lfc.edu/~korkyjj/art).

to communicate: my feelings on the ability of an audience to invent<sup>20</sup> meaning in the work that wasn't there to begin with. This ulterior motive seemed to have been communicated well, because many people felt sheepish after discovering that the performance was a conglomeration of random items. (There is hope for art as actual communication after all.)

The solution to the problem of extremely limited control over the audience, lies in achieving a balance between choosing objects and ideas that directly apply to the message the artist is trying to convey, and choosing objects that are only marginally or not at all related to the message. To do this successfully, one must rely on artistic intuition, but also not be too tied down to one's own idea of what one is trying to communicate. As stated in the introduction, the reason I am attempting to communicate through art is because what I am trying to say cannot be communicated in any other way. Sometimes I have to rely on my intuition, instead of trying to define what I am trying to communicate in words, because words do not apply. And if I do use words I may be limiting myself unnecessarily.

I feel that Gombrich is wrong in saying that art and communication do not equate. I agree with him that art is a bastion of communicating on a different level: Soul to soul or heart to heart. And it does not mean that the act of communication failed if Van Gogh's words for what he painted did not match the random "subject's" words for what was painted.

Perhaps they were just using different words for the same thing. But even if while Van Gogh was painting he was trying to convey a message of peacefulness and solitude, and a

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<sup>20</sup>I realize that there is also a perfectly good argument stating that the audience does not invent anything that wasn't already present in my work having been placed there subconsciously. This argument however is pointless in this case because this is not just an argument about slightly different takes on the content, it is an argument about whether there is content at all. Even if there were subconscious content in the work it is still irrelevant because the overall message was not altered by it.

viewer in confronting the piece saw vibrancy and joy, this still does not constitute a failed act of communication (it may however constitute a disappointed artist). We are dealing with subjective reality. How often have we laughed (involuntarily?) when somebody slipped and hurt themselves? Or laughed in a serious moment in a play/movie because the action presented was so cliché for us that it presented itself as farce? But, I feel that it is still important for the artist, in addition to arousing emotion in general, to arouse specific ideas that he was trying to communicate; this is truly successful art.

The only way to discover whether the artwork is successful or not, is dialogue with the audience. Fortunately live art has the advantage of being so integrated with the audience that often the discussion continues in a non-verbal fashion. An actor on stage is aware of whether his dramatic monologue is eliciting weeping or bursts of laughter. But beyond that it is important to verbally interact with the audience. I often question the audience in search of meaning, in search of verbal definition of what it is I was trying to express. If their response is in a similar vein to my own thoughts then I deem the work successful. If their response is in complete conflict with my own, and I mean not just their words but their experience of the reality I presented, then I deem the work successful but not highly communicative. If the audience's response is non-response then the work is unsuccessful. I have failed to elicit any psychological or somatic reaction. But more importantly, because the audience presence is such an integral part of the work, why not just ask them what they thought of it. Did they think it was a successful work of art? The same conclusion comes from a student of art history and philosophy: "We must teach children to trust their own reactions and creativity. Ask them about their responses, support them, show them how to

spend more time with a piece, and *then* tell them the background and formal information.

...Above all, encourage them to [be creative in terms of meaning].”<sup>21</sup> In this way not only is the art a vehicle for communication but an excellent vehicle for discussion.

This still does not completely alleviate the problem of control on the part of the artist. In order to be successful the artist has to cede control not tighten it. First, it is important to work intuitively. Artist’s intuition is a method that has results. Speaking on the nature and origin of her ideas Suzanne Lacy declares: “the idea originates in the shower, on the freeway, floats in the air, (some of her ideas are bizarre)...you shouldn’t censure the visions as they emerge.”<sup>22</sup> You shouldn’t censor yourself because you might be making significant art subconsciously, as Moira Roth explains: “I quote this not to suggest a literal illustration of this old legend by Lacy, who indeed told me she was unaware of the story, but rather to emphasize again the unconscious affinities between Lacy’s imagery and old legends, myths and rituals.”<sup>23</sup>

Second, It is important to work in a circumscribing manner. If I am trying to convey an emotion or an idea I will be much more successful if I present many points of reference for it than if I simply present an ideogram or a word supposedly delineating this object. If I want to present the idea/emotion of love and I show a cartoon heart shape the audience might get it or they might think "heart" literally, or if the heart is blue they might think loneliness, or whatever else. If I show them many objects, hearts, roses, people hugging, kissing, making love then they are more likely to be thinking in the vein of "love" but they might still

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<sup>21</sup> Erin Lucido, “A Museum of One’s Own: An Investigation of Aesthetic Experience” (B.A. Thesis, Lake Forest College, 2002), 97.

<sup>22</sup> Moira Roth, “Suzanne Lacy,” TDR (Winter 1997), 49.

announce "Valentine's day", "marriage", etc. In turn, in the context of discourse they respond "caring," "emotion," "friendship," "human relationship," etc. A circumscribing response that centers around a similar or even identical idea. Then I know we are thinking in a similar vein, and though the word "love" does not surface successful communication has occurred.

In my own art I try widen the ability to circumscribe reality of the objects I chose to communicate with to maximum capacity. I call this idea the Boundlessness of art.

## **BOUNDLESSNESS**

Art works the best and is most immediate when it is as close to being boundless as possible. By this I do not mean that everything is art, and that no effort beyond merely delineating space, is necessary to create it. By boundless I mean that around the edges of what seems to be clearly defined as the artwork we find that it can/does relate in a seemingly endless way to the world. One physical example of this lack of an edge of definition would be Meredith Monk's *Vessel*, an outdoor performance that elicited a reaction of "someone seriously wondering if the plane that flew over was on her [Monk's] payroll."<sup>24</sup> It wasn't, but the audience extended the space of the performance to include a lot of their physical experience. In this way not only do I widen my own discourse of circumscription, but I allow for an (almost?) infinite palette of experiences and objects for the audience's own circumscription when it comes to relating the experience of my artwork.

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<sup>23</sup> Moira Roth, 54.

<sup>24</sup> Deborah Jowitt, ed. Meredith Monk, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 1.

This search for boundlessness is also the reason why I am adamant about including "the magic of theater" in my performance practice. If I create a psychological space where anything is possible. Then the artwork is also boundless in that it is not bounded by reality. It can then delve into the mythic, archetypal, and fantastic aspects of our imagination and our experience of reality.

I also create boundlessness, by employing something that I call Archetypal Meta-Specifics<sup>25</sup>. Because I work in the intersection of Theater and Performance Art, for all objects I employ (including live actors/performers) I have the choice to represent them realistically as what they are, or to represent them as metaphors for something else. It seems like a difficult decision, but making a choice involves limiting the circumscription abilities of such an object. In this way each object can be doubly functional, it can conjure up images and feelings for the audience both as the object itself and as the metaphoric idea it represents. Confusing? Downright chaotic if left unchecked. That is why it is important to make choices, both in objects and in allowing them to function in this dual manner. Some things have to stay defined in a single manner, if only to contrast with other objects that function dually, or to provide dramatic impact when its singular use suddenly bursts into duality, in this way allowing the audience member to think, well if it can do that then what else can it do? and in this way increasing the boundlessness of the work.

This boundlessness is closely tied to Kant's Theory of the Sublime. In fact, in describing the sublime Kant uses the word boundlessness. "The sublime, on the other hand,

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<sup>25</sup>An Archetypal Meta-Specific is an object or a person that functions in a dual/multi fashion both as the object itself and as the symbolic and/or real representation of an archetype for that object, all at the same time and all referencing each other and the multitude of meanings and interpretations for that object in between.

is to be found in a formless object, so far as in it or by occasion of it *boundlessness* [Kant's emphasis] is represented, and yet its totality is also present to thought."<sup>26</sup> For Kant sublime is the awe we feel when confronted with great vistas of nature such as "Bold, overhanging, and as it were threatening rocks; clouds piled up in the sky, moving with lightning flashes and thunder peals; volcanoes in all their violence of destruction; hurricanes with their track of devastation; the boundless ocean in a state of tumult; the lofty waterfall of a mighty river and such like."<sup>27</sup> Such encounters make us feel small, fearful, and in awe. And "provided ...that we are in security...we willingly call these objects sublime, because they raise the energies of the soul above their accustomed height and discover in us a faculty of resistance of a quite different kind [different to the feeling of resistance we feel when we are fearful], which gives us courage to measure ourselves against the apparent almightiness of nature."<sup>28</sup> For me this challenge to nature comes in the need to make art, which I guess would support the argument that art is a sort of intermediary between nature and human.

We live in an age where human-made objects can also be considered sublime. Kant would disagree, but he never saw the Sears Tower, the Hoover Dam, or for that matter the destruction of such human made objects such as the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. A boundless art can encourage the feeling of sublimity on an emotional/intellectual level. This is precisely the feeling we get when we see a great work of art, a great movie or play, in our hearts we understand that somehow it is presenting a truth so great that it applies to all of life, it unveils a psychological vista that at once makes us feel small in comparison with it but

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<sup>26</sup>Immanuel Kant, "Critique of Judgment," in Art and Its Significance, 3rd ed., ed. Stephen David Ross (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 114.

<sup>27</sup>Kant, 120.

also as Kant describes it, it makes us want to go out and live life, because we are invigorated by what we saw. Such an encounter is what I would call beauty in art, though what is being presented may not even be aesthetically pleasing.

In summary, my art practice is performance that is based in theater but is informed by practices such as performance art and installation art. Theater is important because it allows a certain boundlessness of reality through the incorporation of the "suspension of disbelief" property. However, the reality of what happens on stage is limited by this need to uphold the "suspension of disbelief." Certain things cannot actually happen on stage because then in a weird reversal of roles the reality that is constructed in the audience's imagination is shattered. This is unfortunate because some images/events are just more powerful if they actually occur. But just as this is true, there are some events, or even the same events but in a different context, that are much more powerful if they occur through the magic of theater.

Additionally, even though the human body is one of the most powerful ways to present "immediate art," this being especially true when it is performed live, there are some ideas, or visual conglomerates that are just best expressed through the use of non-human material. This is where performance art and especially theater are lacking but installation is key. Installation art has the power to explore balance, color, static movement etc. through the use of objects and their real and symbolic meanings. Installation is also further connected with the sublime through its ability to exist as a meaningful artwork solely by providing a meaningful vista. A collection of objects that are meaningless in themselves can collectively combine to create an aesthetic vista that elicits in us the same feeling of

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<sup>28</sup>Kant, 120.

sublimity as a collective vista in nature. Also though installation is a visual art, it is performative in its need for an audience and its use of it in the construction of meaning. Installation art is also useful in that it is site-specific. Because it relies so heavily on its surroundings, it becomes part of them and in this way increases the boundlessness of the artwork.

Because each of these art forms is lacking in some way in its purest<sup>29</sup> form, I suggest that in order to create the most powerful artwork, one that impacts the audience most strongly, one must combine these three disciplines into a conglomerate that is carefully balanced and is always aware of the benefits and hindrances of each form. The resulting elements that are necessary to create a communicative and audience-affecting work of art are:

Immediacy – the intellectual/physical connection between artist and audience. The smaller the gap the more immediate the work and the higher the chance of good communication and good affectation. Performance art is the element that is most immediate.

Archetypal Meta-Specifics- use of objects and/or people in a manner that allows for layering of multiple meanings upon them. The meaning ranges from the object existing as itself to the object existing as a metaphor for other ideas and objects. This meaning is in constant flux and change. This element is only possible in an intersection of theater and performance art. Theater alone allows only for metaphoric objects to exist, while performance allows only for real objects to exist, only the intersection of these two allows for the constant flux between states of existence.

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<sup>29</sup>I realize pure is a relative definition and is especially malleable when it comes to performance art but I use it

Boundlessness – The ability of a work of art to exist beyond its defined boundaries. Boundlessness is important both as a way to widen the pool of ideas and objects for artist and audience circumscription, but also as a way to make the work approach the scope of nature in its size and in this way causing feelings of sublimity. While all art tries to relate to the world in general, installation performance is unique in this ability in that it is able to use Archetypal Meta-Specifics which allow for an even broader and more immediate relation to the world in general.

### **Part III**

#### **Theory in Practice / Implementation**

Below are a few descriptions of some of the ventures I have undertaken as a student at Lake Forest College.

##### ***Skewed Vision: a true war story***

Although this piece was created through a workshop method, it is in many ways the most theatrical of my endeavors. In retrospect, I see this piece as a theatrical representation of some of the principles of Archetypal Meta-Specifics. With this piece I was not trying to describe Vietnam, recreate it, or in any other way try to bring that particular experience to life. I was, however, trying to recreate and create/perform some of the conditions under which language, communication, and even perceived reality break down. One such condition is war. Tim O'Brien in his book The Things They Carried, which this piece was based on, does a wonderful job of relating this experience to us. But he also hints at the fact

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here in terms of the main characteristics for each of the three forms described above.

that language and specifically storytelling can re/create reality. The piece as a whole created a space where reality through storytelling is created. In many ways this is the definition of theater, but this piece went beyond that, because of the fact that, the performers were not only telling the story through characters but at times actually telling their own "real" stories. The whole space fluctuated between being a theater space and being a performance space.

One such instance where this was especially prominent was in a series of "scenes" where I had individual actors tell a "buffalo" story. In a sense this was nothing more than theatrical characters retelling the story that exists in the book. The actors assumed characters of fictional people that had witnessed this event and they retold it to the audience. However, in order to heighten the immediacy of the piece I had the actors tell the story in their own words. I wanted them to internalize the story, for many of them it had an emotional impact, and therefore they conveyed this story as if it had actually happened to them. This tactic functioned on many interesting levels. Since the story did have an emotional impact for the actors, they retold it as if it was something real, as if it was their own distant memory that they were recalling. In this way the actors functioned both as characters, but also as performers who were performing a real action, they were recalling a story. Because the actors were really remembering this "event," every night each of their monologues was different and unique. This contributes to the second manner in which this series of events operated. In one sense this was nothing more than theater where a fictional story is presented as reality. But because so many of the elements functioned in an Archetypal Meta-Specific flux between theater and reality, so did the space. The space became the locus where actual reality was also being constructed through language. This type of construction of reality was

of course the point of the whole piece.

Another aspect of this piece that functioned as an Archetypal-Meta Specific was the many action sequences that I used to tell/show some of the other stories from the book. In these sequences I had actors portray characters, objects, thoughts, actions, and shifts in time and reality. In these sequences they were constantly shifting between different states of existence, but I never hid the fact that they were actors either. In one such sequence a group of actors started as symbolizing a character's thoughts. Midway they became the grenade that that character throws at another character, physically traversing the space to delineate the path of the grenade. They also physically threw themselves at the other actor, and with their own bodies knocked his down. Whereby this pile of actors came to symbolize the mangled multitude of body parts that remain of a person being hit by a grenade.

If this had been a pure theater production where I had intricately built the audience's suspension of disbelief to the point where they actually thought that my actors were the "thoughts" of another character, they would have been unpleasantly jerked out of this reality the moment the actors knocked down the other actor, because they would have started to wonder about the actors themselves and whether they had hurt themselves or not, and in this way destroyed the illusion that the actors are not real human beings they are thoughts. On the other hand as this event happened as part of a whole flux of symbolic assignments, the moment of impact was synonymous with the actors changing from thought/grenade into characters or real human beings who are hurt when knocked down. As always, this Archetypal - Meta Specific mode widened the area of circumscription, and increased Boundlessness. Because the actors are constantly shifting in what they represent, they are

able to represent many different things for different people or even different things at the same time. For example in the moment when the actors traverse the space as a "grenade." They can represent that, or they might also be a symbolic manifestation of the thoughts of the original character actually killing another human being (as in "thoughts can kill"). There is no set definition for what actually occurred, perhaps even nobody was "killed," since the "grenade" was composed of one character's thoughts, perhaps the whole thing was an imagined episode in their own minds. In spite of this, the audience seemed to "understand" what was happening in front of them.

### *The Sandbox*

This piece would seem like it was furthest removed from my aesthetic of installation performance, but in fact many parts of it are exactly exemplary of it. Not only is The Sandbox a play by Edward Albee, but the piece was performed in a theater. This of course made it a very theater heavy production. But what brought me to the play and something I did not know how to explain at the time is the fact that the characters are written in an Archetypal Meta-Specific mode. That is they all fluctuate between different states of existence. "Grandma" for example is written as a 86 year old woman but often her actions resemble those of a young baby, she coos and cries and throws sand. "The musician" is written as a musician meaning he does not really fit into the reality of the play (if there is a specific one set at all). Nevertheless he exists in it, the characters address him. I played up the fact that the musician somehow exists outside of the framework of the story. I even cast a real musician who has no background in theater, and instructed him to be himself and

respond to the characters as if they were real human beings addressing him. In this way he both reinforced the artificiality of the theater performance and reinforced the reality of the world being presented. I also continued this vein of actual vs. constructed reality constantly vying for attention, in the fact that the musician was actually the source of the music, but not all of the time, because some of it was produced through theatrical convention (i.e. preshow and postshow music). “The Young Man” is the most versatile of the characters, he is the young man, but he is also the angel of death, and the script also makes reference to the fact that he is nothing more than an actor on stage.

The setting was also designed in the spirit of Boundlessness and Archetypal Meta-Specifics. It was minimal in this way reinforcing the artificiality of the theater space but at the same time it provided a framework on which to build the reality of the script. The center piece of the set was a large sandbox filled with white rock salt. The script already contained the fact that the "beach" is represented by a "sandbox", and in this way it reinforced its own artificiality. I furthered this concept by adding real salt to the mix. In this way extending the conceptual latitude of the object. The whole set was black and white, including the black sandbox on a black floor filled with whiteness, in this way "grandma" was playing in a large white void, perhaps suggesting some heavenly space, maybe purgatory, as she hadn't quite died yet. On the other hand the salt also extended the real world latitude of the concept, because as it was real salt the actor herself was constantly in a state of undergoing the process of curing and mummification, and in the same way so was the character.

I also added a third layer, in that I made references to modern day, one that is overrun with technology, still the exact time setting of play was not set and kept fluctuating. The

concept of bringing grandma to a place where she can die also reinforced the fluctuation in time as it both referenced modern day ritual of taking people to a hospital to die (an idea underscored with the familiar sound of a heart monitor through some of the scenes and played by the musician), and referenced some sort of real or imagined ritual in the past (perhaps like the Eskimo's, or the Japanese legend of Obasuteyama<sup>30</sup>) of taking the elderly to a secluded place to die.

Technology was apparent also in the kind of music used (electronic) and the way it was produced. While I did have a real musician on stage, he did nothing more than press the play button on a cd player. On the other hand he was the same person who had orchestrated and created the music being played, except that it wasn't played live. This isn't even philosophically possible since it is electronic music and everything is orchestrated through the manipulation of digital information on a computer.

### ***WWTMD?***

This piece was site-specific. I was aware of the fact that the performance was taking place in a theater. Therefore I used many of the conventions of theater to achieve my artistic goals especially to affect the audience. But in essence this was a performance piece more than a theater piece. I even instructed my actors to perform some of the actions as "the exercise" more than any specific characters that I or they had in mind.

I used theater conventions to establish the stage/audience relationship only to ultimately break it and break it again, in having the performers walk out into the audience

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<sup>30</sup>John W. Traphagan, Taming Oblivion (Albany: State University of New York, 2000), 150.

and have them walk out of the theater without bows. In this way I once again made the work boundless. It continued physically beyond the stage and temporarily beyond the actual duration of the piece because there was no indication that it had actually achieved completion.

Also I was not interested in the creation of a narrative. What I had achieved was a series of images related to the same theme, Frankenstein, but not necessarily directly related. Some of the images were reactions to reactions. My primary goal was to create images that were interesting to look at. Without too much intellectualizing behind the scenes, I had managed to create a piece that caused people to think. But in many ways I was also interested in pure entertainment. I wanted people to have an interesting and stimulating experience.

I had created a series of images and events that I wanted the public to experience. This goal of a visually and intellectually stimulating presentation was more important to me than that of creating a cohesive narrative based piece. My approach to the whole piece is exemplified and most evident in the opening "scene." The piece starts with music. But it is a type of music that does more than set a mood. It puts people in a certain mode, dance music makes people want to dance. It is played long enough in a total darkness that, especially on a Friday night performance and especially it being the last performance of the night, it makes people step out of the reality of being in a theater space and pretend they are in a dance club bumpin' and grindin' to the music. Ordinarily, this kind of approach is detrimental to a production. Preshow/Opening music is supposed to set the mood/tone of the production, but in a subtle way that still allows for the artistry of the production to shine through. For this

specific piece my approach worked beautifully because it jarringly juxtaposed the next image which was an actor on stage in an extremely harsh light that came on suddenly just as the music suddenly cut off in the middle of our enjoyment of listening to it (a very real immediate experience achieved by very theatrical means), speaking about "BioCom" a fictitious? company in a sophisticated language that is hard to understand. But we are still drawn in, because he seems to be speaking about something important, and he is speaking in a convincing and animated manner as if he was actually giving a sales pitch or promoting the company, or being a motivational speaker. It seems realistic enough and convincing, we are drawn into the reality of it, we want to understand what he is saying but it is hard because the language is so complex, but periodically we are jarred by the fact that he occasionally punctuates his speech by sipping on a drink that is almost eerily and not healthily blue. But it could be nothing more than that Blue Cooler drink they serve in the cafeteria. And just as suddenly as this image appeared it disappears with a long period of silence and shuffling on stage. What happens next?

In fact the blue liquid was indeed Blue Cooler from the cafeteria but it took on a symbolic meaning, in this use. Especially since the man was talking about genetic engineering, and ways to extend health and life. On the other hand public speakers often have water on hand so that they can refresh their parched lips perhaps this particular one preferred blue cooler for that purpose. Even the subject matter of the speech functions in this reality/fiction dual existence. The speech is directly lifted from the website of this company, so it is a real life text, but it is being used in a (semi)theatrical context. But it is even more complicated than that, the company itself is semi-fictitious. Bio-Com is an actual scientific

company that actually exists and has real facilities with real people working for it, that concerns its self with genetic engineering and new brand of eugenics.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand it is a piece of art created by the Critical Art Ensemble, with the purpose of critiquing contemporary society by precisely enacting those things that seem outrageous (like genetically backed eugenics), but are nevertheless possible in our contemporary society.

This opening scene alone functions on the many levels I attempt to exemplify in my practice called installation performance. It functions both as a theatrical performance and at the same time as performance art since it is based on the real and in some ways is real. On the other hand it functions purely as an interesting or just plain image because the actual text and purpose of this particular vignette is ambiguous. On yet another hand the image can also function as a symbol or metaphor since it is ambiguous and since it does exist in the context of a theater production, which as stated before often functions as a metaphor beyond the actual objects being presented to be played out.

Another moment that is exemplary of Boundlessness and Immediacy, and to some extent Archetypal Meta-Specifics comes later in the performance. There was a moment where the actors stood in a line at the back of the stage and recited some definitions. They were strangely lit so that their faces were barely visible and their outlines were very sharp. As they started to walk forward they were visible only by their outlines. They were eerily advancing towards the audience in silence. When they reached the front of the stage they disappeared in a darkness that ensued. In an ordinary stage production this would probably suffice. Because, the image was striking enough, the audience would mentally extend the

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<sup>31</sup>reference: <http://www.critical-art.net/biocom/index.html>

walking motion into their own space producing an eerie effect of the actors/characters disappearing and their ethereal invisible bodies continuing and invading the space the audience themselves occupied.

But this is installation performance. I could not stop with an aesthetically interesting visual image. The actors did not stop, they continued, breaking the “fourth wall,” and continued the eerie image making it physical by physically entering the audience’s space, in the process making them quite uncomfortable. This small performance device caused many changes in the performative makeup of this piece. Suddenly, the piece became even more immediate. Suddenly, the stage, the device that defined this piece, was no longer applicable. The audience risers, and the audience themselves became part of the definition, if I broke that convention then where else did the piece extend to? In a sense I defined the piece even beyond that because the actors left without bows, a common marker for closure. This was more of a symbolic way to extend the piece than an actual one, I don’t think any one actually thought there would be performers in the lobby or somewhere outside, [although this has been done before also] but it did serve to increase its boundlessness.

### ***CIV SIM RAVAGE***

This was a hard piece to self-critique and even to describe as I never got to see it as a complete work of art.

This piece was certainly very much informed by installation, and used many of its conventions, but its performance aspects were undeniable, therefore it became another

example of performance installation. In this piece, the theater background played a minor role. I was interested in using the human body as part of an installation. And actually, the fact that I used a real body in a visual art space is what really defined the space as site-specific. The same exact set up in a theater setting would not have worked.

In writing about Gilbert & George's "singing sculpture" Anthony Howell states the following "About such living statuary there is both familiarity and unfamiliarity. What is familiar is that we are clearly observing living humans in precisely everyday poses: what is unfamiliar is their stillness. And it is the tension between these contradictory qualities which produces the uncanny effect."<sup>32</sup> In my piece I further accentuated this tension by portraying a spiritual or fantastical figure with my own corporeal body. This uncanny effect was so powerful that it endowed the room with a certain tension also. My presence in the room made the steak lying in front of me even more real than it would have otherwise been perceived. Putting a piece of raw meat in a gallery is usually a pretty strong statement. But the problem is we are so trained to not look at it as something that came from a live animal that as soon as we recognize it we immediately compartmentalize it as an object inanimate. The fact that the meat is glistening and is still red from the blood that once animated it may once in a while thrust us out of this mode of thinking, but having a real live human being juxtaposed with the meat suddenly made it a piece of muscle that once was also a living being. The rawness of the meat became "uncanny" also fluctuating in its own tension between live-ness and not. This is probably what caused people to call this image "compelling." They were mesmerized by this tension.

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<sup>32</sup>Howell, Anthony. The Analysis of Performance Art. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Harwood Academic

This fluctuation is the principle of Archetypal-Meta Specifics in action. I did not assign a specific meaning or state of existence to any of the objects in the gallery or to myself. Furthermore, because of my choice of presentation and choice of objects, I not only allowed for this flux but I also agitated it, I was a catalyst, it was impossible to stay within one assignment, the meaning and the reality were forced to change constantly. This was one of the most immediate works I have ever experienced, and although the feeling of immediacy I experienced and the feeling my audience experienced were probably of different qualities, they must have felt the immediacy just as strongly.

For many people the white line across the wall was meaningless or even went unnoticed, but for many others this simple device/form was an endless canvas for ideas relating to the piece. It worked as an Archetypal Meta-Specific. Philosophically it worked as a division line, a marker, a horizon line, a separation between higher and lower, heaven and earth. Practically it worked as added visual stimulus, it visually divided the physical playing space into planes, planes of playing space, planes of metaphysical space.

## **CONCLUSION**

In retrospect I find that much of my theory comes from the awareness I developed as an actor playing parts in regular theater. In fact, I find that much of this theory also applies to and explains the very art form from which it came. On a fundamental level acting is a kind of Archetypal Meta-Specific. Theater tries to mask this reality, while I try to exploit it, but it is there none-the-less. While the actor is presenting a character, and while the theater

setting allows us to suspend disbelief and believe in the existence of this character, if the actor is any good there are parts of his performance that are actually real. Of course through the setting of the theater we attribute this fact to the metaphoric abilities of the whole experience. And if the audience were to realize the fact that some parts of the performance are actually “real,” the whole construct of disbelief would fail, because it only works when we are in a space where everything is artificially created.

In the same way, on a macro level, theater practice as a whole also works as an Archetypal Meta-Specific. This reality however also has to be denied, in order for the suspension of disbelief to work. At this point, to further facilitate the discussion of this complicated matter, it is helpful to bring in the sign system described by Paul Grice in his book Studies in the way of words. In the chapter titled "Meaning Revisited", he sets up the following method of describing an act of communication.  $Psy_1$  is some psychological state in the creature attempting the communicative act.  $U_1$  is some utterance made by the first creature that in turn causes  $Psy_2$  another psychological state to occur in a second creature. If  $Psy_1$  and  $Psy_2$  are of similar sorts then a successful act of communication has occurred.<sup>33</sup>

Theater has the added complication that the  $U$  the utterance, is its own constructed reality. By that I mean that if we apply Grice's terms to theater, then  $Psy_1$  is the collective thought of the production team including the director, designers and actors and playwright.  $Psy_2$  is the resulting thought in the collective audience's mind. And  $U_1$  is the production itself. And very often especially in "realistic" theater,  $U_1$  is constructed of its own  $Psy_x, U_y,$   $Psy_z$  relations ( $x, y,$  and  $z$  are used as variables to represent multitudes of acts of

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<sup>33</sup> Paul Grice, "Meaning Revisited." Studies in the Ways of Words (Boston: Harvard Press, 1989), 287.

communication). That is  $U_1$  is composed of actors that portray characters who communicate with each other. Because the goal of theater is the suspension of disbelief,  $U_1$  is presented with the underlying notion that  $Psy_x$ ,  $U_y$ , and  $Psy_z$  are “real” acts of communication. This is a precarious balance, because in reality an actual existence of  $Psy_x$ ,  $U_y$ , and  $Psy_z$  (actual instances of communication between people) would exclude the existence of the overlying  $Psy_1$ ,  $U_1$ ,  $Psy_2$  relation (communication between the creative team and the audience via the “actual instances of communication between people”). In order for this apparent oxymoron to work there exists a balance between real actions (masked) and character actions (flaunted). This balance is the same flux that occurs in Archetypal Meta-Specifics.

Obviously, Archetypal Meta-Specifics is a method that is already in practice, but its potential, to increase Boundlessness and immediacy is severely limited or curbed towards non-existence, unless it is used in the space of installation performance. In my own work, I have always tried to use Archetypal Meta-Specifics to their fullest potential.

Through the use of it in my own work and its success (judged on audience response and my own discussion with them) I have proven that this method is not only viable but also useful. In fact this method is directly useful for me because it not only allows for an aesthetic art, but it also creates an intelligent art that causes people to think. In describing “liminal” art (liminal art being a category that according to her definition would encompass my own) and specifically performance, Susan Broadhurst states “[These] performances can nevertheless potentiate resistance strategies: for instance, their perceived complicity [i.e. they are not outright political], masks a critical deconstruction and their promotion of a diverse range of ‘perceptive strategies’ can lead to a challenging of traditional institutions of

authority.”<sup>34</sup> I would extend this argument further and say that my artwork not only challenges traditional institutions of authority but also challenges conventional institutions of perception in general and institutions of perception of our reality specifically. (Though I am apolitical, this can create an extremely political kind of art.<sup>35</sup>) But beyond that even, this art is aimed to “slow you down enough so that you really become more aware of reality. ...And it gives you a little bit of space to--let go of the habitual ways of--of dealing with seeing and hearing and experiencing things.”<sup>36</sup> It allows us to step back, become aware of, experience, and hopefully to understand the multitude of realities that surround us. By stepping back we, our selves, are able to be less defined and inhibited by the “only” reality that we think exists, and in this way each of us can approach the wonderful feeling and existence of Boundlessness.

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<sup>31</sup>Susan Broadhurst, Liminal Acts: A Critical Overview of Contemporary Performance and Theory, (London: Cassell, 1999) 4.

<sup>35</sup> By “apolitical” I mean that I am not actively aligning myself with any political system or actively working against any such system. On the other hand, I make art with the understanding that all art can be interpreted as a political act, and in fact my own mission in art making to change the way we view and experience the world around us I understand can be an extremely political stance. Nevertheless this is not my intent, it is not my directive to make political art, even as I have an understanding of its political implications.

<sup>36</sup>Meredith Monk. "Interview with Meredith Monk" <<http://www.meredithmonk.org>> (19 November 2001).

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# NOTES

Remnant

10(4x20)

things to talk about  
performance art and ethics  
communication theory  
the importance of visual in relation to archetypal undefined meta-specifics.  
written language is symbollic also and suffers from similar miscommunication as art

[must be put back in taken out because of lack of time]

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[This is especially true for things that can only be viewed if they happen outside of our own immediate reality.]p13

[“Provided that we are in security” this is one of the advantages of theater and the suspension of disbelief.]p14

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[ SO HOW DOES ALL OF THIS THEORY WORK IN REALITY?]

[how to make art like Jan]

[the archetypal meta-specifics and the manifesto of meaninglessness]

[I consider myself an artist. In general I make art for myself. I make art out of a need to express myself. Every once in a while I get this urge that I have to make art. I feel unwell if I do not fulfill this urge. However, as Alfredo Jaar said if you make art for yourself and just keep it in a closet so no one else can see it than you are not an artist<sup>37</sup>. It is impossible to express one's self only to one's self. Expressing one's self is a form of discourse. The artist does some "arting," in what ever medium he or she expresses him or herself, and then presents it to the world, "here it is, I made this," the world then responds "what is this crap? / oh what genius!/ What the??" and thus the discussion is made. For me as an artist it is of primary importance to facilitate discussion. I feel that it is the artists duty/ calling to use the power to question/highlight reality vested in them in a way that affects the audience most.

In response to the question "What is your role as an artist in society?" Meredith Monk explains: ]

[[I would argue that realistic theater also presents realer than real reality, if not purely by the fact that even though we may empathize with the charactes on stage, we are still allowed to view this experience from an outside point of view. But in general I firmly believe in the ability to express reality better through non-realistic theater.]

[ The suspension of disbelief there is beauty in the unreal in the boundaries between reality and unreality. Fantasy and real life. There is no room for fantasy in performance art because

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<sup>37</sup>Jaar, Alfredo. Lecture/ Workshop. Lake Forest College. date.

it is real people in real time. There is no room for magic because there is no room for the suspension of disbelief]

[I also believe in the importance of site specificity. This is especially true of installation art but it is also important to be ware of this in my theatrical installation performance pieces. If the piece is defined and informed by its direct surroundings than it once again becomes boundless and beautiful. At the same time as it is boundless in this philosophical sense it defined in a physical sense. Upon this strict definition of the space can be played out the various breaks. in audience expectation.]

[The Importance of symbols is paramount in my art work. Except that I view everything as symbolic and I treat and display it in that way.

The role of the sublime. It is important to just simply have beautiful images that are uninformed by any intellectual activity.]

This [ability of art to make people think] is also the basis on which artworks merit should be judged. of course everything is relatively relative, but there is still some way to quantify and artworks ability to promote thought. in this way it is absolutely irrelevant weather the art work was made by the artist himself or by a factory weather the artwork is original or not. It is important here to delineate the fact that making an artwork that is purely an aesthetic experience also fulfills this definition of avant garde/ successful art work.

[in order for the character parts to work I work in the medium of transcendence where the actor and their character continually come to the surface - in this way my work is informed by grotowski poor theater where emphasis is placed on the actor- the actor has to do tremendous work in order to create the reality that supports his character because very often the installation part around him works very hard to deny any fabricated reality because it is based so firmly in our actual reality.]

This is why I argue that performance should not be documented, firstly it losses its power immediately as we loose the immediacy of an actual its actual performance, secondly the moment it is recorded in some fashion, it becomes a historic account of an artists [or group of them] response to that moment which is quickly becoming dated and farther removed from us each second.

[MUST DEFINE IMMEDIACY SEE ¶1]

Once I have defined the pros and cons of each of the art forms that inform my work (Theater, Performance Art, Installation Art), and I have managed to distill all of the pros, it would seem relatively easy to make successful though critically complicated artwork. However, I feel there is a major component of the artwork that is left unaccounted for and it is one that is

very hard to control.

All three art practices that inform my own have one key defining component that is necessary for them to exist: an audience. In many ways, as I have defined art in the introduction, all art demands an audience in order to be called art. However there is one significant difference in the way that the audience operates in performative art and the way it operates in "non-performative" art. In both it is necessary for the receipt of the "message" that is being broadcast by the artist. In fact, an audience is a necessary component of any communicative act. However, the audience serves a special role in performative art work, it is not only a necessary component of the completion of the communicative act in terms of receiving the message being sent, but it also plays a critical role in the definition of the actual message itself.

At this point, to further facilitate the discussion of this complicated matter, it is helpful to bring in the sign system described by Paul Grice in his book Studies in the way of words. In the chapter titled "Meaning Revisited", he sets up the following method of describing an act of communication. Psy1 is some psychological state in the creature attempting the communicative act. U1 is some utterance made by the first creature that in turn causes Psy2 another psychological state to occur in a second creature. If Psy 1 and Psy 2 are of similar sorts than a successful act of communication has occurred.<sup>38</sup> In layman's terms and one's that are extremely simplistic this roughly translates in the following manner: Creature one is thinking of "cheese" the dairy product. Creature one says the word "cheese" to creature two. If creature two at that moment as a reaction to creature one's utterance thinks of "cheese" the dairy product then the communicative act is successful. Of course there are many things that could have gone wrong in the process. The simplest thing for example could be that creature one was thinking of yellow Swiss cheese and creature two upon hearing the word "cheese" thought of white farmers cheese. In this case an act of communication still occurred but not one that was completely successful.

Theater has the added complication that the U the utterance, is its own constructed reality. By that I mean that if we apply Grice's terms to theater, then Psy1 is the collective thought of the production team including the director, designers and actors and playwright. Psy 2 is the resulting thought in the collective audience's mind. A U1 is the production itself. And very often especially in "straight" theater, U1 is constructed of its own Psyx,Uy,Psyzy relations. That is, the actors portray characters that communicate with each other. Because the goal of theater is the suspension of disbelief, U1 is presented with the underlying notion that Psyx, Uy, and Psyzy are real acts of communication. This is a precarious balance, because in reality an actual existence of Psyx, Uy, and Psyzy would exclude the possibility of Psy1, U1, Psy2 existing.

The difference between avant-garde (useful) art and kitsch is the degree to which// where on the continuum of entertainment- discussion/thinking promoter the art work lies.

Anything is suitable for artwork but not all the time. There is a time and place for everything

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<sup>38</sup> Paul Grice, "Meaning Revisited." Studies in the Ways of Words (Boston: Harvard Press, 1989), 287.

even a place and time for breaking that time and place. But that still does not mean that anything is allowed at any given time. And it does not mean that any given thing cannot be repeated, because it can, and it will acquire different meanings, though it is the same thing through different contexts around it. Sept 11th art right after sept 11th is stupid. It is fine for kindergartens, grade schools and may high schools and colleges but no serious artist should attempt it, as any such feeble endeavor instantly becomes a parody because of its seriousness. The only place I see serious sept 11th art is as Parody, or as commentary on sept 11th art. This said I of course turned right around and created a piece of sept 11th art. The fact that it related to those events was incendiary and in retrospect I think it was a mistake.

Top down thinking versus bottom up thinking. In visual art you start with the ideas and slowly bring them down to immediate human experience. In performance you start with the kinesthetic experience of watching another human being and slowly bring it up to the level of intellectual abstraction.

My artwork is informed by magic practice. David Copperfield.

My artwork is informed by my cultural background where vagueness and roundabout ways of talking are upheld.

[Because Performance Art is live art performed for a live audience, and it differs in presentation from theater in that it does not put up an artifice, it does not construct an alternate reality but instead it presents it, it often deals with issues of everyday life. The notions of fantasy, and imagined reality are often absent. And if they do find their way in it is through symbolic associations on the part of the audience rather than representational mimicry on the part of the performer.

Use of symbols can also alleviate the ethical issues of performance. This direct experience is a facet of Performance Art that I incorporate into my work. Also in general I find it a limiting way to describe reality and our experience in it.  
]

One such topic that is often debated as to whether it is suitable for art is technology. For many artists and critics technology is the ultimate antithesis to an "Immediacy" response from an audience member. Ultimately art is about communication from one human being to another, and technology is about the antihuman - the opposite of human- so for many it is an oxymoronic useless task to try to use technology to try to advance any such communication between humans. Such logic is completely at fault. While it may be true that in some philosophical matters, or even practically technology impedes our human to human experience, but in reality in the twenty-first century technology has become a staple of human communication. Technology is part of our everyday lives. While it may be true that it has altered our age old traditions of communicating, humans are adaptable animals and we are doing quite well communicating via this new mode. I feel it would be absolutely archaic

and unbeneficial towards achieving this immediacy in art not to address and use technology in art. We cannot deny the existence of technology in our lives. It has changed/altered some fundamental conditions of the "human condition" that art is so often concerned with. How could we not use it in art?

Cons:

This hierarchical relationship between the parts is the exact reason why I am entirely disinterested in doing straight theater any more.

["Although the term "installation art" has become widely used it is still relatively nonspecific." Reiss xiii]

Even though the relationship with and presence of an audience, is the common thread tying Theater, Performance Art, Installation art and consequently Installation Performance, and is probably the most important aspect of all of these art practices it is the least controllable aspect of each

Archetypal Meta-Specifics are only possible in an environment such as Installation Performance. Any one of the art forms I use as a basis often limits the abilities of Boundlessness or Immediacy and sometimes completely precludes them.

[By combining the Boundless with

This sublime connection with nature is also why I believe in the power of pure images in art. Nature does not intellectualize, it does not analyze our psyche it simply is. I believe that a similar effect can be achieved through art. But it can be even more diverse because a given formulated vista can be purely aesthetic, or it can be aesthetic with intellectual thought backing it.]

As Laurie Anderson said "People say, 'C'mon, just say what you mean,' which to me seems like such a bizarre thing to say. I've always felt that if I could say it, I would just write it down on a piece of paper and stand on the street corner and hand it out. I wouldn't make songs or pictures I wouldn't bother." Writing about art, writing about my own art as an artist as the artist is an extremely hard thing. If everything I was trying to address in my pieces was able to be put into words then I would have definitely become a writer, but, instead I am a performance installations. And I know for a fact that writing about my work does not compare in the least with actually confronting it. Even watching video reproductions and still photographs does very little to bring back the actual experience of the art. Ultimately art is about communication from one human being to another, but nothing can reproduce this act as faithfully as the original if the chosen medium is a human being.

[First of all, although the aesthetic of installation performance I described above is perfectly viable it is still a theoretical model for my actual ventures in that artistic direction. Often

times the practicality of a particular project takes precedence over the philosophy from which it came. In theory Installation Performance should be a balance among the elements it came from, but often in practice one element becomes prominent, or one may drop back while two remain on top. Or even some completely new art practice becomes the focus played out on the netting of the other three practices. This is not a problem. First of all the definition I put forth is a description of an ideal. Second, this particular definition is a reflection of how I feel at this particular moment. Thirdly, this is experimental theater, and each new venture is a new experiment where I try out new things and new ways to perfect achieving the ideal. If through some new experience I make some new revelation as to the nature of theater and art, then my definition of what I'm striving for will surely change.]

Although this piece was created through a workshop method it is in many ways the most theatrical of my endeavors. Even so there are parts of it that function in the Performance Installation aesthetic, and especially in the Archetypal Meta Specific direction in relation to the actors themselves.

Although theatrical, what was often misunderstood and criticized, was the fact that I was not trying to recreate a story. With this piece I was not trying to describe Vietnam, recreate - it, or in any other way try to bring that particular experience to life.