

From Performance by Artists  
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*Steps Into Performance (And Out)*

## 2. AS PERSON

What's developed, thus far, is a contradiction: the 'I' that has been attending to 'it' (as long as that 'I' is seen from a distance as a moving integer, moving object) has become no more than an 'it' itself. If I am using myself, then, I have to come back to myself (rather than retreat into 'it,' into 'things'); that self has to be lived up to (self as 'person' — person as 'motivational/interpretative agent').

In the back of my mind is starting to form a notion of a general condition of art-making: behind every (at least, western) art-work there's an artist — art-work, then, as the sign of an artist (or, conversely, art-work as a cover for the artist — but, in either case, the self is there, in the background, potentially presentable). A logical consequence, then: push the self up to the foreground (art as presentation of self/presentation of artist).

Forming a(n) (art)self. Applying a language: rather than attend to 'it,' 'I' attend to 'me.'

The form is frontal ('Here I am'); the movement is circular; the method is closure. 'It,' at least for the time being, fades away: the action is isolated from its surroundings — 'I' have only 'me,' 'I' need only 'me.' I am the agent of an action and, at the same time, the receiver of the action; 'I' initiate an action that ends up in 'me.'

(In the background, a notion of a general condition of art-experiencing: viewer, entering gallery/museum, orients himself/herself to an art-work as if toward a target, viewer aims in on art-work. This condition of target-making, then, can be a pre-condition: it can be used, beforehand, as a condition for art-doing — art-doing becomes isomorphic with art-experiencing. I can focus in on myself, turn in on myself, turn on myself, treat myself as a target; my activity of target-making, in turn, is treated as a target by viewers.)

The appropriate medium is film/photo (whether or not actual film/photo is utilized): I'm standing in front of a camera — the camera is aiming at me, the camera is (literally) shooting me — all the while, I can be doing what the camera is doing, I can be aiming in on myself. Over all, the film frame being formed separates my activity from the outside world, places me in an isolation chamber (a meditation chamber where I can be—have to be—alone with myself). The implication might be: soon I'll come out, this is only a training ground, it doesn't stop here. But, in the meantime, as far as the viewer can see, I'm caught in a trap.

This can be defined as 'performance' in the sense of 'something accomplished' (the accomplishing of a self, an image, an object).

On the one hand, the system is 'open': if I turn on myself (applying stress to myself), I make myself vulnerable, make myself available to (grabable by) a viewer.

On the other hand, the system is 'closed': if I both start and end the (same) action, I'm circling myself up in myself, I've turned myself into a self-enclosed object: the viewer is left outside, the viewer is put in the position of a voyeur.

(It's as if I got side-tracked: I started out by thinking of 'you' — but, then, working on myself in order to have myself presented to you, I became wrapped up in myself. So my concentration, my efforts, remained on 'art-doing,' not 'art-experiencing.' But, no matter how self-enclosed I became, I must have had a viewer in mind all the time: by closing myself up in myself, I've fixed an image of myself, and that image has to have someone in mind, someone it can be presented to: it's as if, under the guise of concentration, training, meditation, all I was doing was setting up a pose.)

'I,' then, attending to 'me,' fixes a 'me' (while leaving the 'I' ineffectual to change it). 'Person' is hardened, objectified; the viewer, in turn, can come only so far, the viewer is hardened in front of that 'person.' (I might have looked at you straight in the eye, but I've turned you-to stone ...)

### 3. ON STAGE

If 'person' (the saying of the word) results in the opposite of person, then 'person' might have to be doubled: to get to 'person,' go 'inter-person' (the introduction of another agent.)

The appropriate medium here is video: video as rehearsal (contrasted to film as a finished image) — video as an image about to be — video as dots, separate dots about to come together to be seen (almost as a last resort) as an image. The notion of video, then, as a backdrop, functions as an impulse to the connection/combination of elements/agents.

(Setting the stage: the 'other element' might be an object: an object is in front of the viewer — I am in front of the object, between object and viewer — I attend to, concentrate on, that object — if that concentration is carried to an extreme, I blend with that object, disappear into it — the object and I have formed a wall in front of the viewer ... Or, to look at it another way: the object, concentrated on so doggedly by a person, becomes personalized, personified ...)

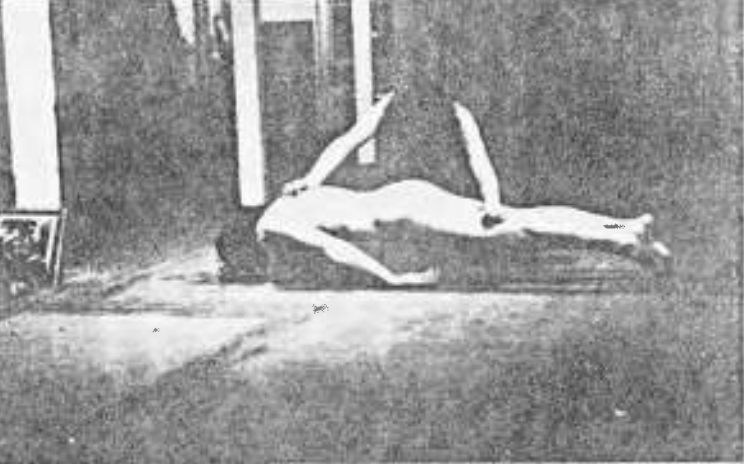
Two people, then, take their positions opposite each other, encountering each other. Apply a language: 'I' attend to 'him'/'her' while 'he'/'she' attends to 'me.'

The guise is: the breaking of the circle of 'I'/'me.' But the circle has only bulged, the circle is maintained as it is enlarged, now, to include — along with 'I'/'me' — 'he'/'she' and 'him'/'her.' Concentrating on each other, we bound ourselves together in a circle: to keep our concentration, we need no one else, we have no use for anyone else. Concentrating on each other, we form a 'magic circle,' a 'charmed circle' no audience can enter.

This is 'performance' almost in the sense of a traditional 'play.' 'He'/'she' and 'I' make up the boundaries of a stage in front of the audience; the audience is witness to the physical movements of a plot: A leads B on, B becomes stronger than A, A and B combine into a union ... Enclosed in each other, we build a house for ourselves — the audience looks in through the 'fourth wall.'

The more each of us gets into the other's person, the less of a person each of us is to the audience: we are not 'persons' but 'representatives' (of a mystery, of an interaction ritual, of a psychology ...)

Right before their eyes, then, we've made our exit. The physical movements of the plot are only blandishments to the audience; we have our own (mental) plot (we have our conspiracy): ideally, we've started a relationship — or confirmed a relationship, or reversed a relationship — that by this time is taking place elsewhere. So, by now, we're out of 'art': the audience is left with nothing, the audience is left with only an empty stage.



#### 4. TO THE VIEWER

To get back to 'art,' I have to make contact with those people who share in an art context: my space and viewers' space should come together, coincide. A piece, then, takes place in a gallery/museum, in an habitual art situation: the gallery/museum, then, is treated as a meeting place, a place to start a relationship.

(In the background: revise the notion of art as 'presentation of a self/an artist': art, then, as a gift from artist to viewer: art, further, as exchange between artist and viewer ...)

Applying a language: 'I' attend to 'you' (while 'you' attend to 'me' — but, once I've occupied the subject-place of 'attending,' 'you' have almost no time to do the traditional work of art-attending, 'you' attend to 'me' only as a by-product, only as reciprocity.)

The choice of place is, specifically, not 'theater-space' (a place that an audience comes *to*, sits *in*) but 'gallery-space' (a place that an audience passes *through*).

The terms set up are: 'I'/'space'/'you' ('you'/'space'/'me').

The basic structure: I set up a point (I set myself up as a point) at one end of a space — the space, whatever its shape, narrows into a channel between 'you' and 'me' — viewers 'flow' toward that point while, at the same time, that point *points to* ('I' as a system of feelers toward) viewers.

But, as long as 'you' can focus on 'me,' the space around fades away: a direct line cuts through that space, almost in spite of the space — the space is peripheral, the space is only a background, a performance set (we might as well be anywhere/it's as if we're nowhere). I've retained, then, a 'stage' for myself: this is a stage you can enter — but, since it keeps its aura of a stage, you remain off-stage (and only mentally on, as if at a movie, as if in front of a book), no matter how close you come.

The basic structure, then, should be *of* the space and not *within* the space: not performance *in* a space but performance *through* a space. If, for example, I'm not so clearly visible, then you the viewer can be 'in a space' rather than 'in front of me' — you are in a space where I happen to be in action. (In the space, we're making a place for ourselves, together; you are performing for me as much as I'm performing for you.)

This is 'performance' in the sense of 'carrying something through' (carrying through a space — performing a space — carrying myself through you throughout a space).

## 5. OUT OF MY PAST

Once I am under cover, things move too quickly, there's nothing to stop me: since I'm not seen anyway, there doesn't have to be a performance; since there's no actual performance, this is only a place for potential performance; since there's no 'fact' here, I can withdraw into the past, disappear in the future; since my mode of being is so fluid, I can move through the viewer, past the viewer ...

To stop myself, I have to come back into the space. In order to come back to the space, I have to face 'you.' In order to keep facing you, I need something to anchor me in the place where you are. But I have that anchor within me: now that I've gone into the past (or into the future, or into metaphor), 'I' can never be the same again: 'I' has a history, an autobiography: the past, that I could have withdrawn into, is brought back here, imported: the past functions as a weight that keeps me in place here. In order to face you, I have to face up to myself.

(In the background: a notion of art as privacy that results in publicness — a private life makes a deposit in a public space, where private times come together in a public function.)

Gallery/museum, then, is used as a buffer-zone: I bring something private into a public space — once that privacy is made public, I can't deny it — once it's brought back, later, to privacy, there's no reason not to face it.

Applying a language: 'I' attend to 'you' through 'me' / 'I' attend to 'me' through 'you.'

It's this phase of the work that might, finally, be claimed as 'performance': roleplaying — I act out my life in front of others, I change my life to be handed over to others.

Gallery returns to theater. Image-structure: spotlight — performance arena — seating arrangement. (granted that a gallery is for observing: as gallery-goers, then, are observing me, from the outside, I can, all the while, be observing myself, 'from the inside.')

The gallery is turned into itself: the gallery is turned into, literally, a museum. This is where I place my past in the spotlight, let it harden. Now that I've faced myself, I can leave my (old) image here, as a museum-piece. This gives you a quick introduction to 'me'; I've left my autobiography as a calling card.



## 6. ADDENDA: AFTER PERFORMANCE IS OVER

1. As long as I'm there, in person, a piece is restricted by (to) my 'personality': I can deal only with my person (physical), my past (psychological), my relation with you the viewer.
2. As long as I'm there, in person, I can go within and deal with (isolation-chamber) self — but I can't step out of myself far enough to deal with (external causes of) self.
3. For an extra-personal world to come in, I have to go out. (I have to leave room for that world to turn in, and not merely to add an atmosphere, a background, to my 'person'.)
4. As long as I'm there, in person, 'you' and 'I' remain on opposite sides, no matter how close we come; we remain 'artist' and 'viewer.'
5. As long as I'm there, in person, no matter how hidden I might be, I'm in the spotlight, I'm the 'star-attraction' you came for.
6. In order for you to have room of your own, in order for you to be free to move around the space, I have to move aside, I have to move out of your way.
7. Behind the scenes, then, there's a structure of performance: I move from place to place (exhibition space to exhibition space) — I act (build) according to the space — I move on to another place.
8. Behind the scenes, there's costuming, role-playing: a piece is directed toward a particular cultural space — a piece in New York is different from a piece in LA is different from a piece in Milan is different from a piece in Cologne.
9. On the scene, I've left my voice, as if calling a meeting to order. (My voice is left as an oppression that, eventually, people will have to react against, leaving the space, ending the meeting and starting an action.)
10. Scenes from people's performance: Wall (presence/body-to-body) — Ladder (direction/escape) — Machine (action/explosion).

