Politics and Performance: Categories of Second-Wave Feminist Performance Art

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Abstract

Through a consideration of feminist performance art from the twentieth century, this paper seeks to explore three categories of performance – the temporary live, the private documented and the trace of a performance. These categories are sustained by essential differences which are present in performance, and they ultimately assist in promoting certain thematic intentions. In works which navigate themes of gender, identity, the female body, commodification and femininity, these three categories provide readers with the ability to understand the diversity of feminist performance art, its various methods and techniques and recognize priorities that artists seek to portray. Beginning with an overview of second-wave feminism and performance art the remainder of this discussion will reveal the specific characteristics which make up each category of performance by introducing examples and concepts which pertain to either the temporary live performance, the private documented performance, and the trace of a performance. Additionally, this paper will consider notions of gender performativity, the use of the explicit body in performance and feminists artists interest in performance art to help contextualize the discussion.

Keywords: Performance Art, Feminist Art, Second-Wave Feminism, Gender Performativity, Postmodernism, Marina Abramović, Carolee Schneemann

Prior to the emergence of feminist art in the 1960s, modern art was separated theoretically from politics by most male art theorists of the time, and was intended to strictly "transcend or to provide an alternative to the crude exigencies of social struggle and political strife".[1] Similarly, many modern artists aimed to refute the possibility of a political agenda and believed that "painting or sculpture that had any kind of real significance in terms of political content" was ultimately embarrassing because politics and art were incompatible.[2] Meanwhile, others recognized that art could have political implications but ultimately maintained that it could do very little to change things. However, at the height of modernism and the social and political unrest of the 1960s, the separation of art and politics came to an abrupt end, causing the art world to reevaluate its priorities. [3] Unsurprisingly, many artists resisted this social and political transition to what is now called

[1] Jane Wark, *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill – Queen's University Press, 2006), 5.

[2] Wark, *Radical Gestures,* 14.

[3] Kim Levin, "Farwell to Modernism," *Art Magazine*, October 1979, 91.

postmodernism, carving out the 1960s and the 1970s as the hybrid decades, an era vacillating between modern and postmodern. It consisted of a generation of artists who tried to revive the fading values of modernist art theory while working alongside the new and prominent ideologies of postmodernism which ultimately aligned with the overall priorities of both the public and artists.[4] With postmodernism emerged feminist art, a movement defined by its political consciousness. It was during this period of feminism in the '60s and '70s – also known as second-wave feminism – that the slogan "the personal is political" emerged which reiterated that "no aspect of life, art included, was exempt from politics." [5] Jane Wark, author of *Radical Gestures: Feminist Performance Art in North America*, explains:

> This meant that, unlike their male peers, feminist artists were able to see art not as compromised by, or in conflict with their political goals, but indeed as the object of them. As they sought to negotiate a new relationship between art, life and politics, feminist artists recognized how existing aesthetic practices was itself a form of gender oppression.[6]

Feminist artists aimed to develop new modes of artistic expression that not only contested strategies cultivated by their male predecessors, but also opened their artistic practices to include marginalized and devalued modes of creation. This included decorative, textile and craft-associated art, body art and performance. Although feminist art included a vast array of socially-charged artistic practices, performance art was intrinsically linked with politicization of feminist art; the powerful political qualities of feminist performance was due to the explicit presence of the autonomous female form – the sometimes nude autonomous female form – in a realm and institution that has historically maintained their explicit absence.[7] When exploring performance art in relation to its political nature, three categories emerge: the temporary live performance, the private documented performance and the trace of a performance. These categories reference one another but approach political priorities in significantly different ways that are noticeable due to the narratives and techniques portrayed in the performance.

Feminist art was a new and radical movement which worked to prioritize female artists and their unique gendered experiences. For the first time in art history, imagery of women was beginning to be accurately represented by women and no longer were feminist artists accepting the overt gendered discrepancies which permeated the western canon of art. The fallacy that art was "above gender," and that gender was irrelevant in the practice and viewing of art was refuted by feminist artists who clearly acknowledged major gender differentiation within their work.[8] In the '60s and '70s, the dialogue of a feminist often had two things in common, and the most distinct commonality was understanding the concept of gender, triggered as a term for differentiation.[9] Feminists also sought to reconstruct and

[4] Levin, "Farwell to Modernism," 91.

[5] Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 5.

[6] Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 5.

[7] Jeanie Forte, "Women's Performance Art: Feminism and Post-Modernism," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 2 (May 1988): 217.

[8] Marilyn French, "Is There A Feminist Aesthetic?" *Hypatia*, no. 2 (1990): 33.

[9] Karen- Edis Barzman, "Beyond the Canon: Feminists, Postmodernism, and the History of Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Criticism* 52, no. 3 (1994): 327.

redistribute the handling of power in society by placing themselves within a resistance against hierarchal power structures which sustained misogyny and masculinity. However, as time progressed and second-wave feminism evolved into third-wave and then third-wave transitioned into fourth-wave, feminist artists no longer maintained gender as the unifying element which they sought to critique. The emergence of twenty-first century feminism recognized a new set of values and aesthetics which were built off the foundation cultivated by feminists in the '60s and '70s but with one very important difference – the concept of intersectionality. Intersectional feminism prioritizes diversity and is a movement bound by the pursuit of equality for all. Thus, while the dialogue of feminist in a contemporary discussion is concerned with reconstructing and redistributing the handling of "power" in society, these power structures are not solely centered around gender inequality anymore. Rather, the dialogue of feminist is just as diverse as the subjects who make up the intersectional feminist community such as, but not limited to: queer, trans and gender non-conforming people, people who identify as MAD, people who have a disability, people of colour and people from various social, cultural and economic backgrounds. However, that is not to say some things haven't remained intact. "Given that the women's movement, in all its historical phases, was a struggle of opposition to tradition and convention," and that participation of social and political activism by feminist artists was significant in numbers, it is no surprise that the politicization of feminism has remained a constant throughout each proceeding wave of feminism.[10] Specifically within a discussion of performance art, feminist performances have similarly evolved to match the values, priorities and aesthetics of twenty-first century intersectional feminism.

Since the 1960s, feminist performance art has utilized many different strategies to advance its political objectives and has had a significant influence on "shifting art practices away from its exclusive preoccupation with aesthetic concerns and toward critical engagement with the social and political contingencies of our own times."[11] This paper will examine, in-depth, a selection of second-wave feminist performance art created between 1960 and 1979. The works examined in this paper are only a mere fraction of examples that could and deserve to be explored in greater detail. While this case study will prioritize feminist performance art at its roots, it is my ongoing pursuit to acknowledge not just the concepts, values and aesthetics which make up feminist performance art since the 1960s, but also consider where it exists in relation to a more contemporary conceptions of the artistic movement. Indeed, feminist art is a movement that has certainly moved and evolved significantly over the last sixty years, and because of the increased diversity of feminists, their ideologies, goals, values and aesthetics, contemporary performance art is now reflective of intersectional devices which prioritize the visibility of the diverse autonomous female form, a theme which was absent from second-wave feminism. Thus, while maintaining the theoretical advantages of second-wave feminism, many twenty-first century feminist performance artists maintain intersectionality as a principal priority within their practice and within the feminist community. As such, in recognizing transgenerational differences, it will ultimately be important in future research to also investigate how performance art has

[10] Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 23.

[11] Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 204.

changed in fourth-wave feminism and analyze whether or not the three distinctions of feminist performance art – the temporary live performance, the private documented performance, and the traces of the performance– continue to exist.

Feminist performance art of the '60s and '70s often referenced or critiqued theoretical commonalities which spanned gender, sexuality, identity and the sexualization, objectification and commodification of the female form. The reason these themes tended to manifest in the work of body and performance art was because it made women's bodies – a body that was not just female but was also an artist – visible.[12] In effect, a theme which prevailed in second-wave feminism, despite critiques of it being an essentialist approach to the movement, was the goal of recapturing and redefining women's relationships to their bodies. These varying themes were approached by artists in a manner which aimed to evade the negative stereotypes which could transcend their social and political intentions.[13] Overall, this was sometimes difficult to achieve because these feminist performances were thought to promote oppressive tendencies of women in art.[14] In a pursuit to legitimize feminism within society, many critics – who were predominantly other women – asserted that this type of body and performance art perpetuated an essentialist narrative of women and feminine identity.[15] Feminist art which utilized the body and mediums regarded as feminine craft became a strategy of art which divided feminism. It was strongly refuted by anti-essentialist feminists who maintained that women's bodies possessed theoretical limitations and were not priorities of political conversation. In her 1977 essay, "What's Wrong with Images of Women," the British feminist art historian Griselda Pollock aligns with this perspective when she explains that visual imagery, such as women's bodies, cannot be separated from the cultural meanings that it has been bound to throughout history.[16] In other words, "operating within the larger symbol system of contemporary western society, a system based on patriarchal and capitalist principles, images of women inevitably function as signifiers of male ownership, no matter who deploys them or how."[17]

However, many artists who vied for an essentialist approach to feminist art continued to maintain that craft-associated art, body art and performance art was nevertheless relevant political art.[18] They asserted that it challenged the sexualization, objectification and commodification of the female form which was becoming a repeatedly distorted concept. It also called into question the pertinent division of gender and sexual differences which have been maintained as a method of managing patriarchal control within society.[19] At its roots, feminist performance art was established as a deconstructive strategy which made inequalities and women's bodies visible. This deconstructive strategy revolved around the recognition of 'Woman', as a "culturally constructed category",

[12] Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (New York & London: Routledge, 1997), 11.

[13] Joyce Fernandes, "Sex into Sexuality: A Feminist Agenda for the '90s," *Art Journal*, no. 2 (1991): 35.

[14] Estelle B. Freedman and Barrie Thorne, "Introduction to 'The Feminist Sexuality Debates'," *Signs*, no. 1 (1984): 102.

[15] Laura Meyer, "Power and Pleasure: Feminist Art Practice and Theory in the United States and Britain," in *A Companion to Contemporary Art Since 1945*, ed. Amelia Jones (Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 328.

[16] Meyer, "Power and Pleasure," 330.

[17] Meyer, "Power and Pleasure," 330.

[18] Eunice Golden and Kay Kenny, "Sexuality in Art: Two Decades from a Feminist Perspective," *Woman's Art Journal*, no. 1 (1982): 14.

[19] Golden and Kenny, "Sexuality in Art," 14.

and 'Woman', as object, within western systems and codes of representation.[20] Jeanie Forte, feminist scholar and author of *Women's Performance Art*, presents a different angle to Pollock's anti-essentialist critiques when she states:

> Woman constitutes the position of object, a position of other in relation to a socially dominant male subject; it is that "otherness" which makes representation possible (the personification of male desire). Precisely because of the operation of representation, actual women are rendered an absence within the dominant culture, and in order to speak, must either take on a mask (masculinity, falsity, simulation, seduction), or take on the unmasking of the very opposition in which they are opposed, the Other.[21]

Therefore, feminist performance art works to unmask, or expose the flawed function of "Woman" and femininity as it has been commonly referenced within the western system of representation. These feminist performance artists clearly display an in-depth understanding of the codes and signifiers set in place in society and operate to subversively adhere to these devices. Feminist scholar Teresa de Lauretis has been part of various discussions surrounding feminism and gender, but her work can also be directly applied to the mediums of feminist performance when she explains that, "whoever defines the code or context, has control… and all answers which accept the context abdicate the possibility of redefining it."[22] Feminist performance does not do this. Rather, it is an artistic movement that, as de Lauretis puts it, is "willing to begin an argument" and confront oppressive systems, languages, symbols, metaphors and representations in society.

There are several reasons why performance art, and a consideration of women artists' autonomous form, became a prominent strategy in feminist art. It has been suggested that, "performance's broad appeal was derived from its potential for the enactment of agency. Agency as a condition of being in action…in contrast to one who is acted upon."[23] Some have also suggested that performance art was so popular among feminist artists because it was not fully theorized within the conception of the western canon and it was considered a young art form. While male artists had certainly explored performance prior to the emergence of feminist practice, it was arguably female artists who redefined performance art in the '60s and '70s. Wark explains the unique circumstances which ultimately separate feminist performance art from the work of their contemporary male counterparts. She states:

> The potential of performance as an "art of action" coincided with their growing sense of themselves as agents of social and political change… By intersecting the personal with the performative, they were able to blur the distinctions between author and agent, subject and object…they have also focused on the specific conditions of female bodies in performance and on the possibilities for activating a critically engaged female spectator.[24]

[20] Forte, "Women's Performance Art," 218.
[21] Forte, "Women's Performance Art," 218.
[22] Forte, "Women's Performance Art," 220.
[23] Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 31.
[24] Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 31.

Performance artists themselves have also contributed to this discussion of why they were initially drawn to performance art during their artistic careers. One of the most prominent feminist performance artists of second-wave feminism, Carolee Schneemann, reflects on performance art in her essay *The Obscene Body/ Politic*, stating:

> There is something female about performance art itself: the admittance of unconscious, forbidden material, dependent on self-exposure, self-display. There is a female sense of associative margins in which artists are a raw material… moving freely in realms of the uncontrollable and suppressed… Somewhere in the psyche these things connect with femaleness.[25]

It should be noted here that when talking about feminist performance art, understanding the difference between performance and performativity is essential. The term "performance art" gained popularity in the '60s and '70s to describe "live art activities." However, it was eventually recognized that the notion of "performativity" ultimately opened new avenues for expressing artists' desires in performance. Stemming from Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, feminist performances which value gender-defined differences almost always acquire narratives from the artist's own gendered experiences and use subversive repetition to transcend their prescribed everyday activities.[26] As mentioned previously, the political nature of feminist performance art is rooted in the explicit presence of the autonomous female form. However, by having control of their bodies, feminist artists demonstrated and critiqued the ways in which art history and society in general had assumed control of their autonomy. These subversive principles are what separate performance from performativity. By taking themes out of an everyday context there is an ability for new approaches and interpretations in performances.[27] To defend this theory, Butler argues that in performance one must "continue to use themes, to repeat them, repeat them subversively, and to displace them from the contexts in which they have been deployed, as instruments of oppressive power."[28] This statement effortlessly correlates with feminist performance art, as feminist artists use their bodies repeatedly to eclipse 'oppressive powers'. It is important to recognize that this concept outlined by Butler is particularly connected to second-wave feminist performances as these artists tended to create performances as act of reiteration, satire and parody which were intended to reveal and critique social constructs.[29] In an interview with *Artforum*, Butler further acknowledges that, " 'performativity' is not radical choice and it's not voluntarism… Performativity has to do with repetition, very often with the repetition of oppressive and painful gender norms to force them to re-signify. This is not freedom, but a

[25] Carolee Schneemann, "The Obscene Body/Politic," *Art Journal*, no. 4 (1991): 31.
[26] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: As Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 520.
[27] Judith Butler, "The Body You Want: An Interview with Judith Butler," interview by Liz Kotz, *Artforum*, November 1992, https://www.artforum.com/print/previews/199209/the-body-you-want-an-inteview-with-judith-butler-33505.
[28] Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism'" In *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. by Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 17.
[29] Temma Balducci, "Revisiting Womanhouse: Welcome to the (Deconstructed) Dollhouse," *Woman's Art Journal* 27, no. 2 (Fall-Winter 2006): 17.

question of how to work the trap that one is inevitably in."[30]

As mentioned previously, feminist performance art can be divided into three categories which assist in recognizing various unique methods of performance and highlighting political priorities which surface in the temporary live performance, the private documented performance and the traces of the performance. It should be noted that exploring the development of each of these categories is not the purpose of this paper. Instead, what I hope to address is how these differing forms of performance informed one another and were simultaneously involved in the conception of feminist performance art as a whole. In many cases, the three categories of performance are often all explored by feminist performance artists during their careers at one point or another. As such, the temporary live performance, the private documented performance and the traces of the performance can, depending of the artist, bleed into one another. These distinctions are therefore meant to allow individuals to theorize the unique characteristics which can manifest from performance art and negotiate the various performative strategies feminists employed as performance artists.

The temporary live performance is a series of work which is presented in a public space and can be manifested in a variety of unique, site-specific places that support the artist's overall narrative. As such, these performances are not solely confined within the walls of a gallery or art institution. For example, founded in the 1970s, the Feminist Art Program created *Womanhouse,* a site-specific installation in a residential home that a group of young women, including well-known feminist artists Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, restored. *Womanhouse* hosted several performances throughout the duration of the exhibition which aligned with the values and aesthetics of second-wave feminism due to the artists' disruption of gender roles and societal expectations.[31] The fact that these performances took place in a residential home rather than in a gallery was crucial; their subversive narratives undermined gender roles and domestic life on a deeper, more experiential level because of the recognizable space they positioned themselves and their viewers in.[32] While feminist performances have certainly taken place in canonical arenas, the choice to present work beyond institutional realms was also often due to the prevalent void of inclusivity within the western canon and western art institutions. Meanwhile, some feminist artists used these negative connotations of the gallery space to their advantage to make their explicit presence known and impermeable. These temporary live performances were also typically accompanied by an audience; an audience which varied depending on the location and desires of the artist. Sometimes the audience was even invited to participate in the performance. Moreover, in other scenarios, these feminist performances were viewed by an audience compromised of only women and served as a consciousness-raising session to bring awareness to the ways in which "women are denied an active role in the constructed path of their own lives."[33] Performances in *Womanhouse* were often centered around this concept of cultivating consciousness-raising sessions, both in the preliminary development of

[30] Kotz, "The Body You Want".

[31] Balducci, "Revisiting Womanhouse," 17.

[32] Balducci, "Revisiting Womanhouse," 18.

[33] Forte, "Women's Performance Art," 218.

Womanhouse and in the fully formed performances which welcomed audiences.[34]

Most importantly, these temporary live performances are just that – temporary. It was often the case that these artists would only perform a handful of times, sometimes travelling to other locations to present their performance for a different audience. The performative pieces were fleeting and not many people got to experience them the way they were meant to be seen due to the ephemerality of the work. However, the transient elements of performance were ultimately at the core of this category; the presence of the artist in real time and space was crucial. While today there is still evidence of performances that took place years ago, this archival documentation was not an essential element of the temporary live performance. Its documentation does not contain performances meant to transcend time and exist through stagnant imagery. Rather, they represent the residual presence of performances and serve to acknowledge past experiences but offer no new experiential elements for today's viewers. And yet, these archival accounts tend to be all we have as contemporary historians to assist in theorizing and understanding the temporary live performance. In some cases, contemporary artists recreate these performances or adapt their work to align with the objectives of past performances. This ensures the vitality of these fleeting experiences and reiterates the ongoing relevance of such themes within a transgenerational context. For example, Carolee Schneemann's 1975 performance, *Interior Scroll* and Casey Jenkins 2013 performance, *Casting off my Womb* are two separate performances which took place fifty years apart yet reflect similar aesthetics and performance techniques as a way to approach their desired narratives. Similarly, performance artist Marina Abramović recreates and represents several of her most well-known performances at her 2010 MoMA retrospective – *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present* – which spans the last four decades of her career. However, Abramović works to provide contemporary viewers with the ability to experience her historical performances through the "re-performance" created by young artists who have been trained by Abramović for the purpose of her retrospective.[35]

The private documented performance is a strategy of art which goes against the traditional conventions of performance, yet still aligns with notions of performativity and explores gender and women's relationships with their bodies. To summarize, this category begins with a private performance, typically carried out by the artist in a domestic setting without the presence of an audience. The private performance that takes place is conceptualized and performed to the same extent as the temporary live performance. However, what the audience sees is not the presence of the artist in real time and space. Instead what viewers witness is the documentation of the artist enacting their performance through photographic imagery and video account. Furthermore, it is often the case that the private performances within this category tend to be equated with a feminized and ritualistic act. So long as these artists recognize gender and feminine identity as a construct of the self and utilize their own physical bodies to explore these themes,[36] the artist can consider this a performance and performativity in the context of

[34] Balducci, "Revisiting Womanhouse," 18.

[35] "Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present," Museum of Modern Art, accessed April 2019, https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/964.

[36] Heather Davis, *Desire Change: Contemporary Feminist Art in Canada* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 39.

'60s and '70s feminist art. In *Introducing Suzy Lake*, second-wave feminist photographer and performance artist Suzy Lake reiterates the connections that exist between performance and photography in the private documented performance category when she explains that,

> The commonalities span role-playing, interrogating gender and shape shifting through the use of the face and the body as a raw material, as well as an emphasis on humor and the absurd, in a work that mixes performance with photo-documentation in still and moving imagery.[37]

The ephemeral nature of the temporary live performance is no longer what drives the strategies of performance because the root of private and documented work is constructed around the long-lasting archival presence of the artist and their performance. The previous category was hindered by documentation and archival material because it was not meant to supplement the experience of performance art. In the case of the private documented performance, we see artists specifically representing private and gendered experiences that are lived through performance and specifically intended to be viewed through documentation. The artists are present in the performance, yet simultaneously absent from the viewing experience, all the while engaged in performance and performativity.

The reason why the contrast between the fleeting and the enduring performance is significant is because the private documented category forces the artist to be permanently engaged in the performance, whether they be fixed into a photographic document or represented on a continuous loop in a video which plays over and over again. In photographic accounts of the private documented performances, imagery is often, but not always, staged in a grid format which alludes to the overall timeline or chronology of the performance. It also reflects an idea of repetition which aligns with Butlers theory of performativity. This notion of repetition is significant in the private documented category because, "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being."[38] This category of performance produces a "rigid regulatory frame" for audiences to view the performance from and simultaneously addresses themes which refute the "rigid regulatory frame" that has constructed and controlled concepts surrounding gender.

The final category, which can be recognized as the trace of a performance, is perhaps the most abstract distinction. This category is anchored in the development and creation of two or three-dimensional visual imagery; what the audience sees in the trace of a performance is not the presence of the artist in real time, in real space or in video or photo documentation, elements that are characteristic of performance art. Like the private documented performance, there are no spectators who are present. However, unlike the private documented performance, what the viewer sees is not a performance through photographic or video accounts, but instead stagnant two or three-dimensional visuals which range from paintings, prints, sculptures and other mixed media works that were created *through* a performance. The performances that takes

[37] Georgina Uhlyarik, *Introducing Suzy Lake* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2014), 114.

[38] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York & London: Routledge, 1990), 45.

place in this category are composed of ritualistic or stylized acts, gestures and movements and these works continue to align with theories of performativity, like the previous categories. However, this type of work exists in the intersections between visual arts and performance as the artists take control of their mark-making and refuse the objectification of their bodies; their presence and absence are assumed using their bodies in performance as the principal instrument in which they create art. Performance artist Ana Mendieta reinforces these objectives when she explains that regular paintings "were not real enough," and thus asserted that a combination of performance and visual art contained more power.[39]

While the temporary live and the private documented performances both clearly incorporate representations of the performer's actual bodies, the trace of a performance does not always overtly depict a recognizable female form, but rather alludes to its existence through a performance which was present in the process of creating the work. While this is not always the case, typically the only evidence of a performance is an abstract form or trace of the artist's physical body. This was striking because it evoked a sense of erasure as a way to simulate visibility, a significant contrast from other feminists who "vied for visibility and self-affirming expression through figurative (and) literal presence."[40] Ana Mendieta's work is a prime example of such concepts. In the text *The Explicit Body Performance* author Rebecca Schneider writes:

> Women are invisible to the degree that they are visible - that is, as visible, woman will be read relative to man, while man is also read relative to man. Thus "woman," striving to be other than representative of the phallic order, can paradoxically find herself striving to appear as invisible - to make her disembodiment apparent.[41]

This is exactly what traces of a performance aims to do. Hovering between embodiment and disembodiment, traces of a performance maintain the same objectives as the earlier two categories of performance. Still enacting a set of gendered themes, traces of performance illuminates the explicit absence of the female artist – not just the absence of their physical form but also their absence in various cultural and historical institutions.

It is important to reiterate that the categories of feminist performance art that have been discussed are not separated by generations of artists or waves of feminism, rather they exist simultaneously and in relation to one another. They clearly echo similarities that connect them together, ultimately blurring any definite lines of separation. The temporary live performance, the private documented performance and the trace of a performance are to be recognized as a more fluid set of concepts which assist in understanding the diverse nature of feminist performance art as a whole. While some of these distinctions may seem abstract, ultimately "the primary criterion used for determining whether or not a given work would be considered (performance) is whether the artist engaged in some form of performative action, pose, gesture or event."[42] Since the 1960s, feminist performance art has utilized many different strategies to advance its political objectives and has had a significant influence on "shifting art practices away from its exclusive preoccupation with aesthetic concerns towards

[39] Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 69.
[40] Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 71.
[41] Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, 117.
[42] Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 10.

critical engagement with the social and political contingencies of our own times."[43] Thus, it can be concluded that these three forms of performance encapsulate the multitudes of feminist performance art.

[43] Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 204.

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