

How has the Role of the Exhibition Evolved and Impacted
Contemporary Art and the Spectator?

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

BA (Hons) Photography in the Arts,

University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Swansea

11th December 2019

Word Count: 6223

<u>Table of Contents:</u>	<u>Page Number:</u>
List of Illustrations	3
Introduction	4
Chapter 1 - <i>The Institution: Challenging the Ideology of The Art Exhibition</i>	5
Chapter 2 - <i>The Spectator: Perception, Reception and Phenomenology in the Art Exhibition</i>	11
Chapter 3 - <i>Installation Art: New Technologies and Participation</i>	16
Conclusion	23
Appendix	25
References	28
Bibliography	29

List of Illustrations:

- Fig 1. Barr, A. (2019). *Cubism and Abstract Art*. [Exhibition] New York: Museum of Modern Art.
- Fig 2. Guerrilla Girls (1989). *Do Women Have To Be Naked To Get Into the Met. Museum?*. [Poster].
- Fig 3. Eliasson, O. (2010). *Blind Passenger*. [Installation].
- Fig 4. Duchamp, M. (1942). *Mile of String*. [Installation] New York: Whitelaw Reid Mansion.
- Fig 5. Gioni, M. (2018). *Strange Days: Memories of the Future*. [Exhibition of Moving Image] London: 180 The Strand.
- Fig 6. Eliasson, O. (2010). *Your Uncertain Shadow*. [Installation].
- Fig 7. Ono, Y. (1964). *Cut Piece*. [Performance].

Introduction:

In order to establish an informed understanding of how the concept of the ‘Art Exhibition’ has evolved through contemporary art, I will investigate how ways of exhibiting art have evolved and been questioned by artists, curators and theorists throughout the 20th and 21st Century. The ideology of the art exhibition is a somewhat new topic within the history of art and has only recently begun to be explored with regards to its role within the art world and contemporary society. I want to further explore the concept that “exhibitions have become the medium through which most art becomes known” (Greenberg, Nairne and Ferguson, 1996). This independent inquiry consists of three chapters. The first is an insight into the institution; an examination into how contemporary artists and curators have been influenced by the ideology of the gallery. In this chapter I will look into how galleries could be considered to be somewhat outdated and how curatorial activism is trying to break boundaries set by this ideology. In the second chapter, I will look at how art is received and perceived by the spectator. Through the research of reception aesthetics and phenomenology, I will explore how the art exhibition has developed to help bridge the gap between the frame and the spectator and how certain forms of presentation affect the spectator. In the final chapter, I will investigate installation art and how the introduction of new technologies, post web 2.0, have allowed for more interactive and immersive outcomes, altering the traditional constraints of galleries. I will examine the spectator’s role within installation art and how participatory art is evolving but could also be considered to hinder spectatorship.

Before I begin, I think it is important to define some of the terms and theories in question. Reception Aesthetics is a theory that focuses on the experience of art and how the artwork is received by the spectator. It is the study of how art allows itself to be experienced by the spectator. Phenomenology is the philosophical study of how humans experience things and the way in which these things present themselves through the embodiment of experience. The movement

of phenomenology came about in the early 20th century, founded by philosophers like Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty *et al.* I think it would be interesting to view installation art from a phenomenological approach and why interactive and immersive experiences are so intriguing to the contemporary spectator. In our current age, numerous events are experienced through screens, whether it's on the television or on our mobile phones, it is becoming rarer and rarer that humans physically experience phenomena. I want to explore whether contemporary art capable of changing that.

Chapter One:

The Institution: Challenging the Ideology of The Art Exhibition

The history of the 'Art Exhibition' is crucial to the history of art itself; it has evolved with the continuous change of what society demands, whilst concurrently challenging those demands. Throughout the 20th century, exhibitions have acted as catalysts and provoked the spectators' thinking about art. Often displayed and contextualised in ways that are accessible to the contemporary spectator, "exhibitions are strategically located at the nexus where artists, their work, the arts institution, and many different publics intersect" (Marincola, 2006). It is important to begin by looking at the ideology of the White Cube, a concept coined by Brian O'Doherty in 1976. The White Cube is understood as a contemporary gallery space that allows no outside context to infiltrate the spectators' encounter with the isolated artwork; a space where time and societal constructs are omitted from the experience of the art contained. O'Doherty proposed that the white cube is the archetypal environment for the presentation of artworks; an empty, white, windowless and artificially lit cube. This type of gallery is often figuratively detached from the outside world, taking on no social, economic or historical context from its surroundings, in hopes

to make the artworks speak for themselves. The white cube is not only a physical location but it's also seen as an ideological and philosophical construct. Quite often, because the white cube tries to withdraw itself and put emphasis on the artwork alone, it can end up overshadowing the art, making it less accessible for the contemporary audience. As Simon Sheikh says, "the white cube's conditions can overpower the artworks themselves in its shift from placing content within a context to making the context itself the content" (Sheikh, 2009).



Fig 1. Cubism and Abstract Art

The Museum of Modern Art in New York was the first and probably the most influential white cube gallery. Founded in 1929, the *MoMA* was revolutionary with its design; stepping away from the 18th century Salons of Paris, the *MoMA* had an almost commercial design, and for the first time, eyes were drawn to the art rather than the architecture. In 1936, Alfred Barr, the director of the *MoMA* at the time, curated an exhibition called *Cubism and Abstract Art*. It was then that the

concept of the white cube came into being. The art was hung sparsely on freshly painted white walls and ceilings; some works of art even had walls to themselves. After decades of paintings being crammed on walls, floor to ceiling, this new way of exhibiting must have been quite refreshing. For the first time, the exhibition was curated to follow the narrative of the history of the works and overlooked the external political and social contexts. The curator wanted each individual piece to speak for itself and visually impact the spectator. The use of negative space, plain walls, light, and no decorative furnishings, isolated the individual pieces of art, allowing them to stand out. However, not a lot has changed in the past 80 years and most of our current galleries still highly resemble the early form of *the MoMA*. Many now consider this style of exhibition space as the nucleus of hypocrisies in the art world. The notion of the white cube goes way beyond the physical location and more towards the social effect of the microcosmic art world. Since the 1960's, artists and curators have challenged the ideology of the white cube, artists started to question the morality of galleries and the larger institutions behind them. Politically and spatially, artists questioned this ideology; for some it was too structured and left little to the imagination, some artists tried to intervene with its physical integrity but many artists just stepped away from the white cube and towards more malleable forms of display. When artists began criticising the spatial and social integrity of the white cube, the gallery suddenly became a space for activism.

An issue that is extremely prevalent in the contemporary art world is the disproportion of the artists represented by galleries. The white cube has become a physical manifestation of the discrimination that occurs between curators and galleries, and highlights the inequality of the art world. A recent study by *The Public Library of Science* showed that 85% of artists represented in American gallery collections are white, and 87% of them are male. Large galleries like *the Tate*

Modern, MoMa, The Whitechapel Gallery and The Saatchi Gallery, are now representatives of this, somewhat overlooked, discrimination in which minorities remain what they have always been considered: outsiders. For example, in 2016 the *Tate Modern* re-opened following a large-scale update and re-hang of their permanent collections. Out of the 300 artists represented by the Tate, only a third were female artists and even less were non-white artists. In the *Pompidou Centre's* permanent exhibition, that contain work from 1900 until now, less than 10% of the artists represented are female, and fewer still by non-white artists. It gets worse. At the *MoMA*, less than 4% of the artists represented in their modern art collection are female, with absolutely no non-white artists are represented (Diversity of Artists in Major U.S. Museums, 2019). The austere white edges of the gallery space mirror the white affluent nature of the current world, where individuality is endless as long as you're a white male. And as with most cases of inequality, the misrepresented and discriminated are putting up a fight with cutting edge subversive curatorial and artistic practices. In fact, it was due to the statistical issues of the gender gap in the *Whitney Museum of American Art*, that the activist art group, Guerrilla Girls, nicknamed the gallery the 'Whitey Museum'.



Fig 2. *Do Women Have To Be Naked To Get Into the Met. Museum?*

Guerrilla Girls is a feminist and hugely activist group of anonymous artists whose mission is to fight discrimination within the art world, with the aim to bring the racial and gender inequality to the eyes of the on looking audience. Their conception occurred in 1985 when seven women responded to the 1984 exhibition, *An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture* at *MoMa*. At the time, the *MoMA* represented 165 artists, of which, only 13 were female. This exhibition was thought to christen the *MoMA*'s newly renovated building, and was claimed to be a representation of that era's most influential artists. Staggeringly, there were absolutely no female artists included in this exhibition and very few non-white artists. In an interview, the exhibition's curator, Kynaston McShine, made a comment that further highlights the explicit gender gap in the art world: "any artist who isn't in the show should rethink *his* career" (Guerrilla Girls, 1995). In response to the exhibition and McShine's overt sexism, the seven women protested outside the *MoMA*, marking the conception of the Guerrilla Girls. I recently had the pleasure of being able to ask the ex director of *Artes Mundi International Visual Arts Exhibition* and now, current curator of Swansea's *Glynn Vivian Gallery*, Karen MacKinnon, some questions about curating. When I asked her about equality within galleries, specifically the Glynn Vivian, she said:

We get quite a lot of applications from white men of a certain age, who want to curate using the collection, they want some money, they want a tour, they want to be paid, they want a book... How do you then integrate diversity? How do you make sure that that's thought about in every single selection? How do you change the system? (MacKinnon, 2019)

In the recent Guardian article, *Budge up, great white males! MoMA goes global with an explosive \$450m rehang*, journalist, Charlotte Higgins states that even after \$450000000, a huge re-vamp and a complete rehang, out of their whole collection, only 28% of them are female artists. Which she follows up with the reassuring statement that "28% is still five times higher than the

proportion in the galleries at the beginning of the century” (Higgins, 2019). In 1971, Linda Nochlin asked a very pivotal question, ‘Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?’ and goes on to say that “[this question] is only the top tenth of an iceberg of misinterpretation and misconception” (Nochlin, 1971). I think it is important to realise that this gender gap goes way beyond the ideology of the gallery and is due to centuries of women being told they’re not good enough. In a response to Maura Reilly’s article, *Taking the Measure of Sexism: Facts, Figures, and Fixes*, the curators of the gallery *Cleopatra’s*, in Brooklyn, state that “hands down the biggest observation that we have made in this role is that probably nine out of ten times, the people who hit us up are men” (The Editors of ARTnews, 2015). This corresponds with MacKinnon’s statement on the amount of men of a certain colour, age and class who apply for exhibitions. Maybe implying that if female artists tried to put themselves out there more and applied for exhibitions then they’re more likely to get selected? Ultimately, this is not just about the art world and it’s not just the big bad men stopping women from being successful, it’s the institutional structures of society. As Nochlin goes on to say:

The question of women’s equality in art, devolves not upon the relative benevolence or ill-will of individual men, nor the self-confidence or abjectness of individual women, but rather on the very nature of our institutional structures themselves and the view of reality which they impose on the human beings who are part of them. (Nochlin, 1971)

And whilst we have come a long way in the past 48 years, we’re not there yet; the inequality persists. Through the examination of the phenomenon of the white cube, many contemporary artists and curators have discovered that this implicit split between institution and art, and the complete lack of consideration when it comes to the discrimination of gender, race and class, unfortunately, is a lot more common than you may realise.

Chapter Two:

The Spectator: Perception, Reception and Phenomenology in the Art Exhibition

When looking at art exhibitions, I think it is just as important to look at the spectator, as it is to look at the institution; art is made to be viewed and the embodied experience of the artwork comes about in the exchange between the spectator and the art. The theory of reception aesthetics focuses on the experience of art; it is not a theory about art but the study of how art allows itself to be experienced by the spectator. According to the theory of reception, the spectators' interactions and the notion that all artwork has been made to be spectated, are fundamental to the art works' own realisation. As Wolfgang Kemp says in his 1998 essay, *The Work of Art and it's Beholder*:

The fact that the work has been created for somebody is not a novel insight, proffered by a small branch of art history, but the revelation of a constitutive moment in its creation from its very inception. Each work of art is addressed to someone; it works to solicit its ideal beholder (Kemp, 1998).

It is important to understand that the contemplation of art isn't just a matter of how it looks; a huge amount of the understanding is about the embodied perception, the overall experience and how the work is received. The idea that the contemplation of art comes about in the interaction between the artwork and spectator is fundamental to understanding the reception theory. This theory has been crucial in contemporary art practice, since the 1960s artists have used techniques, such as spectator participation and interactivity, to draw in the curious spectator. I will expand on the notion of participation further in the final chapter of this inquiry.

As interactive beings, we naturally want to engage with things through our senses; "we orientate ourselves in our surroundings by way of embodied perception" (Wesseling, 2017). The idea that humans need to be physically connected with our surroundings stems from the philosophical construct of phenomenology and plays a very important role in the reception of artworks. Maurice

Merleau-Ponty was a philosopher whose research and writings revolved around phenomenology and perception. Throughout his works he intertwines the theory of perception, how the spectator experiences the artwork and how interpretations are made from the experience. In his 1945 book, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty defines phenomenology as the “study of essences; the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). He believed that phenomenology is a method for describing the nature of how humans connect with their surroundings and perception as a means by which a phenomenal experience is understood. I believe that Merleau-Ponty’s writings have never been more relevant than they are now. In the emerging nexus of an age of virtual reality and the Internet, technology has evolved to appeal to the body and our surroundings. Whilst it is quite easy to Google Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* and probably get a better view of it than if you were to see it in real life, through the crowds in Paris’ Musée du Louvre. On the other hand, you cannot fully experience most kinds of art through your smart phone. I recently visited installation artist, Olafur Eliasson’s new exhibition, *In Real Life*, at the *Tate Modern*. This retrospective is a perfect example of how installation art has to be experienced in person. The piece, *Your Blind Passenger*, considered by many as the exhibition’s pièce de résistance, is a long tunnel filled with dense fog. Because of its density, you can only see 5 feet in front of you and suddenly your other senses are significantly heightened. The vapour used to create the fog is sugar based, so when your vision is hindered, you can taste the artwork - something you cannot experience through your smartphone. My generation seems to be constantly consumed with feeling the affect of their surroundings and I wouldn’t be surprised if Eliasson’s *Your Blind Passenger* is one of the most Instagrammed pieces of art of this year, everyone wants to experience this affect-causing phenomenon.



Fig 3. Your Blind Passenger

The idea of the affective has been correspondingly discussed within art research and philosophy. Theorist Marie-Luise Angerer commented on how “emotion and affect are now viewed as crucial to cognition and communication” (Angerer, 2015). Merleau-Ponty’s ideas of perception and embodiment run through this research of the affective reception of artworks. This recent spike in interest into affect, the body, emotions and the senses has become central to many contemporary theorists work and is down to the philosophical concept of affect, established by the likes of Baruch Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze and more recently, political philosopher and social theorist, Brian Massumi. Massumi highlights how affect is almost detached from human emotions and feelings. As he states:

Affect/affection. Neither word denotes a personal feeling and has the ability to affect and be affected. It is a pre personal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. (Massumi, 1987)

Affect is not a conscious thing that the spectator can control but often their emotions can intensify the affect of the artwork. As Angerer stated, “Today, the enthusiasm with which affects, emotions and feelings are habitually used to underpin arguments points to a dispositif of affect” (Angerer, 2014). Affect can be described as something that creates a moment of intensity or a reaction on the human body and it is in arts nature to produce affect in the spectator. 17th Century philosopher,

Baruch Spinoza, originally defines affect as the effect on another body, for example the affect of a work of art on our own bodies, “the affections of the body whereby the body's power of acting is increased or diminished together with the ideas of these affections” (Curley, 1994).

It is interesting to look at the affect theory in terms of traditional galleries. Galleries are often considered as untouchable, sacred places, where the spectator is expected to walk quietly between artworks and contemplate from a distance. But, as with our human nature, the spectator often feels the innate need to bridge that distance and interact with the art more intimately. As Jean-Louis Chrétien said, “no phenomenology of life, of body and the flesh, can be constituted without basing itself on a phenomenology of touch” (Chrétien, 2004). While many have discussed the phenomenon of touch, it is once again Merleau-Ponty's philosophy on this particular phenomenon that has influenced countless artists and thinkers. His writings successfully draw the attention of the reader towards the embodied experience and how our own bodies come into play in terms of perceiving the surrounding world. Merleau-Ponty reinterprets Edmund Husserl's notion of ‘double sensation’. Husserl states that double sensation only incorporates the sensation of touch, but Merleau-Ponty expands on this notion further by applying it to all the human senses. Husserl's argument is that the intentionality of reflexivity on the body is completely dependent on the distinct act of touch:

The body as such can be constituted originally only in tactuality and in everything localised within the sensations of touch, such as warmth, cold, pain, and the like. A subject with eyes only could not have an appearing body at all. The body becomes a body only through the introduction of sensations in touch, the introduction of pain sensations, etc., in short, through the localisation of sensations. (Husserl, 1913)

In Merleau-Ponty's book *The Visible and the Invisible* he wrote about the experience of a handshake and the double sensation of touching. He comments on the dual nature of the human body, as the spectated and the spectator or the touched and the ones touching. He goes on to argue that the two experiences, to be touched and to touch are not concurrent. In terms of a handshake,

even though both of the hands touch each other, they will always remain detached. We cannot touch without being touched, in both a physical and philosophical sense. The double nature of touch, exposing yourself at the same time as experiencing, serves as an analogy for how we encounter works of art. Philosopher, Jacques Derrida, also explores the sensation of touch and his concepts can also be applied to our interactions with art works. Derrida's research has been continually obsessed with hands and the act of touching. He explored this interest most deeply in his book *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, in which Derrida uses Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy as an anchor to explore the philosophy of the sense of touch and examine the act of touching the untouchable. As Derrida questions, "How do we touch upon the untouchable? Distributed among the indefinite number of forms and figures, this question is precisely the obsession haunting a thinking of touch – or thinking as the haunting of touch. We can only touch on a surface, which is to say the skin or thin peel of a limit" (Derrida, 2000).

To end this chapter, it is important to return to the figure in question, the spectator. In his book, *The Emancipated Spectator*, Jacques Rancière theorises that the common view on spectatorship is in itself somewhat discriminatory, he states that we shouldn't consider the spectator as a passive onlooker, "spectators are as active as interpreters, who try to invent their own translation in order to appropriate the story for themselves and make their own story out of it" (Rancière, 2008). He goes on to talk about how the spectator has often been considered an ignorant and passive voyeur but shouldn't be underestimated because there is no art without them. Rancière also details that thinkers often presume that the feelings and understandings of the spectators, will be what the artist had predetermined they will feel and understand. The emancipation of the spectator often starts with the understanding that actively spectating can interpret and transform the work in question; what they see, understand and feel from the experience is not always what the artists' thinks and expects them to.

Chapter Three:

Installation Art: New Technologies and Participation

Installation art has been one of the most decisive and influential developments within the practice of art in the last fifty years. For contemporary artists and galleries, installation has more recently become a popular method to achieve more immersive and interactive affects. However, due to its individual style of in situ locale and playful nature it is also a method that often causes controversy among some spectators. Installation art is also thought to be more difficult to comprehend and in terms of analysis, it is considered to be beyond the traditional methods considering aesthetics. The term 'Installation Art' is generally used to describe a spatial artwork located in three-dimensional space, no longer a painting hanging on a wall or the Modernists' untouchable object on a plinth. It can now be anything at all; sound, performance, movement. This ability to interact with the artwork has allowed for a new level of intimacy between the art and the spectator. It is no longer a precious object that can only be looked at; it becomes an experience that appeals to the human senses. Installations that immerse and appeal to the human senses satisfy the spectator's contemporary condition and allows for a level of escapism from the real world and in turn, they become a part of the experience. The sensations the spectator experiences within a space and the relationship they have with the space defines their perceptions of the surrounding world. Installation art has created a monumental shift away from traditional aesthetic objects and frames on the wall towards site-specific pieces that consume the spectator, often spatially filling their container and are constructed to trigger complex emotional and sensory experiences within the spectator.

There are two key writings in regards to installation art: Julie Reiss' 1999 book, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* and Claire Bishop's 2005 book, *Installation Art: A Critical*

History. Both writers note that ‘installation art’ is a rather new term but the style of practice has been around long before it was named. For example, in 1942, Marcel Duchamp created an installation type piece of work titled *Mile of String*. It consisted of a mile long portion of string, that he then draped across all the works of art in the retrospective exhibition of Surrealist art in New York, *First Papers of Surrealism*, curated by Duchamp and André Breton. The addition of the string affected the spectators experience by making it more challenging to view the work and in turn, altered the experience of the spatial container. The intervention that the work caused in the space sparked a lot of disorientation by hindering the spectator’s physical movements; a challenge most spectators hadn’t ever faced in a gallery setting.

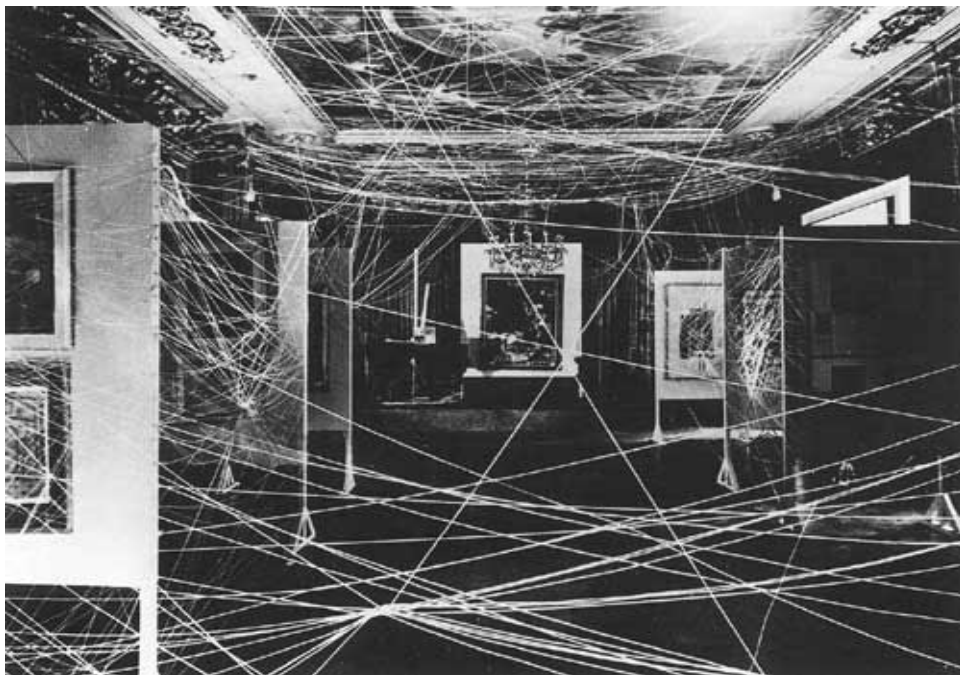


Fig 4. Mile of String

When it comes to contemporary installation art, post Web 2.0, artists have explored technology’s potential to create both physical and virtual experiences that are spatially relevant. With the introduction of new technology, artists are able to create both tangibly real and virtual spaces that

allow for spectator interaction and immersion. The evolution of these affect-causing experiences means it is possible for the spectator to easily encounter phenomena. Due to the nature of installation art, the temporality of the aesthetic object placed on a plinth has become disenthralled. Methods such as moving image, virtual reality and interactive art often cause more affect on the spectator. The oscillating and ephemeral nature of moving image means the spectator experiences the affect within them, around them and across them, even if it is spatially fixed. In our post-smartphone age, the overstimulation we are constantly exposed to has begun to diminish our senses and the developments within technology have altered how installation art is experienced. The acceleration of hand held technology has lead to a decrease in humans actually experiencing phenomena.

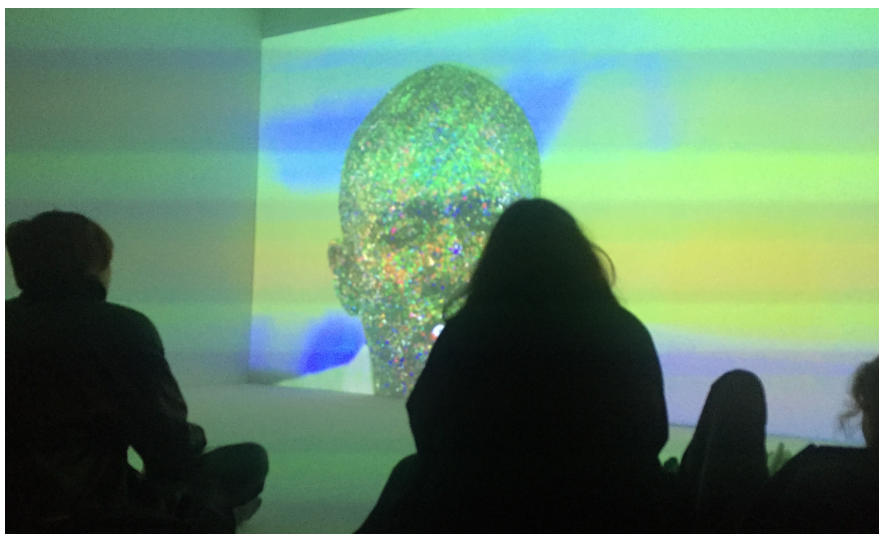


Fig 5. Strange Days: Memories of the Future

An example of how installation art can use technology to its advantage is the moving image exhibition *Strange Days: Memories of the Future* presented by *The Store X* and *the New Museum* in collaboration with *the Vinyl Factory*. The show is a radical culmination of twenty-one moving image and sound installations. The exhibition is an epic fusion of sound and visuals, creating

ethereal, dreamlike experiences and video compositions that tap into and trigger a sense of vicarious nostalgia. Through the use of new digital technology, the installations conjure a sort of futuristic sublime, creating a sensually consuming and affect-causing environment. As the website states, “in many of the videos in the exhibition, technology is both a subject and medium – perhaps even a talisman – in peculiar parables that expand definitions of identity, vulnerability, and power” (Strange Days, 2018). For me, the technology behind moving image and projection mapping allows for not only an immersive experience but also enables the spectator to become a part of the work; by walking in front of the projector, the spectator blocks the light and their own silhouette superimposes itself on to the piece, changing the dynamic of the work. Bishop believes that installation art is often characterised as a type of art that the spectator can physically enter. She argued that the most important component of installation art is its ability to confront the spectator front on as a physical presence in a spatial container and “presupposes an embodied viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are heightened as their sense of vision, rather than imagining the viewers as a pair of disembodied eyes that survey the work from a distance” (Bishop, 2005).

The completion of some artworks is completely dependant on spectator participation and an integral relationship between the work and the spectator. Reiss explored the notion that “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... the spectator is in some way regarded as integral to the completion of the work” (Reiss, 1999). The contemporary spectator of installation art does not experience art only through visual reception, but rather they are immersed in a multi-sensory experience that counters the passive and disembodied viewership. In some ways, installation art is not a representation of elements, like paintings or photography are, instead it’s perceived as a first

hand presentation of an idea. This first hand experience allows for the spectator to become more aware of their body and surroundings, “introducing an emphasis on sensory immediacy, on physical participation, and on a heightened awareness of other visitors who become part of the piece” (Bishop, 2005). Because of installation art’s dependency on the spectator’s physical presence in the work, it is phenomenological by nature. In order to fully experience and comprehend the work, the spectator goes through a multi-sensual experience. However, it could also be considered that installation art can never be fully comprehended because there is no single specified angle to view the work from. The installation invites the spectator in but at the same time the work restricts them by not allowing them to take in the whole piece. As Reiss goes on to state, ‘the spectator is in some way regarded as integral to the completion of the work’ (Reiss, 1999). It is interesting to look at pieces of work where the spectator’s interaction and participation is essential to the artwork. Multiple installations at Olafur Eliasson’s current retrospective relied on participant interaction. For example, his piece, *Your Uncertain Shadow*, consisted of a series of coloured lights, pointed at a blank wall. The specific combination of colours lit the wall up white, but when the spectator walks through the room, their shadow is then projected onto the wall, blocking each light separately. This leads to a multi-coloured silhouette being projected onto the wall. Without a participant, it is nothing; it remains a blank, white wall.

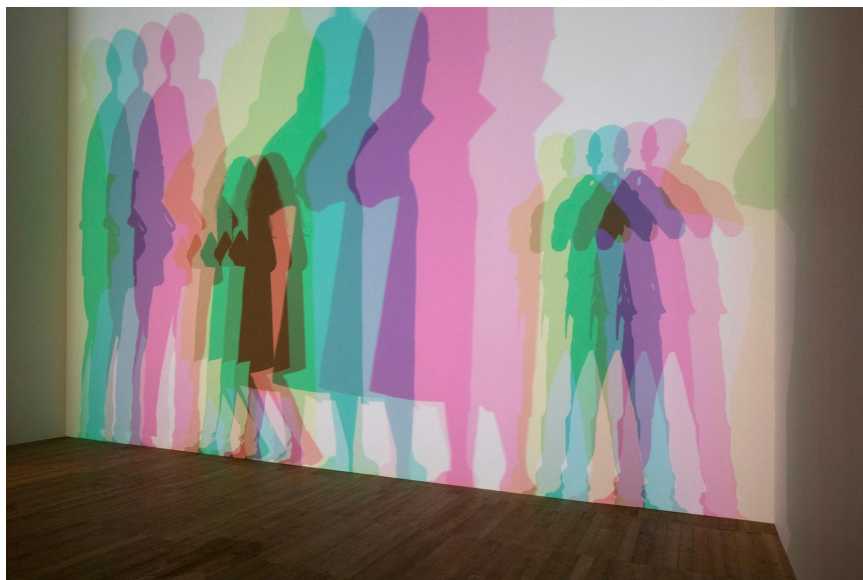


Fig 6. *Your Uncertain Shadow*

In Nicolas Bourriaud's influential 1998 book, *Relational Aesthetics*, he recognised that the emerging contemporary art practice revolved around "human relations and their social context" (Bourriaud, 1998). This book provoked cutting-edge discussions into the rising interest into participatory art, which are still extremely prevalent within the art world now. Bishop further explores this international rise in participatory and collaborative art in her 2012 book, *Artificial Hells*. Many advocates of participation in art believe that because of the "near total saturation of our image repertoire artistic practice can no longer revolve around the construction of objects to be consumed by a passive bystander" (Bishop, 2012). Due to this there has been a rise in contemporary artists producing work that both engages and requires the participation of the spectator. Participatory art often incorporates a social aspect to the spectatorship, usually encouraging the spectator to not only interact with the artwork, but also with the other participants, whether they're performers that are an element of the installation or fellow spectators. This addition of social interactions within the work, as well as with the work, accentuates the embodied experience the participant goes through, once again drawing the attention to an experience rather than an object. The use of participation in art can be traced back through multiple art movements such as Fluxus, the Situationist International, Happenings and the Minimalism movement. This form of art practice introduced the possibility of temporal artworks, allowing the spectators to become performers that are integral to the piece of work. The spectators' presence has become an essential aspect to this ephemeral form of art, signifying a revolutionary transformation; bridging the gap between artist and spectator.

Fluxus artist, Yoko Ono's installations often required spectator participation. In her 1964 performance, *In Cut Piece*, she asked the spectator to come up on stage and cut bits of her clothing off as she sat there motionless. The participation of the spectator is crucial to the integrity

of the work of art; the spectator then has a responsibility to their own embodied experience. Now interactive and participatory based works of art are becoming more popular, they also seem to be under constant debate and are often been criticised.



Fig 7. In Cut Piece

Although they are often extremely engaging and immersive, it could be said that participatory performances only contribute temporary interventions rather than something that causes a lasting affect on the exhibition spaces and the spectator. Another critique of this form of artwork is this implication that its aim is to create social interactions rather than what the artist had intended - a conversation between the artwork and the spectator. As Claire Bishop suggests, in her 2004 paper *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*, this perspective can often lead to a lack of urgency and challenging. Bishop goes on to say that we should be aware that participatory work seems to be replacing the activist and political critique. But, on the other hand, Bourriaud argues that participatory works of art are not just aesthetic, but the method can also be used to produce political and challenging works of art. He believes it is crucial to look at the relationships produced by relational art and suggested that when a spectator is presented with a relational piece

of work, they should question it: “does this work permit me to enter into dialogue? Could I exist, and how, in the space it defines?” (Bourriaud, 1998) It is important to look at these critiques and how they examine the limitations and also the possibilities of participatory artwork. Not all interactive works of art provide radical criticality; some are subtler about their aims. But, as a spectator, it is important to be aware that the playful elements of installations and participant dependant art can sometimes overshadow the critical message. And while some installations are made purely to allow for temporal affect causing interactions, this form of presenting art is also a perfect platform for politically challenging work, allowing the spectator to reconsider and question the contemporary art practice.

Conclusion

Due to the constant introduction of new technologies and new methods, the ways in which we choose to exhibit art are in an ever-changing state. The fugitive and temporal nature of the art exhibition allows for experimental, interactive and radical movements that cohere with our current affect driven society. Whether we look at them from a political and critical point of view or from a philosophical and psychological one, it is clear that over time, the forms and demands of exhibitions have affected the work artists produce. Over the past 80 years the gallery space as we know it has been challenged, criticised and celebrated, but in that time the physical container itself has hardly changed. I am not sure if this is because it is widely considered the ideal archetypal gallery space, or because we are too afraid to break the traditional constructs? But many artists have challenged aesthetic ideology and societal expectations of presentation, whilst trying to deal with the institutional issues of discrimination as well as allowing for an embodied experience. Whether they're exhibitions in large institutional galleries or smaller-scale ones, they are just

microcosms of much larger issues concerning our current world. Whilst some artists choose to draw attention to this, others create an environment that acts as an escape and allows for the emancipation of the spectator.

Due to the rise in installation, interactive and participatory art, the contemporary exhibition has become the ideal space for the spectator to feel the embodied experience of phenomena. As the world of digital technology rapidly evolves, allowing for progressive and mentally stimulating styles of exhibiting, I believe it is important that the role of the gallery and the curator have to evolve with it. Because of technology's oscillating and volatile nature, artists are now able to spatially construct and shape both real and virtual environments that we are now allowed to physically touch and sensually interact with. The constant shift of art practice and the technological advances have opened up the possibilities for installation art, allowing this form of display to become the ideal environment for the contemporary spectator to experience affect. Moving forward there are many challenges that we, as artists, curators and spectators, need to overcome. The art exhibition has to sustain its significance in our current society; if galleries are too afraid to exhibit more controversial and unconventional work then they might not survive. As our society evolves, art is evolving alongside it and so should the way we exhibit it. The fundamental aim of art exhibitions is to construct new narratives and allow for new contexts within art that are both accessible and culturally important to the contemporary spectator. To return to the quote I began this inquiry with, I do believe that "exhibitions have become the medium through which most art becomes known" (Greenberg, Nairne and Ferguson, 1996), they act as the primary platform from which we experience artwork so it is important that artists, galleries and curators use that to their advantage when trying to cause affect and make a change within our society.

Appendix

Alice Oliver in conversation with Swansea's Glynn Vivian Gallery's Curator, Karen MacKinnon:

Alice: So I am currently writing my dissertation and I'm interested in curating art in ways to help bridge the gap between the art and the audience, also curatorial activism and equality in art galleries and how the levels of equality are hopefully changing.

Karen: Obviously, these are massive questions, I mean they're urgent and they're absolutely necessary. I think we're aware of those issues on a daily basis and hopefully challenge those issues. I've been here [The Glynn Vivian] 7 months but before that I was at Artes Mundi (International Visual Arts Exhibition and Prize), you can imagine I was challenged a lot, most of the artists I worked with were incredibly challenging contemporary artists. It might be interesting to think about Artes Mundi, somebody once did a survey on how we selected artists, and about diversity, and we actually came out on top. They asked how do we do it and I said well we decide on them, that's what we do. So if we're selecting and there are too many men, then we change it. But I think here [The Glynn Vivian] its pretty good actually, excluding the current display of the collection, that's a completely different matter.

Alice: So, how do you feel about the level of equality within current art galleries?

Karen: You can imagine, we get quite a lot of applications from white men of a certain age, who want to curate using the collection, they want some money, they wanted a tour, they want to be paid, they want a book, and they're often exhibitions that I think are very interesting if you're a historian or if you're interested in the curatorial history. They're fine, but actually for most people, they're not very interesting. And it costs a lot of money. But then again, it's all well and good putting on an LGBTQ exhibition but what do you do after that, what happens? How do you then integrate diversity, LGBTQ, age, sexuality, gender, race and class? How do you make sure that that's thought about in every selection? How do you change the system? There's so much to do here, I've only been here 7 months; I'm trying to make that change.

Alice: How do you feel about curatorial activist groups like Guerrilla Girls and the White Pube who question and challenge the institutions?

Karen: I think it's so great. But I have some issues with the White Pube; I met them when I was working at g39 in Cardiff. I think they're really punk rock and as someone who started as a little punk, I get it. I get that they're shouting at everyone and I get why they're angry. Going back to me saying that we're always getting applications from men of a certain colour and age, I get it. But where I find them problematic, as Mark Fisher said about the left, we're always fighting each other. We just rip each other to shreds all the time. When The White Pube came to g39 to work with some young artists, they just ripped everyone to shreds, without even knowing whom they were. You need to work on who you're enemies are, or we're not going to change anything. I like it that their role is to disrupt, but to what ends and what responsibility to you take for those disruptions. However I do love reading their posts, they make me laugh and I love their subjectivity. But if we're to change society, then we need to work together. Their post about the Liverpool Biannual was really awful because I know the Director and I know the financial strains

and the difficulties she was under. So when they wrote that I was just like its not really fair, you're probably going to just add grist to the mill to the people above her who already want to cut it, you know? Cause we're all under such pressure to lose these galleries in the place of hospitals and schools et cetera.

Alice: How do you think this form of gallery will fair in the future?

Karen: We do need to talk more about galleries and the system because it doesn't really work anymore and you know this. You know? What will survive in the next 10/20 years in the gallery sector? Art will survive and radical curatorial strategies will survive, and I'm convinced that if we lose these places they will become more activist, because that's what happens when you look at things like Art in revolutions and Nazi Germany.

Alice: So I'm really interested in interactive installation art and taking the work of the wall and let it become something that the audience can experience. Working with technology to make immersive and participatory and socially engaged. Coming at it from a slightly critical point of view, do you think this form of gallery suits installation and site specific work?

Karen: I think so... The gallery has got a bit lost in the last few years but the Atrium is perfect for installation and site-specific work. Some Examples from years back are the NS Harsha exhibition that we did with Artes Mundi, Ecce Homo, Mark Wallinger's work and the Lindsay Seer's crazy upside down boat that filled the whole Atrium. In the future that Atrium space will be for site-specific work. The reason it's important and the reason that it works here is that the Atrium is colonial architecture and has historical context. So, from a critical point of view, that space is perfect to engage with more diverse artists who have been excluded in the past. I think these spaces are already in their battlefield, they've already got that history embedded in them, I think they can be really useful. But if these kinds of spaces continue to operate in the way they always have, I don't think they'll survive.

Alice: They need to evolve with the times.

Karen: Absolutely. How do you think they should change Alice?

Alice: I don't know very much about the system yet, but I don't know whether it's that not many artists make installation pieces or that galleries don't tend to pick installation/interactive work to show. It's what interests me most, so it is always what I hope to see when visiting a gallery, but of course that is just a personal opinion!

Karen: I know what you mean; there has been an awful lot of drawing on show here lately! Room 3 is absolutely perfect for film; I'm not quite sure why we don't show film in there more often. But we will be doing that soon which is exciting. I think finance is a big issue so I think galleries have become quite safe and I think we're in a time where that's the wrong thing to do. I think money is an huge issue, with installation art and technology available. I think there is a big fear of it going wrong. We don't have a specific AV technician here so if we need specialist help we often have to bring in an AV technician. Probably, galleries have become safe and in some ways sometimes they sanitise though complicated issues that you're talking about. I think it's reasons like that that we don't see as much installation art.

I am really interested, Alice, in this question about installation work?

Alice: Sorry, I didn't mean to criticise the Glynn Vivian!

Karen: No no no no of course not, it's a very interesting and important question

Alice: I guess its just personal preference? Maybe it's my generation? I was brought up going to a lot a lot of galleries all the time and it has always been the interactive, immersive installations that I saw that have stuck with me. But sadly the framed works on the walls haven't always stuck with me.

Karen: Yes! So what kind of things do you remember seeing that you loved?

Alice: Well I went to see Olafur Eliasson's Weather Project at the Tate Modern in 2003 when I was only 5 but I still remember it as if it was yesterday.

Karen: Oh amazing! But you see, I don't know what that would have cost; Tate can do that sort of stuff. But I do think here has been a little conservative for some time now. But I think it's very important stuff, whether its film or something like Eliasson's work, its that experimental stuff that's interesting. People like it when you play don't they, and when they feel involved in something. Unfortunately we are under pressure in these times, when we have no money. The money thing is a whole other story.

Alice: It sound really naive and stupid, but I hadn't really thought about where the money actually comes from.

Karen: If you look at Tate, I think it used to be 80% public funded and the rest would come from its shop and cafe, but now its 70% corporate funded. But the question is where does that money come from?

Alice: That's crazy, I never thought about that.

Karen: But, whatever happens, I'm a real believer that if the institutions don't survive, art will always survive.

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