The Object Is the Thing: Objecthood and the Female-Identifying Body in Performance

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April 2023

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

Abstract

Developments in the art world such as performance art have influenced theoretical and practical analyses of human-object interactions as expressive of gender, identity, and social behaviour. Theatrical studies of objects often focus on the use value of onstage objects, and artistic analyses occasionally approach the object as disparate from the agentive human subject. Though objects play important roles in their interactions with and usage by performing bodies, they also enact their own importance as agents within performance. Reading the female-identifying body in conjunction with nonhuman objects generates productive discussions on the multiple positions that the female body occupies in performance. Such a reading further reveals that these positions are framed by social and aesthetic conditions that guide both the performance and viewing of female bodies. My thesis draws on Marina Abramović's *Rhythm 0*, Pina Bausch's *Bluebeard*, and Aliza Shvarts' *Untitled (Senior Thesis)* to explore the challenging of subject/ object binaries that takes place in feminist performance. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as New Materialism in connection with Performance Studies and Gender Studies theories and concepts, I analyse archival records of the three performances to explore the nexus between objecthood and the female body. My analysis suggests that when the female body takes on the role of an object, it interacts with nonhuman objects and with spectating bodies to highlight the agentive capacities that objecthood can offer. I then propose that the links between performing bodies, nonhuman objects, and performance frameworks display the shifting positionalities of the female body in artistic and social relationships. Lastly, my thesis argues that the female body can occupy multiple object positions at the same time. I also note that it can shift between these positions, highlighting its duality as a material and metaphorical entity. Based on these findings, I conclude that objecthood is an ambiguous position rather than a restrictive state, and that it allows for opposition against social frames that aim to constrain female bodies and subjectivities. I posit that looking at diverse forms of

performance layers analyses of the female body in performance. My analysis comments on the positioning of female bodies in society and the ways in which female performers work with the ambiguous, unstable intersections of subject and object to push against these conventions. Lastly, I conclude that thinking through the multiple ways in which female performers inhabit, resist, and subvert positions of objecthood highlights how conditions of performance and representation reference the physical and social positioning of the female body.

Résumé

Les développements dans le monde de l'art, tels que l'art performatif, ont influencé les analyses théoriques et pratiques des interactions entre l'homme et l'objet en ce qui concerne le genre, l'identité et le comportement social. Les études théâtrales sur les objets se concentrent souvent sur la valeur d'usage des objets sur scène, et les analyses artistiques abordent parfois l'objet comme distinct du sujet humain doté d'agentivité. Bien que les objets jouent un rôle important dans leurs interactions avec les corps performants et leur utilisation par ces derniers, ils jouent également un rôle important en tant qu'agents au sein d'une performance. La lecture du corps féminin en conjonction avec des objets non humains génère des discussions productives sur les multiples positions que le corps féminin occupe dans une performance. Une telle lecture révèle en outre que ces positions sont encadrées par des conditions sociales et esthétiques qui guident à la fois la performance et l'observation des corps féminins. Ma thèse s'appuie sur *Rhythm 0* de Marina Abramović, *Bluebeard* de Pina Bausch et *Untitled (Senior Thesis)* d'Aliza Shvarts pour explorer la remise en question des binaires sujet-objet présents dans les performances féministes. En m'appuyant sur des cadres théoriques tels que le nouveau matérialisme en relation avec les théories et concepts des *performance studies* et des études de genre, j'analyse les documents d'archives des trois performances pour explorer le lien entre l'objectité et le corps féminin. Mon analyse suggère que lorsque le corps féminin prend le rôle d'un objet, il interagit avec des objets non humains et avec des corps spectateurs pour mettre en évidence les capacités d'action que l'objectité peut offrir. Je propose ensuite que les liens entre les corps performants, les objets non humains et les cadres de performance montrent les positions changeantes du corps féminin dans les relations artistiques et sociales. Dernièrement, ma thèse soutient que le corps féminin peut occuper plusieurs positions d'objet en même temps. Je note également que ce dernier peut passer d'une position à l'autre, soulignant sa dualité en tant qu'entité matérielle et métaphorique. Sur la base de ces résultats, je conclus que l'objectité est

une position ambiguë plutôt qu'un état restrictif, et qu'elle permet de s'opposer aux cadres sociaux qui visent à contraindre les corps et les subjectivités féminines. Je postule que l'examen de diverses formes de performance permet d'enrichir les analyses du corps féminin dans ces dernières. Mon analyse commente le positionnement des corps féminins dans la société et les façons dont les artistes féminines travaillent avec l'intersection ambiguë et instable du sujet et de l'objet pour s'opposer à ces conventions. Enfin, je conclus que la réflexion sur les multiples façons dont les artistes-interprètes féminines habitent, résistent et subvertissent les positions d'objectité met en lumière la manière dont les conditions de performance et de représentation font référence au positionnement physique et social du corps féminin.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to multiple people for their help with this thesis:

My supervisor, Professor Katie Zien, who went above and beyond in reading and commenting on drafts, meeting with me to discuss my thesis, and supporting, encouraging, and advising me throughout the entire process.

Professors Erin Hurley, Paul Yachnin, and Miranda Hickman, whose courses gave me new knowledge and enabled me to develop different parts of my thesis.

Mariève, Donetta, and the rest of the Graphos team, whose meetings and writing sessions provided invaluable motivation and support.

My parents, who have provided material and emotional support throughout my academic career, and who believed in me and allowed me to follow my own path.

My friends: Brianna, who read and commented on my drafts, listened to me, and was always there for me, Maira and Faiz, whose friendship, feedback, and positive reinforcement have kept me going throughout the M.A. programme, and Jay, who generously shared his work with me. And my roommates: Shashini, Tharushi, and Seunghyun, who helped me with tech issues and have been there for me over the past two years.

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Introduction

Marina Abramović is threatened with a gun in *Rhythm 0*. Beatrice Libonati, playing Judith in Pina Bausch's *Bluebeard*, is dragged across the floor like a lifeless doll by the dancer playing Bluebeard. Aliza Shvarts allegedly repeatedly inseminates herself and ingests abortifacient in *Untitled (Senior Thesis).* Factors such as materiality and discourses of objecthood around the female-identifying body unite these performances.[1] These performances are compelling because of their disruptive and reactionary nature. Additionally, their representation of the female body as embedded in networks of affect and objectification elicits powerful commentary on gender and its relationality. While female objectification and the workings of the male gaze are key aspects of the performances, they also question social contexts that influence how women and their bodies are positioned, such as abortion debates and the control of the reproductive body.

Discussing the material objects used in the three performances presents materiality as an integral component of the performances and as a framework for analysing them. Objects take on a multiplicity of roles in performance, for example as props and other stage objects. They are often central to meaning and theme, taking on a symbolic dimension that elevates them above their everyday functions. Bernstein's discussion of the "scriptive thing" and Andrew Sofer's analysis of props as agents in performance are key resources for my analysis of the material objects in these performances. This analysis highlights the body's standing as an object and how this standing shifts and changes during performance and its interpretation. My thesis analyses the relationship between objecthood in performance and the female body by considering the inextricable links between the material and the symbolic and the ways in which objects influence interpretation. The objects that I analyse in each performance are either

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[1] Although I move on to talk about 'the female body', this is to reduce the word count rather than to suggest that the term 'female' is a unifying/ exclusionary category.

used by, used on, or frame the performing female body. I trace links between the work that the objects and my interpretation of them perform in subject formation and the female body and identity.

Psychoanalytical debates around the female as subjugated, both physically and discursively, by the all-encompassing, all-governing phallus reinforce the link between gender and objecthood. Most evident, perhaps, is the patriarchal tendency to objectify women and to exoticise and debase the female body because of its physical and semiotic otherness. I examine how female performers respond to limitations of their agency and subjecthood using material objects, their own bodies, and the material and discursive frameworks that frame them, and question whether, in so doing, they successfully coopt their own objectification and objecthood as spaces of agency.

My thesis draws on Marina Abramović's *Rhythm 0* (1974), Pina Bausch's *Bluebeard* (1977), and Aliza Shvarts' *Untitled (Senior Thesis)* (2008) to present its argument. I initially chose these three pieces based on my affective reactions to them and their relationship to abjection. However, I gradually realised that the three works present a far more interesting commentary on objecthood. Their differences in genre, content, and form make them more interesting to analyse against and in relation to each other, as opposed to works that have more generic and thematic similarities. Furthermore, the two works from the 1970s are located within discourses specific to the time (such as feminist art and second-wave feminism) that influence and precede the contemporary postfeminist concerns that Shvarts' piece references. Additionally, the three performers are all controversial figures in their fields. Bausch's revolutionary influence through Tanztheatre has led to her pieces being performed and discussed to this day, while Abramović's daring and prolific body of work continues to be reperformed, added to, and appreciated. Likewise, Shvarts' work draws on queer, feminist lenses to present contentious topics such as reproduction.

New Materialism and Objects

Props

Theatre and Performance Studies often discusses matter and objects and their semiotic and affective properties.[2] Such analyses generate productive discussions of posthumanism and the move beyond anthropocentrism. Andrew Sofer's framework of the prop and its role in theatre is a promising framework for understanding things' agentive capacities and their influence over human action. Props and stage objects occupy their own spaces and levels of agency in performance, despite often being neglected and ignored in historical analysis (Sofer, *The Stage* 2). Sofer defines a prop as "a discrete, material, inanimate object that is visibly manipulated by an actor in the course of performance", an object that "goes on a journey" whereby it guides and scripts historical and spatial narratives (*The Stage* 2, 11). Props come into existence within actor-object interactions and signify differently onstage and offstage (Sofer, *The Stage* 12). As material participants in action that script both time and space in performance, they play active roles as material and semiotic agents in performance (Sofer, *The Stage* 2). Sofer emphasises that props are "material ghosts" that enliven stage action and animate meaning, albeit by the active presence of a human subject (*The Stage* 3, 20). Props are also recalcitrant and semiotically subjective, becoming defamiliarised because of their dual material/ semiotic nature (Sofer, *The Stage* 24, 25). Approaching the objects used in the three performances as props reframes their use-value in performance and in daily life.

Scriptive Things

New materialism, Actor-Network Theory, Thing Theory, and Posthumanism have all contributed to theoretical developments in Performance Studies by decentring subjectivity and positioning the object within subject-object relations (Sofer, "Review" 674). Actor-Network

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[2] Work by Marvin Carlson, Andrew Sofer, Rebecca Schneider, Diana Taylor, Joseph Roach, Brian Massumi, and Robin Bernstein, for instance.

Theory (ANT) ascribes agency to the nonhuman and highlights the links between humans and the nonhuman world. Central to ANT is Latour's concept of the "social", which focuses on the work of actors and their interactions and connections (Latour 46). The concept of an actant is a key part of this theory. Emerging out of semiotics, narratology, and critical theory, the concept focuses on the active roles that human and nonhuman entities play in narrative ("Actant"). Bernstein emphasises that objects' materiality and composition can sometimes suggest or invite specific behaviours ("Scriptive Things" 71). She defines a scriptive thing as "an item of material culture that prompts meaningful bodily behaviours" (Bernstein, "Scriptive Things" 71). The "scriptive thing" furthers the distinction between things and objects, where "a thing focuses a person into an awareness of the self in material relation to the thing" (Sofer, "Review" 683). Scripts assert themselves in a theatrical sense, where behaviour is guided by a set of prompts that influence (but do not determine) live performance and behaviour, allowing for human resistance and revision (Bernstein, "Scriptive Things" 71). While things script behaviour, objects do not, and things (unlike objects) can hail and interpellate humans (Bernstein, "Scriptive Things" 72, 77). A key point in Bernstein's work is the idea of human resistance against the scripts that things suggest. Further takeaways are the ways in which scripts circumscribe human agency and how marginalised subjects can coopt and resist the scripts that things establish for human behaviour (Bernstein, "Scriptive Things" 79). Abramović's performance provides a fertile point of departure for this sort of analysis, given the multiple objects present in the performance and the level of audience interaction that is called for.

New Materialism

Performance studies analyses are closely relevant to new materialism theories in ways only beginning to be acknowledged (Schweitzer and Zerdy 3). New materialism emerged in relation to materialism, a critical and philosophical field that responds to religious models of

thought and highlights how physical, tangible entities lead to mental, social, and other connections (Coole and Frost 5, 6). New materialism approaches matter as both agentive and discursive, questioning the tendency to view language as the only means of meaning-making (Barad, qtd. in Schneider, "New Materialisms" 7). Schweitzer and Zerdy note that the "new(ness)" of new materialism reflects materialist theories, especially their grounding in Marxist philosophy and emphasis on matter's centrality in social and daily life (4). New materialism is distinct from materialism because it challenges the boundaries between human and nonhuman, nature and culture, and uses a "dialectical methodology" (Schweitzer and Zerdy 4, 5). These boundaries are further complicated by advances in biotechnology and digital technology, which are pushing the boundaries of what it means to be human and nonhuman (Coole and Frost 16).

New materialism is central to my analysis because of its framing of matter and physical objects. New materialist theorists consider the influence of nonhuman materialities as agents and primary motivators of action, promoting the idea of "living matter" (Bennett 47, 50). New materialists centralise matter as a productive, resilient force that is both "self-constituting" and reconfigured by "intersubjective interventions that have their own quotient of materiality" (Coole and Frost 7). These analyses extend beyond the human to deemphasise human agency via a stronger focus on objects, animals, and the nonhuman world, positioning human and nonhuman entities as intertwined (Schweitzer and Zerdy 5).

Viewing matter as "active…productive, uncreatable" necessitates a reframing of simplistic views of causation (Coole and Frost 9). Although social structures and dynamics exert force over the human condition, matter also plays a formative role in human relationships and existence. New materialism suggests that order to recognise matter's "self-transformative", agentive capacities and centrality to existence—states and conditions that are typically positioned within an ideal, external, subjectivist realm—we must rethink our understanding of

matter (Coole 92). Significant too are matter's slipperiness and refusal to be apprehended, whereby it is "indeterminate" in ways that suggest that "'matter becomes' rather than 'matter is'" (Coole and Frost 10).

New materialism focuses on relationality and on the agentive potentialities of "materials in relation", and its analyses sometimes incorporate human bodies' materiality (Schneider "New Materialisms" 7). Sara Ahmed's work intertwines materialism and gender, challenging the assumption that feminism is anti-materialist and antibiological; this in turn has led to the setting up of new materialism "as a gift to feminism in its very refusal to be prohibited by feminism's prohibitions" (24). Relationality is key when considering the connections between performing bodies, gender, performance objects, and sociopolitical conditions.

Performance Studies converses with new materialism through 'theatricality' and 'choreography', unsettling subject/ object borders and overturning questions of agency and action (Schneider, "New Materialisms" 14). Approaching objects as agentive shifts our understanding of human-object interactions, and analysing nonhuman objects alongside human objects reveals objecthood as a site of agency. New materialism intersects with feminism via the material world's influence on bodies (including female bodies); bodies draw their agency, identity, and social positioning in **relational** engagements with matter, space, time, and materiality (Ahmed 24, emphasis added).

New materialism risks creating a binary between materiality and culture, one that scientific and other fields have worked towards challenging (Ahmed 33). Furthermore, new materialism may fetishise matter as a purely theoretical entity, ignoring its complexities and multiplicities (Ahmed 35). Another issue is its devaluation of human responsibility in favour of inanimate objects' agency (Coole, qtd. in Schneider, "New Materialisms" 10). One of the most significant critiques of New Materialism is its "romantically expanded liveness', where conferring agency upon the inanimate ignores broader discourses on human rights, with

millions of people lacking agency and basic self-determination rights (Schneider, qtd. in Sofer, "Review" 683). Lastly, scholars who use new materialist methodologies and frameworks need to foreground the sociopolitical elements of their studies and avoid deemphasising and depoliticising social realities. One way of doing this may be by combining new materialism with Gender Studies and other fields.

Contextualising Feminist Performance

Art and the Material

Meaning and matter are intertwined in human existence because of the body's material capacities for agency (Coole 101). Corporeality unites the physical and the metaphysical, allowing the body's materiality to come into being and coexist alongside idealism (Coole 102). Bodily space is "lived spatiality", and the body inhabits and influences space and time through movement and gesture (Coole 102). Art, too, plays a significant role as an intermediary in these relationships, with perception and creativity guiding daily life and scopic regimes (Coole 104). The female body as dual subject and object of art critiques its own social and discursive positioning in the performances I analyse (Brand 2). For example, Shvarts' performance generated strong reactions against its approach to abortion and female bodily effluents. Materiality is integral to feminist art, given that the maternal body and gendered bodily effluents such as breast milk and menstrual blood are coded as abject and as tied to social reproduction (Brand 2). Thinking through the material implications of feminist performance also allows for a recognition of the historical and material conditions of production and of the gendered, corporeal body as "the site of struggle" (Brand 2, 3).

A general tendency of feminism has been to reject associations between the female body and materiality, given that female bodies are always already marked as material. Feminisms have instead resorted to culture, discourse, and language as contrasts to materiality (Alaimo and Hekman 1). This is accompanied by a movement away from rendering the female

body visible and apprehensible by way of its materiality (Alaimo and Hekman 3). This movement prioritises the discursive over the material, which is a problematic binary in postmodern feminisms (Alaimo and Hekman 3). Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman suggest integrating the material and discursive, positioning bodily materiality as a site of possibility and resistance, whereas older feminist theory turned to the discursive to avoid materiality and its reobjectification of female bodies (1-4). Performance and body art are significant interlocutors here, emphasising embodiment and the intertwining of discursive and material in bodies' existence and workings (Alaimo and Hekman 7).

Defining Performance

Performance is an inherently contested concept, and theorists like Richard Bauman note its "consciousness of doubleness", where action that is executed exists alongside "a potential, an ideal, or a remembered original model of that action" (Carlson, "What Is Performance?" 71). Performance gives rise to "new consciousness" in response to existing social conditions (Shepherd 133). It proposes a "polymorphous thinking body" that challenges textual authority, illusionism, and canonical art forms to unsettle audience interpretation and reject simplistic analysis (Diamond 85). Multiple developments in the art world influenced feminist performance. These developments provide contextual information on the three female performers' motivations and influences.

Relational Art, Hardship Art, and Viennese Actionism

Relational art, an "outgrowth of installation art", creates intersubjective encounters where meaning emerges in response to environment and audience, transcending unilinear relationships between art and its viewers (Bishop 54, 62). Relational art challenges static notions of the object, and has both political and emancipatory goals (Bishop 62). "Hardship art" or "ordeal art", another performance genre, evokes the singular body as a metonym for pain as nonreciprocal, and distinguishes between presence and representation (Phelan 152).

Viennese Actionism emerged during the 1960s and 1970s in the work of artists like Hermann Nitsch, Günter Brus, and Joseph Beuys (Goldberg 164). These performances were "emotive and expressionistic" and drew on action painting and ritual to explore sacrifice, catharsis, suffering, and primitivism (Goldberg 164). Male actionists often explored and emphasised a masculine subjectivity and martyrdom (Jones, *Body Art* 130). Amelia Jones writes that masochistic male body art emphasised "the integrity of the male *heterosexual* body" as indexed in "the conflation of the penis with the phallus of paternal law" (Jones, *Body Art* 234, emphasis in original). Viennese Actionist principles were also coopted by artists like VALIE EXPORT, Gina Pane, and Marina Abramović, who also displayed dramatic self-expression and a focus on psychology (Goldberg 164). Abramović's work explores themes such as "the ritualized pain of self-abuse" and the distance between body and self (Goldberg 165). However, her gender and bodily visibility significantly alter both her performance setup and its reception.

Conceptual and Body Art

Both concept and body played central roles in art and activism between the 50s and the 70s, with conceptual body art stemming political urgency or conceptual concerns that were converted into bodily action (Jones, "Encountering" 21, 23). Artists' bodies were central to their artwork and activated the bodies of audience members as "*participants* in the construction of meaning and value" that the work undertook (Jones, "Encountering" 21, emphasis in original). The conceptual body in performance was also a by-product of anticolonial and rights movements unfolding from the 1950s onwards across Europe and North America (Jones, "Encountering" 14). Conceptualism, or "idea art", arose in the 1960s, and views art as a process rather than a product or thing (Jones, "Encountering" 13). While performance involves a shift from metaphor to metonymy, performance art complicates this shift by making the performer's body both the subject and object of performance (Phelan 150). Body art and other such forms

also reframed approaches to the 'ordinary' through a political bent that drove new thinking (Shepherd 117).

According to Lucy Lippard, conceptual art emerged in the late 1960s, transcending art's object-centric focus by centralising the idea or intent behind a work of art (vii). She suggests that conceptual art creates "a bridge between the verbal and the visual" (Lippard x). This is especially interesting because Shvarts' work both relies on and transcends the verbal and the visual, challenging both these states. By moving away from the art object and the commodification of art, conceptual art conveyed its political intent through its form rather than its content (Lippard xiv). Conceptual art rose in popularity when political and feminist art was exploring questions around representation, gender, and the quotidian during the 1980s and 1990s (Lippard xxii). It provided a means for women to enter the art world, with the media that drove conceptual art (such as video, performance, and narrative) encouraging female participation and enabling them to bring in concerns relating to feminist politics, role-playing, narrative, daily life, and autobiography (Lippard xi). Conceptual art is a useful framework because of my focus on objects and the body; since conceptual art moves away from the primacy of an art object, it is useful to consider what it reveals about feminist politics and artmaking. It is also useful because of its relationship to processes of production and reproduction; artists criticised modes of art production, reception, and distribution through their focus on the problems of art's commodification (Wark 44). The link that conceptual artists sought to create between their artwork and institutional and ideological structures and processes is also relevant to feminist art such as Shvarts', which addresses the societal structures and frames that restrict women's sexual and individual agency (Wark 44).

The 1970s Performance Tradition

Performance in the 1970s arose out of 1960s art forms and sociopolitical movements and concerns. Performance art, body art, and other interdisciplinary forms developed in the

1970s, with women featuring prominently in their development and propagation. One element of 60s art that carried over to 70s art was aesthetic radicalism, an attempt to transcend existing art and language (Graham, qtd. in Foote). Artists expressed a desire to reduce the gap between art and life, and created reactionary "disturbatory art" to address war and other such crises (Danto 31). Critics linked body art in the 60s and 70s that invoked violence and self-harm (such as work by Abramović, Burden, Pane, and others who underwent physical suffering in their work) to the post-war landscape and the effects of war (Weir 114). Its early expressions in the 1970s appeared in the work of artists who "cut open other bodies or damaged their own" (Shepherd 117). Artists such as Orlan employed spectacle and self-directed violence to confront viewers and position the female body as "'a site of public debate'" (Orlan, qtd. in Faber 108). Art in the 60s and 70s also integrated art and situation and highlighted the separation of mind and body, possibly leading to the distinction of performance art and conceptual art (Jones, "Encountering" 19). In contrast to these artists and the direct physical violence that they evoked and underwent, Bausch's work instrumentalises cruelty as a metaphor to confront audiences and convey her political messages (Weir 114).[3]

Performance Art

Marvin Carlson notes that performance artists foreground their bodies and experiences, rendering them performative in "their consciousness of them and the process of displaying them for audiences ("What Is Performance" 71). Although a multidimensional practice that resists definition (Goldberg 6), performance art can be defined based on spatial and temporal location, artists' engagement in activity, and the (usual) presence of an audience (Marsh, qtd. in Ward, "Some Relations" 36).

Performance art often highlights the self-conscious, reflexive, theatrical, and socially aware climate of the contemporary world (Carlson, "What Is Performance" 72). Performance

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[3] The literature on Bausch's work and influences is included in Chapter 2.

art also problematises simplistic understandings of subjectivity by using the body to highlight the impossibility of securing the connection between subjectivity and the body (Phelan 151). While distinctions regarding the real and the representational in performance art and theatre risk oversimplifying their disciplinary boundaries, bodies in both forms undergo semiosis and processes of meaning-making (Diamond 85). Lenses such as haunting, theatricality, and subject-object relations, additionally, bridge performance art and theatre, allowing for an understanding of how the two forms feed into each other.

Viewing Performance Art

As the animate subject of their artwork, performance artists function as both artistic subject and object (Stiles, "Performance" 75, 76). The body then becomes a mode of expression and means of experience, contributing to embodied rather than disengaged viewing and enabling "kinaesthetic empathy", which encourages audiences to identify with the performing body (Oliver 120; Thielemans 1; Duggan 56). Performance art also alters subject-object relations within art by unifying performing and viewing subjects who both act and interact (Stiles, "Performance" 75).[4] These features form a contrast to many conventional visual art practices, where artists produce an artwork that then exists apart from them as an external, tangible reality. While the connection between viewer and performer is also a feature of theatre, these scholars and the discourse around performance art and its origins provide a means of situating performance art pieces within their sociohistorical contexts.

Feminist Performance and the Female-Presenting Body

Objectification

Thinking through the aims and reception of feminist performance underscores its relationship with objecthood. Female bodies are simultaneously circumscribed by invisibility

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[4] I also reference some of this literature in a previous article (Constantine, R. Shannon. "Embodying Memory: Intersections between Sri Lankan Performance Art and Prosthetic Memory." *Society and Culture in South Asia*, (20220824), 2022, https://doi.org/10.1177/23938617221105592).

and hypervisibility. As a body "automatically shadowed by the history of (its) signification" female-identifying bodies always already signify, both literally and symbolically (Schneider, *The Explicit* 17). Feminist art is often interpreted literally, precluding possibilities for figurative interpretation (Doyle 35). Apart from being sexualised and objectified, female bodies are also pathologised and portrayed as spaces in need of remedy (Davis 6, 14). This pathologisation is especially significant in Shvarts' performance, which exposes attempts to secure, contain, and govern bodily boundaries and effluents via medical discourses (Laqueur 14). Diamond proposes that feminist performance brings broader historical and sexual discourses into the contemporary moment, allowing for meaning, interpretation, and temporality that unsettles the subject's position (164). As such, feminist artists bring present and past into a productive tension that inflects performance time, converting it into a "now-time of insight and transformation" (Diamond 149). 1970s feminist art drew 60s second wave feminism in its reactions against patriarchal worldviews (Shepherd 118). By highlighting the purpose of artmaking and the role that women's feelings played in motivating their artwork, female performers underlined the self-assertion of female identity (Shepherd 118, 119).

Visuality

Although certain kinds of female bodies (especially those that conform to normative standards of beauty) hold higher levels of "representational visibility", this does not often translate to economic or political power (Phelan 1, 11). Several female performers of the 60s and 70s "(used) their bodies *hyperbolically*" to highlight how women were positioned as passive objects of the male gaze (Shalson 43, emphasis in original). Rebecca Schneider argues that by literalising the body, feminist performers employ a "doubled vision", using the site/ sight dichotomy to look out from their bodies and look back at the gazer, the visual, and the field of vision (*The Explicit* 8). Feminist art and its visibility build upon avant-garde uses of performance, such as by Yoko Ono and other Fluxus artists, who drew on gesture and

performativity, and engagement to underline the ways in which gendered, racialised, and otherwise othered bodies were objectified and victimised by and within society (Jones, *Body Art* 14). By collapsing the distance between viewer and viewed, feminist explicit body performance confronted viewers with their own complicity in viewing, making visible the links between sexuality, vulnerability, and power (Schneider, *The Explicit* 77). The bodily presence of performing female subjects unsettles assumptions of a unified subjecthood and complicates processes of seeing and apprehension (Diamond 151).

Diamond proposes combining Brechtian concepts such as alienation and distancing with feminist theory to highlight the representative possibilities that accompany feminist performance (43, 46). Using Brechtian theory positions the performing female body as signifying "'looking-at-being-looked-at-ness'" or "'looking-ness'"; as representing the confines of representation (Diamond 52). By putting the female body on display, female performers challenge Western ways of knowing and seeing, the hierarchy between a "masculinised subject (given to know)" and a "feminised object (given to be known)" (Schneider, *The Explicit* 22). Performers went against hierarchical viewing systems that interpellated women's bodies as objects and safely distanced viewers from the objects of their viewing (Schneider, *The Explicit* 71). This mode of vision also questioned constructions of the feminist subject as inferior, lacking, and as constantly desiring the position of the male (Diamond 157). Schneider writes that the collapse of distinctions between the symbolic and the literal produces a "binary terror" that conflates sacred and obscene and unsettles viewing and social positions (*The Explicit* 18).

Mimesis

Feminist performance works both with and against mimesis. Elin Diamond analyses mimesis (which differs from similarity and reproduction) as enabling a more critical exploration of the resemblances and links between subjects and objects in feminist performance

(Diamond ii, 104). The collapse of the symbolic and the literal in feminist performance encourages a "counter-mimesis" that conflates sign and referent, highlighting their theatricality and performativity (Schneider, *The Explicit* 117). Schneider criticises the "counter-mimicry" that female performers employ for not being critical, distant, or subversive enough (*The Explicit* 134). By invoking their own objecthood, feminist performers expose the binaries and power dynamics that undergird "phallic representation" (Diamond 160). Feminist performers often use their bodies explicitly to highlight the historical, political, cultural, and economic structures that mark female bodies as 'other' (Schneider, *The Explicit* 2, 17). Audiences reacted negatively when feminist performance first emerged, overtly because of its use of nudity, but possibly also because of the agency and subjectivity performers displayed in instrumentalising their own bodies (Schneider, *The Explicit* 35). Female Fluxus artists and cultural feminists used their bodies materially and explicitly in performance to capitalise on the "paradox of being artist and object at once" (Schneider, *The Explicit* 35, 38).

The Trap of Visibility

Performance art continues to receive criticism from both within and outside the art world, especially when it is sexually explicit. Women and other marginalised groups are often scrutinised for the heightened visibility that they accord their bodies in such performances. Art historian and founder of the *Feminist Art Journal* Cindy Nemser expressed a concern that when performance artists—especially those who identify as female—treat their bodies as objects, they reinforce an absence of bodily integrity, rather than uniting subjecthood and objecthood as intended (qtd. in Shalson 40). Critics such as Max Kozloff protest that setting the body up as an object courts dehumanisation and objectification, with voyeurism guiding both viewer and performer (qtd. in Shalson 41).

The gap between representation and reality complicates the female body's visibility— while "the visible real is employed as a truth-effect for each discursive real", the visible real

cannot function as a representational real (Phelan 3). This suggests that instrumentalising the material female body cannot always successfully combat the conditions that constrain women and their bodies. Phelan argues that political agendas that seek representation and visibility for the underrepresented or unrepresented without scrutinising the politics of the visible and the power distribution embedded in these channels constitute flawed means of addressing these issues (26). Feminist performance must constantly grapple with the notion that women draw existence and value from representation, a state that "both precedes and confines (them)" and positions them within a reality that is "always already fantastical" and representational (Schneider, *The Explicit* 51). Female artists in the 1970s, especially, were accused of furthering their own oppression by using their own bodies in their art (Shalson 42). As such, it is important to look more closely at objectification and objecthood as valid points of departure and powerful aesthetic positions.

The Contemporary Moment

Postmodern performance operates against the art object, turning to theatricality to effect a self-conscious and overt manipulation of the audience (Diamond 151). Shvarts' work displays the influence of both 70s and 90s art traditions. 1990s art shifted away from the concerns that had characterised the 60s and 70s towards discourses considered "extrinsic" to art and discourses about art (Jones, *Body Art* 20). Artists became more involved in social processes and situations during the 1990s, allowing for a more consciously "relational" or "participatory" form of art came that built upon 1960s situations and concepts (Jones, "Encountering" 20).

Criticism of Shvarts' performance highlights how the female body is controlled and policed under patriarchal worldviews and values (Phelan 145). Her refusal of reproduction was also controversial because of reproduction's close association with representation and the female body, thus casting nonreproductivity and unrepresentability as failings (Phelan 135). Richard Schechner's concept of 'dark play' is useful in analysing *Untitled.* Dark play is a

particularly transgressive and boundary-crossing aspect of performance, and play itself straddles the divide between spectacular and quotidian, abandon and awareness (Roach 278). Combining analyses of reactions against Shvarts and attempts at controlling female reproduction with the idea of play highlights objecthood as a productive position in Shvarts' work.

Drawing on the literature discussed above, I explore the connections between objects in performance in connection with female bodies and their social and relational implications through three main arguments. First, I argue that reading the performing female body through objecthood highlights how human and nonhuman objects speak against constraining frameworks, rather than simply reinforcing notions of passivity and victimisation in relation to the female body. Second, I suggest that props and performing bodies draw attention to the structures that limit female agency in fictional and real-world narratives. Finally, I explore bodily effluents and performance documentation as objects, looking at how they position the female body as simultaneously material and conceptual.

The amount and type of archival and source material available for each performance varied greatly. As such, I approached each work differently and through various definitions and frameworks. Since *Rhythm 0* was performed at a time when Abramović did not record her performances, there is only photographic documentation of the performance. Furthermore, it is unclear whether these photographs were taken by the gallerist or by other staff members at the performer's request, or whether they were taken by members of the audience. Accounts of the performance note that there was a gallerist named Lucio Amelio present who took the Polaroids (Westcott 76). He appears in some of the photos with a camera, suggesting that he did not take all of the archived photographs, but that some were presumably taken by an individual named Donatelli Sbarra, who is credited online as the source of some images. My analysis is based on photographs from a book entitled *Marina Abramović: Artist Body, Performances 1969-1998,*

published by Charta and featuring images from the Marina Abramović Archives in Amsterdam. While this limits my analysis in certain ways, analysing the photographs challenges my understanding of what constitutes performance, and interacts with my focus on objects. Another reason for including the photographs in my analysis is that Abramović's audience incorporated some of the photographs taken at the location (presumably Polaroids) in the performance.

Bluebeard, on the other hand, was filmed during one of its initial performances. The video recording I use allows for movement analysis and gives a sense of how the performance unfolds. However, it has its own limitations—the video recording alters the form and reception of the performance, given its proximity to film. The camera angles and field of vision prevent viewers from seeing the performance in its entirety, and the camera sometimes focuses on individual performers rather than on a more panoramic view of the performance. *Untitled (Senior Thesis)* presents an even more interesting analytical layer. Unlike the other two works, it does not exist as a 'performance' if the term is conventionally understood as an action that is framed or highlighted (Schechner 2). Instead, it only exists in a conceptual form, in fragments or remnants of Shvarts' proposal for her senior Visual Arts degree project. I think that this performance adds complex commentary in terms of both objecthood and the question of how we define performance. In contrast to the other two works, this piece exists in a transient space that blends imagination, intent, and narrative.

In terms of the limitations of this thesis, it must be noted that my analysis and the content of the performances omit discussions of race as a key consideration in objectification and the body's materiality. These three performances feature white artists centrally and exclusively, which is something that I acknowledge—and which does not acknowledge the diversity of the artmaking of the 1970s and beyond. Additionally, the bodies under discussion align with normative beauty standards. The whiteness and attractiveness of these bodies shape

my observations and yield conclusions that will not apply universally, as they are conditioned by whiteness and mainstream beauty norms. Yet, it is not my intention to reiterate the assumptions of normativity and neutrality that surround such bodies; writing from the perspective of a racialised and gendered body, I am interested in looking out from my own positioning towards those expressed in artwork that proved innovative and central in their own time and context. To ensure that I address the performances and my frameworks in as much detail as possible, I also draw on material and information from reviews and critical analyses of the three performances.

My next three chapters deal with the three performances. The first chapter looks at object-body connections in *Rhythm 0* as a participatory performance artwork. The second chapter looks at haunting, narrative, and the female body as object in *Bluebeard*. The third chapter both extends and complicates these discussions by bringing in *Untitled (Senior Thesis)*, which displays subversions of form and intent that encourage a more nuanced reading of objecthood as it emerges in performance and with the idea of the female body as a material and conceptual entity. The thesis ends with a concluding chapter that sums up the themes and ideas discussed in the previous chapters and suggests future directions for research on the topic.

Chapter 1

Body and/as Object: Marina Abramović's Rhythm 0

In this chapter, I analyse how *Rhythm 0* positions the female body as both the object and subject of performance. Reading the performing body and its links to objecthood allows for a closer examination of the agentive capacities of objects (including the female body in this performance) to speak against the discourses and frameworks that constrain them rather than simply reinforcing ideas of passivity and victimisation in relation to the female body. My argument rests on two main ideas: first, the performance's ludic timeframe influences the body's shifting status as subject/object and gives the audience a sense of permissiveness and the licence to treat the performing body as they would a nonhuman object. Second, Abramović challenges the subject-object binary and prevents viewers from categorically apprehending her as either subject or object by denying them access to her interiority. Real time, performance time, and ludic time—the three timeframes that governed the original performance—interact to produce both these states.

As I see it, performance time and ludic time exist within real time, and it is impossible to separate the three. The performance takes place during a fixed portion of time within the broader framework of chronological time (such as the evening on which the performance took place). This block of time interacts with the frameworks with which Abramović provided her viewers (discussed in detail in later sections) to enable a more vague and ambiguous sense of time which I am calling 'ludic time' as connecting to play, dark play, and a sense almost of the bacchanal. I propose that it is because of the permissiveness of this third timescale that viewers behave with the licentiousness that they do, and that this is where they seek to fully cooperate with Abramović's injunction to treat her as they would an object. The ludic timescale in *Rhythm 0* allows Abramović to occupy a position that it is both within and outside real time, and her

co-option of objecthood works as a feminist assertion of agency[5]. Through its liminality, ludic time goes against time as a heteropatriarchal concept. Sue-Ellen Case, for instance, writes that many plays constrain the female experience within the "ejaculatory form" of male drama, which commonly utilises a structure of foreplay, excitation, and ejaculation as its governing logic (Case 129). The performance's ludic timescale also ties into a sense of futurity, which Irigaray describes as an extension of possibilities that are conceivable in the present that then challenges the promise of an inevitably positive future (Jameson, qtd. in Muñoz 13). By troubling subject/ object boundaries and highlighting objecthood as a legitimate position of agency, Abramović's self-objectification allows her to inhabit a zone of future possibility by way of the viewers' actions.

The concept of the actant from Actor Network Theory (ANT), Sofer's discussion of the prop's function in theatre, and Bernstein's concept of the scriptive thing underlie my analysis of the objects. Sofer's and Bernstein's concepts focus on the agentive capacities of objects and their connections to human behaviour, while ANT highlights how both human and nonhuman entities can enact agency. These theories interact with my consideration of time in the performance, and I draw on this two-pronged structure to explore how Abramović exposes notions of a unitary subject and the conscription of the female as object by positioning the performing female body in a dynamic of subjecthood and objecthood. I elucidate how instances of agency and subversion through the performing body restrict attempts at objectification while operating from a position of power within objecthood, thereby suggesting the multiple implications of putting the female body on display.

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[5] While Abramović disavows any feminist bent to her performances, it is difficult to divorce her performances from her gendered identity, as several of them form metacommentaries on gender politics and the experience of inhabiting a gendered body.

Setting Up the Objects

Abramović created *Rhythm 0* as an experiment to challenge the accusations of masochism directed at performance artists by emphasising the audience's role in the unfolding of violence (Westcott 73). Part of her *Rhythm 0* series, the performance is also an instance of her extended exploration into the limits of the human body and psyche (Abramović, "Body Art" 29). This exploration grounds a reading of the body as pushing the subject-object boundary in this performance. The year is 1974, the location Naples' Studio Morra, the site of numerous avant-garde events that included Viennese Actionism and Body Art ("Fondazione Morra"). Abramović's performance and intention reflects the influence of Viennese Actionism and its proponents' ritualistic, sacrificial performances. For six hours, Marina Abramović lays herself bare to her audience in *Rhythm 0*, the final performance in her *Rhythm* series (*Rhythm 10*, *Rhythm 5*, *Rhythm 2*, and *Rhythm 4* being the others). On a table near her, seventy-two objects are laid out for the audience to use as they please, as instructed by a sign that reads "There are 72 objects on the table that one can use on me as desired. I am the object. During this period I take full responsibility" (Abramović, qtd. in Ward, "Marina Abramović" 135) (see fig. 1 below).

List of Objects on the Table	spoon	nails	sheet of white	salt	coat
	cotton	needle	paper	sugar	shoes
	flowers	safety pin	kitchen knife	soap	chair
gun	matches	hair pin	hammer	cake	leather strings
bullet	rose	brush	saw	metal pipe	yarn
blue paint	candle	bandage	piece of wood	scalpel	wire
comb	wax	red paint	ax	metal spear	sulphur
bell	scarf	white paint	stick	bell	grapes
whip	mirror	scissors	bone of lamb	dish	olive oil
lipstick	drinking glass	pen	newspaper	flute	rosemary branch
pocket knife	polaroid camera	book	bread	band aid	apple
fork	feather	hat	wine	alcohol	
perfume	chains	handkerchief	honey	medal	

(Fig.1.) The table and the list

Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 0*, 1974 © Marina Abramović Archives

Marina Abramović, *Artist Body: Performances 1969-1998* (Charta, 1998), p. 81

The performance begins "tamely", with people lifting her limbs, touching her, and performing other actions on her body. In time, the audience becomes more reckless, with people beginning to strip her, cut her skin, and assault her physically and sexually (Abramović, qtd. in Ward, "Marina Abramović" 137). Her eyes become glassier and she starts tearing up, while the audience continues their invasion of her body, smiling and laughing as they do so. As I explain in this chapter, these actions and the reactions of both Abramović and her audience

highlight the body's positioning as object. They also point towards the shifting, ambiguous subject/object space that both the human and non-human objects in the performance occupy. According to some accounts, the performance ended when someone took the loaded gun off the table and forced Abramović to hold it against her temple with her finger on the trigger (McEvilley, qtd. in Ward, "Marina Abramović" 137). This may have happened because of the ethical dilemma and the ensuing conflict between those in attendance (Westcott 76). Others claim that the gallerist terminated the performance when it was scheduled to end (J. Kaplan 6.). Another account states that a man took the gun and pointed it at Abramović's head at some point, but the audience "grabbed it and threw the bullet out of the window" (Stiles, "033 Survey" 80). This uncertainty around the gun as a material object highlights relationships between actor and actant, and this supports the shifting status of agency and objecthood in the performance.

I refer to audiences on two levels: the original performance audience (implying physical presence) and myself as a viewer and critic engaging with performance documentation. My viewing of the photographs stands at a remove from the initial *Rhythm 0* performance. This reflects the doubling that runs through the interpretation of performance archives. As a 'secondary viewer', my engagement with *Rhythm 0* is filtered through multiple factors such as time, distance, context, and the ways in which camera and photographer frame the "evidence". My engagement is also constrained by the material available for analysis (photographs, in this case). As such, my analysis is primarily image-based and focuses on visuality. The photographs are framed in a specifically gendered way, with attention being drawn to Marina Abramović's bare breasts. This gives rise to additional layers of objectification and sexualisation. The photographs also stand as objects that influence performance interpretation in their standing as material evidence. The properties and features of the photographic documentation influence our viewing behaviour in line with how images' coordinates and positions can prompt and

guide human behaviour (Bernstein, "Dances" 68). For instance, Marina Abramović is framed in the centre of several of the photographs. This draws our eyes to her body, and the visual framing then influences our readings of the performance. This portrayal suggests an unstated gender bias (although it could also just be an outcome of how the performance unfolded). The scripting further highlights how photographs perform knowledge and scenarios, rather than merely standing as records of fixed moments in time. As such, the photographs call us, or interpellate us, into guided ways of seeing and knowing that position us as co-participants, allowing the photographs to function as durational events (Schneider, *Performing Remains* 140). It is also significant that there is a lack of clear information on the performance's mechanics (in terms of its speed, intensity, and specific moments within the performance), despite there being multiple accounts of the performance.

A closer look at the list of the objects that were on the table in 1974 reveals a few interesting details. First, although the written instructions state that there were 72 objects on the table, the list in figure 2 lists 73 objects.

List of Objects on the Table	spoon	nails	sheet of white	salt	coat
	cotton	needle	paper	sugar	shoes
	flowers	safety pin	kitchen knife	soap	chair
gun	matches	hair pin	hammer	cake	leather strings
bullet	rose	brush	saw	metal pipe	yarn
blue paint	candle	bandage	piece of wood	scalpel	wire
comb	water	red paint	ax	metal spear	sulphur
bell	scarf	white paint	stick	bell	grapes
whip	mirror	scissors	bone of lamb	dish	olive oil
lipstick	drinking glass	pen	newspaper	flute	rosemary branch
pocket knife	polaroid camera	book	bread	band aid	apple
fork	feather	hat	wine	alcohol	
perfume	chains	handkerchief	honey	medal	

(Fig.2.) The list of objects

Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 0*, 1974 © Marina Abramović Archives

Marina Abramović, *Artist Body: Performances 1969-1998* (Charta, 1998), p. 81

This suggests that two objects were intended for complementary use, possibly the gun and the bullet. Second, the gun and the bullet are itemised separately, suggesting that the gun on the table was not loaded (and therefore that someone loaded it). Since it was used later, this separate

listing suggests that the action was premeditated. The inclusion of the bullet is significant, however. As a scriptive thing, it hails us and demands to be confronted on its own terms; that is, as a weapon. The "weapons effect", although it has since been questioned, is a useful intermediary to bring in here. The weapons effect highlights the militarisation of everyday life, and suggests that the presence of a gun or similar weapon encourages and amplifies tendencies towards aggression and violence, especially in those who already have these tendencies (Brady and Mantoan 2).

Third, in my view, 17 objects can be explicitly identified as objects that incite, or invite, violence (they are highlighted in yellow). The two items highlighted in red can also be interpreted in this way, as they are objects used to assuage injury. As such, it is possible that the object presentation constrained viewer behaviour into very specific and directed channels (although this does not necessarily outweigh or contradict the presence and use value of the other, less threatening objects). This ties into Robin Bernstein's suggestion that objects enact their own force over human behaviour. The table's materiality and visuality also condition the viewers' responses to the objects and to Abramović's invitation. The long table and the white tablecloth draped over it evoke a banquet-like setting, one that invites excess, partake, and engagement. The table may also be interpreted as an altar, which brings in elements of ritual and the sacred ("Marina Abramovic"). While ritual is a pervasive strand in Abramović's work, the invitation that the table's spread extends also invites transgression, or sacrilege, because of the nature of its contents. The objects do not seem to be treated as sacred tools or implements, but instead become weapons and means of control.

The performance moment presented in figure 3 casts new meaning upon the table as a prop that has its own influence over and relationship with human actors.

(Fig.3.) Body as corpse

Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 0*, 1974 © Marina Abramović Archives

Marina Abramović, *Artist Body: Performances 1969-1998* (Charta, 1998), p. 8

The corner of the table on which Abramović's body lies in the photograph suggests that it is

possibly the same table that held the objects at the beginning of the performance. The way that

Abramović's body is positioned is suggestive of a corpse, which, as "the ultimate waste"

(Kristeva 3), might be read as the epitome of objecthood, of subject-turned-object. The table

on which her body lies can be interpreted in several ways—as a gurney, an operating table, a

beauty salon couch, and/or a bed, for instance. In this sense, the table produces an additional

layer of meaning that intersects with her prostrate body and situates it as a corpse-like object.

The fact that the body is covered with a sheet connects to the operating table/gurney reading,

and her fixed expression reinforces the corpse-like aspect of her body. The chain across her

covered body suggests restraint, torture, and a limitation of Abramović's mobility. The laying out of her body on this long banquet table suggests presentation, where Abramović's body is offered up for visual and tactile consumption by the viewers. This granting of access mirrors how female bodies in popular media and in society are positioned as available for consumption and as commodities that are open to public access. The way that Abramović's prone body is posed as a body situated between the poles of death and life connotes ritual, sacrifice, and offering (Kristeva 4). The male participant positioned behind Abramović furthers this reading. He appears to be smiling, and looms over Abramović's inert body with his hands in her hair, and might be read as performing the role of a priest-like figure or divine authority. Physically and visually, he is on a higher level than Abramović, acquiring a sense of power that is conspicuously absent from Abramović's physical position. The photographs of Abramović's other *Rhythm* performances on the wall behind him, however, complicate my interpretation. Their positioning places them on a visually and structurally higher level than the male viewer. Furthermore, the photographs present self-directed pain and endured violence as unifying narratives across the performances. This might have then caused the viewer to assume that Abramović wanted the current performance to take a similar turn, and to direct his behaviour along these lines. This then stands as another instance of how objects can script behaviour and influence human agency.

Although Abramović does not specify her intent for providing these particular objects, some of them are inevitably linked with violence by way of their cultural and social associations (such as violence). We may question how the performance might have unfolded in the absence of the bullet or the knife—what if the only objects present had been the feather, the medal, and other such objects? As Frazer Ward puts it, "it is possible to imagine another version in which Abramović is tickled or massaged or fed cake for six hours" ("Marina Abramović" 139). In such a case, both the direction and intent of the performance would

probably have altered. The nature of the objects, then, plays a strong role in their semiotic functioning. Furthermore, the photographs of Abramović's other performances could have guided the viewers' actions in correspondence with their perceptions of her intentions and performance style. Likewise, these more overtly "violent" objects colour other objects such as the rose, which became a weapon when viewers used its thorns to pierce her skin (McEvilley, qtd. in Ward, "Marina Abramović" 137).

The image in figure 4 is a point of departure for analysing the objects as props that interpellate the viewers in specific and mediated ways.
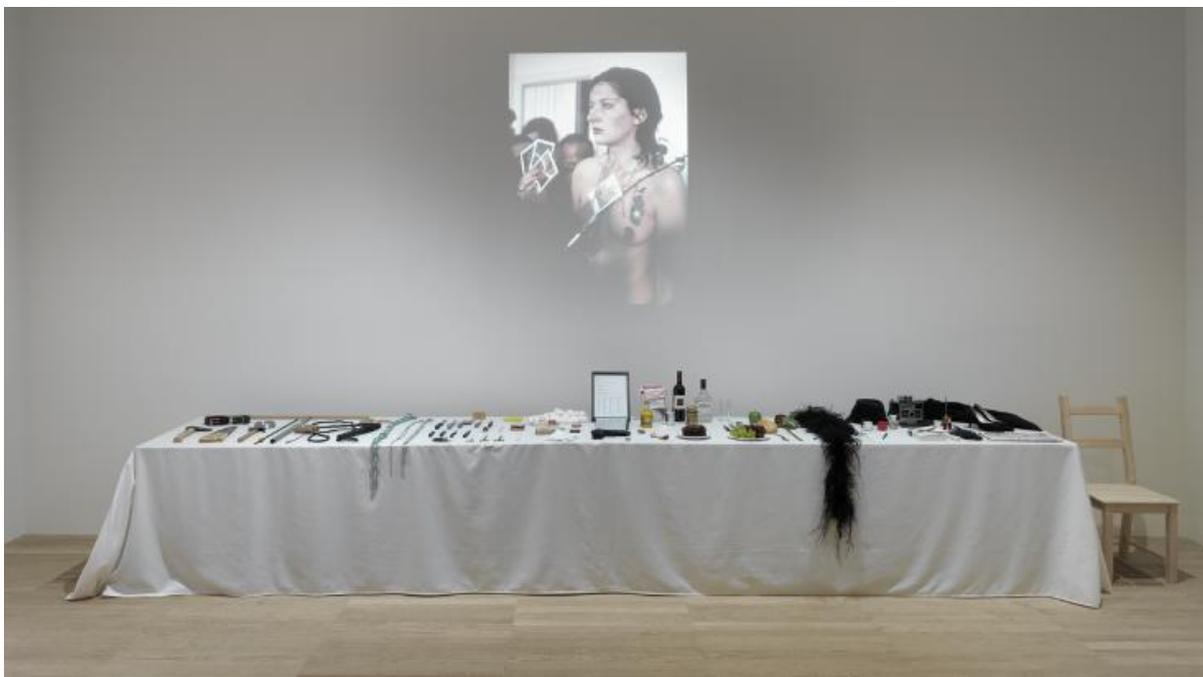
(Fig.4.) Table reconstruction, MoMA 2009

Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 0*, 1974. © Marina Abramović. Photo: © Tate, London [2023]

"Marina Abramović", *Tate*, 2009, www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/abramovic-rhythm-0-t14875

The figure displays a *Rhythm 0* exhibit created for the 2009 Abramović retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. In addition to the 72 objects (although not the originals), the exhibit includes a framed copy of the instructions Abramović originally gave her viewers and a slide projection of the photographic documentation of the performance. On the Tate website, Catherine Wood writes that while the exhibit at the 2009 Abramović

retrospective was not a reperformance, Abramović sought to "physically (incorporate) the 'instruments' used as props in the performance (or their replicas), so that the mechanics of threat and seduction played out in the original work (were) palpable to the viewer, especially when seen in combination with the slides documenting the event" ("Marina Abramovic"). Although Abramović expresses disbelief in objects' power or commemorative value (she talks about her annoyance over the idea of "original objects"), she acknowledges that she kept her shoes and stick from her 1988 performance with Ulay, *The Lovers*, and the white coat from her 1997 *Balkan Baroque* (Biesenbach and Abramović 19). In the Tate exhibit, foregrounding the objects' physicality to represent the effects of and relationships in the original performance positions materiality as a key concern.

Perhaps the clearest example of materiality and its force over human action is how the gun was used in the performance. The fact that Abramović was allowed to use the gun in her initial 1974 performance is a testament to historical time and location. As she has noted, when she wanted to restage the performance in the U.S., she was forbidden from loading the gun and instructed to chain it down in accordance with American law (rendering it harmless) (Biesenbach and Abramović 19). Discourses like the weapons effect contend that the gun can successfully script human behaviour through its design; the ability to kill or maim can be unlocked by placing a finger on the trigger. This contrasts with pervasive arguments that humans have agency and can choose non-violence (and thus nullify the gun's power). To a certain extent, the gun's mere presence may translate to the possibility of death by virtue of the presence of mobile human bodies (Dell'Aria 2). In Latour's formation, the gun is neither "autonomous force" nor "neutral object", but is instead an actant that fuses together gun and shooter, introducing a "citizen-gun", a third agent in the situation (qtd. in Dell'Aria 2). I argue that the gun's standing as an actant (and also as a quasi-object) contributes to the unsettling nature and ambiguity of Abramović's positioning in this performance. While accounts that

state that the performance ended when the gun was levelled at Abramović's temple highlight the very real threat of death, they also reinforce the gun's capacity to disrupt and unsettle the human body's agency and integrity.

The gun's metaphorical and use values within the performance's sociohistorical context expose possible gendered undertones in this situation. Abramović' notes that viewers classified her body along three major roles: Madonna, mother, and whore, because of the pervasiveness of religion and the Church in Italian society at the time ("Body Art" 30). It is also significant that theoretical feminism in Italy began in the 1970s, with the movement generating work ranging from theory and pedagogy to socio-political thought (Anderlini D'Onofrio, qtd. in Kirshner 386). *Rhythm 0* took place during the Years of Lead (Anni di piombo) in Italy. The Years of Lead took place between the 1960s and the 1980s and were characterised by political upheaval and violence, with the word "lead" being a metaphor for bullets (and therefore violence and/or death) (O'Leary 244). Extending this terminology to the performance links the gun and bullet in Abramović's work to Italy's socio-political situation at the time. Although beyond the scope of this chapter, the Years of Lead and their terrorism intersected with the rise of feminist movements in Italy and some parts of the world in the 1970s, with female participation in violence challenging the patriarchal nation-state and gendered social dynamics (Melchiori 28). To a certain extent, the gun is a gendered signifier and signifies the presence and authority of a patriarchal and militarised state. By including a gun in her array of objects, then, Abramović appropriates a weapon of patriarchal control. This overturns, however, when the gun is forcibly turned against her—despite having appropriated this gendered means of control, her power is unsettled when the gun is used against her.

While the gender of the person who used the gun is unknown, it is significant that the gun is put in Abramović's hand, with her own finger on the trigger (rather than being pointed at her by someone else) (see fig. 5). This moment grants Abramović the potential to cause her

own death, and stands as an instance of disrupted objecthood where Abramović's subjectivity comes into focus in a clash between performance time and real time.

(Fig.5.) The gun

Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 0*, 1974 © Marina Abramović Archives

Marina Abramović, *Artist Body: Performances 1969-1998* (Charta, 1998), p. 88

These two time schemes build upon each other to frame how Abramović—as subject-turned object-turned subject—both enacts and undoes her own agency.

Andrew Sofer's theories on the prop's function in performance can also be used to analyse the gun and its use in the performance. Approaching the gun as an object that "goes on a journey" in time and space" (Sofer, *The Stage Life* 2) extends its function beyond its fracturing of ideals of subjectivity and self-integrity (Dell'Aria 2). Analysing the gun as a prop

highlights how it is used within the sense of ludic time afforded by the performance. While it is unclear whether the person who used the gun intended to kill or maim Abramović, it is possible that they viewed their action as part of an object-object relationship encouraged by the artist and by the sense of freedom in the performance. According to Sofer, a prop signifies as a prop (as opposed to just as an object) in conjunction with an actor's presence and force, and it has different onstage and offstage functions (*The Stage Life* 9, 12). The gun's potency and latent threat positions it as an object of destruction even in the absence of human bodies; once confronted with them, it acquires the power to operate as an actant and as an agent of death. A contrast can be drawn between the female body-object as a prop in its latent state (as something to be acted upon within the performance setup) and the gun in its latent state as an index of violence. Though the gun is also used, or acted upon, by the viewers, it does not undergo the process of objectification and disarming that Abramović's body does. The contrast in how both these objects signify as props during and outside the *Rhythm 0* performance suggests that the shifting status of objecthood and the different implications of objecthood are key concerns in analysing the female body in this performance.

Objecthood and the Body

There are three major features that allow the human body to be read as an object in this performance: semiotic interpellation, the framing provided by the other objects, and the actions of the viewers. Although the interpellation and the framing provided by the other objects encourage the viewers of the 1974 performance to view Abramović's body as an object, these two aspects and the archival documentation of these viewers' actions encourage us as contemporary observers to draw our own conclusions. Abramović's instructions to her viewers set her body up as an object that in turn plays a central role in the performance's spectating and relational dynamics. I read the sentence "I am an object" in her written instructions as a performative gesture that is reinforced by her silent, still posture throughout the entirety of the

performance (Westcott, for example, describes her as maintaining a "perfect thousand-yard stare" (76)). This written instruction calls for the performing body to be viewed and treated as an object. The interpellation links to the table of seventy-two objects that confronts the audience—Abramović's immobility and pliability enable a visual, metonymic association between the body and the non-human objects lying on the table. As such, the framework set up for this reading of the body is both visual and linguistic—as Figure 1 at the top of this chapter suggests, a visual precedent is set up for identifying the performing body as an object that is comparable to those near it.

Additionally, the status of the performing body as both subject and object of performance art reinforces the ascription of objecthood to Abramović's body. This implies a relationship between form and content that undergirds the body's presence and centrality. Significantly, Abramović did not include her own body in the list of objects, despite intending to position it as an object. To a certain extent, the distance between her explicit written instructions and this absence on the list highlights the ambiguity surrounding Abramović's agency and control over the performance's unfolding.

It is useful to highlight agency through objecthood as an important lens through which to approach the female body, as Abramović's self-objectification was considered problematic by some critics. Vettese labels Abramović's behaviour and the impetus for the performance as "passive self-sacrifice" that has sadistic overtones (51), echoing accusations directed at early feminist performance art of problematically centring visuality on the body (Shalson 42). Vettese seems critical of the setup and performance dynamic, stating that Abramović draws the audience into the possibility of violence by choosing to acknowledge it (51). She suggests that Abramović offers herself up as a victim while also "acknowledging her non-innocence" (51). Her criticism ignores the strategies of mimesis and mimicry that may underlie the performer's motives and behaviour.

Abramović's performances emerged while feminist thought and body art were becoming more visible. *Rhythm 0'*s setup and proceedings associate it with work by other female body artists such as Gina Pane, Yoko Ono, and VALIE EXPORT. Yoko Ono's 1964 *Cut Piece* and its reperformances are significant interlocutors. *Cut Piece* is based on a similar concept to *Rhythm 0*, where the artist offers herself up to an audience that interpellates her body as an object and uses a pair of scissors to demonstrate this interpellation. Ono's performance and her body's visibility and vulnerability during her performance mirror Abramović's. However, Ono's performance brings in race, an added dimension that colours the viewers' actions and the performance interpretation. Read alongside Abramović's performance, its framing and negotiation of the female body highlight its materiality as a key element.

By buying into and reproducing the dynamics governing female bodies and their visibility in public space, Abramović mimics the very structures that confine her. In so doing, she also speaks back against them. Abramović's positioning of herself in this performance has also been read as centring the "subject-object fluctuation" to alter both intersubjectivity in body art and feminism's fight against objectification (Renzi, qtd. in Dell'Aria 3). In other words, "(by) objectifying herself, she dictates how we should treat her" (Stokić 24). These interplays influence the rest of my analysis in this chapter.

Figure 6 displays a moment in the performance when Abramović was made to hold a set of photographs of the performance, presumably taken by the gallerist Lucio Amelio.

(Fig.6.) Holding photographs

Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 0*, 1974 © Marina Abramović Archives

Marina Abramović, *Artist Body: Performances 1969-1998* (Charta, 1998), p. 90

The set of photographs establishes Abramović as "thrice removed": as an object that shadowed the actions of the audience, the 72 objects' functions, and "her own photographic shadow" (Stiles, "033 Survey" 80). The photograph's framing brings us as secondary viewers into the performance. By holding up the photographs that document her own victimisation, Abramović reflects the actions of the viewers back at them. Given the closeup and the angle of the photograph, Abramović's body and facial expression are highlighted. As such, we are made to remain in the moment with Abramović and are forced to be aware of her emotions and of her behaviour as the assumed object in this piece. Moments like this (where we see evidence of Abramović's emotion through her tears) activate Robin Bernstein's distinction between objects and things, showing that in such moments, Abramović's status shifts from 'object' to 'thing'. Bernstein suggests that things have more potency than objects, and that they make people

"confront (them) on (their) own terms" by directing bodily behaviour in particular ways ("Scriptive Things" 73). These moments of 'thingness' also betray the intrusion of real time into the sense of performance/ ludic time that runs through the piece. This betrayal highlights the complex self-objectification and vulnerability that the performing female body undertakes in this performance. The viewers' failure to respond to Abramović's thingness supports this view. While her tears would prompt action (such as halting the performance, perhaps), the viewers do not comply with this suggested script, highlighting their resistance to the script of vulnerability expressed by the 'thingness' of the performing female body (Bernstein, "Scriptive Things" 79).

In contrast to my argument above, Abramović's account of how the performance ended highlights her thingness as causing the viewers to respond to the script suggested by her altered behaviour. She writes that at the end of the performance, she came out of her immobile state and started walking towards her viewers, who then ran away, unable to confront her ("Body Art" 30). Her movement confronted viewers with the assertion of her personhood. By signalling that the performance had ended, it also caused a shift from ludic/ performance time to real time. This shift signified that the period of permissiveness surrounding her body as a performance object had ended. Here, the intrusion of real time unsettles fixed positions of objecthood (or even subjecthood) by shifting the boundaries between performer and viewers. This highlights the use of a performance strategy where the performing female body functions as prop, object, and thing. Some of Frazer Ward's comments on the performance prove useful here. Ward writes that the performance is "a hyperbolic demonstration of the construction of female subjectivity…as purely exterior, an imposition; a subjectivity without identity except insofar as it is…called something, by a group" ("Marina Abramović" 140). He also notes that the performance revolves around the challenge Abramović levels at the audience and an abandonment of the public/private distinction around the female-identifying body (Ward,

"Marina Abramović" 141). By establishing herself as an object and inviting the audience to engage with her body along these lines, Abramović highlights the female body as an object or surface onto which subjectivity is projected, granted, or taken away. In playing with the distinction between objects and things, the performance calls attention to the precarious status of female subjectivity and the female body.

A second point of interest is Abramović's impassiveness throughout the performance (except during her moments of tearfulness). In choosing to remain immobile, silent, and compliant, Abramović granted viewers access to her body while denying them access to her inner self and subjectivity. This withholding is another instance where real time intersects with performance time and ludic time. Abramović held on to the integrity of her own thoughts and emotions (which I view as part of real time) while the performance unfolded within the other two timescales. I believe that this withholding challenges her objecthood by hinting at a hidden and unreachable subjectivity that unsettles the subject/object binary and prevents viewers from apprehending her as either object or subject. Ward problematises Abramović's attempted linking of body and objecthood, noting that since the body cannot be separated from a subject, it can neither "quite be an object" nor a "readymade" ("Marina Abramović" 138). However, as I have suggested through my arguments, *Rhythm 0* relies on this intertwining of subject and body to highlight positions of objecthood as spaces of agency for the performing female subject.

In instrumentalising a "refusal or reservation of private subjective interiority" (Ward, "Marina Abramović" 138), Abramović also absents herself from the actions that her viewers perpetrate against her. In Figure 7, we see her looking away from the camera and away from the man who is tying something around her waist.

(Fig.7.) Impassivity

Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 0*, 1974 © Marina Abramović Archives

Marina Abramović, *Artist Body: Performances 1969-1998* (Charta, 1998), p. 84

Her expression is frozen despite her teary eyes, forming a stark contrast with the laughing viewers behind her. This makes it difficult to make assumptions about what she is thinking and feeling (although as before, her tears suggest pain and discomfort). Abramović's purposive impassivity in this scene reminds me of Tina Post's discussion of 'awayness' as a means of Black (in)expression in culture, where access to an individual's body through visual images does not necessarily permit a corresponding access to their interiority.[6] In applying this premise to *Rhythm 0*, I note that Abramović's behaviour and impassivity can be analysed as feminist

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[6] See Tina Post's *Deadpan: The Aesthetics of Black Inexpression*. Many of Post's theories are also applicable to feminist art more broadly.

performance strategies that instrumentalise the tenuous divide between subject and object to establish a sense of female agency and identity.

Female performers risk reinscribing patriarchal confines and reobjectifying the female body when its visibility is foregrounded. Analysing a performance like *Rhythm 0* using contemporary lenses highlights how objectification can work as a space of agency. Such performances also portray how female performers sometimes use their own bodies to highlight subjecthood and objecthood as ambiguous positions that they can inhabit for political purposes and to reflect the conditions of objectification. Additionally, the different performance timescales allow restrictive conceptions such as objecthood and responsibility to be nuanced. My next chapter looks at Pina Bausch's *Bluebeard* to explore how objectification emerges as a by-product of gender relations and norms.

Chapter 2

Haunted Objects and Haunted Bodies: Ghostly Encounters in

Pina Bausch's *Bluebeard*

Pina Bausch's *Blaubart- Beim Anhören einer Tonbandaufnahme von Béla Bartóks Oper Herzog* Blaubarts Burg (hereafter *Bluebeard* as a translation of the German *Blaubart*) focuses on gender and objecthood in relation to the fictional female identity.[7] Bausch's portrayal of Judith interweaves multiple textual, gestural, and objectual elements to explore the forces that limit female agency in romantic relationships. I focus on Judith's presence and interactions with Bluebeard across three main interlocutory texts to analyse how Bausch portrays Judith: her choreography, the *Bluebeard* Märchen (fairy tale) read in relation to the libretto that Béla Balázs wrote for Bartók's opera *Bluebeard's Castle*, and the apocryphal Book of Judith.[8] Judith's position as a gendered body-object in *Bluebeard* is best understood through the lens of haunting. Viewing Judith (both as character and as performer) as a figure haunted by her/their relationship to other bodies, objects, and narratives highlights how most social structures and relationships are imbued with patriarchal values.[9] Moreover, the repetitive violence she undergoes is indexed and foreshadowed in the human and nonhuman objects around her. The physical and discursive links between Judith, the props and other objects, and the other bodies on stage foreground Judith's victimisation and her abusive relationship with Bluebeard.

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[7] *Bluebeard- While listening to a tape recording of Béla Bartók's opera* Bluebeard's Castle.

[8] Balázs names Bluebeard's newest wife 'Judith'. In previous iterations, the wife is either unnamed or is given a different name.

[9] Murray and Keefe's notion of the actor as actant in physical theatre is a useful point of departure. They suggest that an actor's body is both functional (that is, capable of signifying through somatic presence) and representational (that is, able to portray character) (41).

Introducing *Bluebeard*

The piece begins with Bluebeard seated in a chair, playing, pausing, and replaying a recording of the music from Bartók's opera. We then see Judith trying to touch him and constantly being rejected. Bluebeard is continually violent, dragging Judith across the floor, pushing her away, and shoving her against the wall. Eight minutes into the piece, a row of men and women (twelve couples) dressed in suits and ballgowns enters the space; these figures become part of the performance, sometimes doubling and interacting with the principal dancers. Fifty minutes into the piece, there are scenes of violence that recall Bluebeard's violence against his previous wives. A woman then enters with a doll, which becomes a focal point of this woman's and Bluebeard's actions. Towards the end, the other couples briefly exit, and Bluebeard and Judith reperform the sequence of actions that took place during the opening. Bluebeard eventually drapes Judith in the other women's discarded dresses and then drags her limp body across the floor and out of the room. The piece ends with the other dancers reperforming some of the previous performance moments. There are several costume changes and a soundtrack guided by the stopping and starting of the tape recorder playing Bartók's music.[10] The dancers' movements remain frantic and disorienting throughout the piece, and their movements are repetitive, with the same sequence of actions often being repeated to an unbearable extent.

Part of what makes this performance a rich and multidisciplinary source is its interweaving of fable, body and bodily movement, narrative, and social reality. The original tale, *Bluebeard* (*La Barbe Bleue* in French), is a Charles Perrault folktale/ fairy tale (Leafstedt 161). The tale appears in various iterations after its initial appearance in Perrault's 1697 *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités or Contes de ma mère l'Oye* (*Stories or*

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[10] Given the length and complexity of the piece, my analysis focuses on key moments and relationships that are integral to my framework, and centres mainly on the figure of Judith.

Tales from Past Times, with Morals or Mother Goose Tales), and elements of the original story are still woven into contemporary media (Leafstedt 161). Pina Bausch diverges from Perrault's fairy tale, using the central couple and the mirroring couples to present a symbolic and expressionistic iteration of the Judith-Bluebeard story. Perrault's fairy tale tells the story of a murderous, rich, blue-bearded man with a penchant for murdering his wives and keeping their corpses behind a locked door in his mansion. He gives his latest wife the keys to his abode so that she can explore his riches, but instructs her not to go into a particular room; she does, and is caught. On the verge of undergoing the same fate as her predecessors, she is saved by her brothers, who murder Bluebeard.[11] Although Balázs and Bartók's version is darker, with Judith meeting the same fate as the previous wives, the narrative is more nuanced and appears more intentionally crafted in terms of theme and character motivation. The opera highlights the two characters' relationship and desires, looks at Bluebeard as an isolated figure who "(thirsts) for redemption through the agency of a woman", and establishes Judith as an influential character in her own right (Leafstedt 163, 177, 430).

Defining Tanztheatre

Bausch uses tanztheatre to explore the dynamics of the *Bluebeard* tale. Tanztheatre, or dance theatre, is rooted in the work of Rudolf von Laban and Kurt Jooss, and reached new formal heights in Bausch's work (with *Bluebeard* being a turning point for her version of tanztheatre) (Grandi 166). Laban's work consisted of "choric dance presentations", while Jooss combined choreographic form and dramatic intent to break boundaries and link the visual, aural, dramatic, and kinaesthetic into a complete event (Climenhaga, *The Pina* 1). Tanztheatre combines the choreographical precision of classical and modern ballet with theatre, free dance, and quotidian movements, gestures, and objects (Grandi 166, 167). German dance underwent

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[11] Plot summary of Perrault's Bluebeard from *Mother Goose's Tales*- English translation accessed through the McGill library website.

a revival following the war, with ballet overshadowing the pre-existing German Modern Dance form, and both traditions called for a departure from American formalist influences (Climenhaga, *The Pina* 2). Bausch was also trained in ballet, learning both its formalist and psychological structures and influences (Climenhaga, *The Pina* 2). As such, ballet strongly influenced both Tanztheatre and Bausch's choreography.

Bausch was inspired by the German Expressionist tradition and by Modern Dance and emotive sixties American dance traditions (Climenhaga, *The Pina* 2). Part of Tanztheatre's relevance to my study lies in its theatricality; Bausch combined postmodern dance and experimental theatre to highlight and make visible the act of performance (Climenhaga, *Pina* 8). Her work at the Wuppertal tanztheatre rose out of her dance training, Brechtian and other experimental theatre influences, and European and American avant-garde theatre traditions (Climenhaga, *The Pina* 3). Her innovations moved dance away from formalist, movement-based forms that were in existence at the time towards a more intuitive and expressionistic style (Climenhaga, *Pina* 2). This imbues her choreography with a visceral sense of performance that is arguably very different from more traditional, linear forms of dance. In Bausch's work, the stage becomes a means of engagement and display, part of the action and emotion that are playing out onstage (Climenhaga, *Pina* 1, 2). In this performance, for instance, the dancers roll around in the dead leaves on the floor, becoming increasingly dirty and symbolically linking their bodies with decay and death.

Tanztheatre and Gender

Bausch draws on Brechtian techniques that effect theatricality in the form of self-reflection, distancing, and audience alienation (Climenhaga, *Pina* 2). Tanztheatre's expressive and visceral nature is expressed in physical gesture and emerges through the dancers' affective experiences and embodied gestures. The Brechtian techniques that Bausch uses activate a feminist critique of Western patriarchal social structures (Price 324). Brechtian epic theatre

focuses on social relations, the quotidian, and "the attitudes which people adopt towards one another", and this frames Bausch's recurrent investigation of male-female relationships (Price 325). For instance, by highlighting her dancers' exhaustion, she draws attention to their physicality and demonstrates "the illusion of a socially constructed subject encased within a body that has been formed by and conforms to a given cultural norm" (Price 326). In so doing, and using Brechtian techniques, Bausch indicates that the gendered female subject is an outcome of sociocultural codes and practices that are repeated and reinforced by society (Price 326). Bausch's version of Tanztheatre highlights the social and cultural values that are ascribed to gender and the body, where gender politics are expressed in performative acts (Price 323). My analysis is influenced by Bausch's engagement of gender construction and the opposition of the sexes and by the inspiration that post-1960s dance drew from quotidian life and the connection between the personal and the political (Climenhaga, *Pina* 9, 14).

The Work of Haunting

Tanztheatre's viscerality and expressiveness provide a point of departure for the lens of haunting. My use of haunting is an outcome of its connection to core ideas that underlie performance studies such as citationality and iteration (Derrida), repetition and "twice-behaved behaviour" (Schechner), and "ghostliness" (Blau) (Mozingo 98). Haunting is also significant on the level of objects and movement. It evokes a sense of objects as haunted by their previous uses and by the actors and bodies that have interacted with them on stage (in line with Marvin Carlson's theories), and of movement as reiterated. As such, my definition of haunting thinks through haunting as a physical and visual condition expressed in the tangible presence of objects and bodies, as well as through the sense of something unseen; a metaphorical layer that underlies Bluebeard's actions in the performance. Haunting is a useful way of thinking through Judith's character in its connections with the other dancers, with Bluebeard, and with theme. Derrida's theory of hauntology in *Spectres of Marx* engages "a pantemporal formulation of

human thought and experience" to entwine past and future in the present, complicating the notion of presence and questioning its dominance through the "ontology of absence" (Rahimi 6). *Bluebeard* and other performances explore the social construction of gendered bodies and relationships, showing how pervasive and problematic these constructions are, and how they recur across multiple situations and temporalities. Given this recurrence and repetition, haunting provides a means of re-examining gendered relationships and their patriarchal underpinnings and of exploring their emergence in performance and in narrative. The figure of the ghost becomes important here as a means of connecting past, present, and future in ways that complicate notions of time and presence (Rahimi 5). Haunting appears across the physical performing bodies of the other couples (especially in scenes involving Bluebeard's past wives). It also emerges through the props, which can then be read as "material ghosts" that reinforce action and animate meaning, especially through human presence and action (Sofer, *The Stage Life* 3, 20).

Thinking through ghostliness and ghostly presence ties into notions of the everyday as haunted and shadowed by ghosts (Rahimi xiv). Haunting unsettles materiality, imbuing it with a dual sense of presence and absence. It overturns impulses to equate truth with the inherent idea of a thing by indicating the alternative meanings and implications that underpin the thing and its materiality (Powell and Shaffer 1). My use of haunting stems from a chapter by Karen Mozingo titled "The Haunting of Bluebeard—While Listening to a Recording of Bela Bartok's Opera 'Duke Bluebeard's Castle'", which traces the through-line that weaves across Bausch's performance and its grounding in literature, culture, and history. I read haunting across bodies, objects, and choreography in *Bluebeard*, and approach haunting along two axes: textual (the different versions of the tale and Bausch's own narrative) and bodily (human and nonhuman objects that influence the performance).

Textual Haunting

From the outset, the performance sets Judith up as a doomed figure whose agency and very life depend on the mercy of her new husband. This threat is manifested through the set and props present on stage when the performance begins, which are haunted reminders of Bluebeard's uxoricidal tendencies. Their physicality evokes both past and present, suggesting that Judith's present is haunted by Bluebeard's past. The set has both visual and metaphorical significance in the performance. The interior is devoid of furniture (apart from the chair and moveable table), with discoloured walls, doors and windows, and a floor covered entirely in dead leaves.[12] The leaves provide both visual and aural background to the performance and convey symbolic meanings such as death and desolation. The drabness of the other dancers' costumes echoes this dilapidation, evoking a sense of despair and history that testifies to the circularity of Bluebeard's narrative.

As a physical representation of Bluebeard's fabular castle, the set is an indicator of the past and a signal of the oppression that is to come. Sophia Preston views the set as representing "the leftovers of a baronial hall", with the leaves suggesting "desiccation rather than decay" (3). She links the set to possible contexts from Bausch's childhood, as a haunted reminder of "the palaces built or requisitioned by Nazi leaders such as Arthur Greiser in Poland and the former Austro-Hungarian Empire in the 1940s" (12). This interpretation then links Bluebeard to other despots or fascists. Even without this interpretation, the interior suggests entrapment, reducing the "castle" to a prison that holds Judith hostage. Bartók writes that he intended the castle to be a third participant in the action, a representation of Bluebeard's soul: "It is lonely, dark, and secretive: the castle of closed doors" (202). These spatial intricacies establish the

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[12] This space is possibly Jan Minarik's studio, which Bausch and the members of her troupe who remained with her used for rehearsal (Mercy and Pereira 546).

castle as a haunted, desolate space, reflecting an inevitability and intertwining of past and present in Judith's narrative.

Bluebeard opens with the titular character seated at a desk that holds a tape recorder. The tape recorder is a key structuring object, as it is a point of contact to which Bluebeard constantly returns throughout the piece. It is also a haunted symbol and reminder of Bluebeard's past violence and a prop that controls Bluebeard's bodily actions. Minařík notes that it was an important choreographical device when the piece was being created, as he and Bausch used the tape recorder "to make the reactions between Judith and Bluebeard clearer" (qtd. in Sulcas). Bluebeard repeatedly stops the tape when it reaches the "blood motif", a musical interval that sounds in the opera every time Judith discovers blood (Preston 4). This compulsion suggests that Bluebeard is constantly trying to prevent Judith from persevering in her investigation of his castle (Preston 4). The repetitive actions create tension, and establish a circular pattern that weaves its way into both the narrative and the choreography. The tape's aural power over Bluebeard depicts his haunting by Bartók's opera and by the darker version of the Bluebeard Märchen and suggests that the music compels him to carry out cycles of violence (Mozingo 99). The tape's effect over Bluebeard positions him as an object because of its ability to haunt him with his past. Its power over Bluebeard is ambiguous because Bluebeard is able to switch it off, and because he exercises his own agency by choosing to reperform his past violence and extend this violence to Judith in the present. His repetitive stopping and starting of the tape, however, suggest that he is haunted by the gender relationships and patterns of abuse that he has previously perpetrated. This haunting reflects how the body is constrained and constructed by cultural structures and symbolic conventions that around gendered bodies and relationships (Price 323).

Judith's presence and characterisation also work on material and symbolic levels to foretell her impending death. Her name has symbolic and historical undertones that engage

haunting as an unrealised potential and that suggest possibilities for Judith's agency. The rest of the performance curtails this potential agency by positioning Judith as Bluebeard's victim and Bluebeard as compelled to repeat his murderous behaviour. Bartók's decision to name Bluebeard's newest wife 'Judith' activates an older usage of the name in the apocrypha. This intertextuality then hints at an alternative story, an alternative potentiality that is ever present, but that is never reached. C. S. Leafstedt writes that the apocryphal Judith was a powerful and seductive woman, a "femme fatale" who had control over men and who murdered a man named Holofernes (430).[13] Bartók is purposive in juxtaposing a murderous male character with a woman named after a murderous woman (Leafstedt 430). The name 'Judith' haunts both Bausch's female protagonist and the performance by setting up the potential for violence and agency on her part. To a certain extent, this agency is realised in her ability to enter Bluebeard's castle and make her way through his physical and emotional landscape (Leafstedt 430). Her inability to break away from Bluebeard's cyclical violence, however, emphasises the ultimate erasure of her agency.

Other elements of her character support this potential for agency and reversal that her name suggests. The visual semiotics of her costume suggest her centrality in the narrative. Her red dress contrasts with the black suit worn by Bluebeard, the pale, muddy colours of the set, and the drab colours of the costumes worn by the other female dancers in later scenes. This contrast draws the eye and makes Judith easily recognisable. Unlike the other characters, Judith does not undergo a costume change during the piece until the very last sequence (which I analyse in the final section), where Bluebeard dresses her in the discarded dresses of the other dancers. This final scene accentuates her powerlessness and ultimate loss of power. Her red dress could also symbolise passion and possibly even seduction, tying into how Gustav Klimt

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[13] Leafstedt writes: "In the Apocrypha of the Old Testament, Judith is the Jewish heroine who saves her city from destruction at the hands of Holofernes, the proud, powerful commander of Nebuchadnezzar's army" (431).

and other artists represented Judith as a seductive force (Leafstedt 188). The apocryphal Judith and her dominance over Holofernes exist as a haunted reminder of female power and agency that are eventually erased from Judith's reality in Bausch's reinterpretation.

Objectual Haunting

Judith's trajectory in the performance is mirrored by two main kinds of body-objects: the other female dancers and the doll that one of the dancers brings into the performance space. This mirroring activates the tension between Judith's potential for agency and the realities of her relationship with Bluebeard. The reflection of Judith's fate in these human and nonhuman objects emphasises how her trajectory is haunted by reminders of Bluebeard's past violence that are to become part of her present reality. These objects function as ghosts, both "(repeating) and (inaugurating)" by simultaneously appearing for the first time and reappearing in the Judith-Bluebeard narrative (Powell and Shaffer 16). Additionally, the objects and the haunted reminders that they give the characters lead to a series of repetitive gestures and behaviours, which highlight how the past intrudes into the present and how patriarchally behaviours are learned and socially reinforced (Price 326, 327).

Haunted Reminders

The inclusion of other dancers in the piece significantly complicates, shadows, and mirrors the dynamic between the central couple. The visual similarity between the style of their dresses and Judith's suggests that as Bluebeard's previous wives, the women can be read as haunted echoes of Judith's character. Additionally, all the women are of similar build, most with dark, long hair. This suggests further links between their bodies and Judith's. Around twenty-five minutes into *Bluebeard*, the other female dancers attach themselves like moths to the walls using footholds and supports (Figure 8).[14]

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[14] The two figures in this chapter are courtesy the Pina Bausch Archives, and were the only two that I received permission to use. They are from a performance featuring Jan Minarik as Bluebeard and Marlis Alt as Judith. The video I analysed was too blurred to screenshot.

(Fig. 8.) Haunted Reminders

Pina Bausch, *Blaubart*, 1977. © Pina Bausch Foundation. Photo: © Rolf Borzik

Rolf Borzik, "Marlis Alt and Jan Minařík in "Bluebeard. While Listening to a Tape Recording of Béla Bartók's

Opera "Duke Bluebeard's Castle"" by Pina Bausch." PINA, *pinabausch.org*,

https://archives.pinabausch.org/id/blau_30022544_44_0000

By framing the women's bodies as objects, the walls themselves become extensions of the performing bodies. This emphasises the link between dance and theatre that emerges within Tanztheatre (Shouse 8). The walls suggest submission, camouflage, and concealment, allowing the female dancers to signal their defencelessness and to use it as a shield or camouflage, highlighting their lack of power in the narrative (Shouse 42). Their physical positioning and actions in the sequence, furthermore, parallel those of Judith's. This visual, physical paralleling then suggests a correspondence between their fate and Judith's. By placing their bodies against the wall, the women make themselves part of the set and the physical performance framework, making their bodies continuous with the walls. In doing this, they set their bodies up as props.

They also place themselves on a higher level than that occupied by the two principal dancers when they position themselves on the walls. This adds a symbolic layer to the performance, whereby the central couple's dynamic is overshadowed by the presence of Bluebeard's former wives, whose bodies appear to haunt the action in a grotesque tableau. This moment adds a supernatural layer to the performance, where the hanging bodies create a ghostly, melancholy tableau that haunts, and is haunted by, the victimisation that Judith undergoes (Shouse 42). Judith's relationship with Bluebeard is visually and symbolically haunted by the presence of these ghostly figures that foreshadow her fate. In other words, Judith's subjectivity in this performance develops within the haunted presences of Bluebeard's previous wives. This scene (among others) highlights the wives as the "tangible intangibility of a proper body without flesh…the body of someone as someone other (Derrida, qtd. in Powell and Shaffer 13). Their entrance into the space brings the past into the present and unsettles Judith's physical existence in the present by overshadowing it with a dual absent-presence that causes her present and future to collide with their pasts. As a result, their shadowiness disrupts straightforward definitions of being and challenges Judith's continued existence and agency (Derrida, qtd. in Powell and Shaffer 13).

The articulateness of the still female body in this performance highlights the subjugation of female agency under hierarchical relationships and power structures. Bluebeard is the only male character present during this sequence; this creates links between all the women's bodies and his and highlights his control over them. As the image above shows, Bluebeard lifts Judith's limp body upwards in this scene, furthering the visual similarities between how she and the women are positioned. The sequence ends with the women dropping off the walls and onto the floor. Bluebeard abruptly lets go of Judith at the same time so that she also falls to the ground. Judith's and the other women's bodies are mostly still during this sequence. In contrast, Bluebeard twirls slightly while holding Judith, and makes an abrupt

movement in dropping Judith. The women's stillness contrasts starkly with much of the dynamic, almost excessively intense movement during the rest of the performance. This stillness is an instance of "articulate stillness" in physical theatre, where the women's bodies are dynamic and convey intensity and purpose even in the absence of movement (Murray and Keefe 211). These bodies' materiality and collapse evoke the distinction between the static body as lifeless and lacking presence and the still body, one that is in a similar state of immobility but that conveys dynamism, articulateness, and presence (Murray and Keefe 212). Although the women are still during this sequence, their bodies convey a sense of how they are oppressed and degraded by Bluebeard.

Of Dolls and Women

Just over one hour into the performance, one of the female dancers walks in cradling a nude doll with long black hair that becomes the focus of Bluebeard's attention, and of hers. The visual and metaphoric meanings that the doll acquires are linked to Judith's haunting by Bluebeard's violent tendencies and by the bodies of his previous wives. The doll operates as a prop, a "material (ghost)" that enlivens the action on stage and brings forth new meaning (Sofer, *The Stage Life* 3, 20). Bluebeard, wearing a pair of boxers and a dressing gown, poses and flexes his muscles in front of the doll, as if he is attempting to seduce or impress it (Figure 9).
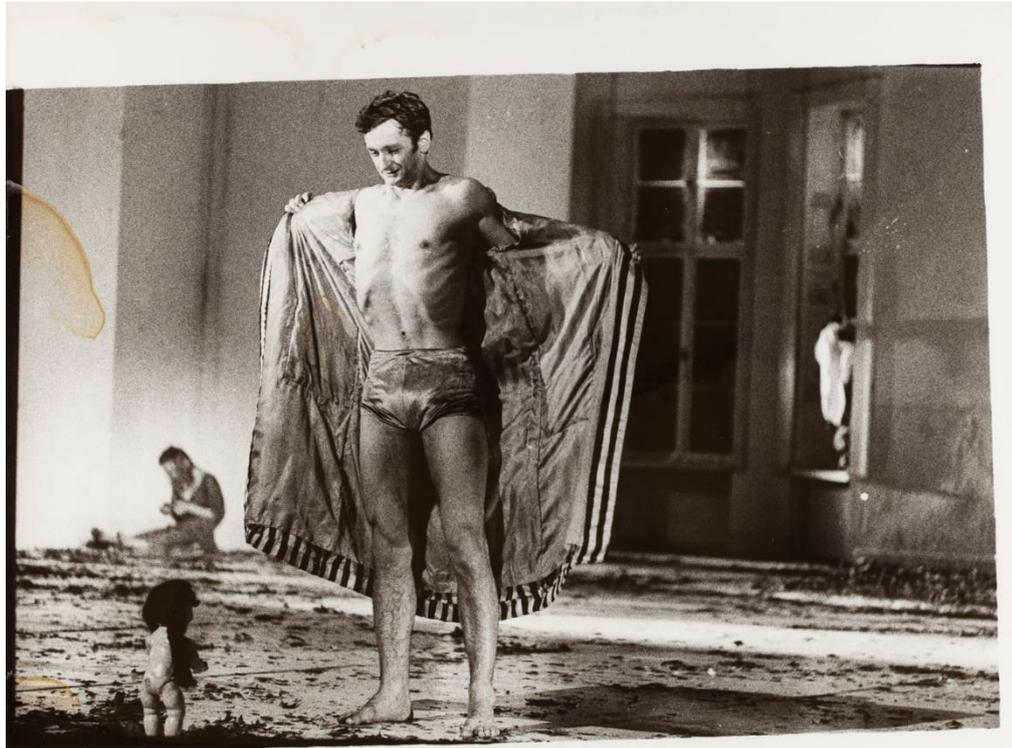
(Fig.9.) Posing and violation

Pina Bausch, *Blaubart*, 1977. © Pina Bausch Foundation. Photo: © Rolf Borzik

Rolf Borzik, "Jan Minařík in "Bluebeard. While Listening to a Tape Recording of Béla Bartók's Opera "Duke

Bluebeard's Castle"" by Pina Bausch." PINA, *pinabausch.org*,

https://archives.pinabausch.org/id/blau_30022545_44_0000

The female dancer then lies on her stomach in front of the doll in a seductive pose and directs her attention to the doll, stroking her lips and sucking her finger.[15] While both Bluebeard and the woman posture and preen in front of the doll, they do not look at or interact with each other, suggesting that the doll is their sole focus. The doll's gendered materiality is especially significant in its connection to the performing female bodies and to Bluebeard's dominance over Judith. It can be interpreted in multiple ways around topics such as sexuality, worship, and infantilisation. Posth's review of the 2020 restaging of the piece notes that the

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[15] The full sequence of actions is as follows: The female dancer pulls one of the doll's arms out of its socket and pinches or rubs its nose. She then places the doll on the floor. A bizarre sequence of actions then takes place involving Bluebeard flexing and preening in front of the doll and the female dancer re-entering the room (after temporarily having left), lying on her stomach in front of the doll in a seductive pose, stroking her lips with a finger, and then sucking this finger.

flirtatiousness and flexing performed respectively by the woman and by Bluebeard set the doll up as an idol uplifted by their adulation and hedonism (Posth).

The woman's entrance with the doll evokes both nurture and perversity—while she carries the doll in her arms as if it is a child, the doll is naked. Her breaking of the doll's arm is an act of violence that contrasts with the usual care and gentleness that would be expected during an interaction of this kind. The doll is seemingly a passive recipient, subjugated by the woman's violence. The doll's maiming visually signifies that it has been violated, and its nudity sets it up as defenceless and as lacking the agency to respond to the woman's violence. In the scenes that follow, however, the doll exerts its own agency over both the female dancer and Bluebeard. The woman's and Bluebeard's posturing set the doll up as a figure that demands acknowledgement, supplication, and adulation, suggesting that its materiality exerts a complex and powerful effect on its human interrogators. The fact that a grown man and woman are behaving in this way suggests that the doll enacts a specific power over them and calls them into a relationship of subordination.

The doll further functions as a miniature version of Judith and of the other women in the performance, thus existing as a haunted reminder of the positions into which Bluebeard circumscribes his wives. Mumford suggests that the doll stands as an "ersatzfrau" (which roughly translates to "substitute woman") whose lack of arms and a voice render it passive in the face of Bluebeard's posturing, and goes on to link this to the stereotype and position that he imposes on Judith (52). This interpretation stands true for much of the performance, where we see Bluebeard being physically violent towards both Judith and his previous wives, who do not defend themselves. In one scene, for instance, we see Bluebeard swinging women around in sheets and piling their limp bodies on a chair, after which he claps his hands, reinforcing his physical dominance and the power dynamics in his relationships. While this is one interpretation of this situation, it discounts the doll's nudity and its effects on Bluebeard's and

the female dancer's behaviour. Once it is placed on the ground, there is a visual and metaphorical association between the doll and the women's bodies, and the sense of debasement that pervades the performance is tied to the doll's placement in this scene. These interpretations support the idea that the props are extensions of the dancers' physical bodies, combining both realistic and imaginary images (Shouse 8). From the outset of the performance, we see Bluebeard puppeteering Judith, dragging her, manhandling her, and treating her like a plaything. Preston notes that in the second half of the dance, Judith's fearful shrinking against the wall, away from Bluebeard, is followed by him violently dragging her across the floor (7). These sequences of violence highlight Bluebeard's physical dominance over Judith and emphasise the "battle of the sexes" that critics identify in this piece (Peña 1).

The doll's existence as a haunted object brings to mind the power dynamics that underlie Bluebeard's interactions with women. As an object haunted by Bluebeard's violent tendencies and future violence, the doll evokes Marvin Carlson's definition of ghosting as "the identical thing…encountered before, although now in a somewhat different context" (*The Haunted Stage* 7). The doll stands as a reminder of violence, but also portrays how this violence transfers itself to the behaviour of his wives and is reframed as a part of relationships between men and women. Apart from rematerialising Bluebeard's violence and murder of his wives, the doll also represents women's complicity in their victimisation and in male violence, partly because the female dancers are heard laughing offstage during Bluebeard's posturing (Mumford 52). Their collective presence, laughter, and the woman's behaviour with the doll question the extent of these women's complicity in their own victimisation and in other women's victimisation. The presence and behaviour of the female dancer mirror the cycles of abuse that populate the narrative. The body of the dancer then also haunts or shadows the body of the doll, and together, they both stand as a visceral reminder of Bluebeard's history and general violent tendencies. The doll's objecthood is key to the sense of defamiliarisation that

this scene evokes; the excessive sexualised displays and gendered behaviour that Bluebeard and the female dancer carry out in front of the doll creates a sense of confusion and distance from the situation in us as viewers. The doll is miniature, childlike, and seems violated in its nakedness, thus making us recoil at the sight of two adults assaulting it in this way. The doll's materiality, then, confronts both us and the performers and creates an alignment with the violation that Judith faces.

A Foregone Conclusion

The threat of violence that has been haunting Judith throughout the performance reaches its climax at the end, where Bausch represents her murder, or her conversion into an object of memory and desire (in the opera). Despite the moments of agency that Judith displays during the performance, she is ultimately overpowered by Bluebeard, relegated to the status of his previous dead wives, and reduced to the level of the dead leaves on the floor. In this moment, her subjectivity is curtailed by Bluebeard's success in turning her into an object, a corpse that is incapable of either movement or retaliation. Around 1 hour and 20 minutes into the recorded performance, we see Bluebeard dressing Judith in the other women's discarded dresses, transforming her into a grotesque scarecrow-like figure that he then proceeds to embrace, topple onto the floor, and then lift up and shake violently. [16] After this, we see him in attitudes of despair and grief, dragging her immobile body along with him in a reversal of the opening sequence. Although he drags her on the floor and behaves as if she were a doll, he spends time with her body and conveys emotion and despondence through his embraces of her body and his slow movements. This unsettles the narrative of objecthood that underlies this piece—although Bausch's Judith may not be the Judith of the apocrypha who beheads her oppressor, Bluebeard's sorrow unsettles the depiction of Judith as victim by highlighting his

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[16] There is a possibility that some footage is either missing or was deleted, as there seems to be a slight time jump that skips over the first part of this sequence.

connection to her. His sorrow also suggests that both he and Judith are responsible for her fate, Bluebeard for his violence and Judith for her continued attempts to build a relationship with him despite the emotional and physical boundaries that he has set up (Mumford 54). His mourning emphasises the sense of inevitability that overshadowed both his behaviour and his relationship with Judith during the piece. His emotion positions him as being haunted by social forces, hierarchical gender relationships, and patriarchal norms, suggesting a possible critique of patriarchy and the problematic relationships between men and women. While Bluebeard asserts his dominance and agency over the female bodies around him, this agency is unsettled by nonhuman objects such as the tape recorder and the doll. This then questions the extent and limits of his agency and suggests that his agency (like the women's) is situational. His agency seems most prominent within subject-object relationships where women's bodies stand as objects. In contrast, his agency is disrupted in subject-object relationships where he becomes the object in the face of nonhuman objects such as the doll.

Bluebeard's movements can be read as a form of Brechtian gestus in order to highlight the links between his behaviour, the *Bluebeard* narratives, and the fate that both haunts and awaits Judith. Scholars note the Brechtian influences that appear in Bausch's work, one of which is gestus as distinct from gesture. Much has been written on repetition, the quotidian, and Bausch's building of gender relationships through everyday actions and moments of interactions between individuals[17]. By using repetition, cyclicality, and dance to highlight and present behaviour such as the violence that Bluebeard carries out, Bausch "(exposes) the politics and social realities behind everyday actions", in this case gendered violence and the gender politics of relationships (Murray and Keefe 90). Bausch's use of gestus in this scene, then, corresponds with the Brechtian ideal of gestus as extending beyond mere demonstration

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[17] See for instance Murray and Keefe's writing on "Pina Bausch and the Wuppertal Dance Theatre", referenced in this chapter.

or effect, but instead as "relevant to society" and "(allowing) conclusions to be drawn about the social circumstances" (Brecht, qtd. in Hake 159). In these scenes, gestus is inseparable from Bluebeard's framing of the female body as object. In the absence of a body which he can objectify, manipulate, and degrade, his actions would lose their connection to behaviour and routine along with its power to signify the haunted reminders of Bluebeard's cyclical pattern with women.

Bluebeard's upright position throughout most of these sequences Another aspect of this sequence contrasts with that of the women (and the doll), who are often on the floor, among the leaves. Their positions on the floor are sometimes preceded by a fall, where Judith and the other women eventually land in prone positions among the dead leaves. This fall is a choreographic moment that is repeated multiple times during the performance. Moreover, the women's position on the ground evokes degradation and debasement, especially because of the visual hierarchy between their bodies and Bluebeard's position, which remains upright during most of the performance. It is only in the last scene that Bluebeard joins Judith on the floor, suggesting that her objectification is now complete in death, and that her objecthood compels him into a corresponding state. This compulsion that Judith's body exercises over Bluebeard recalls the power of the nonhuman objects over his behaviour.

Having explored the restrictive and haunting effects of gender norms and relationships, my next chapter brings in the idea of abstractness and conceptualism as significant layers that interact with an object's physicality and enable different kinds of analysis around the female body as an object in social and institutional networks.

Chapter 3

Conceptual Objects and the Female Body as Producer/

Reproducer in Aliza Shvarts' *Untitled (Senior Thesis)*

My previous chapters analysed positions of female objecthood in performance art and Tanztheatre. This chapter considers the female body as a conceptual object in an ambiguous performance that straddles performance, narrative, and imagination. *Untitled (Senior Thesis)* (hereafter *Untitled*), was Aliza Shvarts' proposed 2008 BFA senior thesis for Yale University. It rested on plans of artificial insemination, abortion, and a culminating exhibition of menstrual/ abortion blood. The project's theme was controversial, and Yale's administration banned Shvarts from completing her project.[18] Analysing the physical objects Shvarts (reportedly) used and referenced in her projected performance as conceptual objects positions the female body as a material object that signifies both literally and metaphorically. The proposed performance and its object-based "afterlives" highlight how objecthood transcends the physical and temporal limits of Shvarts' proposal. This also ties into the social and aesthetic frames that position the female body as an object. My chapter begins by setting up the performance through its objects and "afterlives". It then draws on the idea of the jettisoned object and Shvarts' discussion of failure to analyse how the female body operates as a conceptual body to expose objecthood.

Shvarts' proposed performance has been documented in multiple news, opinion, and academic articles.[19] The salient facts are as follows: as her final project for her BFA at Yale University, Shvarts proposed a project that would have performance, videographic, sculptural,

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[18] Yale's spokesperson at the time, Helaine Klasky, dismissed Shvarts' work as a "creative fiction" (qtd. in Edidin).

[19] The articles that I refer to in this chapter are mostly from the *Yale Daily News Archives*, which hold four webpages of articles on Shvarts' piece and the controversy it caused.

and narrative elements, and that would "call into question the relationship between form and function as they converge on the body" (Shvarts, "Shvarts Explains'). Shvarts writes that the project "used self-managed abortion to explore questions of biological, ontological, and epistemological reproduction" ("*Untitled* [*Senior Thesis*]"). Describing the project brings up the question of whether to use past tense or future tense to recount it. As the debate between Shvarts and the university administration suggests, it is impossible to verify Shvarts' claims, or to decide whether she indeed induced bleeding and carried out the actions that she described.[20] To highlight the project as a work of conceptual art, I will continue to use future tense in describing the project (thereby underscoring its status as a proposed, rather than completed, work).

According to both Shvarts' website and her 2008 article in the Yale Daily News, preparation for her final project was to last nine months, culminating in an installation at the final project showcase at Yale's Green Hall. Each month, during the second week of her menstrual cycle, Shvarts would artificially inseminate herself with semen collected from an unspecified number of anonymous donors (whom she termed "fabricators"). At the end of her cycle, on the 28th day, she would ingest a legal, herbal abortifacient that would induce cramps and bleeding. The blood that resulted from these ingestions would either be a menstrual period or a "self-induced miscarriage".[21] Shvarts planned to collect and preserve the blood from each procedure and embed a mixture of Vaseline and the preserved blood into the walls of a large cube lined with plastic sheets onto which she would "project video footage of herself 'experiencing miscarriages in her bathroom tub'" (Edidin).

In contrast to my paraphrasing of the project, Shvarts describes her actions in the past tense, suggesting that she did indeed carry them out. No clear evidence exists to support her

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[20] This debate is chronicled in the Yale Daily News archives, which are available online.
[21] Shvarts' framing of miscarriage as "induced" is problematic, because it ignores the wider experiences of women who have undergone miscarriages.

claims; the images that purportedly document her process (such as figure 10) are ambiguous and do not point to an unassailable reality.

(Fig.10.) Uncertain documentation

Aliza Shvarts, *Untitled [Senior Thesis]*, 2008

*"*Untitled [Senior Thesis]*"*, *alizashvarts.com*, https://alizashvarts.com/2008_senior-thesis.html

Shvarts seems to court this ambiguity, noting that her performance rests upon dualities of doing and telling/ retelling (Shvarts, "Figuration and Failure" 155). She also notes that the performance's reception was an outcome of her actions and their transmission to a wider public (Shvarts, "Figuration and Failure" 155).

The *Yale Daily News* Archives' news and opinion articles portray the controversy surrounding Shvarts' work as an outcome of its perceived insensitivity, unethical nature, and the risks that it posed to Shvarts' health. A related issue seems to be that Yale's reputation was at risk because of its association with a project of this nature. Robert Storr, the Dean of the School of Art at the time, deemed the project an "(unacceptable) project in a community where the consequences go beyond the individual who initiates the project and may even endanger

that individual" (Johnston). The project received backlash from both pro-life and pro-choice groups for an irresponsible approach to reproductive rights and freedoms. Shvarts' intent was seen as ignoring spiritual and emotional suffering and as trivialising the lived realities of women undergoing abortion and miscarriage (Gray). Yale also asked Shvarts to assert that there was no human blood in her project and that she had not carried out any of the actions she described (Addenbrooke). This suggests that part of the issue was her supposed use of human blood. Shvarts' advisers were faulted by students and possibly other staff members for approving Shvarts' project and for allowing it to proceed (if indeed she carried out the actions she claimed to have performed). One of Shvarts' advisers, Pina Lindman, was reportedly suspended and another (unnamed) official disciplined for their roles in the events (Murphy). Yale released a statement dissociating itself from Shvarts and banned her from exhibiting any of the material associated with the project for the next ten years ("*Untitled* [*Senior Thesis*]"). These reactions are relevant to my discussion because of how they position the female body as an object with social and reproductive obligations. Additionally, its use of bodily effluents, abortifacient, and documentation underscores questions of concept and production.

I use the term 'performance' to refer to Shvarts' initial proposal (consisting of her ambiguous, possibly nonexistent actions and suggested installation) and to centralise the conceptual. Shvarts used elements of the performance and some of the reactions it provoked in two later works, *Posters* (2008/2017), and *Player* (2008/2018) ("*Untitled* [*Senior Thesis*]"). This gave the performance 'afterlives' that complicate its status as an unrealised event. These afterlives strongly influence how I interpret the performance objects. Figure 11, from *Posters*, is a key material component related to the discourse around Shvarts' initial performance.

For an academic year, I performed repeated self-induced miscarriages. I created a group of fabricators from volunteers who submitted to periodic STI screenings and agreed to complete and permanent anonymity. From the 9th to the 15th day of my menstrual cycle, the fabricators would provide me with sperm samples, which I used to privately self-inseminate. Using a needless syringe, I would inject the sperm near my cervix within 30 minutes of its collection, so as to insure the possibility of fertilization. On the 28th day of my cycle, I would ingest an herbal abortifacient, after which I would experience cramps and heavy bleeding. To protect myself and others, only I know the number of fabricators who participated, the frequency and accuracy with which I inseminated, and the specific abortifacient I used. Because of these measures of privacy, the piece exists only in its telling. This telling can take textual, visual, spatial, temporal, and performative forms—copies of copies for which there is no original.

Statement by Helaine S. Klasky — Yale University, Spokesperson

New Haven, Conn. — April 17, 2008

Ms. Shvarts is engaged in performance art. Her art project includes visual representations, a press release and other narrative materials. She stated to three senior Yale University officials today, including two deans, that she did not impregnate herself and that she did not induce any miscarriages. The entire project is an art piece, a creative fiction designed to draw attention to the ambiguity surrounding form and function of a woman's body.

She is an artist and has the right to express herself through performance art.

Had these acts been real, they would have violated basic ethical standards and raised serious mental and physical health concerns.

(Fig.11.) Posters

Aliza Shvarts, *Posters*, 2008/2017.

"Posters (2008/2017)", *alizashvarts.com*, https://alizashvarts.com/2017_posters.html

Shvarts' caption on her website identifies this poster as "performance documentation (score, still, and official university statement) from *Untitled* [*Senior Thesis*]". She writes that it is the first visual documentation that she released, and specifies that the posters are "the same size as those issued for college dorm rooms ("*Posters*"). This sizing visually and metaphorically links the initial performance setting (the university) and the performance afterlives.

Figure 12, from *Player*, is closely linked to the documentation in Figure 11, and was part of Shvarts' 2018 *Off Scene* solo exhibition.

(Fig.12.) Player

Aliza Shvarts, *Player*, 2008/2018.

*"*Player (2008/2018)*"*, *alizashvarts.com*, https://alizashvarts.com/2018_player.html

Shvarts' caption on her website associates the work with *Untitled* (it is unclear whether it consists of video footage or a series of images) ("*Player*"). She notes that it played on a "variable-speed media player that speeds/slows footage to the duration of any exhibition so that it never loops" ("*Player*"). Her 2018 work *Banners* (Figure 13) explores online notoriety and online comments and responses: Shvarts writes that her banners "materialise moments in the lives of people who have been overexposed on the internet", and that they invite viewers' tactile engagement ("Banners (2018)").

(Fig.13.) Banners

Aliza Shvarts, *Banners*, 2018.

"Banners, 2018", *alizashvarts.com*, https://alizashvarts.com/2018_banners.html

These three afterlives extend the performance beyond its initial creation and reinforce its discursive aspects. I highlight the role that objects play in establishing the performing body as doubly a material and conceptual entity by framing Shvarts' work as an initial performance and afterlives.

Untitled is predated by other examples of conceptual art such as Marcel Duchamp's 1917 *Fountain*, Piero Manzoni's 1961 *Artist's Shit*, and Andres Serrano's 1987 *Piss Christ*. All three works commented on artistic (and religious, in the case of Serrano's work) production and reception. I reference these three works because they are all prominent works by male artists that centralise bodily effluents and the scatological. As such, they are comparable to Shvarts' *Untitled*. Although their content also caused distaste and criticism, the response to Shvarts' work can be examined for its antagonism towards her instrumentalisation of menstrual blood as a female bodily effluent.

Objects and the Abstract

Shvarts' planned performance rested on multiple abject objects. Shvarts' use of these objects reveals tactics of resistance linked to the abjection of the female body and its effluents. I classify the performance objects under three categories: instruments (such as the syringes Shvarts used to insert semen into her vaginal cavity and the abortifacient she ingested), framing devices (such as the bathtub that appears in some photographs and the cube that she planned to build), and bodily effluents (such as Shvarts' blood and the donors` semen). These objects are ambiguously material because they exist primarily within discourse as imagined/ proposed objects. Unlike the blood, the performance archives in its three afterlives are distinctly material entities. As such, their material continuity extends the performance's conceptual focus.

Shvarts is seemingly the active participant in the performances, making choices around its unfolding and how the objects are to be used. However, the objects' use value and quotidian functions position as agentive entities that influence bodily actions and the performance's trajectory. For example, the syringes and the abortifacient reinforce the medical, clinical layer of the performance. Shvarts exposes and challenges attempts to secure and control bodily boundaries and effluents within medical discourses by invoking medical discourses and making menstruation and abortion hyper visible (Laqueur 14). In doing this, her project also speaks against pathologising the female body as a space in need of remedy and resists such constructions by playing into the very narratives that they espouse (Davis 6, 14). Albeit problematically, Shvarts appropriates medical discourse to frame her project while disavowing "the social mechanisms and medical facilities already in place" ("Figuration and Failure" 160, 161). She creates a questionable binary between abortion and miscarriage by calling her processes 'miscarriage' as opposed to 'abortion' because "miscarriage is something that happens outside the medical institution, something that happens all the time" ("Figuration and Failure" 160, 161). Here, Shvarts uses mimicry and apparent compliance to speak against the

discourses that constrain her bodily integrity and reproductive rights. Her framing of "miscarriage", however, is deeply problematic. Shvarts fails to address the nuances of either abortion or miscarriage and ignores discourses around miscarriage that call for its visibility as an often traumatic and serious concern that women face. Shvarts risks undoing her project's political message by nullifying miscarriage as a significant problem within the medical and social aspects of women's health. Her framing normalises miscarriage and reinforces its erasure. She also risks foregoing ethical considerations for her own political project.

Bernstein's discussion of the scriptive thing and the scripts that objects exercise over humans is a useful lens for this performance. Abortifacient is usually used in emergencies, and sperm injections when there is a plan for conception. Shvarts unsettles these implicit, expected scripts by instrumentalising these elements in line with her own intentions. This tension between script and action suggests that nonhuman objects can exert force over human agency and guide human behaviour. Medical experts questioned the possibility that Shvarts induced abortion using a herbal method, noting the lack of evidence that any natural substance could cause miscarriage (Bhushan). These disputes unsettle the abortifacient's use value and suggest that its script does not necessarily translate to a desired outcome. Shvarts decries the "myth" that "penises and vaginas are "meant" for penetrative heterosexual sex" ("Shvarts Explains"). Her performance rejects genital penetration, but still depends on the reproductive potential of both the sperm and her own body. Here, she both references and contradicts established scripts such as conception and pregnancy. This highlights the agentive potential of the female body even in its standing as an object.

While the semen used in the performance is also an effluent that could evoke disgust and revulsion, it does not acquire the same level of abjection as Shvarts' blood does. I suggest that this is a result of the fact that the semen functioned as an intermediary material, almost as a prop, and that it was used by Shvarts (if at all) with the intention of leading to possible

conception. As a result, the semen gets coopted into the processes and effluents associated with Shvarts' performance rather than being an identifiable, discrete material, and avoids the labelling and framing that Shvarts' body fluids undergo.

The bathtub, cube, and other framing devices also contribute to female abjection in the performance by challenging menstruation and conception as private acts. The framing devices can also be analysed as props. The picture that Shvarts uses in *Posters* (Figure 11) shows her seated in a bathtub in an attitude of difficulty or despondence, and presumably represents her bleeding or in pain. The *Yale Daily News* notes that student reporters toured Shvarts' studio and were shown footage of Shvarts "sitting in a shower stall for hours before moaning and bleeding into a cup" (T. Kaplan). As "objects that go on a journey" (Sofer, *The Stage Life* 2), the bathtub and shower stall shift from spaces of privacy and cleansing to places of refuge, visibility, and invitation. They also then undergo a subtle process of transformation; while most women experience some bleeding in bathtubs and shower stalls, Shvarts' bleeding is purposeful and directed. She uses these spaces to reinforce menstruation and render it palpable as a performance. The cube that Shvarts proposed to use as a container and display surface underscores Shvarts' intent to render menstrual blood visible and confrontational rather than controlling, defining, or erasing it (Shvarts, "Figuration and Failure" 157).

Shvarts' supposed actions evoke the explicit body in feminist performance. Shvarts focuses on the ambiguous divides between the representational and the actual and acting and doing, thus highlighting how the real is constructed (Shvarts, "Figuration and Failure" 158). Berkeley Kaite writes that blood is "metaphorically fluid", capable of signifying, threatening, and imposing (7). Shvarts' alleged actions instrumentalise her own menstrual blood and its abjectness, even in the physical absence of this blood. The blood's ambiguous absent-presence positions menstrual blood as both discursive and material, and as discomforting and threatening even as a discursive, abstract object. The menstrual/ abortion blood exists in the telling and

creation of the performance and its narrative, forming part of the "creative fiction" that results. Perhaps the most concrete evidence of blood are moments in the video footage Shvarts used in *Off Scene*, which supposedly show "the marking of blood on the artist's thighs or collected in cups" (Szymanek 5). Even this, however, may have been staged using ketchup or paint. This ambiguous standing of blood as a bodily effluent in this performance also highlights the duality of the literal and the figurative as a two-part framework for the performance. In line with the abject as a state that resists strict definition and boundaries, blood is positioned as both literal and figurative, and functions "as evidence of the body's indeterminacy, its simultaneous living and dying" (Blocker 107).

From the outset of *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva defines the abject by its very indefinability, describing how its ambiguity defies attempts to classify, govern, or eradicate this "threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside" (1). She writes that the abject cannot be objectified or expelled despite a subject's best efforts, thereby denying the subject any safety-valve of distance (Kristeva 1). She further notes that its compelling power is an outcome of its dual attraction and rejection of desire, as well as the fascination that it exerts (Kristeva 1). Blood is an unmistakeably abject object, and menstrual blood poses a threat in its leakiness and exit beyond the body's threshold, which exists as the "'pivotal point' where cultural negotiations are both worked out and inscribed" (Grosz, qtd. in Kaite 8). Blood, furthermore, manifests as a sign only once it exits the body, becoming performative (Kaite 8). This observation brings renewed significance to Shvarts' performance; not only does blood exit her body, she reportedly collects and preserves this blood to be used to confront and represent.

Shvarts' supposed collection and preservation of expelled blood reinforce the intersections of abjection, materiality, and discursivity. Kristeva's discussion rests on the impulse to reject, expel, and turn away from the threat that the abject represents. She notes that

the abject, or "the jettisoned object", draws one "toward the place where meaning collapses" by virtue of its unknowability and uncanniness (2). As such, what is abject constantly resists objectification and containment within aesthetic and anti-aesthetic parameters (Beressem 21). Shvarts' actions in this performance contradict what Kristeva proposes regarding expulsion and exclusion. Shvarts (reportedly) retained the blood her vagina expelled to use it as an art object. Rather than becoming a jettisoned object that guards subjecthood, the blood becomes a haunted object that represents the gendered meanings associated with menstrual blood in religion and culture (such as uncleanness, lack, and the absence of a child) and the cycles of insemination and sanguinary purging that Shvarts underwent. This sense of materiality and intent to subvert are located in visceral menstrual blood's instability and potentiality.

Abjection in this performance also ties into the feminine and the maternal. Kristeva defines female, maternal abjection as the "most pointed form of abjection" because of its connection to subjecthood and the infant's movement into subjectivity and the Symbolic (Grahovac 8). The failure to separate oneself from the maternal body then threatens both self-determination and the boundaries of the self (Grahovac 8). The mother then stands as a symbolic figure "figured as background to the subjectivity of others rather than a meaning-making subject in her own right" (Stone, qtd. in Grahovac 9). Shvarts' refusal to classify or jettison her blood thrusts menstruation and abortion into the public sphere, where they unsettle social expectations around women's reproductive rights and threaten public morality. In doing this, Shvarts points to the interconnection of private and public, personal and political that undergirds feminism and feminist art.

As suggested by my repeated use of the terms "reportedly", "supposedly", and "allegedly", Shvarts' draws on a conceptual art framework to capitalise on the ambiguous materiality and discursivity that surround the blood and other objects in this performance. The performance's disruption of the art object reflects older performances that responded to the

anti-objectual turn in much conceptual art, and creates a layer of inscrutability around Shvarts'

embodied actions. This then veils Shvarts' interiority or subjectivity, which allows her to absent

her subjectivity (recalling Tina Post's discussion of deadpan aesthetics) in a comparable way

to Abramović's behaviour in *Rhythm 0*. The circularity and disguising that Shvarts employs

are a contrast to the linear, clearly defined pathways that underlie factual evidence, scientific

logic, and narratives of truth. Such modes of knowing are considered traditionally masculine,

given that they are often determined through "evidence, proof, or fact" (Szymanek 3). The

absenting of Shvarts' subjectivity questions what other kinds of alternative relations between

differently situated bodies are conceivable and achievable (Szymanek 3). In other words, the

ambiguity and inscrutability around Shvarts' actions encourage a reimagining and realigning

of identity, agency, and bodily integrity.

The speculation around the performance constructs the female body as both a material

and discursive entity. Shvarts writes that fiction "covers over the space left behind when real

existences are jettisoned from political and social visibility," when bodies become mute

landscapes from which physical evidence of violence can be collected (qtd. in Vogel 249). This

sentiment is ambiguous, but gestures towards fiction's futuristic and worldmaking potential in

the absence of clearly identifiable realities and frameworks. The visual leftovers and traces in

Shvarts' performance evoke Muñoz' theories on "queer ephemera" and "invisible evidence"

as challenging conventions and expectations of what constitutes solid 'proof' (Kopenkina 88).

Muñoz' articulation of queer ephemera unsettles attempts to approach Shvarts` bodily actions

as clear violations of abstract moral standards and widely accepted principles.

Interestingly, while the ambiguous divide between fiction and reality unsettles fixed

notions of the female body as a material and metaphoric entity, it risks reintroducing and

reproducing the same frameworks and standards that confine it. Although she works with the

"creative fiction" label Yale gave her performance, Shvarts writes that fiction and speculation

often position women in disadvantageous ways: "Through fiction, we are mobilized not as subjects, but as objects of discourse within those structures of power from which we have been historically excluded" (qtd. In Vogel 249). I would argue that these tensions hinge on materiality, and that the physical, embodied elements of the performance encourage reading the female body as an object. Shvarts' rights and personal decisions become part of public access because of this objecthood, and her body and actions are judged and policed as such. This objectification highlights the links between the material and the social, where bodies (especially women's bodies and other marginalised bodies) are products of the social (Apter 101). Shvarts notes that her decisions "interrogate the way dematerialized social forms like law or language are produced through bodies", revealing her engagement with the social (Apter 101).

While the reactions against Shvarts' performance understandably respond to its insensitivity and failure to consider the painful realities of miscarriage and abortion, they are also gendered. While it is possible that Yale would have banned any project that used blood, Shvarts' studio was scrutinised, and according to an anonymous Yale official, scientific tests were carried out to test for any trace of blood in her studio (T. Kaplan). While the tests found no evidence of blood in the studio, the scientific tests were used to investigate Shvarts' past actions and prevent future actions (T. Kaplan). This explosive inquiry into the ethics of Shvarts' project recalls the inequal responses to work by female artists that centred on the female body. Barbara Kutis writes that artwork by men celebrated as "ejaculatory creations of virility" are often lauded and validated over comparable work by women, which is associated with menstrual bleeding and framed as accidental or as a "stain" (Saltzman, qtd. in Kutis 111). Like the art featuring menstrual blood by Rupi Kaur, Sarah Maple, and Jen Lewis that Kutis discusses, Shvarts builds upon the tradition of feminist art centring on menstrual blood that emerged in the sixties and seventies. As such, part of the reaction against Shvarts' work points

to respectability politics surrounding her planned use of menstrual blood. A comment in an article on the *Yale Daily News* website points to the use of menstrual blood as a cause for disgust. In Cooper Lewis' letter to the editor, they write against Shvarts' politicising of abortion. They also denigrate one of Shvarts' classmates who considered her work (including the proposed cube) beautiful and commendable. Referring to this individual, Lewis writes: "I find the reactions of students such as Schvartz' [sic] colleague Castillo '08, **whose master list of "beauty" likely includes "Two Girls, One Cup,"** equally revolting" (emphasis added). The parallel drawn between this classmate's response and a scatological pornography video suggests that Lewis places the video's faecal play on a level with Shvarts' menstruation. While this is just one example of reactions against menstrual blood, its incendiary nature points to excessive, problematic responses to the aesthetic usage of menstrual blood.

As a metaphorical body, the female body signifies issues that range from morality, motherhood, and nationhood, to evil and social ills. Shvarts engages with the female body as a reproductive body in this performance (Doyle 32). She remarks that she felt there was "something fake" about her own sense of agency, and that women's bodies and voices are often used as "base material" for generating and signifying other meanings (Shvarts, "How does" 43). To a certain extent, Shvarts plays into the tendency to use the female body as a signifier, constructing it as a metaphorical entity to pursue her political project. The discourse around abortion rights and women's bodily integrity stands as a major framework that Shvarts integrates to highlight the tenuousness and ambiguity of the subject/ object binary. Her work explores narratives of ownership and the policing of bodily integrity, demonstrating the role of the female body as a site of political conflict as well as a means of experience (Smith, qtd. in Posner 27). When it comes to issues of agency, Shvarts attempts to speak out against restrictive narratives by giving her actions a sense of authority and intention. In contrast to *Rhythm 0*, where Abramović denies making any commentary on female objectification and the gendered

aspects of visibility, Shvarts purposefully exposes and questions the discursive underpinnings of the female, reproductive body. Her work also differs from Bausch's work, which despite exploring the nuances and societal roots of gendered roles and relationships, arguably replicates them.

Production and Reproduction

Shvarts' performance positions reproduction and production as both artistic and gendered processes. She uses her own body as both a "site of production and a medium of her art", which suggests that a woman is both "reproductive subject and creative subject" (Grahovac 13). The absence of a final "product" highlights the intangibility of much conceptual art, which prioritised idea and process over the creation of a material art object. Indeed, the major material outcome of Shvarts' performance might even be waste. Grahovac notes that "Shvarts's performance confronts us with a question of waste" and goes on to equate this waste as ambiguous in its association with either performance, time, an embryo, or the body (8). This sense of waste, even when tied to material objects such as Shvarts' blood, overturns definitions of product and commodity in relation to production and reproduction.

The focus on discursivity through the (im)materiality of Shvarts' blood and bodily effluents raises the question of whether this blood even existed. As such, one could argue that this ambiguity opposes both biological and artistic (re)production. This is further complicated by the perception that production and creation are generative processes while reproduction is mimetic and derivative. Marx's writing on productive and unproductive labour under capitalistic systems defines unproductive labour as linked to revenue, relying on capital to sustain itself, and productive labour as producing further capital (Marx, qtd. in Gough 52). These ideas were then applied in Marxist feminist analyses of reproductive labour that criticised the fact that most Marxist texts ignored the productive labour that women performed in the private sphere. As Shvarts' performance has no result and does not ostensibly partake in

commodification and labour relations, it exposes the tenuous boundary between productive and reproductive labour. Shvarts supports these arguments by challenging links between reproductive labour and the female body and positing reproduction as an agentive process via "wayward reproduction" that challenges representation and definition (Apter 110). Shvarts highlights discursivity by underlining the metaphorical aspects of the female body's relationship to reproduction, and reveals the constraints of representing abortion (Doyle 36).

Shvarts uses the terms "figuration" and "failure" to characterise her work and its influences. These terms are in dialogue with the theme of labour that underlies her performance. She defines figuration as "the ways in which a body becomes sensible to a viewer through visual and linguistic representation", suggesting a direct link to labour ("Figuration and Failure" 156). Shvarts gestures towards aesthetic and social practices around bodily legibility as expected and desired in mainstream representation and discourse. Such processes have productive functions and create legibility around the body. She sets figuration against failure as "that which is not reconciled to normative standards of value or meaning and falls outside the bounds of functionality or progress" ("Figuration and Failure" 156). This evokes unproductive labour and highlights her own work as a form of "failure" that resists social and reproductive frameworks. By employing shock tactics and transgressing artistic and representational frames in a particularly challenging form of dark play, Shvarts takes ownership over the productive process and establishes the woman as the agent and owner of her own bodily functions and capabilities (Roach 280). Grahovac suggests that while Shvarts evokes women as authors and creators rather than reproducers, it is uncertain whether Shvarts emerged as a producer or simply "a vehicle of production" (13). This uncertainty highlights the tension around materiality and objecthood in relation to female bodies and feminist artwork. By overturning the conflation of a woman's body, reproduction, and productivity, Shvarts challenges the assumption that a woman "is a productive citizen insofar as she procreates" and

that alternative forms of female creativity threaten national reproduction (Berlant, qtd. in Grahovac 4).

Shvarts' performance speaks against the symbolic cooption of a woman's role as that of a means of reproduction: "Shvarts suggests that the symbolic and ethical value of an aborting subject lies precisely in this reversal of a woman's position – from the position of 'an object' of reproduction to that of 'the author', the one who effectively produces either birth or abjection" (Grahovac 9). By playing with discursivity and materiality and highlighting the role of labour and the (non)labouring female body, Shvarts' performance contributes to wider discourses on the aims and themes of feminist art. In its engagement with play and exposure of patriarchal frameworks and the limitation of women's bodily and individual freedom, Shvarts' performance dialogues with work by Abramović and Bausch. Tracing these threads across their work highlights how female performers utilise objects and position their own bodies as objects to reveal and challenge social norms and attitudes towards the female body.

Conclusion

Feminist performance, especially when it began to take shape from the 1960s onwards, faced a host of challenges that affect performers, the content of their work, and their work's reception. Compounding the pre-existing objectification of the female body, feminist performances involving nudity, menstrual blood, or gendered violence pose significant risks to performers' bodily integrity and audiences' reception of their work. Objecthood is one method that female performers employ to speak against these concerns, where they use self-directed objectification and hyperbolic themes to expose how female bodies are systemically and institutionally objectified. This in turn enables them to explore objecthood as a potential site of opposition. The ways in which these performers utilise objecthood, moreover, destabilises the dichotomy of discourse and materiality that feminist critics have often sought to draw. In so doing, they challenge the false binary that overvalues discursivity as a refuge from victimisation.

Reading the three performances in relation to each other (despite disparities in their time period, form, and intent) underlines the contributions that they make, separately and together, to objecthood as a site of confrontation when inhabited by certain performing female bodies. In choosing to analyse three performances that are so different yet share some genealogical contiguities, I wanted to consider how conditions and processes of self-directed objectification differ in relation to a performance's form, audience and content, and the timescales on which it relies. Bringing in concepts such as participatory art, conceptual art, abject art, and physical theatre, I positioned materiality as a complex and wide-ranging process that calls broader debates around the art object and the nature of performance into question. In addition, positioning the female body as object creates added standpoints for considering both the limitations and possibilities that objecthood creates.

My analysis of the three works revealed connections in their themes and intent and in the traditions that they both represented and subverted. Each performance draws on different strategies to expose objecthood, suggesting the multiple ways in which objecthood can create positions of commentary, reversal, and challenge for female bodies. Granting an audience the power and right to objectify and physically interact with a still female body highlights how the interaction of ludic and real time schemes influences the body's positioning and interpretation. Patriarchal values and structures haunt embodied performances of fictional relationships and interactions between and within human and nonhuman objects. This brings the past into the present and exposes female objectification and victimisation as pervasive, recurrent features of gender relationships. Likewise, the linking of fiction and fact highlights how materiality and discursivity interact to influence interpretations of the female body and bodily processes such as menstruation. This then presents the conceptual as a useful position that can coexist with materiality and move beyond the material/ discursive dialectic to open new avenues of commentary and dissent for female performers.

As I acknowledged in my introduction, my analysis is restricted to works by three white performers, and thus analyses a limited sample that is not representative of larger bodies of works by BIPOC artists and by other white artists. Likewise, my work does not address the nuances of sexuality and gender normativity, instead presupposing the position of a cisgender, possibly heteronormative female subject. It is my hope that I will be able to extend my conclusions and analyses to reflect the work of BIPOC artists. This will allow for a diversity of identities. More importantly, it will allow me to explore how objectification and self-objectification mean different things, and pose different challenges, when it comes to BIPOC women and identities. Part of the issue in terms of racialised bodies and gender is the construction of whiteness as a dialectical opposite of Blackness, which then problematises how gender is constructed and understood. Race also inflects how female bodies are viewed; BIPOC

women are constructed as more sexual than white women (Bordo 9). Setting oneself up as an object would then involve more complicated relationships to materiality and the body for BIPOC performers. Such an exploration would challenge the assumption that taking on the roles and positions that Abramović, Bausch and her dancers, and Shvarts choose to inhabit in their respective performances is an accessible option for all female subjects and bodies, and would bring in questions of visibility, representation, and access in terms of which bodies are able and willing to instrumentalise positions of objecthood. It would also allow for a heightened, intersectional focus on objectification and marginalisation and their disproportionate effects on racialised and otherwise marginalised identities. For instance, Black subjects have vastly different sociohistorical relationships to objecthood than white subjects. Therefore, self-directed objecthood would look very different, and have different politics, when inhabited by Black female subjects. Broadening my analysis would make way for an awareness of the existence of female **bodies** (as opposed to a unitary, homogenous female **body** as I might seem to suggest in my thesis).

Given its focus on three major areas of inquiry, my thesis left out certain avenues of research that might have deepened and nuanced the links that I draw between performing as a female performer, the body, and human and nonhuman objects. My analysis draws links between common understandings of objects as entities that are incapable of rationality and agency and the circumstances in which white female bodies are placed because of their sexualisation and objectification in media and popular discourse. What merits further attention is the boundaries between human and nonhuman objects and the differences and similarities that undergird their objecthood. Likewise, the work that performance carries out in enabling and highlighting these differences (or similarities) deserves more exploration. Such an analysis may reveal ways that objecthood pertaining to both the female body and nonhuman objects

shifts and alters across the three performances (both separately and together) and even within the course of each performance.

Throughout my thesis, my analysis set the female body up as an isolated entity, rather than positioning it in relation to other bodies; this might distort from the realities of how female bodies exist in society. As such, there is a need to consider how female bodies interact and intersect with other bodies. Similarly, my development of objecthood as a central framework precluded a deeper investigation of subjecthood as sometimes coexisting with objecthood, along with how subjecthood is developed and influenced by and in performance. These themes would benefit from further analysis, in addition to from research on objecthood, performance, and BIPOC and other minority identity positions such as the work that Uri McMillan does on Black performance and the concept of the avatar.[22]

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[22] For deeper investigations of Black embodied performance, see the work of Uri McMillan, Daphne Brooks, Saidiya Hartman, Harvey Young, and Rashida McMahon, among others.

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