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The appropriation of performance as a means for general alienation

What could be performance

You can't be everything you think that you are in thought; all you are is what you appear to be, the outcome of your performance as a human being. Art as performance has been present in several cultures for centuries if we choose to consider its definition as something broader: the act of using one's body to express ideas, gestures and feelings. Then we can begin our argumentation with Chris Burden's performance "Shoot", from 1971, when a friend shot him in the arm with a .22 caliber rifle and start to look back in time for similar performances. We might not stop with the early 1900's Avant-garde performances, but we may as well go back until bull fights, or the gladiator fights from the Roman Empire. One may think we are possibly making a mistake by comparing athletes with actors, musicians with artists, or even making a greater mistake by saying that two gladiators battling each other until death or a man fighting a bull until the animal is dead is the same thing as Al Pacino saying the words of David Mamet in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, or a rhapsode singing the poems of Homer, or Marina Abramovic performing at Moma. No, they are not the same thing, they are different types of performances, with even more different contents, but still performances nonetheless. Some are what Plato called "physical training", what he described being something that enhances the capabilities of those who are

already educated or initiated in art. The philosopher suggested both cultivation of mind and body would elevate the soul:

And won't a person who's educated in music and poetry pursue physical training in the same way, and choose to make no use of medicine except when unavoidable? I believe so. He'll work at physical exercises in order to arouse the spirited part of his nature, rather than to acquire the physical strength for which other athletes diet and labor. That's absolutely right. Then Glaucon, did those who established education in music and poetry and in physical training do so with the aim that people attribute to them, which is to take care of the body with the latter and the soul with the former, or with some other aim? What other aim do you mean? It looks as though they established both chiefly for the sake of the soul. How so? Haven't you noticed the effect that lifelong physical training, unaccompanied by any training in music and poetry, has on the mind, or the effect of the opposite, music and poetry without physical training? What effects are you talking about? Savagery and toughness in the one case and softness and overcultivation in the other.¹(Complete Works 1046).

Therefore we actually could consider those activities aforementioned – games, fights, theater, etc. - to be part of the same category of performance because of the implication that physical and mental expression work together in order to achieve what Plato conceived as goodness. Since the concept of goodness is not central to the discussion presented here, we will not prolong ourselves in the subject and will instead use the term “an elevated state of thoughtfulness“. Therefore, let us consider the fact that performances are composed by these two

¹ Republic III

elements, the physical training and the mental expression. The term “mental expression“ is frail and broad, so we can presume it as any kind of pre-conceived idea, or plan like sheet music, poetry, a play, the rules of an artistic performance, or even the planning to a basketball game – which plays to use, the best moment to attack with more intensity, when to rest, and so forth. The physical training is the part that synchronizes body and mind. In every performance mentioned here we could perceive the relation between trained body and trained mind. Thus that relation must be sustained. Consequently, we can take a look at specific cases – for instance, can an actor be out of shape (meaning that the actor didn’t undergo an optimal physical training) and still be a good actor? Yes, if the role demands so, but if they are out of shape and their role demands energy, they would face trouble performing a good job. Can an athlete be out of shape? No, of course not. Can an athlete be mentally unprepared? Yes, but in a decisive moment, when they need stability and focus, they might not perform well. Can a bull fighter be out of shape and mentally unprepared? No, in either case they could be fatally injured by the animal. Can a gladiator be out of shape and mentally unprepared? No, in either case they would be falling to a better trained or smarter opponent. Can Marina Abramovic be out of shape and mentally unprepared? Never, because the performances she chooses to make are always both physically and mentally demanding. Actually this is the base of all her work: physical and mental preparation in order to achieve her objectives as an artist.

Performance as representation

For Plato even in the pure athletic act there might exist the effort to better oneself and to achieve a state of elevated thoughtfulness. But even the noble athlete with all good they represent could not express or grasp truth with their acts. In Plato’s “Apology”, Socrates uses an analogy

about horse races as a means to address the fact that, in his defense against the death penalty, the role of the philosopher was to make people happy by showing them the truth, unlike the illusion of happiness that would come from a simple victory in a race or a game. The philosopher starts saying he had not lived quietly because he thought he should work on the idea that people should want to be good and wise in essence, instead of having concerns about their possessions and mundane things. When Socrates is given the death sentence he responds:

He assesses the penalty at death. So be it. What counter-assessment should I propose to you, men of Athens? Clearly it should be a penalty I deserve, and what do I deserve to suffer or to pay because I have deliberately not led a quiet life but have neglected what occupies most people: wealth, household affairs, the position of general or public orator or the other offices, the political clubs and factions that exist in the city? I thought myself too honest to survive if I occupied myself with those things. I did not follow that path that would have made me of no use either to you or to myself, but I went to each of you privately and conferred upon him what I say is the greatest benefit, by trying to persuade him not to care for any of his belongings before caring that he himself should be as good and as wise as possible, not to care for the city's possessions more than for the city itself, and to care for other things in the same way. What do I deserve for being such a man? Some good, men of Athens, if I must truly make an assessment according to my deserts, and something suitable. What is suitable for a poor benefactor who needs leisure to exhort you? Nothing is more suitable, gentlemen, than for such a man to be fed in the Prytaneum, much more suitable for him than for any one of you who has won a victory at Olympia with a pair or a team of horses. The Olympian

victor makes you think yourself happy, I make you be happy². (Complete Works 32-33)

And this is where we can devise the difference of what a performance conveys to the audience from the truth the philosopher wants us to know. Performing is not only something that moves the most rational of human beings to an emotional state, but also is an imitation. It gives a representation of an idea, not the idea itself.

The problem with those types of performances is that in a Platonic interpretation every single one of them has an emotional appeal and therefore, like the imitative poetry that Plato mentions, “is likely to distort the thought of anyone who hears it, unless he has the knowledge of what it is really like, as a drug to counteract it.”³ (Complete Works 1200). The drug used to counteract it is knowledge, mental training. Passionate figures according to Plato have an inferior degree of truth, and, as art often appeals to passion, to the irrational nature of man, the result is a clear distance from the truth: “he is the manufacturer of images and is very far removed from the truth”(Republic loc 9419). According to the philosopher, when facing the expression of strong feelings, “the best of us delight in giving way to sympathy” (Republic loc 9419). Those emotions remove us from reality in a sort of self-estrangement that keeps us from acting rationally. Plato sees the engagement of the audience into poetry – as he was discussing this specific form of art – similar as being under the spell of magic: “The “victims” of magic, I think you’d agree, are those who change their mind because they are under the spell of pleasure or fear.”⁴ (Complete Works 1049).

² Apology

³ Republic X

⁴ Republic III

The difference from a last-second shot made by a basketball player guarded by three 7-footers opponents in a game and the long stare of Marina Abramovic sitting in front of a single person is the amount of thought each of those performances can generate. With a basket scored at the last second one might be inspired by the human potential of performing physical activities with such perfection, or even admire the beauty of the movement. In Abramovic's performance nothing is clear; while she works with her body and mind, she tries to transcend the formality of the work of art by trying to achieve "a luminous state of being and then transmit it", as we can read in the website about her movie "The Artist is Present"(marinafilm.com). The performance consists of someone from the audience sitting in front of the artist, across a table. That person stands in front of a larger audience – the audience is also part of the show – and might feel overwhelmed by the attention, or excited by the presence of an artist of such stature as Marina Abramovic. But then, what would the audience take away from the performance? What is the after-thought? What is the priceless abstract entity they are able to absorb from that? Is Marina Abramovic capable of transmitting her "luminous state of being"? And why are we comparing an artistic performance to a basketball game? The idea is to create a relation between what is considered an art performance and the appropriations of it that resulted in performances that focus on emotional aspects and might be used as instruments that separate us from rationality.

Marina Abramovic's "The Artist is Present" performance and the appeal to the emotional aspect of art

Marina Abramovic's performance that took place at the Museum of Modern Art (Moma) in 2010 during the retrospective of her life's work was an attempt to stage a representation of the essence of the artist in a very philosophical approach. The work had many degrees of

representation – it was conceived almost as a TV program. Abramovic would be surrounded by cameras and spectators, imitating a show that already is an imitation of reality, if we consider that it is not already expressing a second degree representation of reality. Her idea of permanent performance is noble: the artist is living in an aesthetical way, engaging in life aesthetically, as if every second of existence were equivalent to a moment of creation and fruition of beauty. However, as a performer she is impersonating a mystical figure, like a guru, or even like the idiotic figure of a rhapsode in Plato's *Ion*.

In *Ion*, Plato directs his arguments to the particular idea that actors, or rhapsodes – to be more precise – act on inspiration instead of on intellect, and that the beautiful in poetry comes from inspiration, from possession, from the obscure concept of a muse, which “as a “Magnetic“ stone moves iron rings“. According to Plato there is no intellect in poetry: “For a poet is an airy thing, winged and holy, and he is not able to make poetry until he becomes inspired and goes out of his mind and his intellect is no longer in him⁵” (Complete Works 942). Plato's argument consists of saying that if the poet is able to speak through one type of poetry and not through all of them, it is not mastery that enables him to be good at that specific form, it is the gods who possess him and speak through him. This situation puts rhapsodes among representatives of representatives, as they are those who sing the work of poets. Thus, for Plato art is not a cognitive process, it is something knowledgeable in a prophetic way. When Plato confronts *Ion* about his knowledge of his profession the philosopher is trying to prove that *Ion* is not a master of a type of art, but that he is - ironically - “someone divine” that gets his inspiration from the gods and who is not in his right mind when representing. One could argue that today an actor is someone who could have studied and perfected his craft in a sense they might have knowledge

⁵ *Ion*.

about the act of representing itself, but it will still be representing, imitating something that already exists and far from the truth: “Then the imitator, I said, is a long way off the truth, and can do all things because he lightly touches on a small part of them, and that part an image (...) because he himself was unable to analyze the nature of knowledge and ignorance and imitation.”(Republic loc 9260).

In this manner, is “The Artist is Present“ a bad performance? Since it has several degrees of representation that are not clear and because it appeals to emotions and not to an elevated state of thoughtfulness, as a piece of art it is not important. In a Platonic interpretation, that performance only conveys emotion, it is unable to engage in a clear demonstration of thought resulting in something far from the truth. It is hard to find the initial idea that gives birth to the first representation. Her act is a performance in front of the cameras, the outcome of it is not only the performance itself, but a documentary film about it. Ms. Abramovic has so many aspirations with this piece that she barely manages to accomplish the simplest one – making one of her good performances. She created a persona that confounds the public. We don’t know if she is a guru, or an artist trying to be a holy person, or simply an artist. We can have that idea by gathering information from the website used to publicize the film made from the performance “The artist is present“. There she is described as “seductive, fearless, and outrageous“, “using her own body as a vehicle, pushing herself beyond her physical and mental limits – and at times risking her life in the process – she creates performances that challenge, shock, and move us.” (marinafilm.com).

Than there is what we could describe as a shamanic interpretation of her artistic capabilities: “through her and with her, boundaries are crossed, consciousness expanded, and art as we know it is reborn. She is, quite simply, one of the most compelling artists of our time.“ (marinafilm.com). During the 2010 Moma performance, Abramovic’s website stated that she

was looking for a chance to “finally silence the question she has been hearing over and over again for four decades: “but why is this art?” Then the information about the performance turns into a description of a ritual of enlightenment:

The mounting of the retrospective and its three-month exhibition at Moma is the narrative of Marina Abramovic *The Artist is Present*, and over the course of the film, we return again and again to the museum. There, as the ‘set’ is built for the new work that will be the centerpiece of the show, Marina sketches her ambitious plans: all day, every day, from early March until the end of May, 2010, she will sit at a table in the Museum’s atrium, in what she describes as a ‘square of light.’ Members of the audience will be invited to join her, one at a time, at the opposite end of the table. There will be no talking, no touching, no overt communication of any kind. Her objective is to achieve a luminous state of being and then transmit it – to engage in what she calls ‘an energy dialogue’ with the audience. (marinafilm.com).

Is her performance harmful? No, but the appropriation of her image as an artist that is more of a guru or a mystical figure is. Her statement with this piece could be: by looking at me you will feel the physical presence of a great artist and you will feel deeply touched by it, you will see that beauty is what I emanate as a superior being, you will feel what art is by being involved by my performance. If we take a look at these ideas from a Nietzschean perspective of a Dionysian state of inebriation that would create a situation where the Dionysian aspect of art puts man in touch with freedom, in that state intoxication is seen as elevation, there are no barriers, then the aesthetical life Abramovic wants is achieved. Her early pieces were very powerful in the way she managed to emanate a pure sense of inebriation astonishing the audiences. That case

would be true in some of her early performances like *Rhythm 0* (1974), where she stood still while the audience was invited to do to her whatever they wished, using one of 72 objects she had placed on a table. These included a rose, a feather, perfume, honey, bread, grapes, wine, scissors, a scalpel, nails, a metal bar, and a gun loaded with one bullet. The public went as far as pointing the loaded gun the her. That performance worked from the Nietzschean point of view because somehow it conveyed a deep sense of truth about the cruelty of the human being. On the other hand, looking at that event from a Platonic perspective, we might argue that since Abramovic is not a Philosopher, since her knowledge about humanity, or more specifically, about cruel aspects of human beings is not as vast as someone's whose profession is dedicated to the *métier* (or art, as Plato would prefer) of philosophy, or even in our days, to the *métier* of psychoanalysis, she is not capable of retrieving any truth from that kind of performance. She would be staging ideas the same way a rhapsode would be singing the words of Homer. She performs inspired by a very obscure entity that Plato would describe as a muse. That way she would intoxicate the mind of her audience with emotions and by doing so she would be helping to deprive people of rationality and intelligibility. Her work would be a mere phenomenon accessible to the senses, not as something accessible to the intellect.

However, the conception of the performance is hers. She is the one who writes the instructions, but Homer was also the one who wrote the words, and according to Plato, he was also imitating reality. He said about Homer that “a man is not to be revered more than the truth⁶” (Republic loc 9568). Perhaps he was speaking about himself as well.

We could go further in trying to defend Abramovic's work when facing Plato's ideas by asking “isn't she creating reality instead of imitating it”? We could start answering that question

⁶ Republic X

by saying that most of her performances take place in galleries and stages and they demand stage props that have meaning within the context of her performance, with specific instructions written by herself. Thus she is representing.

But let us believe in Abramovic's capabilities as an artist and overcome the obscure idea of a muse that inspires every artist to say or make beautiful things. Her performances start with planning, elaborating what she expects from her act and finally setting the instructions. A well-executed performance has the power to engage the audience into a situation highly charged with emotions. In that sense, when the only intention is to shock, or to bring about the illusion of the revelation of some sort of idea apart from truth, according to Plato, the performance would be hurting the rational principles that rule our society. The artist is not helping to uncover hidden features of the human nature, nor trying to shape an elevated form of expression that might help clarify the mysteries of our very existence.

As a matter of fact, Abramovic poses as a guru, as someone who is capable of reaching the truth by staring at us. That is problematic because in this case, she is indeed a rhapsode that sings poems to our contentment. By behaving as a mystical person she is entering the realm of the senses and leaving behind every principle that is based on knowledge. She is trying to access a disturbed notion of truth by triggering strong emotions in her audience. And here is where appropriation takes place. One can't appropriate a work of art, but can appropriate what it represents.

Appropriation of appearances

It is hard to tell when in History the idea of Republic that Plato conceived started to be pervaded by such subterfuges as we see in today's society. Entertainment not only as an industry, but as a means of reproduction of ideas and concepts of an ideal world that is far from being

ideal. Movie stars, visual artists, musicians, athletes, everybody who appears on television and, more recently, on the Internet, and, still, on the radio is taking part in reproducing a republic of appearances. Nothing beats fame and money in today's society. Writers can become famous if they sell millions of copies of their book or sign a deal to make a movie or a television series. Success is at everyone's door. One has to work hard to show one's face somewhere. One has to be seen. One has to appear. And Plato describes a world that can be built like that:

You could do it quickly and in lots of places, especially if you were willing to carry a mirror with you, for that's the quickest way of all. With it you can quickly make the sun, the things in the heavens, the earth, yourself, the other animals, manufactured items, plants, and everything else mentioned just now. Yes, I could make them appear, but I couldn't make the things themselves as they truly are⁷.

(Complete Works 1201)

The problem with art today is that it is not being able to avoid the circle where the artist appropriates a reality that was already appropriated by someone before. Art is making a mirror that reflects another mirror that once reflected a resemblance of reality. Art is no longer imitating reality, it is imitating the imitation of reality. The way Pop Art, for instance, appropriated images of movie stars, themes from comics, subjects from television shows, and turned it into art is a clear example of what we could call a representation of a representation. But we shall keep our attention to performance art and the way it is appropriated by what is outside the art realm.

Then how does the appropriation take place? Throughout History various forms of performances were used as a means of distraction and to appease imminent revolt, or social unrest, or political and economical crisis. We cannot judge whether the public enjoyed more the

⁷ Republic X

gladiator's combats – which, according to our argument, might be considered a performance – or the spectacle of feeding Christians to lions at the events that happened in the circuses during the final period of the Roman Empire. Therefore it is not hard to find traces of such kind of activity elsewhere: rituals of bravery and initiation in primitive cultures all over the world that happened even before the Roman Empire, the tournaments of knights during the Middle Ages – and here we are only considering the violent performances, since there is also music, theater and poetry that were present in several different cultures from early stages of development.

However, speaking about the entirety of human history would not help us with our argument. Let us stay with the bread and circuses policy of the Romans. Edward Gibbon describes the games that took place in the Roman Empire:

The people was repeatedly gratified by the attention and courtesy of Honorius in the public games, which were celebrated on that occasion with a magnificence not unworthy of the spectator. As soon as the appointed number of chariot-races was concluded, the decoration of the Circus was suddenly changed; the hunting of wild beasts afforded a various and splendid entertainment; and the chase was succeeded by a military dance, which seems, in the lively description of Claudian, to present the image of a modern tournament. In these games of Honorius, the inhuman combats of gladiators polluted, for the last time, the amphitheater of Rome. The first Christian emperor may claim the honor of the first edict which condemned the art and amusement of shedding human blood; but this benevolent law expressed the wishes of the prince, without reforming an inveterate abuse, which degraded a civilized nation below the condition of savage cannibals. Several hundred, perhaps several thousand, victims were annually slaughtered in

the great cities of the empire; and the month of December, more peculiarly devoted to the combats of gladiators, still exhibited to the eyes of the Roman people a grateful spectacle of blood and cruelty. (History Vol. 3 152)

The violence of the games eventually stopped with its prohibition during Constantine's rule because the efficacy of it in maintaining the people satisfied also depended on the capability of the State of being able to function without falling in total collapse. Gibbon speaks about the fact that the amusement by the people by the bloodshed degraded the nation to a condition of savages. Emperor Constantine also accepted Christianity within the Roman Empire, so the blame for plagues, calamities and crisis could not be put on Christians anymore. Before that they would be fed to lions in a sacrifice for the people's amusement, so the gladiator's combats would be often followed by the massacre of Christians, as if the honorific dispute between two professional soldiers could be compared to the slaughter of a human being. At this moment we could see an immediate appropriation of a performance, when it is been displayed in the same stage where people are being killed:

On those occasions the inhabitants of the great cities of the empire were collected in the circus or the theatre, where every circumstance of the place, as well as of the ceremony, contributed to kindle their devotion, and to extinguish their humanity. Whilst the numerous spectators, crowned with garlands, perfumed with incense, purified with the blood of victims, and surrounded with the altars and statues of their tutelar deities, resigned themselves to the enjoyment of pleasures, which they considered as an essential part of their religious worship, they recollected, that the Christians alone abhorred the gods of mankind, and by their absence and melancholy on these solemn festivals, seemed to insult or to lament

the public felicity. If the empire had been afflicted by any recent calamity, by a plague, a famine, or an unsuccessful war; if the Tyber had, or if the Nile had not, risen beyond its banks; if the earth had shaken, or if the temperate order of the seasons had been interrupted, the superstitious Pagans were convinced that the crimes and the impiety of the Christians, who were spared by the excessive lenity of the government, had at length provoked the divine justice. It was not among a licentious and exasperated populace, that the forms of legal proceedings could be observed; it was not in an amphitheatre, stained with the blood of wild beasts and gladiators, that the voice of compassion could be heard. The impatient clamors of the multitude denounced the Christians as the enemies of gods and men, doomed them to the severest tortures, and venturing to accuse by name some of the most distinguished of the new sectaries, required with irresistible vehemence that they should be instantly apprehended and cast to the lions. The provincial governors and magistrates who presided in the public spectacles were usually inclined to gratify the inclinations, and to appease the rage, of the people, by the sacrifice of a few obnoxious victims. (History Vol.2)

But let us return to the path of the appropriation of the performances and ask ourselves why are we talking about gladiators fights in the Roman Empire? At the beginning of this article, we broadened the definition of performance in order to be able to go back in History and see how different types of performances had been used as an instrument of distraction (we could use the term alienation only within the capitalist mode of production, as described by Marx) of people from being engaged in actual thinking. Aspects of artistic performance as we see today were appropriated from theater, from music, from sports and even from the violent combats that took

place in ancient times. The first movement, then, is that of art appropriating something that already existed and making it part of its own language. The second movement is that of culture (incurring the risk of being too vague by using the term “culture“) appropriating art as a means to disconnect people from thoughtfulness. This cycle seems to be repeating itself since the beginning of mankind in various forms. Here we are looking at the point in History when performance art enters the stage. More recently, this second movement became that of art as performance being the inspiration for TV shows and spectacles that are not related to the “fine” arts. It took place mostly from the beginning of the 1960’s, when performance art started to become more present. It was already known and used as an artistic expression from the beginning of the 1900’s, but reached its adulthood by the 1960’s (Goldberg).

Having said all that, it seems that we have been inside a cycle of Platonic game of appearances from the moment the first man saw its own image, whether it was a shadow or a reflection. We might be tempted to blame the Capitalist mode of production for appropriating things, making them a product, and selling them as a palliative for the problems this very mode of production inflicts upon our lives. But the problem seems to be older. The problem seems to be man, mankind, or us and our human nature. We are drawn to violence and spectacle and to things that deeply move our emotions. In a pragmatic Marxist analysis, we could make an analogy by using his definition of alienation and replacing the object that is the product of one’s labor for anything that can carry a symbolic value and may be turned into a commodity, including art:

All these consequences are implied in the statement that the worker is related to the *product of his labor* as to an alien object. For on this premise it is clear that the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful becomes the alien world

of objects which he creates over and against himself, the poorer he himself – his inner world – becomes, the less belongs to him as his own. It is the same in religion. The more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself. The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object. Hence, the greater this activity, the more the worker lacks objects.

Whatever the product of his labor is, he is not. Therefore, the greater this product, the less is he himself. The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside him*, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him. It means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien.” (Marx 29)

From that perspective we could say that what one makes as a product with a given value, and maybe some function, eventually confronts their own existence with hostility. From an aesthetic point of view that confrontation might be good, in a sense that it could lead thought to an elevated place. However we are precisely speaking about alienation and the point of it is not be perceived. Thought is not in motion because there are processes that we created that conceal it. Symbolic appropriation is one of them. What Marx saw as labor was something almost opposite to thought that was used against the worker, and that is their own labor:

First, the fact that labor is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker

therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. (Marx 30)

This is almost the reverse of the description that Plato gives us of the necessity of mind and body being in balance in order to reach what he saw as goodness – if such a simplification is allowed to us.

Considering that the movement of removing thought from the production process alienated the worker in a Marxist interpretation, in an analogy we can say that man have been using thoughtlessness against man for so long that is hard to see when it began. Plato saw the dangers of imitative art being capable of taking its audience to emotional states disconnected from thought. We saw that that movement, as we described the process of removing thoughtfulness from activities, has been present in several moments of History, as imitation, distraction, or in the Capitalist mode of production as its main mechanism of alienation. The same way, by removing thought from art, in our case, from performance art, by staging acts that convey emotions and don't allow for rationality, the artist is not only facilitating the appropriation of their work by a culture that thrives on thoughtlessness but also reproducing that very lack of thought we see in entertainment and even in art today.

Conclusion

In order to better elaborate on our argument we have to recapitulate the main ideas that were presented here. We started outlining what we consider to be a performance, making its definition broader to contemplate different performances that took place in the past. Then we discussed performance as a representation, or imitation, in Plato words, because as a representation an art form can be more easily appropriated; as a matter of fact, it can be distorted

and reinterpreted. Later we talked about the appeal of performance to emotions using the specific case of Marina Abramovic's "The Artist is Present". In that case we saw that that specific performance is problematic because it leaves room for appropriation and misinterpretation. It's appeal to emotions keeps it distant from pursuing the type of transcendence it claims to achieve. It creates the idea of the artist as an illuminated being in an almost religious sense, without the appeal to intellect and thoughtfulness that could draw a line that differentiates art from a simple basketball game. If the artist is not capable of setting his work apart from the rest of what is being made as pure action for entertainment, then they are failing. At last, we went back into History to see a specific case of performances being used as distraction, alienation and manipulation of the people, when the Romans experienced the circuses and the combats of gladiators.

By tracking the same type of appropriation happening as far in time as more than 2000 years ago we should not be surprised by the fact that it still happens today in various forms. Actually, what is remarkable is how Plato's ideas are still fresh, what gives us the feeling that we have been living within the illusion of progress of thought when we have been reproducing our own imprisonment by making representations of representations of representations *ad infinitum* of what we conceive as reality. We are sure that, in case we decide to search for more evidence in History, we could find the same type of mechanism taking place. The mechanism is as follows: (1) performances have been used throughout History as a means of alienation in a broader sense and even before Capitalism; (2) art appropriated performance as a medium in response to "old art" in the specific case of art from the beginning of the 20th Century; (3) mass media, the State, rulers in general appropriated artistic performances and turned it into entertainment as a means of alienation; (4) the cycle repeats itself.

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