Praktognosia and Performance: Phenomenological Epistemology in
the Performance Art of Marina Abramović and Lia Chavez
by Julie Hamilton

In his work *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty gives a
phenomenological epistemology of the body’s relationship to space and time. He argues that
praktognosia or “know-how” is the body’s primary, somatic epistemology or perception of the
world without discursive reasoning. Essentially, ‘doing’ is both prior to and formative for
‘knowing.’ These components, Merleau-Ponty postures, are the body’s continual encounter of
“indeterminate horizons” containing innumerous perspectives from inhabiting the world. Taking
this to be paradigmatic for performance art, in this paper I will employ the aid of art historian
Kristine Stiles on the ‘metonymy’ of performance art, who considers the grammar of the body as
interwoven with, not metaphorical of the world, shaping its’ epistemology through embodied
actions. Thus, the body as subject in visual art arguably surpasses the former object (e.g. painting,
sculpture), expanding the socio-political-ethical dynamics of art, as well as phenomenological
dimensions. From this interpretation, I engage Merleau-Ponty’s insistence that we “perform
afresh” in the world, his ‘praktognosia’ as a hermeneutical reading for performance art,
specifically selected works by Marina Abramović (b. 1946) and Lia Chavez (b. 1978). Both
Abramović and Chavez employ ascetic disciplines, meditation practices and habituated
neurological training in hyperconsciousness, “performing afresh” the body’s phenomenological
epistemology through their respective art making. For both Abramović and Chavez, the body is a
studio through which one acts in order to know. Both of these women exemplify
phenomenological epistemology in their praktognosia performances, bearing witness through their liturgical practices of the body’s mystical and complex intuitive perception.

Performance Art: A Brief History

In order to situate the conversation between the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the particular performance pieces by Marina Abramović and Lia Chavez, I will provide a brief introduction to performance art in order to establish the context for art with the body as the primary medium. It would be easy to presume that performance art’s earliest origins lie in ancient theater and stage acting, with later manifestations in Futurism, Russian Constructivism and Dada at the Cabaret Voltaire. However, it did not formally emerge as a recognized practice until the late 1950s and early 1960s as the progeny of action painting’s existentialism. In a post-World War II setting, performance art began as a direct and indirect response to the loss of human life from the Holocaust, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The threat of annihilation in this nuclear age heightened artists’ awareness of the body’s potential obliteration and subsequent need for preservation. In addition to the geo-political context, the presence of French existential philosophy, particularly in the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus influenced the intellectual and artistic culture of America, especially the New York School, where action painting was born.

The New York School artists understood Sartre’s existential maxim “existence precedes essence” as a manifesto for a new kind of action painting. Their work was more about process than it was about the meaning or ‘essence’ of the work. In his painting Cathedral (1947), Jackson Pollock emphasized both the subjectivity of the maker and the act of creation—direct and immediate—born out of influences from German Expression and American Indian Sand painting.
Learning the term ‘all-over painting’ from his teacher Hans Hoffman, Pollock was interested in creating a record of the energy and dynamism generated through the artistic process on the canvas as a kind of artifact.

Allan Kaprow described Pollock as ‘the great failure’ in his essay “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” (1958) because Pollock drew attention to the work itself as an object, instead of the action events that his work captured. Rather, Kaprow innovated action artworks “generated in action by a heedful of ideas or a flimsily-jotted-down scores of root directions” which he called ‘Happenings.’ Nevertheless, Kaprow borrowed from Pollock’s expressionism, transforming the gestures from action painting into the bodily actions in performance. Kaprow’s work, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959) was a dada-esque assemblage built in a structure of three “rooms” divided by plastic walls with simultaneous events occurring in each of the multiple rooms. This work invited spectators to be participants and contributors to the Happenings, instigating the audience’s involvement with the artist. These Happenings were collaborations between the performer and the audience that expanded into other types of performance work with Jean-Jacques Label and Joseph Beuys; John Cage’s scores; Wolf Vostell and George Maciunas’s “Fluxes”, Yves Klein’s conceptual works, and feminist performance pieces by Carolee Schneemann and Yoko Ono.

The atomic age’s shift from abstract expressionist paintings into actions replaced the canvas with the body as the primary locus of artistic making through performance. Art historian Kristine Stiles argues that these artists emphasized the aspect of process over artifact, transposing “representational objects to presentational modes of action that extended the formal boundaries of painting and sculpture into real time and movement in space.” In this way, the nature of artwork shifted: art was no longer limited to formal objects but could now be incarnated in bodily
performances, resulting in ephemeral actions. This medium not only allowed for a plurality of voices as the diversification of bodies increased, but the medium itself additionally critiqued the commercialism latent within the emerging global art market due to its intrinsic limitations within the body.

Stiles postures that the concept of ‘metonymy’ in performance art narrows the distance between the body and space, making art and life appear seamless. Metonymy is the interwoven fabric of the body to the world that shapes its actions in the subject-object distinction. It is the body-in-motion, the dynamism in space and time connecting the body to the world in a complex interwoven field. The body’s visceral communication acts as a metonymic joint, liminally overlapping the body within the space it inhabits. Metonymic knowledge is the body’s somatic motor intentionality, breaking down barriers between art and life. This ability for art to exist between the traditional relationship of ‘subject’ and ‘object’ obfuscates the Formalist (as well as Greenburgian) notions of art’s aesthetic aim towards Kantian ‘disinterested contemplation,’ as advocated by Michael Fried in his “Art and Objecthood” (1967).

Attacking performance as a kind of anti-art, Fried distinguishes between ‘theatre’ and ‘theatricality’, wanting to maintain definitive limits to art’s ‘objecthood’ by distancing the metonymic aspects of performance art which concern the body into the arguably safer category of ‘theatre.’ Au contraire, says Stiles, following from Allan Kaprow’s manifesto, insisting that the unique advantage of performance art is precisely its’ ability to be mistaken for reality, “forcing attention upon the aim of its ambiguities.” Performance art’s ability to blur formerly clear-cut art historical definitions of what art specifically entailed not only challenged the landscape of what art could be, but also favorably complicated the marketability and capitalism of art. Thus, performance art affords the body an opportunity to facilitate its nexus of meaning as a vehicle for
revelation, whereby metonymy is the integrative component to hosting the body’s praktognosia as artistic epistemology.

*Praktognosia: Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenological Epistemology*

The twentieth-century French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) provides a helpful and methodological syntax for discussing the body’s praktognosia within performance art. In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty articulates that acting or ‘doing’ is epistemology or ‘knowing’ for a person on a visceral register. He writes:

> The space and time which I inhabit are always in their different ways indeterminate horizons which contain other points of view. The synthesis of both time and space is a task that always has to be performed afresh. Our bodily experience of movement is not a particular case of knowledge; it provides us with a way of access to the world and to the object, with a 'praktognosia,' which has to be recognized as original and perhaps as primary.5

Merleau-Ponty discusses the body’s perception of the world or praktognosia as antepredictive—a mode of first and primary access without discursive thinking, a world that is ‘already there.’6 This “way of access” or communion with the world is kinesthetic and metonymic: a body-in-motion within both space and time. The phenomenology of space is continually an ever-changing stage on which the body performs and discovers its’ ‘indeterminate horizons’, exemplifying its’ “complex embeddedness to the world.”7 Praktognosia’s intuitive perception is contingent on its environmental setting, repetitively discerning its’ motor intentionality amidst its shifting vantage points, where the synthesis of time and space are cyclically brought together within the body and “performed afresh.”8 Thus, praktognosia is phenomenological epistemology, in which the body’s metonymic ‘doing’ is the primary perception and form for ‘knowing.’ Knowing from doing presupposes that the actor does not have a prori knowledge of the act before doing it and is
consequently a beginner. Such a methodology assumes that risk and self-discovery are primary factors in this form of epistemology.

The body’s *praktognosia* is conditioned by practices that are written upon the body’s history. Through repetitive formation, kinesthetic knowledge catechizes the body by way of habituation, informing it somatically. Ritualistic practices, as well as liturgical rites, follow this phenomenological pedagogy. Whether one is exercising a method in executing the ideal pour-over coffee, pitching the perfect ball game, reaching simultaneous orgasms in lovemaking, or chanting the sacred litany of the Mass, these bodily liturgies inform and reform the body’s metonymic *praktognosia*.¹

The integral connection of bodily know-how from Merleau-Ponty’s grammar with performance art is the participation of flesh in the world. The flesh, he contends, is a sacramental presence, a ‘given’ and way of communion not unlike the Eucharist.¹⁰ Far from an abstract concept, transcendental idealism or even an icon, it is a *flesh itself*. Richard Kearney insists that Merleau-Ponty navigates philosophical dualism in his phenomenological terminologies by adopting the religious taxonomy of Eucharist and communion, “revitalizing theological and sacramental idioms in a post-metaphysical language.”¹¹ Calling Merleau-Ponty’s ‘sacramentality of the flesh’ “a eucharistics of profane perception”, Kearney explains that the phenomenological understanding of the flesh entails “infinity embodying itself in daily acts of Eucharistic love and sharing: the word made everyday flesh.”¹² This incarnational language of embodiment is ideal for the phenomenological discussion of the flesh in performance art.¹³

Through his phenomenological account of metonymic epistemology, Merleau-Ponty offers a philosophical rehabilitation from the Western crisis of modernism, in which the Cartesian ontology divorced the body from the mind by prioritizing discursive reasoning over bodily
practices. Critiquing the binary errors of Intellectualism and Empiricism, while concurrently
navigating Platonism and Idealism, Merleau-Ponty considers the body/mind/soul as an integrated
unit, preserving its’ hybridity (or as he terms ‘betweeness’), resisting compartmentalization. This
posture of integrating “the cognitive in the carnal” forms a fruitful ground to discuss the
performance works by Marina Abramović and Lia Chavez.

Marina Abramović: Performance as Eucharistic Presence

Considered the godmother of performance art, Balkan born (Serbian/former Yugoslavia)
performance artist Marina Abramović has innovated and canonized formal methods of
performance art, known as the “Abramović method.” Influenced by both Happenings and the
Fluxus scripts, Abramović’s own explorations during the 1970s and 1980s engage the body,
bordering on the daring and even violent, ranging from shorter experimental performances to
longer durational pieces. For Abramović, these practices experiment with states of consciousness,
cultivating pain-level tolerances, radical physical and emotional vulnerabilities with her audiences
within record-length endurance capacities. Often employing extreme forms of asceticism, she
provokes difficult questions from her audience, involving them in larger ethical ramifications
concerning the body. Consequentially, Abramović tests her limits of physical and psychological
exhaustion, processing her cultural memories and traumatic bodily experiences.

Growing up in a Communist country with military parents, strict expectations and
disciplines were expected of Abramović from a young age. Her praktognosia has come through
decades of ‘doing’ ascetic practices, repetitively questioning the body’s limits of life and death.
She has phenomenologically explored her body’s metonymic limitations though discipline and
control, drawing upon her Communist upbringing, Orthodox liturgy and Tibetan Buddhism
meditation. Many of her works are inspired from folk culture, personal experiences and social and political relativity. Above all, her live audience is the critical ingredient to her sustaining her performances—like air to breath.¹⁴

The Nightsea Crossing performances (1981-1987) with Ulay (then her artistic partner and lover) were a series of collaborative performances that challenged Western society’s values through fasting, silence, and inactivity.¹⁵ After dwelling among the Australian Aborigines in the desert and influenced by its nomadic, ascetic and ceremonial culture, Abramović and Ulay decided to approach a host of museums around the world (a total of 22 performances over five years) with their performance piece Nightsea Crossing. Named for the psychological and subconscious “sea-crossing” the pair would endure over the course of the performances, Abramović and Ulay sat silently across from each other at a mahogany table—fasting, motionless, seven hours a day, as long as the museum allowed them to perform. From the museums opening to closing (10am-5pm), the couple was a tableau vivant, present in their timelessness, without beginning or end.

Abramović’s work is concerned with a paradox found in Western society: Westerners experience an ever-present sense of nostalgic yearning or impatient desires, yet simultaneously an inability but to abide in the present. Considering herself as a kind of bridge between Eastern ascetic practices and Western consumer culture, she strips herself of luxuries—sustenance, rest, clothing, shelter—facing the challenge of having and doing nothing. By sacrificing comforts, she offers the public her vulnerability, acknowledging her body’s perception and praktognosia as ‘already there’. For Abramović, performance is about offering her audience this gift of presence to be received—a kernel of her humanity.
Marina Abramović revived her original concept of *Nightsea Crossing* for her three-month long performance *The Artist is Present*, the namesake of her retrospective in MoMA (2011). Sitting in mezzanine atrium gallery of MoMa from open-til-close for entire three months of the exhibition, Abramović performed a total of 716 hours. Like *Nightsea Crossing*, Abramović set two chairs facing each other with a table in the middle (removed halfway during the exhibition) but this time the audience was allowed to sit across from her—one at a time, for as long as they liked. In the exhibition documentary, Abramović highlights the most arduous task of the performance is maintaining a continual state of mind. She claims that holding simple actions for excruciating periods of time are cathartic, heightening her intuition of her audience. She arrives at a “full emptiness”, a phrase from the Tibetan language which Abramović employs in order to describe her performance state, which is not nothingness.

Dressed in flowing gowns resembling priestly vestments, her performance in MoMA is liturgical, symbolically akin to the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Merleau-Ponty’s sacramentality of the flesh is quite vivid in this artistic instance with regards to Eucharistic dimensions of her venerated human flesh, adored as people assemble within the museum, keeping vigil. Masses wait in line to receive the same “wafer” of her presence, a clear analogy to the Real Presence within the Eucharistic Monstrance. As a “host” herself, Abramović recognizes: "It's not about me anymore. Sooner or later I am a mirror of their own self." By giving each person at her Confessional the same treatment, her Communist sense of equality and regularity distributes her presence anew with each sitter. That is, until Ulay, some thirty years after their original *Nightsea Crossing* performances together, sat across from her in MoMA as an audience participant. Having had a history of ‘horizons’ with his flesh that knows hers well, Abramović broke her concentrated gaze by shedding tears and reaching to embrace his hands, altering her composure for this
exception. Her shaman-like communion with the world is born out of an affectionate love and reverence for the body’s sacramentality—be it the flesh of a stranger or a lover known intimately.

Marina Abramović has charted performance territory for another generation of artists to draw upon her methods and collaborate with other disciplines. For Lia Chavez, the metonymic practices of the body have led her beyond performance work to explore embodied art, through mining the caverns of inner space.

Lia Chavez: Embodied Meditation of the Interior Cosmos

New York-based artist Lia Chavez works in a variety of mediums ranging from photography, installation, performance, painting and collaboration with innovators in the fields of technology and science. Featured in the Venice Biennale, Frieze Art Fair and the New York Armory Shows (among others), Chavez has exhibited extensively on a global platform. Educated at Oxford and Goldsmiths College in London, as well as yogis in India, Chavez draws upon a wealth of authoritative and creative voices ranging from theoretical academia and medieval mystics to embodied prayer practices from eastern traditions and ancient rituals. Utilizing astronomical and neuroscience research collaborations, her multimedia explorations through the body contemplate the laws of universe alongside mystical and Divine Presence.

Chavez situates her performance work under the more specified category of ‘embodied art’, a genre not yet substantiated in art historical scholarship. A significant reason for this distinction is to distance embodied art from the need of a viewing audience or spectators. Embodied art, in contrast, is an artist’s interior exploration and performance within the body, unintended for an audience. Nevertheless, Chavez publically performs although her work need not necessarily be witnessed, often sharing it through social media platforms in real-time.
Referring to her body as a studio, Chavez explores interior space through extended-duration contemplative practices. Her embodied art is structured around listening, unifying the body and mind through breathing—requiring silence, stillness, and darkness. In silence, Chavez postures herself to receive her body’s inexhaustibly layered constitution of experiences. This quiet place is generated through a disciplined posture of stillness, nurtured by prayer. Listening in this silent meditative place is a dark interior space, but one in which she encounters lavish optical light. By cultivating an embodied sanctuary within her body, Chavez witnesses and harvests mystical visions and luminous objects.

Chavez creates embodied art as a mode of her perception, employing her body’s \textit{praktognosia} to help assist scientific innovation. Her self-understanding of \textit{praktogosia} is conceived from her substantial risk-taking. By transversing her internal landscape, Chavez continually encounters ‘indeterminate horizons’ through her vulnerability, at times visible through a chandelier of illuminating optics. She relates: “Knowing by doing involves the admission that one does not know what they are doing before they do it. This is both childish and absolutely necessary for creativity.”¹⁸ Risk permits openness to discovery with the possibility for failure, since the work is not reduced to a procedural method. Operating from contingency, Chavez admits that her position is more akin to an instrument or prepared vessel—not unlike the Beatrice’s mirrors from Dante’s \textit{Paradiso}.

Like Abramović, Chavez is interested in the body’s intuitive knowing and its subsequent unburdening when obstacles are removed—food, sleep, noise, technological distractions. What might be the possibilities of the body’s perception and communication if given closely focused attention? Simone Weil’s oft-quoted maxim that “absolute unmixed attention is prayer” is fitting for Chavez as she harnesses and moderates her consciousness, through forms of vedic and
mindfulness meditation, yoga, and mystical prayer. Living on a strict dietary, exercise and meditation regime, Chavez orients her entire being around phenomenological perception. While her earlier academic studies attend to the writings of Bergson and Deleuze concerning “the intelligence of sensation” (not unlike Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological perception), she discovered the praxis of performance art to be more epistemologically helpful than her theoretical ruminations.¹⁹

Commissioned by the Armory Show, Lia Chavez’s Luminous Objects (2013) considers the aesthetics of inner space through durational meditation and its relationship to cosmology.²⁰ In physics, ‘luminous objects’ are substances that generate their own light (such as the sun) compared to illuminated objects that reflect light (the moon). Without light, vision is impossible, since sight is dependant on light’s ability to highlight and differentiate subjects in the brain. Through durational meditation, Chavez has discovered that a similar world exists in the interior realm if the body is conditioned to listen and see. She voyages not merely in exterior time-space, but within the uncharted landscape of her consciousness. By elevating the kinesthetic to the poetic, her beautifully executed performance pieces marry the microscopic to the macrocosmic, in matters of gamma-wave generation and string theory.

Chavez compares the artist’s inner third eye to a camera lens, such as the Hubble Telescope, in its ability to capture light and phenomena, magnified amidst the darkened interior cosmos. In a prolonged state of sensory deprivation and theta-wave meditation, which Chavez describes as “relaxed alertness” or “a cinematic dream state”, ebullient visions come to her in the seeming vacant and black backdrops in her mind. Ranging from the fibers of dark matter to turbulent structures of gasses, she expresses: “I am likely to experience concussive visions of the dynamic inner storm systems, cataclysms of radiance, vortices and fractal patterns, gyrating fibers
of electricity, clouds of short lived photons, cascading fire bolts and embryonic stars.”21 Through the process of opening the third eye she witnesses the flow of consciousness parallel the patterns in nature.

Her on-going collaboration with cognitive neuroscientists at Goldsmiths College in London has had innovative and groundbreaking results. Using scientific technology to document the wave generation in Chavez’s cerebral cortex, neuroscientists are conducting a case study of her performance practices, providing original phenomenological data for science and art—an oft unholy union. Until recently, gamma-waves had been discarded as negligible by-products and are now being considered as mysterious “dark matter” in neuroscience. These are generated most effectively, states Chavez, “by a deep sort of meditation in which one centers the heart on Love.”22

The *Luminous Objects* performance was continued in Lia Chavez’s *PLETHORA* (2013) collaboration with Linnéa Spransy and Maggie Hazen.23 In the tiny Soapbox gallery in Brooklyn, Lia Chavez meditated for two weeks, in six-hour increments after dark. Viewers from the surrounding neighborhood gathered outside the gallery to watch Chavez meditate, visible to the public by means of the exterior clear glass—a sliver of pulchritude on a dingy side street. Alone on the opening night, draped in a white goddess-gown with cascading folds and apollonian laurel headdress, Chavez began meditating in the bare gallery. Each night, Spransy and Hazen contributed to Chavez’s performance through incremental installations, utilizing the walls and the floors of the constricted gallery. The conceptual thrust of *Plethora’s* installations were to depict imaginative representations of Chavez’s luminous objects, encompassing and cascading around her very performance space. Spransy’s delicate and time-intensive translucent drawings on frosted mylar are motifs simulating Chavez’s biomorphic theta-wave patterns and heartbeat
rhythms. Hazen’s floor installation is a collage of utopian and dystopian imagery based upon modular strategies of growth. By the eve of the final performance, Chavez was enveloped in a pregnant space, filled from floor to ceiling with a plethora of visions, ripe for harvest.

The trio hosted a panel discussion at the exhibition’s close with Ultra Violet, considering the complexities of time and the body integrated in their collaboration. By intersecting both chronological time of the exhibition and systolic time signature of Chavez’s biomorphic phenomena, the trio facilitated liturgical patterns for sculpting their environment. Yet it is Chavez’s presence—her flesh—animating the surrounding constellations, a *cantus firmus* among the polyphony of voices.

**Performance Art and Liturgy: Theological Possibilities?**

Maurice Meleau-Ponty’s phenomenological epistemology is ordered towards liturgical practices in a religious language, particularly his eucharistics of profane perception. This grammar of discovering what is ‘already there’ as ‘givenness’ through enacting codified rituals is no stranger to the language of theology. In fact, it is the very syntax by which the Christian Church dramatizes her participation in her biblical narrative by means of the liturgy. In his recent *Decreation*, Paul Griffiths provides (among other things) an elegant account of time and the flesh, which has meaningful resonance to liturgy and performance art.

Griffiths lucidly configures cosmic time into metronomic and systolic paradigms: the former is chronological time, leading towards the grave, and the latter is the mystical time of the liturgy. Metronomic time is regular, ordered, measured, durational, the unendurable tick-tock of decay down to death. Expounds Griffiths: “Metronomic time is time whether you like it or not, the heartbeat of a damaged but still beautiful cosmos, the hammer that knocks all coffin-nails
firmly and finally home.” Systolic time, in contrast, offers the cure or chemotherapy for metronomic time. Taking his queue from St. Paul in I Corinthians 7:29 that time after the Resurrection has been changed (systolated), Griffiths offers the physiological image of the heart’s systole, pumping blood and providing life into the body through rhythmic intervals as a helpful trope. Griffiths affirms: “to call time 'systolic', then, is to suggest that it is contracted, gathered, tensed, ready for life-giving action.” The paradigmatic account of such ‘pleated’ and ‘folded’ possibilities, he concurs, is the liturgy of the Mass in which the narrative of the Passion is reenacted and performed, ad infinitum. Participants in the liturgy of the Mass are taken up into this transfigured time, acting as a type of portal in monotony of the metronome’s accumulation.

Both Abramović and Chavez have liturgically retimed their bodies in their respective performances, one acting as a kind of priest, the other a monk. Praktognosia has underscored their ability to discern the metronome’s curse: humanity’s addiction to novelty, frivolity and distraction towards its death-bound destination, consensual or not. Abramović and Chavez have discovered a temporary freedom from and transposition of this enslavement to the forces of time’s unyielding march. Intentional or otherwise, these artists’ ascetic practices and embodying states of consciousness are repetitive liturgical patterns. Meditation and altered states of consciousness have aided both women battle time’s merciless grip and consequential weight on both themselves and their audiences. Abramović desires to slow time, even pause it, encouraging her viewers to be present with her; Chavez perceives time’s malleability and elasticity when meditating, a systolic portal into another dimension. Both Abramović and Chavez seek to transfigure the very nature of time in their performance art, utilizing its’ mercurial anomalies to their advantage.

As vessels and mirrors, both women depend on and wait for an outside energy, an other, the Divine Presence. Both artists acknowledge that they are drawing upon primordial, sacred and
cross-cultural practices, ordering their lives in rituals celebrated by sages and saints. However it is their somatic openness to fresh possibilities and collaborations (which, of course, the liturgical structure makes viable) freeing both women from art’s normative obsession with novelty. Thus, praktognosia’s insight pioneers innovation from its metonymic knowledge absorbed through bodily liturgies in performance art.

Indeed, liturgy is the template for performance par excellence. For in liturgy, a drama is enacted onstage, motor intentionality is formed and performed by the catechized, and indeed, the synthesis of time and space are cyclically brought together within the body and “performed afresh.” For Griffiths, the liturgy of the Mass participates in Eden’s repetitive stasis of Adoration, of love and being loved in the beatific vision of God. Perhaps performance art’s praktognosia is its liturgical ‘knowing’ that is ‘already there,’ engaging the eucharistics of profane perception in time and space, nurturing, purifying, even healing—the flesh.


4 Schimmel, 231.


6 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, and James M. Edie. *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*. Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964. “By primacy of perception, we mean that the experience of perception is our presence at the moment when things, truths, values are constituted for us; that perception is a nascent logos, that it teaches us outside all our dogmatisms, the true conditions of objectivity itself; that it summon us to the task of knowledge and action. It is not a question of reducing human knowledge to sensation, but of assisting at the birth of this knowledge, to make it sensible as the sensible to recover consciousness of this rationality”, 25.

7 *Phenomenology of Perception*, 145.

8 Ibid, (Xi-Xii).

9 While the term ‘liturgy’ has become revived in recent philosophical and theological scholarship, particularly in that of Stanley Hauerwas and James K.A. Smith, I want to bracket the terminology’s use here to strictly Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s syntax as a phenomenologist. However, I will later consider ‘liturgy’ in the syntactical use of Paul Griffiths in his explication of Catholic liturgy, but will note the distinction.

10 “Just as the sacrament not only symbolizes, in sensible species, an operation of Grace, but is also the real presence of God, which it causes to occupy a fragment of space and communicates to those who eat of the consecrated bread, provided that they are inwardly prepared, in the same way the sensible has not only a motor and vital significance, but is nothing other than a certain way of being acted upon by our body, provided that it is capable of doing so, so that sensation is literally a form of communion.” Kearney notes this passage compares how “the sacrament of transubstantiation is to the responsive communicant what the sensible is to the capable perceiver.” *Phenomenology of Perception*, 150.


12 Ibid, 147.

13 Maurice Merleau-Ponty is not a theologian nor a Christian apologist. While appearing to use theological terminology, he is strictly employing them as a phenomenologist.


17 Ibid.


19 Ibid.


21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.


26 Ibid, 57.

27 Ibid, 58.

28 Of course it is their perception of time that changes, making the comparison to Griffith’s schema by way of analogy.