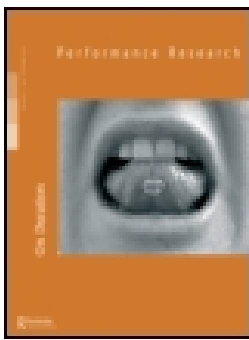

Performance Research

A Journal of the Performing Arts

ISSN: 1352-8165 (Print) 1469-9990 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rprs20

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

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To cite this article: Lara Shalson (2012) On Duration and Multiplicity, Performance Research, 17:5, 98-106, DOI: 10.1080/13528165.2012.728448

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2012.728448

Published online: 09 Oct 2012.

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On Duration and Multiplicity

LARA SHALSON

As I write, two immense oil tanks in the foundations of Tate Modern's building site are being transformed into 'a unique setting for artists' installations and performances' (Tate Modern n.d.). At a cost of £215 million, the tanks represent a major investment in live art by the Tate and reflect a broader movement on the part of many contemporary art museums to incorporate live performance within their galleries. Such increasing investment in live performance is remarkable given that performance emerged in the visual art world in the 1960s and 1970s precisely as the inassimilable, that is, as that which could not be housed within the traditional structures of the museum. This incompatibility with the museum was not incidental; on the contrary, an interest in *art as experience*, rather than *art as object*, was often described as a form of institutional critique, as a resistance to 'any institution or profession that treated art as a commodity, a dead object to be kept behind walls' (Brentano 1994: 31). As Henry Sayre writes in relation to performance art and other art practices in which 'the art object per se had become, arguably, dispensable', over the course of the 1970s 'it became increasingly clear … that the museum – designed to house and display objects, after all – was as deeply in trouble as the object itself' (1989: 2).

In the following decades, the museum responded to the challenges of ephemeral art practices in a variety of ways, and performance art has increasingly been integrated within it – often through its documentation in photographs, videos and relics, and to a growing extent, as live event. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, more and more artworks involving live performers are being included within museum exhibitions. Works by artists such as Santiago Sierra and Tino Sehgal are being acquired by major art institutions, and large-scale exhibitions are being built around performance art. 'The Artist is Present' (2010), a retrospective of the work of Marina Abramović held in the USA at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), which included, in addition to extensive documentation of Abramović's past performances, re-enactments of five pieces by other performers as well as the title performance by Abramović herself, is just one prominent example.

Importantly, in 'The Artist is Present' all of the performances took place for the entire duration of the exhibition; they started each day before the museum opened and ended each day only after it had closed throughout the six weeks. We might see this use of duration not only in relation to the formal properties of Abramović's work but also in relation to the demands of incorporating live art within the framework of the museum. According to MoMA's description of the exhibition, the performances began before opening and ended after closing time in order 'to allow visitors to experience the timelessness of the works' (Museum of Modern Art 2010). By a similar logic, Tino Sehgal insists that his pieces – celebrated for their ephemerality – must also be performed from opening until closing of the museum for a minimum of six weeks in order to ensure that they are read as art exhibitions and not as theatrical events (Stein 2009: 4). According to these logics, durational performance enters the museum as that which solves the very difficulty of ephemerality (and

PERFORMANCE RESEARCH 17·5 : pp.98-106
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2012.728448
ISSN 1352-8165 print/1469-9990 online
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theatricality) that live art presents. Extended duration is, paradoxically, that which enables the work to be recognized according to the ideal of 'timelessness' (one of the most traditional values attributed to great art) – to be seen as '*not* subject to time; not affected by the lapse of time; existing or operating *without reference to duration*; eternal' (OED Online, 'timeless, a. (adv.)', my emphases). As museums invest in live art, durational performance is privileged, then, because duration makes live art 'make sense' within a museum context.[1]

Nevertheless, live performance still presents challenges to museums – not least because it is expensive to produce – so live performance remains largely limited to solo shows or to brief exhibitions of a day or two.[2] In recent years, however, some larger scale group exhibitions of durational performance have begun to emerge, including two such exhibitions presented as part of the Manchester International Festival, a biennial festival of new works in the performing and visual arts, which began in Manchester, UK in 2007. In 2009, the festival featured 'Marina Abramović Presents …', a group show at the Whitworth Art Gallery curated by Abramović and Hans Ulrich Obrist, which comprised live performance works by thirteen international artists who performed for four hours a day over the course of the seventeen days' long exhibition, and at the following festival in 2011, Obrist teamed up with Klaus Biesenbach to curate '11 Rooms' at the Manchester Art Gallery, which featured '11 of the most interesting artists creating durational encounters', in an exhibition that ran for seven hours a day over nine days (Manchester International Festival 2011). How does duration function within such exhibitions? How might our experiences, and therefore our interpretations, of durational performance change in significant ways when it is multiplied across numerous works in a group exhibition?

Such preliminary questions are complicated by the specificities of the exhibitions under consideration, and it is important to note some key differences between them. Perhaps most importantly, in 'Marina Abramović Presents …', all of the performers were themselves the artists, and all of the pieces lasted for the full duration of the show. In other words, the artists themselves performed their own individual works for four hours a day throughout the exhibition. In contrast, in '11 Rooms' all of the pieces were performed by performers *other* than the artists, and all of the pieces were performed by multiple performers who traded in and out throughout the day; thus, while the pieces ran continuously for seven hours each day, they were also discontinuous insofar as they were not attached to specific bodies for their duration. These aspects of '11 Rooms' raise a number of questions about how durational art functions within a museum context. These include questions about the ethics of hiring performers to produce durational art (a concern that is built in to Santiago Sierra's work, including his contribution to '11 Rooms', *Veterans of the Wars of Northern Ireland, Afghanistan and Iraq Facing the Corner*, but which is not necessarily addressed within a re-enactment of Joan Jonas's *Mirror Check* (1970), also included in the exhibition). They also include questions about how such working conditions change the nature of the performances themselves: What happens when a work like Marina Abramović's *Luminosity* (1997), which was originally performed by Abramović for two hours, is performed by a group of performers taking thirty-minute slots over a seven-hour period daily for nine days? As museums increasingly seek to exhibit live art, questions such as these around the working conditions of the performers employed will continue to demand address.

In this article, I want to focus on what 'Marina Abramović Presents …' produced in, one could say, a 'purer' form: the phenomenon of multiple durational performances all occurring for an extended period of time in the same place within the framework of a single exhibition. Specifically, I want to think about this phenomenon in relation to a key claim about durational performance: that one of the most important things it does is *slow down* in the face of an ever-accelerating pace of

[1] It is worth noting that this is not purely a matter of institutional pressure but also an effect of performance artists themselves responding to and being interested in working with the constraints of particular contexts. For example, in response to the questions 'How did you first decide on how much time [your durational performance piece] *Ghost Dance* needed in order to be realized fully both for yourselves and for the spectators/participants?' and 'Why choose a durational form for this material in the first place?', Gregg Whelan responds, '*Ghost Dance* began as a gallery piece, and the first time we did it the gallery told us they could stay open for 12 hours, opening at noon and closing at midnight – so we worked to that, we inherited that time frame from them' (Whelan and Gardner 2011: 98).

[2] There have been a handful of such exhibitions at Tate Modern in recent years, including, for example, 'Actions & Interruptions' (2007), a one-day '"exhibition"' (Tate Modern 2007, quotation marks in original), in which a small group of artists presented embedded performances throughout the museum in an 'investigat[ion] of the museum as a "situation"' (Tate Modern 2007), and 'Living Currency' (2008), a two-day exhibition exploring 'approaches to the body as a focus of performance in the visual arts' (Tate Modern 2008).

life. Numerous commentators have discussed durational performance in terms of an 'ethics of slowness' – what Adrian Heathfield describes as 'a laborious commitment in a cultural context of acceleration to a different pace and understanding of creative generation' (2009: 23). Certainly, these are the terms through which Abramović has often described the value of duration, and in numerous interviews, this is precisely how she described the importance of 'Marina Abramović Presents …'. As she stated in one such interview:

> I really believe our life has become faster and faster and faster. I mean, we are literally zipping through television programs, as we are zipping through our lives. So I'm thinking that long durational performances should be [the] answer to the fast life. (Abramović 2009)

This is not the first time that Abramović has suggested that durational performance could provide a much-needed response to an accelerating pace of life. At the end of her 2002 performance, *The House with the Ocean View*, she suggested that the piece was intended as a gift of time for the inhabitants of New York: 'In a city that has no time I wanted to create an island of time' (Phelan 2004: 576). That art might not just *take* our time, but might *give* us time, is a wish I very much want to hold onto. As the pace of life continues to accelerate, providing occasions to slow down and reflect is a vital necessity. Yet, as durational performance becomes the object of large-scale exhibitions, I find myself wondering what kind of answer it provides to the sensation that life is getting faster and faster and faster. What understandings of time and acceleration are implied by this logic? I turn to some theories of time to look for answers.

Most theorists of social time agree that the phenomenon of acceleration began with the advent of modernity, with the inauguration of 'the regime of modern time discipline, framed by the conceptions of abstract, linear time and dominated by clock time' (Rosa and Scheuerman 2009: 8). The term 'time-discipline' was coined by E. P. Thompson in 1967 to describe a key mechanism in the turn to industrial capitalism when the time clock emerged as a way to calculate the labour of workers and the 'time period' came to replace the 'task' as the primary measure of production (1967: 85ff). Thompson argued that this restructuring of working habits was intimately 'related to changes in the inward notation of time' (1967: 57). Perhaps most importantly, he argued that under the regime of time-discipline, 'those who are employed experience a distinction between their employer's time and their "own" time' (61). Within the linear clock-time of industrialization, work and leisure are clearly divided, and with this division, the amount of time felt to belong to the individual decreases.

Furthermore, as employers start paying for their workers' time rather than for tasks accomplished, making full and efficient use of this time becomes imperative. As Thompson writes, 'the employer must *use* the time of his labour, and see it is not wasted.… Time is now currency: it is not passed but spent' (61, emphasis in original). As time becomes money, speed becomes crucial to making the most of this otherwise fixed and quantifiable unit. Technological advancements, which speed up processes of production, transportation and communication, are thus key to the rise of industrial capitalism. Importantly, the speed enabled by such technologies does not shorten the workday or produce an increase in leisure time. Rather, making the most of one's time becomes both a moral and economic imperative. As Thompson writes: 'In mature capitalist society *all time* [my emphasis] must be consumed, marketed, put to *use* [emphasis in original]' (90–1).

The industrial revolution thus inaugurates a period in which time is both highly regimented and restricted, *and* subject to acceleration. It is into this condition that durational art has often been argued to intervene. As Heathfield writes in relation to the work of Tehching Hsieh:

> By the late nineteen-seventies, the allied organizing kinetic logics of capitalized temporality – regulation and acceleration – were firmly embedded in the Western social

> and cultural milieu, and it is with these forces that durational aesthetics can be seen as being phenomenologically and discursively engaged. (Heathfield and Hsieh 2009: 20)

For those seeking understandings of time other than that of clock time, the writings of French Philosopher Henri Bergson (1869–1941) have provided an important alternative viewpoint. Bergson refused the notion of time as a homogeneous medium, external to ourselves, and divisible into equal units. He argued that clock time was only the 'project[ion] of time into space', in which 'succession thus takes the form of a continuous line or a chain, the parts of which touch without penetrating one another' (2001: 101). As opposed to this sense of succession, Bergson argued that our experience of duration is internal, continuous and interpenetrating. Describing the experience of watching a clock, he writes:

> Outside of me, in space, there is never more than a single position of the hand and the pendulum, for nothing is left of the past positions. Within myself a process of organization or interpenetration of conscious states is going on, which constitutes true duration. (Bergson 2001: 108)

Duration, for Bergson, is of the body. Rather than a series of quantitatively separable points on a line, it is qualitatively multiple and interpenetrating. It is the body's ability to 'gather' impressions rather than merely counting them in succession that constitutes duration (2001: 86). Duration is what we experience when our consciousness 'forms both the past and the present states into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another' (2001: 100).

Importantly, although duration is intimately tied to the consciousness of a living body, it is also something we must endeavour to experience. As Bergson writes, 'pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego *lets itself* [my emphasis] *live* [emphasis in original], when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states' (2001: 100). Duration is something we experience when we dwell outside of the rationalizing structures of clock time, which both homogenizes and separates time into discreet units. For Bergson, we experience true duration through the effort of 'intuition', which he explicitly linked with aesthetic perception: 'That an effort of this kind is not impossible, is proved by the existence in man of an aesthetic faculty along with normal perception' (1998: 176–7). Intuition was to be found for Bergson in 'an inquiry turned in the same direction as art, which would take life *in general* for its object' (1998: 177, emphasis in original). That resisting the artificial divisions of clock time might be connected to letting ourselves *live*; that art might be the vehicle through which we learn to do this: these are persuasive arguments for the value of durational art, which, of course, has also often been celebrated for breaking down the boundaries between art and life. In resisting the homogenizing and rationalizing structures of the clock, durational performance puts us in touch with qualitatively multiple, affectively rich, diverse and layered experiences that exceed capitalist logics of value. As Heathfield writes:

> Durational aesthetics give access to other temporalities: to times that will not submit to Western culture's linear, progressive meta-narratives, its orders of commodification; to the times of excluded or marginalized identities and lives; to times as they are felt in diverse bodies. Time, then, as plenitude: heterogeneous, informal, and multi-faceted. (Heathfield 2009: 23)

In some ways, it is precisely this notion of duration as heterogeneous, informal and multi-faceted that group shows of durational performance make tangible. Certainly, a group show immerses one within multiple temporalities and rhythms: in 'Marina Abramović Presents…' one encountered stillness in works such as Jamie Isenstein's *Rug Rug Rug*, a piece in which the artist lay unmoving under a series of animal skins; one confronted slowness in pieces such as Yingmei Duan's *Naked*, in which the unclothed artist shuffled slowly around the gallery space, often coming

very close to spectators; there was punishing repetition in Nico Vascellari's piece in which he continuously beat a rock with a piece of metal while speakers amplified the sound; there were cycles of prolonged anticipation and short-lived climax in Amanda Coogan's *The Fall*, in which the artist waited on the edge of a landing for long periods of time before throwing herself off the stairway onto a massive padded structure beneath her, only to climb back up the stairs and begin again; and there was the negotiation of mediated pasts in the temporal present in Ivan Civic's *Back to Sarajevo ... After 10 Years*, a piece in which the artist navigated a series of wall mounts while video footage of his family played on the wall around him. As these brief descriptions suggest, the different rhythms of these and other performances, all occurring within the same building, made palpable a multiplicity of duration; they gave form to the realization that not all minutes or hours measured by the clock are the same, that time contracts and expands according to our boredom, absorption, pleasure or discomfort.

Yet, I also find myself wondering if such an experience of 'the radical heterogeneity of durations' (Heathfield 2009: 21) is necessarily opposed to the everyday experience of time in our present moment. If the industrial revolution radically transformed our experience of time and ushered in an era of acceleration, many people are arguing that the digital revolution and the advent of the information age has likewise transformed our experience of time. The experience of acceleration remains a key feature of contemporary temporality, but the structures that shape this experience have changed in important ways.

In *The Culture of Speed: The coming of immediacy*, John Tomlinson argues that since the 1990s we have entered a new phase in the culture of speed – one that '*grows out* of the general acceleration of practices, processes and experience associated with the institutional and technological bases of modernity', but one that also moves beyond the cultural imaginary of machine speed associated with industrialization (2007: 10, my emphasis). Tomlinson describes our current situation as a 'condition of immediacy' (2007: 10ff), a condition characterized by such things as twenty-four-hour news coverage, and real-time updates on the web; by the fact that information that once would have required a trip to the library, can be obtained with a quick search on the internet – a resource that increasingly in wealthy nations, people carry with them on their mobile phones. It is a condition that Robert Hassan and Ronald E. Purser refer to as the '24/7 networked society' (Hassan and Purser 2007: 3).

As opposed to the regimented, linear divisions of time associated with industrial capitalism, time in a networked society is defined by multi-tasking – a term that originates in the 1960s in relation to emerging computer technologies, and is first used in relation to humans in the 1990s. Multi-tasking requires that one is constantly attuned to multiple rhythms and temporalities. Rather than the synchronicity of earlier models of speed, multi-tasking capitalizes on asynchronicity: we make use of the pauses and lulls in one activity to attend to another. Instead of time conceived as a homogenous medium, which marches onward in a linear fashion, we are often bound up with multiple times. With increasing globalization, this includes being conscious of multiple time zones and coordinating to the rhythms of sleeping and waking of people to whom, no matter how far away, we can still send instant messages with the press of a button.

Importantly, this period is also one in which differentiations between work life and home life – divisions that were central to the time-discipline of industrial capitalism – are no longer clear. If breaking down the boundaries between art and life in the art of the 1960s was associated with refusing the regulated divisions of industrial time management, what does it mean in a context in which 'heretofore distinct social institutions, such as work and family, education and entertainment, have blurred to the point of near identity' (Tomlinson 2007: 81, citing Agger 2005: 1)? Can we still say with confidence that breaking down such divisions is liberating?

A number of theorists have begun to suggest that in the information age of the twenty-first century we are seeing significant movement away from the regulation of clock-based time-discipline back towards the task-orientation that Thompson attributed to pre-industrial societies, and about which Thompson noted, 'a community in which task-orientation is common appears to show least demarcation between "work" and "life"' (1967: 60).[3] Email is a case in point: as the demands of responding to email increase, and as more and more people maintain twenty-four-hour access to email, we are more and more likely to respond to work emails outside of strictly working hours in-between other activities of home and leisure. But, if a model of work in which 'social intercourse and labour are intermingled – the working day lengthens or contracts according to the task – and there is no great sense of conflict between labour and "passing the time of day"', was valorized by Thompson as 'more humanly comprehensible than timed labour' (1967: 60), any romanticizing of this model is more difficult today. For, if the task-based labour of pre-industrial agrarian societies involved stretches of waiting according to the seasons, periods in which little happened, as Thompson suggests, the new task-based economy is designed to keep things happening all the time. Clock-time, then, has not been overcome; it would seem it has multiplied. (Apple's popular 'World Clock' application might be thought of as a graphic illustration of this.) As Tomlinson writes: 'Indeed the awareness of an existence governed by clock time – by the multiple and competing itineraries of modern life – would seem to be uppermost in the motivation to fit parcels of work-time into gaps in these other routines' (2007: 88).

The clock, then, continues to tick, but our use of time is not regulated by it in the ways it once was. As Hassan and Purser note, the '24/7 networked society' is 'a flowing and ever-accelerating networked and globalized life where the time of the clock no longer schedules and meters our individual and collective existence in as predictable a fashion as it once did' (2007: 2). Whereas the clock-time of industrial capitalism regulates and quantifies time down to the smallest possible unit (workers using punch cards are often paid to the minute) – time in the information age *flows*, is continuous and interpenetrating. But whereas for Bergson, the fluidity and flux of duration was linked with a refusal of the artificial segmentation of time and with an experience of freedom, contemporary time now flows, is continuous and interpenetrating as it binds us to capital. As we become caught up in this flow, time is perceived less as a homogenous medium 'out there' and more as part of our interconnection within a networked world that is multiple and continuous. Hassan writes: 'Control in this context is almost impossible: take your time and you lose the sale, suffer a drop in efficiency, or miss the "valuable" connection' (2007: 55). In a distorted echo far removed from Bergson's idea of 'intuition', it is those who are best able to act instinctively, to 'go with the flow', who are most able to succeed within this structure.

The problem with networked time is not that we view time as external and homogenous, nor is it that we fail to experience the multiplicity of duration. Instead, what we lack is 'the capacity for sustaining undivided human attention' (Hassan and Purser 2007: 17). As Hartmut Rosa and William E. Scheuerman note, 'the time we're allowed to concentrate exclusively on one thing is progressively diminishing' (2009: 1–2). Such concentration is, of course, one of the things that durational performance has often explored. Beyond its ability to denaturalize our habitual divisions of time (the divisions of the clock which tell us, for instance, that a performance usually lasts around ninety minutes), the opportunity to concentrate on a single, often very simple, idea or activity for an extended period of time, in the belief that such engagement yields certain rewards, has been a central feature of durational performance. Whether understood as a process of healing, of exchanging energy, of finding beauty in the mundane, or of creating community,[4] the belief that a focused engagement with a simple idea or

[3] See, for example, Klein (2004: 252–55), Hassan (2007: 51–2) and Tomlinson (2007: 87–8).

[4] I am referring here to ideas articulated about the durational performances of, respectively, Joseph Beuys, Marina Abramović, Forced Entertainment and Lone Twin.

action over a prolonged period of time can bring about transformations in perception, affect and human relations that cannot be attained otherwise has been central to conceptions of durational performance.

Returning to 'Marina Abramović Presents…', it should be apparent from the brief descriptions above that the performances in this exhibition largely followed this model. For the most part, the pieces were structured around deceptively simple premises that the performers committed to for the duration of the exhibition. But if one of the things that durational performance offers is the opportunity to spend time with a single idea or action, and to discover the rich and multi-layered possibilities that can only unfold in this time, what happens when durational performances are multiplied across numerous bodies in a single space? The irony of the group show of durational art is that one's ability to focus on any individual performance is limited from the start. To give all thirteen performances an equal amount of time in the three hours available for viewing them would have been to spend less than fourteen minutes with each. If the time to concentrate exclusively on one thing is what we currently miss in our accelerated lives, this exhibition with its slow, focused performances didn't necessarily provide this. Rather, to be at this exhibit was to be constantly aware of many things happening at once.

Of course, we have a model for the presentation of simultaneous performances in a compartmentalized structure; this is precisely how Michael Kirby described Happenings (Kirby 1995: 18–19). Could the group show of durational performance be a new form of Happening? Certainly, the exhibition was framed to be encountered as a whole in a variety of ways. Visitors were asked to sign contracts committing to the four-hour duration, and we were asked to leave our bags and mobile phones at the door. We were given lab coats to wear, which covered our street clothes, helping us to leave our everyday lives outside and enter into an altered state, as well as to become members of a temporary community. The first hour of the exhibition was given over to 'The Drill', a lecture and laboratory led by Abramović, which aimed to help the audience prepare for and learn how to appreciate the form. However, whereas Happenings have been described by Richard Schechner as 'an attempt to bring into a celebratory space the full "message-complexity" of a downtown street' – an attempt to create 'an image of that world, particularly of its busy-ness' (Schechner 1995: 217–18) – the emphasis of 'The Drill' was on experiencing the value of slowing down and filtering out the constant buzz of our everyday lives in order to experience the fullness of the tiniest acts through sustained focus. Thus, we practised appreciating the mundane by drinking a small cup of water over a ten-minute period; practised feeling what it is to be face-to-face with an other by looking into the eyes of a stranger for five minutes; practised sensing our bodies moving through space by walking very slowly across the room; and practised feeling the power of our breath and the vibrations of our vocal chords by engaging in a collective scream.

If 'The Drill' was designed to transform our usual experience of time and to provide an alternative to a life that is getting 'faster and faster and faster', it is noteworthy that for some bloggers and reviewers, it also framed the experience of the exhibition in terms of an 'endurance test' (Noble 2009). As BBC Radio Manchester's Andrew Edwards said: 'It's all about durational art – will you last the course?' (Edwards 2009). That certificates of accomplishment were handed out to spectators who stayed until the end would seem to confirm this sense of passing a 'test'. How does this framing of the experience of the exhibition as an 'accomplishment' relate to the understanding of duration that it produced? Might the certificate, counter to its intentions, actually serve to fold the duration of the exhibition back into the very economy of time-scarcity that the exhibition aimed to resist? After all, according to B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, the 'experience economy' arises precisely in relation to 'the time-starved 1990s' (Pine and Gilmore 1998: 97). In a networked society, when time is accelerating,

experience itself becomes something that consumers desire. What the certificate seems to confirm is that by making it to the end of four hours, one has *had* precisely the kind of unique experience that our harried pace of life makes scarce. Ironically, by focusing on the time spent, rather than on what transpired during it, the four-hour period (not really so long to spend at an exhibition after all) is transformed into a quantified representation of precisely that which escapes such measurement.

To be clear, I do not mean to suggest that exhibitions such as 'Marina Abramović Presents…' simply play into the hands of an experience economy. The relationship is certainly not simple.[5] However, in a context in which major art institutions are investing in live art as a revitalizing force, it seems worth considering how a rising interest in durational performance might emerge from the same conditions of acceleration that support an experience economy. When arts administrators in the information age are described as 'experience brokers' (Taylor 2002), we might note that 'the experience economy is a byproduct of a deeper shift in currency, from money to attention, a resource that is "a fundamental human desire and is intrinsically, unavoidably scarce"' (Taylor 2002: 2).

What if, instead of removing viewers from the hectic pace of life outside, 'Marina Abramović Presents…' produced, in the form of a kind of slowed-down Happening, 'an image of that world, particularly of its busy-ness'? Might this offer another way of understanding the experience it opened up and the choices it required? I, for one, did not give all of the performances an equal share of my attention. Instead, I found myself remaining for a long time with Kira O'Reilly's contribution to the show, *Stair Falling*. In this piece, O'Reilly, naked except for a pair of leather gloves, enacted a slow motion 'fall' for four hours down the Victorian staircase of the Whitworth Art Gallery. Impeccably controlled, O'Reilly's fall was a feat of athleticism and awkward grace. It transformed that quintessential accident, so familiar in its iconicity – a woman falls down the stairs – into an experience of sustained focus. There was no room for accident here. As I watched, I wondered what it meant to remain with this moving image being created by O'Reilly while being conscious that I was missing many other things in the process. If an accident is an event that arrives too quickly, and hence, is 'recognised as such by the mind *one moment too late'* – if it is that which is never experienced directly but is 'precisely the *missing* of this experience' (Caruth 1996: 62, emphases in original) – was this a demand for vigilance, an insistence that there are some events which *must not* escape our attention? Or was it, paradoxically, an invitation to slow down and witness the inevitable, to inhabit that

■ Kira O'Reilly, *Stair Falling* (2009) Durational performance, 17 days, 4 hours each day. Marina Abramovic Presents …, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester International Festival 2009. *Photo: Marco Anelli*

experience which takes us out of time, and to accept that being out of time, there are things we will always miss?

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