

Amelia Jones Roundtable — 27 July 2010
LIVE ART, DURATIONALITY, AND THE MEANING OF ENCOUNTER
AUT UNIVERSITY: WE240

Dr. Maria O'Connor
ORAL PRESENTATION:

Title: ***The Aestheticisation of the Everyday in the in-between of being and becoming art.***

4 Texts under discussion:

Amelia Jones' *Performance: Time, Space and Cultural 'Value'* (written for One Day Sculpture Symposium)

Lucas Ihlein's *To follow things as I encounter them: Blogging, Art and Attention* (posted 127 Prince: On the art of social practice and the social practice of art)

Katie Mondloch's *Installing Time: Spatialized Time and Exploratory Duration* (Chapter in her book: **Screens: Viewing Media Installation Art**)

Philip Auslander's *The Performativity of Performance Documentation* (published in Performance Arts Journal, 2006)

Or The Aestheticisation of the Everyday as attention-seeking

QUESTIONS

Amelia Jones Roundtable:

The meaning of encounter is at the level of the everyday in relation to a reframing of being attentive in relation to duration (of the everyday), and the implications here for *aesthetics*, or the work of art.

Blanchot's Everyday:

According to Blanchot's notion of the everyday "The everyday escapes. This is its definition. We cannot help but miss it if we seek it through knowledge, for it belongs to a region where there is still nothing to know, just as it is prior to all relation insofar as it has always already been said, even while remaining unformulated, that is to say, not yet information." ("Everyday Speech" (1959)).

Blanchot's everyday takes us back to existence, to what is most important, to spontaneity as it is lived. (the not 'knowing', beyond gender/genre — beyond categorisation).

Blanchot insists that in the everyday the individual is in a state of "human anonymity", held in its movement without knowing it: "we have no name, little personal reality, scarcely a face, just as we have no social determination to sustain or enclose us." (Everyday speech).

How does the everyday escape? "The everyday breaks down structures and undoes forms, even while ceaselessly regathering itself behind the form whose ruin it has insensibly brought about." (

“Nothing happens” in the everyday, neither rest, nor moment for reflection. Indeed contemplation makes the everyday vanish, a characteristic observed by Guy Debord when he announced that “disinterested observation is even less possible here than anywhere else”. (Guy Debord, “Perspectives for Conscious Alterations in Everyday Life” *Situationist International Anthology*, 1981).

Blanchot’s notions of the *everyday* open up onto a more radical thinking of “attention” as a state of existence that is without interest/disinterested in calculation, reflection, value, property.

There is, perhaps, a coinciding notion, between Amelia Jones’ text and Blanchot’s everyday, in the notion of escape. The everyday that escapes, and the escape performed by live and performance art in their “moments of unpredictability: extrusions of desire, slivers of affect, that escape contortion and frame of the aesthetic”.

These moments of *escape* are described throughout all three texts through duration (and the non-sanctioned situational and extended practices of live and performance art). Extended duration (blogs, screen-base installation, etc “emancipates” us from the ‘wholly manifest’ desire of Modernity and its legacy, for knowing something in its entirety, to fully comprehend it—to make fully present and knowable its objects of contemplation.

- In terms of duration at the heart of Katie Mondlach’s text via a critique of linearity in the passive cinematic experience through the “multiple and sometimes contradictory durational impulses at work in the presentation of moving images to moving bodies in space” (aka screen reliant installation art) — This critique reveals that our subjectivity is an open-ended durational process, and that (via phenomenology) many flows of awareness (ATTENTIVENESS) occur via layered structures of our subjectivities.
- For Ihlein blogs help to capture the everyday, which he describes a ephemeral (short-lived, fleeting, partial etc). Documenting via the blog helps hone his errant attention span— the everyday is something he desires to make peace with due to its insignificance. Blogging helps become more attentive to our surrounding world – our everyday.
- Through the framework of Blanchot, might the attention seeking behaviour of Ihlein’s blog, reside in the Laws of a modernist dream to know what is unknowable or escapable? Are there perhaps, many flows of awareness of attentiveness, that go unnoticed, not recoupable, escape comprehension, capture, rationalisation in the escapable everyday? In terms of duration and attention then, is not the everyday the most interminable, infinite, expanded and open-ended duration for the possibility of an affecting and attentive seeking engagement with our being in the world?

- 1) I’m interested in Amelia’s response to the provocation of Blanchot’s *Everyday*. Given that Amelia wants to “de-frame” (or de-contain) the work of art, undo the ‘grip’ of aesthetics” and given that for Derrida every de-framing will be another reframing, does Blanchot’s *everyday* present a thinking of a radical outside to aesthetics?

If so, what then becomes of *recognition as such*, of the work of art?

(How would we know the work of art? For Blanchot it is the worklessness of the work of art etc.)

Context of asking this question as a secondary concern:

- 2) Given none of these 3 texts deal with theories of the “everyday” (and yet is it such a popular thematic in art practices) — theories from Guy Debord (Situationist International) De Certeau, Henri Lefebvre¹, — how would you see theories of the everyday in the context of affecting a possibility to the outside of aesthetics?

² *Disouvrement*

Notes in Preparation for the above

The four readings have brought up many questions and many points of interest for me in relation to duration, liveness, encounter and the artwork in today’s contemporary existence. However, for the purposes of today’s discussion my chosen focus comes via a response to a set of concerns arising out of the research happening the postgraduate cohort in Spatial Design — research that works across the expanding of fields of “performance arts”. Spatial Design being one such host to “its” expansion. In particular, I would like to draw attention to the *framing* of the everyday in relation to duration, particularly via the work of Maurice Blanchot who has been influenced here by Martin Heidegger (the most significant philosopher of time for the 20th Century) and Blanchot’s influence on Jacques Derrida (mentioned in A. Jones’ text when referring to his notion of framing via the motif of the *parergon*), as well as other political, ethical and social philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze, Giorgio Agamben and Emmanuel Levinas. My focus on the everyday aims at a question around the politics of the everyday in relation to “performance arts”.

Blanchot’s Everyday

Very quickly let me sketch Blanchot’s notion of the everyday According to Blanchot “The everyday escapes. This is its definition. We cannot help but miss it if we seek it through knowledge, for it belongs to a region where there is still nothing to know, just as it is prior to all relation insofar as it has always already been said, even while remaining unformulated, that is to say, not yet information.” (from Maurice Blanchot, “Everyday Speech” (1959), (trans.) Susan Hanson, (eds.) Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross, *Everyday Life, Yale French Studies*, Number 73, USA, 1987, p.15)

Blanchot’s everyday contests truth and thus the world of the Law, Government, the University, the sensible and the rational, of depths and meditations, for it designates, “a region or a level of speech where the determinations true or false, like the opposition yes and no, do not apply – it being before what affirms it and yet incessantly reconstituting itself beyond all that negates it.” (ibid, p. 16).

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- ¹ **Everyday:** Lefebvre’s ‘everyday’: Future social transformation, Revolutionary in nature. De Certeau’s ‘everyday’: A critique of everyday cycles of production and consumption — Institutional strategies are destabilised via individual tactics.
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 - And others such as Michaels’ ‘everyday’ in relation to how everyday technologies produce prosthetic/hybrid/cyborg entities in relation to the human:
 - ² (The impossibility of the artwork – he would suggest this as the *disouvrement* — the worklessness of the work of art (literature)). The work of art is fundamentally everywhere, located in its worklessness i.e. what is not made apparent.

Blanchot's everyday takes us back to existence, to what is most important, to the spontaneity as it is lived. (the not 'knowing' beyond gender/genre).

Blanchot insists that in the everyday the individual is in a state of "human anonymity," held in its movement without knowing it: "we have no name, little personal reality, scarcely a face, just as we have no social determination to sustain or enclose us." (ibid, p. 17).

How does the everyday escape? "The everyday breaks down structures and undoes forms, even while ceaselessly regathering itself behind the form whose ruin it has insensibly brought about." (ibid, p.17).

"Nothing happens" in the everyday, neither rest, nor moment for reflection. Indeed, contemplation makes the everyday vanish, a characteristic observed by Guy Debord when he announced that "disinterested observation is even less possible here than anywhere else." (Debord, G. "Perspectives for Conscious Alterations in Everyday Life," (trans.) Ken Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology*, The Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley, CA. 1981.)

The everyday wholly occupies and absorbs so there can be no aesthetic judgement or distance. There can be no re-presentation of the everyday. No, appearance of it, no presentation, and further nothing that would give it ideality as in the Being before becoming of appearance, image, copies.

If for Kant, art was that which had no purpose "and purposiveness without purpose i.e. interested in the beautiful but not its ends" — this begins to suggest that we were affected in the first instance — "experiencing" that aims at the suspension how it could be useful. It is the usefulness of art practices in its relation to the everyday that I wish to focus my critique on. Particularly paying "attention" to "attention". Something that each writer raised as a question in relation to the affectiveness of the artwork.

How helpful is this for our discussion today? How helpful is Blanchot's everyday for "performance arts"?

I would like to link this preamble on Blanchot's everyday to a more radical thinking of "attention" as a state of existence that is disinterested in calculation, reflection, value, property, ... Etc I aim here at suggesting that for performance arts.

In the artful or seductive talk on the everyday by aesthetics, we are dragged from our commonplace meanderings, removed from our absorption in our daily lives, which are neither pleasurable nor arduous, to be immersed instead in the meditative seduction of form and play. Power relations (such as the work by Suzanne Lacy and the 'New Genre Public Art' performance practices such as *In ourning and In Rage* that desired to bring politics and art together through aesthetics; as an attention seeker ... to quote from Amelia Jones' text "a complex network of political/aesthetic actions in protest at the *lack of attention* on the part of LA media and police to the escalating series of rapes being committed in the city". — Is this everyday? Rape?

Perhaps, more carefully, I should cite from Jones' text, Mierle Ukeles *Maintenance Works* as the activation of women's labour (usually behind the scenes in relation to aesthetic and other public spaces) as performance art visible to the public eye" (33-34) as the activation of work itself in aesthetic contexts as 'art'. These Power relations that are politically aestheticised, given the everyday as a pure task, inscribed in gender are legible (knowable, lawmaking, attention seeking,

codified) only indirectly, through the bringing of (cultural, social, political) values extraneous to them. That is, how implicit or implicated are the Garbage collectors of NYCity in the cultural values of gender, labour, poverty, hygiene, etc — in their awakening from their everyday routines are they somehow transformed by the plight of feminism (in its aestheticisation)? Wouldn't they have to continue to collect the rubbish, wake up everyday and continue on with the underwayness of their projects? Has the aestheticisation of the everyday in performance art stopped them from raping their wives each night? In Blanchot's terms they are in a state of "human anonymity," held in its movement without knowing it: "we have no name, little personal reality, scarcely a face, just as we have no social determination to sustain or enclose us." (ibid, p. 17). In this sense I would pose a question around the ethics of performance art (and any art), with its audiences as witness — who does the witness (the garbage man) speak on behalf of? That is, if every audience member is implicated in the work as a witness, when they testify to this viewing/encounter, who are they speaking for?

Of course, the context for this work is to suggest that those histories of marginalized subjectivities (woman, blacks, gay/lesbian etc) contest the canons of aesthetics, and further that in their performative practices, open up an unknown space between art and the public, artist and audience — that could precisely be the space of the artwork itself. (p.34).

In my response, I believe this in-between space between the University and its audience, debating, discussing these texts is precisely the space of the artwork. Without discussion the framing of aesthetics whether it be Kantian or some more radical notion of sensual or sensate messiness, reframing could not occur. With every reframing a new framework arises. Derrida would see that it is impossible to get outside of framing mechanisms. Derrida's point on the parergon as a deconstructive motif is precisely this space of re-framing in his reading of Kant's *Critique of Judgement* as the work of art. That is, he draws attention to Kant's writing as artmaking, throwing up the question of whether *The Critique of Judgement* is inside or outside the frame of the work of art.

The duration of everyday events = Does the everyday have a temporality? Or is it the impossibility of its capture? That is, in the distillation of tiny daily acts — do we remember politics, ideologies, national interests — In the absolute present do we forget? In the daily measures taken to survive is not this experience beyond or behind (thinking here of Ihlein's blogging methods as a means to follow the everyday) contemplation or critical reflection? Whose everyday? Different bodies have different daily and ordinary events. For some they may seem extraordinary and for others tedious. Ihlein's is the everyday of artists underway with their art practices.

ANNOTATIONS:

Amelia Jones

Performance thwarts structures of aesthetic judgement (art history, curating, art market)

1790 Kant's *Critique of Judgement*: framing the unknowable aspects of subjects and objects. Some objects 'aesthetic' or 'art', while others are not

Kant: elimination of the sensual (bodily) 'interest'. This person must be disinterested. Not invested in a bodily or sensual way in the artwork! Excludes, "scary, fleshy, joyous, wounded and/or object vicissitudes of embodied experience.

Kant + Capital fantasy: immaterial. It appears that Jones is basing her reframing on a neat dualistic and Platonic framing:

Mind/body, immaterial/material, perfect/imperfect, being/becoming, spirit/corporeal, male/female

Live art – live enactment of bodies presented as ‘art’

Work presented in non-sanctioned exhibition spaces (such as blogs, out-in-the-street, soliciting audience (garbage collectors, random bloggers, etc) in performative and temporally extended ways. (blogs run for as long as the can, always partial, never fully or ‘wholly manifest’.

Live, art, bodily, duration, public, space — works that intersect with these terms activate *de-containing!* I would argue in how I perceive the everyday that another kind of framing/appropriation/exclusion occurs in the attention seeking disruption of the *everyday*.?? Every framing is a potentially a reframing in its unframing.

Performance a “deconstructive enterprise” to “unframe” the messy embodiment that constitutes our relation to space and things — deconstruct the tight Kantian aesthetic frame that ‘contorts’ the body to fit into a restricted economy of said aesthetic tradition.

The essay goes on to explore these ‘contortions’ that daily occur to encompass live and performance art AND the moments of unpredictability: extrusions of desire, slivers of affect, that escape contortion and frame of the aesthetic — HERE I WOULD WANT TO COINCIDE THE ESCAPE FROM THESE CONTORTIONS, WITH BLANCHOT’S EVERYDAY THAT ESCAPES COMPREHENSION – WE CANNOT KNOW IT.

Deconstruct the artwork as “wholly manifest” (durational works as discussed in the Katie Mondloch’s *Installing Time: Spatialized Time and Exploratory Duration*, discuss at length the efficacy of the work in terms of the impossibility to fully grasp, make “wholly manifest” the work. Thereby critiquing a metaphysics of presence in its desire to make fully present and knowable its objects of contemplation. That is, ultimately this article aims at bringing about via a critique of linearity in the passive cinematic experience, that the construction of subjectivity is an open-ended durational process (p.53). And, further, phenomenology, explores our layered structures of subjectivity suggesting for the allowance for many flows of awareness — WOULDNT THIS MULTI-LAYERED SUBJECTIVE AWARENESS SUGGEST THAT BEING ATTENTIVE TAKES ON MANY STATES OF BEING. IN AS MUCH AS THE EVERYDAY IS ESCAPABLE, THERE IS AN INTENSE STATE OF ATTENTIVENESS AS WE ARE ATTUNED TO OUR “ARTLESS” AND COMMONPLACE ROUTINES. MIGHT THE BLOGGING PRACTICE OF LUCAS IHLEIN ATTEMPTING TO MAKE MANIFEST THE EVERYDAY AS A SEDUCTIVE AND THEREFORE ARTFUL, MARKETABLE ENTITY. WHAT COULD BE MORE EXTENDED IN TIME THAN THE EVERYDAY; MORE PARTIAL, MORE FRAGMENTARY, MORE ESCAPING. IN CAPTURING IN THE BLOG, THESE PRACTICES, WHILE EXTENDED IN DURATION ATTEMPT, IN COMPARISON TO THE DURATION OF THE ONGOING, INCESSANT/INTERMINABLE CONDITION OF THE EVERYDAY, TO COMMODIFY ITS IDEAL — AN IDEAL THAT SITS IN CLOSE PROXIMITY, I WOULD ARGUE, TO THE APPEAL OF THE ARTMARKET — THE EVERYDAY HAS BEEN THE MATERIAL OF ARTMAKING SINCE THE SITUATIONIST, BAUDELAIRE’S FLANEUR, FLUXUS, ETC ...

SITUATIONALIST PRACTICES – Adrienne Piper’s Corner Piece – interrogate where we belong.

Extended audience – via non-traditional, in situ, “situation aesthetics” site specificity.

Transform galleries into cultural statements, sculpture into installation, performance into artworks How is the audience implicated in the political, cultural identity – reflecting back the artist as the assumed fantasized ORIGIN of the work.

A. Jones – a need to have identity politics and art activated through aesthetic and performative means (undoing subject/object dualisms).

Lacy: Public art (‘plop’ ‘plonk’ art). No consideration of communities the art inhabits. Unknown relationship between artist and audience. A relationship that may *itself* become the artwork (discussion, debate, reflection, liveness).

Art always already social and political whether or not these terms are positioned front and centre in the work.

ART CRITICISM: Bishop contains artwork insisting that artworks can be autonomous from the social. (better art = autonomous). Re-contains messy art practices too)

Phenomenology of perception (flesh). We are always embedded in flesh of our world – already immersed in it. Art never discrete/autonomous bounded thing that Modernism dreamed it to be – fully complete – wholly manifest.

Ponty – reciprocally engaged with spaces and bodies around us.

Jones' new frame: Be historically aware (rigorous) – Messy and difficult to contain art practices – potential to do something to shift the frame of aesthetics – prick emotions.

Interrelationality: Aladag's *Occupation* work disrupts the normal conventions of the event: "Introducer speeches" to the "opening night" – but how radical is it given the context of it being a Berlin Performing Arts Festival. Hardly an unorthodox site. Let the mind be affected – Wasn't this Kant's opening thoughts to *The Critique of Judgement!*

LUCAS IHLEIN TEXT: *To follow things as I encounter them: Blogging, Art and Attention*

Blogs record ordinary social interactions that drive/constitute their own creative practices

He intimately weaves in art practice and everyday life

Annotating dozens daily small events

Bringing to light ephemeral experiences (characterizes everyday as ephemeral i.e. 'short-lived', transient, passing, fleeting – I would suggest that the duration of [Blanchot's] everyday is ongoing, incessant, interminable, infinite)

Documents and hones HIS errant attention span (hence attention in the title).

Make peace with seemingly insignificant / banal aspects of daily living. (the presumption here is that he finds the everyday a war! What exactly is he battling here?)

Focus on blogging projects

Bring together transformative relations between blogging and quality of our attention

Blogging – Becoming more attentive to our surrounding world – our everyday "ephemeral" experiences/interactions.

The question arises are we not attentive enough to our everyday surrounding world? What kind of attention is he describing? What kind is Blanchot describing? Has our attention span become more errant (like Lucas Ihlein's)? What does this errancy mean in the world of performance art? How is the material of our ephemeral world being appropriated as something/an object for reflection on? What is it about the duration of both the archive/the document and the performative or theatrical art processes, such as blogging or photography, writing – or any other mode of inscriptive (recording) practice – that makes the work of art work?

My claim is that the everyday is problematically accessed through these 'transformative' processes of re-presentation.

Counter to attention or appreciation are these inscriptive practices as they become ultimately entangled in an economy of exchange, calculability, instrumentalism and ultimately, commodification. Blanchot's everyday is that which escapes commodification – to take it into the knowable world of aesthetic appearances it become lost, altered, seductive.

Recording *documentary* category: Is a witness to an event (ontological relation – here Auslander is cited) – What actually happened. Ideologically it is a fiction for Historians to piece cohesive and convincing story together – make an event 'authentic'

Characteristics of authenticity – *uncontaminated, unmediated experience* – documenting always mediates this "authentic" – what actually happened.

The witness is always a mediating/or mediated agent (were the garbage collectors mediating the event when they tell it to their families – what do they say?)

The witness (document) always transforms the event. Document always inside and outside of the work of art in Derrida's notion of the Parergon.

Theatrical – documentation integral to artwork as performance. Theatrical work works in the present when we come into contact with the work (extended duration – the work lives on in its multiple unforeseen encounters). Does it become everyday in the unspectacular iterations of its

appearance? “yeah, I saw Acconci’s *Photo Piece*’ in Auckland. The images were pretty unspectacular” (someone commented in our reading group).

Is the desire here to make the work of art, everyday? To remove it from the specialist/privileged reifying conditions for its coming into appearance? (Benjamin essay: democracy of reproducibility – loss of elite aura)

What is banal is most precious. What Lucas . I. suggests as that which he needs to make peace with – as though the everyday was a warzone before! Perhaps, it was under the conditions of what makes an artwork legitimate.

“authentically” or theatrical ongoing presentness – Blogs equal document and theatrical. I’d say that within every document is a theatrical component, precisely because it is mediating our experience (making it knowable, special, seductive). It is inherently performative. It performs [on] us. Enframes (Heidegger) our reality of the event. This would be Blanchot’s point – that as soon as we notice the ‘everyday’ we take it out of its everyday context and specialize it – treat it as:

“making discernable experiences which would otherwise remain *entirely* (my emphasis) unnoticed”. Is there perhaps, another kind of noticing going on that is not apparent (appearance)? Are our bodies perhaps more attentive than ever, precisely because we do not notice that what we are not noticing? Is not this condition of expanded, extended underwayness (unconsciousness) with our everyday lives the most attentive, attuned to the possibility for our existence (survival)?

What would Heidegger say about boredom? How are attunement and attentiveness linked here?

If artwork such as those cited in the extended duration essay by Kate Mondloch’s article – can only ever be encountered partially, attending to the impossibility of ever knowing for certain something in its entirety, then how can the everyday of Lucas Ihlein’s go entirely un-noticed? How can any work experience be fully absent or present? Rather in the extended duration of these works (blogs included) as the writer suggests “construction of our subjectivities is an open-ended durational process (53) – and that, phenomenologically speaking, any structuring of our subjectivity, whether through live performance, viewing a document, black box cinematic experience, installation, temporal media art, or walking down the street on our way from here to there, allows for many flows of awareness or attentiveness as there is no stable coherent conception of the subject.

L.I. claims that blogs produce a tangible effect on the attentive consciousness of the artist as the artwork unfolds.

Investing in the material and conscious world – conscious attentiveness. Rechner’s daily activity of “observing things as they are” through photographing sunsets, maps etc – the key outcome/product, according to L.I. is “her own sharpened sense of attentiveness – carefully edited blog, not sliding into cliché etc. This sharpen sense is her attentiveness as an ‘artist’ to help her/his surrounding world les of a warzone. But what does it do for others’ surrounding world? The other of the artist and audience?

Feedback Loop: action and reflection. Intensifying the FRAME (invisible frame) – Attention – more intensified experience of that which is framed. What about both an increasing attentiveness to what is excluded and therefore a heightened mistrust in terms of the way we are asked to view the artwork. All of a sudden the everyday is enframed as the commodified ‘product’ – i.e. to have an instrumental means to sharpening our attention.