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Waiting for Marina: Generosity and Shared Time in Marina Abramović's *512 Hours*

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This article discusses Marina Abramović's performance 512 Hours (2014) as a critical response to the temporality of everyday life. I argue that by encouraging participants to slow down and focus on the present moment the performance is an antidote to contemporary neoliberal imperatives to be 'productive' and continually account for our time. Set against the backdrop of Abramović's earlier works, which focused on more visceral forms of bodily endurance, 512 Hours appears less obviously critical. However, I argue that by using slowness as a medium Abramović ushers in a new approach to criticality, which takes slowness, generosity and shared time as its key drivers.

This article examines Marina Abramović's performance, *512 Hours*, which was held at the Serpentine Gallery in London during the summer of 2014, as a catalyst for thinking about forms of criticality needed to respond to contemporary conditions of neoliberal culture. I ask what kind of criticality, if any, is generated by the project and how this is informed by the artist's history of 'endurance performances', which test the limits of her bodily and emotional strength. In this pared down performance Abramović was present in the gallery between 10am-6pm, six days a week between 11 June and 25 August. Building on her critically acclaimed 2010 performance at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, *The Artist Is Present*, in which audience members queued to sit with the artist for as long as they liked, much was made in the weeks preceding *512 Hours* of the idea of doing nothing with Abramović. However, as with many performances in which it appears that nothing is happening, *512 Hours* was replete with expectation and reminded participants that not being busy is not the same as doing nothing. Here I examine what this realization has to offer as a critique of neo-liberal imperatives to produce tangible outcomes, act in a purposeful way and measure productivity.

On arrival visitors were asked to leave their belongings in a locker, wear large sound-blocking headphones and occupy the space with the artist. Visitors were invited to participate in a range of slow, meditative or repetitive tasks such as sorting lentils from rice or slow walking. The 129,916 people

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who flocked to the Serpentine gave their time and were encouraged to shut out the noise of everyday life. The temporality of the performance is, I argue, part of its challenge to the notion of a 'productive life' in which goals must be met and only particular kinds of work can be valued. Consequently, I focus on the ways in which Abramović used time as her primary medium in *512 Hours*. This started with anticipation of the event and extended beyond the time spent in the gallery to the artist's video diaries, interviews with those who attended (often multiple times) and use of social media to comment on the experience. The artist's use of these media platforms arguably democratises access and challenges the privilege afforded within performance studies to the 'live' event experienced in 'real' time. Much is made of the importance of experiencing an intensified present in the literature on Marina Abramović's work, but this is rarely examined in depth. What is it to experience the present? Can it be separated from the past or future? In this project a multiplicity of temporalities converge, which expands the discussion of what matters in performance art, too long dominated by the singularity of the one-off event shared with the authorial artist. However, the primacy of the originary experience as a unique experience in time is hard to shake off, as I aim to investigate below.

512 Hours is not a confrontational work and can be contextualised in relation to contemporary notions of mindfulness and wellbeing. The idea is to draw participants into a state of relaxation and calm in which time is something to experience in the present moment with others. It is to press the pause button on life and to dispense with the need to measure time. In place of business and usefulness Abramović encourages the sharing of time without the need to account for it. It is as if the artist feels that we have lost the ability to experience being with others for its own sake.

The gentle rhythm of *512 Hours* differs from Abramović's earlier work, which was more direct in its confrontation with the violence (symbolic and physical) done to a woman's body and, therefore, more explicitly critical. In *Rhythm 0* (1974), for example, visitors to the performance were presented with 72 objects on a table, which they could use on the artist's body as they liked. The objects included a hammer, feather, scissors, rose, a pistol and one bullet. By the time the performance had concluded six hours later a man had cut Abramović's shirt, her neck had been cut with a knife and the pistol had been loaded and put in her hand before being moved to her neck. Throughout her career Abramović has shifted from visibly explicit endurance (screaming until she lost her voice, lying in the centre of a fire) to a form of performance that is differently demanding to endure. A performance such as *512 Hours* enables the concept of duration to come to the fore because we cannot see the pain of her endurance so clearly. However, my hypothesis is that far from being benign or lacking in critical agency *512 Hours* contributes to an emerging model of criticality that takes slowness, generosity and shared time as its key drivers.

I start with my own experience of the work and some thoughts about how I felt during my visit to the Serpentine. This is an intensely emotive performance, which aims to change how the participants feel while they are in

the gallery space. As such it raises important questions about the role of emotion in art historical writing on criticality. A performance such as this shows the idea of critical detachment up for the ruse that it is. As a highly embodied, sensate and reflexive experience it seems methodologically important not to deny this in writing about it. This is to resist the tendency in art criticism to separate 'seriousness' from emotion, a distinction perpetuated by influential journals such as *Artforum* (established in 1962) and *October* (founded in 1976). Emotion has been associated with self-indulgence and lack of rigour, despite the affective power that not only art, but writing about art, can have. Jennifer Doyle has made a brilliant intervention into this debate, arguing against the denigration of feelings in art criticism and claiming that "'Serious, complex and rigorous criticism' can be passionate and personal".¹ Her contribution is a breath of fresh air and opens up a space in which others can explore the critical potential of how art feels. My intention here is to fold argument into experience and to suggest that emotion is not detached from criticality.

Waiting for Marina

My own experience of the performance began with frustration. I travelled from Bristol to London by train and then fought my way across the city to the relative calm of Kensington Gardens where the Serpentine Gallery is located. As expected there was a queue, which extended far enough that it became a curiosity for visitors to the park who had no knowledge of what was happening inside the gallery. As I listened to the conversations of others queuing with me I was struck by the differing expectations and hopes that people had brought with them. One man was keen to ask Abramović about Serbia, her country of origin, seemingly unaware that this was a silent performance. Others were returning after many previous visits to spend more time in the artist's presence. Almost everyone referred to Abramović by her first name as if they already felt a personal connection. Everybody was waiting for Marina.

I soon realised that I was going to need to recalibrate my sense of time as the queue moved slowly and the clouds grew darker in the sky. Gradually I realised that this was my first exercise of the day. It was as if the artist was challenging me to give time to others, unknown to me, who were already in the gallery sharing as much time as they liked with Marina. It required an unselfish patience, a realisation that the whole point was not to acquire an experience for myself alone, but to share in a collective experience only part of which took place inside the gallery.

Jennifer Fisher pays close attention to the dynamics of the queue in her discussion of Abramović's *The Artist is Present* at MoMA in 2010. She identifies the multiple purposes of the queue, which was not only a means of managing access to the artist, but also a way to "slow down and become ready to sit".²

¹ Jennifer Doyle, *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*, Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2013, p. 72.

² Jennifer Fisher, "Proprioceptive Friction: Waiting in Line to Sit with Marina Abramović", *Senses & Society*, vol. 7, issue 2, 2012, pp. 153-172.

Located in Kensington Gardens the queue for *512 Hours* became a transitional space between the chaos of a crowded city, full of purposeful commuters vying for pavement space with ambling tourists, and the calm of the gallery. There was a need to prepare visitors to embrace a pace of existence utterly at odds with the journey they had likely had to get there. The walk from South Kensington underground station to the gallery takes the visitor past some of London's major museums such as the Victoria & Albert and Natural History Museum. Exhibition Road is busy with tourists keen to get to their destination to see the exhibits inside, whereas on arriving at the Serpentine it became clear that the queue was, in part, the destination. I had the feeling of having embarked on an artworld pilgrimage, having set off early from my home, jostled for a seat on the train, negotiated the claustrophobia that accompanies a trip on the underground and walked as quickly as possible along the crowded street in a vain attempt to avoid waiting too long to see Marina. I was, somewhat ironically, in a rush to get to my destination where I knew I would be asked to slow down. It was difficult to let go of this in the queue as I watched people leave the performance slowly, seemingly without a second thought for the many of us waiting to experience it. The organizers allowed 160 people into the event at any one time and maintained a one-in one-out policy to keep this equilibrium. There was none of the jostling for position that Fisher reports in the queue for *The Artist Is Present*. I suspect this was because two anxieties that permeated that queue were absent from this one. Firstly, I was not aware of any VIPs going straight to the front, whereas at the MoMA performance the opportunity to sit opposite the artist, one-on-one, attracted a host of celebrities to the occasion as well as Abramović's former partner and artistic collaborator Ulay. During the time I was waiting outside the Serpentine no one jumped the queue. Secondly, the license given to visitors to spend as much time as they liked seated opposite Marina at *The Artist Is Present* (all day if desired) presented the real possibility that those who may have queued all day would not get to sit before the gallery closed. Indeed, this was the fate of Fisher who reflects on her disappointment with insight into the difference between the serenity and composure of the 'main event', for those lucky enough to sit, and the combination of camaraderie and competition that was evident in the queue, which she understands as a peripheral part of the performance.

I share Fisher's expanded approach to the temporality of Abramović's work. Indeed the temporal aspect of the event, so important to performance art in which the present tense is often valorised above all else, started long before I set out for London. It was palpable in the anticipation of the performance, the sense of 'looking forward' to something enigmatic and uncertain. This contrasts with the rhetoric of present-ness through which Abramović's work has understandably been discussed given her desire to interrogate what it means to share time and space with another person. Discussing the conditions that she aims to create for those who come to participate in her durational works, Abramović explains that "The thing is the space has to be charged differently so you lose this concept of time and it is really now, here and now,

just here and now. There is no beginning and no end”.³ At the same time Abramović lets her audience see the scaffolding upon which this intense ‘here and now’ is built. In her memoir, *Walk Through Walls* (2016), she describes the journey she has taken (emotional, geographic and aesthetic) that has led her to a point where she can undertake a performance such as *512 Hours*. The enormous stamina involved takes preparation so for Abramović there is a period of time before the exhibition opens spent developing enough physical and emotional strength to endure the performance. Indeed, she has published a series of exercises named ‘The Abramović Method’ to help prepare visitors to experience long durational performances. In other words, being vividly in the present requires the artist to have worked hard in the past.



Marina Abramović, *512 Hours* (2014), photograph ©Marco Anelli.

After queuing for one hour and 30 minutes I finally gained entry to the performance. A gallery assistant stamped my hand to legitimate my being there and in an instant I had left the social dynamic of the queue behind and found myself sharing a space with others who seemed to understand better than me how to respond to the situation we found ourselves in. The shift from ‘waiting for’ to ‘being with’ brought with it a further shift from consensus to self-interest. Once inside the gallery the temporality of the queue seemed like a distant memory and I had little thought for the people waiting outside,

³ Abramović quoted in Sophie O’Brien, “A Resonant Emptiness”, *Marina Abramović 512 Hours*, London: Serpentine Galleries/Koenig Books, 2014, p. 34-35.

probably by now in the rain. The first room had a cross-shaped platform in the middle. Some people were standing on this with their eyes closed, while others stood or sat against the walls watching. In another room people were walking slowly up and down and the third room contained rows of chairs arranged with their backs to the door. People were sitting still, some with their eyes closed. One of Abramović's assistants took me by the hand, led me to the platform and asked me to close my eyes and concentrate on my breathing. Noticing my reluctance to wear the headphones he asked me to put them on saying "it's better that way". I duly did as I was told, but still found it difficult to shut out the stresses of everyday life. This blocked out the ambient sounds of the room such as the rustling of clothes, the sound of footsteps and the hum of air conditioning. It also denied the possibility of hearing something that might help me to 'read' what was going on. My reluctance to block out sound was related to my desire to interpret the performance even though I knew it was not a 'text' to be 'read', but a situation to experience.

The significance of silence in performance art is explored by John Lutterbie who discusses a performance called *Untitled Dance (with fish and others)*, 1987, by Angelika Festa in which the artist hung from a pole silently for 24 hours with her body wrapped and eyes taped shut. Lutterbie pays attention to ambient sound noting that the performance only approximates silence.⁴ The distinction between quietness and silence is relevant to *512 Hours* as well. The quietness of the room experienced without headphones rendered the performance relational in an aural sense because the ambient sounds were part of what was shared with others. The silence of the room experienced with headphones on turned it into an isolating event. I felt unconnected to the other people, an individual but not part of a group. However, even without the headphones the conditioned response of *interpreting* this as an invitation to share time with others for calm relaxation blocked the very experience I was hoping to *feel*. I found it impossible to stop worrying about everything else I had to do that day, which train I was going to get home, how long it would take me to get back to the underground station or how I was going to manage my own flagging energy levels whilst getting the most out of the experience. The performance attracted a great deal of attention from critics some of whom also noted their difficulty in submitting to the mindfulness of the event or their reluctance to do so (Dorment, 2014; Gibson, 2014).⁵ I wondered how it was that some people were able to participate more readily, how it appeared to make sense to them as a mode of being with others more easily than it did to

⁴ John Lutterbie, "Performance in the Proximity of Silence", *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, 4:3, 1999, pp. 12-16.

⁵ See, for example, Richard Dorment, "Marina Abramovic review: I hated every second but I can't deny its power", *Telegraph*, 12 June 2014. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-reviews/10895104/Marina-Abramovic-review-I-hated-every-second-but-I-cant-deny-its-power.html>, accessed: 30 July 2017. See also Megan Gibson, "Why Marina Abramovic's *512 Hours* Didn't Make Me Cry", *Time Magazine*, 13 June 2014. Available at: <http://time.com/2865045/marina-abramovic-512-hours/>, accessed: 30 July 2017.

me. Perhaps this quest is what fuelled the many repeat visits that some people made to the Serpentine during the summer of 2014, a process of practicing how to be calm and unhurried.

(Un)productivity and slowness

The idea of slowing the pace of contemporary urban life found its clearest form of expression in the slow walking room, which contrasted sharply with the type of walking I had done to get to the gallery, which involved weaving through crowds on busy London streets. In this room visitors were invited to confront the pace of what usually counts as a productive existence. It was an opportunity to not be busy. Accepting this opportunity is particularly difficult in a culture that rewards productivity, as measured by tangible outcomes, and in which walking is either something to do in order to arrive somewhere or understood as leisure time. However, leisure time is a product of work time, so still does not escape the capitalist logic of productive and valued work. As Rebecca Solnit writes “walking allows us to be in our bodies and in the world without being made busy by them”.⁶ Not being busy engenders guilt when seen from the point of view of a goal-orientated mindset, which may be why we find substitutes for doing nothing. Solnit is alert to this tendency when she writes that “...thinking is generally thought of as doing nothing in a production-orientated culture, and doing nothing is hard to do. It’s best done as disguising it as doing something, and the something closest to doing nothing is walking”.⁷ Her insights on walking and thinking concern what we value and what counts as productivity, in particular the notion that we do not value pursuits that cannot be quantified. For Solnit this includes experiences such as cloud-gazing, wandering and window shopping, pursuits that involve walking slowly and dispensing with the need for efficiency and urgency. It may also go some way to explaining the success of art installations that invite their audience to slow the pace of everyday life, often using mediations on nature, such as Olafur Eliasson’s *The Weather Project* (Tate Modern, 2003) and the critically-acclaimed immersive video projections of Pipilotti Rist (see, for example, *Mercy Garden*, 2013-14, Hauser & Wirth, Somerset). At *512 Hours*, the challenge to urgency involved repetitively walking the length of the room and back again, slowly putting one foot in front of the other. It provided an opportunity to concentrate on walking itself – its rhythms, balance and tempo – as opposed to the target destination.

Walking has a wider resonance in Abramović’s work. During the period of March to June 1988 Abramović and Ulay walked the Great Wall of China. Abramović started from the Yellow Sea and Ulay started from the Gobi Desert. After each walking 2,500km they met in the middle to end their relationship as partners in life and art. It was an epic performance, which took eight

⁶ Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, London: Granta Publications, 2014, p. 5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

years to realize due to the difficulties of gaining permission from the Chinese authorities to walk through provinces that were not accessible to tourists. Abramović and Ulay's original intention was to marry at the point where they met, but during the time it took to arrange the performance their relationship had deteriorated and instead they separated. Walking with Marina, therefore, has a historical residue for those aware of this earlier piece. Other artists have employed walking in/as their work, notably Richard Long, whose *A Line Made By Walking* (1967) evidenced the trace of repetitive walking in a photograph of a straight line of flattened grass. During the 1970s Long became renowned for creating Land Art sculptures based on walks such as *A Line in the Himalayas* (1975). The exercise at *512 Hours*, however, was not open to the elements or situated in an awe-inspiring landscape. It was not walking to reach a (former) lover and collaborator. There was no goal or achievement at the end, no matter how painful. There was no destination. This lack of outcome, or at least redefinition of what an outcome might be, is the crucial realization gained by the slowness of the endeavor. It threw me back into why I was there and the position from which I participated in the performance, which was as a researcher and lecturer.

Immaterial experience / tangible outcome

I knew I wanted to write an article about *512 Hours* and I was aware that some of my students were likely to want to study it. At the same time I realized that what was being offered was the opportunity to let go of these motivations and the anxiety that accompanies them. Nevertheless, I found it all but impossible to inhabit the present tense in and of itself as opposed to it being a precursor to something tangible, some kind of outcome. It felt too uncertain and unproductive. In the wider political culture the idea of being unproductive is associated with laziness and social irresponsibility. For the Conservative UK government productivity is couched in the language of 'doing the right thing' as if what counts as being a productive citizen is so obvious it need not be questioned. The fear and stigma attached to being unproductive, in academia and in the wider social realm, can obscure a discussion of what this means. The assumption in academia is that it involves a lack of quantifiable research outputs and an unwillingness to submit to the mechanisms by which these are measured.

To work on oneself in an academic context is usually understood as carving out precious time to produce research outputs. It is framed within an institutional context of achievement and career development. This, in turn, is situated in the UK within national frameworks for measuring research excellence within universities, which is ultimately tied to funding and reputational gain. It is an all too familiar story for academics trying to fulfill these expectations without falling out of love with their subject. In short, doing research means being productive, where this is measured in terms of wider social impact as well as contribution to one's field of study. How, then, can we loosen the ties to this regime in order to engage with the utterly different notion of

productivity, without goals or anxiety, encouraged within the force field of *512 Hours*?

One of the metrics increasingly used to measure the worth of research carried out in universities is its impact beyond an academic audience. Productive work is understood as work that can be seen to have a social benefit in a relatively short period of time. This also informs decisions about which research to fund in a fiercely competitive race for scant resources. The arts and humanities face particular challenges in evidencing wider social impact that is visible and quantifiable. This forms part of the context for Claire Bishop's persuasive argument that socially engaged participatory art projects have, since the 1990s, largely been valued on ethical rather than aesthetic grounds. Part of the context for *512 Hours* is the re-emergence of socially engaged art in which what matters is a collective experience shared by participants understood to have equal value in making something happen. In these kinds of projects the artist takes on the role of a facilitator or catalyst, which appeals to a non-hierarchical democratic process rather than the production of an artefact. A range of process-orientated art practices have gained traction since the 1990s, some championed by Nicolas Bourriaud such as Rirkrit Tiravanija's shared meal installations of the 1990s in which he served curry to visitors within the gallery space. Such events are seen as valuable to the extent to which they have some kind of 'real world' impact, often occurring outside the gallery space and engaging members of the public as community art. An example of this approach to practice is a project called *Tenantspin* (1999), which is an Internet-based TV station created by Danish collective Superflex for the residents of a tower block in Liverpool. It invites participation from the public, occurs outside the gallery space and can be argued to have a social impact on the residents. Bishop argues that a binary is constructed in which "contemporary art's 'social turn' not only designates an orientation towards concrete goals in art, but also the critical perception that these are more substantial, 'real' and important than artistic experiences".⁸ She further argues that despite prioritizing the social efficacy of participatory art, such projects are not critically positioned in relation to non-artistic forms of social/community engagement. Comparisons are usually made with other art projects and artworks despite value being identified in social impact rather than aesthetic affect.

So, how does *512 Hours* fit into this critical landscape? I argue that the scepticism that surrounds Abramović's work is partly because the outcome is not tangible or concrete but affective. The work has the potential to change a person's mood, the way they think about the pace of life outside the performance space or the way they interact with others. However, in a culture obsessed with accounting for every second of every day (and in which slowing down engenders guilt) this does not count as an outcome at all, despite its importance for improving wellbeing.

⁸ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London: Verso, 2012, p. 19.

Abramović facilitates a sense of wellbeing and mindfulness, but not entirely at the expense of more tangible outcomes for her as an artist. There is a tension at the level of her performance between the aspiration to relinquish outcome-oriented thoughts (be in the moment and don't worry about what it may or may not lead to) and the production of an event that exists within the artworld and is framed as an outcome in countless ways including the production of a catalogue to record and document the work, online and print materials to publicise the event, and the writing of critical responses, which situate *512 Hours* historically and theoretically. In contrast to the experience of being in the space with Marina and her assistants, outside the gallery walls there is an imperative to historicise the event, which means using film and photography to materialize a performance in which immaterial experience is emphasized. In short, a lot of material is generated within which the performance can flourish as both non-commodified experience and tangible outcome.

Abramović herself has worked hard to cement her own position and legacy within the history of performance art, including the establishment of the Marina Abramović Institute, which is an organisation that aims to promote time-based work.⁹ This jars with the politics of some performance artists for whom the lack of documentation of their work is a challenge to the aesthetic economy of the artworld and material commodification of the artwork, making work that only exists in the present and cannot be bought and sold on the art market. Chris Burden and Robert Rauschenberg, for example, did not write down instructions for their performances because the work, as performance at least, was intended to be only for the present, not the future. This was not, however, universally adopted as an approach despite the aesthetic politics of dematerialisation in post-Abstract Expressionist art of the 1960s and Conceptual and Body Art practices of the 1970s. Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1964), for example, was an exception and has been performed multiple times by other artists and once more by Ono herself in 2003. Abramović has taken this to a new level both by training younger artists to perform some of her 'historical works', which accompanied *The Artist is Present*, and herself re-performing some famous works by other artists including Vito Acconci's *Seedbed* (1972), Bruce Nauman's *Body Pressure* (1974) and Valie Export's *Action Pants: Genital Panic* (1969) under the title *7 Easy Pieces* (Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2005). Such works are part of a broader concern with re-interpreting historical performances over the last 15 years. In 2002 Carolee Schneemann's *Meat Joy* (1964) was re-performed at the Whitechapel Gallery in London as part of the gallery's series entitled *A Short History of Performance*. A younger generation of artists have also worked with this material such as Oriana Fox whose project 'Once More With Feeling' (2009) restaged feminist

⁹ The Marina Abramović Institute (MAI) is currently a travelling organisation, working with partner institutions to set up collaborative workshops and events for those interested in performance art and other fields such as music, dance and theatre. It is envisaged as the artist's legacy.

performances from the late 1960s to 1990s, often with a playful touch.¹⁰ One of the consequences of Abramović overseeing the re-performance of her earlier work is that she has situated herself within the canon that this work originally challenged. However, as a female artist keenly aware of the need to write women back into art historical discourses the materialisation of her performance work is differently charged. This leads me to explore in the final section the extent to which it matters that it is the artist herself who performs and interacts with the audience.

Presence of the artist: individualism / participation

As I moved through each room of the gallery I realised that Marina was not there. After what felt like about 20 minutes I gave up, feeling disappointed, and headed for the locker room to collect my bag. At that point Marina appeared so I went back into the gallery space to observe how she interacted with participants and to put myself in her way in the hope that she might give me some of her time. It was an entirely selfish act on my part at odds with the atmosphere of cordial collaboration and generosity. She gently took my hand, led me to a chair and positioned my hands on my knees so that I was in a relaxed position. It felt kind and caring.

In conversation with Nancy Spector, Abramović reflected on her own presence within her work: "I have proposed that I withdraw even more. In the future, I don't even need to be there for the work to continue".¹¹ However, to me it mattered a great deal that it was the artist herself who engaged with me directly and not one of her assistants. Somehow this was a profoundly different experience imbued with the resonance of over four decades of endurance performance work. Despite the attention given in both Abramović's work and its critical reception (as well the broader sphere of performance studies) to sharing the present moment, there is no pure present. It is knowledge of the artist's history of durational, exhausting and sometimes dangerous performances that makes sharing this moment meaningful, which was for me entirely lacking when interacting with her assistants. It is a present entwined with a past, which is in turn mediated by photographs, documentaries and critical commentaries through which Abramović's work is known and understood.

I felt uneasy about my own reaction as if I was valorizing the artist's star status as a celebrity of the artworld and devaluing the work of her assistants. The individualism of the artworld finds its fiercest criticisms when aimed at artists who are highly successful and whose position in art history is secured. This kind of individualism makes the relationship between Abramović and her young assistants, for whom creative labour is likely to be precarious and

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of re-enactment and documentation of performance art see Amelia Jones, "'The Artist is Present' Artistic Re-enactments and the Impossibility of Presence", *The Drama Review*, 55:1, 2011, pp. 16-45.

¹¹ Nancy Spector, *Marina Abramović: Seven Easy Pieces*, Edizioni Charta Srl, 2007, p. 19.

sometimes unpaid, uncomfortable. They do not feature in the promotional material for the performance and their status in realising the work is unclear.

This individualism is at odds with the collective experience of participatory art and raises the question of authorship. Within *512 Hours* there is a tension between individuation and socially progressive collaboration in art because the performance is both dependent on cooperation between strangers and authored by an artist who is acutely aware of her place in the history of performance art. Abramović does not comply with what Bishop calls an 'ethics of authorial renunciation'.¹² This is the idea that forms of participatory art in which the artist reduces the extent of his or her control are valued over those in which the artist affirms authorship. The publicity materials for *512 Hours* made clear that this performance is indeed authored by Abramović, using a headshot of the artist for the exhibition poster and a close-up of her face on the Serpentine's website page that advertises the performance. Read through Bishop's observations unless Abramović's authorship is suppressed her project does not meet the ethical standards expected of socially collaborative art. She is accused of courting celebrity, which goes against the direction of thought about what is good about participatory art practice. For women artists there is often a further layer of criticism as they are accused of narcissism and self-indulgence when they feature prominently in their own work.

However, arguments about authorial superiority only get us so far. In my view the tension between Abramović as an individuated author and the collaborative politics of participatory art is a false dichotomy premised on the idea that the only way to be critical is to disavow individual authorship. Arguments about the presence of the artist in performance art used to centre on the idea of direct address, the confrontational gaze and the importance of experiencing something in real time. *512 Hours* ushers in a different repertoire of critique using the affective power of the artist's own history, different modes of temporality and kindness towards participants.

By using slowness as a medium, which is to read the performance in aesthetic rather than ethical terms, Abramović offers a critique of the culture of quantifiable outcomes with concrete 'real world' impact that currently permeates neoliberal policy including arts-based research. This form of criticality is gentle in its form and never didactic. There is no message, no 'them' who must change and 'us' who must show them the error of their thinking. It is, however, highly affective as evidenced in the responses given by many of those who joined in the discussion about the performance on social media and for the video diaries. What mattered to many was a re-engagement with the present tense in which the futurity of aspiration and achievement could be set aside. The slowness generated by the performance offered an alternative to the contemporary experience of aggressive neoliberal individualism and social atomisation in which time is unitised to such an extent that there is little room left for the experience of being with others that *512 Hours* facilitated.

¹² Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, *ibid.*, p. 22.

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