Dance Installation:
An Art Historical and Practical Investigation

by

Greta Hartenstein
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Introduction:

Throughout my concurrent study of Art History and Dance during my college career, Dance has cultivated my understanding of artistic theories, disciplines, and processes of art creation. In a complementary way, Art History has provided me with a strong aesthetic focus in my dance making, and conceptually pushed my choreographic practice to explore the realm of art within the dancing body. This overlap has inspired my work here and encouraged me to explore how movement is situated in the realm of art. My research has further progressed to focus on identifying and analyzing the role of dance within Performance Art.

In September 2010, I interned for Trisha Brown’s exhibition, *Off the Wall: Part 2*, at the Whitney Museum of American Art, in New York, New York. Brown’s dance company performed seven pieces from her Early Works in the second floor gallery as a 50-minute long performance during their 4-day residency at the museum. I was present for the installation of the exhibition, rehearsals, and performances, and my hands-on role in many aspects of the show gave me a unique vantage point toward Brown’s work. This allowed me to analyze and absorb her conceptual approach to the pieces, their physical existence in space, the performance quality of the dancers, and experiential nature of the work. My observation and analysis of this performance constitutes a prominent part of my research within this thesis, providing the foundation for the discussion in Chapter Four.

This was my first opportunity to see Brown’s work live, and I was fascinated by her creation of a viewing experience similar to that of an art exhibition, but with
moving, living bodies. Viewing Brown’s exhibition encouraged and inspired me to explore the concept of bodies moving as objects intended to be viewed as a physical experience as opposed to a performance rooted in narrative or emotion. Through an in-depth analysis of Brown’s work I began to develop a framework for categorizing it as an art form within Performance Art. In defining this type of performance it became clear to me that Brown had created dance that functioned as an art installation, or *Dance Installation*. I set out to comprehensively define *Dance Installation*, a term that I had not previously seen or read in my research of Performance, within the scope of my study and experience.

First, this undertaking necessitates a multi-faceted investigation into the theories, origins, and overall evolution of Performance Art in Europe. Artists used *performance art* as a loose term in the 1960s to describe their work, but the Futurists were the first group of artists to write manifestos on the art of performance.¹ The Futurist movement began in the early 1900s in Italy, led by poet and theorist Filippo Marinetti. Marinetti proposed that viewers should be at the center of a work of art, an active component of the piece, namely through the use of performance to make the spectator aware of the artist’s actions. The Futurist Evenings featured live readings of their manifestos, music, and bizarre actions, attempting to instigate the audience to the point of counteraction, thereby forcing them to participate. The new methods of the Futurists set the groundwork for the Dada movement that took root in the major European art centers, and in New York City.

The Dadaists used performance as a means of rejecting the existing artistic conventions, in search of a wholly new approach to their art-making and philosophies
regarding the role of art in society. Beginning with Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings, co-founders of the Cabaret Voiltaire, Dada performances were the product of interdisciplinary collaboration among writers, poets, musicians, dancers, painters, sculptors, and cabaret performers. The Dadaists developed new performance forms by bringing together these disciplines. One example of this was Sound Poems, which employed phonetics to create a performed score referencing the use of language in the press regarding World War I. These artists directly challenged the rules and structure of the art establishment, further pushing the existing boundaries.

The Bauhaus utilized the Dadaist’s philosophy of interdisciplinary collaboration as the cornerstones for an institution dedicated to innovation through the use of performance. This was the first art school of its kind, pioneering a cross-medium curriculum and a stage program. This was anchored by an underlying belief that performance brought artistic exploration into real space, making live art, and thereby creating a total artwork. Unencumbered by political intentions, the artists and students of the Bauhaus were free to focus their energy on forging new ground within the realm of performance. They designed fanciful costumes, elaborate sets, and dramatic lighting for pieces that drew inspiration from dance, painting, pedestrian action, geometric shapes, and architectural theory. The Bauhaus festivals featured full-scale productions of their performances, establishing Performance Art as a true artistic medium. In order to cultivate an understanding of Performance Art over the past 50 years, it is necessary to identify the roots of these theories in the work of the Futurists, Dadaists, and Bauhaus artists. In this vein, my first chapter sets forth a
historical trajectory through the art of the early 1900s, providing the foundation for further analysis.

The second chapter will discuss the growth of Performance Art in the United States in the 1950s and 60s, which was greatly influenced by the previous artistic revolutions. The pioneering American artists, notably John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Allan Kaprow and Trisha Brown, utilized performance as a means of pushing the constraints of their individual art disciplines and exploring unknown territory within live action and physical experience. Cage transformed his method of composition through the use of chance procedures and everyday sounds as his foundation for developing scores. Cage worked extensively with Cunningham, who adapted these methods for his dance composition, and produced works that emphasized a sculptural physical presence of the body. His dance performances often included components of visual art and music, and collaboration with artist Robert Rauschenberg was common. Interdisciplinary work was widespread among the New York artists of the 50s and 60s, spurring new developments as theories and methods transferred across mediums.

The Rueben Gallery and Judson Memorial Church became centers of performance and collaboration, bringing together artists in search of an outlet for their art-making, and the work of Allan Kaprow and Trisha Brown, among others, developed from them. Kaprow, originally having studied painting, created the Happenings, which not only disregarded all artistic conventions, but also challenged the rules and structures of traditional performance. He rejected the use of theaters, galleries, and other art-defining locations, encouraging performance to meld with
everyday life, in ordinary settings. The Happenings focused primarily on active
viewer participation, demanding complete engagement with the work in order to fully
experience art. Chapter Three focuses on Kaprow’s philosophies, which stem directly
from the manifestos and theories of the earlier movements, thereby building on the
previously presented concepts to construct an in-depth analysis of the guiding
principles of the Happenings. Additionally, this discussion introduces a structured
method of analysis for performance works, and I base my analysis in Chapter Five on
this system.

In Chapter Four I present my observational research of Trisha Brown’s work
in *Off the Wall: Part 2*, which differs greatly from the previous chapters since it is
based on my personal experience of the work. In a detailed examination of this work I
pinpoint specific qualities and themes in her pieces, including the dancer’s physical
presence, the structure of the movement, the relationship to the location, the use of
pedestrian movements, and the interaction with gravity and weight as natural forces.
In the following chapter I identify five prominent aspects that define Brown’s pieces
in this exhibition as *Dance Installation*. Using these five characteristics, I develop a
structure for the analysis of my own choreographic exploration, and that of Brown
and Kaprow. Through my own work I explore *Dance Installation*, each semester
providing an opportunity to work with different aspects of the form in order to
understand them practically.

In this thesis, I work towards a comprehensive definition of *Dance
Installation*, acquired through a historical understanding of the trajectory of
Performance Art, a contextualization of the origins of Trisha Brown’s Early Works, a
structured analysis of the fundamental characteristics of *Dance Installation*, and a practical exploration of those defining qualities.
Chapter One:
A History of Performance Art in Europe in the Early 1900s

Futurism:

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti launched the Futurist movement in 1909 with the publication “Le Futurisme” in the Paris newspaper in *Le Figaro*. Marinetti’s intentions, set out in this paper, were to revolutionize the contemporary art and culture in Italy, and Europe. His theories implored artists to move away from the traditions and past the prevailing artistic forms that were so embedded in the Italian present, which he claimed were stale and static. Marinetti posited that this complete disregard for the previous conventions and artistic styles was necessary for the progression and development of new ideas.

The first Futurist manifesto on painting, *La pittura futurista: Manifesto tecnico*, signed by artists Gino Severini and Giacomo Balla, was published in 1910. This marked the break from traditional realistic painting and the Futurists’ advancement toward new innovation and freedom. One of the characteristics of this change was an emphasis on placing the viewer in the center of the work, and no longer as a mere outside observer. The young Milanese painters Umberto Boccioni, Luigi Russolo and Carlo Carrà enthusiastically adopted these theories shortly after the manifesto was published, and the Futurist group began to expand within Italy. The manifesto insisted on an art “which finds its components in its surroundings” and “that the spectator [must] live at the center of the painted action.” The painters’ movement toward performance stems directly from this theory because performance could actively force the viewer to take note of their actions. Painting became a setting
for theatrical experience, by including and addressing the spectator. Performance gave them “artistic license to be both ‘creators’ in developing a new form of artists’ theatre, and ‘art objects’ in that they made no separation between their art as poets, as painters or as performers.” These new theories and practices led to the idea that, as artists, they were art objects because there was no distinct separation between their performance and paintings.

1911 marked the beginning of true Futurist painting. The use of complementary hues, linear lines and rhythms to define space, an expansion of depth within formal structures, and the sense of movement and dynamics within a composition became prominent. Futurist painters strove to incorporate movement into their work and place the viewer, or spectator, at the center of the piece. This later led to an inevitable expansion of Futurist art into the realm of performance and live art in an attempt to expand the boundaries of their work into new artistic territory.

In 1912 the Futurists exhibited across Europe in Paris, Berlin, London, Brussels, among other major cities as a means to proliferate their theories, work, and aesthetic. In 1913 the Futurist painters began to branch out from painting to other forms such as music, the study of movement, sculpture, and theater.

Accompanying their manifesto publications, the Futurists, led by Marinetti, gave public readings and declamations performed at evening shows. These dissertations included a component of provocation towards the audience and served as the beginning of performances within the Futurist movement. The official First Futurist Evening occurred on January $12^{th}$, 1910 at the Teatro Rosetti in Trieste, Italy. In the context of a combative and raging discourse, Marinetti presented the
theories laid out in his manifesto and opposed the commercialization of art that was currently stuck in traditional conventions. Futurist performers at these Evenings enjoyed irritating and instigating the spectators to the point of activating vocal or physical unrest in the audience. Marinetti wrote about the “Pleasure of Being Booed,” in a manifesto explaining that the viewer was engaged in the work when participating in the act of booing and not simply subdued by “intellectual intoxication.” He asserted that applause was only evidence of “something mediocre, dull, regurgitated or too well digested.”

Instead, the pioneering Futurists challenged the audience and infuriated them to take action. These publications encouraged artists to experiment with more elaborate performances that often incorporated improvisation, leading to further innovations and new manifestos. In *Variety Theatre Manifesto* (1913), Marinetti describes the defining factors of Futurist Variety Theatre. First, this model called for a mixture of film, acrobatics, song, dance, clowning, and overall ridiculous absurdities and actions. Secondly, there was no story line; the actors and theater technicians must work “incessantly to invent new elements of astonishment.” Thirdly, the show should coerce the audience to participate, bringing them out of their passive roles as “stupid voyeurs.” Next, the “most obtrusive problems and most complicated political events” must be explained to the audience whether they were adults or children. Lastly, the Futurist Variety Theatre was expected to be “anti-academic, primitive and naïve, hence the more significant for the unexpectedness of its discoveries and the simplicity of its means.”
Luigi Russolo experimented with noise music in which the sounds were the art (art of noises). Using machinery sounds as templates, such as trains, motors, trams, and industrial noises, Russolo built special instruments that would emit such sounds, coming together to create a Futurist orchestra. He published a manifesto to explain noise music further: The Art of Noises (1913). These instruments were nearly three feet tall, comprising of a rectangular wooden box with a funnel-shaped amplifier. Each instrument contained a motor that produced various sounds when operated by performers. A theory to mechanize the performer, stemmed from this new notion of mechanized sound. Giacomo Balla realized these ideas in his 1914 work, Macchina tipografica. Balla called for twelve performers to stand on the stage, each executing a simple task, thereby collectively creating a large machine. In 1917 Balla premiered a work in Rome titled Fireworks, based on Igor Stravinsky’s score in which the set design was inspired by one of Balla’s paintings. The theatrical lights and stage set were the performers, creating a moving visual installation of shapes and colors. Both the stage and auditorium was illuminated in a choreographed ballet of lights.

The Futurists continued to push their notion of performance further, next with Futurist Ballets, in which they experimented with new innovations, art forms, presentations, and methods of using the body. One common exploration involved adding cumbersome, geometric, machine like costumes to their bodies to alter their movements and the visual perception of the viewer. These performances often studied the norms and constructs of the traditional theater in order to challenge them. In the piece Light, by Futurist artist Francesco Canguillo, the theater was in complete darkness for three minutes until the actors, scattered around the theater, created such a
commotion that the theater burst with illumination.\textsuperscript{19} Theatrical lighting is fundamentally, an extremely important part of performance, by removing it, no matter how briefly, Canguillo challenged the audience’s perception of the use of light in the show.

In his 1917 manifesto, \textit{Futurist Dance}, Marinetti outlined instructions on how to move for Futurist performances featuring the live body. He called for a specific style of movement that captures the admirable qualities of contemporary dancers such as Vaslav Nijinsky, Isadora Duncan, and Loie Fuller. Marinetti emphasized “the pure geometry of dance,” which described dance that is free of narrative, emotive, or sexual qualities. To the Futurists, movement needed to “go beyond the ‘muscular possibilities’ and aim… for ‘that ideal multiplied body of the motor that we have so long dreamed of.’”\textsuperscript{20} Although this focused on the performative body, the Futurists utilize multiple components to create an overall aesthetic. The idea of synchronization and simultaneity were integral their theater pieces, developmental processes, and theories. In the \textit{Futurist Synthetic Theater} (1915), simultaneity is identified as being “born of improvisation, lighting-like intuition, from suggestive and revealing actuality.”\textsuperscript{21} Futurists found that the only way to capture the simultaneity and chaos of confused “fragments of interconnected events” happening in everyday life was through improvisation, not extensive preparation.\textsuperscript{22} This was not a means to an end, but a method of developing new work and setting a measure of value in a performance.

Due to the work of the Futurists, performance had become an art medium in its own right by the mid-1920s. Their theories and manifestos were well known and
recognized in major European hubs such as Paris, London, and Zurich, as well as New York, which encouraged artists to push boundaries between various forms and experiment with performance. Marinetti proposed that “the time will come when life will no longer be a simple matter of bread and labour, nor a life of idleness either but a work of art.” By 1914 Giacomo Balla had adopted these theories as part of his life and began wearing eccentric costumes as everyday dress, originally to demonstrate his support of Italy’s entry into World War I. Others wore ridiculous costumes, hats, and face paint in public as a means of proclaiming the unity of art and life, suggesting that the conventions separating them should be eradicated. The Futurists made their lives into a stage for art and performance. Throughout the 1920s, Futurism continued to develop across Europe, becoming increasingly political and expanding to involve over 100,000 participants. This encouraged further innovation and influenced the development of subsequent artistic movements, including Dada.

**Dada:**

The Dada movement began in Zurich, Switzerland in 1914. The Dadaists were not unified by one artistic style, but by a common rejection of the accepted artistic conventions and establishment. Additionally, separate groups developed concurrently and existed under that same name in New York, Berlin, Barcelona, Paris, and elsewhere. The Dada movement provided an outlet for artists to channel their discontent that arose with the outbreak of World War I. Their revulsions unified against the bourgeois society, as well as the nationalist and materialist values tied to the initiation of the war. Shock tactics and demonstrations driven by a combative
spirit against the established European framework of art characterized the Dadaist public position and image.\textsuperscript{28}

The Zurich Dadaists notably included Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, Tristan Tzara, Richard Huelsenbeck, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Hans Arp, Marcel Janco, and Hans Richter.\textsuperscript{29} Ball and Hennings came to Zurich from Germany in 1915 after the start of the war. In 1916 they founded the Cabaret Voltaire based on the German cabaret, which drew the attention of Tzara, Arp, and Janco. The material for performances at Cabaret Voltaire was the product of the collaboration between these artists and they agreed that “live reading and performance was the key to rediscovering pleasure in art.”\textsuperscript{30} They established performance as an artistic medium essential to the Dada movement and invited artists from other various nationalities and trainings to participate. Each new member brought their unique background and entered into an interdisciplinary collaboration between painters, sculptors, performers, poets, and dancers.\textsuperscript{31}

The Cabaret Voltaire was a site for artists to display and experiment with new art practices, ideals, and collaborations. The Dadaists created performances that represented their internationalism and incorporated the various mediums represented among themselves. Emmy Hennings was the only professionally trained cabaret performer in the group,\textsuperscript{32} and she brought cabaret tradition together with the other, more widely recognized, artistic mediums. Ball acknowledged that their work stemmed from Marinetti,\textsuperscript{33} specifically the idea of simultaneity and multiple forms coinciding in one moment. The cabaret’s influence was evident in the incorporation of elaborate costuming and an overall sense of pandemonium, both on stage and in
the audience. *Sound Poems* were characteristic of these performances, composed with invented words or syllables that referenced everyday language but carried different emphases.\(^{34}\)

Cabaret Voltaire only lasted for five months before it shut down, but the Dadaists persisted. They brought their performances to the Waag Hall in Zurich and had their first public Dada Evening.\(^ {35}\) Despite the change of context, this performance included masks, costumes, manifestos, music, paintings, dances, theories, and poems, in a continuation of the spirit of the cabaret. Shortly after Cabaret Voltaire closed it was replaced by the Galerie Dada, opened in 1917, which became the new site of exhibitions, lectures, soirees, recitals, and performances.\(^ {36}\) With the shift from the cabaret to the gallery, the nature of the Dada work changed. Trademark spontaneous performances became more organized and part of a didactic gallery program for which they charged admission. There was a new focus on dance, largely influenced by Sophie Taeuber’s performances in the gallery that Ball described as “full of flashes and edges, full of dazzling light and penetrating intensity.”\(^ {37}\) He further denoted dance as “an art of the closest and most direct material.”\(^ {38}\)

Tzara published a *Manifeste dada 1918*, as well as a series of periodicals entitled *Dada*, which explicated these philosophies on performance in order to propagate their ideas and foster innovation in others.\(^ {39}\) Additionally, Tzara’s publications functioned as the documentation of work from the Cabaret Voltaire and the Galerie Dada. The Galerie Dada spanned a period of eleven weeks before it dissolved.\(^ {40}\) The artists departed in separate directions, transporting these experiences, new methods, and performance theories to the art scenes in Germany and, later, Paris.
The New York Dada movement, initiated by Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp’s work, placed a greater emphasis on pushing against the art establishment and showed less concern for the politics of the war.41 (There was no contact or interactions with the Zurich group until later in the movement, although their theories paralleled one another.) The New York Dadaists turned to industrially manufactured objects for their art to imply the idea of anti-art and to challenge the conventions of aesthetic critique and judgment. This is best recognized in Duchamp’s _Fountain_, which he submitted as part of the Society of Independent Artists’ exhibition in New York in 1917.42 (Duchamp’s _Fountain_ was simply an upturned urinal, placed on an exhibition pedestal.) Picabia collaborated with the other artists to publish the periodicals _291_ and _391_ (in 1915 and 1916 respectively), which focused on the New York Dadaists’ theories and practice.43 The U.S. entered World War I in 1917 and a dispersal of these artists followed. Picabia embarked for Europe, and many of these artists, Man Ray, Duchamp, and Picabia, later reunited as part of the post-war Dada movement in Paris.

Berlin Dada was the most politically charged of all of Dada groups, due to the uprisings and crises that enveloped the city during the war. Richard Huelsenbeck formed the Berlin group in 1917, which included artists John Heartfield, Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Höch, and George Grosz.44 These artists rejected the ideas of abstraction and Expressionism that had dominated the art world. They instead focused their work on responding to the political events that circumscribed their art. Heartfield, Grosz, Höch, and Hausmann created collaged works from mass media photography and publications, allowing them to comment on the current events by
combining words and images. Hausmann created phonetic poems as an extension of the Zurich Sound Poems and often referenced the use of language in the press. These poems were performed and realized as phonetic scores, in which the size of each letter represented its force. This use of ephemeral material and assemblages of found objects worked against the idea of commercial value of art, similar to the New York artist’s use of manufactured materials.

The Berlin performances were similar to those in Zurich, but were more rebellious, militant, and political in nature. The first Berlin Dada performance featured Huelsenbeck joined by Grosz and two other poets. Huelsenbeck played a violent and arrogant role, aggressively yelling about the war. Grosz recited his poetry that featured accusatory language directed at the bourgeois and urinated on an Expressionist painting. This provocation immediately appeared in the press where the performance was referred to as a scandal. However this performance set the stage for Dada performances to follow.

Barcelona was a common destination for artists escaping Paris at the beginning of the war. The existing avant-garde circles absorbed the Parisian artists, who continued to push their work past Futurism toward Dada. When Picabia arrived in 1917, he brought the New York Dada theories and publications with him, fueling the Dada development in Barcelona. Picabia and Tzara first united in 1918 in Lucerne, Switzerland, and worked together to produce Dada publications that linked the New York, Zurich and Barcelona Dadaists. This became the precursor to the accumulation of Dada artists in Paris in 1920, which developed as the post-war Dada movement.
Paris became a common ground for the unification of prominent Dada artists spanning all initial Dada groups. This included Picabia, Duchamp, Tzara, Arp, Man Ray, among others.\textsuperscript{49} The significance of provocations against a respectful audience remained an underlying force in Dada through the movement’s transition from Zurich to Paris. One noteworthy 1920 performance in Paris took place at the Salon des Indépendants, where performers read manifestos containing insults and accusations. The large crowds in attendance retaliated by throwing garbage onto the stage.\textsuperscript{50} This event had to be broken apart and shut down completely, which was exciting for the Dadaists, similar to the Futurists’ theory behind the “Pleasure of Being Booed.”

From 1919 to 1924, these artists published various Dada literature and manifestos that described their anti-nationalist ideals and revulsions against the norms of contemporary art and life. By 1921, Dada ideas and provocations ceased to surprise the widespread public, and artists began to diverge towards their individual interests and styles.\textsuperscript{51} Arp moved toward sculpture, Duchamp focused on optical machines, and Man Ray experimented with paintings, provocative objects, and camera-less rayographs. This disintegration confirmed the lack of a common Dada artistic style, and eventually ended in 1924 with the onset of Surrealism.\textsuperscript{52} Despite the lack of longevity, the unifying characteristic of Dada—to undermine the established values and conventions of the art world—continued to be a factor in the artistic movements that followed.
Bauhaus:

The Bauhaus, opened in 1919 in Weimar, Germany, was a teaching institution for the arts that brought together artists and artisans of various mediums and backgrounds to teach and collaborate. The Bauhaus principles maintained a separation from political activity, preserving a pure focus on artistic education and innovation, and so the Bauhaus was not as politically charged as the Futurist or Dada movements. The Bauhaus was dedicated to reinforcing the importance of performance as an art form and medium in its own right. The artists and students lived on the school’s campus in Weimar and taught various workshops focused on specific trade-like methods, such as metalworking, weaving, wall painting, stained glass, and cabinet making. These crafts were taught in conjunction with fine art classes—primarily painting, sculpture, and architecture—to bring together the applied art and the fine arts. Students were drawn from across Europe, and eventually the world, as the Bauhaus developed as the most recognized teaching institution of the avant-garde during the interwar period. They launched the transformation of avant-garde into the international modernism of the late 1920s.

These courses included a stage workshop, the first course focused on performance to be taught at any art school, as a mandatory part of the interdisciplinary curriculum. Performance helped extend the theory of total artwork, held as part of the Bauhaus ideal, translating aesthetic and artistic explorations into live art and real space. Lothar Schreyer (Expressionist painter and dramatist), whose philosophy focused on the idea that “work on the stage is a work of art,” was brought in from Berlin to head the performance program. His teachings and
performances were an extension of the Expressionist Theater and reflected the past five to six years of work in Berlin, lending little room to innovation and progress. For these reasons, Askar Schlemmer, who had experience in painting, sculpting, and dance productions, soon replaced him.\textsuperscript{59} Schlemmer translated his painterly ideas to performance in his set designs and overall stage visions. In his first performances, \textit{Figural Cabinet I} and \textit{II}, Schlemmer included mechanical devices, projections, figurines, and pictorial design with references to the cabaret constructs and techniques.\textsuperscript{60}

Schlemmer became the overall director of Bauhaus in 1923, due in part to his “refusal to accept the limits of art categories resulting in performances which quickly became the focus of Bauhaus activities.”\textsuperscript{61} The goings-on at the Bauhaus became the center of attention and elaborate events were planned around their performances, providing the artists opportunities to experiment with innovative stage ideas. Performances included the Bauhaus jazz band, pantomime, elaborate costuming and masks, dance, and extensive decoration that encompassed the whole school. At \textit{Metallic Festival}, a 1929 Bauhaus Dance, the entirety of the school was covered in metal decorations and substances, and the whole night of festivities was metallic themed. Upon arrival, audience members were immediately transported into this shiny performance world by way of a chute, activating their participation in the festival.\textsuperscript{62}

Along with Schlemmer, most Bauhaus students did not have professional training in dance. However, Schlemmer included dance as a substantial portion of his work. The lack of previous training did not hinder his work by any means, and even
Schlemmer performed with his students after years of directing and demonstration.\(^6^3\) He developed a theory of performance that reflected the Bauhaus philosophy of cooperation between various mediums. This principle classified drawing and painting as dominantly intellectual art forms, while performance allowed for unrestricted experimentation and pleasure. The stage provides an experience of physical space while painting simply negotiates and describes two-dimensional aspects of space. Schlemmer’s consistent focus on painting and performance naturally led him to draw inspiration from paintings for the creation of performative works.\(^6^4\)

For Schlemmer, this combination of passions was a strong guiding force; he described it as “two souls in my breast—one painting-oriented, or rather philosophical-artistic; the other theatrical; or to put it bluntly, an ethical soul and an aesthetic one.”\(^6^5\) Schlemmer considers the theatrical side to be aesthetic, and the painter-artist to be ethical. The statement indicates his personal movement away from the traditions of drawing and painting in order to achieve a greater aesthetic quality and understanding. This translates directly to his practice of using painting as theoretical research and performance as its application. Often times he created drawings that delineated space around a body, or demonstrated abstract theories of motion, from which he developed a dance executing these notations.

One of these works, *Gesture Dance* (1926-27), merged complex linear pathways that described the dancers’ forward motion with gestural movement appropriated from everyday activities (sneezing, laughing, listening, walking, etc). Each dancer wore a red, yellow, or blue costume; the complementary colors worked towards isolating the abstract forms in his work. Schlemmer defined “space as the
unifying element in architecture as the point of overlap and common ground for
the varied interests, artistic backgrounds, and trades of the Bauhaus teachers. This
became a focus for his performance work as he tried to feel the sensation of volume
within space. He placed dancers within simple geometric forms that defined and
activated the volumetric space created. In various explorations of this, Schlemmer
had dancers move within a geometrically defined stage along linear markings,
wearing costumes designed to draw focus to particular areas of the body or specific
movement. He created a mathematical dance, a space dance, and a gesture dance
within these constructs.

The idea of unifying man and machine was a focus of Bauhaus, stemming
from theories of the Italian Futurist performers. A Bauhaus workshop, focused on
stage costumes, developed a means of altering the human physical body to represent,
and function as, a mechanical object. Various dances were created for and performed
in these costumes, which altered and transformed the audience’s perception of the
body as well as the movements and motions of the dancers. “Schlemmer emphasized
the ‘object’ quality of the dancers and each performance achieved his desired
‘mechanical effort’.” This ideal was realized in the puppet-like manner, or self-
propelled mechanical movement, of the dancers, as if human intervention was
completely removed from the actions. In 1926 the Bauhaus began a traveling
performance group, led by Schlemmer, which gained international attention by
transporting the ideas and work of the Bauhaus students and faculty to greater
Europe. The performance repertoire contained works from the previous three years
including *Dance in Space*, *Metal Dance*, *Gesture Dance*, and *Slat Dance*, among others.\textsuperscript{69}

The Bauhaus officially closed its doors in 1932, yet the development of performance in the 1920s was forever influenced by Askar Schlemmer’s work at the Bauhaus. His theories and works affected the trajectory and development of theater and performance thereafter. He paved the way for freely innovative performances, completely separate from politics and rebellion, but as a respected artistic medium. As the Bauhaus dissolved, many of the artists and students took the ideas and principles of the Bauhaus with them across Europe and America. Joseph Albers notably appropriated the Bauhaus philosophy and brought it to the Black Mountain College in North Carolina, where workshops, courses, and teaching methods, were modeled off of the Bauhaus.\textsuperscript{70}
Chapter Two:  
The Development of Performance Art in the U.S.

Black Mountain College:

Founded in 1933 with only 22 students and nine faculty members, the Black Mountain College was an institution similar to the Bauhaus with an interdisciplinary arts focus.¹ Shortly after it opened, Joseph Albers was invited to join the community and bring his experience at the Bauhaus to supplement their school. He added his teaching ideals and philosophies to their curriculum, emphasizing the experimental, process oriented approach to artistic study.² Albers’ approach came with a focus on performance as a means of innovative exploration. After joining the school, Albers persuaded a former Bauhaus colleague, Xanti Schawinsky, to head the performance department. Schawinsky created his own program—stage studies—that was a study of the fundamental aspects of theater without a particular focus.³ He taught on space, form, color, light, sound, movement, music, and time as an entry into the practice of performance.⁴ One of the first pieces created by Schawinsky at Black Mountain College was, Spectodrama, that featured an interplay of geometric shapes and light, creating a visual spectacle.⁵ This initiated the use of collaborative performance between faculty members who focused on different artistic mediums. Performance enabled these artists to push the boundaries of their work by experimenting in a different, more active form.

In New York at this time, musician and composer John Cage began developing ideas about experimental music by using found noise—sounds heard in every day life—as the material for his music and scores. In 1943 he performed at the

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Museum of Modern Art in New York, presenting a concert very similar to the Futurists' noise music experiments.⁶ The audience was far more receptive and accepting of Cage’s music than the spectators were nearly thirty years earlier at Russolo’s *Art of Noise* premier.⁷ Concurrently, Merce Cunningham worked with source material from everyday life in his dance choreography, appropriating pedestrian movements such as walking and standing. Interestingly, Futurist, Dada and Bauhaus artists used this type of movement earlier in performances as the basis for their dances. Cunningham, a trained professional dancer, utilized these movements to expand the limits of contemporary dance by incorporating them into his choreography designed for the stage.⁸

Cage and Cunningham collaborated extensively, each inspiring the other. Together they arrived at a form of creation reliant on chance procedures for a work’s preparation. In Cunningham’s piece *Sixteen Dances for a Soloist and Company of Three* (1951) the show’s order was determined by the toss of a coin.⁹ Along with prominent artists, Willem de Kooning and Buckminster Fuller, Cage and Cunningham were both invited to participate in a summer session at the Black Mountain College in 1948.¹⁰ They both returned the next few summers, furthering their artistic innovation. During the summer of 1952 Cage conceived of *Untitled Event*, a performance bringing together Cunningham and his dancers, with artist Robert Rauschenberg, composer Jay Watt, musician David Tudor, and various students, in an intricate, multi-disciplined performance. Rauschenberg created paintings and projections that were placed on the walls and ceilings, Cunningham danced down the aisles, and Cage played a variety of scores while performers in the
audience recited poetry. The final result was somewhat chaotic, but achieved Cage’s goal of an autonomous piece in which no one, including Cage himself, knew what was going to happen.\textsuperscript{11} Following \textit{Untitled Event}, Cunningham enlisted Rauschenberg as the décor and costume designer for his company which led to an ongoing, lasting collaboration between the two.\textsuperscript{12}

**New York:**

The New School for Social Research was begun in 1956 in New York City to continue interdisciplinary collaboration and experimentation, emulating the artistic-institution model of the Bauhaus and Black Mountain College. Cage, coming from the Black Mountain College, joined a prominent cast of NY artists as the New School's instructors. Some of the young artists in his classes included Allan Kaprow, George Brecht, George Segal, Jim Dine, Al Hanson, Jackson MacLow, and Dick Higgins, who spanned the disciplines of painting, filmmaking, poetry, and music.\textsuperscript{13} Cage’s classes and the reports of the Black Mountain College events directly influenced each artist to continue this method of exploration in their own work. For these artists, who had already absorbed the Dada ideas into their work, the study of live art followed.

Allan Kaprow created environments, cultivating a spatial existence that was a direct translation from painting into three-dimensional space. Kaprow would perform different task-like activities within these installations, which developed further to become his Happenings. One of the early public showcases of this was his \textit{18 Happenings in 6 Parts}, performed in New York’s Reuben Gallery in 1959.\textsuperscript{14} The
invitations to this event notified the audience of their expected participation should they choose to attend.\textsuperscript{15} This simultaneous observation and participation required the viewers to walk through the gallery that had been divided by plastic into three rooms. In each room a different happening took place, forcing the audience to choose what they experienced. A bell was used to signal the beginning and end of each performance. The audience was instructed when they could move, where and how to sit, and when to applaud.\textsuperscript{16} The performance itself consisted of figures walking stiffly down the halls between the rooms in a single file line, some reading placards with various content, not directly correlated with the events. Musicians played instruments including a flute, ukulele and violin while gramophones were wheeled around the space. Artists painted on unprimed canvases hung from the walls, bells rang, and things were dropped onto the floor, creating an overwhelming feeling of nonsensical happenings without relation to one another.\textsuperscript{17}

Spectators left the complex event with fragmented experiences that seemed unformulated by the artist. This was precisely Kaprow’s goal. Despite this common belief, the work was, in fact, rehearsed for days before it opened and performed over and over exactly the same. Kaprow had carefully controlled every action and organized the sequence of events, resulting in this completely meaningless series of actions, movements, and seemingly spontaneous events.\textsuperscript{18} In Chapter Three, I will further discuss Kaprow’s work, the theories behind his art, and his approach to performance.

This type of performance spawned many others like it at the Reuben Gallery and Judson Memorial Church, which had both become nuclei for artists’
performances in New York City beginning in 1960.\textsuperscript{19} These events were collectively known as \textit{Happenings}, although the artists did not endorse the term or unify together under any common manifestos, theories, or publications. Claes Oldenburg brought his sculptural objects into real life by activating them in built environments. In his work, \textit{Store Days} (1961),\textsuperscript{20} he presented his art objects in the context of a store, of which he performed the role of proprietor. He posited that “the place in which the piece occurs…is part of the effect, and usually the first and most important factor determining the events (materials at hand being the second and players the third).”\textsuperscript{21}

This idea that the place was the determining factor of a work was common among artists exhibiting in the galleries, lofts, bars, basements, cafés, parks, etc. in New York City. Jim Dine’s performances became an extension of both his regular life, and his paintings. His performances brought the subject matter of his paintings directly in line with his life. This created a never-ending circle with no distinction between his life and his art, a theory similar to that of the Futurists, 50 years prior. He considered the element of \textit{time} as one of his materials for art making, just like canvas or paint it was necessary to create a performance work.\textsuperscript{22} Al Hansen focused on the spectator’s role in the work, identifying the work that “enclosed the observer [and] that overlapped and interpreted different art forms” as the most interesting.\textsuperscript{23} Many of these developments in their work, namely the notion that performance creation is similar to making a collage, stem from the Futurists and Dadaists innovations.\textsuperscript{24} In the late 1950s and early 1960s these new performance based works were accepted in the art world with much greater support than they were in Europe in the early 1900s. This shift allowed these artists to push farther and bridge new gaps between mediums.
An example of this type of interdisciplinary work was Rauschenberg’s *Pelican*, which he premiered in 1963 after years of collaboration with Cunningham. Alex Hay and Rauschenberg performed at a skating rink wearing roller skates and backpacks that opened into parachute-like apparatuses. They moved around dancer Carolyn Brown who performed a set routine in ballet shoes. The parachutes drastically altered their movement, slowing their momentum, while the dancer was free to move at an accelerated speed. The elements of costume, place, and footwear determined the nature of the work. Rauschenberg continued to expand upon these ideas in *Map Room II*, where he incorporated a moving collage of elements on stage, including furniture, props, pieces of the set, and other theater equipment. The dancers were in costumes that made them indistinguishable from the other moving pieces, yielding uncertainty as to whether something was an inanimate object and or a live dancer. This performance was reminiscent of Giacomo Balla’s 1917 piece, *Fireworks*, taking the concept a step further by employing moving bodies as part of the stage set. This idea of the dancer/performer body as an object became the focus for a series of performances thereafter.

Dance developed as a major part of the New York performance scene. Prominent dancers included Simone Forti, Yvonne Rainer, Lucinda Childs, Steve Paxton, Deborah Hay, and Trisha Brown. Each of these dancers both participated in performances and created their own works. These dancers, entering the performance art realm with a traditional dance background, fostered an exchange with artists of other mediums that helped expand the ideas and possibilities of movement in performance for both groups. They shared common artistic concerns, such as not
separating art creation from everyday life, thereby emphasizing the incorporation of real life actions and objects into performance. The dancers introduced the artists to various methods of movement creation and suggested new theories of the body in space. In exchange the artists provided the dancers with a means to expand the limits of traditional dance through the integration of different mediums into their performance.

Prior to this collaboration, many of these dancers, notably Forti, Brown, Rainer, and Paxton, traveled to California in the late 1950s to participate in Ann Halprin’s San Francisco Dancers’ Workshop Company. Halprin brought artists together in order to explore non-traditional choreographic frames including everyday actions (walking, eating, touching, etc.), improvisational forms, free association, and task-oriented movement. These non-representational forms of dance broke away from the classic narrative or emotional aspects in dance performance. Upon returning to New York in 1962, these same dancers formed the Judson Dance Group to develop inventive, creative work in the prospering art scenes of the Judson Church and Reuben Gallery. A focus on the physicality of the individual dancer’s body led the compositional work of the group. Their first public concert took place in the summer that year, showcasing the group’s repertoire, which they had developed since their return to the city. The movements were specific to each dancer; Forti performed simple motions of the body in altered speeds, Brown showcased creative methods of tossing a dice, and Paxton spun a ball. Together, these artists created a three-hour long performance attended by 300 people.
Shortly after this marathon performance, Rainer developed a work, *Terrain*, in accord with the following principles: “No to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformation and magic and make-believe no to the glamour and transcendency of the star image no to the heroic no to the anti-heroic no to trash imagery no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved.”

She was attempting to move into completely new territory, away from the drama and spectacle of the theater, but also away from the meaningless, non-dramatic atmosphere of the Happenings. Later, in 1966, Rainer wrote a script for an evening-length work, *The Mind is a Muscle*, in which she mentions the “one to one relationship between aspects of so-called minimalist sculpture and recent dancing.”

She explicitly declares an interest in the use of a dancer’s body as an object in performance “so that it could be handled like an object, picked up and carried, and so that objects and bodies could be interchangeable.”

Her focus on the dancer body as an object echoes Rauschenberg’s earlier ideas of the live body in *Map Room II*. This overlap of theoretical performance interests was indicative of the grey area that had developed between dances and Happenings, making the forms indistinguishable at times. This was especially relevant for Rauschenberg’s works, because many of his performances included dancers from the Judson Dance Group.

By the end of the 1960s there was widespread disregard for the art object among artists, since it represented the commercialism of the art market and the role of galleries. The artwork needed to be tangible in order to be bought and sold, as a commodity in an economic business. For this reason conceptual and performance art
was more appealing because it was impermanent, time-based art that could not be bought and sold as an object. Kaprow emphasized this rejection of materialism through his work, which he explained in 1961: “To the extent that a Happening is not a commodity but a brief event, from the standpoint of any publicity it may receive, it may become a state of mind.”

This notion led into the concept of the body as an object for many performance artists, and studies in various ways to embody the sense of art’s objectivity in a living form became more common. Performance provided a medium in which the artist and the viewer could have a shared experience, making the work even more accessible to the audience. The body presented a medium for the direct expression of the experience of time, space, and action, the materials of importance for many artists at the time. Like the Bauhaus artists, performance was used as a platform for the translation of concepts from a two-dimensional plane—texture, depth, spatial relations, and layering—into a live presentation. By the 1950s young artists were no longer classifying themselves as dancers, painters, poets, or sculptors, but rather as artists unconstrained by a specific discipline. Performance allowed these artists to freely incorporate any combination of creative methods, materials, and inspirations into their art-making processes.

Often these performances resulted in a rather abstract event, challenging audiences to perceive the experience created by the artist, rather than understanding the overall visual impression. This use of the body as the artist’s material was known as body art. The term body art classified a broad range of artists, some of whom positioned themselves on walls in galleries to be viewed as works of art, and others
who wore costumes and assumed poses as *living sculptures*. Some built environments around themselves to alter the perception of space, and others focused on movement in space by creating a vocabulary of set body actions.

Trisha Brown notably worked with altering the perception of space, and the body’s spatial existence. In two works, *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1969) and *Walking on the Wall* (1970), she distorted the natural logic of gravitational forces by having dancers walk on the walls as if it was the sidewalk, street, or any other everyday walking surface. Their bodies were parallel to the ground, yet their movements seemed completely normal and ordinary, as if gravity was acting on their bodies differently than the rest of the world. She utilized harnesses and rigging to suspend her dancers in this manner, and even though they were executing an everyday action, their movements seemed to defy the normal possibilities of real life motion. Brown also created works that directly translated two-dimensional concepts formed on paper as notations, drawings, numbers, and lines, into movement and choreography. (Her piece *Lotus*, 1975, exemplifies this.)

For Dennis Oppenhiem, body art represented “a calculated, meticulous and strategic ploy” against the preoccupation with the “art object.” He forced the viewer to focus on him, the artist/maker, instead of a finished object, in his performance work. Other artists focused on the body’s relationship to space. Bruce Nauman’s work, *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square*, featured him walking around his sculpture to experience the three-dimensionality of the work in relation to his body and movement. German artist Klaus Rinke translated this three-dimensional, sculptural existence into performance by making geometric
configurations with his body and his partner’s body, moving very slowly from one to
the next. Full performances would last for hours, with a clock recording the time it
took to make each shape. This sense of altered time reflected the static existence of a
sculpture made of inanimate materials such as stone. These various approaches were
often deeply rooted in the artist’s original discipline or background: dance, painting,
sculpture, poetry, music, or theater. The overarching goal of the artists was to
question the boundaries of art by pushing the edges, crossing lines between mediums,
and bringing the audience into this discourse by provoking them to define art for
themselves. Additionally, by actively engaging participants in the experience and
artistic process, this brought the audience out of the traditional passive state of a
viewer.

This phase of conceptual art lasted only from 1968 to 1972, when the new
ideas and questions became absorbed into the art world and the focus shifted to
political interest and social change. Performance began to reflect this shift, and a
more public audience and new attitude towards the priorities of artists resulted.
Artists reincorporated the gallery because it provided an institution that functioned as
an outlet for their messages. This new period marked the development of pop culture,
which concurrently began to emphasize performance. Stylish, flamboyant, and
entertaining pop icons were known across the country, such as the Rolling Stones,
The Who, and Alice Cooper. The exchange between pop culture and the art world
allowed for a burgeoning overlap of images, concerns, and performance ideals.

Performance art began to move away from the experimental, exploratory
sphere created by the artists of the ‘50s and ‘60s and turned to the realm of
entertainment. Throughout the ‘70s and ‘80s artists became part of the public’s eye as they turned to fashion, filmmaking, popular music aesthetics (i.e. Punk), and media as channels for their artistic expression. These works often had autobiographical, dramatic, rebellious, or political elements as the driving inspiration and content. They moved away from the direct experimentation with the body and movement in a non-narrative context, since it was no longer relevant to their artistic concerns. (The artists before them had investigated those ideas, so naturally they wanted to move onto something new and exciting, the “been there done that” mentality.) Not until after the turn of the century would these artists’ work, like Trisha Brown’s early dances, again hold relevance in the art world.
Chapter Three: Allan Kaprow and the Happenings

Allan Kaprow emerged in the art scene in New York in the later 1940s, having studied art at New York University and painting at the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts. In 1953 he began writing and publishing his artistic perspective and philosophies in relation to his own work and the work of those around him. Throughout these writings, published in Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life, he investigates the development of his own work and the use of performance to actualize his artistic and philosophic theories. He focuses on identifying the elements, materials, and conceptual nature of the events that came to be known as the Happenings. In this chapter I will discuss the characteristic features of his work, specifically the Happenings, including the authentic experience, use of performance, and relation to time, space, and audience.

In his early career Kaprow was heavily impacted by Jackson Pollock’s action paintings, John Cage’s teachings on the use of chance principle in art creation, and the philosophical writings of John Dewey in Art as Experience. In 1958 Kaprow wrote an essay, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” in which he provided an analysis and philosophical examination of Jackson Pollock’s work. Pollock’s environmental and performative qualities in his paintings had a huge influence on Kaprow’s conceptual development as an artist. He was able to go beyond Pollock’s innovations in painting by actualizing his art in real life, physical space, and experiences.

Kaprow studied music and composition with John Cage at the New School for Social Research, where he learned Cage’s theories of chance procedures as a tool for
the creation of art. Using this as inspiration, he moved away from identifying himself or his work as strictly within painting or sculpture, and focused conceptually on art as an experience. Kaprow abandoned the preoccupation with creating a traditional art object and instead turned his attention to areas of real life, everyday spaces, actions, and events. He explained this transition in a passage written after Pollock’s death: “Not satisfied with the suggestion through paint of our other senses, we shall utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movements, people, odors, touch.” He used menial objects, noises, and smells from everyday life that hold and convey the common experiences of daily human action, such as Drano, crushed strawberries, garbage cans, etc. These ideas became the seed for his Happenings, where these commonplace objects became the art and experience.

Kaprow’s theories focused on art as a set of conventions in which experiences are framed and meaning is translated. He emphasized the value and significance of the experience, not of the art. This concept was further promoted by his study of Dewey’s *Art as Experience*, in which Dewey explains, “even a crude experience, if authentically an experience, is more fit to give a clue to the intrinsic nature of esthetic experience than is an object already set apart from any other mode of experience.” This focus on the authentic experience was a driving force for Kaprow in his artistic exploration and process, specifically in his creation of Happenings and Environments. He worked to achieve art that directly explored the durations of the experience itself—the conventions, exchanges, habits, events, etc.—“to provide the frames in which the meanings of life may be intensified and interpreted.” Subscribing to Dewey’s belief that art is indistinct from experience, he focused on creating an
authentic experience, or environment that necessitates a process of interaction. This theoretical model shaped Kaprow’s guiding philosophy for his art making and ideas of creating a truly participatory artistic experience.

Communication through art had traditionally been solely from artist to viewer, but a two-way flow with a reciprocal exchange between the audience and the viewer was fundamental to Kaprow’s work. This implied the spectator’s active engagement and participation with the work. His performances forced the viewer to make a choice of some kind, to participate or not, for which a conscious mental engagement is necessary. In making this engagement, the audience is brought into the artistic process and aesthetic experience. Participation, interaction, and active engagement, drawing on the common human experience, was the basis for his work. In order to nurture feedback and involvement from the viewer, Kaprow used five means of communication that he identified in everyday life: situations, operations, structures, feedback, and learning. These became materials for him, as paint or canvas would be for a painter; he freed himself “from the restrictions of conventional art materials,” and turned to everyday life from which to draw his inspiration, content, objects, and actions. He manipulated, altered, and appropriated the events in order to create experiences that directly referenced, and eventually became indistinguishable from, everyday life.

Kaprow held the idea that the final product is not the most valuable part of art; he was completely uninterested in the materialistic values in art world. Instead, Kaprow believed that the artist’s engagement with the everyday living experience, is the point of departure for the art making process, and therefore the meaning and value
of their work. Process is the central focus of Kaprow’s work, grounded in the common experience of life, producing *life works* that blur the lines between art and life. Kaprow suggests that artists should draw from nature and harness the sensory stimuli in ordinary life, such as green leaves, the smell of cut grass, the sound of a bird, or the flutter of a butterfly. This became a point of departure from which he developed sensory oriented experiences in an attempt to create *total art*. This concept stems from the attempt to expand the limitations of other forms, painting, collage, etc., leading to the inclusion of different senses, thereby completely engaging the observer. His ideal form of *total art* is one that is open and fluid enough to constitute everyday experiences, without simply imitating them, and needs to be malleable enough to adapt frequently to reflect external changes.

As Kaprow developed these theoretical models for his work from contemporary and earlier art, he steadfastly focused on making entirely new art. Through his use of innovative methods, he worked to create something unknown to the artist and participants/audience. His experiments were meant to test the boundaries of lifelike art by pushing, or often times completely disregarding, the prevailing artistic conventions. From this emerged *Environments*, which were installations or assemblages that incorporated lights, sounds, and everyday objects. *Happenings* were a collection of abstract events, similar to a live collage, made for various locations, spaces, and audiences. The Happenings and Environments were the products of his attempts to develop new art, separate from those that existed previously.
In an exhibition at the Hansa Gallery in New York in 1958, Kaprow created an Environment in which audience members entered into the space, became a part of the surroundings, and provided the shapes, colors and forms of the work. The installation was made up of sounds, odors, and lights, and viewers entering the space became the subjects within the work.\textsuperscript{18} The first public Happening took place at Douglass College in Rutgers University in 1958. The term “Happening” was first used in an article written about this event, published at Rutgers in 1959.\textsuperscript{19} The work of Kaprow and others began to be publicly categorized as Happenings, although the artists themselves never officially agreed upon this term. The Happenings occurred within different circles including theater people, writers, musicians, and artist groups. Involved artists included Kaprow’s colleagues Oldenburg, Hansen, and Vostell. “Happenings” was an umbrella term for all of these events, despite their lack of common identity. The form was completely open-ended, having no set structure, and often were only a single performance, or a couple events.\textsuperscript{20}

Initially, Kaprow described the Happenings as “events which, put simply, happen; an art form similar to theater in that it takes place in a specific time and a specific location. Its structure and its content are a logical extension of the [performance] environment.”\textsuperscript{21} Some of the criteria for the early Happenings were, (1) they only occurred once, (2) no invitations or announcements were sent out, and (3) the sites constantly shifted from artists’ apartments, basements, lofts, remote landscapes, or a combination of these.\textsuperscript{22} As these events developed, Kaprow further analyzed their characteristics.
His 1961 essay, “Happenings in New York,” set forth the Happenings’ defining qualities. First, the context, or the place of conception and enactment, was crucial to the work. Context determined the audience interaction, overall atmosphere, the various relationships or associations with the space, and a sense of closed or openness dependant on an indoor or outdoor setting.\(^2\) The next specification was that the Happenings have no plot. Instead they operated entirely within the realm of improvisation, never knowing precisely what was going to happen in a given event.\(^3\) These works were not based off of scripts or written structure, but dependant instead on chance, spontaneity and improvisation. Kaprow posited that a flexible framework was necessary to expand the limits and possibilities of the outcome being new or unknown.\(^4\) This notion was similar to the Futurists’ model for Variety Theatre, in which they discarded the use of a story line and relied on improvisation and spontaneity. Lastly, impermanence was the most important element. A Happening cannot be preserved, or continue for long expanses of time, because they are a unique, irreproducible experience.\(^5\) “Happenings can not be sold and taken home; they can only be supported. And because of their intimate and fleeting nature; only a few people can experience them.”\(^6\) This maintained the freshness and innovative quality unique to the Happenings.

In his 1966 essay “The Happenings Are Dead: Long Live the Happenings!,” Kaprow expanded on his earlier writings by outlining the “rules of the game”. He provides a more specific analysis of the various elements and principles, and reflects on their growth and development. The Happenings were no longer exclusive to small artist circles, and they began to globally to influence the art world. He provides seven
theories that form a malleable structure within which an artist should work—conceptually and realistically—to actualize a Happening.

First, Kaprow asserts that, “the line between the Happening and daily life should be kept as fluid and perhaps indistinct as possible” in order to blur the line between life and art. This had been an ongoing theme in his work, but here he went even further, declaring that the “themes, materials, actions, and the associations they evoke are to be gotten from anywhere except from the arts, their derivatives, and their milieu.” He encourages artists to move away from art galleries, theaters, cafes, and traditional art exhibition spaces, in order to allow a new art to emerge.

Speaking on location, Kaprow cautions that one space for performance limits the artist’s options and freedom to create something new. Instead, “the Happening should be dispersed over several widely spaced, sometimes moving and changing, locales.” Happenings began to occur across countries and continents, sometimes as simultaneous events in various locations, or by traveling artists holding events across the world. The discussion of location necessitates a consideration of the aspect of time, which Kaprow believes is “closely bound up with things and space.” Each event, action, or occurrence should happen in relation to its natural time, without adjusting for the sake of the performance. It should have the same relationship with time as in life, and therefore “be variable and independent of the convention of continuity.” This opposes the normative tradition of altering or molding the timing of actions to create a cohesive performance.

Kaprow strove to emulate real life in the Happenings, even to have the Happenings be real life, and his conditions reflected this objective. In this type of
work, “the composition of all materials, actions, images, and their times and spaces should be undertaken in as artless and, again, practical a way as possible.” This necessitates a disregard for formal theories associated with the arts, while staying mindful of a set framework that provides room for the participation of planned and unplanned events, performers, and natural elements. Additionally, Kaprow posits that non-skilled participants should perform the Happenings. This facet yields no known outcome, and no need for rehearsal or repetition. There is nothing to improve upon; the event only should happen once. The focus then falls on the performer’s sense of value in their experience. In addressing the aspect of an audience, Kaprow specifies that, “there should not be (and usually cannot be) an audience or audiences to watch a Happening.” Instead, those who are spectators of the work are participants, not audience members, and the experiential event mandates their presence. This vast framework allows for endless possibilities and outcomes under rigidly specific regulations and directions. Kaprow has solidified his ideal model for the creation of total art, referenced earlier, which is malleable and receptive to external influences, while fostering participation to generate an “authentic experience.”

In his essay, “Pinpointing the Happenings (1967)”, Kaprow identifies six different types, or categories, within the overarching structure for the Happenings. These reflected differences in location, participant role, guiding purpose or goal, and the conceptual nature of the work. The first, denoted as Night Club, Cock Fight, or Pocket Drama, occurred in basements, rooms, studios, and other private spaces with small audiences standing very close to the performers. The viewers may choose to engage in the performance themselves, but an overall sense of intimacy and closeness
amongst the spectators and performers was fundamental.\textsuperscript{35} The \textit{Extravaganza} performance is a large-scale event, presented in sizable spaces that could hold a vast audience, i.e. stages, arenas, and exhibition halls. Many different artists would perform in varying mediums simultaneously. This is the Happening type most commonly known because it had a wider-reaching viewership.\textsuperscript{36} The third type is the \textit{Event}, which also took place in a theater with an audience. They observed brief happenings, such as a light going on and off, the sound of a trumpet, or prolonged actions such as a man walking back and forth for two hours.\textsuperscript{37} This explicitly explored the idea of bridging art and life by blurring those lines. Kaprow suggested that “we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life, either our bodies, clothes, rooms” to achieve this.\textsuperscript{38} These everyday objects, actions, and experiences are the subject or focus of the \textit{Event}. It challenged the viewer to differentiate between what was performed and what was merely a daily action.

The fourth Happening is the \textit{Guided Tour} or \textit{Pied Piper}. This event gathered a small group of audience members and led them through the countryside, a city, buildings, or other public/outdoor spaces. The audience followed set directions, which highlighted particular aspects of the environment, or instructed them to observe various occurrences. Overall the participant had a unique experience, full of discoveries within commonplace spaces, activities, and actions.\textsuperscript{39} This focuses heavily on the spectator’s experience and active engagement, as does the \textit{Idea} or \textit{Suggestion} form. This type differs from the others because it is much more mentally focused, usually presenting itself in the form of written notes or scribbled
instructions. “They follow the Duchampian implication that art is what is in the mind of the beholder, who can make art or nonart at will; a thought is as valuable as an action.”

The last model, *Activity*, is one that directly engages with the everyday world, maintaining a disregard to the theater or audience, and has an emphasis on participation in a selected situation or action within day-to-day occurrences. “It is the least encumbered by artistic precedents and the least professionalistic; it is free, therefore, to confront the question raised earlier, whether life is a Happening or a Happening is an art of life.”

Despite these seven Happening models, the prominent common threads that unite them reflect Kaprow’s true artistic motivations. For one, they are an escape from the conventions of art, within which an artist’s creation is limited. Instead, Kaprow pushed hard against the boundaries to create completely new, fresh, unknown art. The second overarching facet is an attempt to create an authentic experience that necessitates participatory action, forcing the viewer to become part of the work. He makes a connection between these two by asserting that “the fine arts traditionally demand for their appreciation physically passive observers, working with their minds to get at what their senses register. But the Happenings are an active art, requiring that creation and realization, artwork and appreciator, artwork and life be inseparable.” This leads into the third theme: that life and art blend into one existence, ideally indistinguishable from one another to both observer and performer. Lastly, the Happenings each maintained an emphasis on engaging in a purposeful activity, even if this purpose is to have no purpose. “Purpose implies a selective operation for every Happening, limiting it to certain situations out of countless
options.” These themes provide a context within which to understand the Happenings, and to separate them as a subgroup within the realm of Performance Art.
Chapter Four:  
The Work of Trisha Brown

Trisha Brown was one of the prominent members of the Judson Dance Group. As such, she was heavily influenced by the work of other artists in the New York art scene in the 1950s and 60s, namely Robert Rauschenberg, Allan Kaprow, John Cage, Laurie Anderson, Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, and Simone Forti. Having collaborated with many of these artists, and having performed in their work, Brown adopted many of the new ideas regarding interdisciplinary work and performance. In 1970 she founded her own dance company and began to actualize her own concepts and theories in performance works. In the late 1960s and early 1970s she created a variety of pieces that were performed in alternative, non-traditional spaces, namely the Whitney Museum of American Art and outdoor settings near her home in SoHo.¹ These locations permitted Brown to experiment with performances on buildings, trees, and walls, suspended by ropes, rigging, and harnesses. She focused on altering the perception of the body in performance, emphasizing pure movement devoid of an embedded narrative, emotional, or metaphorical meaning.² Brown’s movement style often drew directly from pedestrian actions like walking, blurring the lines between dance and everyday tasks or actions. This is reminiscent of Kaprow’s intention, but explores this in the realm of dance. Her movement based installation works pushed the boundaries of both the art and dance worlds by presenting movement as art.

Her earliest works explored the use of rigging and apparatuses, which were aptly named her equipment cycle. They focused on the body’s relation to gravity, working with and against its logical pull towards the ground. *Planes* (1968), the first
of these pieces, featured three dancers who navigated the surface of a wall using hand and footholds to climb and suspend themselves above the spectators. The performer-viewer orientation was constantly challenged, forcing the audience to evaluate their relation to the ground, gravity, and the dancers. In Forest Floor (1970), dancers were instructed to move through a grid of clothes woven together by rope raised seven feet above the ground by a metal frame. (fig. 3) Dancers were placed in this hammock-like structure, having to navigate through without set choreography or movement. The outcome was a task-like performance in which the viewer observes the dancer negotiate their weight, balance, and motions to fulfill the task at hand. Her 1972 piece, Spiral, placed dancers walking around the trunk of a tree, suspended by ropes which held their bodies parallel to the ground. Brown takes this to an extreme in one of her most impressive works, Man Walking Down the Side of a Building (1970). The piece featured a dancer walking down the side of a seven-story building at a 90-degree angle to the street below. (fig. 4) The performer’s movements were just as calm, normative, and pedestrian, as if he was simply walking on the sidewalk.

In these early works, Brown created movement that focused on the dancers’ experience of gravity and weight as physical forces acting on, altering, or engaging with the body. By referencing reality, she explored pedestrian actions and interactions between bodies in a physical space, propagating direct relation and experience for the viewer. Brown brings the viewer into the work by mentally engaging and stimulating their senses into physically feeling what is occurring before them, maintaining a similar experiential emphasis to Kaprow’s Happenings.
In 1971 Brown conceived a work to be performed at the Whitney Museum, *Walking on the Wall*. (fig. 5) This piece utilized rigging installed along the ceiling of the gallery, from which the dancers were supported with harnesses. They walked along the walls, horizontal to the floor, and navigated the corners and other dancers while simply walking as they would in everyday life. This movement-based work was installed on a surface that is widely associated with the display of artwork: the white wall of a museum. Brown was not only challenging the conventions of gravity and daily action, but also the conventions of the art world; the performance was art, just as a painting, collage, or sculpture, and it was to be viewed as such. This piece was one of her first to be installed and performed in a museum setting, and she continued to present work in museums throughout her career.

Brown has had an ongoing artistic relationship with the Whitney and the Walker Museum, both of which have presented her works in large-scale exhibitions. Most recently Brown’s work was featured in the show *Off The Wall: Part 2: Seven Works by Trisha Brown*, installed at the Whitney. Throughout this four-day residency, the company performed a variety of Brown’s *Early Works*, primarily from the late ‘60s and early ‘70s. These pieces were ground breaking performances nearly 40 years prior in New York. Many of these pieces were intended for performance in a museum setting and premiered at the Whitney as part of the exhibition *Another Fearless Dance Concert*, including *Walking on the Wall*, *Leaning Duets 2*, and *Falling Duet*.7 (Figures 1 and 2 in the Appendix show the original program for this exhibition.) For these pieces, the dancers occupied the space in the gallery as an art installation
would, and the viewers observed the movement as they would more traditional art objects in an exhibition.

Seven of Brown’s works were performed in the 2nd floor gallery as a 50-minute, twice daily, performance. These pieces included *Accumulation* (1971), *Leaning Duets 1* (1970), *Walking on the Wall* (1971), *Leaning Duets 2* (1971), *Spanish Dance* (1973), *Falling Duet 1* (1968), and *Figure Eight* (1974). In addition, *Forest Floor* and *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* were performed multiple times throughout the exhibition. The audience was invited to enter the museum floor before the performance and was asked to move freely within the gallery space. The manager of the company welcomed the audience just before the performance began, introduced the show, and explained where the audience should sit or stand for the first piece. She encouraged the viewers to feel free to move during the pieces and to create space for the dancers when necessary. Between many of the works she returned to offer more explicit instructions as to how the audience should adjust their position to make room for the dancing bodies. Other times the dancers would simply walk into a crowd and the viewers moved to form a clearing. The fluidity of the audience’s movement between the pieces maintained their roles as active observers and promoted the notion of viewing the works as an installation.

*Accumulation*, the first work, featured two dancers who stood facing each other in the center of the gallery floor with the audience encircling them. The Grateful Dead’s “Uncle John’s Band” played through the space and the dancers began moving as mirror images of one another. (fig. 6) They performed a simple repeating phrase, accumulating new movements after every few repetitions. Although it was not
a complex phrase it was fascinating to experience the two dancers move together, perfectly in unison, while facing each other. It was a deceptively challenging task for the performers because the dancers were viewing the visual opposite of what their own body was doing. Despite this, they were able to maintain complete composure and focus, creating the feeling that their sole physical purpose at that moment was to perform this piece. The movement was simple and repetitive, thereby encouraging the viewers to closely observe the bodies and each detail of the phrase.

*Leaning Duet 1* featured all eight of the dancers separated into four pairs. The constructs of the piece required that each pair travel across the floor along a diagonal while equally sharing their weight with their partner. They held arms and leaned away from each other, creating an inverted triangle. (fig. 7) In this position they walked in unison while counter balancing their partner’s weight with their own body. This piece also appeared very simple and straightforward, but as it progressed the difficulty in maintaining balance between the two bodies while walking became evident. The viewer could observe slight shifts that altered the equilibrium and allowed gravity to affect their stability. *Leaning Duet 1* forced the dancers to renegotiate the activity of walking under a new set of parameters. Originally, this piece was performed on the street with the dancers dressed in street clothes,\(^{10}\) appearing as pedestrians and again referencing everyday life in the work.

Brown highlights the act of walking once more in the piece *Walking on the Wall*, but she provided a new complication to the ordinary action. This piece challenged the logic of gravity by featuring dancers walking along the walls as if it was the ground. Each dancer carried their own body parallel to the floor, moving
fluidly along the walls, and navigating the corners of the room with ease. Gravity appeared to be acting independently on their bodies, pulling them towards the walls, not the floor. Harnesses that attached to tracks on the ceiling supported the performers horizontally. They climbed ladders on either side of the room to secure the harnesses, allowing the spectators to see this action, and Brown did not intend to mystify the viewer or create a super-human experience. (fig. 8)

In transitioning from *Leaning Duet 1* to *Walking on the Wall*, a few dancers began to climb the ladders and secure themselves into the harnesses, while others completed the progression across the gallery floor. This slight overlap provided a short moment in which the viewers observed bodies moving across the floor and the walls simultaneously. This stark contrast only heightened the excitement and abnormality of seeing dancers walk on the walls. Each time the dancers began to walk parallel to the floor the audience members inhaled quickly, full of anticipation and fascination. The wall is an unconventional surface on which to walk, yet the dancers’ bodies gracefully navigated a plane that defies the norms of our everyday world. The counterintuitive nature of this action creates intrigue, drawing the audience into the movement. By displaying dancers walking on walls, Brown forces the viewers to observe and focus on the otherwise menial action of walking, an automatic function of everyone’s day-to-day operations. She deals with reality in a manner that directly translates to the viewers’ own actions and body, making the viewer an active part of the experience.

As the dancers descended from the walls, they split up into pairs and moved into the audience, forcing the viewers to rearrange themselves accordingly. The
following piece, *Leaning Duets 2*, utilized a support system made of two square wooden boards attached on either side by rope. Each dancer placed his/her body against the square, with both performers leaning away from their partner. (fig. 9) The movement consisted of the dancers playing with the distribution of their weight and how it affected their partner’s body. If one dancer moved quickly to their right, the dancer opposite was spun to the right as well. If one dancer began to lean heavily against the board and walk away, their partner worked to balance and move with them. It was clear how the subtle shifts created a sequential movement between the pairs. At times the dancers seemed so precariously positioned, leaning against the weight of their partners, that they could fall at any moment. (fig. 10) Each pair of dancers created unique shapes through these movements, which invited the audience to observe the physical actions, and the aesthetic nature and qualities of the piece.

Before the fifth work, *Spanish Dance*, the company manager explained that the dancers would perform along a line in the center of the room and asked the audience to move to either side. Six female dancers stood evenly spaced along the line facing the same direction and "Early Morning Rain", written by Gordon Lightfoot but sung by Bob Dylan, began to resonate through the gallery. The dancer in the back of the line began to move her hips back and forth with her arms rising above her head while shuffling forward. When she arrived against the back of the next dancer, she in turn slowly raised her arms and the two continued the forward trajectory, touching up against the back of the next dancer, and so on. This continued until the dancers were all moving together in a line towards the wall. When they reached the wall the music stopped, and the piece ended. (fig. 11) The audience
could visually observe the transfer of physical movement from one dancer to another, once again bringing them into the performance as active spectators.

*Falling Duet 1*, Brown’s sixth work in the progression, engages directly with the affects of gravity on the body. Divided into pairs, one dancer would stand and slowly begin to lean away from their center of balance. As soon as they began to fall their partner would move to catch them just before they collapsed. (fig. 12) Both bodies gracefully found their way to the floor, completing the natural downward flow of momentum, and the cycle began again. The pairs were scattered about the space, each occupying a section of the room with the audience in small groups around them. It was obvious when one of the dancers began to lean and fall, and so a moment of intense anticipation was created before their partner caught them. Each time, the audience was rife with apprehension, wondering if the other dancer would get there in time to cushion the fall. During one show a 3-year-old boy in the audience exclaimed “Uh oh!” as a dancer began to fall, perfectly capturing the viewers’ anxiety combined with fascination in the otherwise silent gallery. Each time one dancer fell it was purely and ordinarily gravity acting on their bodies. The observing spectators were forced to become aware of the weight of their own body, feeling gravity pulling them down as well.

In Brown’s final work, *Figure Eight*, nine dancers (including the company manager) stood evenly spaced on a diagonal across the floor with their eyes closed. Their arms arced back and forth, from their sides to the top of their head, with the sound of a metronome playing in the gallery. They did not touch their heads in any obvious relation to the beat of the metronome, but they remained in perfect unison
throughout the entire piece. The dancers’ right arm moved in expanding time patterns, while their left arm moved in decreasing time patterns. This enlarging and diminishing pattern was unidentifiable to the audience, and the dancers appeared to be magically moving simultaneously to an unknown rhythm. It resulted in a trance-like, mesmerizing action, cultivating an intense focus throughout the audience. Visually the row of dancers with their arms floating to their head and back created a sculptural installation that could be observed from any point in the room. (fig. 13) Again, it asked the audience to look past the movement itself and observe the details in the shapes and figures of the work.

In these pieces, Trisha Brown focused on highlighting the dancers’ physical presence, developing a pedestrian, yet structured quality of movement, engaging the viewer in active observation of the work, cultivating audience participation (both physically and mentally) in the performance, and utilizing the context of a museum for the presentation of her work. These underlying factors, themes, and constructs created an overall sense of dance as art installation.

In addition to these works, Trisha Brown created a vast repertoire with her company, which still performs across the world in venues ranging from ultra-traditional theaters to museums to outdoor spaces. Her oeuvre spans the artistic spectrum, encompassing choreographed pieces meant for a proscenium stage, adaptations of operas, short solo works, evening-length shows, and the discussed works conceived for a museum setting. Whereby works discussed here are relevant to my investigation of dance installation, by no means do I intend to diminish Brown’s other illustrious career accomplishments.
Chapter Five: 
An Analysis and Practical Exploration of Dance Installation

Installation is a term that became common in the 1960s to describe the construction, or assemblage, of an artwork that inhabits the entire space in which it is located. Installation art differs from the discrete art-object of more conventional sculpture. The viewer then enters the work of art, exists within the art, interacts with the space it creates, and actively engages in the physical, visual, and sensory experience of the work.¹ This definition provides a foundation from which to explore the concept of Dance Installation, or, effectively creating an installation with choreographed movement.

This differs from Site Specific work, which is designed for a specific location, to such an extent that both the meaning and performance of a Site Specific work are inextricably bound to the site for which it was created. A Site Specific dance cannot exist, and is meaningless, if not performed in its intended location.² By comparison, Dance Installation is not simply a choreographed dance that is performed in a museum setting. There is a specific intentionality in the conception of dance installation, which produces a movement-based experience similar to an art installation.

Through these comparisons, an understanding of the history of Performance Art, and an in depth study of Kaprow's Happenings and Brown's Whitney performances, both through personal experience and academic study, I have realized five fundamental aspects of Dance Installation.
1. The dancers’ or performers’ physical presence.
2. The structure and quality of the movement.
3. The viewer’s active observation of the work.
4. The context of the installation/performance within a museum, gallery, or space generally associated with the display of visual art.
5. The temporal existence of the piece creates an installation that seems to exist regardless of the audience’s viewing presence.

My observation of Trisha Brown’s Whitney Museum exhibition allowed me to recognize these five prominent qualities in her work, further describing Dance Installation. These factors are not unique to Brown’s work, as many of the individual concepts appear in the work of other artists producing vastly different outcomes. Alternatively, I am defining Dance Installation as a form that emerges from the simultaneous focus on these five aspects. Specifically, these extracted characteristics, qualities, and concepts work together to establish a sub-group within Performance Art: Dance Installation.

1. The dancers’ or performers’ physical presence. Brown’s dancers performed the movement without exuding superimposed emotion or narrative. The performance was simply a celebration of the physical movement without the added spectacle of a theatrical show. The dancers performed in a state of present-ness, as if they existed in that moment for the sole purpose of executing the movement. As an audience member, the dancers did not appear to exist outside of these pieces in any capacity. The dancers seemed to be continuously performing in the gallery and, as a viewer,
you feel fortunate to be in the museum at that moment and privileged to experience them.

2. The structure and quality of the movement. The movement itself highlights the physical experience of natural forces acting on, altering, or engaging with the body, often gravity and weight. Much of this movement explores pedestrian actions and interactions between bodies in a manner reminiscent of real life.

3. The viewer’s active observation of the work. The dancers were not separated from the audience members in any way, and the spectators were encouraged to move around the space. The viewer was thus actively engaged in observation, as opposed to the more traditional role as a passive audience member.

4. The context of the installation/performance within a museum, gallery, or space generally associated with the display of visual art. The context of a museum environment primes the viewers to observe art. Spectators find themselves watching dance in the frame of reference of artwork, contrary to a theater or auditorium performance. The gallery setting lacks the theater’s artifice, creating a genuine experience comprising of just the dancers’ bodies and the movement in which they are engaged.

5. The temporal existence of the piece creates an installation that seems to exist regardless of the audience’s viewing presence. The dancers performed a 50-minute set, so there were audience members who attended the entire performance, and did experience a start and finish to the work. However, other museum visitors entered the gallery space completely unaware of the performance underway. To these spectators, the performance was an exhibition in the museum that occurred with or
without their presence. This sense of continuity is unique to visual art exhibitions, and encourages viewers to understand the performance within these constructs, reinforcing the sense of her work as an installation.

My experience and analysis of Trisha Brown’s work, exhibited at the Whitney, shaped my investigation of Dance Installation. The experience encouraged and inspired me to explore this concept in my own work. I used this framework as a choreographic guideline, and I explored the notion of using moving bodies as materials with which to create artwork. My intent was to place the emphasis on the physical experience of the dancers and movement, as opposed to on a narrative or emotionally based performance. I aimed to force my audience to view the dancers as pure movement and form, without the artifices of theater and performance.

The first semester piece was performed in the ‘92 Theater, which allowed me the opportunity to work against the conventions of a performance in a traditional theater. The challenge was finding a way to change each spectator’s means of viewing the piece. I was compelled to find a means of altering the norm of watching a performance in that space. Audience members expect to enter a theater, find their seats and wait for the lights to go off and the show to begin. They are encouraged to stay subdued and quiet, a passive viewer of the show that is presented to them. This type of viewing would not be successful in conveying these ideas of present physical experience, which was the ultimate goal of my investigation.

1. *The dancers’ or performers’ physical presence*. I worked with my four dancers, two male and two female, to convey a state of tranquility and physical
presence that differed from the tendency to perform and outwardly emote while dancing. It was not a sense of nothingness, or unemotional dancing, but an acute awareness of the tangible physicality and genuine experience of moving through space as a dancing body. (fig. 14) My goal was to have the dancers appear as though their only purpose was to execute the dance and only acknowledge the reality of the movement in which they were immersed.

2. The structure and quality of the movement. Choreographically, I wanted each body to move independently as individual shapes and forms in the space, yet be viewed all together as one composition. Within the piece, sections emphasized raw improvisational movement to capture the essence of genuine initiations and reactions between the bodies. (fig. 15-17) This was paired with more structured segments with set movement that brought the dancers together and gave the audience an opportunity to view the four bodies as a moving unit. (fig. 18) By juxtaposing these two focuses, the dancing bodies produced an energy that activated the entire theater space, allowing the spectators to feel that energy themselves.

3. The viewer's active observation of the work. Before entering the theater the audience was encouraged to remove their shoes in order to walk on the stage and dance floor. The dancers were spaced around the theater, on the stage and in the audience’s seats, with no regards to the end of the dance floor. The spectators were invited to walk around and observe the dancers in the space; this immediately engaged the audience in active viewing that primed them for the rest of the piece. (fig. 19) When the theater was full the house manager made an announcement for them to be seated and the dancers began moving to the down-stage right corner, yet
some remained on the cusp between the stage floor and the wooden floor. I continuously broke the norm of respecting this boundary by disregarding the change between dance floor and the audience’s space throughout the piece to keep the entire theater activated and energized.

4. The context of the installation/performance within a museum, gallery, or space generally associated with the display of visual art. I needed to create an environment that encouraged the audience to view the dance as if it was art in a gallery or museum setting. The lighting was static, and remained on the audience as well as the stage, creating a uniformity of white light throughout the space. Having lights on over the audience functioned as a reminder for them to maintain an active viewing and observational role, similar to that in a gallery space. The lighting had no resemblance to theater dramatics, and a neutral atmosphere where the moving bodies could dominate the viewer’s attention was created. Additionally, one piece of the music used was abruptly different from the others and aggressively demanded the audience’s attention, in case they began to drift into passive observation.

5. The temporal existence of the piece creates an installation that seems to exist regardless of the audience’s viewing presence. This piece was performed in a theater, as part of a larger dance show; therefore it was impossible to create a situation identical to that which Trisha Brown employed. Instead I focused on the elements I could manipulate to generate a similar sense of altered, or extended, temporal existence. The goal was to have the audience feel as though this installation existed before they entered, and would continue after the dancers exited the space. (This is similar to the feeling of entering a gallery and knowing the pieces were there
before and will remain there after you view them.) The dancers were moving in the space when the audience entered, and danced out of the space at the “end” of the piece. The lights never went off and there was no conclusive ending. This implied that the performance continued out of sight of the audience. Additionally, the music occasionally repeated or was silent in the middle of the dance, which promoted a sense of altered time, or unpredictability within the piece itself.

Overall, I tried to create a work that fits into the realm of Dance Installation. There were some limiting factors, including the time limit, the setting of the piece within a larger dance performance, the constraints of the theater space, and the expectations of the audience. I did succeed in creating a new environment within the theater, which encouraged the audience members to observe the movement and dancers in an unconventional way. This differed from the customary practice of entering a theater, sitting in the dark, watching a show, and expecting entertainment. After this work it became clear that I needed to move out of the theater in order to fully explore these ideas without said constraints. Ideally, I wanted to conceive of a work to be performed in an art gallery, to truly explore the other facets of dance installation.

Through analysis of Allan Kaprow’s Happenings I found many similarities, and distinct differences, to my depiction of Dance Installation. Primarily, Kaprow’s work focused predominantly on the amalgamation of theater and visual art concepts, bringing art and painting theories into a live space through performance. Additionally, he greatly emphasized the blurring between art and life, attempting to
create Happenings that drew directly from everyday occurrences. To further my study, I looked at the general characteristics of the Happenings, as discussed in Chapter Three, and identified their relation to the qualities of Dance Installation. My findings are thusly laid out.

1. *The dancers’ or performers’ physical presence.* In the Happenings the performances were typically unrehearsed and carried out by nonprofessional performers. These works did not have a conventional narrative, plot, or script. Instead, events were improvisation-based, drawing from real life, and allowing for a candid, unplanned series of actions. The performers presence was not a constant throughout the Happenings, which filled the spectrum from the more performative qualities seen in the *Extravaganza* events, to the absence of a performer in the *Activity*, or *Idea/Suggestion* forms.

2. *The structure and quality of the movement.* The Happenings were not solely focused on movement. They also had a strong emphasis on involving all of five senses, engaging the audience in sight, sound, smell, and touch, to create a total art experience. Although the structure of the occurrences within a Happening was often important to the overall effect, the quality of the movement was not a unifying or defining characteristic.

3. *The viewer’s active observation of the work.* Audience participation was one of the most prominent aspects of the Happenings, to so large an extent that Kaprow declared “there should not be (and usually cannot be) an audience or audiences to watch a Happening.” The experiential nature of the events mandated the presence of participants, not passive spectators. This was not always a physical
participation, but sometimes an active mental engagement in the work. This type of cognitive awareness and involvement is crucial to Dance Installation.

4. *The context of the installation/performance within a museum, gallery, or space generally associated with the display of visual art.* Kaprow insisted that the Happenings occur outside of art-indicating institutions—theaters, galleries, or museums—to bring art into real life. This being said, the location of a Happening was critical, and often dictated, the event’s outcome and overall purpose. He encouraged the use of alternative locations “dispersed over several widely spaced, sometimes moving and changing, locales.” Despite this position, the earliest Happenings did take place in galleries, and others were performed in theaters or large presentational spaces, such as areas, or exhibition halls.

5. *The temporal existence of the piece creates an installation that seems to exist regardless of the audience’s viewing presence.* The Happenings had a temporal existence that was independent of any exterior constraints or expectations. Kaprow stated that “time, closely bound up with things and space, should be variable and independent of the convention of continuity.” This implied that the Happenings engaged with the everyday world, maintaining a general disregard to the theater or audience. Although some were performed with viewers in attendance, others occurred in the middle of a field whether or not spectators were present. This duality of tangibility and impermanence gave the Happenings an air of continual occurrence, as if one could be happening this very moment without anyone’s knowledge. The theme of constant existence, present throughout the Happening events, is also essential to the concept of Dance Installation.
Many of Kaprow’s underlying theories for the Happenings inform and offer a foundation for the characteristics I previously set out for Dance Installation. Additionally, they bring other criteria under theoretical scrutiny, specifically the necessity for the work to be performed in an art-specific environment. For my second choreographic exploration into dance installation I absorbed these ideas, allowing them to influence the performances and intention behind location, audience presence, and structure within the work itself.

I explored the constructs of Dance Installation further in my second semester piece, experimenting with different locations, using a larger group of performers, and creating a piece with a malleable structure that could adapt to various environments and outside factors. With this greater knowledge, I focused on the concepts that were left unexplored in my first work, expanding on my initial results and outcome.

1. The dancers’ or performers’ physical presence. I chose nine dancers, male and female, who ranged from dance majors with training and experience, to those who had never previously danced or performed. Due to this vast diversity, I worked to create a community in rehearsal to nurture the dancers and allow them to become comfortable with each other and with the movement. I wanted the physical presence of the performers to reflect that sense of present-ness, without exuding emotion or narrative, which was prominent in the first semester piece. In addition I intended for the dancers to give off a relaxed, informal, and natural quality, reflecting everyday life. It was extremely important for the piece to maintain its integrity and essence when placed in various locations with different audience/performer relationships.
This was accomplished through the performers’ physical presence in relation to each other, producing a distinct cohesive energy and connection among the nine dancers. (fig. 20 and 21)

2. *The structure and quality of the movement.* The movement in this piece resembled an amalgamation of task-like actions, motions borrowed from everyday activities, abstract dance-like movements, and creating shapes and structures with bodies. I juxtaposed trios and duets against group unison movement or stillness, alternating with sections of unity within the entire group. (fig. 22) The movement was sculptural in quality, with the bodies moving as forms in the space, creating lines and shapes with a relationship to the overall composition. (fig. 23 and 24) Using art materials, actions, applications, and surfaces as the source of inspiration for the collaborative generation of much of the movement allowed my dancers to think of their bodies as the materials with which we were creating art.

3. *The viewer’s active observation of the work.* Through the use of choreography, spacing, and overall structure, I wanted to construct a dance that forced the spectator to view the piece as they would an exhibition in a gallery. They had to consciously decide what to watch throughout the performance, similar to choosing what work of art to look at first, or spend time viewing, in a visual art exhibition. This element of choice was nurtured by having various different things happening simultaneously in one space. As in the previous piece, I had the audience stand and move around the space with the dancers, allowing them to view from very close up, or farther away. This changed how each viewer observed the movement,
specifically which parts of the piece became more prominent for them since each vantage point provided a unique view. (fig. 25)

4. The context of the installation/performance within a museum, gallery, or space generally associated with the display of visual art. The location was a defining element of Trisha Brown’s Dance Installation, because the context of the Whitney Museum shaped the audience’s perception of the work, encouraging them to view it as art. Kaprow renounces the use of art-defining institutions for the Happenings, moving instead to varied locations, both indoors and outside, in urban settings and immersed in nature, in private spaces and public areas. Intrigued by this dichotomy in philosophies, I experimented with my work by placing it in diverse locations to observe the changes and effects that performance environment carries.

The first of these locations was the Zilkha Gallery; it was performed twice in this setting. The piece was performed in Lindsay Keys’s senior thesis photography exhibition, Blackout. Having the dance juxtaposed against, and framed by, the photography exhibition installed on the back wall of the gallery, truly brought the work into the realm of art installation. (fig. 26 and 27) The space itself was somewhat restricting, long and narrow, and the movement had to mold to fit the space. The audience mostly stood around the perimeter along the walls, so each vantage point emphasized different parts of the piece. For some spectators the photographs in the background provided a backdrop, or context, for the movement, while others observed the bodies moving in front of the limestone gallery walls.

The second location was the Zelnick Pavilion, adjacent to the ‘92 Theater. The piece was performed in this space prior to each of the three evening senior thesis
shows in the theater. The Zelnick Pavilion is an entirely glass-walled building, with benches around the periphery and three pillars in the center. The dancers adjusted the movement to navigate the pillars and incorporate the benches, fitting the dance into the environment. In this setting the audience also moved around the space, walking and sitting on the benches, and moving between the columns. (fig. 28 and 29) The audience was more mobile in this space, possibly because many of them were a dance audience, or dancers themselves and felt more comfortable engaging with the space of the performers. The pillars also broke up the space, providing places for the viewers to stand in the middle of the performance. Additionally, the benches allowed spectators to move about the space while remaining out of the way of the dancers. In order to challenge this inevitable sense of separation between performers and audience, I had the dancers consciously move into the viewers, forcing them to react. This location also allowed for spectators to watch from outside observing through the Pavilion’s glass walls. I wanted audience members coming for the show in the theater, to happen upon this performance already underway, see it as they were approaching, and force them to consciously decide whether to enter into it or observe from a removed position.

The work was performed one time only in three other locations: in the Olin Library Lobby, the CFA Courtyard (fig. 30), and on top of Indian Hill. These environments differed greatly from the other two because they allowed for expansive, unrestricted movement. (fig. 31) The lobby of Olin is a large space, and the outdoor locations had little, or no spatial limitations, permitting the dancers to move freely. This generated a completely different type of energy than in the gallery or Zelnick,
because the movement radiated outward from the dancers bodies into the surrounding space, enveloping the audience in the piece. Whereas in the gallery and Zelnick the focus was firmly placed closely on the bodies and the audience observed the dancers in a very active, aware, and engaged manner, the expansive locations created a shared experience of energy and motion between the dancers and the audience.

The piece had a unique ability to conform to each of these locations, without prior rehearsals in all of the spaces. The dancers found ways to interact directly with their surrounding, using the surfaces of walls of the gallery and the benches and pillars in the Pavilion. The grass in the outdoors sites provided a cushioning, inherently causing the dancers to throw their body more freely, producing a heightened energy level. In Olin Library, the dancers completely filled the space, navigating around the benches on either side, and eventually exiting through the main doors of the library for the piece’s conclusion. (fig. 32 and 33)

(See Appendix for images in each the location.)

5. The temporal existence of the piece creates an installation that seems to exist regardless of the audience’s viewing presence. At each location the dancers occupied the space prior to the spectators entering. They moved in the space, warming-up and going through the movement, in order to display their constant presence in the space. The audience entered and milled around, and without warning the dancers began to move in unison, sometime cued by music and other times in silence. The audience navigated the space without any given instruction, and realized that they were free to move about during the piece. The performers danced out of the space at the end of the piece in order to create the illusion that the piece continued
after the audience finished viewing. In some locations this meant that they danced out of a door, into the grass and away in the distance, and sometimes simply out of site of the spectators, furthering the sense that they continued dancing endlessly.

The temporal dimension of the piece varied based on location, and the illusion of continued existence, regardless of a viewer or audience, was more effective in certain environments. The most successful in this regard, was the performance in the lobby of Olin Library, because it is a very public setting with constant foot traffic, which created an situation where passersby walked through, unaware of the performance until they were physically in it. During the performance students and professors were forced to walk through the space to enter or exit the library. Other students heard the music and came out of their carrels to overlook the performance from a second-floor balcony. This sense of happening upon the piece, without previous knowledge of the performance, is crucial to the temporal existence of Dance Installation because it removes the elements of a beginning and ending.

The earlier discussed limitations I faced in my choreographic process did not allow the creation of true Dance Installation work in either of my pieces, however I gained comprehension of the explicated five defining characteristics, which I would not have otherwise obtained. Through my choreography, I explored the facets of this form, gaining an understanding of how they operate individually and together in this framework. The products of my work challenged the viewers to see dance in a new context, interact directly with the space and performance, and engage in active observation of the movement. As a choreographer, I was pushed to manipulate the
dancers’ performative presence, the spatial and temporal existence of the piece, and
the work’s relationship to its environment, thereby fully investigating the theories of
Dance Installation.
Conclusion:

The scope of research within this thesis is merely a glimpse into the extensive world of Performance Art, and only the beginnings of distinguishing Dance Installation. I acknowledge that there are numerous artists producing works that fit into this structure in some capacity, in the realms of both art and dance. Eiko and Koma have been creating movement installations in the United States since the 1970s, many of which have been prominently exhibited in galleries and museums. Their works stem from an amalgamation of modern dance, the Japanese practice of Butoh, and a focus on creating stillness, shapes, lines, and light.¹ Eiko and Koma’s performances highlight the extremely slow, trance-like movement of their nude bodies, situated in constructed environments, usually lasting for multiple hours or days at a time. The temporal existence of their work and its location in an art-defining setting suggest that it could very well be classified as Dance Installation.

Another example is the Recoil Performance Group, a contemporary performance company founded by choreographer Tina Tarpgaard and based in Copenhagen.² This group has brought many Performance Art theories into the realm of contemporary art, dance, and performance, through their incorporation of technology in their work. The collaboration between software-programming artists and the choreographer produces works focused on the interaction between dancer and technology. Many of their works are presented in the form of installations, notably their piece in the performance *Labyrinth* (2008), an exhibition hosted by the Danish Dance Theater. *Labyrinth* was installed in Kaleidoskop (K2), a theater and
performance space in Copenhagen dedicated to experimental art. It was a maze-like architectural installation, and multiple dance companies and artists performed simultaneously in different spaces through the structure. The audience was free to roam through the maze, choosing which elements to observe, thereby creating their own experience. This was essentially a multimedia installation that employed dance as its main component. Although some of the facets of Recoil’s work in Labyrinth fit into the realm of Dance Installation, due to the use of technology as a dual partner to dance, it remains outside of the scope of this particular study.

These artists are among those exploring the fusion of dance and art, providing an opportunity to broaden and enrich this investigation of Dance Installation. My historical, observational, and embodied research resulted in a clear divide between Dance Installation and other forms of Performance Art. Additionally, the five defining characteristics provide a framework for the relative comparison and analysis of performance work in relation to Dance Installation. I have only begun to realize the complexities of Dance Installation’s place and role in the vast realm of Performance Art, and there is much more work necessary to fully distinguish Dance Installation as a distinct form. If the consistent innovations of earlier performance artists are any indication, I expect contemporary artists and performers to continue propelling Dance Installation forwards, establishing it as a distinct medium in its own right.
Appendix:

Fig. 1

Trisha Brown

another fearless dance concert

Tuesday, March 30 & Wednesday, March 31, 1971 at 8:30 P.M.
Whitney Museum of American Art
945 Madison Avenue at 75th Street
New York, New York 10021

Tickets are available on a first-come basis
beginning Wednesday, March 24. There is no
charge other than the usual $1.00 admission
to the Museum. Cushion seating.
Fig. 2

Walking on the Wall (1976)

Whitney Museum of American Art
Presents
Another Postmodern Dance Concert
By Trisha Brown

Leaping Duet II (1971)

Carmen Bouchat
Caroline Gooden
Linda FFT
Mike Bower
Ginger Nichols
Carole Bernard
Kitty Kyan
Bar Dolphin

Palladium Duet I (1971)

Richard Kuna
Jon Kalina
Mark Gobbo
Fernando Vona
Darby Orlowsky
Victor Brooks
Suzanne Harris

Palladium Duet II (1971)

Steve Paxton
Trisha Brown

Sky Map (1969)

Recommended position for audience is lying on the floor on back

Sponsored by Change Inc.
Technical advisor on track system: Bernard Kirschenbaum
Track installation: Richard Kuna and Jared Berk
Track system by Richards-Allison Mfg., Co.

March 30 & 31, 1971

Fig. 2
Off The Wall: Part 2: Seven Works by Trisha Brown (September 2010):
Photos by Paula Court, courtesy of the Whitney Museum of American Art

Fig. 3: Forest Floor

Fig. 4: Man Walking Down the Side of a Building
Fig. 5: *Walking on the Wall*

Fig. 6: *Accumulation*
Fig. 7: Leaning Duets 1

Fig. 8: Dancer with harness for Walking on the Wall
Fig. 9: Leaning Duets 2

Fig. 10: Leaning Duets 2
Fig. 11: Spanish Dance

Fig. 12: Falling Duet 1

Fig. 13: Figure Eight
Fall Semester Senior Thesis Dance Show:
Photos by Andy Ribner

Fig. 14
Fig. 18

Fig. 19
Spring Semester Senior Thesis Dance Show:
Photos by Daria Lombroso

Fig. 20: Indian Hill

Fig. 21: Zilkha Gallery
Fig. 22: Indian Hill

Fig. 23: Zilkha Gallery
Fig. 24: Zelnick Pavilion

Fig. 25: Indian Hill
Fig. 26: Zilkha Gallery
Fig. 27: Zilkha Gallery

Fig. 28: Zelnick Pavilion
Fig. 29: Zelnick Pavilion

Fig. 30: CFA Courtyard
Fig. 33: Olin Library
Notes:

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Conclusion:

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