

transmutation

chris wood, 2017

I never paint dreams or nightmares, I paint my own reality.

Frida Kahlo

From Gerald Hinkle's book on aesthetic theory "Art as Event: An Aesthetic for the Performing Arts", we come to understand a fundamental aspect of performance: transmutation.

It involves not only the ordering of the objects of perception and the moments of experience into patterns of coherence and regularity, but also the assigning to the result of such ordering the characteristics of an original, complete, and a self-significating entity in its own right.

Gerald Hinkle, *Art as Event: An Aesthetic for the Performing Arts*, 1979

Performance—throughout the events of conception/presentation and reception/perception—is an act of creation. The artist reorders their individual experience into an aesthetic moment which is perceived by an audience member. The audience member then reorders it into their individual experience with a resulting effect on their future experience. Through this shared endeavor between the artist and the witness *a powerful genesis occurs*.

The artist's role has been defined and contested by countless aestheticians, theorists, artists, and 20-something year-old party-goers throughout time. Hinkle poses what I think is the clearest and most encapsulating definition of the artist's role:

In short: is not the special character and role of art primarily attributable to its success in encapsulating the timespan and amplifying the awareness of all who, in and through its mediation, 'see and sense life' more pointedly? ... is not art the vehicle by which the oft-times undifferentiated ebb-and-flow of things and incidents common to on-going human consciousness is 'clustered' now and again to the illumination of all concerned?

(Hinkle, 1979, p25)

The common thread in most definitions of the role of the artist is a pragmatic relationship to their audience. Accepting of a diversity of individualized processes, art's

final function is to alter the other through their experience with it. What differentiates the performing arts from other art forms is the real-time cohabitation of this altering experience between the artist and audience. Performance enables the creation and perception to happen in one “aesthetic moment”, as Hinkle would say ¹, providing a space for co-creation in a form derived from the roots of performance: a constitutive community experience. Though this excludes the initial conception of the choreographer, playwright, composer, etc., the immediate components of these mediums still act as creative and constitutive in the moment.

In order to better understand this “aesthetic moment” and to avoid writing about the various aesthetic schools and their contributions/limitations of understanding this role of the artist, we’ll go to the source with Plato’s literal-as-possible definition of ‘aesthetic’ in which he cites the Greek origins of the word: “[Aesthetic is] an inescapable emotive dimension as a form of ‘perceiving’ which results from a pronounced excitation of the senses by arresting external stimuli.” What is so apt about this definition is the intentional exclusion of any kind of dynamic between the artist and viewer. The aesthetic moment is a balanced duet, an act in which perception and creation are one in the same. With this framework, we can understand that performance constitutes an altered new actuality: in that our further perceptions, actions, and creations are altered by this shared eventful moment.

¹ Gerald H. Hinkle. *Art as Event: An Aesthetic for the Performing Arts*. (Washington, D.C.: U of America, 1979).