James Lee Byars' Performable Objects

A 1,000-Foot White Chinese Paper

The Performable Square

1 x 50 Foot Drawing

1 x 200 Foot Paper

A Mile-Long Paper Walk

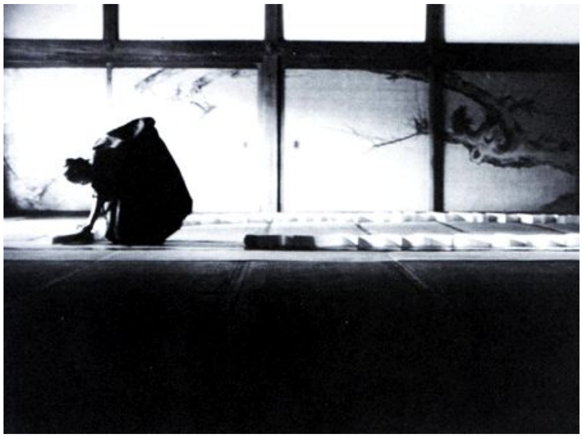
James Lee Byars lived in Japan from 1958 to 1967. In the second half of his residency there he made what collectively came to be known as Performable Objects. This phase of his career is relatively short. In the late 50's he primarily made paper and drawings; in the 60's he focused on performances and books, and later, in the 80's and 90's, on sculpture. Byars died in 1997, in Cairo. In the context of his long and diverse career, it can be said that the Performable Objects constitute a bridge between his paper works and slightly better known performances presented in the US and Europe. Here are descriptions of these pieces as they appear in *The Perfect Thought, Works by James Lee Byars*, by James Elliot:

> 1962
>
> Creates several giant, performable paper works in Japan made of many sheets of Japanese flax paper connected by paper hinges. These works are folded into solid geometric shapes and intended to be exhibited in stylized, gestural presentations in which a performer, sometimes Byars, sometimes and individual he has invited, deliberately unfolds the paper over the course of as much time as an hour. While these works were conceived as performable pieces, it appears that they were seldom performed immediately; rather they were shown months later, and in one case only after nearly fifteen years. These events initiate Byars's

practice of presenting works through special actions inspired by Zen and Noh theater.

1963

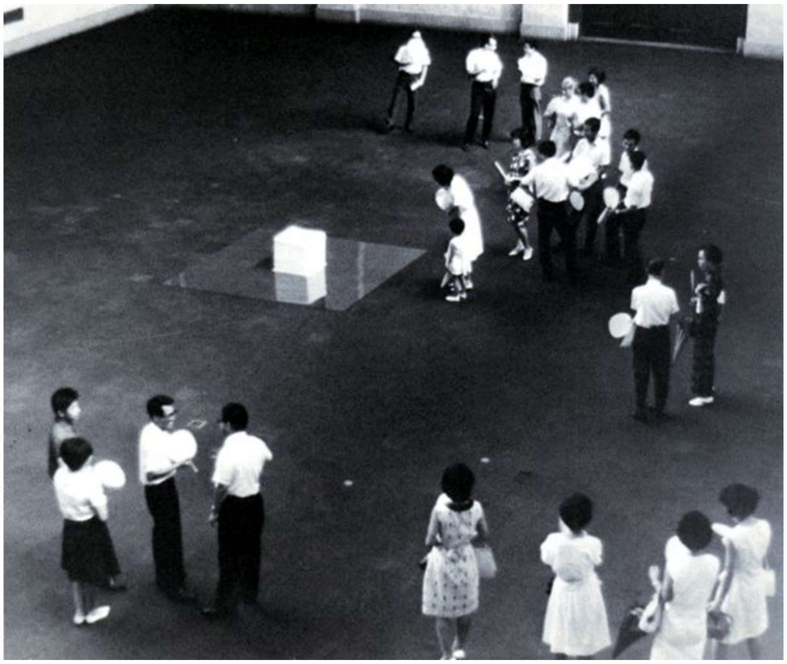
Exhibits performable paper works at the Shokokuji Monastery in Kyoto: one work, *A 1,000-Foot White Chinese Paper* (4 inches by 800 feet), folded like an accordion, is unfolded to an oval shape by a Japanese woman in ceremonial dress; another work, a long sheet of white Japanese flax paper (1 by 200 feet), with a single charcoal line running the length of the sheet, is unfolded from an accordion shape and stood on edge in a straight line.



A 1000-Foot Chinese Paper

The Performable Square. Exhibition of a giant performable paper work, which, when folded, measures one and one half feet per side. In this exhibition the work is shown folded and placed on a square glass plane in an empty gallery at the national Museum of modern Art, Kyoto…

Although this work was conceived of as a performable work, in the manner of the works mentioned above, *The Performable Square* was not performed and displayed fully unfolded until 1978, when Byars presented it at the University Art Museum at Berkeley.

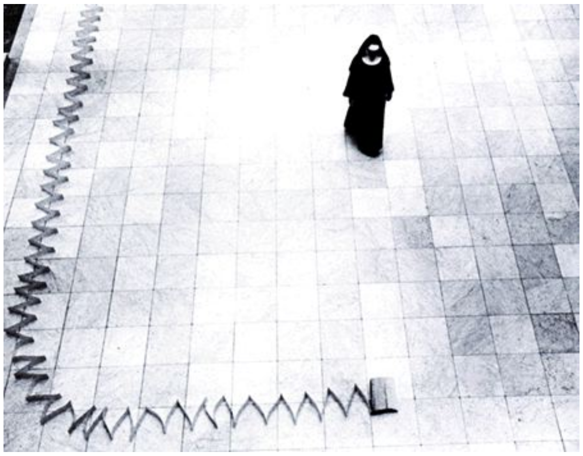


The Performable Square

1964

Meets Gordon bailey Washburn, director of the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, while making a pink, thousand-foot-long tissue-paper tribute to Shakespeare in Central Park. Washburn invites Byars to present his works at the Carnegie later that year….

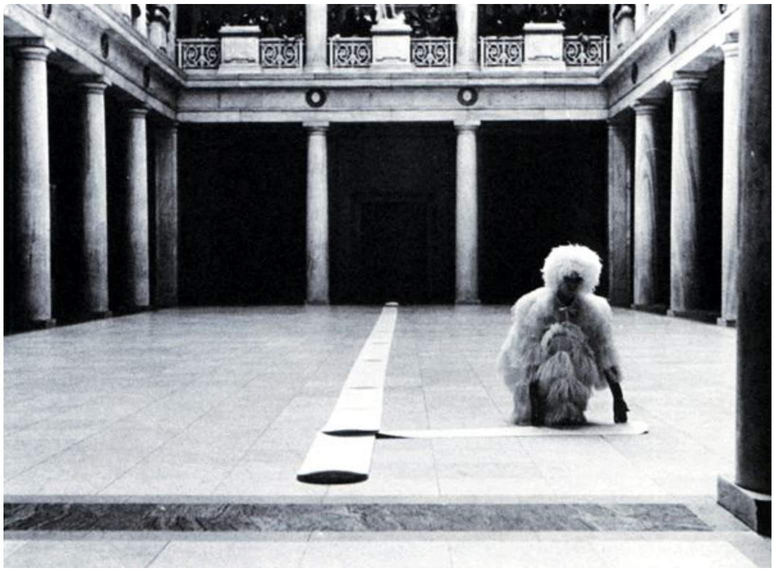
In November Byars exhibits the first of three performances in the sculpture court of the Carnegie Museum of art during the 1964 Pittsburgh International: *1 x 50 Foot Drawing* is performed by a Catholic nun dressed in habit. In this action, as with the two performed the following January, each of which lasts about one hour, the performer carries a folded paper work to the center court, delicately and deliberately unfolds the paper to full length, and finally refolds the paper to end the action. November 8.



A 1000-Foot Chinese Paper

1965

During January presents two performances during the 1964 Pittsburgh International exhibition, which had begun the previous November: *A 1000-Foot Chinese Paper*, performed by a Catholic nun dressed in habit (January 13, 9:00 a.m.); and *A Mile-Long Paper Walk*, performed by the dancer Lucinda Childs, who is dressed in a full-length ostrich feather costume (date unknown).



A Mile-Long Paper Walk

What appears at first glance when seeing images of the *Performable Objects* is an overarching tone of stylish sobriety, the look of the modern; the evocation of other contemporaneous art practices. In contrast, the work that Byars makes after this, the *Plural Garments*, defers seriousness: *Four in a Dress*, 1967, and *Three in a Pants* of the same year, feature performers walking on city streets wearing one billowing piece of fabric. It's not that the *Performable Objects* aren't playful too, but they benefit from a solemnity that speaks of a particular style: a style identifiable in other media.

Four in a Dress

Another way to understand the *Performable Objects* in relation to other genres is through their reliance on that ultimate modern formal device: the grid. The grid here is manifest in two ways, as model and image. The grid is implicit in the extrapolation of the three-dimensional paper object itself, and the consequent grid-like frame imposed on the performer's movements. The other manifestation is more abstract. It would be too simple to call it "the image of the grid" (although that is hovering here, too). It has more to do with the ability of the grid to *make* an image: to create pictorial space.

> In the flatness that results from its coordinates, the grid is the means of crowding out the dimensions of the real and replacing them with the lateral spread of a single surface.[1]

This is getting ahead of the argument, but in the *Performable Objects*, the "lateral spread of a single surface" becomes an analogue for a film screen. In other words, the kind of pictorial space created here by the grid, as a motif and means of spatial organization, is cinematic.

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[1] Krauss p. 9

This essay explores the *Performable Objects* within the context of Minimalism, Pop, task-based movement in dance, “art and technology”, and ultimately, avant-garde film and the “expanded cinema” of the mid-sixties. The premise is not that there is a transparent relationship between media, and that it is crystallized in Byars’ performances. Nor is it that ubiquitous formal motifs, such as the grid, can produce generalized results across disciplines, but that there is a layered coexistence between three-dimensional geometric form, structure, image and story in this work. And each component remains distinct and essentially arbitrary with respect to the others, while at the same time referencing more medium-specific sources. In general terms, my interest lies in the translation of three-dimensional geometric form into (pictorial, time-based, narrative) cinematic space. The reason why this became a preoccupation is because of an earlier interest, from architecture, in the complex transaction between drawing, with its binary metrical and pictorial functions, and buildings.

Cube

The Performable Square, exhibited in Kyoto and Berkley, begins its trajectory as a one-and-a-half foot cube and ends up as a 50 by 50-foot sheet on the floor. How do these two endpoint conditions compare to objects that came to be known as Minimalist a few years later? The pure geometric, “socially given”[2] forms of cube and square are typically Minimalist. *The Performable Square* was designed - a process facilitated by its shape - and likely commissioned from a fabricator. For these and other reasons, in some superficial respects the static versions cube and square would have fit into exhibitions that included Byars’ future Green Gallery colleagues, Morris, Flavin, Judd and André. However, for one thing, the cube is too small (it would have been called an ornament[3]) and the floor-piece too big (perhaps not a monument, but worse, a carpet). It is not possible to find examples of Minimalist work as small as a one-and-one-half-foot cube: In volume, Sol Lewitt's narrow *Wall Piece (Hockey Stick)*, 1964 is as small, but almost person-height. His large floor piece, *Serial Project #1 (set A)*, 1966, a grid of 20', is less than half the size of Byars' impractical 50' one. The size issue directly relates to the question of where and how these pieces were supposed to be viewed. In the case of the *Performable Square*, the implicit requirement is for the one-and-one-half-foot cube to be in the center of a room larger than 50' square, and for that 50' square zone to remain untransgressed when the piece is open. Both open and closed modes of the object, and every stage of movement in between, are pointed to simultaneously, making it a perverse contradiction of Robert Morris' demand for shape as experience, not depiction: *There are two distinct terms: the known constant and the experienced variable*.[4] The illusion of wholeness created by a mobile spectator as described in *Notes on Sculpture 2* is negated by its movement, making the piece Cubist, in Morris' terms. But even in a static state, it has too many parts: The delicate lines formed by the layers of paper that make up the cube create surface detail and "scientistic" internal relationships that would have been completely unacceptable to Morris.

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[2] Meyer

[3] Morris, p. 11. The size range of useless three-dimensional things is a continuum between the monument and the ornament… the new work being done today falls between the extremes of this size continuum.

For Judd, Byars' material, paper, not only would lack firmness, but would be rejected as a conventional art-making material, even though it is used here in an atmosphere of sparenenss and purity, standing for itself. But it is not nearly literal, or "specific", enough, being contingent on iconographic associations - and even assigned a function: "If (the new materials) are used directly, they are more specific. Also, they are usually aggressive. There is an objectivity to the obdurate identity of a material."[5] Judd demands a decontextualization of material so that its physical properties are foregrounded above and beyond conventional associations and seen afresh. Byars' paper particularizes, and capitalizes on, cultural associations about Japan. And in the biggest contradiction of Judd's requirements, Byars' paper is *instrumental*, functioning here in the service of jumbo-origami. The *Performable Objects* are entirely incompatible with Judd's ethics of materials and would certainly not have qualified as "the best new work", to use Judd's expression.

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[4] Morris p. 17

[5] Donald Judd, Specific Objects, *Complete Writings*, p. 187

Origami

In terms of establishing a relationship to Minimalism, the origami reference is anything but incidental. The action of folding and unfolding paper emphasizes the obsession Japan has with wrapping (an adjunct to shopping). Origami becomes a hinge-point, expressing the crucial connection between Minimalism and mass media images. It functions as a marker of a Japanese-inflected aesthetic ubiquitous in cultural production in the mid-sixties. What is significant is how this aesthetic, a visual and conceptual tendency of sparseness, was being diffused through an interchange between mass media and the art world. For example, in his book *Minimalism*, James Meyer finds magazines such as Harper's and Vogue advanced a paired-down, ascetic glamour that encompassed fashion, photography, and the various branches of design. He describes how in the art-world, the proto-Minimalist exhibition of 1966, *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculpture*, was covered by Newsweek and Life. Curated by Meyer Shapiro, the show featured Flavin, Judd and LeWitt, among many others, and "led the artists to public recognition by a route that temporarily deferred reliance on the gallery system"[6]. The features in the magazines presented the look of clothing worn by the attendees at the opening as analogous to the artwork. The lines between fashion and art were being blurred. An article in Harper's from July 1966 brought together artists, in black turtlenecks, and their assistants, posing in elegant geometric dresses. Sculpture and fashion existed on the same level[7]: Meyer describes this phenomenon as "the highbrow in congress with the middlebrow, (lending) the authority of fine art to design while conferring the glamour and publicity of fashion to fine art."[8] It becomes apparent that Minimalism cannot be separated from its commercial art and media influences, conflating an intellectual and aesthetic trend toward reductivism with pop-culture images from fashion and commercial art.

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[6] Meyer

[7] Meyer p. 28

[8] Meyer p. 29

Getting back to origami, and to the *Performable Objects*, Byars, living and exhibiting in Japan, is mining and transforming well known, cliché, images of that country, particularly of (as James Elliot says) Zen rituals and Noh theatre. The costumes, the silence, the paper all add up to a kind of Pop/Minimalist/Performance-Art *Mikado*. The intended audience is both Japanese and Western, and the aesthetic would be similarly identifiable in both places: Japanese visual culture has been shaped by Western art and mass-media, and the ascetic solemnity points to the historical roots of modernism, and to its essentialism.

Image

These "Japanese" objects, in their plain-ness, speak not only of Minimalism, but also of a related movement: Pop. For one thing, they conform to Roland Barthes' description of the factual object. His description could be equally applicable to Minimalism, except Barthes' terms are applied more broadly; encompassing two-dimensional objects, and images:

> What Pop Art wants is to desymbolize the object, to give it the obtuse and matte stubbornness of a fact (John Cage: "The object is a fact, not a symbol"). [9]

The *Performable Objects* are only partially, and temporarily, three-dimensional. They have other lives as drawings, with the fold-lines depicting a larger grid of which the strip, or section, of paper is only one part. Denoting denial of the artist's hand, or artist's choice, the grid is the most typical Pop ordering system. It has the function of, but more significantly, the look, of mechanization. And mechanization is the corollary of the seriality so ubiquitous in Pop (for example, Warhol's *White Car Burning Twice*, *Flowers*, *Marilyn*). According to Barthes, seriality introduces the element of time in paintings[10], and in this case, the seriality is acted out. It is not only etched into the paper, and in the virtual grid surrounding it, but in the repetition of the movements of the performer. With each repetition, the movement becomes more codified, more pose-like, and more eligible for division into discreet units analogous to the frames of a film (like the units of the paper). Each pose has the potential to be a separate photographic image. The performer is the engine driving an instrument: the paper strip. Conversely, the paper shape is a tool whose function it is to animate the performer. Paper and performer have a symbiotic relationship, setting each other into motion within the same tableau – a term that brings us back to Pop. And Pop is the right reference, because the tableau in question is itself made up of a serial accretion of flattened *images* ("not produced, but immediately reproduced: reproduction is the very being of Modernity"[11]).

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[9] Barthes p.25

[10] Barthes p. 24

> Now the fact, in mass culture, is no longer an element of the natural world; what appears as fact is the stereotype: what everyone sees and consumes. Pop art finds the unity of its representations in the radical conjunction of these two forms, each carried to extremes: the stereotype and the image. Tahiti is a fact, insofar as a unanimous and persistent public opinion designates this site as a collection of palm trees, of flowers worn over one ear, of long hair, sarongs, and languorous, enticing glances (Liechtenstein's *Little Aloha*). In this way Pop Art produces certain radical images: by dint of being an image, the thing is stripped of any symbol.[12]

Like Liechtenstein's Tahiti, Byars' Japan is stereotype as "fact": the site of solemn ceremonies, hand-made paper, precision and clean lines. Although Byars' performer has been known to wear traditional Japanese costume, and the performance to take place in a Zen Buddhist monastery (*1,000 Foot Chinese Paper*), in more secular spaces the performer wears a nun's habit or an ostrich feather costume. The image is still Japanese. The paper, the sparseness, the introspection and effort overwhelm other cultural references. The performer is iconic - anything but a person. With her costume and disembodied actions, she lacks any interiority, just an all-consuming relationship to the task. As in Pop portraiture, her identity is presented as remote, beautiful, flat and iconic. The effect is glamorous. Lucinda Childs' splendid white ostrich-feather coverall conflates opera with Hollywood: Papagena by Edith Head. The suggestion is of a pristine creature from another planet, or at least, from another species. But white was in. For example, the covers of consecutive issues of Vogue from the same period featured spacey, head-to-toe outfits of white: A long white wig, silver eye-shadow, white boots and a fluffy white Norwegian mink cloche with matching hat[13]: Like Minimalism and Pop, these performances are in dialogue with fashion.

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[11] Barthes p. 24

[12] Barthes p. 26

Task

The “casting” of, or collaboration with, Judson Church Theater member Lucinda Childs as the protagonist of the *Mile Long Paper Walk*, underscores the identification of these performances with dance. The fact that women perform in almost all of the works of this series automatically makes the pieces more dance-like; more like solos extracted from a longer traditional ballet. The nature of the movements aligns the performances with the task-oriented dance of the Judson Church Theater, but here the task-oriented-ness is reframed within the larger historical relationship of the female dancer to pictorial representation. Norman Bryson writes about the significance of the female dancer:

> In late-nineteenth-century Paris, dancers and dancing became crucial subjects for representation because the figure of the female dancer, in particular, came to embody social and sexual processes at the heart of the modern city. Since modernity involved the expansion of spectacle and the generalization of the relation of seer/seen to an increasing number of social domains, the female dancer could stand for modernity as a whole; the dancer figured forth, in intense and specialized form, the essential social relation of observer to observed now to be found in all aspects of metropolitan life. If urban culture distributed power in the visual field between those flâneur-subjects who possessed the keys to the city and those who featured only as the objects for the flâneur’s gaze, the female dancer iconized the system, standing for the truth of the visual (and sexual) economy as a whole.[14]

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[13] Vogue, October 1966

[14] Bryson p. 66

If the units delineated by the paper fold-lines are analogous to the frames of a film, then what the film depicts is the embodied relationship described above. And it was exactly this seer/seen configuration that Judson dancers were bringing to light, and subverting. The Judson Church Theater's innovations came out of a relationship of the members with Merce Cunningham, and indirectly, John Cage. A student of Cunningham, Lucinda Childs' original interest was acting, and generally speaking, her work focuses on the solo performance. Childs' early work is distinct from the other Judson Church members by its theatricality. Using small props, facial expressions and spoken word, it is more figural. Her later work abandons the use of objects and focuses on an overarching, career-long preoccupation with repetition, including what it does to gesture, to rhythm and to geometry. Collaboration is a constant throughout her career, working with Robert Rauschenberg, Sol Lewitt, Robert Wilson, Philip Glass, and Robert Dunn. Examples of her work include the 1964 piece *Carnation*, in which a woman turns into a flower through the manipulation of objects like curlers and sponges. Some pieces feature tape-recorded monologues, like the radical Hollis Framptonesque *Street Dance*, of 1964, in which spectators looking out a window observe Childs and another dancer blending into what was happening on the street, and pointing things out in the surrounding environment. The latter is synchronized to a tape recording heard by the spectators looking out the window describing in detail what is being pointed to by the dancers in the street below. A work of 1963, called *Pastime*, involved Childs moving stretchable cloth with her legs while seated on a table.[15]

Like Minimalism, the Judson Church Theatre was not a homogeneous entity. It was also short-lived, active for only about four years ending in 1966. So for Childs, the collaboration with Byars in the 1965 *Paper Walk* came at the height of her involvement with the group. Her last Judson project was called *Vehicle*. Performed in 1966, it was an "art and technology" piece made collaboratively with Bell Laboratories for a show called *Nine Evenings: Theater and Engineering*. Given the function of objects in Judson performances, it's easy to see how this would be congruent with the previous work. The unfolding paper in the *Paper Walk* is, after all, technological, as are the object-catalysts appearing in Judson performances.

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[15] Banes p. 133-147

Childs partner in the *Vehicle* project was Yvonne Rainer, the best-known theorist of the Judson Church Theater. Rainer's 1964 piece *Room Service*, was generated by a game structure. Performers were required to move large pieces of furniture, most notably mattresses. Their resulting "natural" movements, uninflected by costumes or other expressive mannerisms, constituted the dance. The idea was to demystify movement by affirming the object-ness of the props as generators of action: Moving a mattress is a self-contained act, requiring no artistic justification.[16] . To paraphrase Meyer Schapiro, the efficient is identified as the essential.[17] The generating principles that Rainer attributes to her 1966 piece *Trio A* apply equally to Byars', although with completely different results. Rainer speaks of "smoothness", in which no moment of the work becomes any more important than any other. Energy expended is commensurate with what is required to perform a task, and a phrase takes the length of time it really takes. Time is full scale. Tasks require repetition, and within them, repetitive gestures. This, in the service of utility, and conversely, in the service of the inescapable rhetorical dimension of Rainer's work. The repetition brings the audience to a heightened awareness of gestural detail that could be equally perceived as working against "smoothness" and towards a perception of the gesture as static image. And with the *Performable Objects* this is only exaggerated by the costumes, performance-spaces, and the nature of the objects. Rainer's aim was to make dance "less fancy". Byars' to make it more fancy.

Technology

An attribute that encourages both of these conflicting aspirations, in *Room Service* as well as *Mile-Long Paper Walk* or *1,000-Foot Chinese Paper*, is an emotional tone of focused concentration, of effort, and endurance. It is a configuration that signifies labor, prescient to the Post-Minimalist notion of process, observable in its nascent form in Robert Morris' *Box With the Sound of its Own Making* of 1961. But in what kind of labor are the performers engaged?

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[16] Banes p.43

[17] from a 1936 essay quoted by James Meyer called "The Nature of Abstract Art": "After the World War, the qualities of the machine as a rigid constructed object, and the qualities of its products and the engineer's design suggested various forms to painters…The essential was identified with the efficient, the unit with the standardized element…drawing with the ruled or mechanically traced line…and design with the model of the instructing plan." p.218

The sizes of the Byars' objects are small, and delicate. They're on the floor, and require careful manipulation by a perpetually bent-over performer. Rainer's are larger than the performer, heavy, and need to be dragged or carried. And if Rainer's dancers are cast as house-movers, Byars' are craftsmen, patiently laying down tiles. The evocation of effort, in fact and image, is a counterpoint to the automatic, ready-made quality of the decision-process the objects stimulate: The performers are not just machines, they are hard working machines. In designating objects as catalysts for human motion, these pieces express an impulse widespread in avant-garde literature, for example, in the writings of Raymond Roussel, E.A. Poe, Henry James and Allain Robbe-Grillet: Broadly speaking, people turn into objects and objects into people. This inversion gets to the heart of instrumentality, depicting both alienation and its corollary, a dreamlike freedom.

Because of the pared-down relationships they contain, the *Performable Objects* are more succinctly technological than some of the elaborate multi-media experiments of the Art and Technology movement that, for example, debuted in Judson Hall in the mid-sixties. In referring to Art and Technology I don't specifically mean the Experiments in Art and Technology collective, with which Childs and Rainer performed in 1966, but the broader movement of multimedia experimentation, expanded cinema and new image-making techniques taking hold globally at that time. One characteristic of Art and Technology is the emphasis on collaboration, not just across artistic disciplines, but with scientists and engineers, and often with corporate support. Art and Technology comes from the legacy of dada-ist performance, more often than not sublimated into techno-fetishism. In general terms, it takes an emotive, critical impulse and, in a sprit of utopian idealism, reifies it in technological form, sometimes in a corporate context (for example, the Experiments in Art and Technolgy group's ambitious Osaka Expo '72 Pepsi Pavilion). Projects such as these recast productivist aspirations most clearly articulated at the Bauhaus of the 20's, with hybrid motives of artistic expressiveness, social justice and profit. Although his medium is completely different, in the late 60's Byars, like his techie peers, collaborates with non-art institutions and participates in the Art and Technology scene. In 1969 he does a project as part of LACMA's Art and Technology show with the Hudson Institute, a think tank. His work is also presented in electronic art exhibitions. In one performance of this era he passes out cards that say, " Mr. Byars is the artist in the Pentagon", which causes rumors to spread that he works for the CIA.

Time

In the context of other time-based work, by Fluxus, or their associates like Nam Jun Paik and Byars' friend Joseph Beuys, Byars' is an anomaly: the aggressive aspect of dada, present in the others, is missing in Byars. He has more in common with Yoko Ono, but his closest precedent is surrealist Philipe Soupeault, who a performance in the 20's in which he released balloons into the air that had the names of famous men written on them. (In 1972 Byars performed *Calling out of German Names* on top of a building at Documenta 5; over the years he performed several pieces in which he released balloons). In looking at the *Performable Objects* it's interesting to consider the conflation of performance and electronic media happening in the early 60's. For example, Nam Jun Paik, coming from a background in music, moved towards a practice in video through Cage-ian experiments that subverted conventional musical performance techniques. His pieces centered on different forms of risk: After early works in which he destroyed musical instruments, his *Serenade for Alison*, performed by Alison Knowles in 1962, was about exposure, in a way similar to Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* of 1964. Paik's collaborations with Charlotte Moorman, including *Opera Sextronique* of 1967, or *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* of 1969, elaborated an attack on "the body as an emblem and social surface" and "destabilized the institutional authority of performance."[18] This coincided with his increasing knowledge of electronics, put to the service of reconfiguring TV's and experimenting with the 1/2" Video recorder, released by Sony in 1965. His performances ultimately gave way to a practice centered on time and image.

In the same years film was expanding its boundaries and intersecting with performance and dance. Stan Van DeBeek's *Move Movies* of 1963 placed performers with movie cameras attached to their bodies in front of a projection screen, projecting images on each other, the audience and the screen. This, and other "meta-film installations treat the elements of the filmmaking process as the means to explore the moving image in terms of light, space and process."[19] Materialist films were turning the material of film into narrative, like George Landow's *Film in which there Appear Sprocket Holes, Edge Lettering and Dirt*

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[18] Hanhardt p.23

[19] Hanhardt p.96

Particles of 1965. Others such as Michael Snow, in *Wavelength* (1967) and Andy Warhol, in *Blow Job*, turn time itself into the material ingredient.

It's easy to see *how Mile Long Paper Walk* is really a film reconfigured, or more precisely, an analogue for film. As mentioned before, the folded paper is the celluloid, the units of the folded sections are frames. The audience watches for the length of the time it takes to unfold the paper in attentive silence. The narrative, apart from the materialist agenda of the paper, comes from the image of the costumed performer. The repetitiveness of her gestures and lack of engagement with the audience creates an illusion of seamlessnes and impermeability. Byars is presenting a mise-en-scene, and the space he creates is cinematic. In 1963 Jack Smith makes the film, *Normal Love*, in which he parodies the glittery surface of Hollywood B-Movies. He pulls the surface away, reconfigures it, and presents it separately as a flattened image. The *Mile Long Paper Walk* is a pictorial tableau composed of the same glittery substance: narrative illusion.

Picture

In his 1979 essay about the show *Pictures* that featured Jack Goldstein, Robert Longo and Cindy Sherman, among others, Douglas Crimp traces the transformation of the theatrical to the pictorial from Minimalism to the postmodern film and photography of the late 70's. He starts with a reference to Michael Fried's famous critique of Minimalism and its inherent theatricality, a theatricality contingent on its position between painting and sculpture, and its "preoccupation with time-more precisely, with the *duration of experience*."[20] Crimp goes on to say that Fried's fears were well founded, since temporality took on a greater importance during the seventies:

> The mode that was to become exemplary in the seventies was performance-and not only that narrowly defined activity called performance art, but all those works that were constituted *in a situation* and *for a duration* by the artist or

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[20] Crimp p.77

> the spectator or both together. It can be said quite literally of the art of the seventies that “you had to be there”.[21]

Crimp’s thesis is that this theatricality was transformed, “and reinvested in the pictorial image” by the group of artists who eventually came to be in the *Pictures* show. Their work (like Jeff Wall’s – another artist who springs to mind in this context), is not about the artist performing the work, but it is rather the presentation of an event. In each case, the narrative being depicted is fictional, and the tableau or picture is a spatio-temporal fragment, like a quotation, but oddly self-contained. I would argue that the same is true of Byars’ *Performable Objects*. The size and shape of the objects governs the timing of the performance. But the mise-en-scene seems like it’s been extracted from a longer story from another world, or at last from a film about another world. If Sherman’s work quotes Hollywood clichés, Byars’ quotes its glamour and “mood of religion”[22].

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[21] Crimp p.77

[22] “The mood of religion is art’s essential zone” Clive Bell

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