

Marina Abramović and Ulay

In Dialogue with Heidi Grundmann

Ulay: When we met each other, there was a strong feeling for many things – including a love-feeling: we had a relationship. Out of this relationship and out of the situation each of us was in at the time of our meeting – it was actually a point where it was possible for her and me to live and work together. From that moment on we decided for a change in our existence, we both left our fixed place of living – Marina used to live in Belgrade and I in Amsterdam – we decided to be very mobile. It is not a hippie idea and it is not a nomad idea, it has to do with the intensity achieved by permanent motion. And this intensity goes through the whole of our work too.

Marina Abramović: As far as the performances are concerned, each of them has different stages: first you have the idea then you begin the preparations, finding the space, finding out about the technical situation, possibilities for recording the performance and so on – everything you need for the realization of your piece. Then, when you have the fixed time and place, you start to perform, by entering into your own mental and physical construction. We start in a very rational state with the idea to bring into life our own concept. But after that rational beginning there comes the moment when you start to be your own piece, where there is a complete identification with the concept of the piece and at the same time less and less consciousness of rational control. It is somehow the situation where you cannot remember later what was happening. In that moment you are absolutely doing what you are doing, but you don't think, you are not separate any more from your own idea. And that point is very strange – I cannot speak about it. We come to the end (of a piece) and the end for each of us is always different, it is completely open and personal.

Ulay: Because we are two individuals, a male and a female, the physical and psychological nature of the performance can make greater demands on me than on Marina or vice versa. It is obvious that we do not want to demonstrate similarity. At that stage of less consciousness, which probably is the most important stage in a performance, you get to the point of confrontation with your own limitations and that point is different for Marina and me. We did many pieces where we worked in opposite directions, where we could not even face each other, where we could not control each other – I think that there is a total dividing process. The spontaneity which is an important factor in our work comes about because we do not rehearse or repeat a performance.

Abramović: All our statements have some kind of physical nature, they are very simple, they never explain anything, they are not theoretical, they are statements where I can say I walk to the wall, I touch the wall, I am hitting the wall with my body, that is my part. Ulay's part is running into the wall, touching it, hitting it, the same thing ... we start in some kind of synchronised similarity, we can say that rationally in the beginning ... and then we come to the point where each of us functions alone. In that moment there

is no contact any more, even in a piece like the hair piece, in that moment, after seven or ten hours, that connection with the hair exists formally, its two bodies doing the same thing, but inside there are separations ... and after the performance we feel completely empty, really no feelings, absolutely away from everything and when we are confronted with the video, photographs, there is always something missing, no documentation can give you the feeling of what it was, because it cannot be described, it is so direct, in the documentation, the intensity is missing, the feelings that were there. And I think that that is why performance is such a strange thing – the performance you do in fixed time and in that fixed time you see the whole process and you see the disappearing of the process at the same moment and afterwards you don't have anything, you only have the memory.

Excerpts from a dialogue with Marina Abramović and Ulay, originally published in: 'Marina Abramović/Ulay: Relation/Works: 3 Performances', catalogue Galerie Krinzinger, Innsbruck, 1978, unnumbered.

Fig. Marina Abramović/Ulay, 'Light/Dark', 1977 (video still).