PROMPTING PERFORMANCE: INTRODUCING PERFORMANCE ART TO THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

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In most American high schools, the art education curriculum is almost exclusively focused on developing the studio skills of students. This project explores performance art as a means of creatively expressing concepts outside of the use of traditional art tools. Performance art is a highly versatile and largely misunderstood practice that can be utilized to encourage and empower high school students to express themselves physically, using their bodies as the medium. While the incorporation of performance art into the classroom has been discussed by other theorists, it is rarely put into practice. Through this project, I created a web-based framework that will facilitate the incorporation of performance art into the high school art curriculum and appeal to students who exist in a world of advanced and omnipresent technology. The supporting paper includes a study of several literary sources discussing the following: the historical and contemporary cultural relevance of performance art, the practice of teaching performance art, the behavior of the high school student, and the use of technology in the classroom. The final web-based framework demonstrates the value of media exchange and communication through the Internet by providing students with video

examples of performance art as performed by their peers, and opens up possibilities for

making meaningful connections with their personal lives through performance art.

CHAPTER 1: PROMPTING PERFORMANCE: INTRODUCING PERFORMANCE ART TO THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

If today, you were to ask a high school student about performance art, that student will likely deliver an answer that has been largely affected by their experiences with pop culture. The student may reference Laney Boggs, the outlandish and misunderstood heroine from *She's All That,* the teen movie version of Pygmalion where the artistic female lead engages in bizarre artistic performances that are never explained or thoughtfully critiqued (Levy, Weinstein, Weinstein, Gladstein, Gibgot, & Iscove, 1999). Another student might mention Maureen, the provocative and outspoken activist from *Rent*—both movie and musical—who relies on shock value and colorful song-and-dance routines with television sets to convey a point (Columbus, De Niro, Rosenthal, Radcliffe, & Barnathan, 2005). A considerably rarer student might bring up the British situation comedy *Spaced*, in which one of the characters is an eccentric conceptual artist who exhibits the stereotypical characteristics of an exaggerated, tormented artist (Barclay, Orsten, Edwards, & Park, 2001).

In each of these examples, the characters capture a sliver of what performance art can entail: *provocation, costume, multimedia integration*, and *questions about identity*. However, these representations are largely stereotypical, and because of their place in popular culture and the lack of sufficient instruction on performance art in high school classrooms, the portrayal of performance artists in popular culture becomes the widely accepted idea of performance art amongst high school students. These stereotypes contribute to the misconception that performance art is a shallow cry for attention; a one-dimensional, often "easy" act designed solely to shock (S. Bishop, personal communication, October 15, 2010).

In reality, performance art can be a very versatile medium, utilized in art that is as bombastic as full-length theatrical productions, such as Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1896), or as subtle as the quick "walking games" featured in Allan Kaprow's *Happenings* (1959). Performance art is art that makes use of the human body as the primary medium. Practitioners of performance art work with their own bodies, identities, histories, and personal experiences to create work that is highly personal and completely engaging (Carlson, 2003). High school is a suitable arena for the introduction of performance art because it is a hotbed of growth, social turmoil, and questions about identity. High school students are frustrated with the restrictions placed on them, and are especially concerned with the opinions of their peers (Farrell, Peguero, Lindsey, & White, 1988, and Coleman, 1959). It is important that teachers find a way to successfully introduce performance art into the high school classroom not only to derail the widespread misconceptions of it as a superficial and shallow medium, but also because it is an engaging, versatile and lively medium that can be used to encourage and empower students to express themselves physically, using their bodies as the medium. In most American high schools, the art education curriculum is primarily focused on using drawing and painting to create a physical image. While these studio skills are important, the curriculum must be expanded to allow students practice in a variety of media forms that best support the ideas they are attempting to express. Performance art can be used to stimulate thoughtful conversation regarding the social issues students face every day, and empower students to physically work through the oppressions and frustrations they experience (Garoian, 1999).

This leads to the big question that began this research: How can I facilitate the introduction of performance art to high school students? This question then led to several other questions that would guide my research. If so few American high schools include any performative methods in the art classroom, how can I make the incorporation of performance more manageable for teachers and more appealing to students? What are some ways I can more thoroughly engage high school students, whose attentions have become so inconstant due to the constant stimulation of new forms of technology and instant media gratification?

To answer these questions, I have investigated a variety of literary sources surrounding the history of performance art, its current cultural significance, means of using it for the development of artistic growth, and adolescent behavior. Through this research, I created *Prompted Performance,* a web-based framework that will facilitate the incorporation of performance art into the high school art curriculum and appeal to students who exist in a world of advanced and omnipresent technology (Shutt, 2011). *Prompted Performance* serves to provide high school students examples of other student performances as well as a platform to share their own performances, as precipitated by a series of brief *prompts* posted on the website.

Limitations

The area of performance art in the high school setting is one that is largely unexplored, and as such, there are few examples from which we can draw inspiration. Due to time limitations, this particular project has not been tested in a classroom, and its potential for success cannot be sufficiently assessed. Additionally, due to the controversial subject matter performance art often encounters, not all programs will find

it appropriate to implement it in their curriculum. However, through sharing this project with other high school art teachers, I hope to spread interest in incorporating performance art into the high school classroom and encourage further study in the area of performance art.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to properly inform the framework for introducing performance art to high school students, I performed an extensive literature review to orient myself with the history of performance art and the ideas behind it, as explained by its innovators and participants. Through my research, I have developed a thorough understanding of performance art by exploring its history and contemporary cultural significance, as explained by Goldberg, Carlson, and Kaprow. To connect this information to the psyche of the high school student, I gathered a list of sources that focused on the behavior of the high school student and related it to my own experience as a student teacher in a high school classroom, and investigated how teaching performance art will engage and empower the high school learner through the literature of Garoian.

Historical Context

The events that led to the definition and popularity of performance art are woven into a winding, tenebrous path. In *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present,* RoseLee Goldberg (1988), known as "La Grande Dame of performance art history," (O'Dell, 1998, p. xi) discusses at length the history of what we now call *performance art* as utilized by the *Italian Futurists, Russian Constructivists, Dadaists, Surrealists,* and those influenced by the *Bauhaus* style. These movements utilized performative elements for a number of reasons; the foremost being to surpass the limits of *formal art*, which consisted mainly of painting and drawing. Each movement used performance to shock and stir the audience, to search for something fresh and new, and to feel the bite of potential failure (and in some cases, arrest). Performance was used by those who sought to create work that used life as its central focus and explore "the realm of play

and pleasure in an art which observes less and less the traditional limitations of making art objects," leaving behind the barriers of the museum and gallery (Goldberg, 1988, p. 9). Central themes of performance art through its history are provocation, technology, the *new*, integration of artforms, the human body, the audience, and the everyday life.

Italian Futurism was bulleted by risk, provocation, machine, simultaneity, and elements of the everyday life. It brought about the beginnings of performance art as we now know it through provocation and satire, as is particularly embodied in Alfred Jarry's "Ubu Roi" (1856). The production was a satire reflecting on greed, power, and corruption, and incited violent responses within the audience. Its extreme controversy made it famous, and influenced Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, author of the Futurist manifesto *Le Figaro* and father of the Futurist movement to present his own satire, *Roi Bombance* in 1909. The scandals that became of these and other like productions soared in popularity, and embodied the Futurist principles of speed, technology and the new, and the vehement rejection of the past.

According to Goldberg, performance was "the surest means of disrupting a complacent public," and "was the most direct means of forcing an audience to take note of their ideas" (1988, p. 14). The passionate followers of *Futurism* were willing to risk everything for the sake of getting a rise out of the audience, and specifically worked to outrage spectators. Marinetti encouraged this attack, as he proved in a manifesto on the 'Pleasure of Being Booed,' which urged Futurists to shun applause for its complacency, and to actively seek ways to incense the audience. Frank Wedekind, whose name has experienced a rebirth in contemporary society due to the fame of *Spring Awakening*, a musical based on his wildly scandalous novel from the early 1900s, was another artist

who reveled in provocation with his controversial plays in 1901: "Der Marquis von Keith" and "König Nicolò, oder So Ist das Leben" ("King Nicolo, or Such is Life"). According to Goldberg, Wedekind was fearless, and used performance "as a cutting edge against society" (p. 52). In Berlin*, Dada* was particularly popular for its provocation and confrontation of taboo subjects in light of the war. Of its riotous effrontery, slogans were spread throughout the city, boldly proclaiming, "Dada kicks you in the behind and you like it!" (p.69).

Technology was another point of interest in the early traces of performance art, and was often accompanied by the integration of artforms. Russian Constructivist Nikolai Foregger's *Mechanical Dances* (1923) called for the use of the human body as a system of biomechanics. Avant-garde musical compositions accompanied notable spectacles that presented a combination of music, visually lush costume, dance, and theater. Poets, musicians, and artists collaborated to create new and fresh art, as conveyed in Alexei Kruchenykh, Mikhail Matyushin, and Kasimir Malevich's *Victory Over the Sun* (1913). In 1924, The Surrealist production *Relâche* represented a complete and full integration of work by "the author, the dancer, the screen, the stage, [and] all…means of 'presenting a performance" (Goldberg, 1988, p. 95). In the 1910s, the *Cabaret Voltaire*, notorious summit of the *Dada* movement featured similar collaborations, and Oskar Schlemmer of the *Bauhaus* stage was known for incorporating technology and machine-like costumes in his *Mechanical Ballets* (1922)*.*

In the 1960s, the literal idea of performance art—using the human body as the primary medium—was expanded upon from its uses in the *Mechanical Dances* and *Mechanical Ballets* by performers like Anna Halprin and the Judson Dance Group, who

often exercised very simple bodily actions extremely slowly, or repeated many times.

Yves Klein took the idea of using the body as a tool quite literally, coating nude models

in paint and dragging their wet bodies around canvas, creating "living brushes". Other

performers involved themes of the audience and identity in the work, such as Allan

Kaprow, whose *Happenings* relied on the participation of the spectators through a

series of seemingly meaningless actions. Artist Dan Graham elaborated on identity and

the relationship between the audience and the artist through combining the role of

active performer and passive spectator in one and the same person in *Two*

Consciousness Projection (1973), and Eleanor Antin used performance to examine her

own identity through conjuring new ones in pieces like *The King of Solana Beach*

(1975).

Today, performance art encompasses the same ideals of its history—

provocation, technology, the *new*, integration of artforms, the human body, identity, the

audience, and the everyday life (Sollins, Ortega, & Wright, 2009). Laurie Anderson's "O

Superman" (1981) encompasses the marriage of technology, music, and visual art,

evoking the fresh, collaborative efforts of Kruchenykh, Malevich, and Matyushin. Allan

Kaprow's simple actions are echoed in Miranda July, Harrell Fletcher, and Yuri Ono's

Learning to Love You More (2002), a public art project that ascribes a series of

assignments to which artists would often submit performative responses. Nikki S. Lee's

assimilation with the spectator in adapting the identities of various cultures in *Projects*

(1997-2001) recalls the persona-identity studies of Eleanor Antin. Performance has also

engendered the work of artists who dwell in the veins of popular culture, such as Lady

Gaga and the Blue Man Group, who both adopt personas and display these personas

through music, costume, and theatricality. Though Lady Gaga and the Blue Man Group may not necessarily be as gallery-friendly as Antin or Anderson, it is important to recognize the impact performance has on many different artists, and that just because the focus of popular music artists tends to be entertainment should not mean that there is a lesser artistic value in their performances. Similarly, it is also important to realize the impact an entertainment artist has on his or her audience, which is generally on the larger side, and often includes high school students.

The Adolescent Learner

After defining performance art and its cultural relevance, I must consider how it applies to the high school student. To understand the mentality of the high school student, I researched studies on adolescent behavior and learning styles of the high school student, and supported these explorations through my own experiences teaching in the high school classroom. My study supports that students in high school are going through a difficult period of physical and emotional transformation, and to cope with this transformation, they struggle against the bonds of childhood and desperately seek acceptance and approval of their peers (Farrell, Peguero, Lindsey, & White, 1988). Being in a state of physical and chemical limbo where one is no longer a child but not yet an adult can incite feelings of frustration and powerlessness, filling students with the need for release.

During my experience as a student teacher in a high school, I was met with great concern from my friends over the mentality of a high school student. High school students are perceived to be very resistant to authority, and more headstrong than younger children. This perception is often supported and explained in literature. In a

study conducted by Farrell, Peguero, Lindsey, and White, high school students determined to be at-risk were interviewed about their difficulties with the high school system (1988). The results of this study pinpoints several common issues teenaged students deal with in school. Students often feel oppressed and "silenced by people and institutions of the dominant culture" (p. 490). Their experiences reflect boredom and pressure, specifically related to three categories: social pressure, school pressure, and school boredom. Social pressure generally concerns competing identities in the contexts of sexual, familial, peer and street cultural, all directly linked to the students' social placement in high school (p. 494). Students often struggle with the demands of their parents and teachers, which often conflict with the students' desired lifestyles and the lifestyles promoted by their peers and friends. According to this study, high school students are far more concerned with their identities as social creatures than they are with being identified as a student.

James S. Coleman, a sociologist who worked closely with high school students during the 1950s, and whose studies largely apply to high school students in contemporary society, also discusses the subject of identity conflict. Coleman points out that the palpable disconnect between adolescents and adult society inevitably leads to an increased disinterest in formal education (1959). After studying a school in the Midwest, Coleman deduced that high school students tend to care more about good looks and being an athlete than they do about getting good grades and being smart. Adolescents, Coleman claims are more focused on material objects that represent popularity, or interests shared by their peers, rather than school-related matter. This seems to be a timeless yearning among high school students—the desire to "be cool."

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This is further by more recent, scientific studies measuring the effects of peers in students' academic achievement (Lin, 2010). The vast majority of students are more likely to be influenced by their intimate social circles than they are by other aspects of school. Adolescents count on the respect and approval of their peers, and the choices they make tend to be heavily influenced by the opinions of friends (Lin, 2010, p. 834).

One of the major reasons for the profound importance placed on peer acceptance is the common bond of growth and transformation adolescents share. High school students are enduring some of the most difficult times of their lives, passing through various rites of maturity—constructed by both nature and society (Hawkes, 2010, p. 201). For some of these rites of maturity, the adults who are supposed to guide adolescents through the difficult benchmarks of life relinquish these responsibilities, indirectly forcing adolescents to seek guidance and affirmation elsewhere, usually through peer acceptance. The tumult of these rites of maturity and hormonal changes inevitably lead to feelings of frustration, angst, and tightly contained energy within the high school student, creating a need for emotional and physical release. Introducing performance art will offer a release, giving students the opportunity to voice their opinions and develop ideas related to their personal identities, while physically working out their issues in a creative and meaningful way. Garoian is largely in favor if incorporating performance art into the studio classroom, stating that doing so will enable "students to intervene and reclaim their bodies from oppressive academic practices that assume students' personal memories and cultural histories to be insignificant to identify construction and new mythic representations" (1999, p. 57).

Contextualization of Literature on Performance Art and Adolescent Behavior

Combining both the behavioral studies of the high school learner and a review on the contemporary cultural significance of performance art, I have come to the question of how teaching performance art will engage and empower the high school learner. Several sources provide support that incorporating performance art into the high school classroom will encourage students to confront issues of identity, physically demonstrate artistic concepts through play and the everyday life, open up to different tools for art making, explore the relationships between the artist and audience and relate it to the relationships they share with their peers in an everyday high school setting.

As was explored earlier in the review of its history as presented by Goldberg, performance art is peppered with investigations of the "everyday life." These investigations encourage us to examine our identities, and how we are sometimes defined by our routines and actions. The everyday life in art explores how the small things we do every day influence the choices we make in our lives and art. Kaprow's *Happenings* are examples of art that depicts the small, playful things we may do with relative regularity and minimal consciousness, such as the way in which one might attempt to avoid treading on the cracks in the sidewalk, or step on only the blue tiles in a hallway. In *Just Doing,* Kaprow discussed many of the experimental exercises he practiced with friends, contemporaries, and students (1997). In his *shadow games*, Kaprow and a musician friend, Jean-Charles Francois partook in small diversions on walks where one would walk in front of the other without saying a word, and the other would have to make sure he would always step on part of the other person's shadow. They faced some challenges, such as the occasion where the sun would cause the

person's shadow to be in front of him, and changes in terrain, where the shadow would

be cast on boulders and in ponds, and the times of day where the sun was high in the

sky, causing the shadows to be so small that the walker and the follower were

practically on top of each other. Should the follower miss stepping on the walker's

shadow (as was wont to frequently happen), the follower would crack two stones

together in his hands, and the walker and the follower would switch roles, an occasion

that occurred rather frequently.

Many of Kaprow's works require that all spectators became participants

(Rosenthall, 2009). His piece *Maneuvers* (1976) was comprised of a series of ways to

walk inside a doorway along with another person. It is a very open-ended procedure,

and because of this, it leaves a lot of room for the subjectivity of the players, who cannot

help but allow their natural biases to affect their actions (Hindman, 1979). This work

relies on the personal experiences of the players, and focuses on everyday human

behavior through examining everyday activities. These are crucial areas for discussion

in the high school classroom, because they encourage students to question their own

behaviors and choices. As was conveyed through the review on the behavior of the high

school learner, many adolescent students are focused primarily on how they are

perceived by their peers. Through utilizing performance art to examine their personal

habits and the reasons behind their daily activities, students will gain a better

understanding of their own identities and how they are shaped by their everyday lives.

Earlier, I discussed how the beginnings of performance art were characterized by

provocation and *the taboo*. Many of the early performances were seen as public acts of

defiance, sometimes considered violent in their fervor. It is extremely important to have

a conversation with students about the controversial nature of some performance art, and establish rules for what will and will not be acceptable given the classroom environment. Students may draw inspiration from the more shocking pieces of performance art, and while it is important for the teacher to encourage creative thinking, it is also necessary to talk with the student about what must be adjusted to be appropriate and safe for the high school environment.

In addition to providing the opportunity for a rich exploration of identity, incorporating performance art into the high school classroom will give students the opportunity to work in a variety of media that transcends the traditional means of drawing, painting, sculpture, and photography. One of the reasons why performance art had such an impact on the shaping of art in the twentieth century was that it forged completely new ideas on what art is, and how often it is merged with other disciplines and can be composed by one or a vast multitude of artists (Goldberg, 2009a). A major benefit of using performance as a medium is that it opens the door to other forms of media, especially based on its need for documentation. In a discussion panel organized by Goldberg for the defense of photographic documentation, Goldberg confronts the vehement declarations of artists who discount the importance of a visual record. Goldberg states that while we may never have been in attendance at the Battle of Waterloo or the French Revolution, that doesn't mean we cannot have a firm understanding of the events that occurred their, further enhanced by photographic documentation. The documentary photograph is important because it is a captured moment of live, active performance, and proves that the work *happened* (Goldberg, 2009b).

While there are some performance artists who feel that performance art is about the exact moment in which the art is being performed and cannot exist out of that moment, there are other artists who so strongly favor audio-visual documentation that they believe the recorded result *is* the art. Johannes Birringer is one such artist who firmly asserts that his work was not made for the moment, but for several forms of continuity (Birringer, 2000). He has audio-visual records of almost all of his performances and workshops, and regularly posts evidence of his work on his website. The integration of video, sound recording, and online documentation is being frequently practiced in the Visual arts, resulting in a banishment of the static and an embracing of the new (Hausler & Schweeger, 2001). This opens up a variety of possibilities for student work, and gives students the freedom and responsibility of choosing how to best present their art.

One of my main objectives for introducing performance art to the high school classroom is to provide students with the option of using another means of expression to best convey their messages. In performance art, lines are often blurred between performance art and more traditional forms of art (Kaprow & Lee, 1966). Jackson Pollock is one such example of an artist who blurs the lines between action and product in art. His paintings are largely physical and based in performance, the product dependant on his movements during the making of art. By some, performance art is even considered to be "acting sculpture" (Gaggi, 1986). The wider the variety of visual presentation formats students are exposed to, the more informed their choices for means of expression will be.

Perhaps the deepest connection between art and life the incorporation of performance art will illuminate is the relationship between the artist and the audience. A large part of performance art depends on participation, exploring the social relationships between spectators and the work. By focusing on these relationships and the act of being social, performance art draws closer to the events of everyday life (Bishop, 2006). These events, coupled with and overlapped by the expression of the high school learner's personal experiences, establish a connection between the artist and the spectator, as well as the classmate to his/her peers. Performance art encourages students to examine this connection, as well as the ways in which they might subconsciously perform throughout their day in order to be perceived a certain way by their peers.

Performance art is an important medium for the proper expression of ones own experiences. When we receive any form of media, we immediately synthesize it with traces of our own memory, involuntarily making free associations. This gradually develops into making more gradual connections as we experience and interpret the work through individual points of view (Garoian, 2001b). According to Kaprow, this can an obstacle, for observers of any performance typically and unintentionally come with certain theatrical expectations (1966). Because of this, Kaprow chose to eliminate the audience in his *Happenings*. Kaprow states that the reaction of the audience has become too cliché, and that their presence should be regarded as simply dead space, "no different from a dead area of red paint on a canvas" (1966, p. 103). Through "eliminating the audience," Kaprow makes every spectator part of the work—an active participant of art making. This reinforces the correlation between performance art and

the dynamics of a social high school environment, where every student is a participant in daily performances of life, subconsciously donning regular facades in front of their peers.

In order to successfully perform, one must be willing to risk failure (Rodenbeck, 2003; S. Bishop, personal communication, October 15, 2010). This directly conflicts with the goals of the majority of high school students, who tend to be significantly influenced by close peers in their grade, relying heavily on their social approval (Lin, 2010, p. 828). This must be overcome through a development of trust and understanding between the teacher and the students, and once that trust is established, successful art practice and meaningful learning can take place.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

The goal of this project-in-lieu of thesis is to facilitate the introduction of performance art to high school students through a web-based framework informed and inspired by the ideas of those who support performance art and its instruction. The process for creating this framework involved a thorough study of the works and ideals of Garoian, Goldberg, and Kaprow, and the use of *Wix ®*, a platform for flash websites. The use of the website was determined to have the most potential for a widespread impact on the inclusion of performance art in high schools because of its wide accessibility and technological appeal. Because students thrive in a technological world, the inclusion of technology in the classroom minimizes the distance between students' personal and school experiences (Overby, 2009). Additionally, the use of the Internet
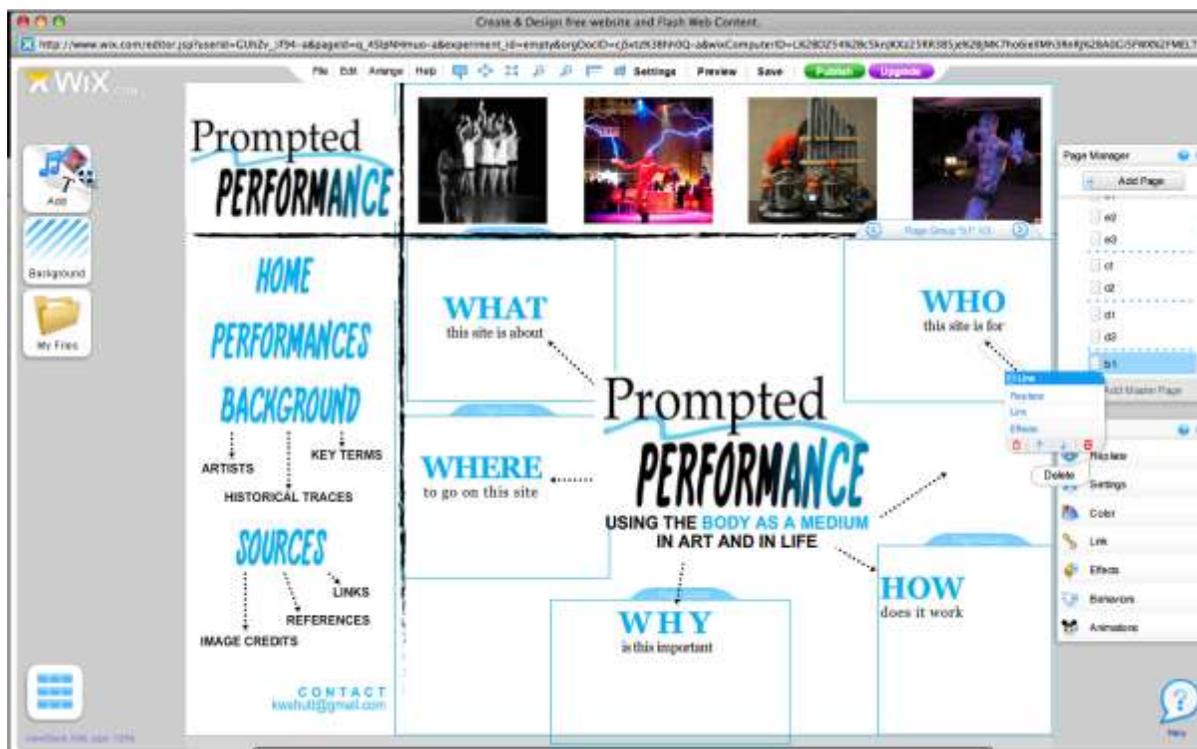

Figure 3-1: In-progress work on the website through Wix ®

allows for immediate and widespread sharing amongst artists who choose to display their work on the web, and allows for easy referencing of other artists through linked websites and search engines. After all, in order to appreciate the visual impact of a performance, students must be able to see it in action through video documentation.

In my 2010 pilot study, I engaged in an in-depth conversation with performance artist and teacher Sheila Bishop about teaching a performance art workshop to a group of high school students (see *Appendix*). Based on my literary research and conversations with Sheila Bishop and members of my thesis committee, Michelle Tillander (Chair), Craig Roland, and Lauren Lake, I determined that an effective introduction to performance art would consist of a series of small exercises. The resulting exercises became the "prompts" of **Prompted Performance**, located at http://www.wix.com/kwshutt/promptingperformance/ , and were heavily informed by the work of contemporary performance artists, such as Allan Kaprow's *Happenings*, Nikki S. Lee's *Projects*, Eleanor Antin's *The King of Solana Hill*, the work of Sheila Bishop, and Jackson Pollack's drip paintings.

Site Transformation

For the website's platform, I chose to use *Wix ®*, a free flash website builder that specialized in graphics-heavy sites and promoted the use of multimedia components such as the use of audio, video, and pictures (Figure 3-1). I searched for performance-themed images on *Flickr ®* with a *Creative Commons ©* license to include on my site, creating a section for image credits so as to avoid any copyright infringement. I selected the images specifically for their relation to performance art activities that might be

prevalent in a high school setting, choosing from a variety of performances that utilized costume, make-up, props, and physical movement.

I also gathered snippets of history from Goldberg's *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* to further inform the viewer of the roots of performance art, labeling it "Historical Traces," for the "history" of performance art is not a specific one; rather, it has gradually formed throughout the years from traces of other art movements (Figure 3-2). I arranged for the viewing of this history to be an animated component of the website; transforming what would otherwise be considered as a dry area of learning into a function that acts much like a digital carousel, whirling by and requiring the viewer to click on the section that interests him/her.

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Figure 3-2: Artist Page and Historical Traces

A slower function was implemented for the "Artists" section; however, I included more images to present the viewer with a better idea of the artists work (albeit through static pictorial documentation) (Figure 3-2). The artists I selected, which included Eleanor Antin, Allan Kaprow, the Blue Man Group, Nick Cave, Laurie Anderson, Lady Gaga, Nikki S. Lee, and Erwin Wurm, were chosen because of their variety of motivations and historical significance. Allan Kaprow was an obvious choice for me

because of his direct relations to the everyday life and the impact his work has had on contemporary artists. I felt that current high school students could appreciate his work for its simplicity and thought, and implement that subtle meaning into the work they create. Erwin Wurm does this as well, but with a higher infusion of humor, which he considers to be an important part of art appreciation. Lady Gaga was an interesting selection because she does not necessarily appeal to highbrow art, but certainly appeals to the mass of pop culture enthusiasts—many of which who are still in high school. Lady Gaga is nearly a peer of high school artists herself, at only 25 years old and a devoted student of art. I feel that her work with persona and costume is no less significant to the high school student's art world than Nick Cave's, because they both reach a wide audience and examine the everyday life and identity through colorful, performative, and fantastic means. Laurie Anderson is an important artist to discuss because she crosses the boundaries of media and incorporates music, technology, and visual effects into her performance, promoting the integration of the arts –much like the Blue Man Group who, like Lady Gaga, have more to offer than just popular entertainment with their inventive instruments and dazzling-yet-cerebral performances.

Nikki S. Lee and Eleanor Antin were among the most critical inclusions because they worked directly with identity, a concept by which high school students are consumed on a daily basis. Both Antin and Lee's work focuses on the artist *becoming* somebody else; donning personas to either fit in ("*Projects*," Nikki S. Lee) or stand out as a character of particularly high status ("*The King of Solana Beach*," Eleanor Antin) (Sollins, Ortega, & Wright, 2009). As was established in the literature review, high school student behavior is characterized primarily by a need to be popular or fit in, and

through that need, high school students regularly create performances of their own, acting in a certain way as to appeal to their peers. The work of the selected artists will intrigue high school students because they provide common ground to which adolescents can relate, encouraging them to express their own frustrations and opinions through performance art.

Performance Prompts

While the background of performance art is certainly an important aspect of the site, the bulk of importance is placed on the submitted performances (as made obvious by its prominence in the *home* menu) (Figure 3-3). While they are supported by a brief history of performance art, titled **Historical Traces**, as well as small biographies on several performance artists and a list of key terms, the performance prompts are truly the "heart" of the framework. The prompts listed on the site include the following actions:

> **Become Somebody Else:** Engage in a brief conversation as somebody else.
>
> **Life Revisited.** Take an activity or chore you do regularly, and after you have done it once, do it again in front of the camera.
>
> **Endurance Art:** Maintain a challenging pose or behavior for a sustained period of time. Consider the changes you experience during and after this challenge.
>
> **Walking Games:** On a walk, perform a short (~ 1 min.) "game." (Ex: Try walking only in shadow. Walk on every other tile. Walk in the straightest line

Figure 3-3: Performances Home Page

possible.) What challenges did you face? How did you feel about your

"audience?" Provide a written response.

Physical Painting: Create a quick (5 - 10 min.) work of visual art using at least 3

different media tools (ex: charcoal rubbing, paint dripping, carving, etc.).

Film the physical act of creating this piece. Write a brief response, and

take a picture of the finished piece to submit with the video of the

performance.

To develop the prompts, I consulted with several sources, including literary,

video, personal experience and personal communication between performance artists.

My conversations with Sheila Bishop played a large part in influencing the ideas behind

several prompts, particularly *Life Revisited* and *Endurance Art* (see *Appendix*). The

prompts were cut in length several times so as to minimize instruction and maximize the

opportunity for artist creativity, modeled after the short instructions of Allan Kaprow and

the artists behind the *Learning to Love You More* project (Kaprow, 1997, & Ono, July, &

Fletcher, 2009). In devising these prompts, I collected a variety of styles that

represented several ends of the performance art spectrum, from theatrical personas in

"Become Somebody Else," to the everyday life in "Life Revisited," to endurance-related

performance activities in "Endurance Art," to spontaneous play in "Walking Games," to

the integration of media in "Physical Painting."

I also offered several suggestions for documentation, including film, photographs,

and reflective passages. While in the contemporary art world there are those who do not

believe that the photograph is in any way representative of the art it documents, I have

constructed this framework as a space where the art is recognized and witnessed

through video documentation. However, I presented "Walking Games" as a prompt that

requires no video documentation because of its spontaneous nature. The only

documentation it requires is a reflective passage telling the viewer what happened.

To acquire performances, I extended invitations to the farthest reaches of my

social life and beyond, utilizing Facebook© to summon all "friends" to participate in one

of the five prompts in a tagged note, and optimistically e-mailing co-workers and

classmates. The responses I received were remarkable in that the artists—many of

whom did not intensively study art—were very enthusiastic about embarking upon new

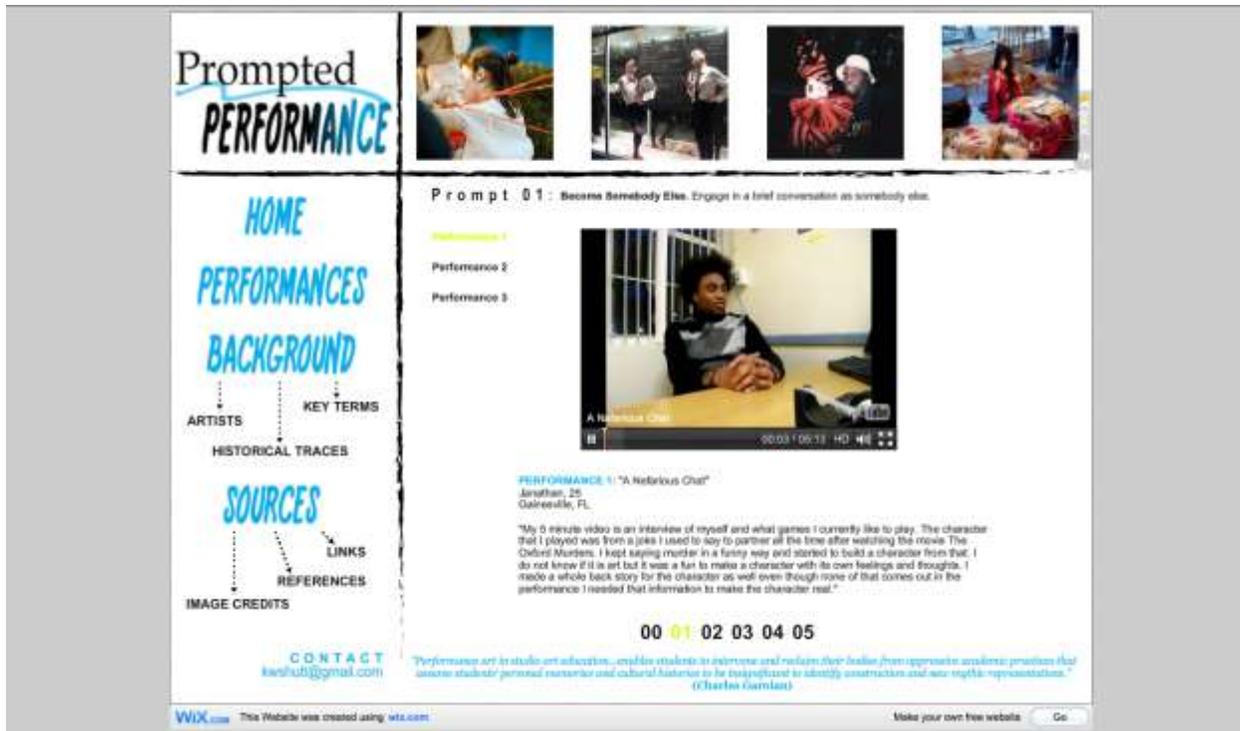fields of art exploration and performance. After reading the prompts I had sent,

Figure 3-4: Janathan's Response to "Become Somebody Else" Prompt

many were curious about performance art as a whole, and expressed an interest in learning more about the practice. Even more were interested in seeing the performances of others.

The performances the artists delivered varied from being extremely spontaneous—as was Michelle's response to *Life Revisited,* where she began to sketch as she does regularly and suddenly decided to have someone film her—to very well thought out—as was Janathan's response to *Become Somebody Else*, where he performed as a character he had been developing for a while, and spliced video footage of himself and his character engaging in a lengthy conversation (Figure 3-4). Some were a combination of minimal script and improvisation, such as Krissie's response to *Become Somebody Else*, where she gave herself a costume and several props, and throughout the course of filming, improvised her character and the events that took

place. This led to an extremely fresh approach to performance, delving further into the integration of art and theater, whereupon the performer thrust herself into her art—the world of her character—so much that she almost literally had *become somebody else;* someone completely absorbed in the task of performing.

The *Physical Paintings* call to mind Jackson Pollock's intensely physical drip paintings and Yves Klein's literal living brushes, evoking opportunities for a wide range of materials and mark making. Artists became purposefully inventive, incorporating a variety of actions in their work, such as: playing with toy cars, whipping tassels, blowing up and popping a paper bag full of confetti, sculpting with pasta, and chewing and stretching bubble gum (Figure 3-5). This prompt was perhaps the most explicit encouragement of integrating performance art into other art mediums beyond the use of **Prompting Performance** as a classroom tool.

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Figure 3-5: Clip of Jenilee's Response to "Physical Painting" on YouTube ®

CHAPTER 4: REFLECTIONS

The ultimate goal of this project-in-lieu of thesis was to devise a way to inform high school students about the merits of performance art as an engaging and versatile artform that can be used to transcend the limitations of working with 2-dimensional media and use the human body as a means to confront issues of identity and explore the relationships between art and audience. This resulting website, which will serve as a classroom tool for teachers to use in the high school art classroom, asks students to reconsider their own preconceived notions on what performance art is, and invites them to create their own work and explore the work of their peers. The submitted performances of young artists show how performance art can connect to the personal experiences and everyday lives of students, and present performance art as a fun, accessible, and meaningful practice.

During the formation of this web-based framework, the website itself went through many aesthetic changes and content-related adjustments. Originally, it was largely text-based, with information presented in many paragraphs throughout the site's pages. However, this made the site seem less like an interactive webpage and more

Figure 4-1: Before (left) and After (right) Captures of the Opening Page

like an online copy of a paper, and it was dubious as to whether or not students could easily be coaxed into reading the vast quantities of text. Therefore, changes were made to enhance the visual appearance of the site and to encourage more interactive "play." For instance, the opening page went from being a blog of "greeting text" to an interactive arrangement of questions about the site (Figure 4-1). Answers could be presented in a video- and performance-based format through clicking on each question. Additionally, I added more images to the site and made them a more prominent part of the page. These changes serve to be more visually interesting to high school students, and allows to navigate through each page more quickly than if they were filled with laborious textual passages. The lack of excess text also makes the existing text more noticeable to viewers.

The overall focus of the site's content also made a shift from instruction on the historical background of performance art towards the prompts and submitted performances. While the inclusion of historical facts and practicing artists is an important aspect of performance art, students become more enthusiastic about learning when the control is in their own hands (Gregory, 2009). Putting the emphasis on learning from the work of their peers and performing the work themselves transforms the practice of teaching performance art into a more student-based approach, encouraging students to take control of their own learning through *doing*. I believe that the videos of student performances plays a crucial hand in learning because they provide examples from which students may draw meaning and connect with their own lives, as well as acting as a source of entertaining inspiration that encourages participation. This was supported by the number of submissions I received from young

adults eager to participate in performance art, many of whom decided to respond to multiple prompts upon viewing the performances of others.

Areas for Further Study

Some limitations of this project include the insufficient ability to assess the completed performances. More research must be done on performance assessment, and the formation of a proper rubric for performance art would be largely beneficial for a number of reasons, the first being that students will be able to know and understand what the instructor requires of them. The second reason is that a successful rubric will help legitimize performance art as an activity requiring skill and thoughtful preparation. These two reasons go hand-in-hand, for a student will likely take the performance more seriously if he or she understands that it is a worthwhile process that requires more of them than the delivery of a shallow activity.

Performance art is a vast area rich with opportunities for meaningful learning. This project, aptly titled an "Introduction to Performance Art," only touches the tip of the performance iceberg. There is much that this framework does not cover that is worth exploring in the high school classroom. Ideally, following the use of ***Prompting Performance*** as a classroom tool for the introduction of performance art, students interested in this practice will be able to further develop their knowledge of performance art through regular practice and additional study on the subject. This project, however, aims to acts as just a teaser for high school art students, presenting them with a taste of a medium that is extremely versatile and rife with opportunities for exploring meaningful concepts that largely relate to the everyday life of the high school student.

APPENDIX: Talking About Performance Art

Interpretation of unrecorded interview with Sheila Bishop, from 10/15/10:

Sheila Bishop: (1) First of all, I will recommend that you read Marvin Carlson's "Performance;" especially the chapters on experimental theater and folk traditions. (2) He's primarily from a theater background, so he has an interesting perspective on performance art and experimental theater.

Katharine Shutt: (3) Which brings me to a question I've been struggling with—what would you say is the difference between performance art and theater?

SB: (4) Well, the difference is mainly the venue. (5) Performance art is directed to the gallery, or it takes place in areas recognized as non-traditional galleries, while theater is seen through the lens of the theater. (6) It depends on the audience.

KS: (7) Speaking of the audience, and as a member of the audience, I want to address the perception we have regarding performance art, in its most insulting and stereotypical way. (8) Throughout the years, the general public has developed this perception of performance artists as crazy people who call anything and everything art. (9) How can this perception be confronted?

SB: (10) There's an assumption that performance is an unskilled activity, and a bias that performance is easy to do in a short period of time. (11) Emphasizing daily routine is not the same as unskilled. (12) Have high school students define a normal action or a performance, and treat it as such. (13) Write notes about it. (14) What changes when you reframe an activity? (15) Have a student brush her teeth, with the mindset that it is a performance. (16) Document it. (17) Photograph the toothpaste foam in the sink, or leave traces of foam-spit on paper; use the residues of a daily activity. (18) As soon as you define it, it's not normal life—a good example of this is Tom Merone's *"The Highest Form of Art is Drinking Beer with your Friends."*

KS: (19) There's a teen movie, "She's All That," where the heroine is a Cinderella/Ugly duckling-type character who is known as the weird art girl. (20) In one scene, her love interest is watching her at a gallery, in a silver leotard, slowly dancing with midgets and a British man in his underwear. (21) The meaning of this performance is not made clear—it's a parody of contemporary art, and the audience is meant to laugh at it.

SB: (22) I actually have a fondness for bad performance. (23) I would show this scene from the movie to the high school students and discuss it. (24) In fact, if you're introducing performance art to high school students, you must relate it to contemporary media. (25) We do a disservice when we only introduce the esoteric or avant-garde. (26) Put it in the edges of performance: the Blue Man Group, Peewee Herman, Cirque du Soleil, Madea…even Jackass.

KS: (27) Jackass?

SB: (28) It's an interesting, juvenile example of endurance-type concepts in mainstream. (29) It's not geared for the gallery, but it's worth mentioning. (30) When students work with performance art, it's important for it to be fun, but hard enough not to be stupid.

KS: (31) I'm afraid they might think everything is "stupid," or that they won't participate.

SB: (32) It's very difficult to coax high school students into performing without having built a relationship with them, so you'd have to build up to it. (33) It takes time to develop a rapport with students in order to have them be receptive to performance art. (34) It is their top fear, so you have to build up to it. (35) Live performance is about taking the risk of failing in front of the audience—it works against students' desire to be cool. (36) They must be willing to be goofy. (37) Give yourself enough time to let them feel comfortable with it; take the pressure off. (38) To perform well, you must be willing to look ugly and uncool.

KS: (39) How do I "build up to it?"

SB: (40) Don't be afraid to bring text in. (41) The best thing to do is give them time to do free writes. (42) Allowing them to write something they don't have to share gives them power, and students have a right to make stuff you don't see; for instance, the free-writes, nudity…

KS: (43) Nudity—how do I tell them what they can and cannot do; where do I draw the line?

SB: (44) Well, when you're introducing content that is very adult, I would build up to it and contextualize it very well. (45) I had a student who wanted to do an endurance piece that would cause herself some physical harm. (46) Most people aren't prepared for physical work, and think that the only way to demonstrate endurance is to be an extremist…instead, have them try holding arms up for three hours. (47) It's incredibly difficult! (48) Or hold a pose for ten minutes. (49) This is an effective way of introducing endurance art that won't hurt them or get you into trouble. (50) If they have this fantastic idea and they're really enthusiastic about it, but it involves nudity and they're underage, just tell them, "That's a great idea—unfortunately, you can't do it right now."

KS: (51) How do you deal with students who are just taking the class because they have to?

SB: (52) In order for performance art to work, the class must be willing to perform. (53) If you have students who are only taking the class for a grade, also known as "The Unteachables," you need to really relate to pop culture. (54) Make it easy for them to take risks, give them a chance to move. (55) Introduce the crazy walk—it's a good icebreaker and brain warm up.

KS: (56) Back to the performance art vs. theater question…how do you make that connection work?

SB: (57) Costume is the marriage of visual art and theater. (58) Performance includes the kinetic, oral, and visual; it can have text, sounds, words, silence, music, sound effects, the audience…discuss persona-based work and issues of autobiography. (59) How is performance art understood popularly? (60) Talk about bodies, and using them as a medium. (61) A *tableaux vivants* is easy and fun to do; you find a photograph or image and recreate it physically. (62) They don't have to necessarily use their bodies…think about using objects in the performance. (63) Allow for crossover between media. (64) When documenting and using video, have them consider the scope of the image, the action, the source. (65) The advantage of the visual arts, as opposed to theater, is that there are more possibilities. (66) *Glee* uses elements related to performance art, although it is *not* performance art…but if they really love *Glee,* then let them love *Glee.* (67) Just be sure to talk about what sets it apart from performance art.

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BIOGRAPHY

Katharine Shutt is a graduate student at the University of Florida. She received a B.F.A. degree in studio art: drawing with minors in art history and Asian studies at the University of Florida in 2009. During her education at the University of Florida, Katharine has been an active member in the student chapter of the National Art Education Association (NAEA). Her work has been featured in several exhibitions, such as the *School of Art and Art History Juried Exhibition* at the University Gallery (2009) and the *Celebration of Creativity in the Arts and Sciences* at the Harn Museum (2009). Her experience includes two consecutive years as a Graduate Hall Director for the Hume Honors Residential Hall at the University of Florida, as well as an internship at Buccholz High School and volunteer work at local area schools in Gainesville. She aims to teach in South Korea following graduation.