

If we were to consider Carnival as a collective performance, what would be its manifesto?  
In what respect could we say that Carnival is a contemporary art form?

The use of the body as prime material (medium), is the main aspect of performance. Whether naked, dressed or dressed up, covered in mud or any other type of clothing, the performer artist is to put his own self in front of the audience.

The art piece is then the experience of the public, taking part or not into the performance, as passive or active spectator.

Being ephemeral pieces, performances can however be short or long in duration. Sometimes even longer than anyone would expect, as that was the case in Marina Abramovic's piece, *The Artist Is Present*, executed in 2010 at the MOMA. The performer, already known to take her art to some extreme degrees, remained that year at the age of 63, 3 months, seated facing her audience.

Since Modern Art, performance has been developed as a new medium in Europe and later in the US, through artists conscious to go against academic form of art as well as a market-led activity with huge impact on the economy, art and cultural policies and the perception from the general public.

Whether happening, live art, flash mob or any other proposition putting the body to front, performance has gone through a variety of definitions and acceptances. Some artists are happy to re-enact a past performance, while others refuse to do so, claiming that by essence, a performance is to happen once. The issue of keeping a visual capture as trace of the performance is also put into the debate: shall we or shan't we take pictures, make movies and then disseminate such derived product as the artwork itself? The answer is no, for artist Tino Sehgal, whose work is rarely allowed to be video-filmed. Even to advertise his exhibition, Sehgal does it without visuals and no written text! The artist has even found a method to sell his pieces without keeping a trace of the financial transaction! No checks, no credit card! Cash is paid directly in front of an expert. Interestingly, Sehgal writes his performance, but they have to be executed by someone else: sometimes a group of children, young people or adults.

Carnival likewise, is an interesting case of analysis to focus on. Considered as a collective performance unlike individual performances made by solo artists, it possesses all the required criteria to be an art form in reaction to global economy.

It is therefore interesting to note that no real university research has been done to place it as part of contemporary art performances. A bit like Negro Art, back in the 1950s, that Alain Resnais and Chris Marker noticed was kept into the Museum of Human Kind, while all other forms of foreign art were integrating the Museum of Modern Art... A sign that we still have a lot to do on stopping to (perhaps unconsciously) look down on some cultural forms...

It is still unsure of where the name comes from: some take the view of the Latin root: *caro* (flesh/body) and *levare* (put away); others are adamant that the term refers to the Latin word *carrus navalis* in reference to the God of the Sea.

However, we know that the tradition is old as the pre-Christian times and was later introduced to the various countries that Europe started to conquer: Africa, India and so on...

If nothing is up for sale, we observe that more and more public funding is required to cover costumes expenses as well as instruments, security, participants meals and so on.

Although performers are not artists but Mr and Mrs Nobody from the community at large, they do their performance fully on the voluntary basis. Even pictures of the bands are sold by third parties companies with no financial returns on the people featuring in them!

We now know that a carnival attracts more tourism and generates greater benefits for some industries. It becomes a money-maker for all others than the people who actually stage the carnival, as the famous Notting Hill Gate Carnival of London has demonstrated cleverly.

The event, which is repeated year in year out, makes it a not-to-be-missed attraction, as it is the only manifestation that is clearly addressed to all members of the community: young and elder, White and Blacks, tramp and well-to-do with no exception! What is on display is a real sense of creativity as Pete Minshall is able to testify in Trinidad where he has self-proclaimed himself: the Massman! His creations are now the object of a museum fully dedicated to Carnival on the very active island.

If Marina Abramovic managed to bring performance into a museum, which is somehow a great challenge in itself, carnival does not need a museum! The street is its museum!

But if we are to consider this popular form of traditional culture, as a performance, one should then question its possible manifesto. As without it, the term might not be appropriate to this definition?

Perhaps should we then recall the aspect of oral tradition to stop experts questioning any further! But even though, a manifesto remains a manifesto once read out loud! In fact it should be read out loud! But then we should consider the increasing number of participants of this type of collective performance, which does not enable them all to contribute easily to the writing of the manifesto. And furthermore, to an unwritten manifesto we could consider instead a musical one given by all the instrument used to repeat all rhythms throughout the entire weeks ahead of the D Day, Ash Wednesday (which follows Shrove Tuesday – or Pancake Day as children like to call it), when everything is to end in the apotheosis: in music, dance, songs and death!

We would then be able to consider that indeed, a manifesto exists: though not spelt out directly. If we could translate all moves, all sounds, all laughs, all joy coming out of this true collective performance, it would certainly read:

To all the blind people of our world we shout at you: Carnival!

To the oppressed ones, the sad ones, the depressed ones, we invite you to our: Carnival!

To all the injustice that we live through, that our children shall live and that our grand-children will continue to live, our answer is: Carnival! Carnival! Carnival!

For we will never let our Carnival go!

For we will never be defeated thanks to our Carnival!

For we will always resist through our carnival where all forms of resistance have for long but disappeared...

