ARCHIVING EXPERIENCE: A CASE STUDY OF THE EPHEMERAL ARTWORKS AND ARCHIVES OF ALLAN KAPROW, EVA HESSE, AND RICHARD TUTTLE

by

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I will examine the difficulties of documenting ephemeral art and the possible solutions that archivists, curators, artists and other museum professions have come up with. I will begin by presenting a background of the history of performance art, which was the impetus for all ephemeral art to come. Then I will present case studies of three artists: Allan Kaprow, Eva Hesse, and Richard Tuttle, and their archival processes, all of which provide very different approaches to similar artistic problems. Finally, I will discuss the implications of re-performance and re-creation of ephemeral artworks.
CHAPTER ONE: Literature Review

Performance and ephemeral art scholarship has become increasingly popular in the past couple of decades. For this thesis, several books were of crucial importance to me when examining ephemeral art and the museum. These books were also helpful in examining the works and archives of the specific artists I chose to study. *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* edited by Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield provided useful introductions to the complicated histories of live art in the context of art history and re-performance. In Amelia Jones’ introductory essay “The Now and the Has Been: Paradoxes of Live Art in History” she provided the historical context for the resurgence of live art, citing 9/11, the Y2K hysteria, and the Cold War as critical historical moments that spurred the desire to reexamine and recontextualize lived experience and present-ness.¹

Jones also drew the connection between the commodification of performance, not only in museums and galleries, but by big businesses that routinely conduct “performance reviews” which act to contain and monitor human actions.² Additionally, Jones highlighted the fact that art history provides a contradictory relationship with performance art, as it attempts to objectify the non-objective. Jones examined the multisensory experience that is live art, which makes it unique from more traditional artworks that are primarily visual experiences. Furthermore, arguing for the importance of re-performance, she stated that, “a historical moment is never new, which means that there is no original to repeat...a successful historical reenactment...does not amount to historical relativism, but rather activates history from within the present...”³

¹ Amelia Jones et. al., *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* (Bristol: Intellect, 2012), 14.  
² Ibid., 15  
³ Jones, *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, 16.
Adrian Heathfield’s essay “Then Again” included in Perform, Repeat, Record, and Philip Auslander’s “The Performativity of Performance,” both provided additional background on the relevance and importance of re-performance from a critical standpoint. Auslander was concerned with the different types of performance ephemera which he put into either documentary or theatrical categories. Auslander’s Liveness: Performance in a Mediated Culture, also examined the same issues as Jones, but Auslander was additionally interested in the legal aspects involved in re-performance. He was specifically concerned with the difference between live and recorded events and how this may change the perspectives of the viewers. Additionally, Auslander’s discussion of copyright as it relates to performance in his chapter “Legally Live: Law, Performance and Memory,” explored the legal implications, or lack thereof, for performance artists and those who want to recreate their work.

Jon Ippolito and Richard Rinehart’s Re-collection: Art, New Media, and Social Memory was an especially important book in examining the ways in which artists preserve their archives. Ippolito and Rinehart provided case studies, including one on Hesse, and possible solutions for a range of ephemeral art problems. Of specific importance were chapter three: “Death by Technology,” chapter six: “Death by Institution, chapter nine: “Death by Law,” and chapter ten: “Unrealizable Archivists.”

In chapter three: “Death by Technology,” Ippolito explained how works can fall into obsolescence based on the technology that was used to make them. This idea is especially applicable to the work of Eva Hesse, who used experimental materials that are now decaying in possibly irreparable ways. The use of digital images and photography is another issue raised in

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this chapter and is an important concern for all the artists I am examining in the case studies. However, this discussion is especially relevant to Richard Tuttle’s “Wire Pieces,” which do not photograph well, and Allan Kaprow, who strictly controlled photographic documentation of his Happenings.

In chapter six: “Death by Institution,” Ippolito outlined how museums can make decisions that change the lifespan of a work. Furthermore, he explored the difficulty of online archives as they remove the human aspect of an archivist, who might be able to put the images and works of art, or artists, in context. Context is of critical significance to ephemeral art, particularly in terms of re-creation, as museum professionals and artists must decide how to best capture the spirit of a live event that was meant to exist during a specific time.

In chapter nine: “Death by Law,” Ippolito outlined how laws can be difficult to navigate when it comes to media and ephemeral arts. Ippolito was specifically interested in copyright law as it related to performance art, and gave various examples of how artists have fared in the recent past. Ippolito also introduced the idea of deceased artists’ estates making decisions on behalf of the artists’ estates they represent, and how these decisions are often contradictory to the artists’ original intent. This idea was especially pertinent to this thesis as two of the three artists discussed are deceased.

Chapter ten: “Unreliable Archivists” also brought up several concerns that I am interested in further examining as they relate to the work of Kaprow, Tuttle, and Hesse. In this chapter, Ippolito asked not whether to transform an object for conservation purposes, but what type of transformation may be best to preserve the object. These ideas are of interest when discussed in relation to Hesse’s latex and fiberglass works, which, in their current state, are unrecognizable due to material decay.
In terms of major sources for the specific artists, *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life* (2008) (edited by Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk and Stephanie Rosenthal) was the most critical resource for information on Allan Kaprow’s art practice and his archive. This volume, published by the Getty, corresponded with the exhibition of the same name that began in Munich in January 2007, traveled throughout Europe, and finished its exhibition cycle at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles in June 2008. Several essays in this volume were useful in giving a broad scope of Kaprow’s artistic career and ideologies. This volume also included important images from Kaprow’s Happenings and Activities. Additionally, since the book was published by the Getty, where Kaprow’s archive is currently stored, I felt that it was one of the more important sources because the writers likely had access to Kaprow’s archival materials. This was also the most contemporary and comprehensive Kaprow book that I consulted for this thesis.

I also examined essays and interviews in *Experiments in the Everyday: Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts—Events, Objects, Documents* by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Judith Rodenbeck. This book was published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name at the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery in 1999 at Columbia University in the City of New York. This book provided several essays about Kaprow and his artistic influences. Besides the books I accessed, I reached out to Allan Kaprow’s Estate and the Getty Research Institute, his personal website, and a blog associated with the Getty to comprehensively examine his archival and recreation process.

A few more books were helpful in adding to Kaprow’s biography. Allan Kaprow’s own *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (1993) provided insight into the critical writings of Kaprow himself, and his original thoughts on his Happenings. *Allan Kaprow: An Exhibition*
sponsored by the Art Alliance of the Pasadena Art Museum (1967) provided a timeline of major events in the artist’s life, as well as interviews with the artist. This book was published during the height of the Happenings craze and illuminated Kaprow’s early views on the performance of Happenings, which would change later in his career. Judith Rodenbeck’s *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings* (2011) provided a comprehensive look at Kaprow’s Happenings and their evolution from a contemporary perspective.

For Eva Hesse, I consulted a variety of sources from Hesse’s time up to the contemporary moment. Lucy Lippard’s biography on Hesse from 1976 provided biographical information on the artist, as well as a catalogue raisonné of her sculptural works. While the catalogue raisonné has changed since the biography was published, it provided insight about where Hesse’s works were originally located after her death. *Eva Hesse: A Retrospective* (1992) edited by Helen A. Cooper, provided additional biographical information on Hesse and provided an excellent chronology of Hesse’s life, including major exhibitions. Bill Barrett’s catalogue raisonné, *Eva Hesse: Sculpture* (1989) provided specific details about the works described in this thesis, as well as important biographical information.

*Eva Hesse* (2002) edited by Elisabeth Sussman for the San Francisco Museum of Art Exhibition on Hesse, provided the most imperative essay, “Uncertain Mandate: A Roundtable Discussion on Conservation Issues,” about the state of Hesse’s sculptural works. This roundtable included a panel of Hesse’s colleagues, studio assistants, curators, and friends and offered the best context for which to examine the current state of her work. *Eva Hesse: Sculpture* (2006), also edited by Elisabeth Sussman, with Fred Wasserman, specified important information about Hesse’s estate and her archive. The footnotes from this book were extremely useful to my research. More information about Hesse’s archive was found on the Allen Memorial Art
Museum at Oberlin College website, where 1,300 of her papers and items currently reside. The conference at the Getty Institute also afforded current information on the situation with *Expanded Expansion* (1969), one of Hesse’s best known works, and one of the most deteriorated.

Several books on Richard Tuttle contained valuable information about his work and art practice. The most comprehensive book on Richard Tuttle was *The Art of Richard Tuttle*, which contained information about his work and biography thus far. This book corresponded with Tuttle’s retrospective at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2005. *Richard Tuttle: Chaos Die/The Form* (1993) edited by Herausgegeben von Jochen Poetter, provided several essays on Richard Tuttle’s working process with the “Wire Pieces” that were additionally useful for this thesis. Richard Tuttle’s *Wire Pieces* (1987) comprised several essays and descriptions of the “Wire Pieces” and how they are made that was helpful to understanding Tuttle’s working process. The other critical book I consulted for Tuttle was a catalog for the “Paper Octagonals” Series, which had a few essays about the scope of his work. This book provided summaries of all of Tuttle’s bodies of works, and was the oldest book I used for research on Tuttle. Since most of the issues I am exploring are contemporary, this book was used as a source for content of the “Paper Octagonals” during the time of their creation. *Bochner, Le Va, Rockburne and Tuttle* (1975) was another helpful book in understanding Tuttle’s “Paper Octagonal” series and provided a description of his contemporary working process. *New Sculpture 1965-75: Between Geometry and Abstraction* (1990) provided essays on both Hesse and Tuttle and had an extensive exhibition history for both artists from 1965-1975.
CHAPTER TWO: Introduction: History of Ephemeral Art

Ever since the advent of art history and the boom of museums beginning in the eighteenth century, there has been a desire to preserve and save works of art, especially those which have been deemed important to the canon. The art museum acts as a display of these “saved” works of art, considered important enough for presentation due to the historical significance with regards to artist, or style; indicating artistic, regional, and national identities. The entire study of art history essentially rests upon this ideological agenda, as the ability for art to be documented and saved ensures that art is still available to be studied and re-studied throughout time.

Due to the importance of guaranteed longevity, most museums today have departments and specialists who deal with archiving and conservation of their artworks. These departments are then further broken down into types, such as painting, sculpture, textiles, and works on paper, as each demands a different conservation and archival approach. However, due to increasing technology and artistic experimentation with materials and new media, not all artworks fit into these traditional conservation categories. This problem of categorization first began with the advent of Fluxus and performance art in the late 1950s to early 1960s, where the ephemeral quality of the work was its most significant component. Artists sought viewers to experience their unique, “one-time” Event or Happening, which may or may not have been documented. This essential component of performance art, that the audience be PRESENT at an event, renders it unique among art viewing experiences.

Corresponding with these types of live art events, the traditional archival process changed. Photography was, and still is, an important tool. However, the use of photography for capturing a live event compared to a still work of art remains problematic, and some artists end up capturing more of an aesthetic than revealing specific information on their works. Many
artists use recordings and videos of their events to preserve a more objective moment. In the case of Allan Kaprow, ephemera from Happenings, including posters (some of which contain the scores of his Happenings), and Kaprow’s handwritten notes have become an invaluable resource for institutions that seek to reinvent his past works.

The ways in which artists capture their events varies widely, as does the amount they wish to share. Performance artist Chris Burden, best known for his infamous *Shoot* (1971) (Fig. 1), in which his friend shot him with a .22 caliber rifle in gallery as a reaction to the violence of the Vietnam war, is an example of an artist who strictly controlled the documentation and subsequent circulation of images and objects associated with his performance works. In 1972, Burden performed his now infamous *T.V. Hijack* (Fig. 2), which is an extreme example of an artist limiting the publication and distribution of his or her images. Below, Burden describes *T.V. Hijack*:

On January 14 I was asked to do a piece on a local television station by Phyllis Lutjeans. After several proposals were censored by the station or by Phyllis, I agreed to an interview situation. I arrived at the station with my own video crew so that could have my own tape. While the taping was in progress, I requested that the show be transmitted live. Since the station was not broadcasting at the time, they complied. In the course of the interview, Phyllis asked me to talk about some of the pieces I had thought of doing. I demonstrated a T.V. Hijack. Holding a knife at her throat, I threatened her life if the station stopped live transmission. I told her that I had planned to make her perform obscene acts. At the end of the recording, I asked for the tape of the show. I unwound the reel and destroyed the show by dousing the tape with acetone. The station manager was irate, and I offered him my tape which included the show and its destruction, but he refused.⁵

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Other artists fully embraced chance and allowed outsiders, often hired for the event, or participants in the performances, to document the experience. In Abramović’s 2010 retrospective, “The Artist Is Present” (Fig. 3) at the Museum of Modern Art, she allowed Italian documentary photographer Marco Anelli to photograph the exhibition. Anelli took photos of the artist, bystanders, participants, and the setting of the exhibition. The photographs of the participants became an entirely new project and resulted in their own exhibition at the Fondazione FORMA per la Fotografia in Rome from December 3, 2010-February 13, 2011, entitled Nel Tuo Sguardo (In Your Look). In this way, Abramović helped further Anelli’s artistic career while providing free advertising for her own work.

In addition to the issue of ephemerality, many artists since the 1950s have made specifications about their work that stifle the possibility for reproduction and re-creation. While artists such as Allan Kaprow encouraged reinventions of his work, Chris Burden did not, and his Estate shutdown Abramović’s request to do so for Seven Easy Pieces (2005). Sometimes, due to certain constraints, relatives and friends of the artist, gallery representatives, curators, art historians, and conservators often must make the choice between saving a work of art, and defying artistic intent. These matters are further complicated for deceased artists who cannot clarify their wishes.

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6 Marina Abramović is one of the best examples. Her 2010 retrospective “The Artist is Present” at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, spawn the creation of an entirely independent artists project of the photographs of participants in the exhibition.

The self-proclaimed “grandmother of performance art,” Marina Abramović is at the forefront of protecting performance artists’ rights and her *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005) (Fig. 4) is cited by many art historians and curators as an example of re-performance done right. This work included six re-creations of seminal performance pieces originally staged in the 1960s and 1970s, two of which were Abramović’s own work from that time period, and one original work by Abramović. From November 9th to November 15th, 2005 Abramović performed one work a night at the Guggenheim museum from 5 pm to 12 am, and on the 15th, she performed her own original work. The artists Abramović chose to recreate included Bruce Nauman, Vito Acconci, VALIE EXPORT, Gina Pane, and Joseph Beuys. Abramović’s goal for this exhibition, as explained by the Guggenheim was “[to] examine the possibility of redoing and preserving an art form that is, by nature, ephemeral.”  

Recreating these works was a long and complicated procedure, as Abramović had to seek permission from all the artists and artists’ estates involved before the exhibition could take place. Some artists outright rejected Abramović’s requests, most notably, Chris Burden. The artist had wanted to re-perform a Chris Burden work in which he had his hands nailed to a Volkswagen, but she received a letter from his secretary rejecting the request.  

The difficulty of obtaining permissions from the artists and their corresponding estates, was part of the process for Abramović, who wanted to recreate these works not only to preserve their memory, but also to ensure these performances were recreated legally and with

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In other arts, including music and visual, copyrights are available to protect the artists. However, there are currently no federal laws to protect live performance works. For this reason, Abramović was careful to gain the appropriate permissions involved before performing other artists’ works. To this end, Abramović was not paid for any of her performances in *Five Easy Pieces*. Additionally, according to the contracts with the artists involved, only those artists were eligible for profits from the book and film that were made in conjunction with the exhibition. Abramović’s re-performance of past works by seeking permissions from the artists is one of several ways institutions can keep the memory of performance art alive. Abramović is a champion for artist’s rights and has been innovative in giving credit and inspiring completely new projects with other artists that participate in projects with her.

Despite the difficulty of staging re-creations, the process is worth it, not only to remember the past, but to reinvent the context as history repeats itself. In the past several decades, performance art has gained in popularity and this resurgence has created a demand, by artists and viewers, for re-creations of past events. Additionally, curators seek to draw connections between past live art and the present. Thus, the use of documentary materials and ephemera is crucial to staging these re-creations as

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10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 In 2010, Abramović performed *The Artist is Present*, during her retrospective of the same name at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. For this performance, she sat in a chair for eight hours a day, for nearly three months and allowed viewers to sit across from her, silently, and make direct eye contact to foster a personal connection between herself and these strangers. Abramović sanctioned Marco Anelli to photograph all the almost 1,500 sitters for the duration of the performance, which became another body of work for which Anelli has been credited with, and from which came his own independent exhibition and publication. With this brilliant move, Abramović furthered another artist’s career, while also promoting her own. This idea is elaborated on in the Introduction section of this thesis.
accurately as possible. Art historian RoseLee Goldberg explains her thoughts on the recent trend of live art in museums: “Performance has been a way of appealing directly to a large public, [and] stems from an apparent desire to be a spectator to the distinct community of the art world…” Thus, performance art offers the public a way to participate. Amelia Jones also describes the unique nature of live art and why it is important:

Precisely because it claims both to be ‘art’ and to be ‘live’…live and/or performance art presses together modes of being, meaning, and value that have historically been considered incompatible. Live and/or performance art enact and engage bodies across time, and, as such, insistently remind us that…it is through memory (as enacted through our cognitively and emotionally driven bodies) that we connect with the world around us.

This thesis seeks to address the concerns of ephemeral art and re-creations while proposing the best ways to conserve and document live and ephemeral art going forward. Case studies on Allan Kaprow, Eva Hesse, and Richard Tuttle provide insight into the ways archiving can enhance, or in some cases, hinder, the process of studying and re-creating transient works. Additionally, the recent push for the digitization and open-access of archives online, has complicated the idea of the unique art object that most archivist seek to protect through their control of artists’ archival collections.

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14 Jones, Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History, 12.
CHAPTER THREE: Allan Kaprow

I. Brief Biography

Allan Kaprow is an artist best known for his Happenings, live performance works that began in the late 1950s into the 1960s, and he represents one approach to archiving ephemeral art. Allan Kaprow was born in 1927 in Atlantic City, New Jersey to Barnet Kaprow and Evelyn Lecomowitz Kaprow. As a child, Kaprow suffered from asthma and because of his illness, he spent much of his childhood in Tucson, Arizona at a ranch for sick children. In Childsplay: The Art of Allan Kaprow, Jeff Kelley cites this as one of the reasons Kaprow became interested in Happenings, which focus on the appreciation of everyday activities and the body. Kaprow eventually grew out of his illness and moved back to New York in 1943, where he attended the prestigious High School of Music and Art, graduating two years later.

Kaprow then studied art history as an undergraduate at New York University starting in 1945 and met many influential mentors during this time. From 1947-1948, Kaprow studied painting at the Hans Hoffman School in New York where he met some of the most avant-garde artists of the day. While in college, Kaprow was also introduced to the writing of John Dewey, specifically his book, Art as Experience. In this book, Dewey stipulated that artists and their works had separated from daily life, which caused a rift between artists and their consumers.

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17 Jeff Kelley, Childsplay: The Art of Allan Kaprow, 8. Kelley discusses how Kaprow’s need to constantly monitor his vital signs as a sickly youth, lead to his bodily self-awareness and interest as he grew older. This idea was something he brought into his art practice in the form of Happenings and Environments.
19 Allan Kaprow: An Exhibition sponsored by the Art Alliance of the Pasadena Art Museum, 8.
Additionally, Dewey “invited [artists] to forget about art for a while and pay attention to the aesthetic dimensions of everyday life.” Dewey’s writings would have a profound impact on Kaprow’s future art practice and his interest in the everyday. In 1949 Kaprow graduated from New York University with his bachelor’s in art history, but continued at the University working on a master of arts in philosophy. Within a year, he abandoned this degree, and transferred to Columbia University to study for a master’s in art history under Meyer Schapiro, another influential art historian and critic.

Ultimately, the idea for his Happenings came as a direct result of Kaprow’s education, and specifically from his professor and mentor John Cage, whom he studied under from 1957 to 1958 at the New School for Social Research. Cage was another performer who experimented with chance, and an artist that likewise was influential to Richard Tuttle, shaping both Kaprow’s and Tuttle’s artistic practices towards capturing the spirit of a moment. In a quote by Kaprow about his art practice, he explained this fascination: “I must say that the ordinary often strikes me as spectacular…” Kaprow wanted to merge art with everyday life and as Alex Potts, professor of art history at the University of Michigan, points out was, “not fixated on objects,” but more interested in the intangibility of his art.

II. Major Exhibitions

20 Jeff Kelley, Childsplay: The Art of Allan Kaprow, 7.
21 Allan Kaprow: An Exhibition sponsored by the Art Alliance of the Pasadena Art Museum, 8.
23 Ibid.
24 Allan Kaprow: An Exhibition sponsored by the Art Alliance of the Pasadena Art Museum, 8.
Though Kaprow had previously had a one-man exhibition at the Hansa Gallery in New York in 1953, his first public Happening did not occur until six years later and represented the first stage of a body of work that would evolve throughout his career.\textsuperscript{26} The term “Happening” had been coined by Kaprow a year earlier in his seminal article titled “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” (1958). In this article Kaprow examined the impact of Pollock on the modern art community. As described by Kaprow-scholar Judith Rodenbeck, the article acknowledged “the ending of painting...as bound by pigment and support. Pollock was an action painter, and his legacy was not painting but action. Kaprow dubbed this new medium the “happening.””\textsuperscript{27} The term was intentionally ambiguous, to avoid association with theatre and to align itself more with colloquial activities such as sporting events and rallies.\textsuperscript{28}

Kaprow’s first public Happening, \textit{18 Happenings in 6 Parts} (Fig. 5), occurred in October 1959 in the Reuben Gallery in New York, which Kaprow co-founded.\textsuperscript{29} As described by Judith Rodenbeck, professor in the Department of Media and Cultural studies at UC Riverside:

the piece was highly, even rigidly, organized (its script was by far the most elaborate of any of Kaprow’s Happenings), and the performance was preceded by several months of rehearsal...The audience, divided into groups, moved from site to site within the gallery space, taking seats to watch orchestrated, non-narrative, performed events at carefully timed and signaled intervals.\textsuperscript{30}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{28} Judith Rodenbeck, \textit{Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings}, 9
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
Other early Happenings were performed in galleries, but as the work matured, Kaprow moved away from this setting, preferring industrial, rural, or residential sites instead. Oftentimes, the works would be performed in different places simultaneously. This “controlled-chance” became important to Kaprow, and made his Happenings less difficult to document since they always contained a plan, of sorts. Kaprow also examined chance to a higher degree in his later works by giving his Happenings open-ended instructions.

Kaprow stipulated that his Happenings only be performed once to preserve their sanctity, and for this reason, photography was an especially important tool for him to preserve his work.\footnote{Allan Kaprow: An Exhibition sponsored by the Art Alliance of the Pasadena Art Museum, (Pasadena, CA: Pasadena Art Museum, 1967), 8. “…unlike most games, mine are not to be repeated.” The stipulation of only one performance is well documented in Kaprow’s writings and in statements he made in the early years of his Happenings. See also, Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life (1993).} Though photography was used by Kaprow for his archive, he became concerned with the participants “acting” for the camera as soon as they recognized that it was present.\footnote{Jeanne Siegel, Artwords: Discourse on the 60s and 70s, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press), 1985, 54.} Interestingly, after Kaprow’s work started to become admired, he banished audiences and photographers (but not photography) from his events, and required only those who were participating in the events to be present for them.\footnote{Ibid., 172.}

Kaprow eventually changed his artistic practice from the group orientated-Happenings, to smaller, more personal performances called Activities (Fig. 6) and his method of instruction also transformed with this new body of work. Kaprow’s Activities explored ideas of private exchange between two people, often involving participants holding up mirrors for each other, or taking photographs of each other, etcetera. The directions for the Activities were given out as bland
instructional-photo-text brochures, or magazine articles. As Rodenbeck points out, “[s]uch instructional documents were, of course, contradictory in that they purported to give directions, via photographs, of an as-yet-unperformed event—while the photographs themselves required performance of elements of the event.”  And despite their ephemeral nature, Kaprow was resolute in stating that the photographs were NOT documentations of the events, despite how they were perceived:

None of the photos—or practically none after the sixties—are documents at all. [They] were made up in the style of…escape instructions. I just was looking for a language, a neutral language, in which to produce executable scores. And the more impersonal it was, I thought, the less people would see it as a document.

III. Estate/Archive

Currently, Allan Kaprow’s archive resides at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, California, and is only available by appointment, restricting it’s use to those that can physically visit. Despite the Getty being a leader in the digitization of their archives, there are no current plans by the institute to digitize his work, thought they do digitize Kaprow files by request. A finding aid of the collection is available online, but, as expected, it provides no visual details to what the archive contains. According to the description of the collection by the Getty, his archive, which is arranged chronologically,

contains materials from Kaprow’s student days, including scores he composed while studying with John Cage. The more than 250 project files comprise all existing material on Kaprow’s Environments, Activities and Happenings: the artist’s notes and drafts of scores; correspondence regarding production and presentation; and photo-documentation. Audio/visual material related to a number of Happenings and Activities may be available…In addition, there are clippings of reviews, drafts of Kaprow’s writings on art and art history, and correspondence with dealers and curators.

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34 Ibid., 57.
36 Information obtained by email between author and the Getty Reference Librarian.
37 Allan Kaprow,” The Getty Institute, accessed May 17, 2017,
In his archive, Kaprow kept written recollections from himself as well as participants in the Happenings, so that he could best capture the experience of his Happenings. However, since Kaprow was the main proprietor of his own archive, one must question how objectively he captured his own work. Additionally, Potts notes that the “documentary” photographs that Kaprow did allow to be taken, aren’t that informative, stating, “…For the most part, these photographs function more like conceptual clues than vivid images…” \(^{38}\) This is notable from the images present in the work *Entr’Acte Happening at CalArts, 1972* on the Getty blog. Of the many known Happenings, this is only one work that is available digitally through blogs.getty.edu under Happenings and Performances entitled, *Entr’Acte Happening at CalArts, 1972*. (Fig. 7) This particular work is accompanied by three photographs that generically depict a male hand grasping a rag, another hand being run under water, two hands shaking, and a photograph of Kaprow’s notes for the Happening. As described by the website, “Entr’acte takes place inside one of the [CalArts] school washrooms, and restages the ritual of handwashing, a common task that might take place during a theatrical intermission (entr’acte in French).” \(^{39}\)

Towards the end of his life, Kaprow seemed to have a change of heart about his feelings towards re-performance as he did allow several re-creations; his website even contains a section titled “Reinventions” that quotes Kaprow on his feelings about certain works being re-performed. \(^{40}\) Under this section only two Happenings are mentioned: *Yard*, originally performed

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\(^{40}\) According to the Estate of Allan Kaprow, “reinvention” was Kaprow’s preferred word to describe any type of re-creation of his work. Information obtained by email between author and Tamara Bloomberg, Manager of the Allan Kaprow Estate.
in 1961, and *Fluids*, originally performed in 1967. Kaprow’s description of the reinterpretations of *Fluids*, is particularly noteworthy, since it appears Kaprow changed his mind to not only accept, but encourage, the reinterpretation of his art:

> While there was an initial version of *Fluids*, there isn’t an original or permanent work. Rather, there is an idea to do something and a physical trace of that idea. By inventing a version of *Fluids*…[one] is not copying my concept but is participating in a practice of reinvention central to my work. *Fluids* continues and its reinventions further multiply its meanings. [Its history and artifacts are catalysts], an invitation to do something.41

Currently, Allan Kaprow’s Estate excepts proposals for reinvention of his works, but there are many steps involved in legally re-performing a Happening or Activity. To stage a reinvention, one must send a formal request and proposal to the Estate describing what they plan on presenting. Pending approval, an agreement, which includes a fee, is drawn up and sent to the requestor for signature. There are copy write restrictions involved and usually only one reinvention is granted per request.42 Additionally, when a reinvention is performed, all documentation becomes property of the Kaprow Estate as well as the institution that performs the work, and all reinventions are also saved for the official Allan Kaprow Archive. However, the photographer of the reinventions is always credited in any publications that become associated with the reinvention. In this way, Allan Kaprow’s work can continue to proliferate pending institutions follow the appropriate steps to recreate them.

As noted on the Allan Kaprow website, reinventions have been staged many times already worldwide. *Yard* (1961), has been redone at least eight times, in Milan, Los Angeles, and New York, and *Fluids* (1967), has also been reinvented in Basel, Berlin, and Los Angeles. In

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42 Information obtained by email between author and Tamara Bloomberg, Manager of the Allan Kaprow Estate.
2008, coinciding with Kaprow’s retrospective at the Geffen Contemporary at MoCA in Los Angeles, students from several California universities and organizations re-performed Kaprow’s *Labor Day* (1971). (Fig. 8)\(^43\) Specifically, at Occidental College, students dumped and re-shoveled one cubic yard of sand in a circular trajectory throughout the city. Students also re-performed another activity in which they drove a car in laps around campus and removed and reinstalled the car’s wheels once per lap.\(^44\)

From the meticulous notes that Kaprow left in his archive related to his Happenings, Activities, and Environments, which have been described by some as “choreographic,” it is clear Kaprow did want his works re-performed despite his earlier statements to the contrary.\(^45\) Performance art curator André Lepecki notes that Kaprow’s meticulous personal notes taken before his first Happening, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959), not only suggest that the piece was meant to be re-performed, but the notes also acted as Kaprow’s personal “dress rehearsal” before the piece was first performed in 1959.\(^46\) Additionally, the choice of Kaprow to control his own archive, eases the work of future conservators and archivists because they know that his archive was left as he wished. Furthermore, his acceptance of re-performance allows his work to stay relevant for future generations, who, thanks to Kaprow’s meticulous archival notes, can participate in an Activity or Happening for years to come.


\(^44\) Ibid.

\(^45\) André Lepecki, “Not as Before, But Simply: Again,” in *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, ed. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (Chicago, IL: Intellect, 2012), 154.

\(^46\) Lepecki, “Not as Before, But Simply: Again,” 154-157. Lepecki also notes that on the eve of Kaprow’s Happening, he wrote a note to himself/his archive “Each of these parts may be re-arranged indefinitely,” suggesting the possibility of the work to be remade many times afterwards.
CHAPTER FOUR: Eva Hesse

I. Brief Biography

Though she lived a short life, Eva Hesse’s oeuvre presents an excellent example of the issues that can arise for an artist who worked with experimental, and ultimately unstable, materials. Hesse’s mature work that involved the use of plastics, latex, and fiberglass, coupled with her untimely death, presents unique archival issues about preservation and artistic intent. As with Kaprow, contradictory statements made by the artist during her life have continued to haunt her work in death.

Hesse was originally born in Germany in 1936, but her family moved to New York City when she was three to escape Nazi persecution. Due to the move and the traumas of war, Hesse’s mother was severely depressed and eventually hospitalized. By the time Hesse was ten, her mother committed suicide, an event that had a profound impact on her. In 1949, Hesse graduated from junior high and despite art being one of her lowest grades, she decided to pursue a career as an artist. Three years later, Hesse started her degree at the Pratt Institute studying advertising design, but she left in the middle of her second year. During the next few years Hesse studied at the Arts Students League and Cooper Union eventually going back to school at Yale after getting a summer scholarship in 1957. After receiving her bachelor of fine arts degree at Yale, Hesse settled in New York City again, and in late 1959, started to gain critical acclaim for her Abstract expressionist drawings and paintings.

II. Major Exhibitions

48 Helen A. Cooper, Eva Hesse: A Retrospective, 19.
49 Ibid.
Hesse did not start producing and exhibiting her best-known plastic and string sculptures until the mid 1960s. In 1966, Hesse was invited to exhibit in “Eccentric Abstraction,” (Fig. 9) a show organized by curator and art historian Lucy Lippard for the Fischbach Gallery, which highlighted the most contemporary art of the day. During the show, which included artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Bruce Nauman, and H.C. Westermann, among others, Hesse was named as one of the most successful up-and-coming artists. A year later Hesse was officially being represented by this gallery. In 1968, Hesse was given her first and only solo exhibition, “Chain Polymers,” (Fig. 11) which featured her plastic and fiberglass sculptures. Her exhibition is well-received, she sells several pieces, and Hesse is highlighted as an important new artist. Unfortunately, a year later Hesse began to undergo surgeries to remove a brain tumor, and despite the operation’s success, she succumbed to her illness in 1970 at the age of thirty-four.

When Hesse began to concentrate exclusively on her unique sculpture in fiberglass and plastics works in the late 1960s, her prestige grew rapidly. Hesse did not start using latex rubber until August 1967 and she stopped using the material when she completed, Sans III in January 1969. During this time, her most famous work was produced in her Repetition Nineteen series (Fig. 10). As noted by John Keats, writer for Art and Antiques magazine, "Industrial latex was meant for casting. Hesse handled it like house paint, brushing layer upon

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51 Helen A. Cooper, Eva Hesse: A Retrospective, 40. Mel Boucher writes: “Hesse’s work is the best in the exhibition. Her work and sensibility is far in advance of the various categories it has been placed in.”
53 The Art Story Contributors, “Eva Hesse.”
54 Helen A. Cooper, Eva Hesse: A Retrospective, 44. Repetition Nineteen III is first piece fabricated in fiberglass at Aegis.
56 The Art Story Contributors, “Eva Hesse.”
layer to build up a surface that was smooth yet irregular, ragged at the edges like deckled paper." This new use of an unpredictable material became Hesse’s signature style, but would ultimately lead to the rapid deterioration of her work.

III. Estate/Archive

When Hesse died, her Estate took control of unsold works, and made decisions regarding how they were preserved. Hesse’s estate was originally left to her sister, Helen Hesse Charash, who was meant to be assisted by the artist’s close friend and fellow artist, Sol LeWitt, along with Donald Droll, her dealer at the Fischbach Gallery. Intriguingly, as described in Hesse’s biography, the artist did not have much of a relationship with her sister until the last year of her life, when she lived with Charash and her family as she recovered from brain surgery. Though LeWitt was involved, especially regarding Hesse’s biography that Charash commissioned Lucy Lippard to write, Droll took primary control. Droll moved Hesse’s representation to his and Xavier Fourcade’s newly established gallery, Fourcade-Droll, but since that time Hesse’s estate has been represented by many different galleries.

After Droll took control of Hesse’s estate, his first major decision was to sell many of Hesse’s sculpture works that had been in the artist’s possession at the time of her death. Victor

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59 Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse* (New York, New York: New York University Press, 1976), 155. Though this information was found in Hesse’s biography, a genre that often contains a level of subjectivity, since the biography was commissioned by Charash, one can assumed that the mention of Hesse’s relationship with her sister is accurate.
60 Hubertus Gaßner, Brigitte Kölle, and Petra Roettig, *Eva Hesse: One More Than One*, (Hamburg: Hatje Cantz, 2013), 105. Sol LeWitt and Donald Droll didn’t work well together, Eva wanted them both to take care of her estate but there couldn’t work out their personal differences.
and Sally Ganz, friends and long-time collectors of Hesse’s work, were especially interested in buying more of her art. After examining some of her work in his gallery collection, Droll made a list of what the Ganzes had liked, categorizing the works in A, B, and C. The “C” list included “works that other collectors were considering and works with ‘questions as to permanence of materials,’” underscoring the knowledge that her choice of materials would likely deteriorate over time.\(^6^1\) Since Hesse’s entire body of work is not all in one place and has moved many times since her death, her archive has presented difficulties to conservators interested in tracking the process of decay of her plastic and fiberglass sculptures.\(^6^2\) Currently, much of Hesse’s archive, especially works on paper, resides in the collection of the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College, which Droll first began donating to in 1977, as these works were of less interest to him.\(^6^3\) The collection currently houses over 1,300 Hesse items and was the first museum to purchase a Hesse sculpture when it acquired *Laocoön* in 1970.\(^6^4\)

\(^6^1\) Elisabeth Sussman et al., *Eva Hesse: Sculpture*, 13. However, Whitney Curator Elisabeth Sussman notes, “contrary to the common belief that all of Hesse’s late work is vulnerable and fragile, most of her sculpture from *Chain Polymers* have held up well. Only two works from the show must now be known only from photographs...”

\(^6^2\) Elisabeth Sussman et al., *Eva Hesse: Sculpture*, 154, note 29. Description of Hesse’s Archive/Estate’s movement after her death: “In 1984 Donald Droll took a job at the Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina At Greensboro. The [Eva Hesse] Estate then moved to Metro Pictures, New York. It later moved to the Xavier Fourcade Gallery. Droll died in 1985, and the estate left Fourcade the following year. Barry Rosen became the advisor to the Hesse Estate and took it to the Robert Miller Gallery. In 2000, the Estate went to Hauser & Wirth in Zürich.” Hauser and Wirth is where most of the Eva Hesse estate currently still resides.

\(^6^3\) Ibid., 154, note 34. “The initial gift of the Hesse Archives was made in 1977 by Helen Hesse Charash. Charash and the Hesse Estate subsequently made additional gifts to the archives in 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1998. An anonymous donor contributed materials to the archives in 1982...the portions that were in the archives as of 1978 are available on microfilm at the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.”

Interestingly, there has been debate as to what Hesse would have wanted based off contradictory statements she made while still alive. Sol LeWitt, a close friend and colleague of Hesse has argued that she wanted to preserve her work. In a statement by LeWitt he remarks, "She wanted her work to last...She certainly didn’t have the attitude that she would mutely sit by and let it disintegrate before her eyes."65 This sentiment is echoed by her other close friends and contemporaries. However, there are some, like art critic Arthur Danto, who emphasize Hesse’s knowledge and acceptance of the ephemeral nature of her work: “Hesse was aware that latex is an unstable material, disposed to oxidize and turn brittle...She was very aware that it was temporary. She was not defensive about it; she was offensive about it. She would say that it was an attribute. Everything was for the process—a moment in time, not meant to last."66 This sentiment is echoed in a statement by Hesse:

At this point I feel a little guilty when people want to buy it. I think they know, but I want to write them a letter and say it’s not going to last. I am not sure what my stand on lasting really is. Part of me feels that it’s superfluous, and if I need to use rubber that is more important. Life doesn’t last; art doesn’t last.67

Additionally, when Hesse first started working with latex and fiberglass, she had many of her works fabricated at Aegis Reinforced Plastics in Staten Island, and was advised against using the material by her collaborator and eventual studio assistant, Doug Johns.

Johns, who was well-aware of the fugitive quality of latex, tried from the very beginning of his collaboration with Hesse to discourage her from using it. However, he recalls, Hesse lectured him on how important the instability of materials was to her

67 Ibid. Statements from Hesse are complicated because she did not make many during her career. Additionally, many believe her attitude on the decay and death of her work was related directly to her illness, i.e. it was out of her control and she wouldn’t be alive long enough for it to matter.
process…she would say that it was an attribute. Everything was for the process—a moment in time, not meant to last.68

In Re-Collection: Art New Media and Social Memory, Richard Rinehart and Jon Ippolito suggest another idea to consider when examining the work of Hesse through her close relationship with Sol LeWitt. Ippolito notes that despite their closeness, the two artistes differed substantially in the documentation of their work. While LeWitt left detailed instructions for his works to be painted or drawn on museum and galleries by anyone willing to follow the instructions, Hesse left no solution for how to deal with the decaying nature of her works. As Ippolito aptly explains, “[t]he secrets to cultural longevity lie not in a medium’s technological sophistication but in the work’s relation to that medium.”69 The idea that Hesse might leave instructions for others to recreate her work is something that LeWitt himself has spoken of, and he and others conclude that though Hesse would have wanted her work to proliferate, while she was alive, she did not want to relinquish the control of her personal touch in the process.70 Others emphasize that the visibility of the “artist’s hand” in Hesse’s works is one of their most powerful aspects.

68 Bill Barrett, Eva Hesse: Sculpture, 212.
70 Tempkin, Ann and Chad Coerver. “Uncertain Mandate: A Roundtable Discussion on Conservation Issues,” in Eva Hesse ed. Elisabeth Sussman and James Meyer (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2002), 299. On this panel, Gioia Tampanelli, fiction writer and friend of Hesse’s, tells an anecdote of Hesse regarding this: “One afternoon Eva and I were going up to her loft…there were a number of fiberglass cylinders—industrially perfect buckets that looked at though they had been made with a mold. Eva was upset at seeing them. Eva had given Doug Johns instruction on how to make the pieces, but she was very disappointed, saying that they looked like ‘garbage pales’ and that they had to be remade. She turned and said to me what was why she had to be there when the work was being done. She said she wished that she could do things like Sol. She wanted to be able to give instructions and to be able to come back and find them done.”
Thus, the seemingly deliberate decision by Hesse to not leave instructions for how to deal with the decay of her own work, emphasizes her assumed acceptance of her art having a definite lifespan. However, this view is difficult for the art museum community to accept, as they believe, justly, that her work has a place in the art historical canon. All this is further complicated by the fact that Hesse is no longer alive to address these issues. One cannot fault Hesse for not fully comprehending the experimental materials she was using, and she is not the only artist to take this risk. The most famous example being Leonardo DaVinci’s *Last Supper* fresco painting that has been an issue for conservators practically since its creation.

Most of the literature on the conservation of the work of Eva Hesse is from the early 2000s to the present, emphasizing how contemporary the problems of decay in the three-dimensional works of Hesse are. In 2002, a retrospective of Hesse’s work was organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the resulting catalogue, edited by Elisabeth Sussman, included a roundtable discussion on the conservation issues associated with Hesse’s latex and fiberglass works. The roundtable included conservators, curators, friends, and colleagues of Hesse’s. Many works by Hesse were discussed during the round table, but *Expanded Expansion* (1969) (Fig. 14) was given the most attention. Participants of the roundtable were given the opportunity to see the work first-hand the day before the discussion at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum conversation lab. As described,

…when first made [Expanded Expansion] was softly draping [and] is now a rigid tawny hulk. Its three sections, which were meant to join seamlessly, cannot now support their own weights. At this point the sculpture cannot be lifted from its horizontal fittings inside three wooden crates without risk of serious damage. *Expanded Expansion* has not been placed upright since 1988, and tens of thousands of dollars would be required to
fund the research and potential treatment to reinforce the structure, and thus allow the work to lean against the wall as intended.\textsuperscript{71}

During the roundtable, Bill Barrette, an artist and former assistant of Hesse’s, emphasized that Hesse’s seemingly lack of concern for how her works fared over time was most likely related to her having bigger concerns in final years she was creating, as she fought for her life.\textsuperscript{72}

The connection between the fragility of Hesse’s work and her own health which deteriorated rapidly in her final years, is often made by art historians when discussing her work. Though it has some bearing, Hesse was making fragile work before she became ill. Additionally, Hesse’s work, with its reference to her personal touch, was a reaction to the industrialism of Minimalism, which was often designed by artists, but executed by third parties.

The focus of Hesse’s work on process, was also cited during the 2002 roundtable discussion as a justification for displaying her deteriorating sculptures in their current state. Martin Langer, a private conservator in Germany, and another member of the panel discussion, cited the work Of Sans III (1969) (Fig. 12) as an example where Hesse’s tedious “latex painting” technique could be admired, despite the decay of the work. Another piece that was discussed and has interestingly been recreated several times, the only work of Hesse’s to be recreated AND displayed, is Metronomic Irregularity II (1966) (Fig. 13), which was part of the “Eccentric Abstraction” exhibition at the Fischbach Gallery. Sol LeWitt commented on his involvement with mounting the work for “Eccentric Abstraction,” and for its subsequent re-creations after Hesse’s death. The original work, which consisted of three panels with wires running through all panels in a random pattern, has been lost, and like Tuttle’s Wire Pieces, is never the same twice.


\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 295.
because each time it is installed, the wires running have to be replaced.\textsuperscript{73}

In 2008, “The Object in Transition: A Cross-Disciplinary Conference on the Preservation and Study of Modern and Contemporary Art” was presented at the Getty Institute and Hesse’s \textit{Expanded Expansion} (1969) was once again, a chief topic of discussion. The work, made of rubberized cheesecloth, painted in Hesse’s experimental and signature technique, and supported by fiberglass poles, was displayed along with a re-creation of the work as it would have looked in its original state. As described: “Whereas the original \textit{Expanded Expansion} had darkened, hardened, and disintegrated, the ‘mock-up’ [is] luminously bright, and ethereal enough to shudder at the breeze from a passing body.”\textsuperscript{74} The original work was very flexible, as the name suggests, and this was Hesse’s intention: “[The work] could actually be extended to a length where one would really feel they were environmental…It is flexible so you could push it very narrower or you could push it wide apart.”\textsuperscript{75} The work was originally displayed propped against a wall, but in Hesse also thought it would be displayed nicely on the floor.\textsuperscript{76} As Lucy Lippard described the work it in Hesse’s biography, “[t]he idea is a modular or Minimal one, but the piece itself, with its contrast of stiff poles and soft, tactile hangings, its potentially accordion-like

\textsuperscript{73} Ann Tempkin and Chad Coerver, “Uncertain Mandate: A Roundtable Discussion on Conservation Issues,” in \textit{Eva Hesse} ed. Elisabeth Sussman and James Meyer (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2002), 311, note 10: “Metronomic Irregularity II has been installed a total of four times. The first and only installation during the artist’s lifetime was that for the \textit{Eccentric Abstraction} exhibition. The original panels were lost around the time of the artist’s death. LeWitt and David Higginbotham reconstructed it for the 1984 exhibition \textit{Flytkpunkter/Vanishing Points} at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm. LeWitt then made a second reconstruction of the work for the exhibition entitled \textit{Eva Hesse} at the SteinGladstone Gallery in 1991. Finally, Barry Rosen and Jaap van Lere created a reconstruction for the 1993 exhibition American Art in the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century: Paintings and Sculpture 1913-1993/Amerikanische Kunst im 2. Jahrhundert: Malerei und Plastik 1913-1993, which was presented at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin and the Royal Academy of Arts in London.”

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{75} Lippard, \textit{Eva Hesse}, 151.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
movement, is not impassive, but hovers on the brink of function and association.” 77 However, in its current state the sculpture lacks both the flexibility and ethereality of the original.

Due to the state of many of Hesse’s later latex works, Sussman recommends that to completely appreciate them one must look at contemporary photographs, critical analysis of the time, memory, and other ephemera as a record of the work in its intended state. 78 Sussman also noted that though Hesse was aware of the material she was working with and knew that it would change over time, she also was not fully aware of how drastic the change would be. Sussman acknowledged that this was precisely the reason Hesse liked working with latex: “As a natural material, latex has its own life cycle---it can soften and ooze years later and then harden, or if exposed to too much light and air, it can become extremely brittle. Hesse was becoming aware of this…Still, she was too enamored with latex’s material qualities to stop using it.” 79

The issues associated with conservation, come not only from the proposed cost, but also from the lack of involvement of other disciplines in the process, which has fortunately been changing. As explained by art historian Graham Larkin, the problem with the conservation of these types of objects is in the language of art museum curators and conservators “to think ‘art objects’ when we read ‘cultural property.’” His solution to saving works of art is collaboration:

If, however, museum workers were to start aligning ourselves more consciously with archivists and academics, really committing to the acquisition, interpretation, and display of art and evidence about art; if we were to work more collaboratively and purposefully in assembling not just art but also detailed conservation, fabrication, and installation specs; …if, in short, we were to develop better knowledge networks within and among institutions and begin to reconceptualize[sic] the art museum as something more akin to a classroom, a laboratory, a history museum, an archive, or a theater only then could we come up with a workable system of collecting and displaying concepts, installations, [and] performances. 80

77 Ibid.
78 Elisabeth Sussman et al., Eva Hesse: Sculpture, 15.
79 Ibid.
This multidisciplinary approach is what most contemporary scholars are turning to, a working together between disciplines.

Hesse’s work, in its current state, has reached its critical tipping point, where museum professionals must make the decision to spend the money to save the originals, or to recreate. Additionally, the context of display of Hesse’s work, if put up in its current state, will be very important. The University of Arizona Museum of Art’s “Exposed: The Art and Science of Conservation,” (January 14, 2017-May 13, 2017), is an excellent example of using works of art that would otherwise not be displayed due to various types of damage, to teach the power and importance of conservation to works of art. If put on display in this context, Hesse’s works could likewise educate artists, about the use of unstable materials.
CHAPTER FIVE: Richard Tuttle

I. Brief Biography

Richard Tuttle is another contemporary artist whose work and archive present unique concerns, especially when examining his “Wire Sculptures” and “Paper Octagonal” series. Richard Tuttle was born in Rahway, New Jersey in 1941, the second child of four children. Tuttle grew up in a conservative protestant family and attended Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, graduating in 1963 with a bachelor’s in art degree. During his time in college Tuttle designed two senior yearbooks and designed several sets for student plays.81 It was during his junior year of college at Trinity that Tuttle met curator Samuel Wagstaff, who acted as an early mentor for him. Wagstaff introduced Tuttle to many contemporary artists and guided his experience of Pop art and early Happenings.

In 1964, Tuttle began working at the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York as a gallery assistant. Betty Parson’s was a leader in Abstract expressionist’s exhibitions, and put Tuttle in touch with the greatest contemporary artists of the day.82 It was here that Tuttle met Eva Hesse and Robert Smithson, both of whom influenced the way that Tuttle approached his artistic practice and his interest in ephemerality.83

II. Major Exhibitions

Tuttle had his first one-man show at the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York in 1965, just a year before Eva Hesse showed her work in “Eccentric Abstraction.” His work received positive

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reviews and established Tuttle as a prominent artist and the newest addition to a growing group of artists that considered themselves “painter-sculptors.” As described by contemporary art curator Madeleine Grynsztejn, the works in this exhibition “[were] the earliest manifestations of a drawing centered aesthetic strategy that Tuttle would pursue throughout his career: he transpose[d] the methods, materials, and liminality of drawing onto painting, sculpture, even architecture, and in so doing he exceed[ed] and overturn[ed] the bounds of each.” Presently, Tuttle is still considered a “painter-sculptor,” and this title is evident in two of his major series of works discussed in this thesis; “Wire Pieces” and “Paper Octagonals.”

Tuttle began making his 48-work “Wire Pieces” series (Fig. 15) in 1971, a body of work whose central focus is ephemerality. These works consist of florist wire, nails, pencil, and the shadow cast on the gallery wall. Tuttle, like other artists such as Carl Andre, insists that he must make the work himself, and as such he refers to the ”Wire Pieces” as his “life insurance.”

When describing the Wire Pieces Tuttle stated: “It cannot be defined, it can only be experienced.” In her essay “A Universe of Small Truths,” Madeleine Grynsztejn notes that, “Tuttle eschewed representation and associations in an effort to make a specific object that would prompt the experience of absolute presentness, overlaid with a metaphysical experience of being in the here and now.” By facing the “now-ness” of the piece, Tuttle forces the viewer to

86 A description of the “Wire Pieces” from Richard Tuttle: Wire Pieces, (Bordeaux: Musée d’art contemporain, 1987), 27. “In the first twenty pieces, the wire is laid to follow the pencil drawing…in the subsequent thirty wall pieces, the wire element does not strictly follow the pencil lines, but explores the lines, in terms of their composition and spatial relationships. (The nature of the lines themselves changes as well: two or more unconnected lines may be used, and at least two pieces I know of use two parallel lines).”
87 Ibid., 42.
live in the moment as they comprehend their existence within the context of a work of art that has a fixed lifespan.

However, the evanescent quality of Tuttle’s work, which is central to his artistic practice, makes the “Wire Pieces” extremely difficult to archive, not only for their impermanence, but for photography’s inability to capture the subtle dimensional changes. Additionally, when thinking about photographing Tuttle’s “Wire Pieces,” one must also decide if the process is worth photographing. Tuttle’s process of putting the “Wire Pieces” together has been described as performance art; Tuttle works alone in the gallery, shoes off, only wearing socks, to be closer with his surroundings. Tuttle describes the process as: “emerging from the memory embedded in his muscles.” Knowing Tuttle’s experience with art in the 60s, when performance art was arguably at its zenith, one can easily see how performative actions might figure into his process, and how the act of making the work becomes just as important as the work itself. Tuttle also describes that “the making of the pieces is part of the consistency of the pieces.” As described by art critic Ellen Lubell “the importance of execution could be interpreted as an evolution from Action Painting, transformed somewhat by Conceptual Art, and in a further form here [with the “Wire Pieces”].”

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Richard Tuttle does not wear shoes while making his “Wire Pieces” because he likes to stay connected to his surroundings. This comes from Tuttle’s belief in Zen Buddhism. See also Richard Tuttle: Wire Pieces, 27-28, for a detailed description of the process of Tuttle putting together a Wire Piece.
91 Grynsztejn, The Art of Richard Tuttle, 177.
92 Grynsztejn, The Art of Richard Tuttle, 40. Richard Tuttle also describes the act of installing the “Wire Pieces” as “an activity,” no doubt referring to Kaprow’s own performance art series of the same name.
93 Richard Tuttle: Wire Pieces, 27.
94 Richard Tuttle: Wire Pieces, 27.
Due to the performative and sculptural aspects of Tuttle’s work, he represents the intermediate archive between Kaprow’s and Hesse’s. Videos of Tuttle making his “Wire Pieces” do exist, however, none are very informative of the specifics of putting together a “Wire Piece.” Just like the description of Kaprow’s “documentary photography,” that provide only glimpses of the event, Tuttle’s creation process captured through video is also not informative, and is more about the aesthetic experience of his creation. Nevertheless, these videos may still be relevant to his future archive in that they represent the performative aspects of this body of work.

III. Estate/Archive

Currently, Tuttle has an archive within the Smithsonian Institute’s Archives of American Art. This collection, as described by the Archives of American Art, contains “personal and professional correspondence, writings, exhibition and loan files, photographs, works of art and born digital media…” and was donated by the artist. Thus, Tuttle’s archive seems to be like Kaprow’s in that it is being controlled by the artist during his lifetime. Also, like Kaprow, this collection is not digitized and can only be viewed by appointment at the Archives in the Washington, D.C. Unlike Kaprow, his archive does not include a finding aid, so besides the general description of it, there is no real indication of what specifically Tuttle has included.

The way that Richard Tuttle currently makes his “Wire Pieces” puts them at risk of extinction within the next few decades. If we are to follow Richard Tuttle’s wishes, these works will cease to exist when he dies. Speaking specifically of his “Wire Pieces” Tuttle states “I like the anti-conservation: things passing away, nothing encumbering. People like something that

lasts; I like something that vanishes.” Furthermore, though Tuttle uses floral wire and nails, materials that currently are easy to find at any craft store, in the future, there is a possibility that these may become rarities. This idea is also brought up by Ippolito when discussing Dan Flavin’s light sculptures that were made of industrial neon tubing, once available at most hardware stores, but now increasingly difficult to find due to the recognized hazards of neon.

Tuttle’s work also shares several characteristics with Hesse’s that adds to the difficulty of re-creation or conservation. Like Hesse, process is central to Tuttle’s work. The process of creation is just as important, if not more so, than the work itself and this aspect make it difficult to be redone by anyone but the artist. Tuttle also shares Hesse’s belief that art and life are indelibly connected, and that they have a finite lifespan. Thus, re-creation goes against artist’s intent and destroys the original meaning of the works.

Tuttle’s “Paper Octagonals” (Fig. 16) is series of twelve works that was first exhibited in 1970 that also deals with the concerns of transience. These works, which were first produced in cloth, then paper, and eventually evolved into his wire sculptures, consist of large cut paper octagonal shapes that are usually white and pasted onto a white gallery wall with wall paper paste and are meant to merge with the wall. Tuttle never signs his works because he believes it: “violates the purity of [it].” With this act, or lack of action, he consequently removes

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96 Ibid.
97 Ippolito and Rinehart, Re-collection: Art, New Media, and Social Memory, 32-33.
98 Ibid., 19. Quote from Tuttle about art and life: “I find that art is strong when it is attached to a way of life…But when art becomes cut off from how you want to live your life then it’s pointless it’s weak. To say that the only way you can see my art is if you are willing to face all of life for yourself…”
100 Ibid.
himself from the work and adds to the difficulty of archiving this series. Tuttle also embraces change with these pieces and encourages them to be reproduced. This idea was demonstrated with the “Paper Octagonal” series when Tuttle gave the Archives of American Art the freedom to sell the work from the original archetype. By doing this, Tuttle ensured the work’s longevity while removing himself from the process. As the catalog for “Paper Octagonals” notes, due to this unique archival process: “theoretically an original Tuttle work may come into existence [as late as] 2500.”

Tuttle’s embrace of ephemerality is also a result of the influence of Zen Buddhism on his work, especially the concept of wabi sabi. Wabi sabi is a Japanese aesthetic principle that values the transient beauty of the world.

The archival process that Tuttle has set up with the “Paper Octagonals” preserves his work for posterity, but removes him from the process, an idea that has worked well for other artists hoping to ensure the future of their work. Sol LeWitt’s museum drawing works are one example. For these works, LeWitt gives the museum instructions of how to recreate his drawings with simple materials, ensuring that “[His] wall drawings are guaranteed to last as long as there are crayon wax and white walls.”

Robert Morris is another artist who allowed his sculptural works to be recreated to fit whatever space they were being exhibited in. Morris stipulated that the works be made of ordinary plywood and painted any color grey of the institution’s choosing. However, Tuttle’s work differs from these examples in that Tuttle has not left any

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102 Ibid.
103 Grynsztejn, The Art of Richard Tuttle, 64 note 112. Tuttle is known to have traveled to
104 Ippolito and Rinehart, Re-collection: Art, New Media, and Social Memory, 7.
105 Ibid., 80.
explicit instructions for what to do with his work, and therefore allows more chance in his archival process.\textsuperscript{106}

In the catalogue for his “Paper Octagonal” Series, Tuttle also included his 11th “Paper Octagonal” with a note that explained:

My [Tuttle’s] intention in including in it the documentation [of his work] is simply to exercise, and to watch the possibilities inherence in the nature of this work…The only condition I am placing on this work is the same as the work’s nature: that is, an octagonal piece of white paper, be pasted to a white wall. All the rest consists of variables, which I am interested in looking at.\textsuperscript{107}

Tuttle is unique in these case studies in that he is still living and still has time to determine how he will, or will not, choose to save his art. His establishment of an archive, “Richard Tuttle Papers, circa 1960-2015,” within the past year at the Archives of American Art signals that his views may be shifting, just as Kaprow’s did, towards the later-half of his career. However, Tuttle may not want to talk about this shift since it seems to be the opposite of what his art promotes.

\textsuperscript{106} No explicit instructions that I am aware of because I have not personally seen Tuttle archives at the Smithsonian Archives of American Art collection.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion

The three artists involved in this thesis represent a range of complications associated with ephemeral art, its preservation, and display. With each artist, the question remains: what is the best way to recreate the artwork at hand, or can it even be done? From the three case studies above, my opinion is that all of the works can be recreated in some way, but several factors must come into play and will vary based on the artist and works involved. For Kaprow, his works have already been recreated. His reinventions, as he called them, are considered new works within the framework of his originals. As outlined in his chapter, there is a protocol to stage a Kaprow reinvention involving permissions, copy write, and fees to reinvent them correctly.

Re-creations of Hesse’s work have been done but require a different process than Kaprow’s. Since Hesse worked with physical objects, a skilled artist/conservator would be needed to recreate her work. Additionally, permissions would be needed from Hesse’s estate to do so. The work would need to be clearly labeled as a re-creation and could be put into context with photographs of the original work, or displayed with the original deteriorating work to educate viewers on the problems that can arise from using unstable materials. Hesse’s process-heavy work should also be described with the re-creation, as this was central to the importance and meaning of her art and why debates continue over what to do with her decaying sculptures.

Tuttle’s work, which is both performative and sculptural, can use concepts from both Kaprow and Hesse’s archival and re-creation process. Since Tuttle is still alive, re-creations of his work are not yet necessary, but the way that he is currently make his “Wire Pieces” will not be sustainable after he is gone. Tuttle has already made a constructive first step in establishing an archive during his lifetime to ensure it is organized as he sees fit. However, Tuttle’s current
practice of insisting on making the “Wire Pieces” himself could hinder the longevity of his artwork.

Another technique of display that could be used by both Tuttle (in the future) and Hesse (now) is the approach that curators took with Chris Burden’s work for “Chris Burden: A Twenty-Year Survey” at the Newport Harbor Art Museum in 1988. The curators of this exhibition used elements from past performances by Burden displayed as relics with descriptions of the original event in context. In this way, none of the works were recreated, but viewers of the exhibition had the satisfaction of seeing pieces of the original performance as relics. Tuttle could likewise use wire and nails from his “Wire Pieces” and Hesse could use pieces of her original decaying sculptural works to provide the context for works that no longer exists in their original form.

Reading about these artists, there is a great deal to learn about art conservation and preservation, and the artist’s role in these processes. Comparing Kaprow to Hesse, one can appreciate the difference between an artist who controlled his archival process, and one who did not, and the problems that Hesse’s work has faced because of it. For the work of Kaprow, the use of detailed artist’s notes have been helpful for those that have restaged his performances. Documentary photography has also been helpful when attempting to re-perform or recreate a work of art, but there are many other factors to considered.

The struggle to document, preserve, and exhibit live art also deals with the issues of

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108 of course, Hesse’s work was also made from unstable materials, while Kaprow’s were performances, which also makes a difference, but Kaprow was involved in how his ephemera was organized and taken care of, while Hesse was not.

109 André Lepecki, “Not as Before, But Simply: Again,” 152-156. Lepecki describes Kaprow’s notes as choreographic, including pictures of movements, and are rigidly transcribed in way that suggest Kaprow did want them re-performed, and in a very specific way.

110 In the digital age, controlling access through photograph becomes much more difficult. While some artist and institutions may continue to fight the trend, many have also embraced it.
ephemerality and questions if one can accurately describe a work of live art if they have not experienced it in its original form. For art historians, this issue is critical. Performance art historian Amelia Jones believes there is value in looking at documentation of performance works, and even if a person is so fortunate to witness the work first-hand, there is no way to have an autonomous relationship with performance art. Additionally, Jones believe that there is a value in NOT seeing the work first hand and looking at it through documentation: “live performances…often become more meaningful when reappraised in later years; it is hard to identify the patterns of history while one is embedded in them.” Looking at performance art from this perspective, there is a value in re-performing past works, to gain new context for understanding.

Though performance art is changing the dynamics of museums and allowing art to be accessible, at least in terms of comprehension by a larger audience, some critics believe this change should be examined with a degree of skepticism. Performance art historian Andrew S. Weiner argues that re-performance destroys context. Certain international artists’ work’s often do not translate well when re-performed or exhibited in other countries. Weiner uses the example of Beuys:

> Without effective contextualization, iconic images too readily confirm existing opinions of Beuys as hopeless utopian or cynical charlatan. He may well have been both, but his political organizing and experiments with direct action establish a complex legacy that can’t be reduced to his cult of personality.

Thus, without the proper context of the time and politics of the Beuys’ era, audience members may misinterpret or fail to see the value of re-performed live works. This lack

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111 Ibid
113 Andrew Weiner, “Part Against the Whole: Performance and/as Institution.”
of contextualization has also occurred as the boundaries between art and life blur and past performances that may have seemed radical no longer hold the same shocking effect. Recently many museums have started to provide public access to their digital archives and exhibitions, highlighting the desire by the public for open access, as well as shifts in funding towards valuing the digital. While this has allowed greater public access, once a work is put online, the context, which is usually provided by an archivist, is removed.

Ephemeral art has always provided interesting challenges to archivists, curators and other museum professionals. As seen in case studies on Allan Kaprow, Eva Hesse and Richard Tuttle, there are many ways to approach similar issues of re-creating and preserving a work of art that is not meant to last. While Kaprow chose to control his archive by deliberately saving certain photographs and paper ephemera from his Happenings and Activities, Hesse left no instructions for what to do with her work as it decayed. Tuttle remains to be seen, though his recent establishment of an archive at the Smithsonian’s Archives of American Art is a sign that he may be working towards preservation. The level of involvement of the artist in the process of establishing his or her archive during life, can help or hinder the re-creation process after his or her death. While solutions are still being examined, a collaborative effort between museum and conservation professionals seems to be the most comprehensive approach to date as these archival issues are not unique to one aspect of museology, but affect many areas of documentation and presentation.

114 A google search of “museum collections digitized” brings up 16,700 results.
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