**Title: The Looking Glass Project: A Critical Review of Endurance and Performance Art as a Catalyst for Social Change**

**Abstract**

The Looking Glass Project is a unique piece of performance and endurance art that highlights social injustices within Utah’s mental health and psychedelic science communities. This article critically examines the project as a powerful vehicle for social change, analyzing how endurance and performance art elements effectively conveyed its message. Through an exploration of the artist’s methods, the project’s evolution, and its ultimate impact, we explore how the Looking Glass Project succeeded as both an artwork and an instrument for institutional accountability and survivor advocacy.

**Introduction**

Performance and endurance art are forms of contemporary art that emphasize the artist’s body, presence, and physical or emotional stamina as mediums to deliver a message. Performance art engages the audience by presenting a live or staged act that often challenges social norms, while endurance art adds a prolonged physical or mental effort by the artist, highlighting resilience and commitment to a cause (Stiles & Selz, 2012). The Looking Glass Project embodies both forms, using the artist’s presence and endurance as tools to confront systemic injustices in mental health and psychedelic research. This review examines how the artist employed endurance and performance to expose ethical failings, advocate for survivor rights, and demand institutional change.

**Defining Performance and Endurance Art**

Performance art emerged as a genre in the 20th century, emphasizing the artist’s actions, presence, and interaction with audiences. Unlike traditional forms, it uses the artist’s own body as a primary medium and often includes unscripted or semi-scripted acts (Goldberg, 2011). Endurance art, a subset of performance art, further pushes boundaries by testing the artist’s physical and mental stamina over extended durations. These works are designed to evoke empathy, contemplation, and sometimes discomfort in viewers, making them a powerful medium for social critique (Stiles & Selz, 2012).

**The Artist’s Approach and Goals**

The artist behind the Looking Glass Project used both endurance and performance to convey her message, often spending hours or even days in public, visible settings to represent the sustained pain and resilience experienced by survivors of abuse. By physically embodying endurance, she symbolized the ongoing struggle for justice that many survivors face. Through this visibility, the artist aimed to raise awareness of boundary violations, delayed institutional responses, and systemic issues that inhibit survivor rights. The Looking Glass Project’s goal was to create a social dialogue around these topics, using the physical and emotional demands of the performance as a metaphor for the mental and emotional endurance required by survivors (Jones, 2022).

**Public Defiance and Legal Challenges as Artistic Mediums**

In addition to physical endurance, the Looking Glass Project incorporated public defiance of a University of Utah cease-and-desist order. This action, taken in protest, directly challenged the institution’s alleged weaponization of the law, which sought to prevent the artist from naming the alleged perpetrator. By violating this order in a public, deliberate manner, the artist highlighted how legal tactics can be used unjustly to silence survivors, reinforcing the importance of survivors’ rights to disclose their experiences. This act of civil disobedience became a pivotal part of the project, symbolizing resistance against institutional pressures to suppress survivor voices and demanding that survivors retain their right to speak out about harms they have suffered (Smith et al., 2023).

**Requests for Help and Communication as Artistic Mediums**

Beyond physical performance, the Looking Glass Project utilized requests for help and email communications as artistic mediums, integrating them into the performance itself. Emails, outreach letters, and persistent requests to institutional bodies like the APA (American Psychiatric Association) and DOPL (Department of Professional Licensing) became extensions of the performance, symbolizing the relentless quest for institutional accountability. These requests were not just administrative actions but were used to expose the bureaucratic delays and resistance that survivors often face in seeking justice. By integrating these communications into the project, the artist highlighted how survivors’ voices are often marginalized, showing the audience the procedural endurance required to advocate for change (Smith et al., 2023).

**Commitment to Non-Completion Until Institutional Resolution**

The artist’s commitment to continue the Looking Glass Project until reaching an ethical resolution underscored the project’s role as an act of civil resistance. This enduring stance—an insistence to continue until the APA responded to ethical violations and the DOPL reached a decision—added a unique layer to the endurance aspect of the art. This ongoing, open-ended nature of the performance reflected the reality that survivor advocacy is rarely straightforward or swiftly concluded. The artist’s decision to tie the project’s conclusion to the formal decisions of APA and DOPL emphasized that the endurance art piece was not just a single act but a sustained protest that would persist until institutional standards were met, demonstrating an unyielding commitment to justice and systemic change.

**Evolution of the Project**

Initially, the Looking Glass Project was intended as a local act of protest and awareness-raising within Utah, focusing specifically on ethical failures and institutional negligence. However, as the project progressed, it gained momentum and evolved into a larger campaign for national whistleblowing and survivor advocacy. The artist incorporated additional endurance elements, such as longer performances in harsher conditions, to reflect the increasing gravity and scale of the issues she was addressing. This evolution allowed the project to draw in a broader audience, expanding from local awareness to national discourse about survivor rights and the need for institutional reform in mental health and psychedelic research (Smith et al., 2023).

**Methods of Performance and Endurance in Action**

The Looking Glass Project utilized several hallmark techniques of endurance art to engage audiences and emphasize its message:

1. Physical Endurance as Symbolic Protest: The artist’s prolonged, often grueling performances symbolized the prolonged suffering and resilience of survivors. This embodiment of endurance encouraged viewers to reflect on the emotional and psychological toll experienced by survivors, fostering empathy and a sense of urgency for change.

2. Use of Public Space for Visibility and Accountability: By situating the performances in public or semi-public spaces, the project demanded attention from the broader community, prompting questions about institutional accountability and ethical transparency. This method aligned with performance art traditions that use visibility as a means to disrupt social complacency and engage passersby directly (Goldberg, 2011).

3. Interactive and Provocative Engagement: The artist used her own vulnerability, allowing audiences to witness her exhaustion and discomfort, creating a raw and impactful experience. Such interactions reinforced the message of endurance and prompted audiences to consider their roles in advocating for systemic change.

4. Documenting and Sharing Performances: The project’s documented performances, shared through social media and online platforms, extended its reach and created an archive of visual evidence. This documentation served as both a record of endurance and a call to action for viewers outside of the immediate performance space.

**Impact and Achievements of the Project**

Through her commitment to performance and endurance, the artist achieved several key goals that contributed to social change:

1. Raising Awareness of Survivor Rights: The Looking Glass Project brought attention to the barriers and ethical violations survivors face within institutions. By making her performances public and accessible, the artist created a platform for survivors to voice their experiences and advocate for rights, pushing institutional leaders to confront these issues openly (Smith et al., 2023).

2. Demanding Institutional Accountability and Reform: The endurance and dedication displayed in the performances underscored the need for institutions to prioritize accountability and reform. The artist’s persistence in her work highlighted the gap between institutional promises and actual protections for survivors, leading to renewed calls for oversight bodies and transparent reporting systems (Jones, 2022).

3. Empowering Survivor Voices and Communities: The Looking Glass Project inspired other survivors to share their stories, creating a sense of solidarity and community. This empowerment reflects endurance art’s potential to create collective healing spaces, where individual resilience is transformed into collective strength (Stiles & Selz, 2012).

4. Catalyzing National Discourse on Mental Health and Research Ethics: The project’s evolution into a national movement brought increased scrutiny to the mental health and psychedelic research communities. By pushing these discussions into the public eye, the artist contributed to a broader dialogue on ethical standards, encouraging policymakers and institutions to consider more rigorous safeguards for vulnerable populations.

**Conclusion: The Lasting Legacy of the Looking Glass Project**

The Looking Glass Project exemplifies the power of endurance and performance art as tools for social critique and change. By combining physical endurance with public performance and integrating continuous calls for institutional accountability, the artist embodied the resilience required by survivors and ignited critical conversations on ethics and accountability. The project’s legacy extends beyond its immediate performances, leaving a lasting impact on the discourse around survivor rights and institutional responsibility. Through her commitment to satyagraha, or nonviolent resistance, the artist demonstrated that performance and endurance art can effectively expose systemic injustices and empower communities to demand reform.

References

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