

## *Introduction*

When the term started at Columbia University in September 2014, Emma Sulkowicz began carrying a standard-issue blue dorm mattress with her everywhere she went on campus. The action was conceived by the visual arts major as both a performance art piece for her senior thesis and a protest against her university's handling of a rape charge that Sulkowicz had brought against a fellow student in 2013. When the university's Office of Gender-Based Misconduct ruled that the accused was "not responsible" and turned down Sulkowicz's request for an appeal, Sulkowicz designed and then embarked upon the performance, vowing to carry the mattress until she no longer attended school with her accused rapist. The piece was constructed around a simple set of rules. Principal among them: Sulkowicz always had to have the mattress with her on campus, and she could not ask for help carrying it, though she could accept help if it was offered (and it frequently was). At fifty pounds, the mattress was heavy enough that it was difficult but not impossible for Sulkowicz to carry it by herself, giving literal weight to the mattress's symbolism as a burden that she had to bear. The performance would end when either Sulkowicz's accused rapist left the university (voluntarily or through expulsion) or Sulkowicz graduated. On May 19, 2015, Sulkowicz, with the help of others, carried the mattress through Columbia's graduation ceremony, thereby ending the performance.

*Mattress Performance (Carry That Weight)*, as the piece is called, quickly garnered international attention. As an artwork, it was described by more than one critic as one of the most important works of 2014.<sup>1</sup> As an act of protest, it quickly became a symbol for a movement: on October 29, 2014 hundreds of students across the United States carried mattresses

<sup>1</sup> See, for example: Ben Davis, "Columbia Student's Striking Mattress Performance," *Artnet News*, September 4, 2014, <http://news.artnet.com>; and Jerry Saltz, "The 19 Best Art Shows of 2014," *Vulture*, December 10, 2014, [www.vulture.com](http://www.vulture.com).

on their university campuses as part of “Carry That Weight Together,” a National Day of Action to raise awareness about rape on university campuses.<sup>2</sup> Yet, while Sulkowicz earned the admiration of leading figures in art and politics, including performance artist Marina Abramović and US senator Kirsten Gillibrand, she and her performance were also heavily maligned in numerous articles and online forums, primarily by those who doubted her allegations of rape. One of the main objections and points of accusation was that she made a performance at all.<sup>3</sup>

Sulkowicz’s performance raises a number of questions that are pertinent to this book. How does *Mattress Performance* work, both as an artwork and as activism? What roles do bodily commitment and perseverance play in this piece? What is the significance of its long duration and indeterminate ending? How did spectators and participants in the performance help to shape this piece? Why did *Mattress Performance* generate such intense and polarized responses, and what might these responses tell us not only about the issues at stake within the piece but about the challenges of the performance itself? Such questions have everything to do with *Mattress Performance’s* form – the form that is the subject of this book.

Sulkowicz describes her project as an “endurance performance art piece.”<sup>4</sup> Her somewhat awkward designation would seem at once to point to a recognizable genre of performance and to indicate how uncertain such terms remain. In fact, if Wikipedia can be taken as a barometer of what has currency in public discourse, “endurance art” only established itself in the lexicon *following* Sulkowicz’s performance. A page on *Mattress Performance* was linked to a very rudimentary page on “Endurance Art” on February 12, 2015. The following day, that page was flagged for deletion with a notice that “There is no such thing as ‘Endurance art.’ No source supports the existence of ‘Endurance art.’ There are no reliable sources for ‘Endurance art.’” Over the course of the next twelve days, the Endurance Art page was updated by two contributors with additional citations, placing Sulkowicz’s piece within a lineage of performances by well-known artists including Marina Abramović and Ulay, Chris Burden, Tehching Hsieh, Bruce Nauman, Carolee Schneemann, and others. After some deliberation about the inclusion of long durational performance,

<sup>2</sup> See Sarah Kaplan, “How a Mattress Became a Symbol for Student Activists against Sexual Assault,” *Washington Post*, 28 November 2014, [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).

<sup>3</sup> See Eun Kyung Kim, “Columbia Student Carrying Mattress to Protest Alleged Rape Gets ‘Overwhelmingly Positive’ Response,” *Today News*, September 5, 2014, [www.today.com](http://www.today.com).

<sup>4</sup> Kaplan, “How a Mattress Became a Symbol.”

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a definition was established: “Endurance art is a kind of performance art involving some form of hardship, such as pain, solitude or exhaustion. Performances that focus on the passage of long periods of time are also known as durational art or durational performances.”<sup>5</sup>

As this anecdote suggests, to write a book about the performance of endurance in art and political contexts (a project that began for me well before Sulkowicz started university) is to contend with a term that already exists in discourse, yet whose definition has remained vague. This book both is and is not about what has popularly been called “endurance art.” It is insofar as it aims to provide insight into the practice of endurance and in so doing contribute to an understanding of what something like endurance art might be. However, this book is not about “endurance art” insofar as, like the contributor who flagged the Wikipedia page for deletion, it does not take the existence of this category as a given. “Endurance art” has never been a movement, and the term has not acquired any consistency of usage. In fact, although “endurance art” has some currency, anyone searching for uses of the term within writing on performance art would find that it has been used fairly infrequently and often interchangeably with a variety of other terms such as “hardship,” “ordeal,” and “masochistic art.” For instance, in an early article to use the term, Thomas McEvelley refers to “the Ordeal or Endurance genre,”<sup>6</sup> and in her survey *Performance: Live Art Since 1960*, RoseLee Goldberg equates “endurance art” with what Kathy O’Dell has termed “masochistic performance.”<sup>7</sup> More recently, in a short entry on “endurance performance” published in 2016, Jennie Klein affirms that “‘Endurance Performance,’ [is] also known as ‘masochistic art’ (O’Dell 1998), or ‘hardship/ordeal art’ (Phelan 1993).”<sup>8</sup> Such terminological inconsistencies suggest that understandings of endurance have been more implicit than specifically theorized. Yet, these terms have different connotations. O’Dell only uses “endurance” once in her book on

<sup>5</sup> To see these changes to the Wikipedia entry, click to “view history” on the Endurance Art page: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Endurance\\_art](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Endurance_art).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas McEvelley, “Art in the Dark” (1983), in *The Triumph of Anti-Art: Conceptual and Performance Art in the Formation of Postmodernism* (Kingston, NY: McPherson & Co., 2005), 249.

<sup>7</sup> RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art Since 1960* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 99. For O’Dell’s understanding of masochistic performance, see Kathy O’Dell, *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970s* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Jennie Klein, “Endurance Performance,” in *Reading Contemporary Performance: Theatricality Across Genres*, ed. Gabrielle Cody and Meiling Cheng (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2016), 22. Klein is referencing O’Dell, *Contract with the Skin* and Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

masochistic performance, and she does so to distinguish “performances that are regarded as *endurance-oriented* rather than *masochistic*.”<sup>9</sup> Instead of being “about” endurance art – as though that category were stable – this book asks what *endurance* is, in art and in other areas of life where it is intentionally performed, most significantly for me, in political protest. What kind of an act is endurance? What happens when artists or activists set out to perform acts of endurance? And why do such acts matter?

In seeking to answer these questions, I offer an understanding of endurance that is both more specific and broader than existing uses of the term. Most often, when the term “endurance” has been used within writing on performance, it has been associated with performance art practices that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, and particularly with body art works involving risk or pain.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, someone searching for the term “endurance” within texts on performance art might find a statement such as Robyn Brentano’s that “[i]n some of these experiments, artists placed themselves (and, at times, their audiences) at considerable risk, creating dangerous situations or performing disturbing acts of self-mutilation, physical endurance, and self-denial in order to confront fears and inhibitions and to plumb the physical, sexual, and psychological taboos of our society.”<sup>11</sup> Or, one might come across Goldberg’s statement that “artists such as Chris Burden, Marina Abramović and Ulay, Gina Pane and VALIE EXPORT, engaged in acts of extraordinary endurance, insisting that their unnerving and frequently dangerous undertakings were learning experiences of a deeply cathartic nature. For them, pain

<sup>9</sup> O’Dell, *Contract with the Skin*, 76, O’Dell’s italics.

<sup>10</sup> The terms “performance art” and “body art” overlap considerably in their usage. Both terms emerged in the early 1970s (see O’Dell, *Contract with the Skin*, 87–88, n. 34). Amelia Jones defines body art as works “that *take place through an enactment of the artist’s body*” (Amelia Jones, *Body Art / Performing the Subject* [Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998], 13, Jones’ italics). As she notes, this term is most often used to refer to work from the 1960s to the mid-1970s, which was labeled “body art” by its makers and commentators in the period, as opposed to “performance art,” which has been used much more widely across periods. For contemporaneous accounts of body art in this period, see Willoughby Sharp, “Body Works: A Pre-critical, Non-definitive Survey of Very Recent Works Using the Human Body or Parts Thereof,” *Avalanche* 1 (Fall 1970), 14–17, and Cindy Nemser, “Subject-Object: Body Art,” *Art Magazine* 46.1 (September–October 1971), 38–42. In this book, I use the broader term “performance art” but also refer to “body art” when discussing work that has been specifically described as such by its makers and critics.

<sup>11</sup> Robyn Brentano, “Outside the Frame: Performance, Art, and Life,” in *Outside the Frame: Performance and the Object, a Survey of the History of Performance Art in the USA since 1970*, ed. Robyn Brentano and Olivia Georgia (Cleveland, OH: Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, 1994), 46.

and fear could be understood as the material of the work.”<sup>12</sup> Such uses of “endurance,” not as a term for a particular form of performance but as part of a description of works that risk or produce pain for the artist, are among the most common uses of the word.

For others, endurance has also been taken to imply long duration.<sup>13</sup> “Endurance” and “duration” share the same root in the Latin *durare* (to last), after all. In her entry on “endurance performance,” Klein combines both connotations, writing that endurance performance “involves the artist using her or his body to the point of privation, discomfort, corporeal danger, or even pain *for long periods of time, ranging from several hours/days to a year or longer.*”<sup>14</sup> That they last a long time is key for Klein, and she asserts that “it is duration – rather than corporeal suffering or competence – that separates endurance performances from other manifestations of body art.”<sup>15</sup> Karen Gonzalez Rice also brings together pain and long duration in the title of her recent book *Long Suffering: American Endurance Art as Prophetic Witness* (2016), the first book to use “endurance art” in its title. However, for Gonzalez Rice, the emphasis is evidently on suffering – she does not discuss duration per se in the book. “Endurance artists suffer,” she begins; “They practice self-discipline by testing their bodies’ physical and psychic capacities, performing long-term actions, or submitting to pain or hardship.”<sup>16</sup>

Overall, whether taking duration into account or not, endurance has largely been understood, as Adrian Heathfield writes, to take “the experience of pain as a primary focus” (or, in the case of long durational

<sup>12</sup> Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art Since the 1960s*, 97.

<sup>13</sup> This, I believe, is what O’Dell has in mind when she suggests that Marina Abramović and Ulay’s long durational performances, including *Nightsea Crossing* (1981–1986) and *The Great Wall Walk* (1988), “are regarded as *endurance-oriented* rather than *masochistic*” (O’Dell, *Contract with the Skin*, 76, O’Dell’s italics).

<sup>14</sup> Klein, “Endurance Performance,” 22, my italics.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>16</sup> Karen Gonzalez Rice, *Long Suffering: American Endurance Art as Prophetic Witness* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 1. Gonzalez Rice’s book was published as I was making final revisions to this book, and hence my engagement with this important contribution to a discourse on endurance art is brief. As her opening sentence suggests, Gonzalez Rice asserts the existence of endurance art, and specifically American endurance art, as a category. For her, endurance artists “attemp[t] to visualize, legitimize, and testify to the conditions of suffering” (2); specifically, she claims that “The disciplined hardship an artist undergoes in these intense, painful actions testifies to the dramatic and persistent affect of trauma” (3). In doing so, Gonzalez Rice argues, “strategies of endurance art in the United States participate in deep traditions of American prophetic religious discourse” (5). While Gonzalez Rice has much to offer in her discussion of the work of Ron Athey, John Duncan, and Linda Montano, the three artists she considers, it will be clear to readers that I do not share her view that endurance practices in art are always a response to trauma or that they are necessarily “a contemporary iteration of progressive American prophetic witnessing” (7).

performances, to emphasize “a sustained living-through pain”).<sup>17</sup> Much has been written about performances involving pain, whether arising through acute injury or prolonged hardship. Within these texts, a variety of claims have been made and debated about the motivations and effects of such performances. It has been argued that performances involving pain: break down the boundary between art and life, producing an experience of the “present” or the “real”; enable personal transformation and function as acts of self-determination on the part of artists; implicate spectators, transforming them into witnesses or active participants; serve as rituals, akin to religious practices, creating communal experiences that are cathartic or healing; confront taboos and critique social norms; and draw attention to violence and suffering in everyday life.<sup>18</sup> This book diverges from these debates.

<sup>17</sup> Adrian Heathfield, “Impress of Time,” in *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh*, by Adrian Heathfield and Tehching Hsieh (London and Cambridge, MA: Live Art Development Agency and MIT Press, 2009), 22.

<sup>18</sup> See for example McEvelley, “Art in the Dark” (1983), in which McEvelley explores performances involving “self-mutilation and self sacrifice” in relation to “shamanic ordeal” (242); Claire MacDonald, Editorial, “On Risk,” *Performance Research* 1.2 (Summer 1996), vi–viii, in which MacDonald discusses Gina Pane as an artist who “used pain and injury to draw attention to social issues” but also worries about the “quasi-religious” interpretations that Pane’s work might seem to invite (vii); Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), where Carlson notes that performance in the 1970s that aimed to “push the body to extremes or even to subject it to considerable risk or pain” was often understood to “part[ake] of reality instead of the ‘more mushy’ illusory world of theatre” (103); O’Dell, *Contract with the Skin*, where O’Dell argues that the “dangerous or harmful acts” undertaken by masochistic performance artists served as “a key metaphor through which these artists could address the volatile social and political issues that affected the everyday lives of individuals in the early 1970s” (12). In *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2008), Erika Fischer-Lichte explores the transformation of both performer and audience in performances involving pain. She argues that works such as Marina Abramović’s *Lips of Thomas* (1975), in which “Abramović was actually harming herself, abusing her body” (11–12) transform “spectators into actors” (13). Fischer-Lichte also situates performance art involving injury in relation to religious rituals (13). In her article “Performing the Wounded Body: Pain, Affect and the Radical Relationality of Meaning,” *Parallax* 15.4 (2009), 45–67, Amelia Jones explores the political potentiality of performances of wounding, arguing that “what matters in terms of what the wound means is determined by the extent to which the viewer experiences affect and in particular *empathy* in relation to the suffering body” (54, Jones’ italics). Furthermore, she considers the relationship between real and representational wounding, arguing that “a ‘live’ wound is not necessarily more affective (or for that matter politically effective) than a representational one. ... At the same time, the wound affects us if and only if we interpret and experience it as ‘real’” (50). Marla Carlson compares performances by what she terms “pain artists,” such as Marina Abramović and Ron Athey, to medieval representations of the physical suffering of mystics, martyrs, and saints (Marla Carlson, *Performing Bodies in Pain: Medieval and Post-Modern Martyrs, Mystics, and Artists* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010]). She argues that “Because pain so powerfully solicits the spectator’s engagement, aestheticized physical suffering plays a vital role in creating communities of sentiment and consolidating social memory, which in turn shapes the cultural and political realities that cause spectators to respond in different ways at different times” (2). In his essay, “Intimacy and Risk in Live Art,” in *Histories and Practices of Live Art*, ed. Deirdre Heddon and Jennie Klein (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan,

As will become clear, while discomfort or pain may be involved in the performance of endurance, these are not the qualities that define it, and many performances of endurance do not involve extraordinary degrees of pain. Returning to Sulkowicz's performance, while the mattress may have symbolized Sulkowicz's suffering, the action itself was not necessarily painful, though it was strenuous, and the piece was explicitly designed to allow Sulkowicz's burden to be lightened by others who could join in to help. We could consider other examples as well, such as Yoko Ono and John Lennon's *Bed-Ins for Peace* (1969), in which they invited guests, including members of the press, to come and speak with them about peace while they sat in bed together for twelve hours a day for seven days,<sup>19</sup> or Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Touch Sanitation* (1979), in which, over the course of eleven months, Ukeles shook hands with the 8,500 workers then employed by New York City's Department of Sanitation and thanked them individually for their work maintaining the city.<sup>20</sup> Performances such as these involve bodily commitment and persistence, but they do not emphasize suffering.

Rather than equating endurance with "the experience of pain," this book advances an understanding of endurance as a formal practice with identifiable structures at the heart of its complex and multiple manifestations. Unlike the terms "masochistic," "hardship," and "ordeal," which attempt to name and describe experiences (experiences that will differ for every individual), endurance names an act. To endure is to *do something*, and it is the form that this doing takes that interests me. In taking this approach, I counter a long-standing habit of regarding performance art as essentially breaking with form (whether with the formal conventions of theatre or with the formalism of modernist art) and as therefore resistant

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2012), 121–47, Dominic Johnson follows O'Dell in arguing that "works which involve injury ... deploy carefully orchestrated representations to reveal the violent reality of everyday experience" (142); he further argues that body modification and other anomalous body practices allow artists to "claim ownership of the body" (144). As noted above, in her book *Long Suffering*, Gonzalez Rice also explores the relationship between "intense, painful actions" (3) and religion, arguing that "The forms and meanings of the artworks discussed in [her] book find their foundations in artists' early experiences of religion" (5). She also argues that through their actions "these artists condemn the social conditions that generate trauma" (8).

<sup>19</sup> Ono and Lennon performed two bed-ins in 1969. The first took place on the occasion of their honeymoon at the Hilton Hotel in Amsterdam. The second took place at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal.

<sup>20</sup> For an excellent discussion of *Touch Sanitation* as well as a number of Ukeles' other "Maintenance Art" works, see Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge 2011), particularly, Chapter 3, "High Maintenance: The Sanitation Aesthetics of Mierle Laderman Ukeles," 75–103.

to formal definition.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, I seek to provide a positive framework for understanding the formal resemblances that characterize endurance as a practice that has been central to performance art *and* that has been taken up strikingly beyond the realm of art. Here, the notion of *performing endurance* is key. It is the deliberate practice of endurance, undertaken with intention and will, that is at stake in these pages.

In the remainder of this chapter, I introduce the form of endurance. I describe its structure and consider its physical composition. In the process, I open up a range of issues that arise from this form, which will be explored in the rest of the book. My premise is that formal analysis offers new insights into what endurance is and what it does, and in the following pages I argue for the ethical and political significance of endurance as a form that engages with fundamental concerns about embodiment and relationality. At the same time, a second proposition of this book is that a more specific understanding of endurance also offers new insights into wider debates about performance because, as will become clear, performances built on endurance structures have frequently served as key examples in performance discourse. The chapters that follow will therefore also recast a number of debates in performance studies, including central arguments about the relationships between audience and performer, between performance art and political protest, between art and life, and between live performance and its documentation.

### The Form of Endurance

In order to open up a formal understanding of endurance, I would like to turn to what is perhaps the most widely known work of performance art, Chris Burden's *Shoot* (1971). For this piece, Burden had a collaborator shoot him in the arm in front of a small invited audience at the F-Space Gallery in Santa Ana, California.<sup>22</sup> *Shoot* is not a foundational

<sup>21</sup> See Henry M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde Since 1970* (Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989) and Jones, *Body Art* for examples of texts that position performance art as antiformalist. Sayre writes, "Performance, which was (and remains) styleless, diverse, and conspicuously unprogrammatic, has consistently proved one of the most readily available means for realizing this strategy of opposition [to modernism's formalist side]" (xii). Jones writes that "Body art is specifically antiformalist in impulse" (5). For a good discussion of the tendency to read performance art (and its British counterpart, Live Art) as always breaking with the formal conventions of theatre, see Beth Hoffmann, "Radicalism and the Theatre in Genealogies of Live Art," *Performance Research* 14.1 (2009), 95–105.

<sup>22</sup> Burden's description of the piece, which typically accompanies exhibited photographs of *Shoot*, consists of the following: "At 7:45 p.m. I was shot in the left arm by a friend. The bullet was a copper jacket 22 long rifle. My friend was standing about fifteen feet from me."



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performance; it is not the first performance of endurance, nor is it the earliest performance discussed in this book. However, it is a useful place to begin for a variety of reasons. First, numerous critics have pointed to *Shoot* as the most representative work of 1970s performance art and body art: C. Carr describes the documentation of *Shoot* as the “most emblematic of seventies body art”<sup>23</sup>; O’Dell refers to *Shoot* as the “best known example of performance art”<sup>24</sup>; and Frazer Ward describes *Shoot* as “a *signal example*, among a body of more or less violent performances of the 1960s and ‘70s.”<sup>25</sup> As such, *Shoot* has been closely aligned with that cluster of associations around risk and pain that I outlined in the previous section.<sup>26</sup> This makes it a productive example with which to show how the perspective on endurance that I offer in this book differs from existing discourses. In addition, as we will see, *Shoot* has been taken as a central example within numerous debates about performance art more broadly and therefore serves as a productive meeting point for a range of concerns that extend beyond it. *Shoot* thus provides the opportunity to analyze and depart from some of the assumptions that have circulated around endurance-based performance *and* to begin to show what a theory of endurance has to offer to the wider discourse on performance.

In its sparseness and apparent straightforwardness, *Shoot* offers a helpfully distilled example of the structure of endurance. This structure is easy enough to describe: it involves a plan and a following through of that plan. However, this deceptively simple premise opens up to a world of complexity, because the plan, like all plans, can never guarantee its outcome in advance. Burden asked his friend, Bruce Dunlap, to shoot him in the arm with the instruction that the bullet should just graze his skin. He also arranged with his wife, Barbara Burden, to film the action on a Super 8 camera; with his friend, Alfred Lutjeans, to take photographs; and with fellow artist Barbara T. Smith to make an audio recording. In addition, he invited a small group of people to watch the performance. Then, on November 19, 1971, before this assembled audience and with recording apparatuses in place, Burden followed through with his plan and was shot in the left arm by Dunlap, who was standing fifteen feet away from him. However, while the bullet was intended to just nick

<sup>23</sup> C. Carr, *On Edge: Performance at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England, 1993), 17.

<sup>24</sup> O’Dell, *Contract with the Skin*, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Frazer Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching ‘Shoot,’” *October* 95 (Winter 2001), 117, my italics.

<sup>26</sup> Meiling Cheng describes Burden’s performances more generally as “pushing [h]is body to the limits of endurance, pain, and danger” (Meiling Cheng, *In Other Los Angeleses: Multicentric Performance Art* [Berkeley, CA, and London: University of California Press, 2002], 53).

Burden's arm, in the performance, it passed through his arm instead, causing a more substantial wound. This disparity arose because, although tightly circumscribed in its conception, the performance was open to innumerable factors that exceeded Burden's advanced planning; from the possibility that the gunman's finger could have slipped to the possibility that his audience might have intervened and not allowed the performance to go on, *Shoot* could have turned out in a number of different ways.

This intentional commitment to a plan whose outcome cannot be determined in advance shapes all of the performances considered in this book. Indeed, it is this, I argue, that defines endurance, not that a performance is painful or long (though it might be either or both of these things). The implications of carrying out performances according to this structure will turn out to be vast. One might object that this description is too broad to be a useful characterization of a performance form. Many activities in life involve a plan and a following through of that plan. Yet, rather than taking this for granted, performances of endurance investigate this mundane feature of human action as a matter of great significance. As we will see, there are complex implications for the embodied subjects who carry out such plans, who strive to complete them as outlined, and who, in doing so, face the limits of their own capacity to control how things turn out.

In its use of a plan or set of instructions, endurance in the context of art is formally related to conceptual art, and the plans that precipitate performances of endurance often function as conceptual schemes similar to the instructions that form the basis for many conceptual art works. It is not surprising, therefore, that performances of endurance have sometimes been associated with conceptual art. Burden himself seems to have aligned *Shoot* with conceptual art at times. When asked in 1973 if it mattered whether the bullet just nicked him or whether it went through his arm, Burden responded coolly, "No. It's the *idea* of being shot at to be hit."<sup>27</sup> Yet, in its insistence upon the carrying out of the plan, endurance also diverges from conceptual art in significant ways. Unlike the classic definition of conceptual art offered by Sol LeWitt – "In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is

<sup>27</sup> Willoughby Sharp and Liza Béar, "Chris Burden: The Church of Human Energy, An Interview by Willoughby Sharp and Liza Béar," *Avalanche* 8 (Summer/Fall 1973), 54, my italics.