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Tehching Hsieh's *Outdoor Piece*:

The Invisibility of Hegemonic Poaching in the Public Sphere

In 1981, Taiwanese endurance artist Tehching Hsieh ventured out into the streets of New York City and proceeded to live outdoors for a full year, ending the piece (aptly titled *Outdoor Piece*) in 1982. In this yearlong derive of sorts, Hsieh essentially takes on the identity of a homeless individual—although “houseless” would be a more apt description of his type of purposeful displacement—calling into question tensions between public and private spaces and their impact on our everyday lives, as well as the way in which public spaces are navigated on a daily basis.¹ Throughout the late-1970s to mid-1980s, Hsieh embarked on a number of other yearlong endurance performances that included living in a cage (*One Year Performance 1978-79 (Cage Piece)*)—Fig. 1), punching a time clock every hour (*One Year Performance 1980-81 (Time Clock Piece)*)—Fig. 6), being tied to fellow artist Linda Montano with a rope (*Art/Life: One Year Performance 1983-84 (Rope Piece)*)—Fig. 2), and living without “art” (*One Year Performance 1985-86 (No Art Piece)*)—Fig. 3). He then concluded this series of works with a final performance entitled *Tehching Hsieh 1986-1999 (Thirteen Year Plan)* (Fig. 14), during which Hsieh created art, but would not show it publicly.

While the subject matter and corresponding themes that Hsieh grapples with in these works varies greatly—from conceptions of solitude to time, human relations to art—he remains

¹ Ben Highmore, “Michel de Certeau’s Poetics of Everyday Life,” in *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), 137; Adrian Heathfield and Tehching Hsieh, *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 38.

consistent in his deft use of visibility and invisibility in order to question hegemonic structures within society—despite his assertion that he is not a political artist.² Subsequently, he uses varying levels of meticulous documentation in each piece in order to enhance visibility or erase it.³ *Cage Piece* brought visibility to isolation, the basest of human experiences; *Time Clock Piece*, visibility to oft-unnoticed structures of time; *Rope Piece*, visibility to human interactions and relationships; and *No Art Piece* and *Thirteen Year Plan*, invisibility to the hyper-visibility of the art world, especially for an artist. But *Outdoor Piece* falls short by this standard, as it maintains invisibility for the already invisible experience of homelessness. With this, I argue that Hsieh's *Outdoor Piece*, while in line with the institutional questioning in which his other works partake, missteps in its use of de Certeau-like poaching in the public sphere.⁴ His life simply takes on a different form, still invisible to others, thus failing as an interventionist platform for bringing visibility to and discussion of public spaces and their human effects.

I will subsequently contrast this work with the series of crawl pieces (Fig. 12 and 13) performed by the black American visual and performance artist William Pope.L in New York in the 1990s. Thus, highlighting the way a *confrontational* artwork about the conditions of homelessness can better serve as site for constructing dialogues around its visibility, or lack thereof. When one simultaneously considers Hsieh and Pope.L's works, the privileged perspective from which Hsieh seems to silently appropriate the homeless experience rather than create visual engagement around it becomes far clearer. While the hegemonic structure that Hsieh works within functions well as a lampoon critiquing institutional rigidity, the power it affords Hsieh himself ensures its failure as a platform for inciting discussions concerning public

² Kathy Marks, "Tehching Hsieh: The Man Who Didn't Go To Bed For A Year," (*The Guardian*: Guardian News and Media, 29 Apr. 2014), [<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/australia-culture-blog/2014/apr/30/tehching-hsieh-the-man-who-didnt-go-to-bed-for-a-year>] (12 Mar. 2016).

³ Frazer Ward, "Alien Duration: Tehching Hsieh, 1978-99," *Art Journal* 65, 3 (2006), 7-8.

⁴ Ben Highmore, "Michel de Certeau's Poetics of Everyday Life," 159.

space, and the ways in which humans exist within it. Pope.L, on the other hand, manages to make a spectacle of sorts surrounding homelessness and its invisibility in the public sphere by making it provocative, urgent, and unavoidable, provoking real conversation and thought around an otherwise unknown perspective.⁵

In order for *Outdoor Piece* to be appropriately framed as a relatively unsuccessful outlier within Hsieh's body of work, it becomes necessary to first look at some of his other performances, *Time Clock Piece* (which occurred one year before *Outdoor Piece*) and *Thirteen Year Plan* (which occurred four years after). In *Time Clock Piece*, Hsieh begins, as he always does, with a statement of intent for the art piece (Fig. 4): he would punch a time clock every hour for a year. However, he took this process even further in this particular work by also providing an explanation, in order to "avoid any suspicion of cheating" (Fig. 5). To this end, he: (1) promised to have a witness sign each time card, as well as be the only individual welcome to fix issues with the time clock; (2) would take a photo after each punch-in—which would also be verified by the witness in the form of a film at the end of the project; and (3) would shave his head at the beginning of the endeavor for the sake of visual chronology. The physical material amassed by this hyper-documentation is astounding and is displayed in exhibits with daily time cards and all of the subsequent images for each corresponding day underneath them (Fig. 7). Additionally, Hsieh combined all of the photos, as promised, into a six-minute long film that plays in the gallery space (Fig. 6).

As mentioned above, Hsieh skillfully uses documentation as a way to craft visibility, in this case, bringing visibility to the invisible subject of structured time. He does this by engaging in the practice of tactical poaching, or customization of the structures in which we live, by

⁵ Emily A. Kuhlmann, "The Artist's Body as a Site of an Other's Otherness," in *Sightlines* (California College of the Arts, 2013), 96-98.

figuring time in a new and innovative way.⁶ In the article “Tania Bruguera: Between Histories,” which discusses the work of the eponymous activist Cuban performance artist, Stephanie Schwartz theorizes on the importance of documentation in this sort of institutional poaching: “[Bruguera’s underground parody newspaper *Memoria*] confronted the [Cuban] Revolution’s dislocations of political agency on its own terms...*through the media.*”⁷ In other words, she corroborates the methodology of using the visual medium of a hegemonic power in art, like Hsieh’s, that is meant to question and fight against the power structure. This sort of action ensures that the piece will be readable within the visual culture that it resides, but allows it to also counter prominent narratives constructed by bodies of power. In this case, Hsieh could be seen to question the capitalist rendering of time as a commodity, which originated during the Industrial Revolution.⁸ And by utilizing a time clock, which is usually used by businesses to ensure employee punctuality, Hsieh brings up a familiar image of time power structures in order to simultaneously critique their devastating effects on the human experience. This very real emotional and physical effect is imaged very clearly in the work, as the inability to sleep or leave his home for extended periods of time begins to show on Hsieh’s face as one looks chronologically through the series of photographs. It is in this way that the hyper-visibility created by painstaking documentation allows an individual to truly see and survey the implication of time in an entirely new light, with a relatively large span of time condensed into a brief video and number of photographs.

Related to Hsieh’s attention to documentation is the role of audience interaction. Created in private, as opposed to being performed live, *Time Clock Piece* was not, like much performance art, meant to be interventionist and incite instantaneous dialogue. Instead, the high

⁶ Ibid, 116-117.

⁷ Stephanie Schwartz, “Tania Bruguera: Between Histories,” *Oxford Art Journal* 35, 2 (2012), 224.

⁸ Frazer Ward, “Alien Duration: Tehching Hsieh, 1978-99,” 6.

level of documentation suggests that Hsieh intended the work to be displayed in a gallery-like setting, where the vast expanse of documentation could be properly and easily viewable (only a relatively small portion of all of the photos is displayed in Fig. 7). This venue and presentation immediately changes the composition of the audience to a more elite and visually literate group of people. While this could be problematic if he were grappling with a less institutional critique, this audience is actually the perfect group to delve into such discussions, as they have the capacity to ponder larger frameworks of power and the role that individual actions, such as punching a time clock, have within them. Accordingly, the piece does not need to be more shockingly interventionist or live, as it functions within a different sphere of dialogue that is more intellectual in nature. In this way, the piece still brings visibility, but to a group of individuals already a part of larger institutions of power. This works in two ways: (1) such viewers likely have a more nuanced understanding of hegemony, but (2) are also complicit in these power structures, allowing the subjects to question themselves and their roles in these systems.

It is worth noting at this time that Hsieh's immigrant status also plays a role in this piece, as it does in many of his works. In *Time Clock Piece*, he chooses to name himself on the artist statement (Fig. 4) as "Sam" Hsieh, as opposed to his native, Taiwanese first name: "Tehching." Upon first reading, it could seem as if this change was simply a result of his recent emigration to the United States—this piece is only his second yearlong endurance performance, and he used the name Sam in the preceding *Cage Piece*, having arrived in the US a couple of years prior. However, it can also be read as a reference to the US national personification in the character of Uncle Sam, which would further his critique of Western conceptions of labor as monetary.⁹ It can thus be read from the perspective of a disillusioned immigrant who came to America for a

⁹ Ibid.

better life, only to find monotonous manual labor where your humanity does not matter, but your ability to contribute your time does, lining the pockets of wealthy corporate bosses. An interesting dichotomy is present here though, as immigrants often “escape” this parasitic relationship by being unable to secure work at all. Hsieh can be figured in this way, as he has chosen for his art to become his labor, a sort of work without pay (which is suggestive of larger issues with the way art is socially undervalued as a category of work, especially performance art that is often unappreciated within the art world). This only further conflates the notion that time and labor are interchangeable in the Western consciousness, as Hsieh’s “work” in this piece simply requires him to physically show up. All of this complicates Hsieh’s feelings regarding such standardized time and the intense work ethic it breeds, as it frames the piece as not only questioning institutions of time, but the state in which he resides, as well. Again, this advances his argument, as he uses a tool of state in order to question its intentionality.

In regards to his tackling of immigrant-specific interpretations of larger power narratives, questions regarding the role of the autonomous artist arise. While Hsieh’s works tackle themes that are often described as basely human and universal, there is actually much particularity in how he presents them.¹⁰ In *Time Clock Piece*, this plays out in his intersecting of questions regarding Westernized time with his differed understanding of time as an immigrant from Taiwan. Here, he is again giving visibility not only to structures of time but also to an unheard immigrant narrative of its effects on the human psyche. In this way, he is partaking in a sort of self-imaging, a method that counters post-colonial thinker Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of the “Third Space,” a space of invisibility in which individuals of hybridized identity lie (this

¹⁰ Kam Shapiro, "Confounding Solidarity: Singular, Universal and Particular Subjects in the Artworks of Tehching Hsieh and the Politics of the New Left," *Angelaki* 18, 4 (2013), 197

includes immigrants, transnationals, multi-racial individuals, diasporic subjects, etc.).¹¹ This space of invisibility stems from lack of representation within the dominant visual culture, which considers these partial identities as not wholly a part of the society. In this way, both their country of origin and their country of residence often see immigrants as not “authentic,” with their unique perspective accordingly being left out of imagery and dialogues in both cultures.¹² By imaging himself and making reference to his outlook as an immigrant, Hsieh breaks out of this Third Space, or more appropriately, makes it visible to others. This self-imaging not only gives a space for new conversations around diverse bodies of people within institutional visual language, but also gives Hsieh autonomy over what image of immigrant life he is crafting.

Thus, it becomes necessary to return to Hsieh’s scrupulous documentation of the piece to evaluate how exactly he chooses to visualize himself, as well as his larger immigrant community. In the photographs taken of the work, each is framed exactly the same: Hsieh is in front of a white wall, positioned on the right side of the frame, with the time clock to his left and the punch card behind him. The camera is situated in a way that causes Hsieh to look slightly upward at the lens, and his facial expression always remains blank, although this often translates as appearing down-trodden. This becomes especially apparent as the work progresses and Hsieh pushes his body to further and further extremes, never sleeping or leaving his apartment for longer than about fifty minutes, in order to be ready for his next punch-in. The way the camera looks down onto Hsieh and the lack of emotions (particularly, positive ones) present in his face enters these photos into conversation with the imagery of mug shots. This visualizing of imprisonment makes evident the aforesaid struggle of immigrants being shackled by capitalist exploitation, as well as time itself. In this way, he not only creates a space for his community to be imaged in a culture

¹¹ Steven Nelson, “Diaspora: Multiple Practices, Multiple World Views,” in *Companion to Contemporary Art Since 1945*, ed. Amelia Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 305.

¹² *Ibid.*

that fails to represent it, but also for them to be imaged accurately, in all of their real trials and tribulations. This imaging of self that simultaneously symbolizes the larger group one embodies is referred to as the “burden of representation” in Kobena Mercer’s article “Black Art and the Burden of Representation.”¹³ Hsieh’s inclination to not shy away from imaging the immigrant fight for visibility also plays out in the way he chooses to figure the time clock punches that he failed to complete. There were 133 instances in the entire piece that Hsieh did not take an image, whether it was from camera error or his own lateness, and in the place of each of these would-be images is simply a black space, or an absence of image.¹⁴ This presentation of a lack of image within the larger work can be interpreted in two ways: (1) as imaging the embodiment of lack that many “othered” individuals feel, or (2) as a metaphor for literal blackness, which is often synonymous with negative connotations of darkness and wickedness, or as blanket term for all racial others.¹⁵ Consequently, this stylistic choice functions as a form of self-erasure, again, bringing visibility to the entirety of the experience of an immigrant, including the way one often embodies invisibility within their own conceptions of self.

Hsieh continues to build the realities of racial and ethnic othering into his portrayal of himself, and his status as an immigrant in America, in his use of a witness to corroborate his time cards, their corresponding images, and ensuing film (Fig. 5). Interestingly, Hsieh’s chosen witness was a white Englishman and fellow artist (David Milne), embodying the need for the autonomy exerted by those seen as “other” to be validated by white individuals within systems of representation. The camera, as the documentarian, also serves as a sort of mechanical witness. This can be related, again, to power structures created by bureaucracy, as cameras are often used

¹³ Kobena Mercer, “Black Art and the Burden of Representation,” *Third Text* 4, 10 (1990), 62.

¹⁴ Adrian Heathfield and Tehching Hsieh, *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh*, 35.

¹⁵ Paul Gilroy, “The whisper wakes, the shudder plays: ‘race,’ nation and ethnic absolutism,” in *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 44.

as a source of surveying by governmental bodies upon their own citizenry, or private businesses and organizations upon their own employees. In other words, cameras become part of the mechanics of bureaucracy, and the ways in which they are manipulated changes the way entire populations are represented, giving the institution that wields them power over the visible depictions of others. Returning to the visual similarity of Hsieh's photographs and mug shots (or possibly identification card photos), the positioning of the camera at a high angle creates an image that figures Hsieh, an immigrant subject, as weak and vulnerable. This puts the camera in a position of control, and thus the viewer takes on the same role, becoming strong and powerful in relation to the visually undermined Hsieh. Additionally, photographs are usually considered to harbor inherent validity due to their ability to capture brief moments of realness, which further enforces the seeming necessity of institutional verification in regards to Hsieh's human experiences. However, Hsieh is self-imaging in this piece, meaning that he has complete control over his aesthetic output. As such, he is choosing to incorporate the media and imagery of powerful institutions in order to question the way they represent a foreign other within their systems. The repetition he enacts in his continuous punch-ins and photographs only reinforces these mechanic bureaucratic apparatuses, making himself a figurative cog in the machine. Accordingly, Hsieh's decision to self-image in the style of the powerful calls attention to the conditions that bring about the invisibility of the Third Space for various outsiders in America, while simultaneously shaping its visibility.¹⁶

The other performance by Hsieh that is crucial to contextualize *Outdoor Piece* in his larger body of work is *Thirteen Year Plan*, which was performed a year after he had completed

¹⁶ Stephanie Schwartz, "Tania Bruguera: Between Histories," 224; Steven Nelson, "Diaspora: Multiple Practices, Multiple World Views," 305.

all five of his year-long endurance pieces.¹⁷ *Thirteen Year Plan* begins with Hsieh's usual artist statement outlining the parameters of the endeavor: he would make art but not show it from his 36th to his 49th birthday (Fig. 14). This artist statement varies from those completed for previous works in two ways. First, it is printed on black paper with white ink, as opposed to white paper with black ink (Fig. 3, 4, 5, & 8). This can be interpreted in a similar way as the black spaces that stand in for images when a punch-in was missed in *Time Clock Piece*, as an image of Hsieh's internalized feelings of invisibility, as well as a visual metaphor for the invisibility of the artwork produced during the performance. Second, Hsieh positioned "EARTH" (Fig. 14) in place of the specific location at which the performance would take place written at the bottom, which was usually as general as "New York" (Fig. 3 & 8), but could also be as specific as a street address (Fig. 4 & 5). This enhances the lack of specificity in the piece, which refuses to image Hsieh or his creative outputs, creating ambiguity both spatial and visually.

The only other material output from this piece is a series of posters created at each year-end in the work (Fig. 15), and a final one at its completion (Fig.16). This extreme lack of documentation after years of painstaking material evidence only highlights the invisibility created by this piece, in clear juxtaposition to his previous visibility-crafting. Though this work directly followed in line after his *No Art Piece*, which worked in a similar way to bring erasure to the hyper-visible art world, as well as question the inundation of images in contemporary life. While at the end of the thirteen year period many people expected to finally see the hidden fruits of his labor, they were instead met with a collage-style poster, which declared "I kept myself alive. I passed the Dec 31, 1999." Again, this poster has a black background, alluding to the invisible art it stands in for. However, the declaration of successful living during the duration of this piece seems to muddle whether the poster is the art, or the life he lived for those thirteen

¹⁷ Adrian Heathfield and Tehching Hsieh, *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh*, 58.

years is, both of which are kept invisible aside from the remark.¹⁸ His signature and the date of the new millennium, January 1, 2000 are underneath the statement, along with each year of the piece, indicating its duration without referencing the substance of the period. This poster has “EARTH” in the same position as his artist statement, as well as a small image of the globe as part of the declarative collage. Again, this muddles exactly what the content of the work is intended to be, and in its vagueness chooses to not directly image its aspirations. The year-end posters were each done in an identical style to the one released at its completion, except that in the place of the declaration was a white square, a literal void of visibility in place of physical evidence (Fig. 15).

All of this crafting of ambiguousness and invisibility can, like *Time Clock Piece*, be grafted onto Hsieh’s individual experiences, both in the art world and in daily life. Hsieh continues to use poaching in his documentation in order to call the hyper-visibility in the art world into question through his understated participation in it. In short, he utilizes the media of the art world to make statements regarding it. But by using the artistic style of collaging, he seems to be making reference to the underappreciated artistic endeavor of crafting, alluding even further to the lack of respect often afforded to performance art as a “valid” art within the sphere of artistic practice. Like this, he images his invisibility within artistic dialogues by choosing to visually erase himself in his performance.¹⁹ This invisibility mirrors, though, not only to his situating in the world as an artist, but also as an illegal immigrant (coincidentally he was granted asylum during the to creation of this piece).²⁰ When this is considered, the collaging done for the final declaration could be read more like a ransom note, which media often portrays as having individual letters cut from various media sources. Similar to *Time Clock Piece*, this alludes to

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Frazer Ward, "Alien Duration: Tehching Hsieh, 1978-99," 19.

²⁰ Ibid.

instances of crime, suggesting the criminality of simply existing in a state of cultural hybridity, as well as the continued imprisonment suffered by such individuals due to structures of power that limit their visibility and legitimacy. His autonomy as an artist is also relevant in this piece due to his attempts at self-erasure. While such experiences of invisibility could be relatable to larger audiences, he clearly bases it on his own self and the endurance he undergoes everyday. Therefore, the invisibility he devises is one specific to himself, allowing him the autonomy to place his body in the “Third Space” rather than institutional powers themselves, while simultaneously referencing their complicity in his visual status.

Turning to the audience implications in this crafting of invisibility, it becomes interesting to look at the retrospective done on Hsieh’s lifework in 2009 at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. One room was dedicated to each of his five year-long works, filled with the varying levels of documentation. But due to the fact that there was no physical documentation of these last thirteen years of his work, they chose instead to have thirteen empty spaces representing the lack of material output over the duration of *Thirteen Year Plan*.²¹ In this way, the original audience for the piece is non-existent, as there was nothing to view during its creation, only adding to the work’s invisibility. However, when the piece is seen in a museum setting, the audience would be very similar to that of *Time Clock Piece*, indicating the continued hegemonic structures through which Hsieh frames his makings. It would take such intellectual and visually literate individuals to conceptualize the meaning and representation behind an empty room. The subtlety of this piece necessitates such an audience, and therefore such an artistic approach in order to conceptualize invisibility.

I will now move to *Outdoor Piece*, which consisted of Hsieh living outside for a full year in the city of New York (Fig. 8), never entering any building or shelter (this includes all forms of

²¹ Adrian Heathfield and Tehching Hsieh, *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh*, 58.

transportation besides walking) and roaming the streets with a backpack—that had his mission statement affixed to it—and sleeping bag (Fig. 10). Throughout this period, he kept meticulous daily maps of his movements around the city (Fig. 9), tracking what he was doing, where, and at what time.²² (As a quick aside, this is reminiscent of the works of Japanese conceptual artist On Kawara: the viewer gets the details of what he does throughout his day, but gets nothing substantial about the reality of his life, maintaining the already invisible moments of humanity and making visible the previously visible—his movements through space.) There was also some film footage taken by his friend, filmmaker Robert Attanasio, of his whereabouts and activities in the city that clocks in at a measly thirty minutes, in comparison to his yearlong endurance feat.²³ There are roughly one hundred photographs that were taken during this endeavor as well, mostly by Hsieh himself, and other artist friends who happened upon him in the streets, though the images are not differentiated as such.²⁴ Already, this bureaucratic sort of documentation complicates a piece that seems intended to cast light on the way movement throughout the urban landscape differs when it is navigated “naturally,” functioning as not only the public sphere, but also the private.

Many questions seem to be addressed, such as how do interactions with the cityscape change? And where is the space for private within the public? While these questions arise as a way for Hsieh to contrast experiences of the urban space and the way time is experienced there by fully inhabiting it, they also apply to the homeless population, which is often not contemplated by the public, invisible despite their constant exposure. Thus, his scientific tracking of his supposedly “organic” movement throughout the city becomes further fraught, as his travels, like those of the homeless he lived amongst, are just as based on productivity as those

²² Adrian Heathfield and Tehching Hsieh, *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh*, 38.

²³ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

who have private repose in between their public journeys. He has time to wander aimlessly, but he stills migrates towards places where he can bathe, eat, defecate, etc.²⁵ And with this, his attempt to access a sort of alternate reality of the urban space and its understanding as a site of accelerated living becomes impossible. Instead, he simply adopts the life of an “other,” one who does not have a choice in their eternal situating in the public sphere, but navigates it for the same reasons, and in similar ways as those who do. Like this, Hsieh just appears to be another homeless individual on the street, failing to heighten their visibility (especially in regards to the social solitude amongst they experience living amongst the many, which seems to crop up some obvious questions to be explored in a larger evaluation of Hsieh’s art), and simultaneously failing to differentiate its conceptions of time and movement from the structures he aims to critique. In this way, his previous works’ incorporation of his autonomy as an artist does not function well when addressing the struggles faced by others, or the broader struggles of isolation and endurance that could be tackled as a larger framework.²⁶

This notion is only heightened when one considers that much of the struggle of homelessness was removed for him, with an invisible network of individuals to support him financially (and artistically) throughout, ensuring him necessities, such as food.²⁷ Additionally, his hegemonic success is most clearly seen in the courts’ reactions to his work. He only spent fifteen hours under shelter during this entire work, which was forced when he was arrested for an altercation with another man on the street (Fig. 11). However, on both of the court dates he had to attend, judges had ruled he could remain outside of the building in order to maintain the

²⁵ Ibid, 38.

²⁶ Kam Shapiro, "Confounding Solidarity: Singular, Universal and Particular Subjects in the Artworks of Tehching Hsieh and the Politics of the New Left," 207.

²⁷ Adrian Heathfield and Tehching Hsieh, *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh*, 38.

integrity of his art.²⁸ In essence, he had worked so rigidly within the framework of institutions in this piece that the institutions complicit in creating the structured context for the work were supportive of its endeavor. There could be an argument made, as Frazer Ward constructs in his essay “Alien Duration: Tehching Hsieh, 1978-99,”²⁹ that due to Hsieh’s status as an illegal immigrant at the time of this piece that his working within the confines of institutionalism was an attempt to remove himself from Bhabha’s “Third Space” in a socially acceptable way. I would agree that Hsieh’s decision to work within these structures allows his message to be more easily received, but would refute the idea that this work in particular was unable to confront such issues head-on in light of this. *Time Clock Piece* more than shows Hsieh’s ability to deal directly with his invisibility as an immigrant through institutional poaching, and I would assume that this could have also translated into a unique iteration of poaching on the streets in *Outdoor Piece*, rather than blatant mimicry.

In this way, it seems that Hsieh is engaging more with theories of the everyday than with theories of public space, which could explain his use of poaching (as the concept originated from everyday theorist Michel de Certeau), but also some of its shortcomings when questioning the use of space from a particular disenfranchised perspective. For reference, Guy Debord, the founder of the dissident artistic and social group Situationist International (SI), focused on theories of the everyday in his manifesto for the group. In part, this manifesto was inspired by fringe artistic movements of the past, such as the Dadaists and Surrealists, and subsequently featured ways to make “strange” the everyday in order to disrupt the institutionalized relationships created by “the spectacle” (or commodity of consumption).³⁰ Hsieh works within this exact model in *Outdoor Piece*, utilizing the fringe artistic style of performance and

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Frazer Ward, “Alien Duration: Tehching Hsieh, 1978-99,” 9.

³⁰ Guy Debord, “Separation Perfected,” in *Society of the Spectacle*, (Detroit: Black & Red, 1977), 12-24.

endurance art in order to complicate spatial awareness. In this way, he seems to want to reimagine the way people live life in urban settings, moving away from planned living in the city, where existence becomes a calculated project, and towards simply living, experiencing one another in an ever-changing community. Nevertheless, in order to tackle these varied ways of life in the city, Hsieh wanders into the territory of homelessness, as in an urban setting, they are the few who are “able” to live such an unplanned life. The notion of rituality connects this piece to the writings of Henri Lefebvre, as well, who assumes that the everyday is simply an internalized institutional rhythm and that such rhythm must be disrupted by special ritual time that places individuals back in their communities.³¹ Again, it seems that Hsieh is aiming to disrupt such patterns, but by working within the urban space, where the public of the city is the private space of the homeless population, these disruptions must be able to address the silent impact such individuals also have on these regularities.

This leads to theories of public space, which I will be looking at through the eyes of Beth Diamond, the late professor of design theory and landscape architecture at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo and the University of Michigan. For three years, guerilla art installation projects were assigned to Cal Poly SLO students in her Design Theory course to demonstrate the real-life impact designers can have on their local societies, altering the way people experience and perceive their world. Diamond argues public space is “the critical stage upon which positions of identity are established.”³² Hsieh is only worried about the identity of those wealthy enough to live and navigate the city while maintaining a place of residence, and he uses his platform in the public space to grapple with issues that affect them, but not those who live in an eternal state of exposure. Diamond goes on to say, “By using public space to voice

³¹ Ben Highmore, “Henri Lefebvre’s Dialectics of Everyday Life,” 116-117.

³² Beth Diamond, “Safe Speech: Public Space as a Medium of Democracy,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 64, 1 (2010), 94.

private fears, a physical space for both civic communication and community action is mapped out and ultimately invigorated.”³³ In other words, the more interventionist or confronting an artistic work in the public space is, the more it provokes conversation in its surrounding community. For Hsieh, despite being in the public sphere, the audience of this piece would be unaware of its happening if they saw Hsieh on the street—unless they chose to read his artist statement on his backpack—minimizing the piece’s impact on those in the community. Then, any of its marginal interventionist nature would be subsequently lost when the same intellectual elite of the art world that sees his other works, views the documentation of *Outdoor Piece* in a gallery, as it becomes re-institutionalized.

I will now turn my attention to William Pope.L in an attempt to show the way visibility can be brought to invisible issues, such as homelessness and isolation. Pope.L, unlike Hsieh, and quite like Diamond, started his crawl series with the intention of seeking to complicate the understanding and visibility of the homeless, as he had first hand experience with the issue, having various family members who had to live on the street.³⁴ The first iteration of the series was a 1991 work called *Tompkins Square Crawl*, where Pope.L donned a suit and held a single orange carnation in his hand as he slowly crawled along the previously transient-occupied city streets of New York (Fig. 12). During this performance, though, an onlooker in the community brought the entire performance to a halt after only a block when he stopped Pope.L in order to question his intentions—most specifically Pope.L’s positioning himself, a black man, in a demeaning action with a white man following him and taking video of the spectacle (for documentation purposes).³⁵ Whilst this point is important for discussing Pope.L’s works (Fig. 13—see title) in regards to his dialogues around the black subject and body politics specifically, I

³³ Ibid, 105.

³⁴ Ibid, 94.

³⁵ Emily A. Kuhlmann, “The Artist's Body as a Site of an Other's Otherness,” 96-99.

will put it aside for the sake of a relatively succinct comparison.³⁶ While the hyper-visibility created by this sort of spectacle generated a strong adverse reaction that seems to be the point of Pope.L's work: to provoke real dialogue amongst the public around issues of the marginalized within the very communities such complacency of viewing takes place—an approach that differs vastly from Hsieh's venturing into the public space in order to change his own relationship to it.³⁷

Immediately the question of visibility arises, especially when in comparison to Hsieh, who, by becoming a homeless individual, simply faded into anonymity along with other people in the same circumstances. Pope.L, on the other hand, creates a sort of visual spectacle around not only the suffering of the homeless subject but intersects it with the suffering of the black community, and possibly even the group where that intersection plays out: homeless minorities.³⁸ In a discussion around the artist using their body to create otherness, Emily A. Kuhlmann describes *Tompkins Square Crawl* in line with these ideas: “Physically engaging the audience by dragging himself across the pavement, Pope.L brings new light to existing social inequalities, without either mimicking the experience of or claiming identification with the homeless population.”³⁹ Pope.L creates a work that has more of an intervention in others' daily lives, rather than his own, unlike Hsieh, who focused on impacts upon himself as an individual and an artist. This approach is not only more apt for addressing a *social* issue; its confrontational nature also forces viewers out of complacency. And, in this case, provoked real conversation and even action on the part of the viewers—the passerby who was offended by the piece eventually got the

³⁶ Valerie Cassel Oliver, “Preface” and “Putting the Body on the Line: Endurance in Black Performance,” in *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*, ed. Valerie Cassel Oliver (Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2013), 2.

³⁷ Beth Diamond, “Safe Speech: Public Space as a Medium of Democracy,” 101.

³⁸ Guy Debord, “Separation Perfected,” 12-24.

³⁹ Emily A. Kuhlmann, “The Artist's Body as a Site of an Other's Otherness,” 95.

police involved and the entire performance was immobilized. Here, in contrast to Hsieh, it becomes clear how necessary it is for the artist to give up autonomy in such a public work if the goal is to let the piece impact people organically, letting it become what it needs to be in order for people to relate and engage with it. Pope.L also refuses to figure the suffering subject as abject by bringing in class connotations with his wearing of a suit, in order to combat assumptions about the homeless, as well as the plight of poverty prevalent within the black community. He brings in further racial connotations by holding a flower, resisting stereotypes of violence and criminality surrounding black males by softening their representation, both of which bring more topics of dialogue to the forefront.

With all of this in mind, I would take one last look at *Outdoor Piece* and *Tompkins Square Crawl*'s shortcomings and successes through the lens of their endurance component as this is where, it seems, that much of the difference between the works arises from. Hsieh and Pope.L take generally different approaches to their understanding of endurance: Hsieh takes it on in a durational way (although there is hardship involved in his living on the streets it would be a stretch to call it "suffering") while Pope.L must endure physical suffering in order to craft a sort of activism around corporeal and emotional pain in daily life. These opposing methodologies place the artists amongst varying dialogues, with Hsieh situating himself more amongst the intellectuals who can grasp larger analytical concepts in regards to theories of the everyday, while Pope.L crafts a dialogue for the common person, catching their eye and forcing them to confront possibly unhappy truths together.⁴⁰ From here, it becomes clear who exactly they are providing a voice for: Hsieh the experience of an individual artist, casting him into invisibility amongst others, and Pope.L the subjugation of masses, casting other into visibility. With this,

⁴⁰ Kam Shapiro, "Confounding Solidarity: Singular, Universal and Particular Subjects in the Artworks of Tehching Hsieh and the Politics of the New Left," 197; Beth Diamond, "Safe Speech: Public Space as a Medium of Democracy," 97.

Hsieh's appropriation of homelessness is not really about homeless individuals, which is why it fails both in its original institution-questioning intentions as well as crafting a potential dialogue about the people he usurps. Pope.L, though, succeeds, as he sets out to address the public from the start and thus, utilizes interventionist tactics to create immediacy regarding the issue, stemming real dialogue and contemplation, rather than elitist intellectual brooding.⁴¹

⁴¹ Ibid.

Images



Fig. 1. Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance 1978-79 (Cage Piece)*. Photo by Robert Projansky.

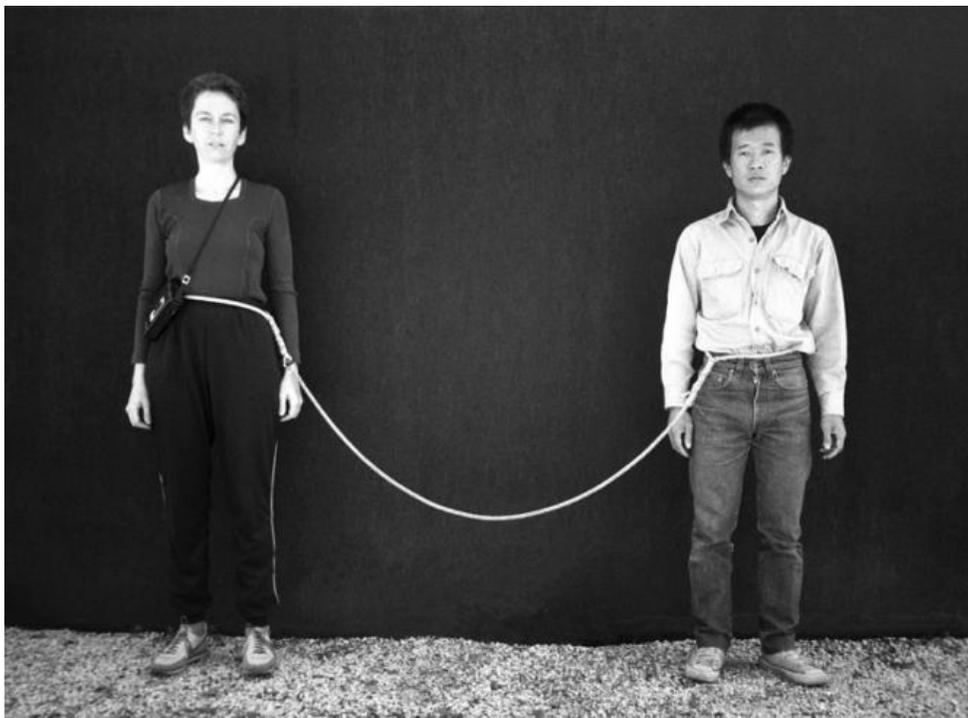


Fig. 2. Tehching Hsieh and Linda Montano, *One Year Performance 1983-84 (Rope Piece)*.

JULY 1, 1985

STATEMENT

I, TEHCHING HSIEH, PLAN TO DO A ONE YEAR PERFORMANCE.

I ■ NOT DO ART, NOT TALK ART, NOT SEE ART, NOT READ ART,

NOT GO TO ART GALLERY AND ART MUSEUM FOR ONE YEAR.

I ■ JUST GO IN LIFE.

THE PERFORMANCE ■ BEGIN ON JULY 1, 1985 AND CONTINUE UNTIL

JULY 1, 1986.

Tehching Hsieh

TEHCHING HSIEH

NEW YORK CITY

Fig. 3. Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance 1985-86 (No Art Piece)*, artist statement.

April, 1980

STATEMENT

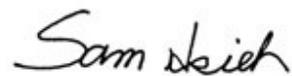
I, SAM HSIEH, plan to do a one year performance piece.

I shall punch a Time Clock in my studio every hour on the hour for one year.

I shall immediately leave my Time Clock room, each time after I punch the Time Clock.

The performance shall begin on April 11, 1980 at 7 P.M. and continue until April 11, 1981 at 6 P.M.

Sam Hsieh



111 HUDSON ST 2FL N.Y.C. 10013

Fig. 4. Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance 1980-81 (Time Clock Piece)*, artist statement.

Explanation of Procedure for Sam Hsieh's One Year Performance

In order to avoid any suspicion of cheating on the piece, I have prepared the following steps:

1. I shall have a witness sign each of the 366 time cards for the total one year performance. He will sign a statement agreeing not to sign any additional time cards.
He will also sign and seal the Time Clock. At any time repair or adjustment of the Time Clock is needed, he will return and witness it.
2. With a 16mm movie camera, I shall document each time I punch the Time Clock by shooting one frame. At the completion of the performance, the witness will confirm that the film is unedited.
3. To help illustrate the time process, I shall begin the performance with my head shaved bald and allow my hair to grow back naturally.

111 HUDSON ST 2FL N.Y.C. 10013

Fig. 5. Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance 1980-81 (Time Clock Piece)*, artist statement.

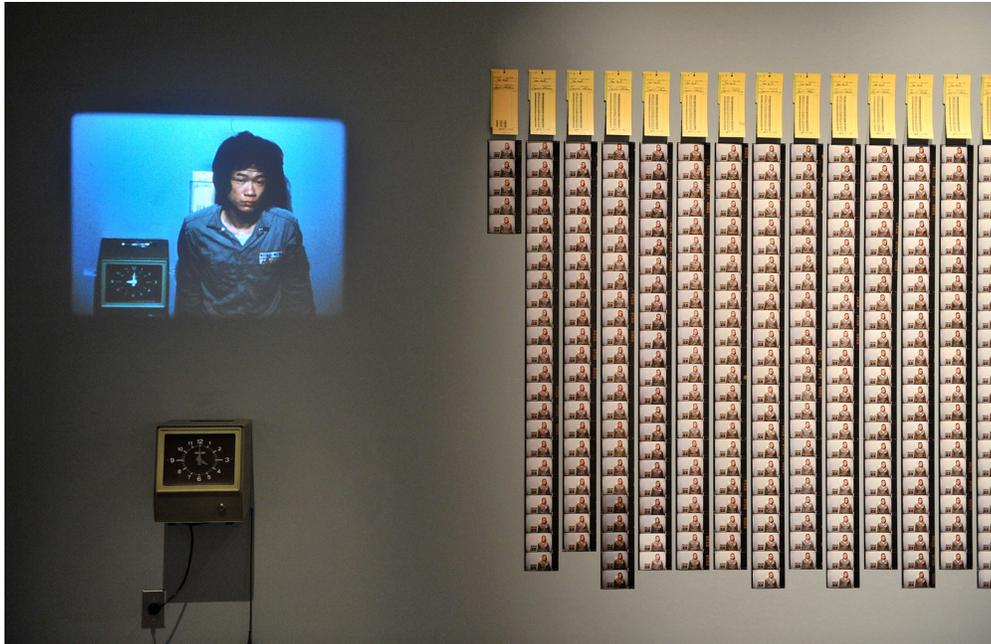


Fig. 6. Tehching Hsieh, installation detail of *One Year Performance 1980-81 (Time Clock Piece)*, at Liverpool Biennial, 2010.

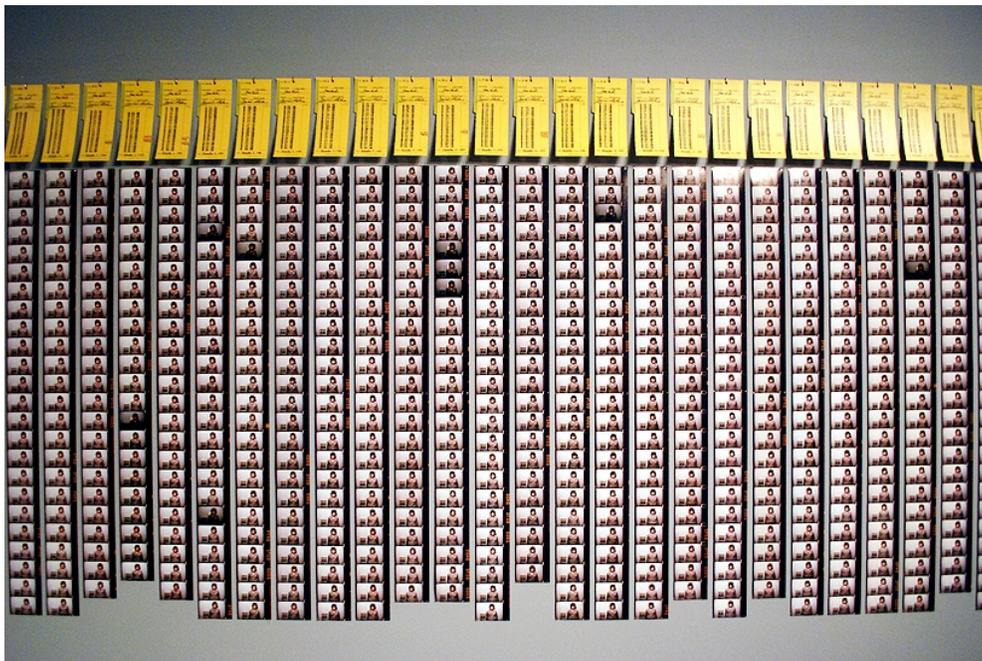


Fig. 7. Tehching Hsieh, installation detail of *One Year Performance 1980-81 (Time Clock Piece)*, at Liverpool Biennial, 2010.

September 26, 1981

STATEMENT

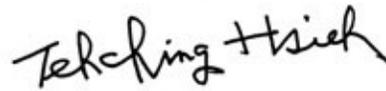
I, Tehching Hsieh, plan to do a one year performance piece.

I shall stay OUTDOORS for one year, never go inside.

I shall not go in to a building, subway, train, car,
airplane, ship, cave, tent.

I shall have a sleeping bag.

The performance shall begin on September 26, 1981 at
2 P.M. and continue until September 26, 1982 at 2 P.M.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tehching Hsieh".

Tehching Hsieh

New York City

Fig. 8. Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance 1981-82 (Outdoor Piece)*, artist statement.



Fig. 10. Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance 1981-82 (Outdoor Piece)*, New York.



Fig. 11. Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance 1981-82 (Outdoor Piece)*, "Being Arrested," New York.



Fig. 12. William Pope.L, *Tompkins Square Crawl*, 1991, New York. Video by James Pruznick.



Fig. 13. William Pope.L, *The Great White Way*, 1996, New York.

December 31. 1986

STATEMENT

I, Tehching Hsieh, have a 13 years' plan

I will make ART during this time.

I will not show it PUBLICLY.

This plan will begin on my 36th birthday December 31. 1986

continue until my 49th birthday December 31. 1999

Tehching Hsieh

Tehching Hsieh

EARTH

Fig. 14. Tehching Hsieh, *Tehching Hsieh 1986-1999 (Thirteen Year Plan)*, artist statement.



Fig. 15. Tehching Hsieh, *Tehching Hsieh 1986-1999 (Thirteen Year Plan)*, poster.



Fig. 16. Tehching Hsieh, *Tehching Hsieh 1986-1999 (Thirteen Year Plan)*, poster.

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