

happenings, live art, Fluxus, action, intervention, conceptualism, minimalism,
feminism, queer, post-colonial, land art, body art, video art, installation

PERFORMANCE ART

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Marina Abramovic, Vito Acconti, Laurie Anderson, Ron Athey, Franko B, Bobby Baker,
Joseph Beuys, Black Market International, Chris Burden, John Cage, Karen Finley,
Coco Fusco, Gilbert and George, Guillermo Gomez-Peña, Hancock and Kelly Live,
Rebecca Horn, Tehching Hsieh, Allan Kaprow, Yves Klein, Michael Landy, Lone Twin,
Mark McGowan, Alistair MacLennan, Meredith Monk, Otto Muehl, Hermann Nitsch,
Yoko Onno, Denis Oppenheim, Orlan, La Ribot, Rachel Rosenthal, Kira O'Reilly, Anna
Seagrave, Carolee Schneeman, Annie Sprinkle, Station House Opera, Stelarc

www.bris.ac.uk/nrla

www.artsadmin.co.uk/home

www.thisisliveart.co.uk

LECTURE AIMS

- address the importance of performance art in relation to this module/degree
- introduce the concept of 'performance'
- historically situate the development of performance art
- outline the key characteristics of performance art as a cultural form
- tackle some of the main issues raised by performance art
 - body
 - risk
 - self
 - time
- showcase the work of several performance artists

Why performance art?

- constitutes a key phenomenon in our culture (20th C.)
- shares fundamental elements with theatre: time space body audience
- has contributed to the development of our understanding of theatre
- offers stimulating and challenging strategies
- has influenced theatre practitioners leading to hybrid works
- will feature throughout the rest of your degree

Acting v. Performance

ACTING

- actor portrays a character
- takes place within a fictional framework
 - text-based
- 'truthfully' conveys emotion
 - essentially naturalistic
 - director-led

PERFORMING

- expression of Postmodernism's interrogation of the idea of a unified subject
 - resists psychological characterisation
 - playfully self-aware / self-reflexive (conventions, pastiche)
 - here-and-now of the performance event
- frequently prioritises the actor's role as a scenographic elements
 - performer-led
 - possibility of autobiographical materials

Performance, a critical term?

1950's - understanding of performance cultivated in anthropology and sociology:

- 'cultural performance' (Milton Singer) Culture is encapsulated in discrete events that "provide the most concrete observable units of the cultural structure". Theatre, concerts, religious rituals, etc. all share:
1. A limited time-span, 2. a beginning and an end, 3. an organised program of activity, 4. a set of performers, 4. an audience, 6. a place and occasion of performance.
- 'social performance' / performative elements of everyday life (Erving Goffman) All social behaviour is performed. We play certain 'roles' in our social relationships.

Performance Studies: began to develop its own methodology, history and focus.

Much credit for the institutionalisation of performance studies is due to the work of Richard Schechner. He called for an approach to theatre theory that:

- not literary or text-based criticism but performance-based analysis

- more informed by work in the social sciences

- converging with anthropology

- play, games, sports, rituals and theatre: 1.- a special ordering of time (event time, set time, symbolic time); 2.- a special value attached to objects (discrepancy in value); 3.- non-productivity in terms of goods (separation from productive work); 4.- rules (constants, apart from the everyday).

"It is hard to define 'performance' because the boundaries separating it on the one side from theatre and on the other from everyday life are arbitrary". (Schechner, 1977:39-40)

A history...

(beginnings)

'Performance' is a constant throughout history (ritual dances, mystery plays, Renaissance spectacles..)

Performance art has its origins in early 20th C. avant-garde movements (Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, the Bauhaus...)

- rebellion against conventional culture/art
- test ground for ideas/manifestos



Fountain Marcel Duchamp 1917

“The history of performance art in the twentieth century is the history of a permissive, open-ended medium with endless variables, executed by artists impatient with the limitations of more established forms, and determined to take their art directly to the public. For this reason its base has always been anarchic.”
(Goldberg, 2001:9)

DADA



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkl92oV1kMc>

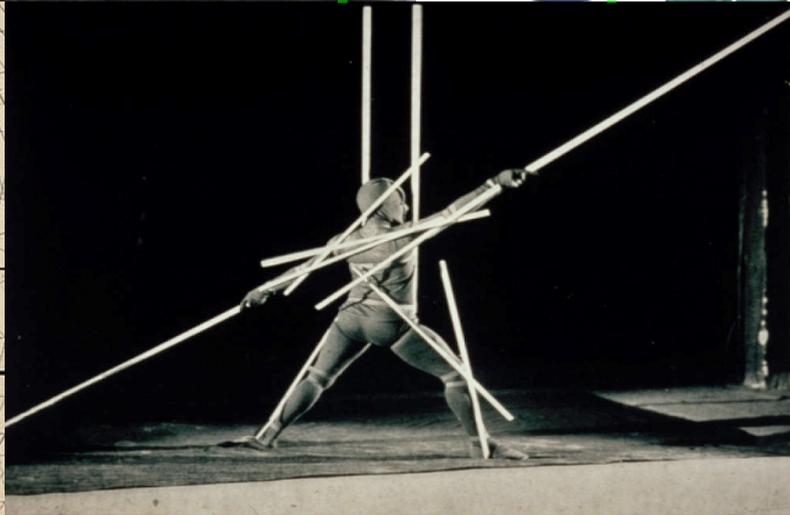
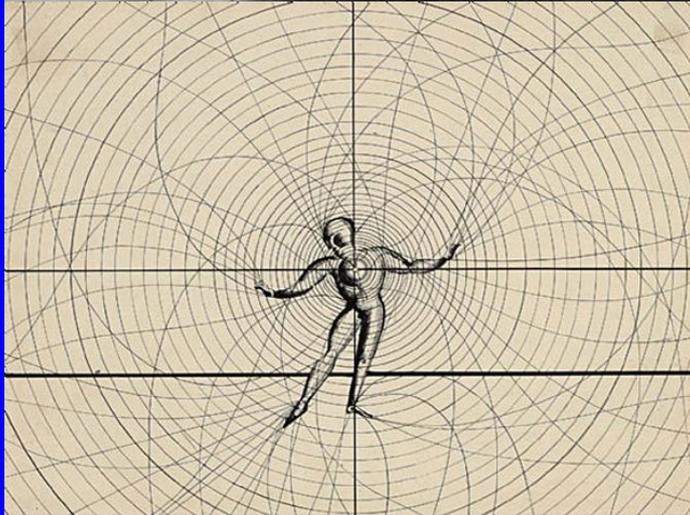
SURREALISM



Un Chien Andalou (1928)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIKYF07Y4kA>

BAUHAUS



The Shock of the New (1980)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Shock_of_the_New

1. 'Mechanical Paradise' (Futurism)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3ne7Udaetg>

2. 'The Powers that Be' (Dada)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JEx6CDW6-o>

5. 'The Threshold of Liberty' (Surrealism)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0HeSrqXKps>



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...history... (shift)

European experiments halted by WWII.
Hub of artistic creativity shifted to the USA.
Emergence of a distinct American scene, which was unthinkable without its European pedigree (Berghaus, 2005:63)

- recently established galleries/museums widen their circles beyond Impressionism (MOMA and Guggenheim)
- New Bauhaus in Chicago
- Black Mountain College
- development of Abstract Expressionism & Action Painting



No.3/No.13 Mark Rothko 1948

“The former avant-garde, which had defined itself through its opposition to society and its artistic institutions, had moved from the margins of society into the mainstream.”
(Berghaus, 2005:69)

Viewing #1

(Action Painting), Jackson Pollock

(Anthropometries of the Blue Period), Yves Klein, for Mondo Cane, 1961

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...history... (development)

“Actions undertaken with the aim of producing objects, such as Jackson Pollock’s action paintings and Yves Klein’s ‘Anthropometries’ made way for art where the intention was the creative process rather than the creation of marketable artefacts.” (Freeman, 2007:25)



Richard Long, *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967

- rise of Conceptual Art, Land Art and performance art

Reaction against commodification and commercialisation of the art world.

Break free from the constraints of dominant forms (painting/sculpture).

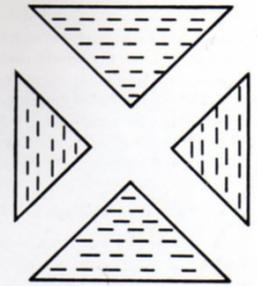
Operate outside constraints of museums and galleries.

Breaking barriers between high art and popular culture.

Moment in history # 1

Black Mountain College (founded in 1933 in North Carolina)

- Interdisciplinary art education (Josef Albers & Xanti Schawinsky -who had taught at Bauhaus- among staff)
- 1948 John Cage & Merce Cunningham invited to the summer school



Everyday noises as music, everyday movements as dance, chance procedures...

Untitled Event

presented in August 1952

Arranged by John Cage in collaboration with several artists.

Minimal preparation (overlapping 'time brackets' to be filled by different artists). No causal relationship between events

nothing is good/bad, ugly/beautiful - art shouldn't be different from life (but an action within life)

Cage read Zen texts

Rauschenberg's paintings hung overhead; Cunningham and others danced around the isles chased by a dog; water was poured from one bucket into the other, slides were projected, a 'prepared' piano was played, poetry was read...

Event was a success and soon became the talking point in the New York artistic scene and at the New School of Social Research (where Cage taught). Its importance was only been recognised later – no record.

Black Mountain College

Black Mountain College: A Thumbnail Sketch (South Carolina Education Network)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3xSAew7vEU>

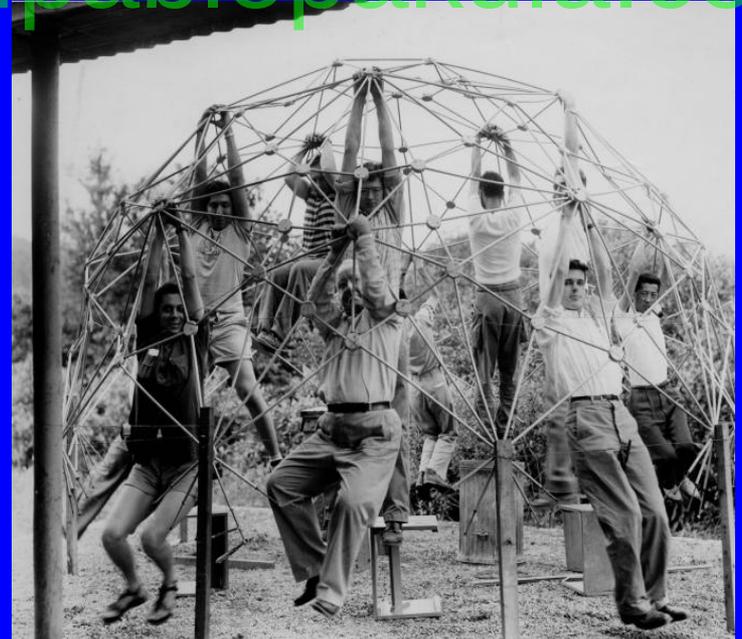
FULLY AWAKE: Black Mountain College (2004): trailer

<https://vimeo.com/89960430>

Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College 1933–1957 | ICA/Boston

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9URP8GgSg5M>

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John Cage



Robert Worply talks about Cage's importance
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6GnJLXL4Lw>

On silence <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcHnL7aS64Y>

Water Walk (1960)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSulycqZH-U>

Sonata IV for prepared piano (1946 - 48)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_c39Ji4bD2I

Musiccircus (2012)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBR8OAA-5p8>

As Slow as Possible (1987)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/As_Slow_as_Possible

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYnEWbL6yao>

As Slow as Possible (2001 - present)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VOCBRhhVr4>

(2013 note change)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSoH4_valAs

Moment in history # 2

18 Happenings in 6 parts presented in October 1959 at the Reuben Gallery, New York.

Conceived and organised by Allan Kaprow (studied under Cage at New School of Social Research)

Gallery space was subdivided into three sections divided by see-through plastic walls. Performance was divided in 6 parts, each containing 3 activities that took place simultaneously. A bell was rung between each part and the audience were led into a different room.

Term "happening": used originally to indicate a very determined, rehearsed and heterogeneous production, the word has picked up the connotation of a spontaneous undirected occurrence - not altogether intended by Kaprow.



18 Happenings in 6 parts Allan Kaprow 1959

Later Kaprow tended to simplify Happenings and relinquished rehearsals.

Throughout 1960's became a popular 'genre' that continued to develop beyond Kaprow's initial conception.

Allan Kaprow



"How to Make a Happening" (1966)

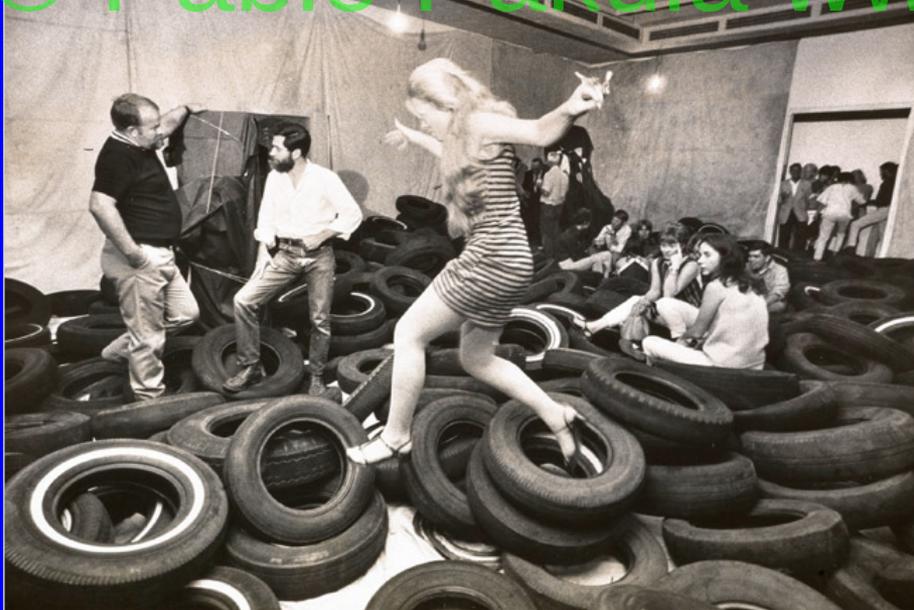
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iCM-YIjyHE>

<https://vimeopro.com/pkirby/kaprow-videos/video/39237880>

Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life, 1993

http://monoskop.org/images/3/36/Kaprow_Allan_Essays_on_the_Blurring_of_Art_and_Life_with_Impurity_Experimental_Art_The_Meaning_of_Life_missing.pdf

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Yard Allan Kaprow 1961



Fluids Allan Kaprow 1964

Fluxus

What is Fluxus? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGZ9OS1Oj14>

Fluxus European Art Academy, Trier (Germany, 11.06.04):
www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZRpjFtzJpo

Flux Boxes <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPi0UyHB95U>

Fluxconcert, NASA, Amsterdam (2013)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oj6e46zmp5w

Fluxus Performance Workbook (2002)
<http://www.deluxxe.com/beat/fluxusworkbook.pdf>

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Manifesto:

2. To affect, or bring to a certain state, by subjecting to, or treating with, a flux. "Fluxed into another world." South.
3. *Med.* To cause a discharge from, as in purging.
flux (flŭks), *n.* [OF., fr. L. *fluxus*, fr. *fluere*, *fluxum*, to flow. See FLUENT; cf. FLUSH, *n.* (of cards).] 1. *Med.*
a A flowing or fluid discharge from the bowels or other part; esp., an excessive and morbid discharge; as, the bloody *flux*, or dysentery. **b** The matter thus discharged.

Purge the world of bourgeois sickness, "intellectual", professional & commercialized culture, PURGE the world of dead art, imitation, artificial art, abstract art, illusionistic art, mathematical art, —
PURGE THE WORLD OF "EUROPANISM" !



Viewing #2

Cut Piece, Yoko Ono, 1965

The Singing Sculpture , Gilbert & George, 1969

I Like America and America Likes Me, Joseph Beuys, 1974

Eindhoven Aktion , Hermann Nitsch, 1982

Performance art (beyond definition)

By 1970's performance art had become an accepted medium in its own right (Goldberg, 2001:7)

- Not a movement: *“By its very nature, performance defies precise or easy definition beyond the simple declaration that it is live art by artists. Any stricter definition would immediately negate the possibility of performance itself.”* (Goldberg, 2001:9)
- No single aesthetic language: *“its key characteristic as a cultural form is that it has no given form. (...) The live art event may consist of anything, and so provokes and satisfies no expectations – its only requirement is that it happens. Consequently it permits no certain framing, denying spectators any secure ways of making sense.”* (Counsell, 2003:210)
- Does not seek to fulfil a single aim: *“The names of forms and approaches overlap, so that one spectator's ‘theatre’ is another's ‘performance’, which in turn might be ‘performance art’ for another and ‘live art’ for another still.”* (Freeman, 2007:4)

in common with the early 1920's
avant-garde (pendulum):
anti-establishment,
questioning attitude
(what is beauty? what is art?)

content rarely follows a traditional
plot or narrative

subverts the recognisable iconic,
deictic, and symbolic codes

embraces its ephemeral nature

the performer *is* the artist, seldom
a character like an actor

aesthetically
eclectic

Key characteristics

subverts frameworks

(an approximation)

hybridises genres

chosen medium to articulate
'difference' and platform for
empowerment
(multiculturalism, queer,
globalism)

Performance art marks "*a return to investigations of the body most fully explored by shamans, yogis and practitioners of alternative healing arts*" (Phelan in Freeman, 2007:8)

high art & popular culture

spontaneity / chance procedures

Performance artist as: shaman, instructor,
provocateur, commentator, entertainer,
visionary, joker, fool, saint, rebel.



What is Live Art?

Joshua Sofaer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOUxv4Do01g>

<http://www.joshuasofaer.com/>

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Viewing #3

Expanding in Space, Marina Abramovic and Ulay, 1977

O Superman, Laurie Anderson, 1981

My Queer Body, Tim Miller, 1992

Two Undiscovered Amerindians visit the West,
Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Coco Fusco, 1992-4

Welcome to the Third World, Guillermo Gomez-Peña, 2004

BODY

- Body as raw material
(development from action painting)
- Rejection of 'body beautiful'
(1980's materialism & narcissism)
- Tendency towards presentation
rather than representation
- Interest in ritual
- Transgressive & rebellious
attitude
- Effort, abnegation and sacrifice
- Body as a site for social
inscription



Untitled Barbara Kruger 1989



Sitting/Swaying: Event for rock suspension Stelarc 1980

Succour Kira O'Reilly 2000



“The artists who started to ‘unfold’ their bodies in public ... aimed at peeling off the sedimented layers of signification with which the body, their body, was historically and culturally coated.”
(Pejic in Berghaus, 2005:134)

RISK

Turner Contemporary Margate, Risk Exhibition (2015-16)

<http://bobnational.net/record/321902>

Rhythm 0 (1974) <https://vimeo.com/71952791>

The Man Who Destroyed Everything, documentary on *Break Down* (2001)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkXrlhoelCc>

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Rhythm 0 Marina Abramovic 1974



Break Down Michael Landy 2001

SELF

- | Breakdown of the distinction between the maker and the made (life/art)
- | Artists deny separation between their work and themselves as social beings (artists *is* the performer)

Persona!

Performance art as an attempt towards a new authenticity / truth. New subjectivity.

v.s.

Performance art as a means to problematise the self (as construct). Identity as constantly shifting and elusive.

“We can also say that – as theatre is the place for the well-told lie – so performance may now be the place for revelations of truth.” (Freeman, 2007:88)

“Autobiographical performances are ultimately authorised fictions.” (Freeman, 2007:96)

Self is political (‘écriture feminine’): performance art may be marked as political not primarily because of what words are spoken so much as by who speaks them.

TIME



The Persistence of Memory Salvador Dalí 1931

- Immediacy: here-and-now
- Duration
- Artwork as an event
- Ephemerality (one-off)
- Problematises perception
- Comment on society

Shift the spectator's physical experience of temporality to denaturalise our sense of official, public, clock, time.

"It is no coincidence that a broad aesthetic shift towards temporalised expression has taken place under the shadow of late capitalism." (Heathfield in *Small Acts*, 2000:107)

- orthodox time seems out of synch with the individual's experience
- time as a commodity that must be exploited to its maximum potential.

“Since the Happening this experimentation has found many different forms: creating fleeting works; diminishing the ‘known’ and rehearsed dynamics of performance by opening it to improvisation and chance; employing actions ‘in real time and space’; banishing, rupturing or warping fictional time and narration; scheduling works at ‘improper’ times; creating works whose time is autonomous and exceeds the spectator’s ability to watch them; extending or shrinking duration beyond existing conventions; presenting the experience of duration through the body; deploying aesthetics of repetition which undo flow and progression.”

(Heathfield in *Small Acts*, 2000:107)

12 am Awake & Looking Down
Forced Entertainment 2000

www.forcedentertainment.com/?lid=122

- Contraction
- Expansion





Aktion 398 Franko B 2000

Action 398
by Franko B (2000)

- one-to-one (*it's own sub-form*)
- two minutes encounter with each audience member

“The two minutes of the performance function as this sliver of time which one must replay; a holographic shard which contains more than its surface and duration suggests.” “one approaches the burden of what did happen through the lens of what did not.” “This desire to revisit is part of the performance, its performative legacy.”

(Etchells in *Small Acts*, 2000:32)

<https://vimeo.com/19071158>

One Year Performance
by Tehching Hsieh (1980/81)

punched a time clock on the hour,
every hour, 24 hours a day, for a
whole year 11/04/1980 till
11/04/1981, taking a picture of
himself every time he did so



One Year Performance Tehching Hsieh 1980/81

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Life and art, public and private blending into
one (sleep, travel, etc)

*“Hsieh labours under the temporal orders of
capitalism but evidently does not produce in
terms of those orders”*

(Adrian Heathfield in *Small Acts*, 2000:109)



Further complication:

It is not 'performance', not photograph, not film

"the work exists somewhere between the year-long event and its record, somewhere in the fusion and clash of its constitutive forms."

(Heathfield in *Small Acts*, 2000:108)

www.one-year-performance.com

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90izVR2Kip0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvebnkjwTeU>

One Year Performance Tehching Hsieh 1980/81

Body Art

FRANKO B

Various Franko B performances <https://vimeo.com/2456372>
I STILL LOVE documentary (2010) <https://vimeo.com/17812919>
I Miss You (2003) <https://vimeo.com/126830380>

ORLAN

Omnipresence (1993) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jN1teX2xzh0>
Orlan - Carnal Art docu. (2001) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=no_66MGu0Oo

RON ATHEY

Interview with Ron Athey <https://vimeo.com/88202911>
Southbank Show Body Art, ITV (1993) extract <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQKPsnmgwQM>
4 Scenes in a Harsh Life (1993) <https://vimeo.com/47239842>
Incorruptible Flesh: Messianic Remains (2014) <https://vimeo.com/118005181>
St Sebastien 50 (2012) <https://vimeo.com/45203633>
Ron Athey: Brunel Research Seminar (2012) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMX1U5YOWI0>

Bobby Baker



Drawing on a Mother's Experience (1988)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZltcjneEz_0

Cook Dems (1990)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isYYI9ibq2E>

Kitchen Show, part of *Daily Life* series (1993)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rlbzhmljz_k

How to Shop, part of *Daily Life* series (1993)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZfQdBq5Wvk>

Table Occasions (1997)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aD8ZssPfzos>

Pull Yourself Together (2010)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TnU6pBiuGMM>

Performance art mainstream?

Can't Stop (Red Hot Chili Peppers, 2002)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BfOdWSiyWoc>

Lady Gaga's entrance to Emmy Awards 2011

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CgGQZuKxYB0>

Lady Gaga talking about Marina Abramovic

www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVY4Whayw0s

Orlan sues Lady Gaga for plagiarism (2013)

<https://news.artnet.com/people/orlan-lawsuit-lady-gaga-new-york-403937>

<http://uk.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2013/june/19/body-artist-orlan-sues-lady-gaga/>

From Yoko Ono to Lady Gaga: how pop embraced performance art (2011)

<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/jul/07/performance-art-pop-lady-gaga-yoko-ono>

How Performance Art Entered the Mainstream (2015)

<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-how-performance-art-entered-the-mainstream>

RECIPE FOR ACTION #1

Look through *Fluxus Performance Workbook* (2002)

<http://www.deluxe.com/beat/fluxusworkbook.pdf>

Pick a couple of scores.

Try them out!

RECIPE FOR ACTION #2

Choose a location, somewhere private or somewhere public with people passing by. Choose a starting time and an ending time for your action (as little as 10 minutes or as long as 24 hours, dawn or dusk, night or day). Select one of the following stimuli as a starting point (if you dare, you could select location/time/stimuli at random using chance):

Exhaust yourself – exhausting all possibilities

Transform the space into its negative

Create a world within this world

Erase yourself

Go from the minuscule to the enormous and back again

Fight against a limitation

Plan out your action (though don't rehearse it). When planning you could use: post-its, sketch pad, pens, etc. Don't be afraid to change your mind; let ideas develop, collapse upon themselves, and re-emerge transformed from the wreckage. You could design your action by setting yourself formalist rules (i.e. never come into contact with the floor; repeat the action forwards, then backwards; only move in diagonals). Be aware of any health and safety implications of what you do (don't do anything illegal or anything that would put you or others in danger). Finally, you should plan how your action will be documented. How and through which means would this action be best documented? Now, enjoy!

Preparation for your seminar:

Reading:

- *Sings of Performance* Chapter 7 'Postmodernism and Performance Art'
- Excerpt by A. Heathfield from *Live: art and performance*
- *In Defence of Performance Art* by G. Gomez-Peña (attached below)

Revisit some of the screenings mentioned today, and do some of the further viewing on the next slide.

Remember the practical invitation!

Further Viewing

Marina Abramovic

<http://www.ubu.com/film/abramovic.html>

<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/marina-abramovic-live-culture-talk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldw488zpw7U>

An Artist's Life Manifesto <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTH4wYhWH54>

“The Goddess of Art: Marina Abramovic” <http://bobnational.net/record/121029>

La Ribot Distinguida documentary (2003)

<https://vimeo.com/77062512>

Carolee Sheemann

<http://www.ubu.com/film/schneeman.html>

Gilbert & George

http://www.ubu.com/film/gg_bbc.html

Hermann Nitsch

<http://www.ubu.com/film/nitsch.html>

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Counsell, Collin. *Signs of Performance*, Routledge, London, 2003

Berghaus, Günter. *Avant-garde Performance*, Pelgrave Macmillan, 2005, London

Freeman, John. *New Performance / New Writing*, Pelgrave Macmillan, 2007