

8 PERFORMANCE ART

Kristine Stiles

After World War II, performance by artists emerged almost simultaneously in Japan, Europe, and the United States. The artists who began to use their bodies as the material of visual art repeatedly expressed their goal to bring art practice closer to life in order to increase the experiential immediacy of their work. Their powerful declaration of the body as form and content insisted on the primacy of human subjects over objects. This assertion must be situated in the historical context of the aftermath of the Holocaust and the advent of the atomic age with their unprecedented threat of annihilation. Emphasizing the body as art, these artists amplified the role of process over product and shifted from representational objects to presentational modes of action that extended the formal boundaries of painting and sculpture into real time and movement in space. Removing art from purely formalist concerns and the commodification of objects, they also sought to reengage the artist and spectator by reconnecting art to the material circumstances of social and political events.

In this sense, they resumed the performance work undertaken by every modernist avant-garde from the futurists to the dadaists, from the various Russian avant-gardes to the Bauhaus members and the surrealists. In the 1950s, documentation about these early performances began to become available. *Dada Painters and Poets*, an anthology of artists' writings edited by Robert Motherwell, was published in 1951. Robert Lebel's *Marcel Duchamp* appeared in 1959. In addition, the Kunstverein für Rhineland und Westfalen launched *Dada: Documents of a Movement* in Düsseldorf in September 1959. This exhibition traveled to Frankfurt and Amsterdam, where enormous crowds saw hundreds of dada pictures, objects, and literary works produced between 1916 and 1922 in Europe and the United States. But whereas the performative aspects of the modernist avant-gardes had been a marginal aspect of their work, the artists who turned to performance after 1945 made the actions, psychological and social conditions, and cognitive features of the body the primary

medium of art, and they developed performance as an independent medium in the visual arts.

Live actions are impossible to circumscribe with limited definitions, and initially artists invented different terms to describe their performative intent: happenings, Fluxus, actions, rituals, demonstrations, direct art, destruction art, event art, and body art, among others. By about 1973, however, the stylistic range and ideological differences between these different forms had been subsumed by critics into the single category of performance art, despite protests by many artists who complained that the term depoliticized their aims and disarmed their work by proximity to theater, then associated by many with entertainment.¹

Performance artworks vary from purely conceptual acts, or mental occurrences, to physical manifestations that may take place in private or public. An action might last a few moments or continue interminably. Performances could comprise simple gestures presented by a single artist, or complex events and collective experiences involving widely dispersed geographic spaces and diverse communities. They could be transmitted by satellite and viewed by millions, appear in interactive laser discs, and take place in virtual reality. The action might be entirely silent, bereft of language, or inclusive of lengthy autobiographical, fictional, historical, or other narrative forms. Performances could occur without witness or documentation, or they might be fully recorded in photographs, video, film, or computers.

One of the earliest manifestations of performance art after World War II occurred in Japan, where Jirō Yoshihara (Japan, 1904–72), a gestural, abstract painter and influential teacher, founded the Gutai Group (Concrete Group) in 1954. He also edited *Gutai* (1955–65), a journal documenting the group's history, theories, and actions. Artists associated with the Gutai came to performance from various disciplines: visual art (Kimiko Ohara, Kazuo Shiraga, and Atsuko Tanaka), law (Saburo Murakami), literature (Shōzō Shimamoto), and economics (Yasuo Sumi). The Gutai created unconventional theater events, individual actions, and site-specific outdoor installations. Their use of the body as material, creation of events, emphasis on process over product, and introduction of natural materials and ordinary objects into the art context anticipated aspects of installation art, conceptual art, performance art, and *arte povera* and was aimed at reinvesting matter with spirit.

Georges Mathieu (France, b. 1921) was the first artist to stage live action paintings before a viewing public. In 1954, in an event filmed by Robert Descharnes, he dressed in medieval military costume to paint *Battle of the Bouvines* at the Salon de Mai in Paris. In this action, Mathieu realized the performative implications of Jackson Pollock's painting process and visualized critic Harold Rosenberg's hypothesis that the canvas had become an "arena" for an event, an "encounter" between artist and material.² Mathieu's public action paintings suggested analogies between artistic innovation, historical battle, and political transformation. They also

demonstrated how the production of a calligraphic image provided a concrete, signifying enactment of individual character, emotion, and thought, and how the body (as a producer of signs) was tied to the development of human character. Mathieu characterized his vigorous physical enactments as a process of "revolt, risk, speed, intuition, improvisation, and excitement." Mathieu's theories were published widely, and illustrations of his actions appeared in the international print media in art journals as well as popular periodicals like *Time*, *Vogue*, and the *New York Times*.

The widespread international reception of Mathieu's work had a rapid impact on the subsequent development of performance art.³ This was true especially for his friend Yves Klein, for whom Mathieu was a model. Klein began to stage spectacular public events. In 1958, for example, Klein began to direct nude female models to apply his International Klein Blue (IKB) pigment to their bodies. Pressing their overpainted bodies against canvas to create figurative imprints he called *Anthropometries*, he implemented the women as "living brushes." Klein's *Leap Into Space* (1960), a photomontage depicting his apparent gravity-defying leap from the second-story window of his dealer Colette Allendy's Paris apartment, inspired numerous artists to explore the body's materiality.

In direct contrast to such activities, the Situationist International (SI), a loose association of European artists and poets (with ties to surrealism, the Lettrists, and Cobra) formed in 1957. They repudiated the sensationalized conditions of contemporary life.⁴ Members included Guy Debord (France, 1931–94), Michèle Bernstein, Attila Kotanyi, Raoul Vaneigem, Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio, and others. Employing theory as the principal means for inciting action, they published *Internationale Situationniste* (1958–69), a journal containing essays in which the artists agitated for an aesthetics of everyday life and the creation of revolutionary "situations." The SI offered a sustained critique of imperialism, colonialism, and all forms of domination, the political division and control of urban space, and the general poverty of intellectual life. In 1967, the same year that Debord published *La société du spectacle*, the SI distributed at Strasbourg University an essay entitled "On the Poverty of Student Life" (1966–67).⁵ Many attribute to the influence of this tract subsequent protests at the university and the insurrectionary events in Paris in May 1968. The theories of the SI united existentialist activism, psychoanalysis, Marxist analysis of commodity culture, and the philosophy of the Frankfurt School for Social Research with anarchistic aesthetic traditions. Debord's suicide in late 1994 prompted the founding of an Internet site for a Situationist International interactive archive.

As a composer, poet, artist, and teacher, John Cage (United States, 1912–92) sought equally revolutionary ends through entirely different means. In 1952 at Black Mountain College, in collaboration with Robert Rauschenberg, Merce Cunningham, David Tudor, and Charles Olson, Cage presented a multimedia performance that anticipated happenings. Four years later, his two classes on experimental mu-

sic at the New School for Social Research in New York, and the International Summer Course for New Music in Darmstadt, attracted many of the originators of happenings, including Allan Kaprow, Al Hansen, Robert Whitman, Dick Higgins, Jackson Mac Low, and George Brecht. Cage combined Eastern philosophy with Western phenomenology. He studied the Huang Po doctrine of universal mind and Zen Buddhism with D. T. Suzuki. Using the *I Ching* (*Book of Changes*), Cage introduced chance procedures into art as a technique for distancing art from the egocentrism characteristic of aesthetic production since the Renaissance. He taught especially that consciousness is not a thing but a process, that art must entail the random, indeterminate, and chance aspects of nature and culture, that behavioral processes continually inform a work of art as an objective state or completed thing, and that "the real world . . . becomes . . . not an object [but] a process."⁶

The term "happenings" is derived from Allan Kaprow's (United States, b. 1927) series of performances *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959), which he performed at the Reuben Gallery in New York. In his happenings, the artist juxtaposed a diverse group of simultaneous, polymorphic, multimedia events and actions. Casting into question boundaries between discrete art objects and everyday events and actions, the happenings gave visual definition to the interstice between art and life. Three years earlier, Kaprow had considered the role that the Pollock legacy had played in these developments: "Pollock . . . left us at the point where we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life. . . . Not satisfied with the *suggestion* through paint of our other senses, we shall utilize the specific substance of sight, sound, movements, people, odors, touch."⁷ Already by the mid-1960s, however, as the theoretical and aesthetic aims of happenings were coopted and trivialized as popular entertainment and party games, Kaprow began to do nonaudience, nontheatrical "activities," private events that required commitment on the part of participants to explore interpersonal communication. The principal theorist of happenings, Kaprow studied art history with Meyer Schapiro and later wrote on video, theatrical, and many aspects of performance art. As an art educator and teacher intent to pass on "new values and attitudes to future generations," Kaprow encouraged artists to become "un-artists" committed to the transformation of "the global arena" rather than the production of marketable objects.⁸

Painter Carolee Schneemann (United States, b. 1939) began creating "kinetic theater" in New York. She had read Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) and Wilhelm Reich's theories of the corporeal link between sexuality and freedom, and these authors informed her belief that women's emancipation depended on the creation of a body of female representations able to express women's voices. In 1963, Schneemann performed *Eye Body*, an unprecedented series of private actions documented through photography, with pictures taken by Icelandic artist Errò (b. Gudmundur Gudmundsson). In these still tableaux, she created goddess im-

agery emphasizing female sexuality and used her body both as sculptural material and a surface on which to paint. Such work anticipated body and performance art and the feminist politics of identity. Schneemann wrote, "The erotic female archetype, creative imagination, and performance art itself are all subversive in the eyes of patriarchal culture because they themselves represent forms and forces which cannot be turned into functional commodities or entertainment (to be exchanged as property and value), remaining unpossessable while radicalizing social consciousness."⁹ Schneemann worked in every medium from drawing and painting to assemblage, installation, performance, photography, film, and video. Her film *Fuses* (1964–65), in which she filmed herself and her husband (composer James Tenney) making love, and her performance *Interior Scroll* (1975), during which she removed and read a text earlier inserted in her vagina, remain classic works of art in each medium and represent her effort to present erotic content in which a woman appears not only as the image but as the image maker.

Schneemann first performed her renowned happening *Meat Joy* (1964) in Paris at Festival de la Libre Expression, the first of several international festivals organized by Jean-Jacques Lebel (France, b. 1936) between 1964 and 1967. Lebel quickly became infamous for erotic happenings advocating free sexuality as a means to liberate experience—a philosophical position he had learned, in part, from dada and surrealist mentors and friends like André Breton and Francis Picabia. His festivals epitomized the alternative perspective that characterized the 1960s, and they were a key source of that decade's radical identity. In 1960, with Jean-Paul Sartre, de Beauvoir, Françoise Sagan, Simone Signoret, and others, Lebel signed the "Manifesto of the 121: Declaration of the Right of Insubordination in the Algerian War," which he later published in his quarterly *Front Unique* (Paris, 1960–61). This tract encouraged French conscripts to desert and caused massive rioting against the French-Algerian War.¹⁰ Friend to beat generation poets like Gregory Corso and Allen Ginsberg, a participant in Julian Beck's and Judith Malina's *Living Theatre*, and the first artist to do happenings in France, Lebel rejected the specialization of his diverse activities as a poet, painter, organizer, and political activist. Performance enabled him to fuse these interconnected practices into a unified form that, in his words, posed a "collective opposition" and "moral response" to institutional categorizations by church and state, revealed the "sclerotic activities of intellectuals" and the "reification and laziness of artists," and led to the restoration of art as an "act of rupture and liberation."¹¹

Liberation and its relation to oppression, destruction, and violence was a theme that animated many artists' performances in the 1960s. Raphael Montañez Ortiz (United States, b. 1934), a Puerto Rican American, began to destroy objects of furniture and fix the remains in what he called *Archaeological Find* in the late 1950s. At the same time, he worked in a radical editing technique, making films that re-

flected these same themes. By 1964, he had shifted from creating objects to performing destruction actions, performances that reflected his extensive study in anthropology, ethnography, philosophy, and the metaphysical uses of destruction in religious rituals. In *Self-Destruction* (1966), he performed a psychophysical regression to childhood that Arthur Janov credited as the inspiration for his theory of primal scream therapy.¹² Ortiz also collaborated with the playwright, director, and actor Richard Schechner, then editor of *Tulane Drama Review*, on the creation of political guerrilla street theater. Their work anticipated the formation of the Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG) by Jon Hendricks, Poppy Johnson, and Jean Toche in 1969.¹³ That same year, Ortiz founded and was the first director of El Museo del Barrio in New York. As the "museum director / artist, [he] explained that he had experienced cultural disenfranchisement which had led him to search for a new way to authenticate his ethnic experience. He saw El Museo del Barrio as a 'practical alternative to the orthodox museum' which he hoped would facilitate the revival of 'living values' and thereby personalize cultural experience" in the Puerto Rican community.¹⁴ He earned a doctoral degree in art education at Columbia Teacher's College for his theory of "physio-psycho-alchemy," a physical process in which he worked with participants on "inner visioning," positing that performance transforms the performer into "the work of art in progress." During the same period, Argentinian performance artist Lydia Clark practiced similar healing techniques, fusing psychoanalysis and performance.

In 1957, Wolf Vostell (Germany, b. 1932) adopted the concept of *dé-coll/age* as the driving theoretical principle of his work. For Vostell, *dé-coll/age* synthesized the destructive/creative dialectic of Western epistemology. He created large-scale *dé-coll/age* happenings that functioned in the social arena, in his words, like "weapons to politicize art."¹⁵ *Dé-coll/age* also emerged in the work of Raymond Hains, who began to collect torn posters (*affiches lacérées*) from billboard hoardings in Paris in 1949. Hains and Jacques de Villégé, François Dufrêne, and Mimmo Rotella exhibited the torn posters as public relics recontextualized as art. Reframed in the conditions of display, the *affiches lacérées* visualized the interconnected processes and links between destruction and creation, construction and deconstruction, and the objects and institutions of the fine arts and the artifacts of popular culture. Vostell positioned his *dé-coll/age* events at these intersections, extending the *dé-coll/age* principle into transformations in real time. He incorporated images and objects from the mass media into his work. In 1959, he began to transfer pictures culled from popular magazines onto canvas and paper (a process discovered independently by Rauschenberg in 1958); and, also in 1959, he included televisions in his environments and installations, acknowledging television as the disseminator of the "two great 20th century themes: destruction and sex." Vostell was the first artist to create live events and happenings in Germany, and he was a founder of Fluxus. He

also published *dé-coll/age: Bulletin Aktueller Ideen* (1962–69), a germinal publication containing many early theoretical writings by artists pioneering happenings, Fluxus, and other experimental media.

Fluxus, a loose international association of artists, formed under the organization of George Maciunas (United States, b. Lithuania, 1931–78), its self-appointed chairman. The series of performance events that he organized in 1961 at the AG Gallery in New York laid the foundation for the first Fluxus festivals in Europe in 1962. Maciunas organized these events, designed Fluxus publications, theorized about the collective social identity and political ideology of Fluxus, and attempted to dictate its membership. Fluxus festivals included the performance of group and individual “events,” defined by George Brecht as the smallest units of a “situation.”¹⁶ Based on a system of short textual notations, these “scores” were indebted to John Cage’s techniques of musical composition, which Brecht and others had been adapting to their own uses since the late 1950s. “Event scores,” a term coined by Brecht, engaged performers in actions that left the realization of the event open to an infinite number of complex or simple, public or private, individual or collective, and mental or physical interpretations. Although Fluxus events were diverse in character, the single-action performance—what Maciunas called a “monomorphic” event—came to distinguish Fluxus performance from happenings.

Richard (Dick) Higgins (United States, b. 1938), a poet, painter, playwright, and composer, attended Cage’s class at the New School and belonged to the New York group of artists producing happenings and theatrical events. In 1962, Higgins and artist Alison Knowles traveled to Europe, where they participated in the first Fluxus festivals. Higgins founded Something Else Press in 1964, followed by Great Bear Pamphlets and Something Else Newsletter in 1966. He published many of the first manifestos, scores, and poems of artists creating what he called “intermedia.” Intermedia differed from the nineteenth-century concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* (a total work of art) by emphasizing the intersections between media, spaces that do not represent a fusion but complex and shifting interim positions. Higgins theorized that intermedia conjoined aesthetic formalism, new social institutions, growing literacy, and new technologies into a hybrid media *between* traditional practices. Visual art performance, which emerged between gestural painting and attention to the process of the body in the production of art, exemplified Higgins’s concept of intermedia.¹⁷

Ben Vautier (Switzerland, b. 1935) joined Fluxus in 1962 during the period when he proclaimed EVERYTHING (*TOUT*) art and began signing the world.¹⁸ His hand-painted words and simple sentences painted on canvases and objects became *peinture écriture* (painted signatures), metaphors for artistic “signature.” In these works, he signified the egocentricity, careerism, and art historical market for personality. Employing traditional objects of art—paintings and sculptures—on which he placed his linguistic sign, Vautier pointed to activities and social relations residing beyond

the framing schemas of art. In his performances—Vautier lived for a week in the window of Gallery One in London during the Festival of Misfits in 1962—he employed everyday events to return attention to the aesthetic dimensions of art. Through word and action, Vautier visualized the interconnection between the linguistic devices that organize categories of experience and the action of artists who mediate between viewer and viewed to negotiate cultural meanings.

Robert Filliou (France, 1926–86) belonged to the Communist Party and the French underground during World War II, then studied economics at the University of California at Los Angeles. In 1953, he worked for the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency as an economic advisor, authoring *A Five Year Plan for the Reconstruction and Development of South Korea*, then “dropped out,” abandoned all political affiliations, studied Gandhi and Zen, wrote poetry, and began making art. He associated with Fluxus, participated in Lebel’s Festivals of Free Expression, and later created performances, installations, and videos. Filliou proposed an “Institute of Permanent Creation” to Allan Kaprow, a participant in discussions organized by New York State University on the subject of experimental curriculum in 1967. These ideas helped shape Kaprow’s concepts for educating the “un-artist.” Filliou also urged that a principal aim of education should be the “creative use of leisure: WORK = PLAY.”

In 1961, composer La Monte Young organized a series of experimental performances, concerts, and other events at Yoko Ono’s (Japan, b. 1933) Chambers Street loft. These led to her involvement in Fluxus. In 1964, she lived and worked in Japan, where she published *Grapefruit*, a compendium of strikingly economical and linguistically conceptual scores for poetry, painting, sculpture, music, and film written since the 1950s. Her actions stressed intimacy, emotions, and the senses (especially touch) in a way that anticipated aspects of feminist theory and performance. In 1969, she married John Lennon and their *Bed-In For Peace*—a live broadcast from their honeymoon bed in Amsterdam during which the couple urged an end to the Vietnam War—extended her aesthetic concepts (scoring events for performance) into real-time politics in an international arena. Together, Ono and Lennon created numerous political interventions in the mass media, actions indebted to her Fluxus experience.¹⁹

Milan Knížák (Czechoslovakia, b. 1940) began to perform “Action Workshop on the street” in Prague in 1962. The next year he was joined by artists Vit Mach, Sonja Švecová, Jan Trtílek, and Ždenka Žizkova. Together they created “ceremonies” and “demonstrations of objects,” again on Prague streets. Knížák cofounded the Group AKTUAL with artists Jan Mach, Vit Mach, Švecová, and Trtílek in 1964. Robert Wittmann joined the group a little later that year. They protested the bankruptcy of Soviet-imposed socialist culture in Czechoslovakia. Their “demonstrations” took the form of mock war games, street actions, and other events that included the destruction of art objects (musical instruments, paintings, and

sculpture). Knížák understood these performative events to be an affirmative alternative to the repressive experience of communism. His work and the "ceremonies" of the Group AKTUAL were embraced by artists involved in happenings and Fluxus. They were known in the West principally through Knížák's handmade books containing written, typed, painted, drawn, and mimeographed manifestos, drawings, poems, and theoretical writings on performance and other subjects. These books documented the actions and other forms of aesthetic resistance that were prototypes for the collective defiance that spurred the liberation of Eastern Europe in 1989. Indeed, playwright and president of the Czech Republic Václav Havel had been involved in the milieu of happenings in Czechoslovakia, and musicologist Vytautas Landsbergis, first president of Lithuania after 1989, had contributed to Fluxus.²⁰ Although arrested on several occasions and imprisoned for his art, Knížák was eventually appointed director of the Prague Art Academy by Havel after the demise of the Soviet Union and the liberation of Czechoslovakia.

Jerzy Berés (Poland, b. 1930) turned to performance as a response to domination and social struggle under Soviet-imposed communism. Trained in traditional art at the Kraków Academy of Fine Arts, Berés first exhibited in 1955. With the easing of political tensions in the mid-1960s, Berés created actions and demonstrations of a more direct political nature. Like Knížák and other Eastern European artists, Berés's ambiguous gestural narratives and oblique significations visualized the unique symbolic language Eastern Europeans developed as an alternative mode of communication under communism but also as a means for survival and subterranean resistance.

In Vienna during the early 1960s, Hermann Nitsch, Otto Mühl, Günter Brus, and Rudolf Schwarzkogler developed an extreme form of events known as *Wiener Aktionismus* (Viennese actionism). Drawing on Nietzsche, Freud, existentialist philosophy, and other intellectual and religious traditions, they collectively envisioned a form of "direct art" in which action led to social change and was an agent for releasing suppressed unconscious drives. Systematically assaulting repressive sexual mores, hypocritical religious values, the overt destructions of war, and the covert physical and psychological violence of the family, they created confrontational, often sadomasochistic and misogynistic, actions aimed at visualizing pain as a means of catharsis for healing. Scandalous in form and content, their art led repeatedly to arrest, fines, and imprisonment.

Hermann Nitsch (Austria, b. 1938) first conceived of the Orgies Mysteries Theater (OMT) in 1957. Condensing Dionysian orgiastic celebration, themes from Greek tragedy (especially Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Euripides' *The Bacchae*), and Christian notions of guilt and redemption, he theorized that his hybrid theatrical form might provide an abreactive ritual cleansing for the violent and destructive aspects of Western ontology and epistemology. He sought to excite the senses into metaphysical ec-

stasy in participatory, liturgically organized, synesthetic works of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) that were often blasphemous. Erudite and prolific, Nitsch developed his theory and practice into increasingly elaborate operatic, architectural, and social forms throughout his life, publishing many books on his complex aesthetic theories.

Otto Mühl (Austria, b. 1925) sought to redress the sources of destructive and aggressive pathology, which he located in sexual repression and values perpetrated in the concept of the "nuclear family." A soldier conscripted into the German army during World War II who survived the winter campaign in Russia, Mühl translated his shock at the self-degradation and violence of war into the creation of participatory *Materialaktion* (material action) in 1964. Comparing the body to lumpen foodstuffs, he submitted his own and those of other participants to confrontational, scatological, pornographic, and hedonistic revelry that satirized social and religious norms and taboos, released his rage at the human capacity for perversity, and aimed at catharsis. Frustrated with the limitations of art performance, he founded the Actions-Analytic Commune (AA Commune) between 1970 and 1972. Organized around direct democracy, common property, communal living, free sexuality, and the collective raising of children, the AA Commune translated his material actions into "reality art," performative realizations of self-actualization (*Selbstdarstellung*).²¹ Self-supporting by the end of the 1970s, the AA Commune was prospering when Mühl and his common-law wife, Claudia, were accused of child abuse, arrested, found guilty, convicted, and imprisoned in 1991.²² Paradoxically, those who exposed them had joined the commune voluntarily, accepted its radical experimental sexual values, and raised their children within its practices. Mühl's art and utopian social project exposed the visionary and tragic contradictions latent in some 1960s emancipatory projects as much as they uncovered hypocritical social mores.

Painter Günter Brus (Austria, b. 1938) constructed painted environmental installations before beginning to perform in 1964. His psychologically intense, physically brutal direct actions anticipated the self-exploratory performances characteristic of the actions many artists did in the 1970s. In his symbolic "self-mutilizations" and sadomasochistic actions, Brus invented a language for the body's material field of physical, psychological, and social pain. But the violence of his last action, *Zer-reissprobe* (Breaking Test, 1970), so threatened his mental and physical safety that he ceased performing. In the romantic tradition of William Blake, Francisco de Goya, and Henry Fuseli, he returned to painting and created *Bild-Dichtungen*, picture-poem books such as *Irrwisch* (Will-o-the-wisp, 1971). These retain the tension between suffering, guilt, punishment, eros, and thanatos that pervaded his performances.

Rudolf Schwarzkogler (Austria, 1940–69) produced private performative actions. Much like Schneemann in *Eye Body* (1963), Schwarzkogler designed still tableaux, staging actions with the aim of arriving at a photographic object. He often took as his theme the subjects of castration, wounding, and healing, and he used

the Austrian artist Heinz Cibulka as his model. Schwarzkogler wrote: "The pictorial construction on the surface is replaced by the constructions for the act of painting as determinant of the action field (of the space around the actor = the real objects found in the surroundings). The act of painting itself can be liberated from the compulsion to have relics as the goal, in that it is placed before the reproducing apparatus, which takes over the information."²³

Because of the myth of the evidentiary power of photographs, these images were often interpreted as true. In 1972 in a *Time* article, Robert Hughes claimed that Schwarzkogler had died by self-castration in a performance.²⁴ He did not. Schwarzkogler realized six actions between 1965 and 1966, performing only in the first and last of them and using Cibulka as his model for the rest. His death was caused by either accident or suicide when he fell from his apartment window in 1969. The Schwarzkogler myth continues to divert serious attention from the considerable aesthetic, social, and political aims of performance art.

In 1966, Valie Export (Austria, b. 1940) entered the circle of Viennese action artists when she began to collaborate with Peter Weibel on "expanded cinema." Two years later, she helped found the Austrian Filmmakers Cooperative. She coedited the groundbreaking documentation of Viennese actionism *wien: bildkompendium wiener aktionismus und film* (1970) with Weibel. Her pioneering feminist work in performance art and as a filmmaker and video-installation artist explored the body as a semiotic material sign, a "signal bearer of meaning and communication." She used the body to decode social constructions of gender and sexuality and to examine the effect that these formations have on the psychological, sexual, and behavioral acts, development, and representation of women.

Ulricke Rosenbach (Germany, b. 1943) joined the German women's movement in the late 1960s. She traveled to Los Angeles in the early 1970s and participated in feminist performance activities in and around the nexus of the Woman's Building. A master student of Joseph Beuys, Rosenbach began performing ritual actions in 1969. Almost from the beginning, she used slides projected onto her body and video as a device to record her action and to give her and the viewing audience an intricate feedback of the performance. Rosenbach examined the patriarchal-basis of art history, its mythological presentations of women, the damage such stereotypes cause to women's identity and artistic production, and the strength and power of women to reconstitute the forms of their own visual representation and identity. Rosenbach studied Buddhism and many esoteric subjects, investigating the psychic and spiritual dimensions of experience.

Marina Abramović (Yugoslavia, b. 1946) and Ulay (Germany, b. Uwe Laysiepen, 1943) met in Amsterdam in 1975 at De Appel, a prominent European alternative space for performance in the 1970s and 1980s. Abramović's physically and psychologically self-destructive "liberation" performances and sound environments date

from 1973. She belonged to the highly energized milieu of artists that included Raša Todosijević, Zoran Popović, and others exhibiting and performing at the Studentski Kulturni Centar (Student Cultural Center) in Belgrade.²⁵ Ulay studied engineering before he moved to Amsterdam in the late 1960s. Before collaborating with Abramović, he worked with German artist Jürgen Klauke in performances probing visual and physical expressions of transsexuality, a theme that compelled many male artists (like Urs Luthi of Switzerland) and musicians (like Mick Jagger and David Bowie) at that time. Abramović and Ulay's collaborative performances, or "relation works," began in 1976 on the theme of constant movement, change, and process. They sought to create a regenerative *art vital* and, until they parted in the late 1980s, they tested the physical limits of the body, balancing male and female principles and investigating fields of psychic energy, transcendental meditation, and nonverbal communication.

The intensity of the United States's war in Vietnam and many artists' antiwar positions and activities caused, simultaneously, an interiorization of experience and a questioning of metaphysical aspects of being. Artists also interrogated the phenomenological conditions of the body, using it as a "tool," the term filmmaker Willoughby Sharp used to describe how performance could be a means to manipulate objects, carry out tasks, and demonstrate process and change in material conditions and mental, physical, and psychological states.²⁶

Vito Acconci's (United States, b. 1940) body art exemplified this approach. Acconci began as a poet and, with Bernadette Mayer, edited *o To 9* (1967–70), a mimeographed poetry magazine featuring poets' and visual artists' writings. In 1969, moving between media, Acconci shifted from performing what he called "language acts" to physical actions. He monitored the bodily aspects of routine, improvement, durability, endurance, and exhaustion. Like Bruce Nauman, who had begun to film his own studio activities in 1967, Acconci used photographs and video to document his private actions. Acconci gradually reintroduced language into his work in stream-of-consciousness monologues that meandered over dense personal psychological subject matter. Acconci's emphasis on narrative altered the previously nonverbal orientation of body art and influenced such diverse artists as Laurie Anderson, Spalding Gray, and Karen Finley. Acconci structured his actions around dyadic relations—private/public, secret/known, trust/violation, performer/spectator—and the staging of exhibitionistic and voyeuristic desires. He also explored the relationship of the body to questions of power, gender, and sexuality. Acconci stopped performing in the mid-1970s when he felt his reputation as a performer interfered with the content of his work, and he turned to making interactive sculptural installations.

While still a graduate student in 1971, Chris Burden (United States, b. 1946) gained attention in the burgeoning West Coast performance scene for his danger-

ous acts of endurance.²⁷ His highly compressed, concise, and self-contained performances overlapped with the aesthetic projects of minimalism, postminimalism, process art, and conceptual art of the period. Structured carefully around dramatic temporal sequences of indeterminate durations, Burden heightened the anxiety of the inherent violence in his work by testing his own psychological and physical boundaries as sculptural form. Burden also confronted spectators with the ethical limits and responsibilities of the performer-spectator relationship and challenged viewers to become involved in, and share responsibility for, the performance. After 1975, he shifted from the impact of power, risk, and disaster on the individual body to its general presence in culture; in sculpture and installations, he addressed wider existential anxieties associated with the weapons industry, war, and destruction.

In contrast to the spare economy of Burden's actions were the theatrical elements predominating in Eleanor Antin's (United States, b. 1935) art. She created alternative personae in such works as the *King of Solana Beach*, *The Ballerina*, the *Black Movie Star*, and *The Nurse*. Resurrecting historical figures and inventing fictional ones, Antin appropriated fragments of identities into her own autobiography and collapsed the arbitrary aspects of self-representation into fictive narratives. Disrupting notions of the autonomy of the subject and questioning claims for the factual basis of history, Antin's characters were an anathema in the context of visual art performance, where the body and psyche had been staged as essential and self-authenticating. Antin's performances anticipated postmodern performance and theories of the social construction of identity, class, race, gender, and sexuality.

Founded in 1970 in San Francisco by Tom Marioni (United States, b. 1937), the Museum of Conceptual Art (MOCA) played host to many performance artists from the United States and Europe. Marioni invited such artists as Nauman, Acconci, Barbara Smith, Howard Fried, Terry Fox, Robert Barry, and others whose work was difficult to exhibit in conventional exhibition spaces. He astutely framed the context of their performances with the word "museum," endowing MOCA, and the art shown in it, with historical significance. MOCA was one of the first artist-directed alternative spaces to specialize in installation, language and conceptual works, video, and especially performance.²⁸ Marioni also edited *Vision*, published by Kathan Brown, director of Crown Point Press, a magazine that he treated as an exhibition space, "curating" issues on California, Eastern Europe, New York, and other topics. Marioni divided his own performance into private drumming actions and public social events that featured beer drinking. In *Cafe Society*, the title he gave to the Wednesday afternoon gatherings for beer and conversation that he hosted at Breens Bar below MOCA, Marioni condensed his public activities as curator, editor, and organizer into a performative metaphor of social exchange.

In 1973, Marioni lived handcuffed to Linda Montano (United States, b. 1942) for three days. Such collaborative experiences raised questions regarding the bound-

aries between art and life and the differentiation between private and public to a demanding performative threshold. Montano and Tehching Hsieh (China, b. 1950) tested the limits of such a commitment when they agreed to live tied together at the length of an eight-foot rope for one year, from 1983 to 1984. In a performance before he met Montano, Hsieh had concentrated on problems of duration, isolation, and survival by living one year homeless on the streets of New York. In her work, Montano had explored the nature and construction of identities both within and outside the frame of her art in her attempt to join them in a continuum. Such performances suggest how performance as a medium uniquely corroborates the visual and psychological conditions of the body. Also, such performances defy the status of art as mere commodity, returning it, as Montano and Hsieh believed, to a state of mind able to reflect attitudes and intentions about experience.

Suzanne Lacy's (United States, b. 1945) performative practice grew out of her own social commitment and conscience. Lacy received a degree in zoology and studied psychology before becoming involved in feminist art programs in southern California developed by Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, and others. Lacy was a key figure in the Feminist Studio Workshop, Womanspace, and the Woman's Building, all founded in 1973. In 1971, Lacy and Chicago collected oral histories of rape. These became the foundation for numerous collaborative performances with artist Leslie Labowitz and others throughout the 1970s, performances addressed to the subjects of rape, sexual assault, and abuse. The public forum Lacy created for discussion of these pressing subjects anticipated—by nearly two decades—confessional television programs that sensationalized the devastation of physical assault and sexual abuse of women. As a feminist activist, she used performance as a means to shift attention from the individual artist to the collective, organizing women's communities to collaborate in the construction of site-specific installations and actions. She was also effective in utilizing mass media to promote awareness of, and discussion about, such issues as aging, race, and labor.

Adrian Piper (United States, b. 1948) invented and performed her "mythic being" self-transformations in the late 1960s. In these public actions, she aggressively confronted conventional representations and constructions of identity, and like others before her used the photograph to document these personae in action. Her increasingly theoretical approach to art drew her into conceptual art circles and she published in such artist-produced leftist publications as *The Fox*. Her articles reflected her philosophical and aesthetic inquiry into institutional policies, artistic practices, art historical conventions, and their relation to gender and race. She earned a doctoral degree in philosophy from Harvard University in 1981. Throughout the next two decades, her performances increasingly challenged racism and addressed controversial subjects like animal rights and the pollution and destruction of the environment.

As performance became increasingly dependent on the photograph to stabilize the image of an action, photography became the basis for a hybrid form of performance. Educated in Quaker schools, Martha Wilson (United States, b. 1947) left the United States at the height of the Vietnam War to study in Canada, receiving her master of arts degree in English literature in 1971. That same year, she began to create private performances, for the purpose of producing a photograph, in which she transformed herself and her boyfriend (Richards Jarden, who also took pictures of her) into multiple identities. Encouraged in her work in 1972 by Lucy Lippard, Wilson came to New York in 1973 (she moved the following year) to collaborate with Jacki Apple on a performance piece. In 1976, after collecting some two hundred artists' books to sell, she opened Franklin Furnace in her TriBeCa storefront loft. Wilson's own impromptu performance in the spring of 1976 launched Franklin Furnace as one of the world's longest standing alternative spaces for exhibiting performance art. Eventually she transformed her internal and private performances into public political satires impersonating such figures as First Ladies Nancy Reagan and Barbara Bush as well as Tipper Gore.

In 1978, Cindy Sherman (United States, b. 1954) began to record her self-transformations photographically. She created numerous photographic series devoted to different themes, the first of which were black-and-white images imitative of film clips, stills that might have been appropriated from 1950s films. Employing a wide variety of costumes and invented characters, she developed fictional visual personae and recreated representations of renowned paintings. Sherman's photographs of performative actions addressed a wide range of theoretical and social issues related to power, class, gender, and sexuality, and the increasingly forbidden territories of violence, decay, disfigurement, and violation that preoccupied the public in the early 1990s.

Psychologically charged and emotionally intense, Karen Finley (United States, b. 1956) emerged in the context of the new wave, artist-run San Francisco club scene of the late 1970s.²⁹ She received a master of fine arts degree from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1982, a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1993, and worked in a variety of media from painting and sculpture to installation, video, and performance. Besides performing, Finley wrote and directed plays and authored two books, *Shock Treatment* (1990), a collection of prose poetry, and *Enough Is Enough* (1993), a humorous self-help book of weekly meditations for living dysfunctionally. Her first full-length play, *The Theory of Total Blame*, was published by Grove Press in a collection entitled *New American Theater*, edited by Michael Feingold. She has had numerous installations and exhibitions of her drawings throughout North America and Europe.

Finley's relentlessly honest performances were powerful portrayals of physical, emotional, verbal, and sexual violence, abuse, and objectification of women. They

were censored repeatedly. She drew national attention when, along with performance artists Tim Miller, John Fleck, and Holly Hughes, she sued the National Endowment for the Arts for denying the four artists grants previously approved by NEA selection panels.³⁰ The national controversy over these actions affirmed how performance art posed fundamental challenges to traditional views of the visual arts, and how the performance medium addressed topics such as AIDS, homosexuality, and lesbianism in a manner that not only embodied the life experiences of the performers but touched the social experiences of viewers. In this sense, performance captured the lived political contradictions and conflicts of a historical period, and the medium posed a threat to the status quo, to the suppression of discord, and to the control and administration of bodies.

After dropping out of the fine arts program at the University of California at Irvine and becoming involved in Native American political activism, James Luna (United States, b. 1950) turned to performance in the early 1970s. Like many artists searching for a medium consonant with deeply painful personal experience, he felt that performance offered expressive possibilities that had not been fully articulated. Eventually, Luna earned his bachelor's degree at Irvine and a master of science degree in counseling from San Diego State University. Living on the La Jolla Indian Reservation, Luna supported himself as a counselor and American Indian specialist at Palomar College in San Marcos, California. Drawing on sacred ritual knowledge, his performances conjoined fiction and autobiography to convey aspects of the archaeology of Native American memories of surviving in a culture dominated by Caucasian and Christian values and governance. Luna deployed performance as a means to confront and reshape caricatures of Native Americans in U.S. history.

In 1994, Homi K. Bhabha opened *The Location of Culture* with the following observation: "It is the trope of our times to locate the question of culture in the realm of the *beyond* . . . [which] is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past . . . [but] 'in between' spaces . . . that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself."³¹ Some forty years earlier, Georges Mathieu and the Gutai had already opened such a space by visualizing and theorizing the creative process that resides between the body and the object of art, the hybrid space theorized by Dick Higgins in the mid-1960s as intermedia.

In both theory and practice, artists who developed the performance medium conveyed the substance of the indeterminate social and political experiences of late modernism, and they augured a new and indefinite cultural condition prematurely announced by postmodernism. Often uncommodifiable, difficult to preserve and exhibit, and defiant of social mores and morals while upholding the highest ethical principles, performance art rendered palpable the anxious corporeal, psychic, and social conditions of global culture in the radically changing electronic and nuclear age.