A History of Performance

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As with all syllabi, this one is imperfect. Readers will see that the course in no way aspires to be global, but rather focuses on earlier historical material from Europe, together with contemporary U.S. happenings and performances, focusing on the 1960s and 1970s. There is much further work to be done, not only in bringing it "up-to-date" chronologically, but also theoretically. Equally, the selection of artists and works needs to be revised to present a more balanced reading in terms of cultural diversity, gender, and sexual orientation. I want to stress, too, that although I use many videos and audiotapes, I have not been able to include a list of them here.

I have taught performance classes since the 1970s, first at the University of California, San Diego, and now at Mills College in Oakland. This current seminar is part of our regular curriculum, and I teach it every other year, revising it extensively each time. In recent years, I have produced photocopied "books" of students' essays. I also have selected one or two artists on whom to focus; in 1995, these were Suzanne Lacy and Joyce Scott (see readings for Weeks 2 and 4). Additionally, we always do some sort of collective event. Among the most memorable were a twelve-hour theater piece (each piece, beginning on the hour, was located on the Mills campus); a red banquet (attended by a large audience that wore red to this lavishly eight-course "red" meal with many performances); and a seven-course breakfast (designed in seven different colors in honor of Linda Montano's Seven Years of Living Art).

In 1995, I divided the material and readings into thirteen weeks as follows: 1) General Introduction; 2) Suzanne Lacy; 3) Dada, Futurism, and Dandyism; 4) Joyce Scott; 5) Revolutionary Russian, German, and French Theater; 6) Introduction to U.S. Happenings, Music, Theater, and Dance Experiments in the 1960s; 7) Fluxus Sensibilities; 8-9) Introduction to U.S. Performance Art, Late 1960s–1980s; 10) Pushing the Boundaries: Performance Art, Censorship, and AIDS. The remaining weeks were devoted to student presentations/performances.

Course Description

Historically the seminar begins with the European antecedents of this art form in the Futurist, Dada, and Russian revolutionary art movements, and so on. Simultaneously it places the history of performance art in the wider context of the nineteenth-century dandy tradition and the history of avant-garde theater (including cabaret), dance, and music. The focus then shifts to the United States.

Performance art develops here in the 1960s, a highly theatrical as well as political decade, in the context of experimental theater, music, dance, and happenings, the Conceptual and earthwork art movements, and a deep questioning of art institutions and the role of the artist. As performance art formally emerges as a recognized genre in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it becomes a major vehicle for contemporary artists in the United States; from the beginning, women artists play leading roles in developing its character and scope.

The readings "required" for the 1995 seminar came from a photocopied anthology of texts (which I revised each time I teach this material) and Robyn Brentano and Olivia Georgia, Outside the Frame: Performance and the Object, A Survey History of Performance Art in the USA since 1950 (Cleveland: Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, 1994).


Frequently Cited Sources


WEEK 2

Suzanne Lacy, Performance Work


Photocopy Anthology


Further Recommended Reading


WEEK 3

Dada, Futurism, and Dandyism

Symbolist, Dada, and Surrealist theater and persona experiments; Futurist “evenings”; theories about theater and sound.

Brentano, performance art timeline, in Outside the Frame, 137–50.

Photocopy Anthology

Apollinaire, Guillaume. The Breasts of Tiresias (1917). In Benedikt and Wellwarth, Modern French Theater, 63–79.


Futurist texts by Balla, Boccioni, Cangiallo, Marinetti, and Rognoni. In Kirby and Kirby, Futurist Performance, 233–37, 252–53, 294–95, 301.


Zdanevich, Ilya, and Mikhail Larionov. “Why We Paint Ourselves: A Futurist Manifesto” (1913). In John E. Bowlt, ed. Russian Art of the Avant-Garde:
Further Recommended Reading

General

Avant-Garde and Theater History/Texts
Benedikt and Wellwarth, Modern French Theater.


Cabaret and Performance History


Dada


Harris, Margaret Haile. Loie Fuller, Magician of Light. Richmond: Richmond Museum, 1979.


Dandyism


Futurism


Symbolism

WEEK 4
Joyce Scott
To accompany a performance by Scott at the San Francisco Art Institute.

Brentano, on Ellen Stewart, Cafe LaMama Experimental Theater, Free Southern Theater, Adrian Piper, Faith Ringgold, Lorraine O’Grady, Joyce Scott, in Outside the Frame, 157, 159, 160, 174, 176, 179, 194, 196, 204–205.

Photocopy Anthology

WEEK 5
Revolutionary Russian,
German, and French Theater

Russian Revolutionary mass theater, Bauhaus theater experiments, and the writings of Brecht and Artaud.

Brentano, chronology (1917–51), in Outside the Frame, 141–51.

Photocopy Anthology


Further Recommended Reading
Russian Theater/Public Spectacles


Antonin Artaud

Bauhaus
Goldberg, “Bauhaus,” in Performance Art, 97–120.

Bertolt Brecht

WEEK 6
Introduction to U.S. Happenings, Music, Theater, and Dance
Experiments in the 1960s
Brentano, “Outside the Frame: Performance, Art, and Life” and timeline, in Outside the Frame, 31–50, 151–70.

Photocopy Anthology
Monk, Meredith. “Notes on the Voice.” In

Further Recommended Reading
General

Dance

Happenings


Russian Theater/Public Spectacles


Antonin Artaud

Bauhaus
Goldberg, “Bauhaus,” in Performance Art, 97–120.

Bertolt Brecht

WEEK 6
Introduction to U.S. Happenings, Music, Theater, and Dance
Experiments in the 1960s
Brentano, “Outside the Frame: Performance, Art, and Life” and timeline, in Outside the Frame, 31–50, 151–70.

Photocopy Anthology
Monk, Meredith. “Notes on the Voice.” In
Claes Oldenburg, etc.

**John Cage**

**Simone Forti**

**Allan Kaprow**

**Shigeko Kubota**

**Yayoi Kusama**

**Claes Oldenburg**


**Yoko Ono**

**Yvonne Rainer**

**Carolee Schneemann**

**WEEK 7**

**Fluxus Sensibilities**
Brentano, references to Fluxus, in *Outside the Frame.*
Photocopy Anthology

Further Recommended Reading

WEEKS 8–9
Introduction to U.S. Performance
Art, Late 1960s–1980s
This unit will consider a selection of performance art in the United States and will particularly emphasize the contributions of women artists and the West Coast.


Photocopy Anthology
General


Individual Artists


Rosenthal, Rachel. “Bonsuir Dr. Schön!”

Further Recommended Reading

General


Juno and Vale, Angry Women. Includes interviews with Kathy Acker, Susie Bright, Valie Export, Diamanda Galas, Karen Finley, hell hooks, Holly Hughes, Carolee Schneemann, and Annie Sprinkle.
Marioni, Tom, ed. Vision, no. 1 (special issue: California) (September 1975); no. 2 (special issue: Eastern Europe).
Eleanor Antin

Nancy Buchanan

Chris Burden

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha


Betsy Damon

Mary Beth Edelson

Karen Finley

Juno and Vale, interview with Finley, in *Angry Women,* 41–49.

Terry Fox

Juno and Vale, interview with Galas, in *Angry Women,* 22.

Guillermo Gómez-Peña

Guerrilla Girls

Donna Henes

Lynn Hershman

Suzanne Lacy
See readings for Week 2

On Individual Artists

Vito Acconci
*Avalanche,* no. 6 (special issue: Vito Acconci) (Fall 1972). Documentation of artist’s projects; interview with Liza Bér; biography; bibliography.


Laurie Anderson


James Luna


Robbie McCauley

Ana Mendieta

Meredith Monk
Linda Montano

Lorraine O’Grady

Pat Oleszko

Rafael Montanez Ortiz

Adrian Piper

Rachel Rosenthal

Martha Rosler

Bonnie Sherk

Anna Deavere Smith
Richards, Sandra L. “Caught in the Act of Social Definition: On the Road with Anna Deavere Smith.” In Hart and Phelan, Acting Out, 35–53.

Barbara Smith

Annie Sprinkle

Mierle Ukeles

Carlos Villa

The Waitresses

Hannah Wilke

Robert Wilson

Martha Wilson

WEEK 10
Pushing The Boundaries:
Performance Art, Censorship, and AIDS
Study of the overlappings of protest demonstrations and performance art, the work of various artists including Karen Finley, Holly Hughes, Annie Sprinkle, Tim Miller, the Guerilla Girls, and AIDS demonstrations by Grand Fury, etc.

Photocopy Anthology


Further Recommended Reading
Carr, On Edge.

Notes
I am deeply grateful to John Alan Farmer, senior editor at College Art Association, for his invaluable suggestions of material, in addition to the many hours he invested in copyediting and library checking. I would also like to thank, as always, Cheryl Leonard for her meticulous assistance.

1. An example of this are the ones I selected to illustrate a range of sound/voice experiments in relationship to Dada, German theater, and Artaud: audiotapes of Alanna O’Kelly (a contemporary Irish artist who uses keening in her performances), Jerome Rothenberg (“A Glass Tube Elegy for Hugo Ball” and his rendering of Ball’s “Kara Awane,” Rothenberg/Turetzky Performing for Poet’s Voice and Cabaretas) and Artaud (a post-World War II broadcast), and videotapes of Ute Lemper (Ute Lemper Sings Kurt Weill, London, Decca Record Co.) and Diamand Galas, The Litanies of Satan, Target Video, as well as a 1993 film entitled En compagnie d’Antonin Artaud, directed by Girard Mordillat, with Sami Frey (Artaud) and Marc Barbe (J. Prevot).

2. In June 1997 I attended Suzanne Lacy’s Under Construction, which consisted of around 140 teenage-girl performers in a construction site in downtown Vancouver, British Columbia. It was part of a two-year public-art project, The Turning Point, in which Lacy and her collaborators worked with a large group of Vancouver teenage girls. This has inspired me to have a group of students (in my Fall 1997 repeat of this seminar) research her recent work on adolescents.

cancelling, intending, escaping, insisting, stemming
accomplishing, registering, leaving, wondering
undergoing, sustaining, resonating, operating
confessing, forgiving, revealing, providing, turning
signalling, accepting, prompting, perpetuating
denying, bringing, ending, insisting, withdrawing
advocating, interfering, informing, returning
according, offering, cautioning, assimilating
replotting, subscribing, losing, including, expecting
basing, testing, swaying, declaring, proving
SEIZING . . . . COMPPLICATING . . . . AMPLIFYING . . . .

Alastair MacLennan 1997