

fifty-nine events  
An Exhibition of Artworks  
by  
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in  
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## abstract

*fifty-nine events* is a thesis exhibition that speculates the affordances of form in mediated performance art and issues of performance art documentation and (re)presentation. An art historical overview of performance art theories and praxes contextualizes and re-visits debates of performance art documentation and its (re)presentation, situating mediation as inherent to any cultural form or product. Contextualizing performance art through the global COVID-19 pandemic provides a point of entry in re-considering the intersubjectivities and object-relations of performance art and performance art documentation as historically contingent, rather than ontologically fixed. An open call for participation circulated through various media becomes the subsequent mode of inquiry; a one-year performance project mobilizes and puts into practice questions and ideas explored earlier. Finally, the thesis exhibition is realized as a cumulation of performance-based video works developed in response to the open call for participation, whereby the artist solicits, collects, and (re)performs over one-hundred performance instruction scores submitted by a mediated public. With a number of sudden deaths in the artists' family over the course of the project, the works coalesce actions performed in response to a digitally mediated public and actions performed in response to personal tragedy. Made largely during a period of governmental mandatory social distancing, this thesis exhibition attempts to articulate and re-imagine what the very *form* of performance art, its (re)presentation, and mediation affords in contemporary happenings.



## acknowledgements

Marilène Oliver, to whom I owe more to than I could ever begin to name. You have pushed me to grow in the most unexpected directions and I cannot thank you enough for your supervision and mentorship. Your openness, curious feedback, and critical prompts have been indispensable, and this work would not be here without it. Thank you for your compassion and care in some of the most difficult times, and for teaching me how to navigate this through my art. Your unwavering support is something I will carry with me always. Thank you for challenging me, thinking with me, and inspiring me.

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**“Research-creation, understood in this way, is a practice of love. It is an erotic, driven, invested practice. And, as such, it fails to fit into those models that see interdisciplinarity as a way to streamline and multiply research productivities. It is too disruptive for that. Research-creation follows desire, and builds spaces and contexts that allow the time and space to *experiment in unpredictable directions*.”<sup>1</sup>**

**-Natalie Loveless**

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<sup>1</sup> Loveless, Natalie. *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2019. 70.

## **fifty-nine events**

*fifty-nine events* is a cumulation of performance-based video works developed in response to an open call for participation that I circulated in the Fall of 2020 through various media and social platforms. The call for participation invited the public to send me a performance instruction score consisting of (i) an object (to be performed with); (ii) an action; (iii) a duration (for the action). Over the course of this one-year research-creational performance project, I solicited, collected, and (re)performed over one hundred instructions submitted by diverse people from across the globe. In the exhibition, these are presented as five large-format, two-channel video projections alongside ephemera from the performances. In addition, I created a project website that hosts the videos and instructions, by way of both continuing the project and sharing it more widely.<sup>2</sup>

Each individual video presents a performance that follows one of the instructions or scores that I received from the participation call. The non-linear videos run simultaneously, continuously looping through large-scale moving images of myself performing an instructed action in front of a fleshy, felt backdrop. These performances-for-camera draw on and cite 1970s performance art and body art documentation tropes<sup>3</sup>, as well as the Fluxus form of the Instruction or Event Score<sup>4</sup>. The individual clips in the two-channel videos are carefully cropped, indexing certain (re)presentations and interventions into these forms. The intentional, multiplied projections of the videos mark the formal and conceptual seriality of the work, that in its own repetition and (re)presentation, suggest extended, persisting duration. The selected

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fiftynineevents.com/>

<sup>3</sup> Figures 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Figures 3-4.

fifty-nine instruction scores are laser cut into rag paper, and delicately held on the wall with pins as part of the exhibition. As well as being published on a project website along with videos of each performance, the instructions have been printed as individual event cards, offered to viewers as a hand-held object to keep and perform.



Figure 1. Vito Acconci, *Rubbing Piece*, 1970

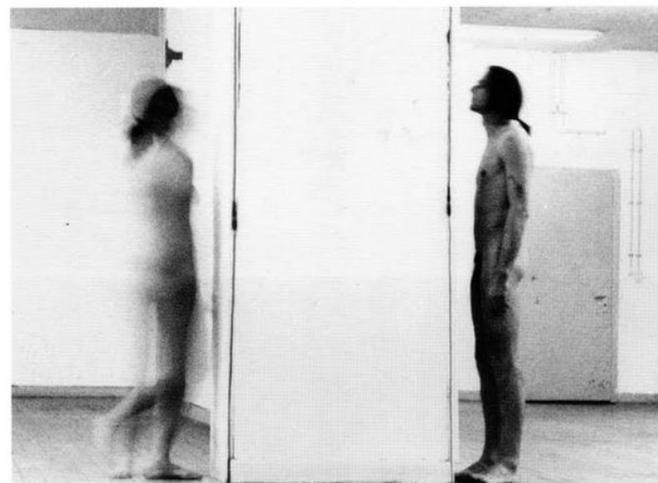


Figure 2. Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Interruption in Space*, 1977

OBJECTS  
and  
EVENTS

( to be arranged by G. Brecht )

The following works are available on commission from  
G. Brecht, through his authorized agents (from whom  
additional information may be obtained).

The form of each work will be determined by the  
situation obtaining at the time and place of its  
realization. Each work will potentially include  
all related occurrences within its extension.  
Each event/object is, moreover, every other one.

ANIMAL	LANGUAGE
ARRANGEMENT	MONEY
ASSEMBLAGE	MORNING
CHANGE	NOURISHMENT
CHANGE	NUMBER
CITY	OPENING
CLOTHING	PAINTING
COMMUNICATION	PARTY
CONSTRUCTION	RADIO
COUNTRY	RECEPTACLE
COVER	SALE
DEATH	SMALL
DELIVERY	SOFT
DEMONSTRATION	TELEPHONE
EVENING	THEATER
EXITS & ENTRANCES	TIME
FLAG	TRAVEL
FLUID	UNCLASSIFIED
FURNITURE	UPS & DOWNS
GAME	VACATION
HEARING	WHITE
JOKE	WIND
KEY	WORLD

Authorized Agents:

April, 1962.

Figure 3. George Brecht, *Objects and Events*  
(to be arranged by G. Brecht), 1962

BLOOD PIECE

Use your blood to paint.  
Keep painting until you faint. (a)  
Keep painting until you die. (b)

1960 spring

Figure 4. Yoko Ono, *Blood Piece*, 1960 in *Grapefruit* 1964

“Performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction, it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance’s being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance.”<sup>5</sup>

-Peggy Phelan

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<sup>5</sup> Phelan Peggy. “The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction”, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge, 1993. 147.

## performance art amid pandemics

The exhibition, consisting of both ephemera and video documentation, invokes both historical and contemporary performance art conventions. It participates in decades of performance art responses to performance studies scholar Peggy Phelan's infamous statement that "performance's only life is in the present."<sup>6</sup> Performance art presents reality; the reality of place and time, but also the corporeality of the performer.<sup>7</sup> The live act is most often privileged as delivering an authentic and "present" body<sup>8</sup>. Presence as understood in performance art is a state that entails the unmediated co-extensivity in time and place; "it promises a transparency to an observer of what 'is' at the very moment at which it takes place".<sup>9</sup> Claims of presence, intersubjectivity, affect – as only occurring or experienced in the specific materiality of bodies and space – are extremely common in both historical and more recent accounts of performance art practices, or body art as performance art. In 1958, Antonin Artaud writes of replacing the stage and auditorium by a single site absent of any barriers, whereby "the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it."<sup>10</sup> In the 1980s, Catherine Elwes states that "performance art offers women a unique vehicle for making direct unmediated access [to the audience]. Performance is about the 'real-life' presence of the artist...she is both signifier and signified. Nothing stands between spectator and performer."<sup>11</sup> In 2008, Erika Fischer-Lichte argues specifically for an aesthetic of presence, rather than of

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<sup>6</sup> Phelan Peggy. "The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction", *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge, 1993. 147.

<sup>7</sup> Van Mechelen, Marga. "Replay and Interplay", *Art at Large: Through Performance and Installation Art*. ArtEZ Press, 2013. 63.

<sup>8</sup> Jones, Amelia. "The Artist is Present: Artistic Re-Enactments and the Impossibility of Presence". *TDR*. Vol 55. No. 1. MIT Press, 2011. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Artaud, Antonin. *The Theatre and Its Double*. Translated by Mary Caroline Richard. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1958. 96.

<sup>11</sup> Elwes, Catherine. "Floating Femininity: A Look at Performance Art by Women", *Women's Images of Men*. London: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1985. 165.

presence effects; [technical and electronic media] “approach is diametrically opposed to generating presence...while presence brings forth the human body in its materiality, as energetic body, as living organism, technical and electronic media create the impression of human presence”<sup>12</sup> in its dematerialization and disembodiment. Marina Abramović’s 2010 retrospective at New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*, reveals in its own title, the “artist’s own claims for the transcendent and mythical effects of her presence.”<sup>13</sup>

My move to Edmonton for my MFA centered around a deep desire to shift towards a more somatic and movement-based practice. I completed my Bachelor of Fine Arts, with a focus on printmaking and sculpture, and a Minor in Gender and Women’s Studies at York University in Toronto in 2019, and while I was beginning to investigate the performative<sup>14</sup>, there wasn’t an emphasis on “intermedia” as a *mode of doing* in its own right. However, I did try to push the formal boundaries set in place in program that was disciplined at the time. For instance, printing large-scale works with my body and effectively, to my professor’s displeasure, “eliminating the matrix of the press altogether”, or arguing for Abramović’s 1975

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<sup>12</sup> Fischer-Lichte, Erika. “The Performative Generation of Materiality”, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*. Translated by Saskya Iris Jain, London: Routledge, 2008. 101.

<sup>13</sup> Jones, Amelia. “The Artist is Present: Artistic Re-Enactments and the Impossibility of Presence”. TDR. Vol 55. No. 1. MIT Press, 2011. 18.

<sup>14</sup> The term “performative” was formulated by John L. Austin and introduced to language philosophy: linguistic utterances not only serve to make statements, but they also perform actions, thus distinguishing constative from performative utterances. Performative utterances are self-referential and constitutive insofar as they bring forth the social realities they refer to; it becomes the performance of a social act. In collapsing binary oppositions between constatives and performatives, Austin demonstrates that speaking always involves acting, which in turn makes it possible for statements to succeed or fail and for performative utterances to be true or false. Austin drew attention to the performative act as a vehicle for the dynamics that “destabilize the dichotomous terminological scheme as a whole” (Fischer-Lichte 2008; Kraemer, Stalhut 56). Thus, dichotomous pairs such as subject-object, artist-spectator, and signifier-signified lose their polarity and clear definition in a performative aesthetics; once set in motion, they begin to oscillate. If performatives as speech acts are self-referential and constitutive of realities, they effectively afford the potential of destabilizing and collapsing binary oppositions. Fischer-Lichte, Erika. *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, Translated by Saskya Iris Jain, London: Routledge, 2008. 25; Felman, Shoshana. *The Literary Speech Act: Don Juan with J.L Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages*. Cornell University Press, 1983.

performance *Lips of Thomas*, as site specific sculpture, in my final art history essay in a course on public sculpture. Moving forward in time to my first performance art in Edmonton event (where I performed “live” for the first and only time thus far), facilitated by Stephanie Patsula (sonic, movement-based performance artist and studio-mate in my first year of grad school) at *Parallel Space*, a site for performance-based works that nurtured in-person viewing, experimentation, collaboration, and community. I share these tangential anecdotes to preface and emphasize the particular form of performance art that I wanted to participate in; presence, liveness, corporeal immediacies, a “real” time and space – *the sine qua non* of performance art and body art as performance.

In March 2020, during the second term of my first year of grad school, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic. In the early weeks and following months, cities and provinces began to “shut down”. Alberta declared a public state of health emergency, issuing stay-at-home orders and prohibiting social gatherings to mitigate the spread of the virus. It was at this time when I recall the abrupt closure of the University of Alberta, and we were no longer permitted to access the graduate studios, effectively necessitating a shift to working from home<sup>15</sup>. Both COVID-19 and socio-political uprisings for racial justice in the United States<sup>16</sup>, thrust a “new phase of makeshift”<sup>17</sup> space that felt nothing less than what I can only describe as feeling like a hellish simulacrum. With the

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<sup>15</sup> I should note, working from home as a shared experience among some of my cohort and peers, but not universal, and I recognize this as a privileged position as a non-essential worker.

<sup>16</sup> On May 25, 2020, a white, Minneapolis, Minnesota police officer knelt on George Floyd, a Black man, for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, killing Floyd. Protests erupted across the United States and North America, and locally in Edmonton, decrying this act, as well as the lynching of Ahmaud Arbery in Glynn County, Georgia, on February 23 and the murder of Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky, on March 13, along with dozens of other Black, Indigenous, and Brown folks killed at the hands of police and white supremacists – in addition to the epidemic and ongoing underrepresentation, underreporting, and misclassifications of MMIWG2S and BIPOC on Turtle Island (North America). Geigner, Morgan; Hecht, Stuart; Mahmoud, Jasmine Jamillah. “Makeshift Chicago States”, *A Century of Theatre and Performance*. Northwestern University Press, 2021. 273.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

precarious force of COVID-19 that emerged not long after the performance at *Parallel Space*, the reality of a lack of a foreseeable or concrete timeline in which I might be able to re-attempt live performance in the company of other bodies set in. I was and remain deeply disappointed with COVID “spoiling” my opportunity to explore live performance.

The obdurate spectacularization of presence in the status and traditions of performance art pulls me back to performance studies scholar Peggy Phelan’s insistence (and other related scholarship) on the presence, immediacy, and singularity of the performance event. However, COVID-19 posed a radical challenge to these ideological claims, marking and presenting a moment that was unparalleled in histories of performance art and body art. In the decades of discourse since Peggy Phelan’s claim of the ontology of performance, many have been at pains to show that it is no longer only the liveness (and in effect presence) of the original event that index the “truth” or capacity for understanding and historicizing performance works, but their (re)presentation (through writing, oral discussion, documentation, re-enactment, memory, the self/ subject, etc.)<sup>18</sup> and mediation (through photography, video, radio, live broadcasting, digitization, etc.)<sup>19</sup> Performance art theorists and scholars, such as Amelia Jones, Kathy O’Dell, Kristine Stiles, Rosalind Krauss, Philip Auslander, and Marga Van Mechelen (whose writings have been integral to my understanding of performance art as I have come to know it),

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<sup>18</sup> For Amelia Jones, the event, the performance, by already “combining materiality and durationality (its enacting of *the body as always already* [emphasis added] escaping into the past) points to the fact that there is no ‘presence’ as such” (Jones 18). Jones also outlines that in performance studies and art history constantly seeking to historicize, theorize, exhibit, and sell live performance art (whether it be through the selling/ purchasing of a ticket to a live performance event, or the selling/ auction or ‘museumization’ of performance art documentation), is inherently representational in its circulation within the realm of capital. Jones, Amelia. “The Artist is Present: Artistic Re-Enactments and the Impossibility of Presence”. *TDR*. Vol 55. No. 1. MIT Press, 2011. 18. Moreover, Jones has stated elsewhere that “there is no possibility of an unmediated relationship to any kind of cultural product, including body art” (Jones 12). Jones argues that in the reading or experiencing of performance art documentation (the works as documentary traces), the comprehension or understanding of a work becomes a document or representation through the memory screen. Jones, Amelia. “Presence in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation”, *Performance Art (Some Theory) and (Selected) Practice at the End of This Century*. CAA, 1997. 12.

<sup>19</sup> Auslander, Philip. “Digital Liveness: A Historico-Philosophical Perspective”. *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*. Vol. 34. No.3. MIT Press on behalf of Performing Arts Journal Inc. 2012.

have situated the paradoxical nature of performance art as a medium that both requires documentation or mediation, while simultaneously resisting its possibility. Specifically, that performance – as mediated through the photograph, film, or video – “calls out the mutual supplementarity of the body and the subject”<sup>20</sup>, as well as of performance or body art and its documentation or representation. COVID-19 both follows and pushes the well-trodden path of these conversations in a new direction. For the first time in most of our lifetimes, our realities were dislocated; habits and routine discombobulated, conduits of communication reconfigured, our lives confined and constrained as never before, futures thrust into doubt in the face of crisis. I began to examine the common and widespread claims of the authenticity of the live body (contra the mediated or representational body) in performance art and the emotional impact of presence that could only exist in the live situation (contra representation through mediation or documentation) as contextualized through governmental mandates related to restrictions on movement and implementations of measurable, physical distance from other bodies. Amidst a precarious and rapidly mutating contagious disease, I wanted to confront and question the stakes of performance art and body art in a world where presence, physical proximity and “flesh-to-flesh”<sup>21</sup> engagement was *impossible*.

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<sup>20</sup> The unique, singular, or present body of the artist in a performance or body art work only has meaning by virtue of its contextualization within the codes of identity that accrue to the artist’s body; thus “body art practices *exacerbate the body’s supplementarity at the role of representation* [emphasis added]” through the inherent subjectivity of the body that signs and signifies codes of gender, race, and other social markers; the body is already representational, thus impossible to separate the performance of a body as a ‘pure’ or ‘authentic’ form that denies representation. Jones, Amelia. “Presence in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation”, *Performance Art (Some Theory) and (Selected) Practice at the End of This Century*. CAA, 1997. 16.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 12.

Following explorations of performance through performing-for-camera (in lockdown), livestreaming on social media (Instagram, Facebook) and streaming platforms (Periscope, Twitch), live video-chat websites (Chatroulette, Omegle), and virtual performance workshops through Zoom (Marilyn Arsem, *Inhabiting Time*, October 2020; Stephanie Loveless, *Acts of Listening*, January 2021; J.R. Carpenter; *attention, a tension, attend, to tend*, February 2021), a Call for Participation through digital platforms ultimately became the next pragmatic mode of inquiry to reach and engage with a spatially distant public .



Figure 5. *Mediated Action II*, Facebook Livestream Performance Video Still, 2020



Figure 6. *Re-Performing 'The Artist is Present'*, Twitch Livestream Performance Still, Dyscorpia 2.1, 2020



Figure 7. *Performing on Periscope*, 2020

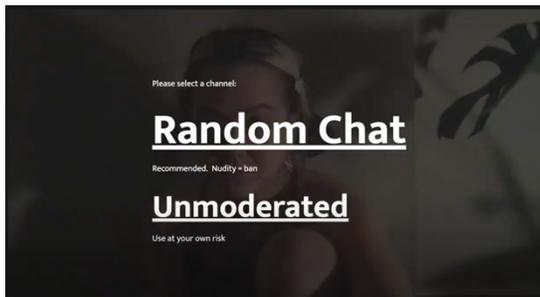


Figure 8. *Performing for Strangers on Chatroulette*, 2020

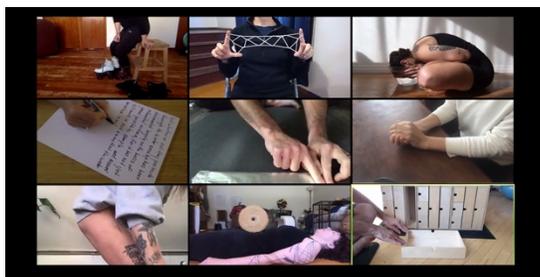


Figure 9. *1 Hour Action (Inhabiting Time Performance Workshop)* Zoom Screenshot, 2021

I circulated this through various media, including including performance art and body art groups on Facebook, Instagram stories, Instagram polls, Google forms, university listservs, as well as my website. Submissions were received from Edmonton, Calgary, and Rosebud, Alberta; Toronto, Waterloo, Ontario; Montreal, Québec; New York, New York State; Bellingham and Seattle, Washington; Portland, Oregon; Baltimore, Maryland; São Paulo and Vitória, Brazil; Athens, Greece; Rijeka and Zagreb, Croatia; Budapest, Szombathely, Hungary; and Nairobi, Kenya.

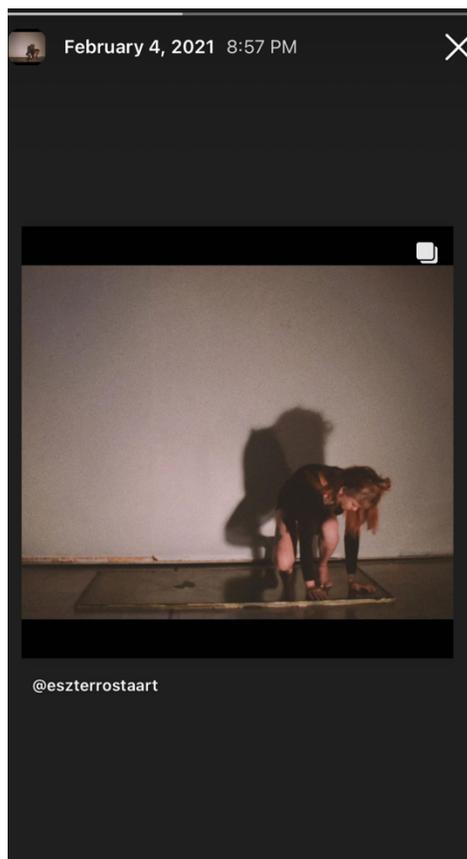


Figure 10. *Call for Participation posted on Instagram, 2021*

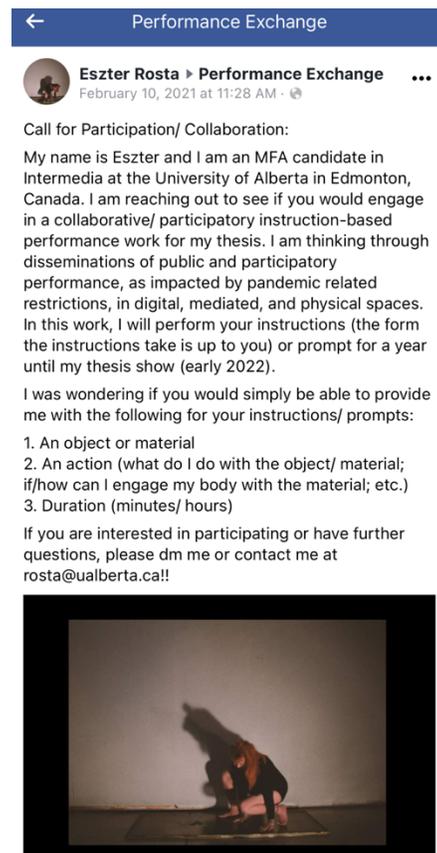


Figure 11. *Call for Participation posted on 'Performance Exchange' Facebook Group, 2021*

The call for participation invited the public to send me a performance instruction score consisting of (i) an object (to be performed with); (ii) an action; (iii) a duration (for the action). Over the course of this one-year research creational performance project, I solicited, collected, and performed and re-performed over one hundred instructions submitted by diverse people from across the globe, including other performance artists, movement-based artists and choreographers, composers and sound artists, professors in performance art and theatre, and other graduate students in different fields (both within and outside of the arts). As the call was also posted on my personal social media accounts, I received instructions from friends and collaborators, some of whom knew nothing about performance art or instruction-based performance. With this range of perspectives, the instructions themselves varied in both form and content, with some referencing historical or canonical performance art works, some being poetic or emotional, some based in personal interests (performance/art and otherwise), and others being completely arbitrary, challenging, silly, or strange.

- i. nuts  
30 minutes
- ii. paraffin wax  
peel like exoskeleton
- iii. large glass of water  
throw water in mouth. pour from above; spoon  
into mouth; use tongue as trough
- iv. flooring materials  
walk on them; bend; pick up; stack;  
repeat
- v. tissue paper  
float between
- vi. apple  
watch it until hunger mounts enough to eat  
it. once you have finished the apple, the  
score is done
- vii. bondage ropes  
tie on chest
- viii. border lines between countries  
chew pieces of chocolate; donate saliva over  
lines  
as long as it takes to melt the lines
- ix. blanket  
sing. talk. dance  
9 minutes
- x. bouquet of flowers  
exchange textures with it  
1 hour
- xi. pillar candle  
sit close; let breath affect candle; do not  
blow out candle; whisper happy birthday using  
your name; blow candle out after 12 minutes
- xii. mirror  
show or give it a gift; receive something  
back from it  
1 hour
- xiii. blow up balloons
- xiv. orange  
peel seductively for as long as possible
- xv. clothing of someone you love, find absorbing  
wear clothing. smell them. think; feel; act  
as you imagine they would

- xvi. old used doors found randomly on outings  
take somewhere you can hear it speak to you;  
listen to it; capture wisdom on the door; do  
this every time you find a discarded door
- xvii. flowers  
he loves me, he loves me not
- xviii. plastic bag  
put bag over your head; take the bag off your  
head when you need
- xix. bubble gum (more than one piece in mouth)  
blow bubbles until gum changes texture or  
loses taste
- xx. ikea bag  
try to fit your body in the bag  
10 minutes
- xxi. drinking glass  
step on, break the glass and count shattered  
pieces
- xxii. put on makeup without using a mirror
- xxiii. bag of ice  
melt with feet  
as long as you can
- xxiv. heavy object  
put object on chest and breathe; listen to  
and feel how your breath changes  
11 minutes
- xxv. knit a scarf  
give it to someone
- xxvi. book(s)  
balance on your head until books fall
- xxvii. braid hair
- xxviii. skipping rope  
chant or sing a skipping rope rhyme you  
remember from childhood  
do this three times
- xxix. shotgun a beer
- xxx. needle  
give yourself a piercing
- xxxi. tattoo word(s) that is significant to you  
as long as it takes
- xxxii. wood or wooden plank  
balance it; stand it up with your body; start  
over when/ if it falls  
30 minutes

- xxxiii. comb and hair  
comb the hair of someone/ something
- xxxiv. read to a plant and watch it grow
- xxxv. go outside and gather snow; watch it melt
- xxxvi. bruce nauman, walking around a square in an  
exaggerated manner
- xxxvii. kiddy pool  
fill pool with water and have a beach day  
45 minutes
- xxxviii. roll of bubble wrap  
pop all the bubbles until roll is done, or  
until your fingers, hands hurt
- xxxix. yoko ono, counting piece III
- xl. pick a song and instead of singing it, recite  
it; say the lyrics out loud
- xli. plant seed(s)
- xlii. george brecht, lamp event
- xliii. george brecht, 3 dances
- xliv. cassette, cassette player  
listen to an album in full and repeat for 2  
hours
- xlv. drink a whole bottle of wine  
10 to 15 minutes
- xlvi. write and mail a letter to someone
- xlvii. string and embroidery thread  
wrap it tightly around a finger a number of  
times until finger starts to turn blue
- xlviii. play pin the tail on the donkey
- xlix. picklebacks
- l. hula-hooping  
20 minutes
- li. marshmallows  
fit as many as you can in your mouth; do not  
avoid drooling
- lii. do a somersault
- liii. ciggies  
smoke four at once

- liv. learn how to drain a tenkoff catheter  
drainage
- lv. ha akarsz lefilmezhetsz  
jo lenne művészetet csinálni erről  
érdekes lenne megmutatni, mit tett velem a  
rák, és hogyan változtatta meg a testemet
- milyen gyorsan növekszik ez a kibaszott  
szar
- lvi. polishing apu's shoes for viewing and funeral  
14 october 2021  
15 october 2021
- lvii. drive back to edmonton from ontario after apu  
dies  
ne örülj meg ezek után, és próbáld meg nem  
halogatni a meg szakdolgozatodat ha teheted  
emiatt
- februárban ott leszek, repülni fogok  
körülotted és nevetek rajtad és egy pincsuli  
adok neked

Figure 12. *Selected 59 Instructions, 2022*

My formal decisions in the performing, documenting, and presentation of the instructions cite late 1960s and early 1970s performance art and body art documentation tropes – in particular, referencing performance-for-camera and action/artist-in-studio. Documentation (through the photograph or film) is embedded and factored into the very form of the work itself, rather than being ancillary to the performance or action. Decisions were also made regarding the “performance costume” (where I constructed a garment made of the same material as the flesh-toned, felt backdrop) and the maintenance of neutrality and the neutral body in performance art practices, wherein the intended focus is only on the unfolding of the action itself. Inhabiting a gendered and racialized body that is coded with social markers, I both follow and deviate from these performance art conventions. On one hand, I uphold aesthetic coherence with a unified and neutral formal structure. On the other hand, I lean into the impossibilities of the body as being wholly neutral, in contrast to early performance art practices of performing in the nude, for example, as marking a body qua body. Moreover, my participation in ‘obvious’ social markers (such as changes in hair colour, nail colour, additional tattoos) function to delineate extended duration of the performance project to viewers.



Figure 13. Vito Acconci, *Step Piece*, 1970



Figure 14. Bruce Nauman, *Dance or Exercise in the Perimeter of a Square (Square Dance)*, 1967 - 1968

Performing-for-camera and alone in my studio in the North Power Plant building at the University of Alberta, I performed and re-performed over one hundred instructions submitted by participants over the course of this one-year performance project. I made the habit and (mostly) daily practice of going to the studio at night, performing at least one of the instructions and ticking them off my list as I went through. As I spent more time with each instruction, I developed a particular obligation to the commitment and resolve of each action. Though the moments of exchange in obtaining the instructions with this new digital public was momentary, I did not expect to feel so responsible, and almost 'beholden', to completing each individual instruction from a person who I did not know or would have encountered if not for this project. This shifted my consideration and relationship to each action, moving towards a more intuitive approach that resulted in numerous iterations and re-performances/ re-documenting. Instruction No. 15 immediately comes to mind as an example of an action that I re-performed multiple times.

xv.                    -                    -                    -                    -  
clothing of someone you love, find absorbing  
wear clothing. smell them. think; feel; act  
as you imagine they would

Figure 15. *Instruction No. 15, 2022*

It is hard to form words that accurately represent this, but prior to the final iteration presented in the exhibition, I could not resolve this action because it simply did not *feel* right. With other instructions, I was surprised at how much I (quite frankly) hated the experience of performing. To provide another example, one of the instructions required me to watch snow melt, with a duration of two hours. Performance art and durational performance art have long-valued

extended duration and slow-time. Even in my own thinking (at the time), the melting of snow seemed to be the most conceptual representation of time as material – a poetic occurrence of physical, chemical, and temporal transformation. Yet, in the actual moment of performing, even though I wanted sit with and appreciate this action, I physically could not do it. In contrast, other instructions, such as skipping rope, playing pin the tail on the donkey, and sitting in a kiddie pool, were fun, allowing my body to remember what play felt like, even for a fleeting moment. I similarly find it difficult to articulate my compulsion to index the “truth” and commitment these actions through my display of ephemera – objects that have become another signifier (in addition to the video as document) or “proof” of performances that happened. Perhaps, it also stems from a related, felt attachment to these objects as traces of encounters, and a desire to share them as materialized moments in time.



Figure 16. *Instruction No. 44 (performed with cassettes my dad gave me)*, Exhibition Installation View, 2022

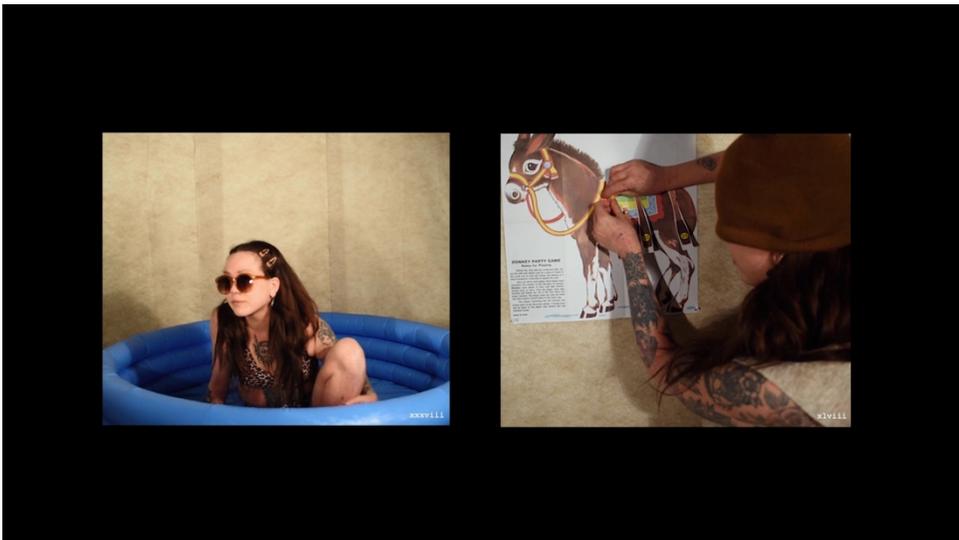
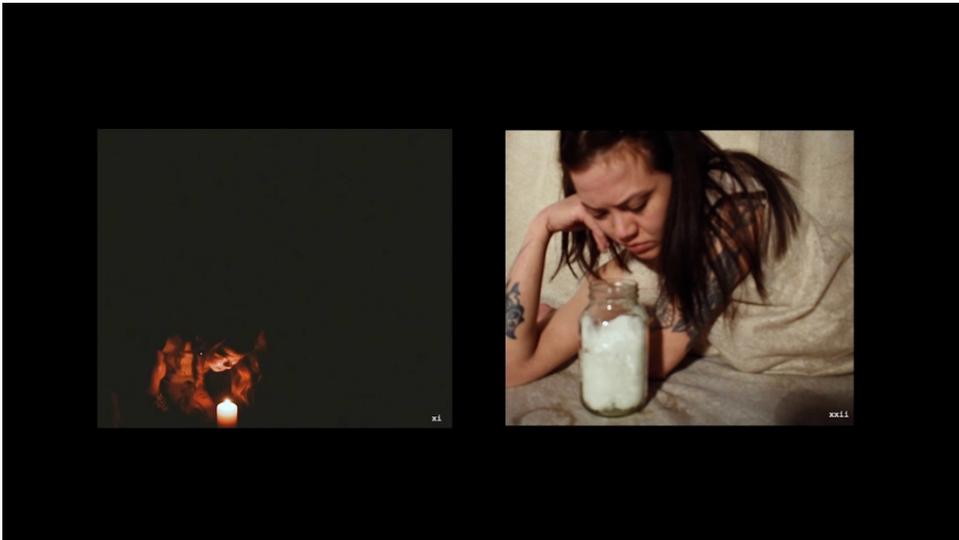
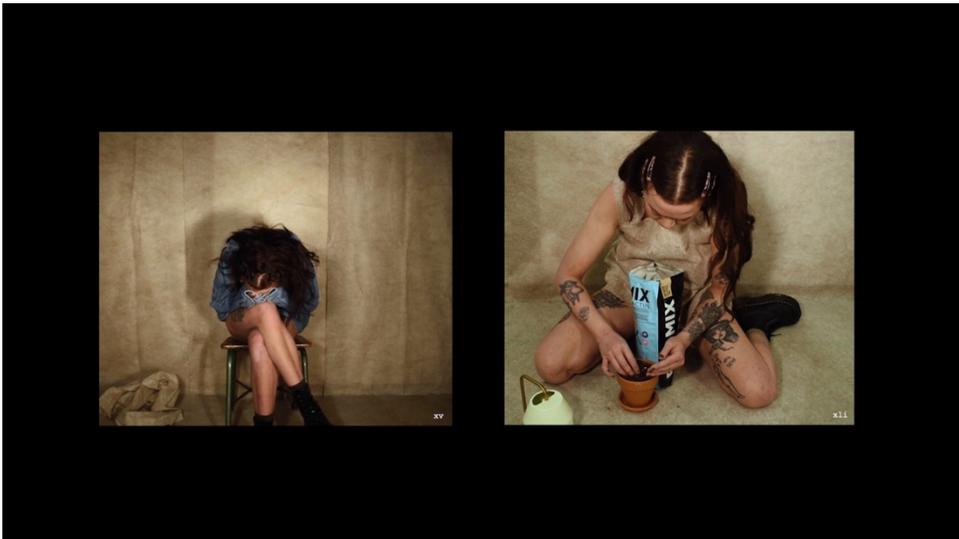


Figure 17. *fifty-nine events*, Video Stills, 2022

**no. 57 – no. 59**

My father was first diagnosed with colon cancer in 2013 while I was still in high school. The placement of the tumour was precarious, but was successfully removed, and my father was placed in remission without the need for a check-up for five years. In the first appointment post-remission in 2018, he was re-diagnosed – colon cancer, but in a different location and unrelated to the previously removed tumour. This time, it was not possible for it to be removed with surgery, it had to be treated with chemotherapy and radiation before a surgery could even be considered. With both my parents being immigrants and me being the eldest child, I had responsibilities that included translating, ordering medication, helping him schedule appointments, and driving and going to chemotherapy with him – chemotherapy was every other Wednesday at 8:00 AM for about three to four hours. I was in the last year of my undergraduate degrees, and I recall working on my MFA application to the University of Alberta during appointments. When I received my letter of acceptance, I will never forget my father's excitement in telling his oncologist and the chemotherapy nurses.

In the later stages of the work towards my thesis exhibition, this performance project shifted and began to hold a different weight in the face of painful happenings, including the death of my grandmother in June 2021, the death of my father in October 2021, and at the time of my writing this, the death of my grandfather in March 2022. I share the experience of caring for my father who had stage four metastatic cancer, and subsequent actions performed after his death at the age of fifty-nine. For most of my life, we had a tumultuous and strained relationship as an effect of intergenerational trauma, abuse, and addiction. During the pandemic I was unable to travel home due to his high-risk immune-compromisation as a result

of treatment. Having not seen him “in-person” for two years while being in Edmonton for my MFA, mediated forms such as Facetime and Zoom (and I would add non-visual mediated forms including telephone calls and text messaging), facilitated and, arguably, healed and strengthened, our relationship across spatio-temporal distance. It was through a Facetime call with my parents on September 13, 2021, that he told me that the treatments stopped working. In automatism, my fingers pressed the volume and lock button – screenshotting and capturing a moving image of a moment that my body thought I needed. This was the first time I had ever seen my father cry.

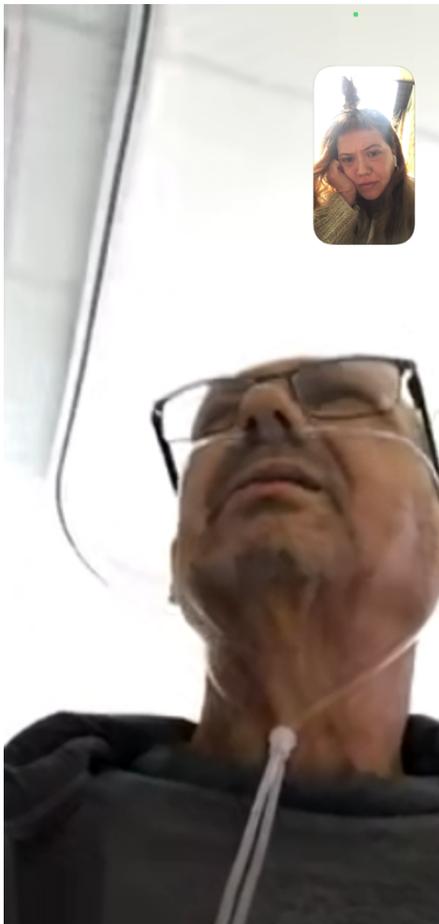


Figure 18. *Facetiming with my father during one of his stays at the hospital, Screenshot, 2021*



Figure 19. *September 13, 2021, Screenshot, 2021*

In the back room of the exhibition, the last three performances are presented as a separate looping video on the left wall – intentionally projected beside and “touching” a projection of myself on the right wall. Events No. 57, No. 58, and No. 59 are both direct and interpreted instructions from my father.

- lv.           ha akarsz lefilmezhetsz  
jo lenne művészetet csinálni erről  
érdekes lenne megmutatni, mit tett velem a  
rák, és hogyan változtatta meg a testemet
- milyen gyorsan növekszik ez a kibaszott  
szar
- lvi.           polishing apu's shoes for viewing and funeral  
14 october 2021  
15 october 2021
- lvii.          drive back to edmonton from ontario after apu  
dies  
ne örülj meg ezek után, és próbáld meg nem  
halogatni a meg szakdolgozatodat ha teheted  
emiatt
- februárban ott leszek, repülni fogok  
körülöttem és nevetek rajtad és egy pincsuli  
adok neked

Figure 20. *Instructions No. 57 – 59, 2022*

As a document of grief, and what I have started to think of and understand as a collaboration, the inclusion of these events is a way to both share and navigate the experience of caring for my father and subsequent actions and events performed after his death. My father has always been very present and supportive of my practice; from nurturing my love of the arts as a toddler and enrolling me in art programs and camps as a child, to being encouraging of my decision to pursue fine arts in university (and later converting the basement and garage into functioning studio spaces for me, teaching me new skills and techniques I was able to use in sculpture, helping me prep and install shows ), to being one of my greatest support systems throughout my MFA degree. Although my father did not respond to the call, we did discuss my

project at length. At first, he was unable to fully understand the project – or my practice and conceptual art, for that matter. However, over time and sharing his ruminations of conceptuality, he asked me to include him and his illness in the project, giving me permission to film him and his body in the end stages of his life. Including these actions of cleaning my father after draining fluids from his failing liver (event lv), preparing his shoes for his funeral (event lvi), and spreading mud from his grave over provincial boundaries (event lvii), calls viewers (and myself) to reflect upon the intimacy and meaning of *fifty-nine events*.

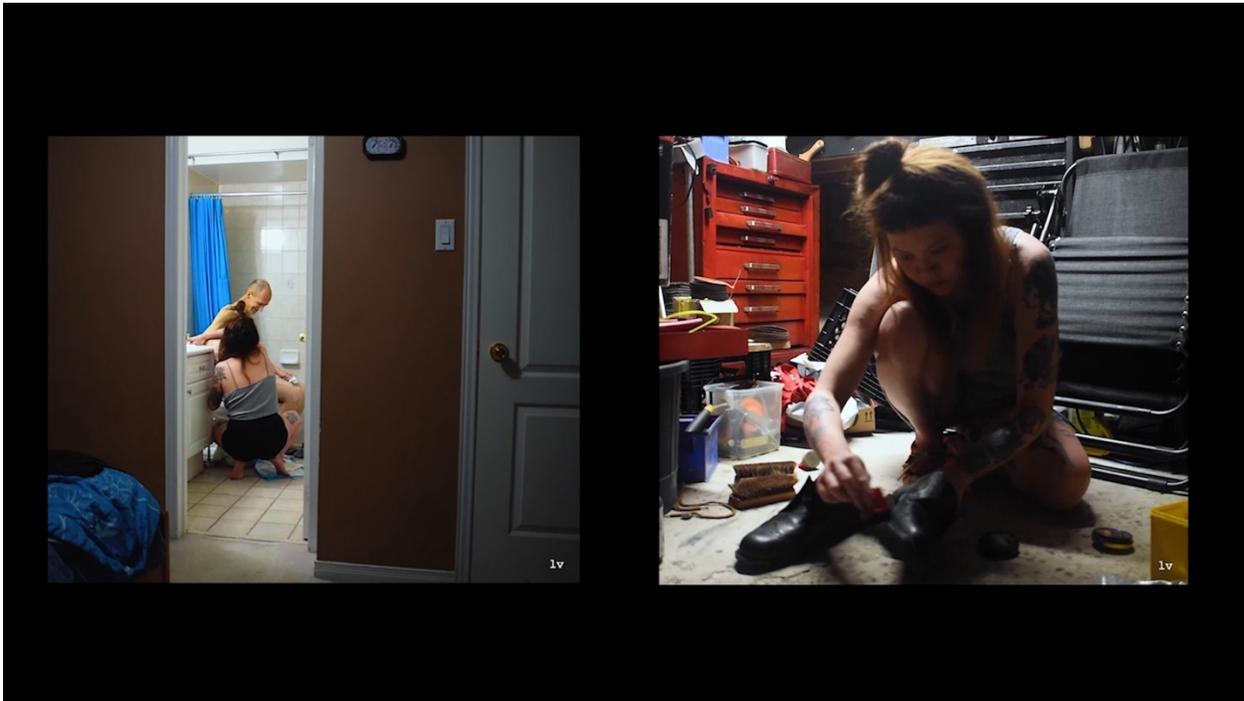


Figure 21. *Instructions No. 57-58*, Video Stills, 2022



Figure 22. *Instruction No. 59*, Video Still, 2022

## speculative intimacies of absence

In writing some closing reflections for this thesis exhibition during uncertain and transitional times, I do not seek to provide a 'conclusion', but rather to consider new imaginaries and stay with the trouble (to borrow from Donna Haraway).<sup>22</sup> Contrasting the acts of deep love and mourning I performed for my father with actions performed for virtual strangers allowed me to completely re-think this whole project. The realities of COVID-19 that coincided with the development of this thesis exhibition were a prelude to the reorientation that humans, as social beings, would have to make in the reconfiguration of conduits of communication in the midst of crisis.<sup>23</sup> With the global shutdown propelled by COVID-19, many of us shared similar experiences of inability to return home to our families; technological forms became integral to performances of care and caring from a distance. In the absence of presence and human touch, "the frontiers of the tonality of voice during telephone conversations and the demeanour and para-language of corporeality"<sup>24</sup> [and I would add text/message-based and non-visual forms] through video calls became tools of warmth and intimacy to convey 'being there' and 'being with'<sup>25</sup>.

I wish to turn to Hans-Georg Gadamer's term "claim" – that he uses in his discussion of aesthetics in *Truth and Method* – to draw parallels between our engaging with mediated forms in both performance art and familial intimacies and care. In the context of aesthetics, Gadamer argues that while a work of art "makes a claim upon us", in order for it to be meaningful, we must

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<sup>22</sup> Haraway, Donna. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene*, Duke University Press. 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Panchadhyayi, Sayendri. "Cartographies of Caring: Time, Temporality, and Caring in Pandemic", *Covid, Crisis, Care, Change? International Gender Perspectives on Re/Production, State, and Feminist Transitions*. Ed. Kupfar, Antonia; Stutz, Constanze. Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2022. 123.

<sup>24</sup> Panchadhyayi, Sayendri. "Cartographies of Caring: Time, Temporality, and Caring in Pandemic", *Covid, Crisis, Care, Change? International Gender Perspectives on Re/Production, State, and Feminist Transitions*. Ed. Kupfar, Antonia; Stutz, Constanze. Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2022. 131.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

be willing to experience it as “contemporaneous” and take seriously its claims.<sup>26</sup> Borrowing the term “contemporaneous” from Søren Kierkegaard, Gadamer states “that this particular thing that presents itself to us achieves full presence, however remote its origin may be”. In this sense, contemporaneity is not a characteristic of the work<sup>27</sup> or object itself, but rather a description and mode of how which we *choose* to engage with the object. That this object or form must be “experienced and taken seriously as present (and not as something in a distant past).”<sup>28</sup> In order to experience mediated forms of communication as co-present, we must be willing to engage with them as such.

Technological and mediated forms have afforded intimacies and proximities through virtual mediums, effectively creating an “environment of polymedia and *omnipresent co-presence* [emphasis added]”<sup>29</sup> ; modernity enables the dissociation of space from place, and *allows* [emphasis added] the sustenance of relations with locationally distant, ‘absent others’.<sup>30</sup> In gesturing to both histories and current practices of performance art and body art, I attempt to articulate what the very form of performance art – in its documentation, mediation, and (re)presentation as a mode of doing – might afford in the contemporary moment that is “marked as much by our separation as by our connectivity.”<sup>31</sup> The form of performance art and its mediation has, for me, facilitated greater connections between and across and within and beyond spatial boundaries that once seemed impossible. Encounters with digitally mediated others, both known and unknown, mobilized various conversations, gestures, exchanges, and events that, however

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<sup>26</sup> Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Translated by Donald G. Marshall and Joel Weinsheimer. London: Continuum, 2004. 123.

<sup>27</sup> Auslander, Philip. “Digital Liveness: A Historico-Philosophical Perspective”. *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*. Vol. 34. No.3. MIT Press on behalf of Performing Arts Journal Inc. 2012. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Translated by Donald G. Marshall and Joel Weinsheimer. London: Continuum, 2004. 124.

<sup>29</sup> Par, Hester. “Medical Geography: Care and Caring”, *In Progress Human Geography*, 2003. 212-221.

<sup>30</sup> Giddens, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.

<sup>31</sup> Khoo, Olivia. “Epilogue: New Regional Intimacies”, *Asian Cinema: A Regional View*. Edinburgh University Press, 2021. 133.

fleeting and physically absent, were still expressed and *felt* as intimate and present. This project retains at its heart a relational, collaborative, and reciprocal ethos. Functioning as a performative and embodied archive of 59 events, this thesis exhibition attempts to provide a framework for imagining ways of being (present) and worlding amidst contemporary times of uncertainty, and what new forms will emerge – and what they will mean – in a post-pandemic landscape.



Figure 23. *fifty-nine events*, Exhibition Installation View, 2022



Figure 24. *fifty-nine events (object detail)*, Exhibition Installation View, 2022



Figure 25. *fifty-nine events*, Exhibition Installation View, 2022



Figure 26. *fifty-nine events (objects)*, Exhibition Installation View, 2022



Figure 27. *fifty-nine events*, Exhibition Installation View, 2022



Figure 28. *fifty-nine events*, Exhibition Installation View, 2022

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