



Method
Living

Marina Abramović learned presence with fifty years of practice. But is there a faster way? A descent into the madness of trying reveals the secret isn't to *look* like living, but to *live*. For those who can't, the performance artist-turned-celebrity may now be taken as a daily supplement – for one pound sterling per milliliter.

Imagine, if you will, living in the wrong direction: going so far away from the self as to lose *feeling*, a sense of *doing*, a connection to what's really happening. When holding these things at a distance, life becomes less about living than about optimizing life. There seems something myopic, then, about casting yourself (your body, your psyche) as your object of study. That's why I resist performance art – because of the intimacy. Unlike painting, which can be more easily about boundaries, performance art is about relation. It forces you to feel, to be *present*. It makes me uncomfortable, and I avoid it.

So, my engagement with Marina Abramović began with a Ted Talk. I could control my level of presence, I reasoned. I could always turn it off. Her account of *Rhythm 0* (1974) – in which she succumbs to the brutal whims of her audience for six hours – is like a thesis, a catalogue essay. As she tells it, the piece is not so much about the violence enacted upon her as an object, but about the *subject* at which she and her viewers arrive together: the *energy dialogue*.

This is the meaning she makes with us. She becomes the material; she hands us the tools. It is a transaction, a conversation, a leap of faith. She gives herself to us, and we believe in her, I guess. She works in the medium of her own fear, primal fears – surrender, pain, mortality – to which she exposes herself freely. In doing so, she trains herself to endure exposure. Her practice is built on time, presence, resistance, attention; this scares me, I have to admit. It also makes her easier to believe. "I'm your mirror," she says. "If I can do this for myself, you can do it for you."

I felt, at that point, that there was only one way to understand. While I waited to receive the Marina Abramović Longevity Method – a wait that felt, in itself, like a kind of training – I studied Abramović, and I practiced living. For a

little over four months, I surveyed myself, cataloging my feelings (their nuances, however painful and embarrassing; where they emerged, and how; what shaped them) on my Instagram Close Friends story. Doing this in public felt important. It required an audience: *energy dialogue*, external confirmation.

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The Method comes in three glass bottles in primary colors. The recommended dosage is fifty drops from each bottle, twice a day. It's a wellness thing. Like my Close Friends story, it invites you to dismiss it. But the thing is – I want to believe, I want to feel better, and I don't know how to do it alone.

From her international study of *presence* – with the nomadic Pitjantjatjara tribe of Central Australia, Tibetan sculptors of *tsa-tsas* (small clay votive offerings of the Buddha), and Brazilian shamans – Abramović derived the foundations of her eponymous Method.

Through simple, repetitive tasks, you retrain your control mechanism by focusing and redirecting your attention. Distraction is a special kind of fear – a fear of feeling, a fear of presence – exacerbated by technology, by contemporaneity. To practice attention is to learn to overcome it.

The Method represents a physical distillation of performance as a time-based art. You have to be there. The point is to live simply, deliberately, from the inside out. The point is to live *now*.

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On a superficial basis, the practice of holistic wellness is similar to the practice of *biobacking*, which treats the body like





Photo: Marco Anelli

a piece of technology that can be optimized and upgraded. You become a system that you are constantly surveying. The idea is that by enhancing your *performance* – energy, cognition, vitality, durability, foreverness – you relitigate your relationship with time.

The Longevity Method, which Abramović developed with Dr. Nonna Brenner (a wellness advisor who helped the artist recover from Lyme disease at Fuschlsee, a lake in the Austrian Alps), has underpinnings in alternative medicine. “To bring the body and soul back to their natural functioning,” Brenner writes, “we must treat all the organs, levels, and systems in a complex way, helping you to become aware of and solve your hidden problems.” In a section on the product website called “My Journal,” an anonymous narrator describes the process – “herbal treatments and energy work” – that enables this mind-body interplay. Healing is about feeling!

When you purchase the Method, you purchase the treatments. The yellow “Immune drops” are a potent cocktail of chilis and alliums. The blue “Allergy relief drops” pair a procognitive resin called shilajit with anti-inflammatory licorice root. The red “Energy drops” contain cranberry juice, antioxidant-rich grape-seed flour, and vitamins C and E. There are redundancies in the composition and function of these products. All of the drops either “support or optimize metabolic balance” while “bolstering body defenses.”

Of course, the Method is not just about the ingredient lists, which you could approximate more or less on your own. What you are purchasing is an obligation to do the work. Twice a day, I take all of the drops at once: fifty times three. I can’t distract myself from their taste, which is unpleasant. I’m living in the present, focusing on the experience so I don’t lose count.

I feel like an animated version of myself – stronger, faster, more capable of endurance. I am going through a kind of *energy dialogue*. I’m not just trying to feel it; I’m trying to say it to you. I check the effects of the Method against the ingredients with my *biobacker* friend, who tells me “That’s what I expected.” I’m not making it up. I do feel better. Then again, I’ve been working on that.

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Not every feeling is immediately interesting. Performance art is not about being an *object*; in the hands of an audience, it’s about reaching a *subject*. This is the difference between assuming life exists at the level of art and using the self as a medium. It’s easy to go the wrong way.

My Close Friends story was good for me until I relied on it to heal me. It was exposure therapy until it became about image, self-indulgence. On the surface, it looked like feeling, but it became another way to avoid fear; a proxy for saying,



Marina Abramović and Dr. Nonna Brenner

doing; a parasocial relationship with myself; not an exercise in living, but a distraction, a replacement, an easy out.

The Marina Abramović Longevity Method is not about looking a certain way; it is not about looking like living; it is not so much about any kind of performance. It is about *living well*. It offers no roadmap to what that means. It is not a substitute, but a supplement: an anti-technology without immediacy, without programs to install or buttons to press. That was where I’d misapplied what I’d learned, and why I eventually drowned in my own reflection, drawn back into the optimization machine.

To some extent, you can *back* your own biology. You can *back* your feelings, your fears, your mind, your life: technically, chemically, palpably, with close attention. Which is to say – the Method works. It can help you feel better; it doesn’t make you. Like Abramović says, *you can do it for you*. The point of it is that you have to. —

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