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PRACTICES OF RELATIONS IN TASK-DANCE AND THE EVENT-SCORE

A CRITIQUE OF PERFORMANCE

Josefine Wikström



Practices of Relations in Task-Dance and the Event-Score

In this study, Josefine Wikström challenges a concept of performance that makes no difference between art and non-art and argues for a new concept.

This book confronts and criticises the way in which the dominating concept of performance has been used in art theory and performance and dance studies. Through an analysis of 1960s performance practices, Wikström focuses specifically on task-dance and event-score practices and provides an examination of the key philosophical concepts that are inseparable from such a concept of art and are necessary for the reconstruction of a critical concept of performance, such as “practice”, “experience”, “object”, “abstraction” and “structure”.

This book will be of great interest to scholars, students and practitioners across dance, performance art, aesthetics and art theory.

Josefine Wikström is Associate Professor of Dance Theory at Stockholm University of the Arts.

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A Critique of Performance

Josefine Wikström

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For Stig and Dora.



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Introduction

From a cultural to a critical concept of performance in art

A “powerful” and “disturbing” performance installation “that poses urgent questions about our time”. Such read the praise for German artist Anne Imhof’s performance work *Faust*, presented during the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017, for which she won the event’s most prestigious prize, the Golden Lion,¹ thereby confirming what Tate Modern’s head curator of performance has claimed to be contemporary art’s most central categories (Wood 2019).² The immersive and highly spectacular three-hour-long performance installation, outside of which visitors were queuing for hours, was the most visited pavilion throughout the entire Biennale. Reconstructed in a classical style by the Nazis in 1938, the German pavilion’s floor was, for the occasion of Imhof’s installation, exchanged to one made of glass, underneath which the eight performers rested, sang, crawled and occasionally made fires. A glass wall was also built around the entire pavilion and on two sides of it were two massive cages inside which Doberman attack dogs were barking. The performers themselves were dressed in up-to-date sportswear from major international brands, their bodies slim and their gazes and facial expressions dead, as if walking on a catwalk.³

In contrast to the Venice Biennale’s prize committee, art critic and art historian Benjamin Buchloh’s essay-like review in *Artforum* (Buchloh 2017) criticises the piece fiercely. His main critique of the performance is to do with what for now might be called the *form* of the artwork. From the way the pavilion was built to the way in which the performers and audience were scored, Buchloh writes that *Faust* was not able to build a critical “outside” from where the viewer could assess the work. As such it was not able to pose any critique of two of the most current acute conditions: capital and state control. This, Buchloh argues, was mainly to do with the architecture of the pavilion, which according to him mimicked corporate and authoritarian architecture reminiscent of German bank buildings and car showrooms, and in which the glass was used to control performers and audience, rather than provide transparency. It was also to do with the way the performers were given direct instructions by the artists through their mobile phones that they kept staring at. Buchloh thought that the work didn’t give any agency to the audience because they were being surveyed from each angle of the pavilion and were not given any space to act otherwise. As such, he writes that *Faust* emphasised, rather than resisted, the fascist history of the pavilion.

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Buchloh also points at two lineages or traditions of performance works. Firstly, he places *Faust* in the context of a tradition of art-making of “art as cult”, going from Richard Wagner’s idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* to Joseph Beuys myth-like performances with coyotes.⁴ The form of the performance in this tradition gets rid of critical distance by asking for submissive participation, not dissimilar to the fashion or music industry.⁵ Secondly, and against this cult-making kind of art, Buchloh poses a “post-Cagean tradition”. Here he includes 1960s practices by dancers, artists and sculptors such as Yvonne Rainer, Robert Morris, Simone Forti and Dan Graham as well as more recent artists’ practices by Andrea Fraser and Tino Sehgal. These artists, in contrast to Wagner, Beuys and Imhof, Buchloh claims, have battled with the importance of critical distance in their works. Whereas artists such as Forti and Morris, during the 1960s, were mainly confronted with the institutionalised de-skilling of artistic work that came after Duchamp, artists that emerged in the 1990s who continued to explore performance within the art institution fought with an increasing commodification of the public sphere and of everyday experience. What all of these artistic practices have in common, Buchloh argues, is that they had to consider ways in which power, capital and other relations were part and parcel of everyday life and how art could exist within these structures.

Inevitably, though, these artists had to face (or avoid) the central question of how their sculptural, spatial, and performative structures might actually reflect on their own *mediations of power* within the fragments of a formerly public space. Put differently, they had to ask whether and how their radically reductivist and deconstructivist works could parry the transformative impact of the process of reception itself—the very moment when their works’ own radicality became *style*, when subversive deconstruction became *design*, when critical performative gesture became mere *theatrical stunt*.

(Buchloh 2017)

Within the post-Cagean tradition of artists’ practices, Buchloh argues, in which performance plays a crucial role, there has been a critical awareness about art not turning into style, design or fashion. Where Imhof reproduces corporate architecture, the fashion industry and the consumer subjectivity of advanced capitalist society, artists such as Rainer and Sehgal work against it. A continuation of Buchloh’s argument could be to claim that the main difference between Imhof’s and these post-Cagean artists’ practices is that the latter, through different “performative strategies”, stays *art* rather than turning into *everyday performance* within capitalist life.

This book looks at the specific form of these so-called performative strategies, and investigates their importance for the establishment of a North American concept of art in the 1960s. More specifically, a primary focus of the book is on the period between the late 1950s and mid-1960s in New York and California, and in particular, on the two novel forms of art-making that developed during this period and that came from two different traditions and disciplines—task-dance

and the event-score—one connected to the international movement of Fluxus and the other centred around the Judson Dance Theatre in New York and Anna Halprin’s workshops in California. Whereas task-dance developed out of and in opposition to a context of modern dance, the event-score was initiated within the framework of musical modernism and composition. Choreographers, artists, dancers and composers such as Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, Yoko Ono, George Brecht, Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown were central in inventing and developing these artistic methods. This book takes from Buchloh’s critique of *Faust* the concept of art that he grounds his claims on and the implications this has with regards to his understanding of performance and performativity as critical categories *within* art. Buchloh follows a long tradition of seeing art as part and parcel of that fundamental period called modernity reflected in Immanuel Kant’s writings on the aesthetic judgement as well as in Charles Baudelaire’s and Walter Benjamin’s writings on the nature of the commodity and art (see also Buchloh 2003 [2001], 2015). For Buchloh, the task of the artist since the early 1900s—and more so the case in the post–World War II period, when structures of capital and commodification intensified—is to mediate such reality, something that artists before Imhof consciously have struggled with but that her work, in his opinion, fails to do. Buchloh’s perspective is unusual—if not non-existent—when it comes to critiques or discussions of contemporary performance works like Imhof’s as well as of performance works dating to the 1960s. The dominating standpoint from which critics and theorists of art and performance most often discuss performance practices in contemporary art—ranging from dance to more performative installations—is one which excludes what Benjamin called a “historico-philosophical concept”⁶ of art in the way that Buchloh does. That is a notion of art which cannot be separated from the historical processes of modernity in which it emerged. Performance in art, including the examples given by Buchloh, have instead been theorised under a concept of performance, broadly understood as a cultural one, in which no distinction is made between art and other cultural phenomena and which is at its best historically revisionist and at its worst ahistorical, as if put in a timeless vacuum. One of the main claims of this book is that this is to do with Anglo-American cultural theories, in particular American performance studies’ dominance over fields such as art theory and dance studies. Rather than a German critical perspective, the dominating literature on performance art practices has, as performance theorist Marvin Carlson notes, instead been swamped by “Deweyesque pragmatism” (Carlson 2008, 6).⁷

Another way of articulating Buchloh’s critique of *Faust* and at the same time tying it to a discussion around the category of performance in art is to suggest the following: Imhof’s work doesn’t distinguish itself from everyday corporate and commercial performance within the fashion and architecture industry. In contrast, it stays everyday performance or what Dwight Conquergood has termed “cultural performance” (Conquergood 1991). In this book this conflict is formulated through the distinction between a *cultural* and *critical concept of performance* (a conflict that might also be articulated as one between “art” and “non-art” or between “performance in an everyday sense” and “performance *as* art”). This book departs from this conflict as its central problem. It concerns how a cultural concept of

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performance has been used within art, and more specifically, how it has been employed to think about performance practices within art. Against a cultural concept of performance—and its interrelation with the category of performativity—used within art, a critical concept of performance is in this book constructed through the placement of performance practices within a tradition of thinking that understands art as a historical category inseparable from societal processes like modernity and from categories like autonomy, abstraction, labour and capital. This means to consider the category of performance within art through thinkers such as Kant, Theodor W. Adorno and Karl Marx. A basic premise in the book is that what Buhloch calls “post-Cagean performative strategies” were central to the development of a generic category of art as well as to the emergence of a general category of performance *within* art established by the 1960s. These forms or strategies of making—as important as models and methods such as the ready-made and the monochrome were for art at the beginning of the 20th century—were central in the reconfiguration of some of the key categories within art, such as mediation, medium, skill, subject and object. They broke radically with the established norm of medium-specificity and by doing so questioned the convention of specialised art labour and the notion of the art object as a material and objective site of meaning. Task-dance and the event-score can thus be said to have been central in the ontological transformation of the concept of art—from a medium-specific to a generic one—that began in the late 1940s and was institutionalised by the mid-1960s.⁸ Each chapter looks at one or a few central works in these “genres” and places them next to a critical concept fundamental for a generic and historico-philosophical concept of art: “practice”, “experience”, “object”, “abstraction” and “structure”. These concepts are crucial in the process of reconstructing a critical understanding of performance that is the central undertaking in this study. In short, the book confronts a cultural concept of performance—and the related category of performativity—and its application to performance practices in art with a critical one that is reconstructed through a set of philosophical categories key to such a concept of performance.

Performance, performativity and its disciples

So, what is meant here by a cultural concept of performance? How has it been included into accounts of post-war performance practices, and what is the crucial problem with this? There are at least three versions of it, which although different in nuances have certain key characteristics in common. Firstly, a category of performance can be found within the by now well-established discipline of performance studies. The connection between performance studies and its concept of performance was established at the opening of the First Annual Performance Studies Conference: The Future of the Field, held in New York in 1995. There ethnographer Dwight Conquergood argued that performance studies is located “on the borders and margins” and that this is what “most clearly distinguishes it from traditional disciplines and fields of study, concerned with establishing a center for their activity” (Carlson 2004, 16). As Carlson suggests, going back

to Jon McKenzie's and Shannon Jackson's important work on the category of performance and the genealogy of performance studies as a discipline, "the field was crystallized in the United States at two major universities during the 1970s and 1980s, at New York University and Northwestern University" (Carlson 2008, 1). These two came to be represented by what McKenzie has termed the Eastern and the Midwestern Schools. Whereas the former was primarily indebted to the disciplines of sociology and anthropology and the intersection between theatre studies and the social sciences, the second had its roots in non-academic teaching, the traditions of oral speech and the "educational theories of John Dewey, who stressed the importance of practical experience in learning" (Carlson 2008, 2). Of particular importance for the first strand was Victor Turner's term "social drama". Introduced in *Schism and Continuity in African Society: A Study of Ndemba Village Life* (1968 [1957]) and expanded on in *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (1982), "social drama" is understood by Turner as a transition from one situation to another and includes the psychological phases of separation, transition and incorporation. Like sociologists before him Ervin Goffman also used terms and metaphors derived from theatre and drama to describe and discuss phenomena such as role playing and performing in social situations. In his essay "On Facework" (1967), Goffman introduced the concept of "interpersonal ritual behaviour". Similar to Turner's "social drama", it "describe[s] an event structure in which the orderly flow of normal interaction, social or cultural, is disrupted by an incident, some breach of social or cultural norms" (Carlson 2004, 34). In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956), Goffman gives an account of performance as "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (Carlson 2004, 35).⁹ This has strong similarities with Richard Schechner's—one of the foregrounding figures of the Eastern School of Performance Studies—account of performance made in a 1973 article. Published in a special issue of the journal *Theatre Drama Review* and guest edited by Schechner, it focused on the divergence between the social sciences and theatre studies. Arguing for the relevance of the connection between the two fields, Schechner wrote:

This issue of TDR is far from perfect and less than a panoramic start of an effort to establish in a systematic way a continuum between the social sciences and performance. It has been obvious at least since the work of Ervin Goffman and Claude Lévi-Strauss—let's say 1950s—that such a continuity exists. In other words that performance is a kind of communicative behaviour that is part of, or continuous with, more formal ritual ceremonies, public gatherings and various means of exchanging information, goods and customs.

(Schechner 1973, 3)

This is followed by seven key areas where the social sciences and theatre coincide and with which performance theory should engage: performance in everyday life, the structure of sports and rituals, semiotics, the relation between human versus

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animal behaviour, aspects of psycho-therapy, ethnography and theories of behaviour. Left out from this article, and in contrast to Schechner's more recent work, are performance *art* practices. In *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (first published in 2002), he characterises four objects of study within performance studies and also includes art. They are behaviour in all its forms, artistic practices (especially avant-garde and community based), fieldwork as participant-observations and social practices. "The underlying notion" of these four, Schechner contends, "is that any action that is framed, enacted, presented, highlighted or displayed is a performance" (Schechner 2002, 2). As a consequence art here is understood in the same manner as the other objects of study, such as behaviour, and are ontologically considered the same type of social phenomena. Despite the differences between the so-called Eastern and Midwestern Schools, and although the former—with key figures like Schechner—has dominated the narrative around performance studies, both hold a similar account of performance as something social and in which the category of art is, if not excluded, not privileged in any way. This is an aspect of performance studies that this book takes as its central problem and point of departure.

The second central concept of performance at work within cultural theory emerged, broadly speaking, as a result of a critical encounter between analytic language philosophy and post-structuralist theory. It has primarily been popularised through Judith Butler's account of gender as performative but goes back to John Langshaw Austin's use of the term and Jacques Derrida's critique of the same. In an attempt to question a traditional view of language derived from formal logic, found in Friedrich Ludwig Gottlob Frege, Austin coined the term "performativity" in his 1955 lectures, where he argued that "performative" utterances, in contrast to "descriptive" or "constative", do not describe or state anything to be true or false. Instead, they *perform* or *do* what they say: "the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action" (Austin 1962, 5). Although this initial definition of a performative statement sounds broad enough to encompass a number of statements, the examples given by Austin demonstrate the opposite. A performative can only take place under strict contextual norms defined by certain conventions (conventionality, completeness, intentionality and conduct), and when broken, the utterance becomes unsuccessful or "unhappy". One of Austin's most cited examples is "I do", spoken when getting married, where the saying changes someone from being unmarried to becoming a wife or a husband. This means that the person who makes the utterance must have an intention and be serious (have conduct). Whilst Austin's critique of conventional and analytically oriented views on language can be debated, it has had an unprecedented impact on post-structuralist theories and, by extension, also art theory.

Derrida was the first to discuss Austin's performative within post-structuralist theory with his lecture "Signature, Event, Context", delivered in 1971 and published in English in *Margins of Philosophy* (1982). Although Austin, in most secondary literature and accounts of the term "performativity", is named as the main reference to the term, Derrida's critique—and, to a certain extent, expansion—of Austin's performative utterance is key for understanding how the term further

has been used within cultural theory and performance studies.¹⁰ Derrida's essay focuses on a critique of a conventional notion of communication within Western philosophy and its foundation on a metaphysical idea of presence. In contrast to such a notion of communication, he develops a concept of writing understood as a break with, rather than a continuation of, presence by arguing for its "iterability" (repeatability) and "graphematic" (linguistic) structure in general. Derrida recognises Austin's performative utterances as an attempt to criticise a classical understanding of communication, but he argues that, although "it could *appear* that Austin has exploded the concept of communication as a purely semiotic, linguistic, or symbolic concept" (Derrida 1982, 322, my emphasis), it fails to take into account the fundamental structure of all forms of locution and of communication in general: "graphematic in general". What Austin calls "parasites" and excludes from the "performative", such as jokes or utterances made in a play on stage, are from Derrida's point of view "its internal and positive condition of possibility" (Derrida 1982, 325). The performative utterance suffers, Derrida argues, in the same way as classical notions of communication do, from "metaphysical origins: an ethical and teleological discourse of consciousness" (Derrida 1982, 327). Derrida's understanding of how communication and meaning is produced demonstrates that specific performative situations could never occur. The performative moment, rather, is *how experience is structured*, whose "marks" are named "signatures". *If* the performative moment could exist for Derrida, it would take place all the time: "the effects of signatures are the most ordinary thing in the world" (Derrida 1982, 328). From this perspective Derrida does not need the term "performativity" to develop his critique of the metaphysics of communication, writing or meaning, which is probably why he doesn't develop the term further in his work. Derrida's intervention in relation to Austin's performative utterance is nevertheless vital for the development of the category, especially if one considers the way in which performativity was developed *after* him, primarily through the work of Butler, for whom Derrida's break with metaphysics is crucial.¹¹

Butler's conceptualisation of *gender as performative*, and the transformation of normative ideas of gender through *gender performances*, has since the early 1990s become the key reference in cultural theory for the categories "performance" and "performativity". Although Butler refers more explicitly to Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser as her main influences, she came across the term "performativity" for the first time via Derrida.¹² Both terms appear as early as in an article from 1988, in which she criticises an essentialist distinction between sex and gender in which sex is assumed as pre-discursive and a natural metaphysical substance and gender as the cultural interpretation of sex. In the article, she draws on a concept of performance in theatre studies and sociology and on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's and Simone de Beauvoir's phenomenologically grounded ideas of the body as a "historical situation" (Butler 1988, 520). Butler's main argument in the article is that gender should be thought of as a cultural production that both conditions and is conditioned by societal norms and conventions that are produced by performances (repetitive acts) over time through the body. "Consider gender, for instance, as a corporeal style, an 'act', as it were, which is

both intentional and performative, where ‘performative’ itself carries the double-meaning of ‘dramatic’ and ‘non-referential’” (Butler 1988, 522). Developed in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), gender, Butler suggests, is the cultural, reiterative and re-productive process *through which sex is constructed*. It is “the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established” (Butler 1990, 10), making sex into another gendered category. Butler’s conception of gender as performative relies on Foucault’s notion of power in which the process of becoming a subject is a twofold and simultaneous paradoxical process: that of being subordinated and that of becoming a subject.¹³ This double movement of the subjectivisation process is, according to Butler, conditioned by a set of normative social conventions (heteronormativity and kinship, for example) in which gender plays a central role. “Performativity” becomes the term through which she describes this temporal and reiterative process of gender construction.

Gender proves to be performative—that is, *constituting the identity it is purported to be*. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed. . . . There *is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender*; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results.

(Butler 1990, 34)

Whilst the term “performativity” is used by Butler to account for the temporal process through which gender is inscribed within the body, the term “performance” is mainly developed in conjunction with her account of resistance to stereotypical gender roles. The main claim made here is that if gender is constituted by a set of repetitive acts at the level of the body, it should be possible to change or transform these acts in a way that they destabilise the hegemonic modes of gender that they are trying to constitute. The main example Butler gives is the performance of drag, cross-dressing or “sexual stylization of butch/femme identities”. These identities, especially drag, displace the relationship between the anatomy and the gender identity of the performance and “suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance” (Butler 1990, 187). Subversive gender performances reveal the fiction, or illusion of gender and sex, because “disorganization and disaggregation” disrupt regulatory fiction of coherence resulting in that the “expressive model loses its descriptive force” (Butler 1990, 185). The political task, Butler claims, is to find out why certain gender performances disrupt the illusion of a stable sex and others do not.

Although Butler does not reflect much on her use of performativity in *Gender Trouble*, her conception of gender as performative is, as Gill Jagger notes, “based on a combination of speech act theory and a poststructuralist understanding of subjectivity” (Jagger 2008, 9). This makes the term “performativity” turn into an empty placeholder *filled* with the concept of gender, or into a generic category, as suggested by Lynne Segal and Peter Osborne, when they rhetorically ask Butler if “performativity [is] the *generic category* of which regulatory norms are

historically specific instances, or what?” (Osborne and Segal 1994, 33). Despite the critique that has been made against Butler’s notion of performativity, and especially the concept of sex that it relies on, the impact of this concept cannot be underestimated.¹⁴

A third and more recent version of the term “performance” has emerged within the field of cultural theory and, more specifically, within an expanded account of performance theory concerned with management studies and versions of post-Marxist theory. Here the term “performance” is employed to account for the change in the organisation of labour since the Second World War and how the production of subjectivity (in the Foucauldian sense referred to earlier) became a key part of such a restructuring and the subsequent debates. Such debates, however, conflate the turn to performative, or the affective forms of labour, as a renewal of new forms of value production in the crisis that capital faced in the 1970s. This conflation partly has its origin in Antonio Negri’s lectures in 1978 on Marx’s “Machine Fragments” in the *Grundrisse* (Negri 1992) but was popularised via Maurizio Lazzarato’s conceptualisation of “immaterial labour” (2016 [1992]) and Michael Hardt and Negri’s *Empire* (2001). New forms of labour (in programming, telemarketing etcetera) that emerged in the 1960s as a result of the deindustrialisation in the West, these thinkers argue, make the production of the commodity inseparable from the worker’s subjectivity. Drawing on the aforementioned thinkers, performance scholar Bojana Kunst argues that the production of subjectivity takes centre stage in capitalist production and that contemporary artists (specifically those within the performing arts), through the structure of their work, play a fundamental role in this (Kunst 2015). McKenzie argued something similar in his *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (McKenzie 2001). Here McKenzie builds on Foucault’s concept of power and the subject to argue to for the transformation of the category of performance within a market-driven economy. The changes at the workplace in the West in the 1960s, in which performance becomes the measurement of value, he writes, make performance “to the twentieth and twenty-first century what discipline was to the eighteenth and nineteenth, that is, an onto-historical formation of power and knowledge” (McKenzie 2001, 17).¹⁵

These three versions of the category performance at work in cultural theory are not exhaustive, but give an account of some of the main tendencies amongst the vast literature on and around the concept. As will be shown in Chapter 5, in which the notion of structure and the “structuralist object” in post-structuralism is discussed—and from which many of these categories of performance derive—no structuralist object can be ontologically differentiated from any other object. All are concerned with meaning in a horizontal way. Art, as a consequence, is considered *another type* of object, rather than an ontologically different one. One of the consequences of this is that a cultural concept of performance has migrated into all discourses of performance practices in art. One such example is the work of American art historian Amelia Jones, whose main argument is that the introduction of artists’ use of the body in post-war art is primarily an introduction of a post-structuralist, decentred subjectivity and that this challenges the conventions

of modernism and aestheticism, conceived as a disinterested (in the Kantian sense) white male subject (Jones 1993, 2012; Jones and Stephenson 1999). Jones also reveals that a post-structuralist notion of “meaning” underlies her arguments when she writes that performance-related practices from the late 1940s to the 1960s, such as those of Jackson Pollock and Hannah Wilke, for example, demonstrate that “meaning is a process of engagement and never dwells in any one place” (Jones and Stephenson 1999, 7). Jones here explicitly reduces performance practices to the representation of a post-structuralist concept of the subject and a critique of what she loosely refers to as “Kantianism”. The latter is posed by Jones against a post-structuralist, performative one. Another example of the relocation of the terms “performance” and “performativity” into other fields is the work of art historian and curator Dorothea von Hantelmann. Whilst von Hantelmann, in contrast to Jones, explicitly grounds her thoughts in a historical modern concept of art and, in particular, in the emergence of the exhibition format, she still holds on to a post-structuralist understanding of meaning when she employs the term “performativity”. Performativity, she argues, provides her with a framework through which art can be problematised in its distinct modern and generic form, and which is inseparable from the critique of the exhibition format as it was introduced in the mid-19th century. Hantelmann uses performativity in an Austinian and a Butlerian sense to argue that artists from the mid-1960s onwards (Daniel Buren, James Coleman and Tino Sehgal) have continued to perform such a critique. She also illustrates what forms such a critique has taken. In her writings, performativity is thus used as an index, or a measurement, to wage the societal impact of art. She sees performativity as able to measure the *meaning*-production of art and what she calls their “reality-producing” dimension:

to ask about the performative in relation to art is not about defining a new class of artworks. Rather, it involves outlining a specific level of meaning production, which basically exists in every artwork, although it is not always consciously shaped or dealt with—namely, its reality-producing dimension.
(Hantelmann 2010, 18)

In short, Hantelmann uses the term “performativity” to describe the meaning-production through which art-works gain societal impact without, however, without critically engaging with what such a concept of performativity has to say about a critical and autonomous concept of art that she nevertheless relies on.

Marx’s epistemology: a critical methodology

If this book is critical of a cultural concept of performance, what, then, is meant here by a critical concept of the same? A critical concept of performance is, in this book, first and foremost to do with a critical methodology taken from the way in which Marx conceptualises the construction of economic categories within a broader claim of epistemology in his introduction to the *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (a series of seven notebooks written roughly

around 1857–8 but not published until 1941).¹⁶ In these pages Marx formulates a general methodology for political economy and, in particular, the construction of economic categories. In contrast to formal logic, in which pure forms of thought are opposed to objective reality, Marx, partly following Kant's transcendental critique, here argues that within a critical scientific method one must depart from the most general and abstract categories to then work one's way through to the simple ones, to finally arrive at the most concrete categories. From the standpoint of the present such a method must be understood as the opposite of a phenomenological or a cultural theoretical method where focus is on concrete cultural events from which "abstract" or "theoretical" assumptions are made or extracted. Marx's epistemology, in contrast to such a method, is about the limitedness of empirical observation: it is through the abstract categories that concrete (reality) "appears in the process of thinking" (Marx 1973, 101).

Of particular importance for the methodology used in this book is the conceptual distinction Marx makes between the abstract and the concrete. Grounded in an idea of how thought works in relation to reality and the way in which knowledge is produced in this process, the main claim made by Marx is that the correct scientific method is "of rising from the abstract to the concrete" (Marx 1973, 101) since this is the only "way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in mind" (Marx 1973, 101). Evald Ilyenkov argues that this makes Marx's scientific method into a dialectical logic standing "against all kinds of neo-Kantian logic and epistemology which oppose, in a crudely metaphysical way, 'pure forms of thought' to forms of objective reality" (Ilyenkov 1982 [1960], 19). A concrete example for histories of art or performance of the implications of such a method is that an analysis doesn't necessarily begin with the art- and/or dance/performance work, but rather in the categories the artwork has operated through. The reason for this is that the concrete (the artwork here) for Marx does not simply stand for—as it does in formal logic—the immediately given, nor is the abstract an abstraction, that is, pure thought, of the sensually given. Rather, with the concrete, Marx understands "a totality of thoughts . . . a product . . . of the working-up observation and conception into concepts". All concrete categories—population (or within the context of this book, the category of artwork), for example—contain within them a range of abstract categories without which they would be inconceivable. This is why the concrete, for Marx, must be considered "the concentration of many determinations, hence the unity of the diverse" (Marx 1973, 101). As Ilyenkov points out, with "unity" and "totality", Marx here means "an internally divided totality" rather than a "similarity of phenomena" (Ilyenkov 1982 [1960], 17). This is why the concrete, for the mind, as Marx writes, appears "as a process of concentration, as a result, not as a point of departure, even though it is the point of departure in reality and hence *also the point of departure for observation [Anschauung] and conception*". This does not mean, however, that this is "the process whereby the concrete *comes into being*", for which Marx criticises Hegel's idealist philosophy (Marx 1973, 101). Rather, it is only how the concrete becomes *thinkable*, that is, being reproducible by the mind. The reason that this book focuses on central categories such as art,

task-dance, event-score, subject, object, structure and practice is that it, following Marx, operates from the standpoint that these categories contain within them the point of departure for thinking about specific artworks and art practices, rather than the other way around.

Such a way of thinking about categories and the relation to thought introduced by Marx rejects a nominalist way of thinking in which there are art practices and then terms or categories employed to name such practices or specific artworks. This becomes clear from the same section of the *Grundrisse* where Marx explains what he means with the “abstract”. With the “abstract”, Marx refers to categories such as “exchange-value” and “capital”, which, in their function of being simple and abstract categories, only describe a “one-sided relation” of a more developed totality, that is, their one-sidedness comes from the fact that they “can express the dominant relations of a less developed whole” (Marx 1973, 102). The abstract for Marx, Ilyenkov writes, is “by no means a synonym of the ‘purely ideal’, of a product of mental activity”, rather “time and again Marx uses this term to characterise real phenomena and relations existing outside of consciousness, irrespective of whether they are reflected in consciousness or not” (Ilyenkov 1982 [1960], 18). The category “population”, for example, cannot exist without the category class “of which it [population] is composed” (Marx 1973, 100). In the same way, the category “exchange-value” makes no sense without a comprehension of capital. So, for Marx, because the mind reaches the concrete by way of thought, the method for science in general, and for political economy in particular, must begin with the simple and abstract categories, rather than the concrete real ones, since the former determine the broader concrete ones. Finally, Marx’s claim about abstract and concrete categories and its consequences for scientific research is made more complex by the fact that the abstract categories do not necessarily correspond chronologically to the concrete ones; rather, he writes:

the simple categories are the expressions of relations within which the less developed concrete may have already realized itself before having posited the more many-sided connection or relation which is mentally expressed in the more concrete category; while the more developed concrete preserves the same category as a subordinate relation.

(Marx 1973, 102)

This is then followed by the example of money by Marx. He writes that “money”, for example, existed long before the more concrete category “bourgeois society” in which money becomes central. He also contends that it is equally possible to find communities with highly developed forms of economies and divisions of labour where there is no such thing as money. Money, in its most abstract and general form, Marx writes, “can only achieve its full (intensive and extensive) development precisely in a combined form of society, while the more concrete category was more fully developed in a less developed form of society” (Marx 1973, 103). The implication of Marx’s critical epistemology—reminiscent of Benjamin’s thought on history and Adorno’s use of aesthetic categories—for a field

like art or performance theory is that focus needs to be on the critical categories used for certain practices and the departure from these categories in order to grasp something about the art practices themselves. Further is the consequence of such a scientific method that a category like performance might appear long before a category like art in general, but the former doesn't receive its full meaning until the latter has appeared and become institutionalised. This book attempts to take the consequences of such a methodology for the category of performance *in art*.

Marx's epistemological historicising claims about scientific method are thus used as the overall approach and method in this book. More specifically, this is done through the employment of terms and categories central to task-dance and event-score practices, which it argues are internal to the more generic category performance as it operates within the context of generic art as played out in North America after the Second World War. The categories in question are "practice", "experience", "object", "abstraction" and "structure", and each of the five chapters in the book departs from at least one of these and also relates to terms and categories such as "mediation", "task", "event" and "autonomy". Instead of a chronological ordering, the chapters thus proceed through different categories that are inseparable from the more general category of performance. In this way, the idea is that each chapter accounts for one aspect within the general category of performance. Together they give an account of how, why and in what ways such a general category developed, as well as the way it can be placed within a generic concept of art.

In the same section of the *Grundrisse* Marx also makes the point that the most abstract categories become valid or thinkable, as abstract categories, only when the historical—that is, real, practical relations of which they are *expressions of relations*—are fully unfolded. The main example given by Marx is the category "labour", which, he writes, is "immeasurably old". But "when it is economically conceived in this simplicity, 'labour' is as modern a category as are the relations which create this simple abstraction". The implication is that "labour in general" "presupposes a very developed totality of real kinds of labour, of which no single one is any longer predominant". It also means that it is only in the most developed form of capitalist societies that "the abstraction of the category 'labour', 'labour' as such, 'labour pure and simple', becomes true in practice". Of the generality of labour Marx writes:

Indifference towards any real kinds of labour presupposes a very developed totality of real kinds of labour, of which no single one is any longer predominant. As a rule, the most general abstractions arise only in the midst of the richest possible concrete development, where one thing appears as common to many, to all.

(Marx 1973, 103)

What Marx here points out is that labour as a general category only became thinkable when labour was practically treated as abstract, in other words, as generalisable under the capitalist mode of production—that is, when labour was no

longer tied to particular and specialised craft-based forms of labour but became non-specialised wage labour. This argument compares on at least two levels with what is argued in this book. Firstly, the break with medium-specificity that developed in art in the post-war era and was institutionalised by the mid-1960s was also the development of an indifference towards the specificity of craft-based art labour. American art critic Leo Steinberg put it succinctly in his 1972 essay “Other Criteria”:

American art since World War II is unthinkable without this liberating impulse towards something other than art. . . . Not art but industry. . . . Not art but technological research. . . . The process of *courting non-art* is continuous. Not art but happenings; not art but social action; not art but transaction—our situation, experiment, behavioural stimulus.

(Steinberg 2007 [1972], 62–3, my emphasis)

Steinberg suggests that art after the Second World War became integral to labour in general (to industry, technology, social action, scientific experiments etcetera) and to “non-art”. Importantly, however, and with regards to the claim that performance studies to a large extent have excluded a critical category of art from its concept of performance, the “non-art” aspect here in the way Steinberg uses it is what makes these practices into art—that is, into a privileged cultural experience distinct from other kinds of experiences. Secondly, in relation to Marx’s claim that labour in general became thinkable when labour was treated *practically* as generalisable, a general category of performance was only institutionalised in the mid-1960s when artists began to make performances which were no longer tied to specialised labour in performance and their specific institutional settings, such as theatre and ballet. Marx’s critical epistemology runs as a red thread throughout this book. It functions as a model for a methodology to be used for the aesthetic category of “performance” and related ones such as “practice” and “abstraction”. But Marx’s thoughts on critical categories within political economy also serve in the book as a backdrop in that they pinpoint the crucial shift in modernity when labour became generalised and abstract, something that had fundamental consequences for art production, not least for performance and dance practices in the early 1960s.

Post-mediality and a generic concept of performance

The break with, or expansion of, medium-specificity that task-dance and the event-score practices pushed for and which resulted in a generic concept of art—a concept that is central to this book—needs some further explanation. Firstly, the notion of medium is here understood in Clement Greenberg’s sense—as he received it from Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s 1766 essay on painting and poetry (Lessing 2003) as the self-purification of what is—and as Greenberg put it in his 1960 “Modernist Painting” essay: “unique and irreducible in each particular art” (Greenberg 1993 [1960], 86). As Rosalind Krauss has stated, Greenberg,

like Lessing, tried to “define what is natural to a given artistic enterprise”, and through this Greenberg then tried to understand its “special powers to create meaning” (Krauss 1981, 3). Greenberg thus took Kant’s enlightenment project and critique of philosophy (a critique of the limits, or conditions, of the possibility of philosophy itself) as the model for his understanding of the history of artistic modernism. As with Kant’s critical recasting of the borders of philosophy, modernism, Greenberg argued, “criticizes from the inside, through the procedures themselves of that which is being criticized” (Greenberg 1993 [1960], 85). Further, for Greenberg, modernism’s self-critique takes the form of what he in the earlier essay “American Type Painting” from 1955 calls the “self-purification” of specific mediums (Greenberg 1993 [1955], 208). Within the medium of painting, for instance, self-purification leads to the problem of flatness, “the only condition painting shared with no other art” (Greenberg 1993 [1960], 87). As time proceeded what became clear, however, was that the consequence of this working towards self-purification was the necessary breaking down of the medium-specific borders of the specific arts, resulting in a production of a generic concept of art. The flatness of painting, for example, led to the questioning of its material support, the canvas, which led to problems no longer inherent to the medium of painting. In relation to such development and through the term “generic concept of art”, Thierry de Duve argued that art, since the institutionalisation of Duchamp in the 1960s, was no longer reducible to a medium-specific theory of the arts (De Duve 1996). For de Duve, Duchamp’s gesture of the ready-made implicated a radical break with the use of non-artistic mediums and artistic craft-based skills. The shortcoming, however, of de Duve’s account of a generic concept of art is that it evades all forms of historical mediations, which is illustrated by his nominal declaration: “this is art”. This book recognises de Duve’s claim about Duchamp’s importance for the development of a generic concept of art yet criticises de Duve’s non-historical aspect of such a claim. As such it lies closer to the claim made by John Roberts that the movement away from medium-specificity leads to a dialectic of a de- and re-skilling of art labour and that this de-crafting, the untying of artistic practice from a notion of craft, crucially sets forth a new ontology of the artwork (Roberts 2008). In this book, and by both following and criticising de Duve, it follows a concept of art which considers art as a general category and as historically mediated. It thus follows Adorno’s understanding of art as he formulated it in his posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* [*Ästhetische Theorie*] (Adorno 1997 [1970]). It focuses in particular on Adorno’s emphasis on art’s ontological condition as a separation from empirical reality and its distinctively historical character. Whereas de Duve’s act of nomination takes place in a vacuum, free from historical mediations (social and technical), for Adorno, the concept of art—and the way art is mediated—is continuously transforming because of social and technical innovations.

The time period and the North American context which this book focuses on, and in which a generic concept of art was institutionalised, has primarily been accounted for by a first generation of *October*-related scholars through terms such as “post-war-art”, the “neo-avant-garde” and the “post-medium-condition”.¹⁷

More recently, a second generation of North American art historians, many of them also associated with the journal *October*, have instead focused on the first part of the post-war art period from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. Such a period has been termed “the social turn” (Joseph 2008), as a shift from “form to process” (Rodenbeck 2011, 117) and as a movement “from representationalism to performativity” (Piekut 2011, 7).¹⁸ If the first generation of *October* scholars engaged primarily with expanded practices of sculpture and painting in the mid-1960s and argued for their importance of a generic concept of art, the second generation have rightly focused on the centrality that performance practices, as derived from modernist theatre, musical composition and dance in the late 1940s and early 1950s, had for the critique of medium-specificity, something that is succinctly pointed out by Julia Robinson, who writes “that the conceptual turn of the 1960s actually started in 1959, with Brecht’s first text-based score, and not, as most accounts would have it, almost a decade later” (Robinson 2009, 77). Peter Osborne made the same claim half a decade earlier when he wrote that “the range of works which can retrospectively—but, nonetheless legitimately—be classified as ‘conceptual’ predates the movement that bears its name by several years and includes, crucially, work by Yoko Ono and others who would become associated with Fluxus” (Osborne 2002, 18). This book, on the one hand, departs from the focus on performance practices in the 1950s and early 1960s that scholars like Robinson and others have explored. On the other hand, this book also recognises the exclusion of task-dance in the same literature and will argue that task-dance is equally important for a generic notion of art as, for example, Robinson’s noting of the significance of the event-score.

Task-dance and the event-score: epistemological problems

What then distinguishes task-dance and the event-score as artistic forms, and what makes them so important for the break with medium-specificity in post-war art in North America of this time? How can they be seen as having paved the way for a generic concept of art? Task-dance and the event-score were forms or structures for making work which consisted of, on the one side, a set of instructions or tasks, and on the other side, the actualisation or the possibility of realising these, in thought or practically. This tension in these works makes them into a kind of “epistemological problem” in a Kantian sense (the concern with the limits of possibility). But whereas Kant’s epistemology deals with the conditions of possibility of experience and universal knowledge, at the centre of these forms is the question of the limits and conditions of art.¹⁹ These forms or strategies of making—as important as the ready-made and the monochrome were for art at the beginning of the 20th century—were central in the reconfiguration of some of the key categories within art such as mediation, medium, skill, subject and object. For this reason they make up the main object of study in this book.

The literature on the event-score and task-dance is on the one hand extensive, encompassing many areas considered within larger narratives such as the history of Fluxus, Judson Church, minimal music and 1960s performance practices

(see for example Baas 2011; Banes 1982, 1987; Haskell 1984; Goldberg 2011 [1979] to name a few). Artists and artworks related to the event-score and task-dance have also been explicitly recuperated and inscribed into a broader history of art practices that are considered important for the development of a generic notion of art, such as those of Duchamp, Cage and Rauschenberg (see for example Basualdo and Battle 2013). Yet none of this literature explicitly works with task-dance and event-score practices as artistic forms which grapple with tensions such as ideal/material, score/event, experience/non-experience and ultimately with art/non-art—tensions inherent to these forms. If much secondary literature has excluded this aspect of these artistic forms, this book attempts to take this as one of its central problems and points of departure. Whilst there has been some literature focusing specifically on the event-score (Kotz 2007, 2001; Robinson 2009) there is none that has investigated task or instruction-dance as a specific form of mediation or genre.²⁰ Instead, the theoretical frameworks that have dominated the reading of these performance practices have been grounded in what here is called an empirico-positivist approach to performance, and of which three theoretical types can be distinguished. Empirico-positivist approaches analyse task-dance and event-score practices by departing directly from concrete artworks and without considering the categories in art without which they would not be able to be thought of. Such a method thus stands in sharp contrast to the critical one outlined earlier via Marx's critical epistemology. So firstly, since the publication of Sally Banes's *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (originally published in 1977), sociology and anthropology have formed the guiding disciplines in the writing on dance of the period. The ordinary, found and everyday movements in works connected to the group around the Judson Dance Theatre and related choreographers are here primarily articulated in relation to terms such as "behaviour", "habit", "environment", "social drama", "myth" and "ritual" by drawing from theories by sociologists, anthropologists and performance studies scholars such as Turner, Goffman and Schechner.²¹ For example, commenting on Judson Dance Theatre dancer and choreographer David Gordon's dances, Banes writes that they "look more like behaviour, than choreography—the sorts of movements people make routinely, unconsciously and therefore often decisively" (Banes 1987 [1977], 105). Catherine Wood's writings on Rainer can also be placed within a sociological discourse in that she describes Rainer's use of repetition by referring to Schechner's concept of performance as "being behaviour that is 'restored' or 'twice-behaved'" (Wood 2007, 55). In addition Wood sees this repetitive aspect of Rainer's work, in relation to Butler's account of gender and the way in which it can be performatively resisted, through subversive repetition as accounted for previously. Similarly, Janice Ross's discussion of Halprin's work is framed around the experiential, ritual and participatory aspects of her choreography and workshops (Ross 2009a, 2009b).

Secondly, a structuralist and post-structuralist approach to event-score and task-dance practices can be detected. Much work has been done on the relation between the event-score and the structuralist and post-structuralist theories of language

as well as on discussions of linguistics in analytic philosophy. For example, in linking the event-score's open character to Ferdinand Saussure's S/S-structure, Julia Robinson argues that George Brecht "through the score . . . asserts the conceptual nature of the denotative function of language—precisely the relationship between signifier and signified—using it as the matrix for engaging a subject" (Robinson 2009, 95–6). Liz Kotz also reads the event-score in relation to Saussure, commenting on the structure of language itself and on the fact that "words are both here—concretely and physically present on the page, or in the moment of utterance—and yet also elsewhere too, evoking or metaphorically conveying up sets of ideas, objects or experiences that are somewhere else" (Kotz 2007, 3). Kotz's and Robinson's account of Saussure are, however, questionable. Whilst Robinson reduces Saussure's Signifier/Signified-structure to the analogy of text (the score) and meaning (the reading or performance of the score), Kotz's reading of Saussure sounds more like Frege.²² Both Robinson and Kotz—following Rosalind Krauss—also argue that the event-score's open character can be read in relation to Roman Jakobson's "shifter-function": "that category of linguistic sign which is 'filled with signification' only because it is 'empty'" (Robinson 2009, 20). Also relating to the textual aspects of the event-score is Kristin Stiles's writings on Fluxus, in which she asserts that the event-scores "are to behaviour what the ordinary language philosophy of Wittgenstein was to language: they investigate the connection of abstract contemplation to concrete activity" (Stiles 1993, 67). In Stiles's account, event-scores link thought with action, perception and experience "in the formation of meaning-producing signs which is critical if the self is to be considered an instrument for reform in the world" (Stiles 1993, 67).

Finally, the literature on the event-score—in particular in relation to Fluxus—has also been centred around a critique of epistemology and Cartesian dualism primarily found in thinkers connected to pragmatism—John Dewey in particular—but also in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work and phenomenology more broadly. Higgins, for example, argues that event-scores, through the multi-sensorial and embodied aspects they impose on the performer and viewer, create experiences that escape boundaries between body and mind, sight and sound and subject and object. This makes the event-score implicitly critical of Western epistemology, which Higgins argues privileges mind over body. This argument is constructed with reference to Dewey's concept of experience and to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the phenomenological body (Higgins 2002, 38; Merleau-Ponty 2002). Similarly, Stiles claims that most Fluxus events challenge Western epistemology by connecting "doing" to "being" and "becoming", and by collapsing "poiesis" with "praxis" (Stiles 1993). In a more historically contextual manner, Ken Friedman understands "experimentation" and "research" in Fluxus as related to American pragmatism as well as to religious and spiritual movements, including Unitarianism, American and European transcendentalism and the Shakers, through their emphasis on the "ordinary" (Friedman 2001).

Pragmatism and language philosophy have also informed the literature on task-dance. One such example is the focus on the democratic aspect of works in the Judson Dance Theatre. Banes sees the collaborative form of making and

presenting work within such a context as reflective of democratic procedures. She also frames this in relation to the Judson Dance Theatre members' interest and close engagement with the civil rights movement at the time (Banes 1993a, 1993b). Mostly, Banes thinks of the works made within the Judson Dance Theatre as democratic at the level of the representation of movements. She paved the way for this reading with her book *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962–1964*, in which she argues that the democratic aspect of the group lies in the focus on people's everyday actions (Banes 1993a). More recent writings on choreographers linked to the Judson Dance Theatre have also emphasised the relationship with democracy, as, for example, Wood's essay on Rainer's iconic dance piece "The Mind Is a Muscle" from 1966 and Ramsay Burt's book on the Judson Dance Theatre (Wood 2007; Burt 2008). Banes, Wood and Burt also refer to pragmatism in a more contextual way. In her discussion of the role of authenticity in Rainer's work, Wood states: "Rainer's work appears to propose a simpler, pragmatic materialist notion of authentic experience" (Wood 2007, 56). The influence of pragmatist thinking on Judson Dance Theatre works, Burt writes, is manifested in the dancers' concern with "external behaviour and actions in the world rather than inner psychological states" (Burt 2008, 80) as well as in their rejection of the dualism between body and mind central to their work. In discussing the use of "everyday" movements, Banes speaks referentially about the link between Rainer's work and Dewey and Charles Sanders Peirce. Underlying this thought that Rainer's and Judson Dance Theatre dancers' work represents a modern version of democracy is Dewey's understanding of this term, modelled on his understanding of experience as an integrated interaction between a living organism and its environment.²³

Despite some divergent sources, each of these empirico-positivist approaches to task-dance and the event-score share an emphasis in their aim of wanting to unify the tension that exists in these art practices. Through metaphysically and phenomenologically charged terms, such as "being", "behaviour", "experience", "presence" and "embodiment", this literature instead posits performance as a unitive, total and holistic activity that brings together body and mind, art and life and artist and viewer into one *unmediated experience*. Rather than addressing the tension that lies at the core of these practices, art and dance theoretical writing has, in contrast, frequently viewed performance as an activity that either smooths over or unifies the relationship between task and dance, score and event, ideal and material and art and non-art. They are empirico-positivist because they fail to account for these artistic strategies as the epistemological problems that they are. In doing so, they also eliminate the possibility of seeing these art practices as art in a generic sense. It is in the pull between ideal and material, score and event, task and dance and, ultimately, art and non-art that these practices are constituted and come alive. By bypassing this tension, partly by considering them as everything but art, the category of performance used to name these same practices stays at the cultural level. Taken together, these three empirico-positivist approaches to performance practices in art, and in event-score and task-dance especially, are important historical informational sources

for many of these works. Without them there would not be much written about these artistic practices. Yet these approaches fail in their theoretical attempts to understand these performance practices as *art*. These various theoretical and historical attempts to understand these art and dance practices are embedded in philosophical discourses which do not consider art as a specific cultural form distinct from other experiences. This has resulted in that task-dance and event-score practices to a large extent have been written out of any account of art understood as a general and historico-philosophical category. By approaching event-score and task-dance practices through the use of Marx's critical methodology, this book, in contrast to such literature, wants to account for these artistic practices in relation to a critical category of art and related categories such as practice, abstraction and object. In this way, this book hopes to be able to say something about the internal tensions that are specific to these same practices and which made them crucial for a general category of art as well as of performance.

Chapter summary

The first and the second chapters introduce the reader to the broad context of artistic practices in which task-dance and the event-score developed. The three final chapters focus on more specific problems that are demonstrated through particular case studies. Chapter 1 argues that the development of a generic concept of art is best described as a shift towards practice, primarily in Marx's account of this term. It begins with a discussion of the break with medium-specificity in North American art and then moves on to a critical reconstruction of two key artistic strategies of the post-war art period in North America: firstly, the expansion of painting through the inclusion of the *process* of painting into the meaning of the artwork, and secondly, the transformation of the musical score from a mimetic/identical to a non-mimetic/non-identical understanding of it. The focus here is on a North American and Western European context, aside from Japanese examples, in which Jackson Pollock and John Cage are used as emblematic case studies, followed with the Gutai group, Yves Klein, Niki de Saint Phalle, Robert Rauschenberg, Merce Cunningham, George Brecht and Simone Forti. This critical reconstruction demonstrates the way in which artistic practices, in both of these two tendencies and through a critique of medium-specificity, altered the conceptions of "medium", "materiality" and the "subject-object" relationship in art. The most substantial part of the chapter is dedicated to Marx's concept of practice [*Praxis*], as it can be found in his early writings, and through which he broke with Kantian conceptions of subject and object and proposed a new idea of materiality and mediation. The chapter also problematises the transformation of these concepts in relation to Aristotle's distinction between practice and poesis, specifically in relation to what might be understood as a "metaphysics of practice".

The second chapter considers the two main artistic methods that came out of Cage's radicalisation of the musical score: the event-score and task-dance. It sets

out from the problem that these methods have been wrongly understood as a critique of a dualistic perspective in Western philosophy as represented by Descartes and Kant. In contrast, this chapter argues that these practices must be seen as epistemological problems in a Kantian sense, which direct attention to the fact that they are simultaneously radically heterogeneous and autonomous works of art, and which thus bring together Kant's aesthetics with his other critical philosophy. This is followed by an account of American pragmatist John Dewey's understanding of experience and art, which is taken as an emblematic example of the main philosophical influence of these different approaches. This part demonstrates the way in which Dewey's notion of experience encapsulates distinctive aspects of task-dance and event-score practices, yet fails to account for them as "art" in a generic and autonomous sense. It counterposes Dewey's critique of Kant with Kant's own critique of metaphysics. Connecting with the first chapter, this second one ends by arguing that Dewey's notion of experience and art relies on a conflated notion of Aristotle's practice/poiesis distinction.

Chapter 3 begins with a discussion of the established discourses around the critique of the art object that are related to minimalism and conceptual art—the "specific object" and the "dematerialised object"—and argues that such a critique was explicit already in task-dance and event-score practices of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Through artistic strategies of reduction and abstraction it is argued that they directed attention to art as the site of objectification tout court. By negating a medium-specific conception of the object, event-score and task-dance practices construct a new conception of the art object. These arguments are problematised by drawing on Edmund Husserl's understanding of the phenomenological reduction and his understanding of objectivity [*Gegenständlichkeit*], as well as what Kant might have termed "acts of abstraction", inseparable from the construction of the transcendental subject and object of knowledge [*Objekt*].

Chapter 4 further develops the role of abstraction, already touched on in Chapter 3, in relation to task-dance practices. It considers Rainer's No-Manifesto (1965) in juxtaposition to the role of negation in Adorno's concept of autonomous art and to the notion of abstract labour in Marx's mature work. The central argument made in this chapter is that task-dance practices, such as Rainer's, are abstract in their social form. The chapter confronts arguments in art theory and art criticism, which reduces task-dance's relation to labour to the level of mimetic representation. The fifth and final chapter comes back to key terms, problems and references made in this introduction, such as "art in general", "performativity" and "performance in general", as well as to the critical method proposed by Marx in the *Grundrisse*. Chapter 5 also returns to the critique of the medium-specific art object. It argues that task-dance and event-score practices, through the negation of the medium-specific art object, proposed a new concept of the object: "the performative structure-object". The claim is that this new conception of the art object functioned as the practical condition for a general concept of performance to establish itself. Taking Trisha Brown's *Accumulation Series* from the early 1970s as a case study, this chapter problematises this argument by looking at the concept of structure as it has been accounted for in structuralism (Claude Lévi-Strauss)

and post-structuralism (Gilles Deleuze and Étienne Balibar). It demonstrates how this concept of structure implied an understanding of the subject that is seen as both transcendental *and* performative and how such a notion of the subject was crucial for the generalisation of performance within art. This final chapter can be read for itself as much as it is a return to some of the book's key questions and categories such as "art in general" and "performance in general", and thus also functions as a "sort of conclusion to the book".

Notes

- 1 The 57th Venice Biennale, entitled *Vive Arte Via*, was curated by Christine Macel. www.labiennale.org/en/art/2017/awards-biennale-arte-2017, accessed 29 March 2019. I visited the pavilion during the press opening days.
- 2 In her survey-type book Wood rightly traces the genealogy of the category of performance in art from the 1950s and onwards to the central position that performance has in contemporary art today. She confirms this in the introduction: "charting the evolution of performance since the 1950s, it asks how this art form has come to play a key role in shaping our everyday understanding of what art is today" (Wood 2019, 8). As will become clear, this book, although focusing on the early 1960s, agrees with such a view of the history of performance and the centrality a general category of performance has in contemporary art. In addition, and in distinction to Wood, this book claims that the artistic forms of event-score and task-dance have been crucial to the construction of a general category of performance and thereby also have been central to the category of "contemporary art" and related terms.
- 3 Imhof's *Faust* has been commented on by many. See, for example, Claire Bishop's article "Black Box, White Cube, Gray Zone: Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention", *TDR: The Drama Review* 62, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 22–42, T238, and Sabeth Buchman's article "Feed Back: Performance in the Evaluation Society", *Texte Zur Kunst* (June 2018): 34–53.
- 4 Buchloh writes: "as we know from Beuys (and Wagner before him), and as we see even more clearly with Imhof, the inherently submissive and compensatory dimensions of art as cult . . . inevitably fail at any critical analysis of class, political economy of the actual conditions of audiences' everyday experience" (Buchloh 2017).
- 5 Much critique has been posed against Buchloh's position, one of them being Kerstin Stakemeier in her lecture "The Aesthetic Properties of Alienation" (Stakemeier 2018).
- 6 This is a category that Walter Benjamin uses frequently in his philosophy and that he introduces in his PhD thesis, "The Concept of Art in German Romanticism", partly reprinted in Benjamin (2002). The exact terminology he uses is: "philosophico-problem-historical [*philosophieproblemgeschichtlich*]" (Benjamin 2002 [1920], 185).
- 7 Carlson's quote comes from the introduction to Erika Fischer-Lichte's book *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (2008), which currently is the study that lies closest to this one in that hers, as much as this one, tries to construct a different genealogy of the concept of performance. She does so through a detailed and useful reconstruction of performance in relation to German Theatre Studies [*Theaterwissenschaft*]. The main problem with her book is that it still relies on a distinctively phenomenological account in its understanding of performance as a transformation, which is a philosophical strand that, like cultural theory in general, suffers from non-historicity and which doesn't take a critical concept of art into account.
- 8 The idea of a "generic notion of art"—an art separated from academic systems and norms of craftily skills—has been discussed by Thierry de Duve (1991, 1996), Rosalind Krauss (1981, 1999), Buchloh (2003, 2015) and John Roberts (2008), to name a few. The most philosophical and thorough account of such a concept, however, is to be

- found in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* [*Ästhetische Theorie*] (Adorno 1997 [1970]) under the category of "autonomous" art—a category that is central to this book. Whereas Chapter 1 focuses on the different theoretical accounts of a generic notion of art, particularly within a North American context, Chapter 4 gives a more detailed reading of Adorno's understanding of such a concept.
- 9 A similar account of performance is given in Gregory Bateson's "A Theory of Play and Fantasy" in Bateson (1981).
 - 10 See for example Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1996), Loxley (2007) and Phelan (1996) for three emblematic examples of how the term has gained wide recognition within the fields of Gender Studies, Literary Theory and Performance Studies.
 - 11 It is sometimes argued that the Austin and Derrida debate merely should be seen as the confrontation between an analytic and a continental tradition of philosophy, something that John R. Searle also has argued against (Searle 1977, 198).
 - 12 Butler, in an interview with Vikki Bell: "I think in *Gender Trouble* I actually took it from Derrida's essay on Kafka, 'Before the Law', which had Austin as its background but which I didn't bother to pursue" (Bell 1999, 164).
 - 13 This is developed in Chapter 3, "Subjection, Resistance, Resignification: Between Freud and Foucault", in Butler (1997).
 - 14 For a critique of Butler through de Beauvoir see Sandford (1999). For a development of Butler's notions of performativity in relation to quantum physics see Karen Barad's article "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter" (Barad 2003). For an extension of Butler's understanding of performance see Fred Moten's notion of "black performance" in Moten (2003) and Nadine Ehlers's work on the performativity of race (Ehlers 2006, 2012).
 - 15 For more recent approaches to a concept of performance situated within a context of a critique of capitalism and neoliberalism in particular, see André Lepecki's *Singularities: Dance in the Age of Performance* (Lepecki 2016) and Marina Vishmidt's *Speculation as a Mode of Production: Forms of Value Subjectivity in Art and Capital* (2018). For the relation between 1960s score- and task-practices with the evaluation of individual performance or behaviour in the benefit of capital accumulation, see the special issue of *Texte Zur Kunst*, "Performance Evaluation" (June 2018), which looks at the relation between performance in art and the importance of performance in post-industrial capitalism.
 - 16 In these well-cited pages can be found some of the central aspects of what will later be developed into "critical theory", as for example stated by Max Horkheimer in his essay "Critical and Traditional Theory" (Horkheimer 2002 [1972]).
 - 17 Whereas the terms "post-war art" and the "neo-avant-garde" mainly have been used by Buchloh, the term "the post-modern condition" was coined by Rosalind Krauss. See Buchloh (1986, 2003), Krauss (1999). See also Hal Foster's use of the term "neo-avant-garde" in Foster (1994). Buchloh, following Peter Bürger's periodisation—but not diagnosis—of the historical and the neo-avant-garde, broadly refers to the neo-avant-garde as post-Second World War art in Europe and North America. Crucial characteristics for neo-avant-garde practices are, according to Buchloh, their denationalisation (as a result of the hegemony of capitalist exchange relations) and the "reemergence of the key paradigms of the historical avant-garde of 1913: grid formation, and monochrome painting, the readymade, collage and assemblage". Buchloh excludes from the neo-avant-garde the New York School Painting of the 1940s and early 1950s and other artistic practices before 1955. He also argues that the real detachment from the historical avant-garde, and the establishment of a generic concept of art, does not take place until 1968 with the rise of conceptual art, which is why all of the essays in Buchloh's book are from the late 1960s (Buchloh 2003, xxiii). As will become clear, this book locates the establishment of a generic concept of art already in the late 1950s

and, perhaps more importantly, in performance practices of task-dance and the event-score, which Buchloh to a large extent excludes.

- 18 Branden W. Joseph locates what he calls the “social turn” mainly in the “aesthetics of John Cage” and its influence on artists like La Monte Young and Tony Conrad in the late 1950s and early 1960s at the Black Mountain College, the Darmstadt School, Robert Dunn’s choreography workshops and the New School for Social Research. He writes, for example, about Young’s work that “by so specifically marking a line out of Cage’s aesthetic” (that is, by providing one possible means by which his generation would be able to ask ‘Who Is John Cage?’), *Compositions 1960* #3, #4, and #6 formed an important, if consistently under acknowledged touchstone, for the transformation from a ‘natural’ to a ‘social’ and potentially collective point of view, a social turn that would come to characterise the general ethos of both minimalism and Fluxus, as well as the more overtly communist projects of George Maciunas, Henry Flynt, and others, eventually including Cardew” (Joseph 2008, 100–1). Joseph’s emphasis on the social aspect of the post-Cagean art practices he considers is important and shares similarities with the concept of practice as it can be found in the early Marx and that will be explored in Chapter 1 of this book, entitled “Practice”.
- 19 This will be developed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.
- 20 Meredith Morse’s book *Soft Is Fast: Simone Forti in the 1960s and After* focuses on Forti’s task-dance practice. Although it gives a good account of what influenced Forti’s work, it does not, more than tangentially, approach task-dance as an artistic form in a more conceptual way (Morse 2016).
- 21 This way of approaching performance and dance seen in Banes’s work is affirmed by Marvin Carlson who, in his critical introduction to performance, shows a lineage that goes from anthropological and ethnographical writings on performance as ritual and social dance, to linguistic and cultural ideas of performance in the development of performance studies as a discipline in its own right (Carlson 2004).
- 22 In contrast to this reading of Saussure, Roland Barthes, for example, argues for a more complex understanding of Saussure’s S/S-model: “we must here be on our guard for despite common parlance which simply says that the signifier *expresses* the signified, we are dealing, in any semiological system, not with two, but with three different terms” (Barthes 1972, 111).
- 23 Interestingly a majority of the dancers and artists who used task-dance and event-scores were heavily influenced by John Cage, whose ideas of politics go in the opposite direction of Dewey’s. Joseph connects the non-representational aspects of Cage’s scores—e.g., in that the performer is not supposed to represent the composer’s “aim” or will—with the American composer’s critique of representational politics and his leaning towards anarchism (Joseph 2009, 228).

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