Language, visuality, and the body. On the return of discourse in contemporary performance

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Abstract

This article deals with the return of discourse in experimental performance-based artistic practices. By putting this return in a historical perspective, we wish to address the questions it raises on the relation between language, image, and the body, resituation the avant-garde heritage in a contemporary context where intermediality and transdisciplinarity tend to become the norm rather than the exception. The discussion of the status and function of discourse in this context calls on the field of theatre and its ambivalent role in modern aesthetics, both as a specifically determined artistic discipline, and as a blending of heterogeneous elements, which defy the assigned limitations of creative practice. The confrontation of Antonin Artaud’s writings with Michael Fried’s conception of theatricality aims to bring to the fore the cultural transformations and historical paradoxes which inform the shift from theatre to performance as an experimental field situated “between” the arts and embracing a wide range of practices, from visual arts to music and dance. The case of lecture-performance enables us to call attention to the internal contradictions of the “educational” interpretation of such experimental practices and their autonomization inside the limits of a specific artistic genre. The main argument is that, despite the plurality of its origins and its claims to intermediality and transdisciplinarity, lecture-performance as a genre is attracted by or gravitates around the extended field of the visual arts. By focusing on the work of Jérôme Bel, Noé Soulier, Giuseppe Chico, Barbara Matijevic, and Carole Douillard, we stress some of the ways contemporary discursive strategies enable to displace visual spectacle toward a conception of the body as the limit of signification.

Keywords: lecture-performance; theatre; language; body; contemporary art; modernist aesthetics; deconstruction

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Among the new interdisciplinary forms that have most attracted the art world’s attention during the last years, lecture-performance occupies an important as much as an ambivalent position. A growing number of exhibitions, festivals, conferences, seminars, academic classes and publications have contributed to developing awareness of an artistic practice which brings together artists from different backgrounds, art critics, theoreticians and curators around their common interest in discourse as a performative act. Yet, as the critical literature on the subject has extensively pointed out, the novelty of the lecture-performance format is a quite relative one.

The first attempt of this kind is commonly traced back to Robert Morris’s 21.3 (1964), a performance during which the artist life-synchronised 21-minute video documentation of a lecture by the art historian Erwin Panofsky. (Although one could also think of John Cage’s Lecture on Nothing, presented for the first time in 1949 at the Artist’s Club in New York, as an even older example.) Subsequent developments in the 70s and the 80s by artists like Robert Smithson (Hotel Palenque, 1969–72), Dan Graham (Performer/Audience/Mirror, 1975), Joseph Beuys (Each Person an Artist—on the Way to the Freedom Figure of the Social Organism, 1978) or Andrea Fraser (Museum Highlights, 1989) have extended the implications of the experimentation with speech and language and opened it to issues related with audience reception, institutional context and other aspects of artistic specificity.

Therefore, the current development of lecture-performance is placed under the sign of a “return” or a “comeback.” This return marks a regain of interest for the discursive aspects of the visual and performing arts, combined with an exploration of their pedagogical implications and mediating potential.

Even if artists such as Giuseppe Chico/Barbara Matijevic (Tracks, 2009, in progress), Carole Douillard (This sign I make, 2011), Bojana Kunst/Ivana Müller (Finally Together On Time, 2011), Jean-Yves Jouannais (L’Encyclopédie des guerres, 2008), Guillaume Désanges (Signs and Wonders, 2009), Danae Theodoridou (But My Devotion is Unconditional, 2013), Terence Koh (Art History: 1642–2009, 2009), Jean-Philippe Antoine (Moule, muse, méduse 2, 2009), can be said to deal with a set of issues “that fall outside the previous focus on the specificity/critique of art,” namely “the rising value of conversation as medium to produce knowledge within a hyper communicative world and the role of contemporary (theoretically leaning) artists within education,” the reading of their work is commonly inscribed inside the web of the established historical (and henceforth institutionalised) affiliations.

This reading, which tends to be canonical, attributes the lecture-performance its own genealogy, history, range of action and key-figures, treating it like a specific and more or less autonomous genre. In this context, the growing preoccupation with pedagogy, mediation and communication marks an “educational turn” which, as Rike Frank observes, corresponds to a much broader tendency in the contemporary art world, and in which discourse about art becomes the field towards which activism, institutional critique, academic and artistic research and vernacular forms of knowledge converge.

This phenomenon is related with the increasing importance of theory in art school programmes since the 70s and the emergence of a generation of artists for who teaching and writing has become an important part of their professional activity, even a central component of their artwork itself. (The difference is that for many contemporary artists teaching is a complementary [and sometimes the principal] source of income rather than an artistic medium.) To this we must add a number of art critics and curators (Jean-Yves Jouannais and Guillaume Désanges, for example), philosophers and theoreticians (like Bojana Kunst and Jean-Philippe Antoine) who are interested in the shift from the teaching of art to “teaching-as-art.”

Nevertheless, “it is precisely such educational interpretations that appear to work against the potential of the lecture-performance format, in many cases involuntarily promoting a concept of genre and media specificity, which seeks to keep a tight rein on a method—the lecture-performance—whose primary goal is precisely to work against such containment and frustrate the status of ‘information’.”

Despite himself, Morris seems to have replaced Panofsky as the father-figure of a specific discipline which pretends not to be one, in as much as it deliberately pushes past “the boundaries of
disciplines (…) as well as the boundaries between art and life.”

The aim of this article is to address this “discursive return” in the contemporary artistic scene from a rather different angle of approach, not reducible to the “educational turn.” By putting it in a historical perspective, we wish to question the conditions that determine the recent regain of interest for the lecture-performance format and stress the problematic character of the latter defined as a fully fledged art form responding to specific characteristics. As a matter of fact, lecture-performance exists as a specific genre or discipline only since this return (the actual term was introduced in the artistic field during the 90s, through contemporary dance), which served to thematise a set of otherwise disparate and heterogeneous practices which, at their time, did not necessarily manifest awareness of belonging to any precise category.

If the critical reading of contemporary work must undoubtedly take into reflexive account this acculturation as a historical process, as well as its impact on creative practice, it cannot be insensible to the internal contradictions of an artistic category which is renowned for its resistance to categorization and its capacity to challenge the separation between the aesthetic experience and the production of knowledge, blurring the limits between art and non-art (whether it be entertainment, teaching or scientific research).

Thus, the historical perspective adopted here does not seek to define lecture-performance as “a sub-genre of performance art” nor as a “unique discipline” “at the intersection of artistic and academic discourse,” but rather to question the assumptions underlying such categorizations of an otherwise “in-between” and experimental field.

Instead of pursuing a genealogy of lecture-performance, we are proposing an archaeology of the current “discursive return,” in the sense that we are not searching to establish affiliations and continuities inside a given corpus of artistic practices but rather to understand where these practices come from, i.e. what they were before they were gathered together in a more or less homogeneous contemporary art sub-genre—and therefore, what they can be no more and how this determines what they actually are.

From this point of view, the emergence of (what came to be called) lecture-performance is to be situated at the convergence between discourse and theatre in the visual arts of the 60s.

**Theatre** is the term used by Michael Fried in order to theorise what he felt being properly anti-modernist about minimal sculpture. In his much-debated—1967 article, “Art and Object-hood,” he attacked minimalism, or literalist art, as he calls it, for establishing a particular, “perverted” relation between the beholder and the art work. This relation takes place in time and is dependent upon the environment in such a way that the focus is displaced from the autonomous work towards the “situation” it creates, transforming the “specific object” into a kind of stage set including the surroundings and the viewer himself as integral components of the work. Thus, the critic identifies theatre with the negation of art—that is, art according to its formalist (Greenbergian) definition as a set of clearly separated disciplines each one devoted to the determination of its proper area of competence and of all that is unique in the nature of its medium.

Fried’s argument has been widely taken on not only by the supporters of formalism but also by its opponents. For many of the latter, if theatricality was implicit in the way minimal sculpture was experienced, then it would be made thoroughly explicit for much of the art that followed (performance, happening, body-art). Moreover, updating his thesis in 1982, Fried implied that, far from being vanquished, the theatrical “has assumed a host of new guises and has acquired a new name: post-modernism.”

Reading retrospectively Fried’s critique of minimalism and putting it in the perspective of subsequent developments in post-modern art theory, Craig Owens proposed to substitute theatre by discourse. The degenerate condition of art that Fried diagnosed in “the illusion that the barriers between the arts are in the process of crumbling” and that “the arts themselves are at last sliding towards some kind of final, implosive, hugely desirable synthesis” would be in fact a manifestation of the eruption of language into the aesthetic field—an eruption which Owens relates to the writings of Robert Smithson, Robert Morris, Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt, Yvonne Rainer and other artists. Thus, like theatricality, the emergence of discourse stands out, according to Owens,
as post-modernism’s distinctive feature, marking a turning point in the history of sensibility.

If the transformation of the artistic object into a linguistic proposition contributed to emancipate art from the sensuous experience, it also enabled to reconsider the body as an instrument of experimentation and a basic material of the creative act. From this point of view, the “theatrical contamination” of the visual arts accounts both for the discursive and the performative experimentations of the 60s and 70s. Moreover, it designates a new, experimental and transdisciplinary creative potential which resists categorization and puts into question the established divisions between visual arts, performing arts and theoretical discourse.

Since, art performance has developed its own history, vocabulary and characteristics, distinguishing itself from more traditional forms such as dance, poetry, music, opera and theatre, whereas at the same time incorporating various elements stemming from them. In that sense, theatre, like discourse, does not refer here to a specific tradition, or to an autonomous aesthetic form but rather to a synthetic impulse or a generic principle which emerged from “in-between” the arts, and which, although conceived by Fried as strictly external to visual arts, represents in fact the encounter of their internal developments with a range of influences of which the specifically theatrical one is only a part. Nevertheless, if the convergence between discourse and theatre partially explains the emergence of lecture-performance at the intersection between the visual and the performing arts, it does not go unquestioned. For it is precisely the traditional link that subordinates it to discourse that modern theatre attempted to disrupt in the quest of its own identity and expressive autonomy. There is no better illustration of this than Antonin Artaud’s writings, in which a virulent critique is stressed against the subordination of theatre to speech and the written text.

Seeking to establish what is unique and absolutely fundamental to the theatrical situation, Artaud defines it in opposition to discourse, as “the domain which does not belong strictly to words.” Artaud’s idea of theatre refers to what is inexpressible by words and lies beyond them, in a poetic realm situated in the immanent field of sensations rather than in the intellectual sphere of concepts. Nevertheless, the fact that “the theatre, an independent and autonomous art, must, in order to revive or simply to live, realise what differentiates it from text, pure speech, literature, and all other fixed and written means” does not necessarily imply the elimination of language from the stage altogether. To challenge the authority of discourse (speech and writing) in theatre, is to favour the emergence of alternative, nonverbal languages which were excluded by the reduction of the drama into speech. Far from dismissing language, Artaud’s ambition was to generalise it by liberating the expressive potential of a plurality of equipollent voices: spoken, musical, gestural, scenographic. In return, thus disseminated in various media, language tends to transform into an entirely material event experienced in its sensuous and bodily dimensions.

But let there be the least return to the active, plastic, respiratory sources of language, let words be joined again to the physical motions that gave them birth, and let the discursive, logical aspect of speech disappear beneath its affective, physical side, i.e. let words be heard in their sonority rather than be exclusively taken for what they mean grammatically, let them be perceived as movements, and let these movements themselves turn into other simple, direct movements as occurs in all the circumstances of life but not sufficiently with actors on the stage, and behold! the language of literature is reconstituted, revivified, and furthermore—as in the canvasses of certain painters of the past—objects themselves begin to speak.

The focus on the physical aspects of language brings to the fore the analogies between the different senses following a movement that assimilates corporeity and plasticity. Significantly enough, the privilege attributed to the sensuous side of language in opposition to its discursive one is supported by a visual paradigm, that of painting. The argument is based on a metaphor, to be sure, that is an analogy between theatre and painting, an analogy which nevertheless sends the metaphorical act back to the sensible reality of the object and its living experience rather than to the abstraction of language.

Artaud’s aim was not simply to invert the traditional subordination of the body to the mind but rather to undo their separation. If theatre is to be identified with the sensuous, physical side of language as opposed to its intellectual one,
it is because this opposition is no longer relevant once verbal discourse has lost its authority and "objects themselves begin to speak." That a visual metaphor should take account for this reunification underlines the metaphorical value invested in visuality in the shift from representation to presentation which characterises modern theatre (and which Owens diagnosed in authors as different as Artaud and Brecht). As a metaphor of the reintegration of the senses, visual experience is no longer (or not yet) opposed to corporeity and physical presence but it works to emancipate theatre from the written text (hence a performative rather than representational conception of image and discourse).

Owens’s interpretation of Fried’s polemical argument on the one hand and Artaud’s writings on the other, enable us to bring to the fore the fact that the lecture-performance format is inscribed inside a different set of traditions from the one that itself created, carrying an internal tension or contradiction between discourse as a performative act and performative act as something that escapes discourse, a tension which tends to be neutralised by the current focus on its “educational turn.”

On the one hand, the discursive return in contemporary performance must be related with the post-structuralist (and more particularly deconstructionist) mutation of the status of discourse as something that does not represent any more the authority of the intellect over the senses, neither does it pretend to be the guardian of meaning (as it could be for Artaud). On the contrary, it works to displace established aesthetic categories through the activity of writing (in the Derridean sense of the term) which, disseminated, contaminates the entire spectrum of artistic production creating “a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.” On the other hand, the synthetic impulse or generic principle embodied by art performance as a transdisciplinary, “in-between” experimental field was already inscribed in the theatre of cruelty.

Hence an ambivalent relation between the discursive, the performative and the visual: for Artaud, the problem was the reducing of presence to speech; today, it is its reducing to image. In the interval which separates the total work of art from contemporary transdisciplinary practices, the image has lost its capacity to ensure the unity of the experience. Discourse returns in this context as an experimental and deconstructive agent, which accounts for the disruption of the metaphorical link relating visuality and bodily experience, but it does so on the background or stage set of the convergence of the performing arts towards a visual paradigm.

As Rike Frank observes, “taking Morris’s lecture as a historical model, it seems only logical that the lecture-performance has been considered—inasmuch as a history of the form has been written—in relation to a tradition of conceptual lectures, in particular artist’s lectures, on the one hand, and to the history of performance, on the other.” In other words, the constitution of the genre is not as much the result of the effective abolition of the limits between the arts but is rather dependent upon a specific mutation related to a particular field, that of the visual arts, a mutation which opened it to various experiments coming from other artistic fields, giving birth to what we call today “contemporary art.”

Thus, despite the plurality of its origins and its claims to intermediality and transdisciplinarity, lecture-performance as a genre, in as much as it is neither dance, or poetry, or music, or theatre, or academic lecture, seems to be attracted by or gravitate around the extended field of the visual arts. This does not mean that all contemporary art can be reduced to the history of painting, photography, and sculpture, but rather that a certain “regime of visuality” enables to gather together and thematise a number of heterogeneous practices which resist inscription inside the traditional fields of the performing arts.

Patricia Milder seems to be sensible to this visual dimension, without however further questioning it. Commenting on “Intersections with Art and Performance,” a panel discussion held at the Martin E. Segal Theatre Centre, City University New York on April 5th, 2010, she refers to it in order to differentiate two contributions on the basis of the speaker’s connection with the audience. (“When [Maggie] Hoffman and [Eric] Dyer performed their lecture, the audience watched; when [Sharon] Hayes spoke, the audience was fully engaged.”) And at the very beginning of her article, she asks, among other questions, why are so many visual artists attracted to this particular form of live performance, without thereafter proposing an answer.
If we bring together Frank’s observation on the limitations that the “educational interpretation” imposes on lecture-performance and Milder’s suggestions on its visual attachments, we can envisage that there is a link between the two. But recognising that this link goes back to Robert Morris should not conceal the fact that, in his case, lecture-performance was directed against aesthetic and theoretical autonomy (neither [modernist] art nor [academic] lecture), whereas today, in many cases, it relies upon their mutual support (both [contemporary, theoretically informed] art and [aestheticised] lecture).

As Judith Souriau suggests, “perhaps the field of contemporary art is more favourable than the stage (the dance stage, for example) to experimentation and the deconstruction of expressive forms.” Even if this suggestion does not go without objections, it underlines the importance of the venue in the lisibility of lecture-performances. Moreover, it reveals the tendency to circumscribe lecture-performance inside a particular institutional context (museum auditoriums, art centres, galleries, exhibition spaces devoted to contemporary art), which in some cases enables “a more immediate tone” than the one of the performing arts.

Jerôme Bel and Noé Soulier, for instance, they both come from the dance scene but their lecture-performances correspond to different sets of expectations. Bel’s Véronique Doisneau (2004), largely commented by Milder, combines danced parts with a first-person autobiographical talk which subtly exposes the social structure of the classical ballet. Even if this work is among the most interesting examples of contemporary lecture-performance, evacuating as it does all the theatrical components of the dance spectacle, it is still organically linked with the stage (and a particular one, that of the Opéra Garnier in Paris), inside which it acquires its lisibility and aesthetic strength. The highly personalised character of the text, written for a Corps de Ballet dancer at the end of her carrier, the way she addresses the architecture and the hierarchical rankings of the Opera house, the anchorage of this body in this place and in this time, all that compose a work in situ which cannot be reasonably detached from the particular context inside which it takes place without losing its sense.

Soulier’s Ideography (2011), on the other hand, is deliberately conceived for contemporary art spaces, in the same way that, according to Michel Foucault, Édouard Manet’s painting is a “museum painting,” i.e. “a manifestation of the existence of museums and the particular reality and interdependence that paintings acquire in museums.” In this case, the disparate phenomenological considerations on the body and sensible experience and their physical demonstration by the artist acquire an aesthetic coherence through the displacement of the body from the stage towards the exhibition space, where the effect of “immediacy” relies on the transformation of the standard material of the oral presentation (desk, chair, cup, water, notebook) into a kind of post-minimalist setting inside which a body “that normally does not talk” is invested with language.

Besides their differences, Bel and Soulier seem to share a common concern with visuality: in the first case the exposure of a backdrop dancer uses language in order to address visuality as a social structure, whereas the second case focuses on the self-awareness of visual perception as a psychosomatic experience related to the other senses and to different levels of consciousness, without however marking awareness of the specific visual regime inside which it is inscribed.

The relation suggested between the return of discourse and the “regime of visuality” of contemporary art does not seek to reduce the former to a visual system of references but rather to stress the fact that the “in-between” where contemporary lecture-performance is situated is not the no-man’s land surrounding discrete artistic disciplines and fields of knowledge that was the cultural background of the 60s and 70s and which since has been largely populated, but the very limit of signification, the thin line which separates (and links) the production and exchange of meaning from what makes meaning possible (and therefore cannot be a part of it). In other words, “in-between” is not between an inside and an outside (artistic genres, discursive categories, academic disciplines or divisions of cultural labour) but between the possibility and the impossibility of such a distinction—hence the difficulty to designate the limit of signification as external or internal.

The body is that external/internal limit. As Jean-Luc Nancy notes, bodies “take place neither...
in discourse nor in matter. They inhabit neither ‘the mind’ nor ‘the body’ [in the conventional sense]. They take place at the limit, as the limit.”

At the same time: “Either as an audible voice or a visible mark, saying is corporeal, but what is said is incorporeal. (...) Language is not in the world or inside the world, as though the world were its body: it is the outside of the world in the world.”

In Carole Douillard’s work speech is used in a direct, descriptive way (recalling Dan Graham’s performances of the 70s) revealing the materiality of a given situation while at the same time producing it. In *This sign I make* (2011), the artist talks non-stop, describing what she sees, feels and glimpses of her surroundings, asking questions about the way she is dressed, the presence of the audience, the quality of their life etc. In some cases the performance is reduced to a reciting, before the audience, of a text describing past work, combining commentaries on its physical and emotional impact on the artist and the way it is reconstructed through memory (*Restituer*, 2008, in progress). Language is approached here as the structure of experience and experience as the condition of language. A loop is thus created between discourse as a performative act and the performative act itself as a material and support for discourse, between the performance of speaking and speaking about performance, a loop which puts into question the definition of communication as the expression and reception of meaning and the traditional opposition between (discursive) interiority and (corporeal) exteriority upon which it relies. For this quasi-tautological recycling finally produces a kind of residue, a distance between saying and performing which materialises the non-coincidence of body and meaning.

Giuseppe Chico and Barbara Matijevic operate on a different level. Their performances combine narrative, visual and sonic elements in an original synthesis which operates like a “music score for three voices” (*Tracks*, 2009, in progress). By displacing the visuality of performance towards a reconstructed “sound landscape,” which becomes the guide line of the narrative, they focus on the infinite links, nuances, conflicts and aporias that emerge between consciousness, intuition and sensation, between the intimate mechanisms of recognition and memory and the collective construction of history. The abstract materiality of sound reveals the way discursivity is constructed as a field of imaginative combinations and intuitive associations of disparate, culturally informed sensory fragments which gravitate around the body as the limit of signification.

It goes without saying that this brief overview of such a heterogeneous and plural artistic field does not claim to be exhaustive. Rather, its purpose was to bring to the fore the contradictions that arise in the current situation, where lecture-performance is simultaneously theorised as a cutting-edge, experimental and transdisciplinary field blurring the limits between art and non-art and as an autonomous (semi-academic, semi-artistic) discipline.

During the last 40 years, the constant displacement of the conventional contexts of the artistic practice and the critique of aesthetic autonomy have been accompanied by a cultural fragmentation in which the more the limits between the arts and every-day life become blurry, the more artistic production tends to be specified and subdivided into partial forms of intermediality and transdisciplinarity. “In-between” art has not replaced the traditional fields of artistic experience, which, even transformed, are still in effect, but rather expanded the cultural landscape by adding new categories next to the old ones. In this respect, the particularity of contemporary lecture-performance with regard to its historical predecessors is often theorised as an enlargement of the latter’s critique of artistic specificity in order to include broader issues of information, instruction, communication, knowledge production and entertainment. And yet, in the 60s and 70s the critique of artistic specificity was aiming to relate art with the “outer world,” and language with society; in contrast, what is at stake in the current “educational turn” is rather “the outlining of the specificity of art as a knowledge structure.” This also refers to the opposition between ultra-specialised work involving specific knowledge and addressed to an aware public, and the claims to a more open, “deskilled,” and participatory approach of artistic teaching and learning (Désanges).

Hence an ultimate hypothesis: what escapes the focus on the “educational turn” is the contradictory character of the status of discourse, i.e. the fact that, in its encounter with contemporary performance, *discourse is turned against itself,*
exposing the fundamentally problematic character of knowledge. Despite the diversity of its occurrences, this feature can be found in modern theatre (Samuel Beckett, Heiner Müller) and in early lecture-performances (Robert Morris, John Cage) but it also informs in various ways the latter’s contemporary revival (Jean-Philippe Antoine, The V-Girls, Terence Koh), namely those practices characterised by the polarity of fictional and performative elements (Denis Savary, Joris Lacoste, Jérôme Game).

Notes
1. “Lecture Performance,” Class Blog of The Public School organized by Fiona Guess. http://thepublicschool.org/node/29191 (accessed November 1, 2013). See also the bibliography of the class, namely: Monika Szewczyk, “Art of Conversation, Part I,” e-flux Journal 3 (2009), http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-of-conversation-part-i/ (accessed November 1, 2013); Jan Verwoert, “The Passion of the Pedagogical,” in Nicosia This Week, ed. Louise Dossing (et al.), (Rotterdam: Veerman Publishers, 2008), 65–69; Lecture Performance, exhibition catalogue, ed. Kölnischer Kunstverein/ Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrad (Berlin: Revolver Publishing, 2009); Gemma Corradi Fiumara, “A Philosophy of Listening within a Tradition of Questioning,” In The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening (London: Routledge, 1990), 28–51.
2. Rike Frank, “When Form Starts Talking: On Lecture-Performances,” Afterall 33 (2013), http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.33/when-form-starts-talking-on-lecture-performances.1 (accessed November 1, 2013). 3. Frank, “When Form Starts Talking.”
4. Patricia Milder, “Teaching as Art: The Contemporary Lecture-Performance,” PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art 97 33, no. 1 (2011): 13–27; ref. on 13.
5. A closer look to the contemporary art world, where intermediality and transdisciplinarity have become the norm rather than an exception, shows that the crossing over of genres, disciplines and media does not always question the process of categorization as such, nor the labour and economical divisions that underlie it.
6. “Lecture Performance,” Class Blog of The Public School.
7. “Lecture Performance – Between Art and Academia,” (Seminar organised by Anna Holm at the Overgaden Institute of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen, June 7–9, 2013), http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/between-art-and-academia-lecture-performance/ (accessed November 1, 2013).
8. Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” In Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), 116–47.
9. “Each art, it turned out, had to perform this demonstration on its own account. What had to be exhibited and made explicit was that which was unique and irreducible not only in art in general, but also in each particular art. Each art had to determine, through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself. By doing this each art would, to be sure, narrow its area of competence, but at the same time it would make its possession of that area all the more secure. It quickly emerged that the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique to the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thereby each art would be rendered ‘pure’, and in its ‘purity’ find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence. ‘Purity’ meant self-definition, and the enterprise of self-criticism in the arts became one of self-definition with a vengeance.” Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” In Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology, ed. Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 5–10; ref. on 5–6.
10. Douglas Crimp, “Pictures,” In Art after Modernism: Rethinking representation, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and David R. Godine, 1984), 175–87; ref. on 176.
11. Michael Fried, “How Modernism Works: A Response to T. J. Clark,” Critical Inquiry 9, no. 1 (1982): 217–34; ref. on 217.
12. Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 141.
13. Craig Owens, “Earthwords,” In Beyond Recognition. Representation, Power, and Culture, ed. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, Jane Weinstock, (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1992), 40–51; ref. on 45.
14. Cf. Philip Auslander, From Acting to Performance: Essays in Modernism and Postmodernism (London: Routledge, 1997); and Henry M. Sayre, The Object of Performance. The American Avant-Garde Since 1970 (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989).
15. Cf. Günter Berghaus, Theatre, Performance, and the Historical Avant-Garde (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
16. Antonin Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, trans., Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 38.
17. “Artaud’s ambition was thus more than the revivification of theatre; it was nothing less than the complete reanimation of poetic language. Or rather, one necessarily implicated the other.” Craig Owens, “Einstein on the Beach: The Primacy of Metaphor,” In Beyond Recognition, 3–15; ref. on 5.
18. Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, 106.
19. Owens, “Einstein on the Beach: The Primacy of Metaphor,” 4.
20. Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, 119, our italics. This “language of the objects” is to be related with Pasolini’s film theory and his particular conception of the semantics of the moving image and its relation with reality. In both cases, theatre and cinema are conceived as systems of signs which are independent from language in general (discourse). Cf. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, trans., Louise K. Barnett and Ben Lawton (Washington: New Academia, 2005); and Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II*, trans., Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), 24–8.
21. As Susan Sontag observes: “The function that Artaud gives the theatre is to heal the split between language and flesh . . . Artaud’s writings on the theatre may be read as a psychological manual on the reunification of mind and body.” Antonin Artaud, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976), xxxv–xxxvi.
22. Owens, “The Primacy of Metaphor,” 4.
23. For Fried, instead, “there is a war going on between the theatrical and the pictorial,” i.e. between art and non-art. Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 135. Fried’s concept of theatre is built upon the latter’s conventional character, a character which it shares with music. Cinema, on the other hand, seems to escape this conventionality. Cf. Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 146, n. 20 and 140, n. 16. For a semantic perspective on the conventionality of theatre and its relation with the moving image, cf. Christian Metz, “On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema,” In *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans., Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 3–15.
24. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans., Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978).
25. Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” In *Image–Music–Text*, trans., Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 142–48; ref. on 146.
26. By liberating the expressive potential of alternative languages, the specificity of theatre paradoxically appears to be its lack of specificity (this is precisely the danger pointed by Fried) and its autonomy a function its “ironical” capacity to synthesize a set of fundamentally heterogeneous materials and forms. In as much as the theatre of cruelty is defined as a combination of a plurality of languages, the quest for autonomy is concomitant with a centrifugal movement which transgresses the limits of the senses and seeks the poetic potential of each language into an other language. Thus “disseminated” rather than concentrated in one single medium, language generalizes the possibility of equivalence, overthrowing the hierarchical rankings of the senses and the artistic media and providing the basis for correspondences and analogies. On Artaud and language, see notably Jacques Derrida, “La Parole Soufflée,” In *Writing and Difference*, 169–95.
27. Frank, “When Form Starts Talking.”
28. The subversive effects which could be obtained in the 60s and 70s are of little relevance today, the experimental or the subversive having been since largely neutralised to a recognisable gesture. Cf. Paul Craenen, “Editorial,” *RTRSRCH* 2, no. 1 (2010): 2–6; ref. on 3.
29. It is evident here that the discussion of lecture-performance inevitably raises more general questions related to the epistemological, historical and aesthetic status of contemporary artistic production; it is also evident that these questions cannot be discussed in the short space of this article. We will limit ourselves to this observation: in today’s cultural landscape, performance is not just an artistic genre, but the very paradigm of contemporary art.
30. To take the example of music, as Paul Craenen notes, sonorous “in-between-art,” “too extramusical to be taken seriously in the musical domain” and “too recognisable for a contemporary musical practice to be incorporated into existing dance or theatre programming” has evolved from music to “sound art” and performance, attempting to “define and distinguish itself in the process as a new, fully fledged art form responding to specific characteristics.” Craenen, “Editorial,” 3.
31. Milder, “Teaching as Art,” 26, our italics.
32. Ibid., 13.
33. Judith Souriau, “Ce que parler veut dire,” *Movement* 58 (2011): 146.
34. Souriau, “Ce que parler,” 146. The author refers to the exhibition space of the Ricard Foundation in Paris, which hosts since 2008 a series of lecture-performances and where the absence of a stage puts the audience in the same level with the performers.
35. It is worth to note that Milder has in mind the film made out of this piece, recording its last performance at the Opéra Garnier. The uniqueness of experience commonly attributed to the performing arts acquires here a singular nuance, in as much as Doisneau’s announcement to the audience of her retirement after this evening fully operates only in this particular occurrence, investing the film with a dimension that other performances did not have. This is not the place to discuss the issue of the filmed performances, or the performances exclusively made for the camera, which exceeds the object of this article. But in this case, as in other, the act of filming detaches the living experience of the performance from its visual dimension and attributes to the actual event the necessary autonomy in order to circulate in a broader, contemporary art context.
36. Michel Foucault, “Fantasia of the Library,” In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans., Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 92.
37. In contemporary theatre, on the other hand, the treatment of the properly theatrical elements (stage, setting, lighting, costumes, makeup, movement etc.) is informed by visual arts, cinema, mass media and popular culture, in a way which deconstructs those elements to the point that the result is often associated with contemporary art performance (Robert Wilson).

38. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans., Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 18.

39. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans., Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 84. We wish to express our gratitude to Dimitris Exarchos, to whom we borrow Nancy’s quotations, for bringing into our attention this point. Cf. Dimitris Exarchos, “Listening Outside of Time,” lecture given on September, 9th, 2012 at *Material Meanings*, 3rd Biannual Conference of the European network for Avantgarde and Modernism studies (EAM), University of Kent, Canterbury, Panel session: *Eyes Listening, Ears Seeing: Discourse and Sensory Experience between Music and the Visual Arts*.

40. Cf. RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art since the 60s* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004).

41. Tom Holert and Simon Sheikh, quoted by Rike Frank in Frank 2013. Cf. Tom Holert, “Art in the Knowledge-based Polis,” *e-flux Journal* 3 (2009), http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-in-the-knowledge-based-polis, (accessed November 1, 2013); and Simon Sheikh, “Talk Value: Cultural Industry and Knowledge Economy,” In *On Knowledge Production: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art*, ed. Binna Choi, Maria Hlavajova, and Jill Winder (Utrecht: Basis Voor Actuele Kunst, 2008), 182-97.