sthetics" and "intersubjectivity" of this experience provide further evidence of similarity to Fischer-Lichte on the analysis of this experience.

Given the pragmatic orientation of much American theory, one might be pted to read Dolan's use of the phrase utopian performance to indicate a sort eleological performance directed toward achieving some utopia, but this is an rpretation that Dolan specifically and clearly rejects. Her investigation into subject, she insists, "resists the effort to find representations of a better world." alling that the word *utopia* literally means "no place," she refuses pinning this erience "down to prescription." "Any fixed, static image or structure would nuch too finite and exclusionary for the soaring sense of hope, possibility, and re that imbues utopian performatives," she argues.[15]

Also like Fischer-Lichte, Dolan stresses the importance of the co-creating of performative by the embodied minds of actors and spectators. In the "present, moment" of performance, she argues, "the synergy of the actor's embodiment the spectator's willing imagination creates possibility, the potential for new erstanding and insight charged by the necessity of intersubjectivity."[16] Finally, an also speaks of the "transformative powers" of performance, "the new worlds eates with each shoring, the potential ... of feeling myself part of a public ly constituted, held together in the moment of performance by a filament of ı."[17]

The striking convergence between the enchanted performances of Fischer-ıte and the utopian performances of Dolan offers the potential of developing ew dimension in the ongoing discourse of modern American performance ory. That discourse has on the whole so far been oriented distinctly, and it ıt be admitted, very productively toward pragmatic concerns and the use of ormance to achieve certain specific social, cultural, personal, and rhetorical ls. In the formation of modern American performance theory, aesthetics in eral and theatre in particular have often been sidelined or outright rejected ıreas of particular interest. In the present book, even more specifically and nsively than Dolan, Fischer-Lichte restores these areas of interest to the center performance studies. Perhaps this book will be seen as marking an "aesthetic ı" in such studies, which would be a development with important and far-hing consequences. In any case, however, it clearly marks and establishes an ortant alternative approach to this popular field of study.

Chapter 1

The transformative power of performance

On October 24, 1975, a curious and memorable event took place at the Krinzinger Gallery in Innsbruck. The Yugoslavian artist Marina Abramović presented her performance *Lips of Thomas*. The artist began her performance by shedding all her clothes. She then went to the back wall of the gallery, pinned up a photograph of a man with long hair who resembled the artist, and framed it by drawing a five-pointed star around it. She turned to a table with a white table-cloth close to the wall, on which there was a bottle of red wine, a jar containing two pounds of honey, a crystal glass, a silver spoon, and a whip. She settled into the chair and reached for the jar of honey and the silver spoon. Slowly, she ate the honey until she had emptied the jar. She poured red wine into the crystal glass and drank it in long draughts. She continued until bottle and glass were empty. Then she broke the glass with her right hand, which began to bleed. Abramović got up and walked over to the wall where the photograph was fastened. Standing at the wall and facing the audience, she cut a five-pointed star into the skin of her abdomen with a razor blade. Blood welled out of the cuts. Then she took the whip, kneeled down beneath the photograph with her back to the audience, and began to flagellate her back severely, raising bloody welts. Afterwards, she lay down on a cross made of blocks of ice, her arms spread out to her sides. An electric radiator hung from the ceiling, facing her stomach. Its heat triggered further bleeding from the star-shaped cuts. Abramović lay motionless on the ice – she obviously intended to endure her self-torture until the radiator had melted all the ice. After she had held out for 30 minutes without any sign of abandoning the torture, some members of the audience could no longer bear her ordeal. They hastened to the blocks of ice, took hold of the artist, and covered her with coats. Then they removed her from the cross and carried her away. Thus, they put an end to the performance.

The performance had taken two hours. In the course of these two hours, the artist and the spectators created an event that was neither envisioned nor legitimized by the traditions and standards of the visual or performing arts. The artist was not producing an artifact through her actions; she was not creating a fixed and transferable work of art that could exist independently of her. Yet her actions were also not representational. She was not performing as an actress, playing the part of a dramatic character that eats too much honey, drinks wine excessively, and inflicts a variety of injuries on her own body. Rather, Abramović was actually harming

> my soul loveth' (Song of Solomon 1:7). Others finally tormented their flesh by severely maltreating it on a daily basis – some with birch rods, others with whips, containing three or four knotted straps, a third group with iron chains, a fourth one with flagella furnished with thorns. During Advent and the entire fasting period, the sisters went into the chapter house and other appropriate places after the morning prayers, where they mauled their bodies severely with the most diverse instruments of flagellation until blood flowed, so that the lashings of the whip sounded through the whole cloister and, sweeter than any other melody, ascended to the Lord's ears.[3]
>
> (Ancelet-Hustache 1930 cited in Largier 2001: 29)

The ritual of self-flagellation lifted the nuns above their monastic routine and offered the promise of transformation. The violence inflicted on their bodies together with the physical transformation evident after the torture brought about a process of spiritual transformation: "Those who approached God in these diverse ways were granted enlightenment of the heart, their thoughts were purified, their passion ignited, their conscience became clear, and their spirits ascended towards God" (Ancelet-Hustache 1930 cited in Largier 2001: 30). Voluntary self-flagellation – physical abuse that aims at spiritual transformation – is recognized by the Catholic Church as a penance practice even today.[4]

A second cultural domain that allows for bodily injury or risk thereof can be found in fairground spectacles. On the one hand, tricks that would "normally" lead to serious injuries miraculously seem not to harm the artists themselves, such as fire eating, sword swallowing, or piercing the tongue with a needle, to name only a few. On the other hand, the artists perform extremely hazardous actions, exposing themselves to real dangers. The mastery of the performers lies precisely in their ability to defy this danger. The performer's concentration need but slacken for a fraction of a second for the ever-lurking danger to erupt that is posed by a tightrope act without a net or by the taming of predatory animals and snakes: the tightrope dancer falls, the tamer is attacked by the tiger, and the snake-charmer is bitten by the snake. This is the moment the audience fears most and which it yet feverishly awaits. Its deepest fears, fascination, and sensationalist curiosity are unleashed in this moment. These spectacles are not so much about the transformation of the actors or, even less so, the spectators. They rather seek to demonstrate the unusual physical and mental powers of the performers, and are intended to elicit awe and wonder from the audience. We are talking here about precisely the emotions that also took hold of Abramović's audience.

The second distinctive feature of Abramović's performance is the transformation of the spectators into actors, for which there also exist examples from different cultural domains. Of particular interest for our context are the penal rituals of the early modern period. As Richard van Duelmen has shown, spectators would crowd around the corpse after an execution in order to touch the deceased's body, blood, limbs, or even the lethal cord. They hoped that this physical contact would cure them of illness and generally provide a guarantee for their own bodily well-being and integrity (1988: 161). The transformation of spectators into actors occurred in the hope of achieving a lasting alteration of their own bodies. As such, this transformation had a completely different thrust from that experienced by the audience in Abramović's performance. Her spectators were not concerned with their own physical well-being so much as that of the artist. The actions that transformed the spectators into actors, i.e. the physical contact with the artist, were aimed at protecting her bodily integrity. They were the result of an ethical decision directed at another, the artist.

In this respect, the audience's actions also fundamentally differed from those of the Futurist *serate*, Dada-soirées, and Surrealist "guided tours" at the beginning of the twentieth century, in which spectators turned into actors. In this case, the spectators were provoked into action by deliberate shocks. The transformation of spectator into actor happened almost automatically as specified by the *mise en scène*; it was hardly the result of a conscious decision on the part of the concerned spectator. Accounts of such events as well as manifestos of the artists speak to these conditions. In his manifesto entitled *The Variety Theatre* (1913), for instance, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti makes the following suggestions for provoking the audience:

> Introduce surprise and the need to move among the spectators of the orchestra, boxes, and balcony. Some random suggestions: spread a powerful glue on some of the seats, so that the male or female spectator will stay glued down and make everyone laugh … – Sell the same ticket to ten people: traffic jam, bickering, and wrangling. – Offer free tickets to gentlemen or ladies who are notoriously unbalanced, irritable, or eccentric and likely to provoke uproars with obscene gestures, pinching women, or other freakishness. Sprinkle the seats with dust to make people itch and sneeze, etc.
>
> (1973: 130)

In this artistic spectacle, members of the audience became actors merely through the impact of shock and the power of provocation. Throughout, they were watched with anger, excitement, amusement, or malice by the other spectators and organizers. In Abramović's performance, too, the transformation of some spectators into actors would have aroused contradictory emotions in the remaining spectators: shame for having lacked the courage to interfere oneself; outrage or even anger due to the premature conclusion of the performance, preventing one from seeing how far the performer would have still been willing to go in her self-torture; or relief and contentment about someone finally deciding to end the ordeal of the performer and most probably also that of the audience.[5]

Whatever the final assessment of the similarities and differences, Abramović's performance notably exhibited elements of ritual as well as spectacle, that is to say, it hinted both at a religious and a fairground context. In fact, it constantly oscillated between the two. It was ritualistic[6] by virtue of engendering a transformation of the performer and certain spectators but lacked the publicly recognized change in status or identity, as is often the case with rituals. It resembled a spectacle by virtue

of eliciting awe and horror from the spectators, shocking and seducing them into becoming voyeurs.

Such a performance eludes the scope of traditional aesthetic theories. It vehemently resists the demands of hermeneutic aesthetics, which aims at understanding the work of art. In this case, understanding the artist's actions was less important than the experiences that she had while carrying them out and that were generated in the audience. In short, the transformation of the performance's participants was pivotal.

This is not to say that there was nothing for the audience to interpret; the objects used and the actions carried out on and with them could indeed be construed as signs. The five-pointed star, for example, would have given rise to the most diverse mythical, religious, cultural, and political associations – not least as the established symbol for socialist Yugoslavia. When the artist framed the photograph with a five-pointed star and then cut a corresponding star into her abdomen, the audience might have interpreted these actions as a symbol for the ubiquity of the state. This ubiquity manifests itself to the individual through its laws, provisions, and injustices; the audience might have read Abramović's actions as a symbol of the violence that the individual suffers at the hands of the state and that inscribes itself onto the body. When the performer used a silver spoon and a crystal glass at a table set with a white tablecloth, the audience might have been reminded of daily activities in a middle-class setting, while the excessive consumption of honey and wine may also have implied criticism of consumerist, capitalist society. Alternatively, the audience might have read these actions as a reference to the Last Supper. In this context they would have then interpreted the flagellation – which in another context might have alluded to sadomasochistic sex practices – as a reference to the flagellation of Christ and his followers. When the artist lay down on the cross of ice with her arms spread out, the audience would probably have made a connection to the crucifixion of Christ. They might even have read their own act of removing her from the cross as the prevention of a historical reenactment of the self-sacrifice or as a repetition of the removal from the cross. Overall, the audience could have interpreted the performance as an exploration of violence that ranged from self-harm to the sort of violence that individuals encounter at the hands and in the name of the state or religious communities. The audience could have seen it as a criticism of social conditions, which allow the individual to be sacrificed by the state and which require such self-sacrifice.

However plausible such interpretations might seem in retrospect, they remain incommensurable with the event of the performance. The audience would have attempted such interpretations only to a limited degree during the performance itself. The actions that the artist carried out did not simply mean "drinking and eating excessively," "cutting a five-pointed star into the abdomen," or "flagellating oneself;" instead, they accomplished precisely what they signified. They constituted a new, singular reality for the artist and the audience, that is to say, for all participants of the performance. This reality was not merely interpreted

by the audience but first and foremost experienced. It provoked a wide array of sensations in the spectators, ranging from awe, shock, horror, disgust, nausea, or vertigo, to fascination, curiosity, sympathy, or agony, which stirred them to actions that equally constituted reality. It can be assumed that the affects that were triggered – obviously strong enough to move individual spectators to intervention – by far transcended the possibility and the effort to reflect, to constitute meaning, and to interpret the events. The central concern of the performance was not to understand but to experience it and to cope with these experiences, which could not be supplanted there and then by reflection.

In this way, the performance redefined two relationships of fundamental importance to hermeneutic as well as semiotic aesthetics: first, the relationship between subject and object, observer and observed, spectator and actor; second, the relationship between the *materiality* and the *semioticity* of the performance's elements, between signifier and signified.

For hermeneutic and for semiotic aesthetics, a clear distinction between subject and object is fundamental. The artist, subject 1, creates a distinct, fixed, and transferable artifact that exists independently of its creator. This condition allows the beholder, subject 2, to make it the object of their perception and interpretation. The fixed and transferable artifact, i.e. the nature of the work of art as an object, ensures that the beholder can examine it repeatedly, continuously discover new structural elements, and attribute different meanings to it.

This possibility was not offered in Abramović's performance. The artist did not produce an artifact but worked on and changed her own body before the eyes of the audience. Instead of a work of art that existed independently of her and the recipients, she created an event that involved everyone present. The spectators, too, were not presented with a distinct object to perceive and interpret; rather, they were all involved in a common situation of here and now, transforming everyone present into co-subjects. Their actions triggered physiological, affective, volitional, energetic, and motor reactions that motivated further actions. Through this process, the relationship between subject and object was established not as dichotomous but as oscillatory. The positions of subject and object could no longer be clearly defined or distinguished from one another. Did the spectators establish a relationship amongst themselves and Abramović as co-subjects by removing the artist from the cross of ice, or did this act, carried out without her requesting or explicitly approving it, turn her instead into an object? Conversely, were the spectators acting as puppets, as objects of the artist? There are no definite answers to these questions.

The transformation of the subject–object relationship is closely connected to the change in the relationship between materiality and semioticity, signifier and signified. For hermeneutic as well as semiotic aesthetics, every aspect of a work of art is seen as a sign. This does not imply that they overlook the materiality of a work of art. On the contrary, every detail of the material is given closest attention. Yet, everything perceptible about the material is defined and interpreted as a sign: the layers of paint and the specific nuance of color in a painting as much as the

tone, rhyme, and meter in a poem. Thus, every element becomes a signifier to which meanings can be attributed. All aspects of a work of art are incorporated into this signifier-signified relationship, while any number of meanings could be assigned to the same signifier.

Any spectator in Abramović's performance could have carried out the relevant processes of attaching meanings to objects and actions, as demonstrated by the above-mentioned interpretations of a fictive viewer. At the same time, the spectators' physical reactions were a direct result of their perception of Abramović's actions, but not of the possible meanings that those actions might carry. When Abramović cut the star into her skin, the spectators did not hold their breath or feel nauseous because they interpreted this as the inscription of state violence onto the body but because they saw blood flowing and imagined the pain on their own bodies. What the viewers perceived affected them in an immediate, physical way. The materiality of her actions dominated their semiotic attributes. As such, their materiality is not to be seen as a bodily excess, in the sense of an unresolved surplus that could not be worked into the meanings that were attributed to those actions. Rather, the materiality of Abramović's actions preceded all attempts to interpret them beyond their self-referentiality. It did not yield to and dissolve into a sign but evoked a particular effect on its own terms and not as the result of its semiotic status. This very effect – holding one's breath, the feeling of nausea – set the process of reflection in motion for the audience. Rather than addressing the possible meanings that Abramović's actions implied, the spectators wondered why and how they reacted. How do effect and meaning relate in this case?

For one, the shifting relationships between subject/object and materiality/semioticity generated by Abramović's *Lips of Thomas* realigns the interconnection between feeling, thinking, and acting, which will be further explored later on. In all events, the spectators here were admitted not merely as feeling and thinking but also as acting subjects – as actors.

Moreover, these shifts make the traditional distinction between the aesthetics of production, work,[7] and reception as three heuristic categories seem questionable, if not obsolete. There no longer exists a work of art, independent of its creator and recipient; instead, we are dealing with an *event* that involves everybody – albeit to different degrees and in different capacities. If "production" and "reception" occur at the same time and place, this renders the parameters developed for a distinct aesthetics of production, work, and reception ineffectual. At the very least we should reexamine their suitability.

This seems all the more pressing as *Lips of Thomas* was, of course, neither the only nor the first art event to redefine these two relationships. Overall, Western art experienced a ubiquitous performative turn[8] in the early 1960s, which not only made each art form more performative but also led to the creation of a new genre of art, so-called action and performance art. The boundaries between these diverse art forms became increasingly fluid – more and more artists tended to create events instead of works of art, and it was striking how often these were realized as performances.

Visual art took a performative approach early on with action painting and body art, later also with light sculptures, video installations, and so forth. The artists presented themselves in front of an audience through acts of painting, by displaying their decorated bodies, or enacting themselves in another way. Alternatively, the viewer was invited to move around the exhibits and interact with them while other visitors watched. Visiting an exhibition thus often meant participating in a performance. Beyond that, it also gave one the chance to experience the specific atmosphere of the various surrounding spaces.[9]

More particularly, visual artists such as Joseph Beuys, Wolf Vostell, the FLUXUS group, or the Viennese Actionists were at the forefront of this new form of action and performance art. Since the early 1960s, Hermann Nitsch's various actions that involved tearing a lamb to pieces have brought not only the actors but also the other participants into contact with objects otherwise tabooed and provided them with particularly sensual experiences. Time and again, Nitsch's audience has been physically involved in his actions, repeatedly turning the spectators into actors. They were sprayed with blood, faeces, dishwater, and other fluids and were invited to slop about in the gore, disembowel the lamb, eat meat, and drink wine.

The FLUXUS artists also began their actions in the early 1960s. Their third event, held at the Auditorium Maximum of the University of Technology, Aachen, on July 20, 1964,[10] entitled *Actions / Agit Pop / De-collage / Happening / Events / Antiart / L'autrisme / Art total / Refluxus – Festival der neuen Kunst* brought together the FLUXUS artists Eric Andersen, Joseph Beuys, Bazon Brock, Stanley Brouwn, Henning Christiansen, Robert Filliou, Ludwig Gosewitz, Arthur Køpcke, Tomas Schmit, Ben Vautier, Wolf Vostell, and Emmett Williams. In his action, *Kukei, akopee – Nein!, Braunkreuz, Fettecken, Modellfettecken*, Beuys caused a commotion following his majestic gesture of holding a copper staff wrapped in felt horizontally over his head, possibly by spilling hydrochloric acid (the exact circumstances are unclear according to a statement issued by the senior prosecutor in his investigation of 1964–5). The students stormed the stage in response. One of them punched Beuys in the face several times, so that blood streamed from his nose onto his white shirt. Already covered in blood and still bleeding from his nose, Beuys in turn opened a big box of chocolates and threw them into the audience. Surrounded by frenzied shouting and turmoil, Beuys compellingly lifted a crucifix with his left hand, while raising his right hand as if to stop the chaos (Schneede 1994: 42–67). Here, too, the issue lay in negotiating the relationship between the participants; once more, corporeality dominated semioticity.

In music, the performative turn had already set in by the early 1950s with John Cage's events and pieces (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 233–40).[11] Here, audio-events consisted of a variety of actions and sounds – especially those produced by the listeners themselves – while the musician, for example the pianist David Tudor in *4'33"* (1952), did not play a single note. In the 1960s, composers increasingly began to write instructions for the musicians into their scores, specifying movements that would be visible to a concert audience. The performative nature of concerts was

thus increasingly brought into focus. Further evidence can be found in such terms as "scenic music" (Karlheinz Stockhausen), "visual music" (Dieter Schnebel), or "instrumental theatre" (Mauricio Kagel), often coined by composers. These approaches to the concert event posited a new relationship of musicians and listeners (Christa Bruestle 2001: 271–83).

In literature, the performative turn is evident within the genre, for example in "interactive" novels that turn readers into authors by offering a vast array of material to be combined at will (Schmitz-Emans 2002: 179–207). But it also manifests itself in the enormous number of literary readings, attended by audiences that wish to listen to the voice of the poet/writer, such as Guenter Grass's spectacular reading from *The Flounder*, in which he was accompanied by a percussionist (on June 12, 1992, at the Thalia-Theater in Hamburg). However, audiences are not just attracted by readings of living authors; readings from the works of long-dead poets are equally popular. Some prominent examples include Edith Clever's rendering of Heinrich von Kleist's *The Marquise of O* – (1989), Bernhard Minetti's reading of Grimm's fairytales, *Bernhard Minetti Tells Fairytales* (1990), or also the event *Reading Homer*, which the group Angelus Novus put up at Vienna's Kuenstlerhaus in 1986. The members of the group took turns reading the 18,000 verses of the *Iliad* in 22 hours without intermission. Copies of the *Iliad* had been laid out in various rooms, inviting the wandering listener – accompanied by the reading voice – to read themselves. The particular difference between reading literature and listening to it being read – between reading as decoding a text and reading as performance – became evident here. Moreover, the attention of the listeners was directed toward the specific materiality of the respective reading voice with its timbre, volume, and intensity, which stood out unmistakably whenever one reader was replaced by another. Here, literature became emphatically realized as performance, as it came to life through the voices of the physically present readers and seeped into the imaginations of the physically present listeners by appealing to their various senses. The respective voice did not merely function as a medium for the delivery of the text. Precisely because the readers changed, each voice emerged clearly in its peculiarity and influenced the listeners with an immediacy that surpassed the meanings of the words spoken. Furthermore, the time factor shaped the performance. The lengthy period of 22 hours not only modified the participants' perception but also made them aware of this modification. The passage of time was consciously acknowledged as a condition for perception that triggered reflection and, in particular, as a condition for emotional transformations to occur. Participants later related that they felt they changed during the course of the event (Steinweg 1986).

Theatre, too, experienced a performative turn in the 1960s. In particular, it advocated a redefinition of the relationship between actors and spectators. Peter Handke's *Offending the Audience*, directed by Claus Peymann, premiered at the Theater am Turm in Frankfurt during the first "Experimenta" (June 3–10, 1966). It aspired to redefine theatre by redefining the relationship between actor and spectator. Theatre was no longer conceived as a representation of a fictive world,

which the audience, in turn, was expected to observe, interpret, and understand. Something was to occur *between* the actors and the spectators and that constituted theatre. It was crucial that *something* happened between the participants and less important *what* exactly this was. The aim no longer lay in creating a fictive world, within which the channels of communication were limited to the stage, i.e. between dramatic characters, as the basis for the external theatrical communication between actors and audience to take place. The pivotal relationship would be that between the actors and the spectators. The actors shaped and tested this relationship by addressing members of the audience directly and abusing them as "drips," "diddlers," "atheists," "double-dealers," and "switch-hitters" (Handke 1969: 30). They also established specific spatial relations to individual audience members through their movements, by pointing fingers at individual spectators and deliberately turning towards or away from them. The audience, for their part, also responded actively: by clapping, getting up, leaving the room, commenting, clambering onto the stage, quarreling with the actors, and so forth.

All participants seemed to agree that theatre was specifically process-oriented – through the actions of the actors, aimed at creating specific relations with the audience, and through the reactions of audience members, which either endorsed the actors' proposed relationship, modified, or sought to undo it. To negotiate the relationship between stage and auditorium in order to constitute the reality of the theatre was of crucial importance. First and foremost, the actions of the actors and spectators signified only what they accomplished. They were self-referential. By being both self-referential and constitutive of reality, they, along with all the other examples described so far, can be called "performative" in J.L. Austin's sense.[12]

On the opening night, the processes of negotiation occurred concurrently. The spectators took on the roles of actors by attracting the attention of the stage actors and other spectators through their actions and comments. They either refused to further negotiate by leaving the theatre or conceded to the actors by sitting down again as repeatedly requested. On the second night, however, the situation got out of hand when some members of the audience climbed onto the stage to join in the "acting" and refused contrary proposals from the actors and the director. The latter finally broke off the negotiations and tried to enforce his own definition of theatrical relationships by pushing the spectators off the stage (Rischbieter 1966: 8–17).

What had happened here? It was obvious that the director Claus Peymann and the spectators who stormed onto the stage had set out with differing notions about the theatre. Peymann acted in accordance with the assumption that he had staged a literary text that concerned itself with the relationship between actors and spectators. To him, this did not automatically imply the possibility of seriously negotiating the actor/spectator relationship. He had created a "work of art," which was to be presented to the audience. They, in turn, were permitted to express their pleasure or displeasure with his "work" by clapping, jeering, commenting, and so forth. But he denied them the right to physically interfere in his work and to change it through their actions. For Peymann, the spectators' crossing onto the

stage area was an assault on the nature of his staged production. It questioned his authority and authorship. Ultimately, he insisted on a traditional subject–object relationship.

Based on the ostensible consensus that theatre is constituted and defined by the relationship between actors and spectators, the audience, conversely, understood the performance not primarily as a work of art – traditionally assessed on the basis of how successfully one applies theatrical means to a text – but as an event. The audience aimed at a fundamental rethinking of the relationship between actors and spectators, opening the possibility of role reversal. According to them, the performance would only succeed as an event if there was equal participation by the spectators. For them, the performativity proposed by the performance was not to be realized through conventionalized actions such as clapping, jeering, or commenting, but through a genuine structural redefinition and an open-ended result, incorporating the reversal of roles.

While Peymann's intervention sought to save and restore the integrity of his artwork, it led instead to the failure of the performance as an event, at least from the perspective of the spectators that were pushed off the stage. In contrast, American avant-garde theatre, such as Julian Beck's and Judith Malina's Living Theatre (since *The Brig*, 1963) or Richard Schechner's Environmental Theater and his Performance Group (founded in 1967), incorporated audience participation into their program. The audience was not only allowed to participate but explicitly invited to do so. Physical contact with the actors as well as with other spectators was actively encouraged in order to achieve a kind of community ritual, as exemplified in *Paradise Now* (Avignon, 1968) by the Living Theatre and *Dionysus in 69* (New York, 1968) by the Performance Group (Beck 1972; Beck and Malina 1971; Schechner 1973, 1970). The redefined relationship between actors and spectators went hand-in-hand with a shift in the semiotic status of the actions and their respective potential meanings. Favored instead was the experience of physicality by all participants and their responses to it, from physiological, affective, energetic, and motor reactions to the ensuing intense sensual experiences.

The dissolution of boundaries in the arts, repeatedly proclaimed and observed by artists, art critics, scholars of art, and philosophers, can be defined as a performative turn. Be it art, music, literature, or theatre, the creative process tends to be realized in and as performance. Instead of creating works of art, artists increasingly produce events which involve not just themselves but also the observers, listeners, and spectators. Thus, the conditions for art production and reception changed in a crucial aspect. The pivotal point of these processes is no longer the work of art, detached from and independent of its creator and recipient, which arises as an object from the activities of the creator-subject and is entrusted to the perception and interpretation of the recipient-subject. Instead, we are dealing with an event, set in motion and terminated by the actions of all the subjects involved – artists and spectators. Thus the relationship between the material and semiotic status of objects in performance and their use in it has changed. The material status does not merge with the signifier status; rather, the former severs

itself from the latter to claim a life of its own. In effect, objects and actions are no longer dependent on the meanings attributed to them. As events that reveal these special characteristics, artistic performance opens up the possibility for all participants to experience a metamorphosis.

Prevalent aesthetic theories hardly address the performative turn in the arts – even if they can still be applied to it in some respects. However, they are unable to grasp its key aspect – the transformation from a work of art into an event. To understand, analyze, and elucidate this shift requires a whole new set of aesthetic criteria, suited to describe the specific characteristics of performance – an aesthetics of the performative.