The Convaluation of Performance Art
A Study of Peer Recognition Among Performance Artists

Edvin Sandström
Abstract

Processes and forms of valuation, evaluation and valorization are important for bringing contemporary social life in order. In this thesis, I study the values of the small and autonomous avant-garde of the art-world, performance art. In art worlds, arguably, we can expect to find the most extreme cases of activities which constantly aim at transgressing existing ideas of what is valued in this world, i.e., art. Performance art is an activity that contemplates the border between art and non-art, and that as an activity contributes to the constitution of this border. My focus is on the ongoing process, which is seen in a historical light. I look at the social structure that both enables and constitutes values. I argue that this process should be understood as a convaluation (Aspers 2008), a partial order with some temporal extension that enables coordination based on valuation and evaluation processes. I find that the convaluation of performance art is characterized by a switched role structure—meaning that actors operate as both artists and curators and as such, switch from being evaluated to evaluating others. The central value that constitutes the convaluation of performance art is bodily presence.
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Edvin Sandström
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1. Introduction

In 2010, the Yugoslavian-born artist Marina Abramović and her performance art event *The Artist is Present*, broke the attendance record at MoMA. For three months, eight hours a day, she sat on a chair dressed in red, inviting the audience to sit down with her, face-to-face, in silence. More than 850,000 visitors came to see this event which became the art happening of the year. This performance art event reached mainstream awareness and put performance art back on the map after years of decline and generated a new wave of curating performance art in national art institutions. For instance, Tate Modern in London opened an underground gallery called *The Tanks* designated for performance art events. The director of Tate Modern Nicholas Serota explained in an interview that *The Tanks*,

[W]ill bring the kind of work that has traditionally been seen in alternative spaces, for short durations, and often barely recorded, into the museum. It will bring it into our own sense of art history as something that is not on the margins, but something central to art (theguardian.com 2012).

However, in parallel with this new wave of curating performance art in national art institutions, members of the performance art world were less enthusiastic about the performances that were showcased there. In an interview in the internet-based art magazine Hyperallergic, the artist and curator, Ryan Hawk explained that, “Performance art is supposed to be rejected by the mainstream…that’s what gives it all the charm…unless we all start having blockbuster shows at the MoMA” (Ortiz 2012). In another article in the same magazine, the artist Thomas Micchelli (2012) accused the recent trends of curating performances inside the walls of the institution as fundamentally changing the character of performance, “turning them from body-centered expressionism to museological spectacle.” And moreover, the renowned performance artists Antonio Acconci stressed in an interview in The New York Observer (2014:14) that,

The worst performance, then, would have to be Marina Abramović at MoMA, three or so years ago, all-day every-day sitting at one side of a table and looking/staring, in silence. She turned herself into a sculpture, into an act of endurance: the repetition, the constancy, turned her action into habit: the constant presence of an audience turned her so-called performance into theater.
Motivated by the reactions to Abramović’s performance at MoMA, I took an interest in the evaluative culture among artists designated for performance art. Inspired by the Dutch sociologist Willem Schinkel’s article, “The Autopoiesis of the Art World after the End of Art” (2010), in which he suggests that the art world seems to make a living out of their own continuing crises, “which are crises of form, substance, and legitimation” (Schinkel 2010:278), I set up this thesis project accordingly, focusing on how contemporary performance artists valorize one another.

Performance Art

Performance art originates from the avant-garde tradition manifested by the early activities of Futurists in the early twentieth century (Goldberg 2011; Pontbriand 1979; Stiles 1996). An important part of their production was manifestos, which were more a practice of propaganda than artistic manifestations. To break with conventional ideas about art, theatre, and literature, Futurist, Constructivist, and Dadaist movements used manifestos to transgress traditional artistic standards. It is argued that the activities of early avant-garde practitioners used performance to test their ideas, “only later expressing them in the form of objects” (Goldberg 1979:170). Understood as a method to investigate the boundaries between art and life, performance has been referred to as, “the avant avant-garde” (Goldberg 2011) and become a catalyst in contemporary artistic production indicating the singular event valorized in its originality and its transgressional form (Berghuis 2005).

Even if most writings on performance art locate its origin in the early twentieth century, there are others who contest this idea and argue that we should begin our examination of performance art in the action paintings produced by Jackson Pollock in 1950 (e.g., Carlson 1996; Stiles 1996). This “second wave” of performance art tries to wash away the theatricality associated with the avant-garde tradition before the 1950s. What makes Pollock’s action paintings considered to be a singular event in the history of art was his confrontation with the canvas. The paintings produced by Pollock in 1950 were critically investigated by Harold Rosenberg, who coined the term “action paintings” in his article published in *Art News* in 1952. Rosenberg wrote that:

The painter no longer approached his easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter (Rosenberg 1991:57).

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1 Schinkel (2010) suggests that we should understand art worlds as social systems (Luhmann 2000), based on the observations that art world’s members spend considerable time negotiating what “is and isn’t their kind of art” (Becker 1982:36).
Such confrontation with the object was further investigated by the Japanese group Gutai (meaning concrete or embodiment) founded by Jiro Yoshihara in 1954. Their experimental activities with subject and object would come to develop the early European avant-garde practices led by an axiom of Yoshihara: “Create what has not been done before” (Tiampo 2011:12).

While the activities of members of the Gutai group constructed experimental and creative spaces, similar activities took place in Black Mountain College in North America (Carlson 1996). One of the most famous artists from this school was John Cage, who is still considered an important figure by contemporary performance artists. Together with Merce Cunningham and Allan Kaprow, among others, they experimented with “chance” and were inspired by Zen Buddhism. Together they executed performances that would later inspire Allan Kaprow to theorize and coin the term “happenings”, which laid groundwork for contemporary performance artists’ manifestation of their practice. In his guidelines for happenings, Kaprow emphasized that: “The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps as indistinct, as possible,” that “Happenings should be performed once only,” and that “audiences should be eliminated entirely” (Kaprow 1956:260-68).

The number of manifestos and critical writings produced about live artistic experimentation in the aftermath of World War II inspired artists to go further in the exploration of the subject in art. This was an especially important medium for many female artists who saw a chance to challenge the perception of the female subject in art (Féral 1992). One of the pioneers in Body Art and Auto-performance in the early 1960s was Carolee Schneemann, who produced several performances stressing the power of subject over product in the production of art. In her meaning, performance art’s ephemeral quality resisted commodification, and thus became a creative critic of the erotic female archetype reproduced by patriarchal culture (Vergine 2000). The female identity became, for many artists, a tool to visualize the constraints placed on female artists in the history of art and society (Jones 1998).

The explosive live manifestations by artists generated during this period came to be termed “performance art” by critics in America in the early 1970s to cover the extensive terminology offered by the artists themselves (Stiles 1996). The artists’ own writings tended to frame their art as “situations”, “actions”, or “demonstrations” (Pontbriand 1979:9). For many non-American artists, the term “performance” was too associated with theatre, which is considered by many to be an antithesis to performance art. For instance, Vito Acconci, who is considered an important figure in body art and performance, stopped performing in the 1970s when he realized that his actions were perceived as theatrical (Stiles 1998:238). Today, performance art is considered by many as institutionalized (Pagani 2001; Wheeler 2003; 2004) and belonging to the tradition of visual arts (see Berghaus 2005:xxiv; Giesen 2006).
Purpose and Aim

Against the above background, the purpose of this thesis is to study cultural valorization among contemporary performance artists. Cultural valorization is a central aspect of culture which contributes, among other things, to differentiation of cultural value to objects and individuals. Certain cultural products and cultural producers are assigned recognition, which indicates that they are more socially valued than others. The overall research question is: how do performance artists valuate one another? To answer this question, my aim is to address the general question of how art becomes valorized—a question that has been given considerable attention by cultural theorists.

To address the question of how performance art is valued, I look for a structural explanation, taking a step back from the concrete observations. To establish the explanation, I trace the acts of valorization, and identify the position of those valorizing “decisions”. I trace actors separated from positions, and investigate how they switch positions in the social structure, from being artists to being evaluators and vice versa. I also study the culture that helps to bring order to their collective. And finally, I look at the concrete values—that is what is behind the concrete activities that are selected to take part in performance art festivals.

My empirical focus is on the contemporary world of performance art, and the ongoing valorization culture at festivals around the globe. Between 2012 and 2015, I attended 13 performance art festivals in Europe, China, and the U.S. to study how performance artists recognize one another. The empirical study is based on a focused ethnographic design, which, in contrast to conventional ethnography, concentrates on short-time field visits rather than extensive time in the traditional anthropological tradition. In the festival setting, I moved like a cat on the prowl, interactive but not threatening, occasionally intrusive, but easily ignored, to examine performance artists’ context of valorization.

In answering the theoretical question of how art becomes valued, I will examine several empirical questions, providing an understanding of how performance art becomes valorized. What makes an action considered a performance artistic event? What roles do festivals play in the performance art world? How are performance art festivals produced, organized, and distributed? What preferences do curators have when selecting artists for their festivals? What makes a good curator? And how is the success of a festival measured? How are performances constructed? How are they tutored? And how are public audiences confronted in the public room? By answering these questions, my aim is to provide an overview of how performance art becomes valorized among contemporary artists.
Cultural Valorization

How does art become valorized? This question has concerned cultural theorists (Dickie 1984; Frow 1995; Guillory 1993; Smith 1988) and sociologists of culture (Becker 1982; Bourdieu 1984; Lamont 1987; Heinich 1996) for decades. George Dickie (1984) introduced an institutional theory of art and a few years later Barbara Hernstein Smith (1988) stressed the importance of the discourse of value in cultural production. About the same time, sociologists set out to investigate the process of cultural valorization in the arts empirically. Becker (1982) stressed the role of artistic reputation in what he conceptualized as “art worlds” and Bourdieu (1983) emphasized the role of cultural valorization as necessary to establish the autonomy of the field of cultural production from the field of economic production. In this section, I will provide an overview of some of the most significant studies of how art becomes valorized to stress my own contribution to this field of research.

Let us begin in 1964, when the philosopher Arthur Danto introduced the notion of “art world” in his so-often quoted article “The Art World” in The Journal of Philosophy (no.61:571-84). Danto argued that the new artforms of his time like pop art, minimalist art and conceptual art, could not be understood without the introduction of a theory of art, namely, an art world. Danto dealt with the problem of how an object became recognized as “art”. He noted that something is needed to recognize an object as art, even though it looks the same as a real object. That is, something is needed to make a distinction between objects to see some of them as reality and some of them as works of art. In so doing, Danto used the famous example of Andy Warhol’s Brillo Boxes, stressing that,

What in the end makes the difference between a Brillo box and a work of art consisting of a Brillo box is a certain theory of art. It is the theory of art that takes it up into the world of art, and keeps it from collapsing into the real objet it is (Danto 1964:41).

Having argued that the art of his time needed a theory to become recognized as art, Danto came to his founding statement: “To see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry—an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an art world” (1964:40). Danto shifted the attention of art historians, critics, and other professionals from the traditional idea that artworks have intrinsic and typical features which make them art, to the view that works become art based on their position in the (historical) context, in other words because of their position in the art world.

The developments in art production in the 1950s and the 1960s that brought Arthur Danto to his concept of the art world, also served as the basis for the origin of George Dickie’s institutional theory of art, which is another significant theory of how art becomes valorized. Dickie made a distinction between a classificatory sense and an evaluative sense of the valorization of art. In the
first case, the expression “this is art” or “this is an artwork” means that the work “belongs to a certain category of artefacts” (Dickie 1971:99). In the evaluative sense, the same expression ascribes “a substantial, actual value” to the work (Dickie 1974:43). This theory, which is primarily based on the classificatory meaning of the notion of artwork, provided a philosophical answer to the question of how art becomes valorized. It reads: “a work of art in the classificatory sense is an evaluable artefact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public” (Dickie 2000:240). What this definition of art stresses, is the fact that “‘art’ incorporates evaluativeness in a way that does not guarantee any degree of value, but leaves art open to the full range of evaluative assessment” (Ibid.). Here, Dickie adds to Danto’s theory of art the significance of an art world public, and by so doing, provides a foundation for sociological analysis of art, incorporating the concepts of roles and rules, and the importance of a public which is more or less a prepared addressee of artistic activities.

In 1982, Howard S. Becker entered the discussion of how art becomes valorized introducing his concept of “art worlds” (Becker 1982). Criticizing Dickie and Danto for “not having much meat” (Ibid:149) on their bones, Becker accused them of not having developed an organizationally complicated concept of what an art world is. In his view, most philosophical perspectives of art worlds do not account for concerns such as “Who?”, “What?”, “How much?”, and “How many?” Introducing the concept of collective activity and conventions, Becker argued that to understand an art world, one would have to empirically analyze its cooperative activity and links between participants. This included an analysis of the status of artworks, which depends on an often-unstable consensus among participants in an art world, which, in his view, was not in contradiction to the institutional theory. Becker defined an art world as “the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joined knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that art world is noted for” (Becker 1982: X). Becker considered his model superior to the philosophers’ model, because it includes collective activity and conventions as central elements to understanding what goes on in the valorization of art.

In contrast to Becker’s symbolic interactionist approach of art worlds, Pierre Bourdieu, a more structural oriented theorist, worked out a theory of fields, which in his view was a superior sociological analytical tool to explain what goes on in an artistic sphere. Bourdieu argued:

[W]hat is lacking, among other things, from this purely descriptive and enumerative evocation are the objective relations which are constitutive of the structure of the field and which orient the struggles aiming to conserve or transform it (Bourdieu 1996:205).
What Bourdieu tries to do, in contrast to Becker, is build a theoretical construct of concepts through which the inner workings of a field can be analyzed. Bourdieu also provides a more focused analysis of how art becomes valorized than Becker (even though his emphasis on reputation and labeling theory are central). In short, the field model, applied in the field of cultural production, is divided into opposite poles which are each governed by two distinct sets of standards of evaluation: On the one hand, there is the (sub-) field of large-scale production, which revolves around economic standards of evaluation, while on the other hand, there is the (sub)field of restricted production, which is oriented toward aesthetic standards of evaluation. One of the most significant issues Bourdieu brings to light in his grand theory of the fields of production, is that a field’s degree of autonomy largely affects to a lower degree and makes the field more sensitive to external (market oriented) factors, even while a high degree of autonomy might be necessary and helpful to make artistic values function in fields other than those in which they are produced without losing their characteristics. Bourdieu further notes that cultural legitimation involves the use of aesthetic judgments to assign value to cultural producers and their products. Bourdieu (1993) identified three types of cultural legitimacy: public acclaim (popular legitimacy), professional recognition from peers (specific legitimacy), and critical evaluation (bourgeois legitimacy). Different audiences typically employ different criteria.

In response to and in stark contrast to Becker and Bourdieu, Nathalie Heinich accuses the dominant sociological analyses of art to dismiss what she refers to as the “singular” and “exceptional” values people use in their admiration of artworks and artists (Heinich 2000:202). She especially points out that their analyses do not focus on watching or listening to art, but rather, on being viewed while perceiving art. Their focus departs from the assumption that people only interact with people, and so only a marginal role is attributed to the art object. The fact that people read books, study artifacts and so on, is assumed to have almost no effect on their social action. In other words, the proposition of the Actor Network Theory (Latour & Woolgar 1979; Latour 2005; Callon et al., 1986; Law & Hassard 1999) that objects play an active role in social networks is barely taken into consideration. As noted in her study *The Glory of van Gogh* (1996), from the nineteenth century onwards, the individual has been the central focus to conceptualize art, while sociology based it assumptions on the community (on what is culturally determined and conventionally thought of). Since sociological research overemphasized the community and the conventional (e.g., Becker 2008; Bourdieu 1984; 1993; 1996; DiMaggio & Powell 1983), Heinich (1996) stresses that they give little notice to the singular event, which in turn led to a blind spot in sociological studies of art worlds and artistic fields.

In her explanation of the singular realm in art, Heinich (1996) argues that it is not a transcendental or universal principle, but the admiration of Vincent van Gogh originated at a certain moment in art history. Heinich (idem:141)
argues that van Gogh acts as the stepping-stone to the singular value realm and the valorization process leading to the recognition of government about his greatness could be described as a new paradigm in the history of art, namely, the van Gogh paradigm (or the van Gogh effect). This implies a coming to terms with the collective realm of the classical art academy. The original system of artistic validation used conformity to the norm as a measure of artistic quality. An artist’s position on the hierarchical scale was determined by his or her obedience to the assumed artistic and collective rules. The essence of the communal realm lies in relative conformity to a group and a series of social conventions. In the early 19th century art world, this meant loyalty to the generally accepted rules of the Academy.

According to Heinich (1996), the test in terms of a stable system of rules within the art world was abandoned with the rise of modernism. The first romantic artists, who manifested themselves at the end of the 18th century, were recognized as artists because of their abnormality, excess and exceptionality. Breaking the rules of the community became the convention, which also implied the birth of the singular realm. Between the end of the 19th century and the end of the Second World War, the communal regime of the Academy and the singular would coexist side by side as two value paradigms. Only at the end of the 1940s, the latter realm started to gain importance and dominate the world of art as a whole (Heinich 1996:51).

Singularity is explained by Heinich as the consequence of the overflowing admiration or adoration that actors invest in an artistic artifact or in a singular artist. To Heinich, this adoration is not a naive or blind principle, as it constitutes a negative construction that is violent and that provokes a constant struggle (repeatedly stressed in Bourdieu’s work 1993; 1996). Someone who adores a piece of artwork in public also engages in a polemic with those who do not. Moreover, adoration does not merely concern the recognition of the love for an artistic artifact. It also implies the stigmatization of bad objects. In other words, it generates an emotional cognitive dimension of categorizing. Adoration presupposes the making of a distinction between what is good and what is bad. By means of this subjective mechanism, one can introduce a more suitable classification of artifacts (Heinich 1996:181). As a consequence, adoration also involves the work of creating a cultural hierarchy.

Convaluations
Having outlined some of the central discourses on how art becomes valorized, I will now present the thesis’s theoretical approach. To address how performance art becomes valorized among contemporary artists, I will make use of the notion of convaluation (Aspers 2008). Based on the assumption that forms of valuation and evaluation processes coordinate social life, Patrik Aspers
(2008) has coined the term convaluation referring to a joint activity of valuation and evaluation processes: “A convaluation is a partial order with some temporal extension that enables coordination based on valuation and evaluation” (Ibid:1).

To better understand the concept of convaluation, we need to clarify the notion of value, valuation (valorization) and evaluation. Aspers (2008:3) defines value “as the determination and rating of a ‘thing’”. This implies that value can be seen as good and bad, and thus function as rank order. There is also the hypothesis that some values are more profound than others (Aspers 2001c). Based on this assumption, valuation becomes an activity of ascribing value to products and producers. Once a value has become entranced in a social formation (Heidegger 1997:38-40), actors can evaluate objects and each other as producers. Or put differently:

Evaluation refers to the act of benchmarking ‘social things,’ such as cars, groups, and people according to a standard, and valuation refers to the act of ascribing these ‘social things’ with value (Aspers 2008:1).

Drawing mainly on the works of George Simmel (1964) on social form and Harrison White’s (1992; 2008) studies on social formation, the concept of order becomes another key concept in convaluations. Order is defined as “the predictability of human activities and the stability of social components in relation to each other” (Aspers 2010:7; Hayek 1973:36). This draws on a structural approach based on order (e.g., Granovetter 1985). From a structural point of view, we can trace three ideal typical coordination forms in the literature: organization (hierarchy), network and market (Granovetter 1985; Thompsson et al. 1991; Polanyi 1957). While organizations are based on asymmetric relations and networks on reciprocal relations, markets are characteristics of processes of evaluation. Thus, while markets are based on economic evaluations (sellers and buyers), it is argued, that a convaluation does not need to include an economic offer, but rather, valuation and evaluation are often more common outside the economic sphere (Aspers 2008:5). Aspers (2005:44-5; 2008:5) suggests that we should replace the ideal typical coordination form of market with the broader term of convaluation (an economic convaluation can be understood as a market). In short, it is argued that the logic of a market’s function as an analytical tool to also understand the consequences of (e)valuation processes (see Lamont 2012) outside of what is referred to as the economy.

Understood as one of three coordination forms, a convaluation constitutes an order based on the components of value, social structure, and culture. Value, as already stated, is defined as the ranking of products or producers. The social structure denotes the roles and identities that actors hold. To clarify, in the context of a convaluation, that is, consequences of (e)valuation practices, a role constitutes of what one does, while identity is related to what
one is (Aspers 2008:10 see also Frank & Meyer 2002:86n1). A convaluation also establishes a culture referring to the formation’s inherent rules and practices.

Moreover, a convaluation can ideally achieve order through status and standard. While a status convaluation is characterized by “the evaluation of what people prefer”, a standard convaluation is based on how well an object or a person meets the criteria for a given standard (e.g., Aspers 2011). In a standard convaluation, we can speak of the process of rating, which requires that all items under consideration be compared against an external set of criteria (e.g., originality, significance) and not against one another, while a status convaluation is constituted of processes of ranking which consist of comparing each item with one another in terms of how well they fare on specific pre-established dimensions. For example, in contrast to peer review in the scientific sphere, peer recognition in the artistic sphere is more likely to be based on emotions and idiosyncratic taste (cf. Lamont 2012). In short, “order can be either a function of value (standard) or a function of social structure (status)” (Aspers 2008:14). It is argued that a status convaluation is the most common form in the art world (Aspers 2008). That is, the evaluation of what is good and bad can be made in discussion among members of a group, or by an audience (cf. Bourdieu 1984; Heinich 1996; White 2002; Zuckerman 1999). This is to say that the audience (peers) in an art world can function as a standard by ranking the identities that constitute that specific art world, thereby, constituting and maintaining order.

Chapter Outline

The rest of the thesis is divided into five chapters. In the next chapter, I provide an overview of performance art festivals and present how I conducted the study, which methods I used, the analytical strategy, and ethical considerations. Chapter 3 examines the social structure of the convaluation of performance art, which is characterized by a switch-role structure. Chapter 4 examines the culture of the convaluation of performance art, focusing on how things are done at performance art festivals. Chapter 5 explores what concrete values become recognized through valorizations in situ. In the concluding chapter, I summarize the thesis’s main findings and stress its contribution and outlook.

2 “An actor cannot be separated from her identity, but she can be separated from her role” (Aspers 2008:10).
2. Studying Performance Art Festivals

To examine how contemporary performance artists valorize one another, I have conducted fieldwork at performance art festivals. Ever since Durkheim’s ([1912] 1995) recognition of festivals as instances of “collective effervescence”, they have played a significant role in the sociological analysis of the meaning and impact of expressing and fusing a sense of community (Sassatelli et al. 2011). Festivals celebrate community values, ideologies, identity and continuity. Thus, festivals can be understood as reproducing a certain kind of culture (Delanty 2011), and so, offering sites and moments for examining (e)valuative processes (cf. Hutter & Stark 2015). Artists, organizers, support personnel, and spectators come together during an intensive period in which new works and artists become recognized, new ties are generated, invites to upcoming events are made, and various other consequences of evaluative practices occur which contribute to the reproduction of this art collective and its culture. The chapter begins with a short presentation of performance art festivals, followed by a presentation of the methods and analytic strategies used. The chapter ends with ethical considerations.

Performance Art Festivals

In my empirical work, I have made nine visits to five different festivals in Sweden (in which I attended four festivals twice), and one in each separate country of France, Italy, U.S. and China. This selection has made it possible to observe similarities but also differences in the organization and valorization of performance art. By studying these festivals, I have observed the role structure among the actors, their culture, and meaning construction of what is valued. All in all, I spent 50 days in festival settings.

Performance art festivals are small-scale events, involving around 10 to 20 artists, usually one or two organizers (who may also take on the role of curator) and operate on tight budgets ranging from 100 to 25,000 Euros. Most festivals are non-profit organizations and receive most of their funding from their national arts councils and/or local community sponsors. The funding is primarily spent on travel and accommodation, since most festivals aim to have
an international approach.\(^3\) It is quite common that there are artists from 10 or more countries participating in a festival. Sometimes the organizers try to contact artists from afar (e.g., festival organizers in Europe contact artists in Japan), to see if it is possible to get some grants from the local arts council of the artist’s home country or cultural institutions to cover the travel expenses. One organizer informed me that in the early days of their festival production, they could only afford to invite so-called “Ryanair” artists—meaning that they strategically invited artists who lived nearby Ryanair destinations to keep down the airfare expenses. Thus, they primarily invited artists who were in Europe. Today, they have managed to establish a relatively stable festival with yearly funding, which means that they can invite a broad range of international artists. They can also, as with other more established festivals, afford to put artists up in hotels or rental apartments/houses. However, many festivals cannot offer hotel rooms or other arrangements, thus, the invited artists must pay for travel and accommodation from their own pocket. If this is the case, artists can apply for funding from their local arts councils themselves.

Even though performance art organizers struggle with funding and are forced to produce festivals on a relatively tight budget (compared with mainstream festivals),\(^4\) they indicate that while money is of course an important factor to be able to invite international artists and pay for travel and housing expenses, a general notion is that “money kills” in the sense of producing large-scale events. Some organizers told me that they had received invitations concerning collaboration with festivals with more financial resources; however, they explain that they had gently turned them down and stressed that they wanted to keep tight control of their festival.

Since the budget is often small, organizers generally struggle with promotion. One organizer explained: “Probably the most significant aspect of artist-run festivals is that they are lacking in promotion. You leave it to the last month and then you have all other things to do so (laughter)” (Festival organizer, June 23, 2013). I have met organizers who collaborate with local museums which can provide resources to promote the festival by printing programs, offering spaces, and providing support personnel. However, this often results in compromise in the artistic productions. As one organizer put it:

It is a kind of love and hate relationship. I love to work in there [a museum setting] space, but there is sometimes too much focus on what you can’t do. It is tiresome to tell artists about all the constraints and rules (Organizer, June 12, 2013).

\(^3\) Only a handful of performance art festivals can provide artists with a fee, which can vary between 100 and 500 Euros per artist. Only those artists who partake in many of these festivals can manage to make a living from performance art.

\(^4\) According to some informants, performance art festivals are the “real” fringe festivals operating as alternative platforms to mainstream art and music festivals.
Performance art is not always on the top of the agenda of local media and it is difficult to attract journalists to come and write about festivals. One organizer told me:

There was a funny story in Minsk. There was a famous journalist coming to the festival and she was in those days one of the best writers of contemporary art. She worked in the newspaper and we asked her, ‘Will you write something?’ And she said, ‘Well you know, I want to be honest. My editor told me that I can write something only if it will be a scandal’ (laughter) (Organizer, May 23, 2014).

Performance art has a reputation among other artists and the public as a scandalous artform given that its renowned performances have included nudity, violence, and self-harming elements (Stiles 1996). As we will see, this is still part of contemporary performance art production.

The performance art festivals I have attended are mainly observed by the inner circle of this convaluation consisting of peers and art students, as an artist describes:

There’s the audience of most of us, who’ve heard of each other’s names or we’ve met each other at festivals and we’ve seen. I saw your performance in Berlin and I saw your performance in Thailand. I’m doing this for my colleagues who I met and they know something about my work so I have something new to tell them or I have something further to explore. (Artist, April 14, 2014)

A significant proportion of the audience is often onlookers in public places or visitors to exhibitions and galleries.

The promise of performance art festivals, according to curators, is a democratic quality offering local communities the chance to interact with artists in their home environment, thus, the festivals have no entrance fee. As one of the curators stated: “We offer an art form which confronts people in their everyday life. We believe in art that is based on human interaction” (Curator, June 2, 2015). In order to distribute such art, the form of the festival is one of the most promising distribution channels.

Support personnel (volunteers) also hold important roles in the making of the festivals. They are often art students (and sometimes artists) who help to organize all sorts of things such as collecting materials for the artists, assisting artists in their preparation of performances, cleaning up after performances, and delivering food and beverages to keep things running smoothly. There are also photographer(s) who provide the curators and artists with documentation. The support personnel partake in all the activities constituting festivals such as lunch, dinner, and parties. They are seen as important by curators and artists and are recognized for their support. For art students, volunteering at these festivals is an opportunity to learn more about the practice and develop new links, as a volunteer in one of the festivals in China said: “Festivals make you
want to create your own artwork. It’s great that artists come here from all over the world. They make you see and experience new things” (Volunteer, May 25, 2014). I have met artists who, in previous festivals, were there as volunteers, but in another festival, were there as performers. The artists, who are “young” in the performance art practice, have the chance to be selected by both artists and curators for future festivals. It is an internal openness, which also keeps the medium open to change, both with regard to identity and to style.

Participant Observations

My primary ethnographical method during my fieldwork in the festival setting was participatory observation. Inspired by Nathalie Heinich (1998) “pragmatic approach”, I stayed in the background and observed how actors spoke about one another—how they discussed each other’s work. I focused on “the work of the work of art” (Hennion & Grenier 2000:210), but rather than being a “fly on the wall”, I moved like a “cat on the prowl…curious and interactive but not threatening” (Thornton 2009:xvii).

In most festivals, I engaged in activities such as volunteer work and partook in workshops. In so doing, I developed a “give and take” relationship, which resulted in a process of becoming accepted by members of this world. After some time, I felt treated like an insider and was included in more activities such as dinners, parties, and being invited to their leisure activities during festivals. This breakthrough was an important moment in my fieldwork—feeling a sense of community (cf. Sarason 1974). Even when I was not an official volunteer at festivals, I took on the role of volunteer to show my engagement and tried to be at hand if anyone needed my assistance—an integrated part of their culture that I had come to learn about. By participating in this work, it was easy to engage in informal talks and at times it felt like I managed to slip out of my role of researcher, which resulted in fruitful small chats with different informants—information I probably would not have given in more formal settings.

As my fieldwork developed, it felt natural to participate in the organization in situ and this approach became an invaluable strategy to reach information about informants’ personal opinions and (e)valuation practices. The more I got to know some informants, the more they spoke of themselves and their peers. For example, when I signed up to participate as a volunteer for the second time in two of the festivals located in Sweden, I worked with the same organizers and support personnel. Since I had already established a relationship with them, the more valuable the information got. For instance, I experienced that our relationship became less formal and informants included me in their conversations with each other—conversations that included gossip about third-party artists and organizers.
The more festivals I attended, the more accepted I felt in the performance art world. Consequently, artists took an interest in me, which made it easy to establish “speech events” (Spradley 1979; Briggs 1986), which meant that I could ask similar questions to the same artists and in doing so “check the frequency and distribution” of various topics and themes (Becker 1958:656). These conversations also generated new contacts and invitations to other festivals and events. The festival setting also provided organized artist talks in which the informants began negotiating their own relevant “hot button issues”. In these occasions, I could sit back and make notes while they negotiated values.

During my fieldwork, I switched from taking notes in my notebooks to using my smartphone as my primary notepad. This felt more discrete than running around with a notebook on which I had received comments like “here he comes again with his notebook.” Even if I interpreted such utterances as rather humorous, the phone became the primary device for taking notes. By using the software program Evernote, I could easily structure my notes in situ. I created different notebooks in which I could do an instant form of coding. For instance, I had one notebook for general observations, another for theoretical concepts ((e)valuative practices), and one notebook in which I separated utterances from different roles such as curators, artists, support personnel, and audience, making up the social structure. Throughout my interaction in the field, I developed my skills of taking notes rather quickly.

Another advantage of using my phone as recording device, was that I could easily write down ideas and scan through my notes, photos, and video recordings in everyday situations (when sitting on the subway or drinking coffee at some café). The more familiar I became with Evernote, the more I realized how powerful this device was because of its various functions offering the fieldworker a range of qualitative opportunities. In addition to writing down “scratch notes” (Sanjek 1990:96), I could take photos, video clips, or voice recordings in the moment. It functioned as a multi-functional recording device that also had the advantage of syncing the collected data directly to my computer. So instead of transferring my handwritten notes in the paper notebooks, I could develop my collected data relatively fast when I sat down with my computer. The photos, videos and voice recordings became helpful triggers in developing “thick descriptions” (cf. Geertz 1973). Even though I agree that software programs sometimes “can encourage an oversimplified and mechanicistic application of analysis” (Coffey 1999:153), I found it to be a useful method to gather and analyze my empirical material (cf. le Grand 2010:37).

In the festival setting, I also gathered information sheets and festival catalogues that included writings from some of the participating artists. Here I could also study archived materials such as previously invited artists. From these catalogues, I could study patterns of invitations and get an idea of the convaluation’s core participants. Many artists turned up on a regular basis and were often promoted as “guests of honor”. This information could also partly
be examined on festivals’ homepages, at least those offering archived information sites. In terms of (e)valuation practices, such lists and rankings offered a good view of who the key artists were in the contemporary scene. The catalogues and festivals’ homepages offered other valuable information in the form of artist presentations and promotions, curatorial concepts, vision, and other valuable information that laid the groundwork for formal interview questions.

Interviews

In addition to the observations and informal talks, I conducted 40 face-to-face interviews relying on an open-ended interviewing technique to identify and explore the “taken-for-granted criteria” that performance artists rely on to draw boundaries between deserving and understanding their practice (cf. Laumont 2009:253). Since I had come to know most of the respondents through interaction and informal talks in the festival setting, it was rather easy to construct a “friendship conversation”-like interview setting (cf. Spradley 1979:461).

All interviews were conducted in relation to the festivals. I set up most of the interviews in situ by approaching artists as the festival unfolded. Since the organizers were busy during the festival, I made contact to set up a suitable time for interviews. The interviews usually took place before or after the festival and varied in length from 30 minutes to 2 hours. Most artists that I asked to interview were positive about sharing their experience. Most interview situations developed into lively conversations and generally I was the one who had to halt the discussion.

I conducted 35 single interviews and 5 group interviews. The group interviews, which were primarily conducted with organizers, held a certain quality because the informants triggered each other and in some cases, undertook the role of interviewer for me. They discussed fruitful topics that I probably would not have come up with in my interview guide. At times, they questioned and challenged each other’s statements, which led to interesting discussions, which revealed different opinions about artistic qualities, organizational aspects, and moral judgments. They also revealed gossip and information about other organizers and artists. As noted by Erving Goffman:

Two-person situations are not good because people can lie to you while they are with you, but with three people there, they have to maintain their ties across those two other persons (other than yourself), and there is a limit to how they can do that ([1989] 2002:152).

Before the interviews, I had prepared by reading artists’ statements and writings to trigger our conversations. When I interviewed organizers, I had, in
a similar manner, studied their festivals’ websites and grant applications for funding to prepare my interview guides (which I altered depending on the role of the informant, i.e., as artists and/or organizers), which included a mixture of “descriptive questions”, “structural questions”, and “contrast questions” (Corte 2012:80).

For the descriptive questions, I allowed the interviewee freedom to expand on the topics I was interested in. I usually began by asking informants how they made contact and began to make performance art and how it related to their artistic concept. Structural questions were asked so as to learn in detail about specific themes and problems such as curatorial concerns and (e)valuative principles. Contrast questions were used to verify the truthfulness of the responses, as well as to learn about the topic and themes by having them compared in unexpected ways (Spradley 1979). As Spradley emphasizes, “The meaning of a symbol can be discovered by finding out how it is related to all other symbols” (1979:156). Contrast questions were used to learn about the rules and symbolic boundaries of the informants. Most interviews were in English, but 10 of them were conducted in Swedish, which I later translated into English.

Coding and Analysis

The empirical material comprises primarily of field notes and interview transcripts, but also secondary material such as festival and artists’ websites, organizers’ application forms, YouTube videos (mainly artist talks), and festival catalogues which contained information on festivals and artists’ vision and statements. The field notes comprise 163 pages (65,482 words), around 6,500 images, and about three hours of video recording of performance artworks. The interview transcripts comprise 365 pages (146,241 words).

To facilitate the process of coding, I made use of the software program N-Vivo, which stimulated the structuring of the material by sorting out categories of meaning. N-Vivo made it possible to analyze the various sources of information in a productive way to capture the whole experience of my fieldwork. While working with N-Vivo, I made use of its memo function, i.e., I wrote down ideas, comments, analysis and reflections about text segments (cf. le Grand 2010:37). By constructing categories from the transcripts, I could extend them by analyzing photos and videos of performances and artist talks.

The coding process was structured by “background codes” (type and source of the empirical material), “substance codes (context of the gathered material), “descriptive codes” (festival organization, culture), and “in-vivo codes” (natural accounts uttered by the informants) (Aspers 2011:171). Additionally, I coded the material based on theoretical driven concepts from the theory of the convaluation, namely, social structure, culture, and value (Aspers 2008).
To support my observations with empirical evidence, I will make use of quotation marks to stress both single words and longer citations. Additionally, I will support some of my findings with photos taken during my fieldwork (cf. Banks 2008). I have selected some photos to provide a visual illustration of performances and activities in a festival setting to give the analysis more depth.

Ethical Considerations

This thesis is part of the ERC-supported project “Coordination by Evaluations and Valuations: Market Logic Inside and Outside the Economy”. The whole project, including this thesis, was ethically approved by the ethical vetting process in Uppsala (2013/172). In my examination of the (e)valuative culture among performance artists, I have taken the advice given by the Swedish Research Council seriously regarding “professional confidentiality”, “anonymity” and “confidentiality” (Hermerén 2011:66-7). In being as transparent as possible, before every festival, I contacted the organizers and informed them about my interest in their work and presented my research aim and purpose. Once contacted, the organizers introduced me to the rest of the festival’s participants and made everyone aware of my role and participation. When artists asked me about my partaking, I tried to be as open as possible, revealing my ongoing thesis project. I continuously tried to share my thoughts and findings with those who showed an interest in my work.

I have taken the confidentiality principles seriously and chosen not to reveal the names of the festivals I have attended. Nor have I presented any names of the respondents in the text, in order to reduce the possibility of identifying single (e)valuators, but rather to show the collective experience of the informants and how they go about (e)valuating one another. Even though one could argue that by using photographs as evidence, and thereby identifying sites and artists, I do not reveal whose judgments are displayed (cf. Banks 2008). All the performances are public and have been visually documented by various audiences and organizers. I have been partaking in more discrete situations such as informal talks and gossip situations. However, I rarely took photos in these situations and have not used any in the analysis.

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5 Marcus Banks (2008) provides a comprehensive introduction to the use of visual materials in qualitative research. The use of various types of visual material has, in recent decades, proven to play a significant role in qualitative analysis. This has also been the case for this study, since the gathered visual material supports and adds depth to the analysis.
3. A Switch-Role Structure

I will begin the analysis of the convaluation of performance art by examining the social structure of festivals—the pivotal activity of the contemporary convaluation of performance art. Though some artists tend to enact some roles more often than others, few are identified only as curators/organizers or artists; they tend to switch roles. This means that actors in this world, when being selected and thereby valorizing certain activities and performances, and when acting as artists, are being valorized (Aspers 2008: 15 ff; see also Cattani 2014; Debackere et al. 1994; Wijnberg 1995).

I will focus here on artists taking on the role of curators, and investigate how they make their artistic choice. For instance, what does it mean to curate performance art? What preferences do curators have when selecting artists for their festivals? What makes a good curator? And how is the success of a festival measured?

The chapter begins with an analysis of the role of the curator of performance art festivals. Then it investigates the process of selecting artists. Thereafter, we will see some admired features of curators. And finally, the chapter examines how the success of a festival is measured.

Taking on the Role of Curator

Curating performance art is considered to be a “noble” practice and involves a “spirit of spontaneity”, which makes curating a performance artwork quite different from art objects such as paintings, sculptures, installations, or videos. It requires a different form of coordination because curators usually do not know what to expect from the artists they have invited. As one curator explained in an interview during a lunch break at a festival: “With performance, you don’t necessarily know all the details of exactly how it’s going to go until you’re there in that space, at that moment” (Curator, April 13, 2014).

Since most of the curators I have met perform themselves, they know how important it is to feel free in one’s artistic production. However, there are of course limitations. I was told by one of them over a cup of coffee that: “When you invite an artist, he or she, has complete freedom, within material and practical boundaries of course” (Curator, May 22, 2013). Due to the tight budget of most festivals, there are economic limitations to what can be provided to artists in terms of material and the like. I have heard that artists have asked for
limousines, elephants, aircrafts, and so on to use in their performances. However, such requests are seldom fulfilled. In one of the festivals, I witnessed a performance by an artist/curator who, in her performance, stood in front of a table reading from a list of requested materials she had received during her time as festival organizer and curator. It was quite an amusing list covering many extraordinary materials and objects that artists had asked for. The audience, who were almost exclusively peers, were very amused by the performance, and from reading their facial expressions, I interpreted that they recognized themselves, laughing and nodding as she went on reading from the list—a list which spiced up the performance.

In general, there are few restrictions on what artists can and can’t do in the festival setting. However, distributing a performance in public spaces sometimes requires more dialogue with the artist. The organizers usually have received permission from the authorities to produce the festival in public places, still, curators prefer to check with the artists about possible “problematic” performances. As one curator explained in an interview: “In the public room you want to have some kind of dialogue. You want to know something about what is going to happen” (Curator, June 12, 2012). Some curators prefer to use written contracts as a precautionary measure. I was told, for instance, that one of the curators had put together a contract at the last minute because she had heard it through the grapevine that one of the invited artists, a student, had

Figure 3.1. The artist, which also is a curator, reads from the oversized list of requested materials by artists. In the performance, which lasted for about 20 minutes, the artist kept reading several artistic requests. At the end of the performance, the artist set fire to the list, and walked out of the gallery room.
planned to cut herself in her performance. The curator explained that they had felt that they rather would take such a performance from one of the more experienced artists because they did not want that in a student situation. The curator stressed that: “In some way you feel responsible, you know. And if you are young and inexperienced in the context of an excited audience, you might take it too far” (Curator, April 12, 2014).

Moreover, I have observed situations in which artists have constructed performances that could have put the festival at risk. For instance, in one of the festivals in China, there was one artist who was interrupted by the curator while doing his performance. The curator, who had been working hard to establish the festival located in a traditional western Chinese village, was furious when he realized that the artist in question put the festival in risk. I had been told beforehand that the police had sent out some people to observe the festival. The curator explained to me that the artist had “risked the festival’s existence” (Curator, May 24, 2014). I asked him about the incident, and he explained that political freedom in performance is of great importance, but, depending on the context, like this one, it could be problematic. Given his limited experience of organizing festivals in China, and knowledge that similar events had been shut down, he did not want to risk the festival and his own curatorial future in the region based on political dispute.

Figure 3. 2. The figure shows the performance that, according to the curator, could have become problematic for the festival based on its political message.

In the same festival, another artist did a performance in which he constructed a brick wall, using bricks he found lying around near a constructing site. For about four hours, he kept on building the brick wall, covering the
festival’s sponsor sign. I observed the performance with another artist who said that he found the performance “clever” and experienced it as a political statement, covering up the sponsors of the festival. Other artists also considered the performance to be an “interesting” statement, observing the performance intensively. However, after some time, when the wall was almost done covering the sponsors of the festival, the curator stepped in and ended the performance. Apparently, the bricks leaning against the sign had become so heavy that it was soon at risk of falling. The curator argued that he could not guarantee the safety of people passing by, hence, he disrupted the performance before anyone could get hurt or injured. The artist in question tried to reassure the organizer that he had control over the situation, but the organizer was not convinced and ended the performance.

Figure 3.3. The artist is building a brick wall outside the main space of the festival. Near the end of the performance, the organizer put an end to the performance due to the possible risk of injuring passersby.

Selecting Artists

Having described some curatorial concerns and how they deal with various situations, I will now focus on how curators make their artistic selections. A fundamental concern among performance art curators is to invite artists they consider “having”, “making”, or “becoming” presence. Curators have argued that some artists “simply” have presence which is “rooted in their persona and
being”. As one curator explained: “You know, some artists have strong attributes which give them presence” (Curator, June 12, 2013), referring to various artists who have characteristic looks or features, which is often tied to the context they work in. For example, western artists, and especially tall white men, tend to draw much attention during their performances in Asian countries because they stand out from the public. Other artists are valued for their skill to “make” or “construct” presence in various situations—meaning that they are considered to know the craft of constructing situations and via the combination of themselves and their environment, produce presence in some fashion. And some artists are recognized for “becoming” present with their surroundings, and with minimal means, “alter” atmospheres. One curator explained: “Some artists construct situations, while others have the ability to just become present. It is a wonderful gift. How some people can attune to situations and make you aware of those little things. I mean, some artists just have that in them—in their being” (Curator, May 22, 2015). Of course, some artists are valorized for mastering all of these attributes.

During my conversations with curators of performance art festivals, a number of qualities have become evident. Although curators have their own artistic concept and work from their own vision, they usually speak of similar typology of artists, each with their own qualities (however, some artists are recognized for having a mixture of these qualities). For instance, curators commonly invite a guest of honor to their festivals. A guest of honor is a recognized artist within the world of performance art who has made significant impact. They are also recognized for their performance art style, which endears itself to the curators’ own concept of performance art. These artists have been doing performances for a long time and developed their own artistic style throughout their careers. Their inclusion in festivals are important for the festival’s status. Their participation can encourage other recognized artists to come and join the festival. In most of the festivals I have attended, there have been one or several guests of honor, who have also been given the opportunity to give a lecture or talk about his or her artistic concept.

Another type of artist that curators have spoken of, are so-called “social artists”. Social artists are artists who brings with them a good atmosphere and provide the festival with “good energy”. One curator described one of his favorite artists as a “happy pill”, which he explained, brought with him a “nice atmosphere”. Another curator stressed: “You know, it is not only about inviting artists who bring interesting work, even if that is the main criterion, but it also has to do with personality” (Curator, May 22, 2013). Social artists are recognized for their social skills, which contribute to festivals’ “unity”. These artists are also recognized for their performances, which often aim to include onlookers. That is, they focus their work on audience participation and community engagement. In so doing, they have been referred to as “democratic artists” who are “great ambassadors for performance art".
In contradiction to social artists, I was told that there are also “divas”. One of the curators explained that: “Some artists have the tendency to absorb volunteers and keep them for their own purposes throughout the festival. There are certainly real ego cases that make you sick to your stomach” (Curator, June 13, 2014). Personally, I observed such behavior at one of the festivals that I attended. The artist in question had been invited as the guest of honor to hold a lecture on his work. During the festival, he acted quite disrespectful towards the organizers, volunteers and some of the other artists. I overheard a conversation between the organizers, who were disappointed and annoyed by the artist’s behavior. For instance, the artist in question had been disrespectful to the service personnel at the restaurant where the participants of the festival dined. The artist constantly nagged festival staff for free rides around the city (which none of the others were offered), appearing drunk during others’ performances, etc. I interpreted that the organizers were determined that this artist would not be a part of future programs and that they would warn their colleagues about his behavior. In direct opposition to social artists, who brought energy with them, this artist (and others like him) took energy.

Another outspoken artistic quality considered when inviting artists is about quantity. Festivals usually span over two to five days. This means that the invited artists have several opportunities to perform. In the eyes of curators, the more the merrier. Artists that produce several performances during festivals are referred to as “hardworking” and/or “self-propelling”. This was stressed by one of the curators: “Some work less and others work more. It is foremost a question of quality, but there is also a quantitative aspect” (Curator, May 23, 2014).

As we will see in the next chapter, most festivals provide “open situations” in the public room in which artists can produce work in addition to their given spot in the program. These sites and moments play a significant role in the democratization of art (the aim and vision among most organizers). Hence, curators admire artists who enjoy making “public performances”. As a curator explained:

I can get a read on who thinks it’s important to work in the public sphere or not. You can see, without judging, you see who likes to do it. Some do it several days and like doing it a lot. They show that they find public spaces important, while some don’t. Some might not be that used to working in that space. You know, it’s difficult space. It is where the unexpected might occur. Not everyone is able to grab those moments (Curator, May 22, 2014).

Another and significant type of artists are “newcomers”. Newcomers are students or more experienced artists who are “new” in the performance art world. The inclusion of newcomers plays a significant role in the future of performance art festivals. Newcomers, particularly from the younger generation, can “push the older generation to make qualitative work, because, sometimes if you invite the same artist over and over, they tend to be a bit lazy and
the quality of their work drops”, one of the curators stressed in an interview (Curator, June 12, 2014). One organizer, who focused on the “linking of generations”, argued that not only the young ones will learn from the older ones, but also the other way around. The organizer noted:

There are a lot of qualities in performance art that are not necessarily on the career ladder, which you can get around, regardless of age. It’s more about being there yourself regardless of experience. There are other qualities simply” (referring partly to non-commercial qualities and joint activity rather than individual success) (Curator, June 13, 2013).

Another curator explained that:

For us, it is interesting to invite students to give them possibilities to start linking with one another. Not just to be included in this family, because it is a long way to get somewhere there, because you need to be noticed first, you need to be in some festival, or need to be seen by someone and that could take a very long time. So it is good to have these kinds of festivals, which aim to provide meeting grounds for artists (Curator, May 22, 2014).

Curatorial Qualities

To be regarded as a good curator, you not only need to establish creative spaces and keep an open dialogue with the artists, but you also need to have the skill to seek funding and be creative in your production and organization. Even though curators do not want to speak much about funding and other economic issues, money of course matters. To be able to write strong festival applications and manage to receive notable funding (between 1,000 and 250,000 euros) is considered to be a curatorial quality. And since actors do not compete for the same funding (due to their organization of festivals in different countries and local communities), they learn “tips and tricks” from each other, for example, extending ideas at artist talks.

However, as previously noted in chapter 2, since most performance art festivals are small-scale productions with little funding, and artists take money from their own pocket coming to a festival (often sponsored by their national arts councils or other grants), another outspoken quality is the “creativity” in production and organization. That means that some curators are admired for their method of producing and organizing festivals making use of their local networks to contribute to their festival’s atmosphere.

Since most festivals struggle with little funding, but still aim to provide a professional and pleasant stay for festival participants, volunteers from local communities play an important role for most festivals. For instance, one of the curators was celebrated for providing his artists with “excellent” cuisine made by a local chef who has become known as the “performance chef”
among performance artists. During a chat with an artist at the performance chef’s table, she said to me: “I try to take part in this festival as often as I can just to enjoy this food” (Artist, June 14, 2013). Another curator was recognized for having good relationships with the local community, making sure that his festival is heavily attended by locals who are considered to be “supporting” spectators and interested in performance art—a relationship which has grown stronger from the first edition of the festivals up to the present day.

Other curators have been praised for their aim and vision, celebrating the core values of their practice, producing festivals that are strategically located to provide exiting performance art festivals. In particular, one of the most praised festivals, also known as the “pirate festival” due its aim and vision to “deframe” contemporary art, is strategically distributed in the streets of Venice, during the Venice biennale. The curatorial concept of deframing refers to performance art’s ability to function as an alternative to mainstream art, based on artists’ direct confrontation with their environment in order to provide platforms for cultural democracy. Distributed outside the walls of the biennale, it functions as an alternative means of experience art—one that is considered “less hierarchal” and less about “economic profit”. On the pirate festival’s website, one can read:

When we are asked why we wish to deframe contemporary art, we answer with other questions: why shall we maintain the gap between art and life? Why shall we exclude people from contemporary art? Each time a work of art is made for, or presented within the context of the framing art institution, the distance between art and life is maintained. Like a status quo. It is when art leaves the institution to meet life and its people that something happens, that the deframing of art takes place. That moment is a magical one. (Curatorial writing)

Measuring Success

Once festivals have ended, curators describe that there is little time for rest. Either they are participating in some upcoming festival or similar event, or they need to begin to work with their next edition of their own festival(s). However, before such work begins, they take the time to evaluate their recent festival. They evaluate “what was good”, “what was bad”, “what can be improved”, “how the artists experienced the festival”, etc. In this evaluation process, organizers also think in terms of success. They generally speak of two components of success: public success and communal success. Public success may be hard to measure: however, there are some proofs of success stressed by the organizers. For instance, festivals that have managed to establish yearly events and stable platforms is one way to speak of a success. As stressed by an organizer in an interview who celebrated his tenth edition described:
When [we] first started it was with some scandals, but since then we can say that [we] have won over the hearts and minds of the people [of that city] … When you have the fruit salesmen explaining the work of the artists to passersby, then you have achieved something (Organizer, May 25, 2013).

Public success can moreover be measured by the festivals’ attention value, that is, if it has attracted local arts councils or other actors within the local community that were interested in economic support or other forms of engagement.

Communal success concerns primarily the linking of artists with one another. As one of the organizers stressed: “A successful festival is not about the quality of the work, but it is the result. I mean, if the festival created some connections between the participants and so on. This connection factor is the value meter I think” (Organizer, May 24, 2014). This line of reasoning can be understood in relation to the relatively small community of performance artists. Even if there are many artists that do performances, few do it on a regular basis. The mission to bring artists from various collectives together and have them experience each other’s work is the aim for many upcoming performance art festivals. The cooperation and construction of new ties plays a significant role for the contemporary scene. Performance art festivals have been described as “family reunions” since there are relatively stable networks of artists participating in these festivals. Although this is a value in itself, it is also considered to be problematic, since it is evidence of a negative autonomization that leads to a more restrict definition of what performance art could be.

Summary

In this chapter, I have analyzed how performance art is curated, focusing on how artists take on the role of organizers and curators of performance art festivals. We have seen that the social structure of performance art festivals is based on a switch-role structure—meaning that actors operate as both artists and curators and as such, switch from being (e)valuated to (e)valuating others. This has consequences for their curatorial and organizational roles. Since most of the actors are both artists and curators, and share similar networks, their curatorial practice is affected by their own identity as artists.

Curating performance art is considered to be a noble practice involving a spirit of spontaneity. It is considered to be different from more traditional forms of curating, since the work being presented is often unknown beforehand. This in turn requires dialogue between curator and artists to limit the possible indifference and misunderstandings between them. For instance, we have seen that some curators make use of written contracts to ensure that artists do not endanger themselves and others. We have also seen that even
though curators do not want to have limitations, there are some constraints, and in particular, in terms of budgeting for what can and cannot be offered to artists and their performances. And furthermore, depending on the context of the festival, some performances can be considered problematic because they can endanger the existence of a festival. We saw this in the case of one of the festivals distributed in China, in which the curator ended two performances; one because of its political statement; and the other for its risk of injuring passersby.

Moreover, we have seen some of the curatorial preferences when selecting artists for festivals. In their selection of artists to their festivals, four types of artistic features have been stressed by the curators. Usually they invite a guest of honor, who is a recognized artist within the world of performance art and has made a significant impact. This is partly done to increase the status of the festival. Another type of artists are social artists, who stand out as bringing good atmosphere to festivals and contributing to the festivals’ community spirit. Curators also favor hardworking artists who make the most of their festival participation by constructing several performances. And last, newcomers play a significant role in festivals’ development and (re)production, and are considered to trigger older artists, who need to be on their toes when performing in front the new generation of artists, which in turn increases the quality of festivals. And as noted, some artists tend to have a mixture of these qualities.

Thereafter we saw some of the features that a good curator is considered to have. For instance, to be regarded as a good curator of performance art festivals, one should have the skill to seek funding and write good applications. Furthermore, it is important to engender a creative environment that makes artists feel comfortable by maintaining dialogue. And a celebrated feature among some curators is the aim and vision of their festival. We saw how one of the festivals was recognized for its strategic location outside the walls of the Venice Biennale, making it a pirate festival and alternative to contemporary mainstream art by deframing what is considered “contemporary” in the art world.

In the final section of the chapter, we saw how a festival is measured in terms of success. Curators speak of two general methods to measure success: public and communal. Public success refers to the festival’s ability to attract attention from the general public, but also, from local arts councils or other actors within the local community that were interested in economic support or other forms of engagement. On the other hand, communal success concerns (re)production of the convalidation of performance art, in which the construction of new ties is valorized to contribute to the future of performance art. Moving on, in the next chapter we will see how things are done at performance art festivals.
4. The Culture at Festivals

In the previous chapter, we saw how the social structure of the convaluation of performance art is based on a switch-role structure. In this chapter, the purpose is to analyze the “culture” (how things are done; Aspers 2008:1) at performance art festivals. For instance, how are festivals organized in terms of activities? How are performances constructed? How are they tutored? And how are public audiences confronted in the public room? The chapter begins with an overview of festivals. Then we will see how performances are constructed and tutored at workshops. Finally, we will see how public audiences might react to performance art works and how festival participants deal with such situations.

The Course of Festivals

Performance art festivals span over two to five days and usually have a program. The festival starts with an initial meeting for the core participants, at which 20 people at an average-size festival come together. They are usually served food and beverages (wine, beer, and non-alcoholic alternatives) as they are given practical information and possible alterations to the festival program. Artists are also set up in their accommodation and are given some leisure time before the formal opening of the festival. These encounters are also opportunities for artists and organizers to discuss in more detail about the organizational matters. Some festivals also organize workshops, which are platforms for artists to develop their performance art skills. The workshops often take place some days before the main festival and comprise primarily art students who have been invited by the organizers through their teachers. They are in general not open to the public.

The formal beginning of festivals usually starts with an opening ceremony in which the curator(s) presents his/her vision of the festival. The vision and aim for most organizers is to bring art closer to the general public. As one of them described: “We want to reach out with art to everyone. The idea that art is for everyone and that everyone is an artist is one of our festival’s foundations” (Organizer, June 12, 2015). Organizers, some more than others, believe that performance art contributes to “democratizing art”, and in so doing festivals are one of the most fruitful distribution channels to carry this vision through. The vision to contribute to the democratization of contemporary art
also has to do with the notion of expanding the discourse on art—to make it less “academic” as one of the organizers described on his festival’s webpage:

We do not separate people into categories, we do not wish to have an audience exclusively with an academic background. No, we want to reach out to everyone, to the people. And it is important to us. Because no one understands art better than anyone else. Everybody can understand and feel, think and imagine (Curatorial writing).

After presenting the festival’s aim and vision, usually a guest of honor is presented. A guest of honor, as we saw in the previous chapter, is a recognized artist from the local community that has made a significant impact on their world. These artists are invited due to their previous endeavors, but also add to the festival’s “attention value” (Ronström 2011). Some festivals also have the tradition of inviting members of the local arts council to say something about the festival and give their views on performance art in relation to the local community. These kick-off events usually take place in the evenings, are open to the public and have food (snacks) and drinks available. The number of people attending these openings has varied from 30 to over 150 including organizer(s), artists, volunteers, and visitors. Below, I will show an example of how some of these opening ceremonies sound:

I (1): It is my privilege to welcome you to three days of performance…We talk about it before and I find it very interesting when I meet people performing in the streets where I’m confronted alongside the public, who sometimes is not so familiar with it, so it creates an interesting tension, and also a moment in which you share something with other people who you don’t know and haven’t met before. I’m looking forward to this year and I say welcome to all the artists, some of whom I have met before, some of whom I haven’t, and am looking forward to three days of performances. I’m glad to be a part of this. Thank you. [Applaud] (Organizer, May 25, 2013)

I (2): I promised myself to write a speech when my brother told me that it was my turn to give the opening speech but I didn’t have time for it so I will actually just talk about the past a little bit, little about the future and something about the festival of course. This is the 9th edition we have presented in Gothenburg. Since we started in 2006, we have presented over 350 performances, outdoors and indoors at different institutions. We have presented 150 artists form 30 countries, so we are one of the most, I would say, international festivals that I can think of in fine art. And this is the last edition of this festival in this format. Because next year, for our 10th anniversary, we will change performance and develop it into something that we find interesting. You know that performance art is the art where you don’t know what the fuck will happen around the corner and we want to keep that thing going, so next year the festival will change form. (Organizer, May 25, 2013)

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6 The Swedish ethnologist Owe Ronström (2011) argues that festivals are deeply embedded in monetary, symbolic, and attention economies.
The opening ceremony is usually followed by some performances and/or lecture(s) (usually given by invited artists or art critics). The lectures are similar to academic ones, and include discussions of specific topics such as performance art’s interdisciplinary quality and its contemporary position in the art world. For instance, in one of the festivals, one of the participating artists held a lecture on the role of documentation in performance art. He presented some ideas about how to combine the experience of live performances and their post-presentation by showing his own work in which he had worked with a photographer who followed him around the globe taking photos of his performances. He emphasized the difficulties in such forms of presentation, arguing that a photo will never be the same as the live situation. However, he wanted to raise this issue among the other artists and discuss alternative ways to “capture” a live performance to keep it “alive” after its presentation. In particularly, how documentation became significant as a form of artistic “legacy”—a form of evidence that the performances actually took place. And moreover, function as post-representation of performances to be used for other purposes such as making of books and other forms of documentation of artists’ biographies.

In addition to lectures, more or less organized artist talks or panel discussion, are also common elements in performance art festivals. In contrast to lectures, these events are organized for the invited artists to discuss “hot button issues”. The talks are commonly moderated by one of the artists or the organizers and focus on issues concerning the contemporary world of performance art. Some of these issues have concerned alternative ways to distribute performances, the contemporary function of performance art, funding issues, networking, the possibilities and difficulties to work in various contexts, etc. Hence, artist talks play a significant role for performance artists since they provide intense sites and moments for negotiating value (cf. Moeran & Pedersen 2011). Artist talks and panel discussion can be considered to be the most concentrated form of the reproduction of the performance art culture (cf. Delanty 2011).

Lately some festivals have begun to video record their artist talks and upload them to YouTube channels so other artists can take part in their discussion. This has proven to be appreciated by members of this art world because they can follow what was discussed in festivals. Below I will present an outtake from an artist talk that was published on a festival’s YouTube channel.

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7 In their edited volume *Negotiating Values in the Creative Industries*, Moeran & Pedersen (2011) shows how fairs and festivals provide sites and moments for local communities to negotiate value. This is also the case at performance art festivals.

8 Following Delanty’s suggestion that festivals are places for the (re)production of culture, performance art festivals, and especially, focused events such as artist talks, contribute to the contingency of their culture, including the discussion of values.
I (1): I think nowadays we have a lot of performance art events in all museums and everywhere all over the world. But I think in this sense—where we are is “off-scene”, little money and everything, but we have a lot of performance art also coming now to the official places like MoMA. You know that. I am not sure. I am asking you: “Do you think it’s helpful for the idea and the movement of performance art that we have these big events? Or, do you think it destroys whatever original idea of performance art…if it goes too much to whatever maybe “market” or whatever it may be?” I have asked a lot of friends and find that there are a lot of different opinions about this. (Artist, April 15, 2012)

I (2): I don’t think that what Abramović is doing now is performance at all anymore, so I have a big problem with this MoMA exhibition. What I saw, it’s just shit what I saw. But I don’t see so much that other big museums have this, what do you mean, for example? (Artist, April 15, 2012)

I (1): I see a lot of openings, for example, when they do opening performances; they invite a performance artist to do this. You know Jonathan Meese in Germany, he is very famous, but not only him but also other artists such as Jon Block. You know, he is a performance artist. He is one of the most well-known German artists now. (Artist, April 15, 2012)

I (2): But I think it is a very different idea of performance art that these people have. Because they are selling things, they are producing products for the market, for the museums, they are producing pieces. I think most of us work differently. I don’t have a problem with this. They can do this, but I don’t think it helps us. It’s another form; it is a market that they are doing. Also, Abramović is just doing things for the market and in the market. (Artist, April 15, 2012)

I (4): I have an idea. I don’t care. In one way, I think it’s important that performance is recognized at that level because it gives performance credibility. And it doesn’t mean that individual artists must buy into the marketplace. This happens in all kinds of art practices in all kinds of disciplines. People make art for different reasons. There isn’t one art scene. There are many parallel scenes and I think that when I teach my students I try to explain to them that there are many ways that you can be an artist and function as an artist in the world. The only time I get upset with the designating [of] performance art people is … On CBC radio, a few weeks ago, Gian Gomeshi was saying that Lady Gaga is a performance artist. Lady Gaga is a celebrity; she is not a performance artist in my view. Marina Abramović is a performance artist. What she is doing now may not be very interesting to some people, like us, but it is interesting for other people who may be intimidated or don’t want to come to this part of town and deal with boredom. So, I feel it’s fine. It is not changing what I’m doing. So, the more the better. And you know, there is bad art. There’s always bad art and there’s good and it’s better to have more art whether it’s bad or good art, and then we can have a conversation about what we can describe as good or bad. That’s my opinion. (Artist, April 15, 2012)

I (3): If somebody who doesn’t know what performance art is learns that the museum of modern art is presenting this stuff and that person is a little more knowledgeable, that’s probably better than worse, because that person you
know may end up on some art support committee which ends up deciding whether we get money and rather than have that idea that this is legitimate, rather than let them continue to think that this is just crazy. I think it’s good and bad, but I figure if it legitimizes, it is probably better than bad. (Artist, April 15, 2012)

This small outtake from an artist talk at a performance art festival shows an ongoing discussion among performance artists concerning their commitment to operating “off scene” and “off market” in contrast to other recognized performance artists. Few of them make their living from their performance art work, but rather from their salary as teachers and/or the production of artifacts. Their interest in performance art is often grounded in the production of an art that is an alternative to their other artistic expression. They value performance art for its ephemeral qualities and that it was and still is for some artists different from market-based art. As the discussion above shows, performance artists recognize artists such as Abramović and John Block, but agree that these well-known names produce performance pieces for the market, something they do not consider themselves to do.

Moving on, there are often two sessions each day of the festival: a day session and an evening session. Day sessions often take place in public spaces such as town squares, parks, markets and so on. They are sometimes referred to as “open space”, “open ground”, or “common ground” in which most or all artists are expected to take part. During these sessions, there are no formal presentations of the artists. They just perform in the chosen area and are more or less self-propelled.

Sometimes artists carry out several performances during these sessions, which is seen as a quality among organizers because it is a sign that the invited artist is making the most out of his/her festival participation (as we saw in the previous chapter). Below there are two figures that show how typical performances may look in public spaces. The first figure shows a solo performance inside a market place in the south of France. And in the second figure a collaborative performance is displayed in which three artists have come together in the same space and their initial solo performances coagulate in the space.
Figure 4.1. The artist is dressed in cleaning towels lying on the floor inside a market in the south of France, cleaning the floor. Most of the onlookers did not bother to pay much attention to the performance, while others took great interest and tried to communicate with the artist, asking what she was doing while she was sweeping the floor with her body. She did not respond.
During the evening sessions, performances often take place inside galleries and/or museums. They are more organized in terms of time frame. Since there may be around five to eight performances during an evening session, artists are usually given around 30 to 40 minutes to carry out their work (there are exceptions in which artists do durational performances that can last from some hours to throughout the whole festival).

In contrast to performances taking place in public spaces, which are more spur-of-the-moment performances, and in which the main witnesses are people in their everyday lives, peers make up the larger part of witnesses in the evening sessions. In most of the festivals I have attended, the viewers of evening performances have made up of more than 50 percent of the festival participants. Consequently, the style and execution of evening performances are often more directed to peers. For example, artists commonly work in a more minimal fashion in which details play a significant part in the artist’s work that could have been difficult to spot in an outdoor environment. Here, one can observe peers’ behavior and conventional patterns of observing one another. For instance, peers often know what to expect and are also less afraid to confront the other artists, to study detailed signs of communication that add to the understanding of the experience of a performance. Such behavior is less common among witnesses in the streets.
The figures below are two examples of evening performances that are primarily witnessed by peers. These figures demonstrate the typical setting for indoor performances and peer witnesses’ perception. The documentation of performances in general is done by volunteers or by organizers themselves. This documentation is then used to archive performances and is used for upcoming events. There are also participating artists that take photos, but that is mainly for private use.

Figure 4.3. The artist walks around the space with blue pigment on his head and after some time he becomes interactive with the witnesses comprising primarily peers and the festival’s organizer and volunteers.
Festivals usually conclude with some sort of *ending ceremony*, including some words from the organizers. They try to sum up the total experience of the festival and thank everyone involved. One of the most memorable official endings of a festival I attended was at a festival in China. Before the festivities ended, there was an *open dialogue* (like an artist talk) in which the artists asked the audience (mostly art students from a nearby art school) about their experience of the festival. Some of the questions were about whether they had had a good time during the festival and whether they would consider doing performances themselves. Many of the students nodded and some responded that they had been inspired to create performances themselves. One of the artists ended the talk by saying: “We can only hope that the images we make stay in your heart as you grow. And if you remember us, you teach us that art is a completely universal language. And that is simply an amazing thing” (Artist, May 23, 2014).

**Constructing Performances**

When invited to participate in a performance art festival, most artists commonly do some “research” on the site and location before they opt to do their work there. The general rule is that you should bring new work to a festival to “communicate” with the local community. Such performances can be referred to as “site-specific” (cf. Kaye 2013). As we have seen, performance
artists value an audience comprised of people in their everyday lives, hence, they often try to construct their work in public places such as city centers, parks, markets, etc. They enjoy working in crowded places to try to engage with many people. Hence, as one informant noted, it is important to work with local signs and symbols to connect with the local public in some sense. This means that performance artists often seek some cultural significance of the site and use materials or body techniques to connect with the local public. It makes little sense to work with materials as metaphors that do not speak to the local community. Performance artists stress that to become present in a local community one should “pay attention to local manners” and “understand the rules of engagement”. However, they further note that it is important to bring “some part of yourself” into your performances. Fundamentally, it is the corporeality of the artist that gives a performance its attention value.

Occasionally when artists do their site-specific performances, they tend to be inspired by the same local characteristics. This is often the case when the local community is small and famous for a particular cultural practice. To give one example, I attended a performance art festival in the south of France, a small fishing village that is famous for being the center of water jousting, a tradition in which two challengers carrying a lance and a shield, stand on a platform on the stern of a boat. The aim is to send the opponent into the water whilst maintaining one’s own balance on the platform. During the festival, several artists constructed performances that had some reference to water jousting. The two figures below show two artists carrying out performances inspired by this local characteristic.

![Figure 4.5. An artist is standing by the canal in the center of Sète. She is painted red and equipped with the traditional lance and shield used in water jousting.](image)
Figure 4.6. This photo shows another artist who has made use of water jousting in his performance, which took place down at the dock at night time.

The artist in the first figure described how she had done some research before coming to the festival and found out that the town was very famous for its water jousting. She stressed that:

In water jousting, they use the two colors of red and blue. Red has always been a color that I have worked with. I learned that water jousting is only for men, so I wanted to create a warrior character which symbolizes a woman (Artist, June 13, 2013).

Inspired by the water jousting, and the fact that it was primarily a male-dominated sport, she used her female identity in the performance. Moreover, she explained to me that she commonly worked with the color red because it symbolized both “femininity” and her heritage growing up in China. She explained: “I always try to bring some part of myself into my work” (Artist, June 13, 2013).

I spoke with another artist (see Figure 4.6) doing a similar performance in the evening in the same town. He also described how he had read about the tradition of water jousting before coming to the festival, which had inspired this performance. Using a different strategy from his female colleague, the artist in question had scanned the town during the day for materials to use in his performance. He found a spear similar to the one the female artist had found, but used a trash can lid as a shield and dressed in a fishing outfit.
This is one example of how artists sometimes become inspired by the same local practices and use them in their performances. Related to evaluative concerns, peers may find it interesting that artists end up creating performances from similar observations. It shows that they share similar working strategies and share similar interests. Since an artist’s personality strongly influences each performance, the risk of “copycats” is rather small. However, I have met artists who have felt that they need to change their intended performances at the last minute because other artists in the same festival (often the same day) have made site-specific performances “too” similar to what they themselves were planning to do. Hence, some artists have learned that it is good to spend some time on their research about local communities to find a range of various characteristics to have alternatives if they feel that other artists are doing similar performances, and at times, perhaps better than their own idea.

In contrast to site-specific performances, artists also like to challenge themselves by coming somewhat empty-handed to a festival to rely on their creativity in situ. I call these performances ethnographic performances, since they are constructed from artists’ observations and examination of the local communities in real time. I will show three example of such performances here. The first two performances symbolize artists who walk around the festival’s location and find situations without using any materials in their construction of performances. Their method is to work with the environment and recognize situations which they find interesting. Such performances are commonly described by the artists themselves as the production of live imagery.

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9 This can be related to what is known as “the ethnographic model” (Foster 1996) that has been part of artistic production since Surrealism in the 1930s (Clifford 1988) to the avant garde-inspired experiments of the writing-culture debate of the 1980s (Marcus and Fischer 1986) and the “ethnographic turn” within contemporary art of the early 1990s (see Foster 1996; Coles 2000).
Figure 4.7. The artist in the middle of the picture stands on his knees in a parking space for motorcycles. Before coming to this site, he had been walking around the area for some time, trying to find a space to work with. He stood there for approximately two hours, while owners of the parked vehicles came and went. Some were a bit confused, while others asked him what he was doing. Occasionally he responded: “I’m parked here”.
Figure 4.8. The artist stands against a flagpole around which he has wrapped his hooded jacket. He stood there for approximately three hours.

While the first two examples of ethnographic performances focus on “live imagery”, the third example demonstrates an ethnographic performance which focuses more on public identification. This performance took place at a festival in China during which I was invited on a city tour in downtown Guangzhou by some festival participants. We were walking around the shopping district, guided by one of the festival volunteers. The streets were crowded with salesmen who practically dragged you into their stores. Everywhere you looked there were salesmen, standing on chairs, clapping their hands meanwhile they were shouting at passersby to enter their stores. Inspired by the salesmen, one of the artists produced a performance the day after in which he imitated their behavior. Outside the festival’s main space (a gallery), in a village square where the festival took place, he set up a chair and a table. On the table, he placed two bottles of red wine and a pack of plastic cups. Then, he went up on the chair and started clapping his hands. There were about 80 to 100 people present, and after a minute or so, some of them approached the table, pouring some wine in the cups and drank. Once the cups were all used up, he stopped clapping his hands and crawled under the table and carried it away on his back.
4.9. The artist stands on the chair and claps his hands while people are pouring and enjoying the red wine he has put on the table. This performance was a result of the artists’ experience of the seller’s behavior downtown.

The above-presented performance is one of many ethnographic-performances I have observed at performance art festivals. These performances came into being based on artists’ ethnographic (observation) skills, a common method used to challenge oneself to engage with local communities. As one of the artists put it in an interview:

I like to observe people in their everyday situations in order to connect with them in some way. Working in new places is hard, but also the most interesting way to develop your own concept. Performance art is about connectivity you know, and learning about local manners enables you to connect with others (Artist, June 2, 2015).

If successfully executed, ethnographic performances can impress peers. On several occasions, I have overheard artists complimenting one another on their observational skills. To recognize local customs and behavior and then construct performances around them in an interesting way is often praised by fellow artists. It is a skill that artists develop throughout their careers as performance artists. As was stressed by one performance art organizer: “You know, the best artists are those who have a peripheral vision. I mean, artists who can recognize moments of presence” (Organizer, April 14, 2013). More evidence of such praised performances can be found on performance art festivals’ webpages and artists’ Facebook pages. As we will see in Chapter 5, social media such as Facebook plays a significant role in the objectification and praise value for artists. When fellow artists capture live imagery on camera
(often with their mobile phones), and share those images on their Facebook timeline, they become objects of (e)valuation and rise in objectivity (cf. Heinich 2000).¹⁰

Teaching Performance

I will now show how performance art is tutored at performance art festivals. As usual, when I prepared my visit to a performance art festival, I tried to get as much information as possible by scrolling around the festival’s webpage, which usually provides the necessary information about the general structure and scheduled events. On one festival homepage, I was informed that they would organize a workshop for art students, three days before the opening of the main festival. I sent an email to the organizers and asked if it was possible to observe the workshop. They replied saying that I had to check with the tutor myself. Luckily for me, I had already met the tutor in Boston when I was visiting a performance art school so I emailed her and asked if it was possible to take part in her workshop. She replied: “Yes, I think it is okay. Hopefully the students won’t mind either, but I think that what I plan to do will be okay for someone to observe. BUT, I might ask you to do some of it too” (Tutor, May 2, 2014). I responded that I was pleased to participate in the workshop.

The workshop comprised 12 participants including myself and the tutor. The first session began with a short presentation of everyone. I was the odd one out and informed the group about my role as a research student and the aim of my thesis work and my intention with the workshop. I had already met most of the students in other festivals so most of them knew of me and my thesis project. The students were mainly from Scandinavia, one from Poland and two from the U.S. Most were visual art students, but there were also two participants who came from performing arts schools.

After the round of presentation, we discussed issues concerning fears in making performances and what it means to make art and be an artist. Some spoke about the fear of presenting oneself in front of others, while others spoke about the fear of being considered a “spectacle” (to make a fool of oneself). One of the students described himself as a “licensed fool”, arguing that the framing of art gives you a certain freedom to act “crazy” and that you can hide behind the concept of art and being an artist. The others smiled and I felt that they more or less agreed with him. Then we were given notebooks to write down our experiences and reflections as the discussion went on. The notebook was also to be used for home assignments.

After the first session, which lasted for about an hour, we were asked to reflect and write down the following questions:

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¹⁰ Nathalie Heinich (2000) suggests that we can measure the objectivity of an artistic event by following the admiration given too it from its moment of creation to its final praise.
• Why are you an artist?
• Why do you make artwork?
• For whom do you make your work?
• Who is your audience?
• Who has it been or who do you want it to be?
• What do you feel is your obligation to your witnesses?
• What is your obligation to yourself?

In addition to answering those questions, we were instructed to bring material for the next day to work with. The only requirement was that it should not be so precious that others could not use it, and moreover, there should be enough of it to be able to work with it several times.

For the second day, I brought a used carpet I had taken from home, as material to use in the workshop. Before we presented our materials, we were asked to write our first thoughts upon waking up that morning in our notebook. Then, we should name three things that we were most aware of that morning, from getting out of bed until arriving at the workshop. After this, we were instructed to lay down our material in front of us. Then we were told to move one step to our right. Thus, we were all faced with material that someone else had brought with them. I found myself in front of an ink pen, which came to be my working material. Then we were asked to find a space to work in, anywhere in or outside the building, examine the material in that place, using all our senses.

I took the ink pen and walked across the space and entered a storage room. In there I found a space on a shelf and began to examine the pen. It soon struck me that I wanted to make it into a musical instrument. I began to disassemble the pen and reconstruct it as a flute. After 15 minutes, I returned to the circle as we had been instructed. Next we were required to write down our experience and describe the material. What senses did we use the most to examine it, and what senses did we use the least? Furthermore, we should describe the space we had chosen to be in, what interested us about the space, how our body fit within it, what we still knew about the space. After this, we were sent back into our chosen space and were now asked to examine the material, experience the space, and discover what we didn’t find the first time, using different senses, a different physical orientation in the space. As I returned to the space I began to be more attentive to the space and investigate it further. Since it was a storage room, there were lots of tools, props and other kinds of objects in the space. Thus, there were a lot of different impressions to take in.

When we returned, again, after 15 minutes, we were asked to write what else we learned about the material and the space, what other associations arose this time around, what the differences were between the first and second time we examined the material and the space, and what did this experience make us understand about ourselves. Then we were asked one last time to go back
to the space and examine what the material and the space wanted to know about us.

I returned for the third time around and tried to set my mind to the given task. What did the material and space want to know about me? I found myself in a kind of meditative state, feeling very tired. I had to push myself and concentrate on what the environment could possibly like to know about me? After spending another 15 minutes in the space I returned to the circle exhausted. This time we were asked to write down how we let the material and space speak to us, what they taught us, how we oriented ourselves—physically and psychologically—to the material and the space change, how were we in the space differently, did we feel our bodies differently, what did we not let them know about us?

The final part of this task was to bring the rest of the group with us, who would operate as witnesses. I was first out and guided them into the storage room. In there, I showed them the ink pen, which at this state was completely broken and torn apart. I was instructed to show the group one action which I felt I was equal with the space and the material. My initial aim was to transform the pen into an instrument, a flute or something like that. The more I worked with it, the more I broke it. My hands were colored blue from the ink. When in the third round I investigated how the space and material spoke to me, I found the word “trasigt” (broken) written on the wall, which was a section for broken amplifiers and other damaged goods. The action I presented for the group was that I held the broken pen pointing to the word written on the wall. My intention was to connect the pen, which I had investigated, but was now in such state that it belonged to the damaged goods section of the room. The students who knew Swedish connected quite quickly with the idea of the “broken” and translated the word for the English speakers, who then smiled and nodded. I experienced an interesting connectivity in the space and for some time I felt part of the group, setting aside my role as observer.

After my presentation, we went around to the other’s spaces in which they also presented part of their performative actions. Then we were sent back to write about our experience:

- How was it different with witnesses?
- What felt new?
- What did we discover?
- What wasn’t the same?
- Were we equal players with the space and the materials, or was one or another in control?
- What images, associations, impressions, and memories did we have in response to the action?
My overall experience of this first part of the workshop, which lasted over two days, made me aware of how one can think about becoming present. I experienced the combination of practice and theory (asking oneself why and how questions about one’s actions) functioning as a method to become aware of one’s action through various communicative triggers. As I have described above, this became especially evident when we were asked to find out what the environment wanted to know about us. For me, that was challenging and I experienced a physical reaction to it in the form of intense fatigue. The whole process, which was divided into three steps, made one pay attention to the object, the space, one’s body, your concept, and the time frame, which made me feel exhausted, but also excited.

Reflecting on an artist’s description that performance art is a way to “merge yourself phenomenologically”, my own experience of this exercise could be analyzed as a phenomenological investigation. A phenomenological investigation can be understood as:

an attempt to set aside what we already know about something and describe how we come to know it; it is a matter of tracing the process by means of which we give meaning to the world (Benton & Crib 2011:84).

While phenomenologists use this methodology to examine taken-for-granted knowledge about the social world, performance artists use this approach to experience awareness through becoming present. This is not in any way unique to performance art, but is used in other art practices as well (e.g., Figal 2015). However, since the bodily presence is core in performance art, this way of merging oneself into a situation to discover awareness in various forms (in situ and reflections of such through writings) is one way to develop one’s performance art skill.

While the first part of the workshop focused on becoming present and experiencing presence through the means of using an object and trying to connect it with a chosen space. The second part of the workshop focused on the examination of social systems.

On the last day of the workshop, we were given 30 minutes to go outdoors, preferably in a busy part of town, and find two or three social systems to examine. While there, we were to stay in the location and watch how it operated. We were instructed to bring our notebooks so we could take notes. We should reflect upon what the organizational principles were in that location. What were the rules of engagement?

Everyone took their notebooks and went outside the space. Most students spread out and chose different directions. I found a path leading down to a dock where I began to study people’s movement on the sidewalk. After the 30 minutes, I returned to the space where we were required to answer the following questions:
• How are the rules of the system communicated?
• Is it possible to encounter the system before you are told, or can you learn the rules?
• In what ways is it possible to not be able to learn the rules?
• What is acceptable or proper behavior in the system? And how do you know?
• What is unacceptable or improper behavior in the system? And how do you know? Who enforces the rules?

The next time we were sent out, we were instructed ask for help. We were to choose one system we had identified and go out there again to spend time in it and engage within it. Our task was to observe how other people used the system. We were asked to pay attention to their energy dynamics, the amount of time that they spend engaging with it, whether they were happy or sad, relaxed or stressed. When and if we would encounter some aspect of it that we didn’t understand, we should ask for help, which should be a genuine request, not something we pretend to not know. She further instructed: “Do not worry, there will always be something that you do not know or understand. Take your time to discover your question, and to decide whom you want to ask and how you want to ask. If one question is answered quickly, find another, deeper, question to ask.”

I stayed with the social system I had observed down at the sidewalk and returned there. I concentrated on how people had made use of or had not made use of the white street surface markers. I observed how people moved and whether they followed the rule of walking on the correct side or not. My task was to ask for help, and learn more about the system, so I decided to ask a man on which side of the sidewalk I was supposed to walk.

It became an interesting meeting. At first he was quite sure whether you should walk on the right side, but then he became uncertain. He picked up his smartphone and googled it. He found out that according to the recommendation, you were meant to walk on the left side on smaller roads, and that bikes and other vehicles were meant to keep to their right. I thanked him for his help and then he moved on. I was surprised that he pulled out his phone, and spent that much time helping me out. I returned after the 30 minutes to the space where we were instructed to write how it felt to ask for help.

• Was it easy or difficult to get someone to help you?
• What adjustments did you make to be successful in receiving assistance?
• What else did you learn about the system?
• And lastly, do you understand the system differently now?
In the last round of our examination of our chosen social system we were instructed to offer people help. We were supposed to find someone, within the system that we were examining, and offer them assistance, and have it accepted. We were told that this may take more than one attempt. So, we set off once again and I retruned down to the sidewalk. This time around I was scanning the system to locate whether there was someone who needed assistance. This wasn’t an easy task. I experienced it as a quite challenging task and had a hard time finding a situation in which I could offer help. I mean, how could I offer people help on the sidewalk?

However, after some time, I spotted a woman who was walking her dog. She was taking pictures with her phone as she walked along the dock and it looked quite difficult, because the dog was going in the opposite direction. I walk up to her, quite nervous, and asked if she needed help holding her dog while she was taking pictures. My first thought was that she would reject me in an instant and think of me as a crazy person, but I was once again surprised when she accepted my help. I held her dog for a short period of time while she took a photo of the river and then handed the leash back to her. She thanked me and kept on walking.

I was quite euphoric and returned to the group yearning to share my experience with them. I returned to the space for the last time and was required to answer the last set of questions.

• How did it feel to offer help?
• How was it received?
• Did you have to make adjustments for it to be accepted?
• Do you understand the system differently now? Of the two tasks – asking for help and offering help, which was easier, and why?
• Which was more difficult, and why?
• What does that make you understand about yourself?

The workshop ended by us summing up and discussing our experience in the group. It was an interesting discussion and sharing of our experiences. The larger part of the discussion was about our last task, asking to help others. This was, for most of the participants, the hardest and most challenging task, but also, the most interesting one. I shared with the group my experience with the woman and her dog, and other participants had had similar encounters, putting themselves in unusual (unknown) situations. There was an excited tension and atmosphere in the group. Everyone wanted to share their experiences.

In her last words, the tutor concluded the workshop by saying:

Making art, making actions, are about systems of exchange. Performance art can be as real as these actions that you did. These in fact could be considered performances, if you framed them as such (Tutor, May 22, 2014).
I had written in my notebook, *Sidewalk meetings*, and I guess that that action became my first realized/framed performance artwork.

As we can see, the last exercise of the workshop reminds us of sociological methods to investigate rules of engagement. In fact, contemporary artists have also been identified as “unaware sociologists” in their art making (Suberville 2015). This is based on the observation that contemporary artists engage, and become triggered by more and more complex conventions in a globalized world. The artist’s role has been, and still is, about exploring social conditions of human behavior and seeking new meanings and perspectives. And there are various methods to reach such investigation. For instance, many performance artworks can be associated with ethnomethodologists *breaching experiments* developed by Harold Garfinkel (1967). Even though artists and sociologists have different purposes and aims in their examination of social systems, there are some similarities worth examining. While ethnomethodologists aim to *breach* commonly accepted norms, performance artists aim to connect and communicate meaning in making themselves and others aware of everyday situations (with references to Kaprow’s aesthetics of the regular experience, see chapter 1, page 9). One central element in breaching experiments is to identify a social norm to break in order to learn more about social norms, social order, and the unwritten rules of society that people take for granted. In a similar way, performance artists examine social systems to find triggers to make people aware of their surroundings—to explore presence in “things we ignore”.

Public Reactions

In this final section, I will show how public audiences might react to performance artworks executed in public space. Passersby or other public spectators in the streets are one of the main targeted audiences in performance art festivals, and so, their reactions and possible interactions are the most significant ones if you ask the artists themselves (even though peer recognition seems more important for a few). In contrast to conventional audiences, who come to see a play or musical performance, passersby more or less “end up” in a performance without having planned to witness it beforehand. Performance artists consider such interaction with people in their everyday lives as co-producers of their performances. The constant flow of people in their everyday lives (including people who work in public spaces) play significant part of performance production. Many artists construct their work based on interactions/confrontations with people in the street.

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11 Moreover, Nathalie Heinich notes in an interview that “contemporary artists are the best sociologists, but through their acts rather than through their writings” (Machete 2010).
Depending on the performances, more or less attention is given to performance artworks (most passersby do not bother to stop and witness actions, especially, in larger cities). While some artists choose minimalistic actions, blending into crowds, others prefer to do more attention-seeking works. A successful performance done in the streets (public space) is one that generates dialogue between artist(s) and passersby. Below I will show an example in which an artist managed to engage in a dialogue with some passersby after his performance, which was executed in the Gothenburg city center.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 4.10.** *The image shows how the artist, the one in the middle with red pigments on his face, discusses his performance with some teenagers who witnessed the performance.*

The artist with red pigment in his face had constructed a performance in which he laid on the pavement, pushing his face on a white pillow, stamping a red cross on it. The performance gathered a crowd comprising around 20 onlookers. After the performance ended, the artist engaged in a dialogue with some teenagers who had encountered the performance and watched it as it unfolded. They were asking the artist about his performance and wondered what he was doing. He explained that he was part of a festival and that he was doing a form of “street art”. They continued their discussion for about five minutes, greeted the artist and vice versa, and then they moved on their way.

In the same festival, some 100 meters away, another artist carried out a performance which included nudity. She had wrapped herself in a fishnet, wearing only her underwear. This performance drew much attention and someone called the police, who came after a while and disrupted the performance. When the policemen began to investigate what was going on, festival
participants came to the artist’s rescue and explained that there was a festival taking place, and that they had permission for it. After some 10 minutes, discussing and reading the permission, they let the artist continue with her performance, which by this point, had attracted a larger crowd.

Figure 4.11. The artist stands silent as the policemen negotiates with one of the festival’s organizers.

This performance and reactions to it exemplify performances that draw attention based on their provocative or shocking presence. Many artists play with the boundaries of public acceptance and use various methods to challenge conventional behavior. But most of them would argue that they are not doing such performances “only” to provoke, but rather to trigger their concept and the message they want to communicate with their environment. In the performance presented above, the artist later told me that she had stripped down to her underwear, only to dress herself in a fishnet, to which she later stuffed some dead fish she had bought from the marker nearby (the famous Fiskekyrkan in Gothenburg). She explained to me that she wanted to do a performance that symbolized the city, and had learned that the fishing industry was part of the city’s history, hence, making use of fish to carry out her performance.
Summary

In this chapter, I have analyzed the culture (how things are done) at performance art festivals. Festivals are organized in terms of activities. Festivals usually begin with an opening ceremony, in which the curator(s) present their aim and vision of the festivals. Then, some performances usually take place. Festivals moreover have organized lectures held by an invited artist and focus on some relevant issue concerning the performance art world. There are also organized artist talks or panel discussions, in which hot button issues are discussed. These events are praised by many artists, since they provide the opportunity to discuss and learn from each other how to think about and organize events in their local communities. Moreover, festivals often have a day and an evening session. In the day session, most performances are held in public space and aim to interact with public audiences, while at the evening session, most performances are held in an indoor space and mainly observed by peers. Festivals usually end with some sort of ceremony before everyone involved returns home.

I observed two common strategies artists used in their construction of performances: site-specific performances and ethnographic performances. The first strategy refers to performances that are based on some research on the specific context in which the performance will be executed, while ethnographic performances often come into existence in situ based on artists’ creative observation skills. Artists commonly make use of both of these strategies in their construction of performance art events.

Moreover, performances can be tutored at workshops. I partook in a workshop comprised of two parts: one that took place indoors and in which we were supposed to investigate ourselves in a space with an object; the other part focused on how to integrate with a social system, in which I confronted people down at a dock, asking them for help. These methods were similar to phenomenological and sociological investigations of presence and social systems. The tutor used tools such as objects, space, witnesses, written considerations, and interactions with people in their everyday life to stimulate our experience of how a performance art work can be constructed.

Finally, we saw how public audiences can react to performances in public space and how they are being confronted by festival participants. Most performances fail to attract large crowds, but if they are provocative in some sense, and challenge normative values around nudity, violence, fire or destruction, people are more likely to stop and observe/engage in such performances. However, as we saw, festival organizers do not have an interest in making a disturbance in public space, but rather, in stimulating interest in performance art activities among general audiences. Hence, they often act when a performance evokes strong reactions by informing people about the situation and explaining the purpose and aim of such actions. However, regarding the sometimes seemingly provocative performances I have witnessed during my time
at festivals, very few have caused any major disturbance, but rather, gone by
unnoticed or engaged people in the performance in a calm and explanatory
manner. In the next chapter, we will see how performance artists valorize one
another in concrete situations and find out more about the value of presence.
5. Recognizing and Valorizing Performance Art

We have so far seen the social structure and culture of the convaluation of performance art. This is the background to an analysis of the more concrete values that are established and that bring order to the world as a result of the convaluation. What concrete values become central? In other words: what is valued in the convaluation? We have seen that there is a structure that is accepted, filled with known incumbents, and there is a culture of how things are done in this convaluation. Let us now turn to the specific valorizing practice that takes place among peers in concrete situations.

I will analyze four situations in which performances become valorized. First I will analyze one of the most praised performances I observed and show the process of its praise value. Praise value can be understood as people (peers in this case) who have witnessed a performance and “talk about their experience and try to describe their feelings of elation or disappointment by comparing the action to others,” (Hutter 2011:206) older performances that the person listening to the judgment might know or have heard about. Second I will show what I refer to as a dark performance, which exemplifies another type of performance that triggers moral judgments, inspired by the term “dark play” (Schechner 2002:108). Third I will analyze an action that fails to become recognized as a performance but is instead valued as a theatrical act. Fourth, we will see how such an act turns into a performance event as a result of the interactions of an audience member.

A Praised Performance

One of the most praised performances I witnessed during my fieldwork took place at 6 pm on May 31st, 2014 inside a gallery room at Gothenburg Konsthall, Sweden. The space was a conventional white box with a stone floor and glass ceiling. Alongside some 10 festival participants, I waited for the performance to begin. On the cold stone floor, there were two charred logs and the room smelled like a bonfire. It was all quiet as the artist entered the space. He picked up the charred logs, placed one in his mouth, and the other in his left hand, and began to walk around in a clockwise fashion. The action
went on from 6pm until 10pm. During the four-hour long performance, viewers, comprising almost exclusively peers, came and went. During the performance, some of them whispered to one another, “Look at the image”, “It’s very graphic”, “So raw and simple”, “What a great space”, “He is really present”, “Very poetic”, “Strong image”.

5. 1. The artist walking around in circles with logs for a duration of approximately four hours.

As I moved around in the space, taking seriously the “cat on the prowl” metaphor (Thornton 2009:xvii), I heard how some peers discussed the concept and strategy of the performance. They knew the artist in question and had seen previous works of his. From what I could hear, this action was similar to another he recently did in a festival in China. That performance was based on the idea of visualizing a Western working day, by walking around in dirt, carving up an “8” for a duration of eight hours. I overheard how one of his peers praised that performance and compared it with the ongoing one to another colleague: “I love his concept. It’s so pure and honest” (Artist, May 31, 2014). As the performance continued, I walked over to the two artists talking, whom I had previously met and spoken with. I told them that I had overheard them talking about the performance in front of them and asked them to develop their thoughts about what they consider to be a good performance and what makes the ongoing performance interesting. One of them stressed that: “A good performance for me, hmm, should have a strong concept, I think” (Artist, May
The other one agreed and filled in: “For me, performance art is based on the elements of the body, the space, time, the material, and the concept” (Artist, May 31, 2014). We continue our talk for about 10 minutes (silently, almost whispering in order to not disturb the ongoing performance) about how the present performance fulfilled their criteria of being an interesting performance. Our conversation developed into an analysis of presence (brief but informative).

To begin with, they both considered that the artist’s ongoing performance had an interesting concept—reflecting a repetitive toilsome labor. They described how the artist in question “became present” through the choice of “space”, “time-frame”, and “materials”, each equally important elements in the performance. They described how his body symbolized a “worker” who operated in a space that for them represented some type of “factory”, with its stone-cold floor and hard white walls. They further noted the durational repetitive movement of walking around-and-around in a circle symbolizing “repetition” and “a clock”—representing the duration of a workday—an observation which was colored by one of the artists’ previous experience of the artist’s previous action in China discussed above. Moreover, in order to realize and clarify the performance’s intention (potential meaning), they stressed the artist’s choice of materials, two charred logs, which for them strengthened the concept of the performance. And finally, they experienced an “emotional dimension” in the performance by reading from the artist’s facial expression, which for them expressed “pain”. One could observe that the log in his mouth was hurting and made him bleed, as he walked around in circles, and from time to time, he took out the log from his bleeding mouth for some seconds before inserting it again. This “important” detail, they argued, gave the performance an interesting dimension, making them experience a “personal struggle for survival,” as one of them put it. The fact that the artist began to bleed from his mouth provided a “realness” and “rawness” to the concept, which they considered be about a form of “hard-working”, “back breaking” labor.

Besides peers’ comments in situ, one of the organizers sat on the floor and recorded the performance with his smartphone. The day after he posted a 5:06 long video on the festivals Facebook page writing: “A study of [the artist’s name] durational work (4 hours) approximately 720 circle was drawn during the action at the Göteborgs Konsthall May 31 2014”. After following this post in the aftermath, one could read comments like, “simply love his work”, “I’m impressed… Amazing action”, “Beautiful work”, “love his work”, “Super again”, “Great action, great meaning”.

Even though the utterances in situ demonstrates an admiration of this performance, from an analytical point of view, the recording by the organizer and the posting of it on Facebook, made it possible to analyze the performance’s objectivity (Heinich 2000). People who were not present at the performance could take part in it through the posts on Facebook, and in doing so, give their
own comments to it and become mediators in its process of praise. First, the act of posting it made it become objectified and visualized for peers or Facebook friends of the group who had not been present during the festival. It was also their “likes” and “comments” that in a measurable way gave the performance an event-like structure. In addition to the organizers’ post, which added another dimension to the performance in his attempt to count the circles the artist did during the action, he used “objects out of action”, the video recording in this case, to bring attention to it. This triggered the attention among peers and fellow members of the Facebook group. In quantitative terms, from its publication (posting) on Facebook from June 3, 2014 to September 12, 2014, the event had been received 82 likes and 12 comments.

In terms of temporization, the recognition process could be measured from its posting on June 3rd to its last posting on September 12th. In relation to other observation on Facebook postings, this was by far the longest period of time. One should keep in mind that once the post is commented on or liked, it once again becomes “present” for actors to think about it and stimulate their memory of it. Thus, for them, the performance holds an event-like status. That is, it stands out among many other performances they have experienced. Lastly, the commentators’ role as mediators play significant part in the performance’s possibility to reach a renowned state, or even in the long run, reach a posterity-like recognition, meaning that the performance has become recognized by a general public (cf. Bowness 1989; Lang & Lang 1988).

In fact, online platforms such as Facebook play significant role in the contemporary performance art world. Artists can follow what is going on in festivals and become part on the process of praise. In so, they become part of objectifying one another’s performances, meaning, giving them attention and in so, make them perceptible for others. However, it is a different form of experience, in contrast to artists who witnessed the performance in real time.

A Dark Performance

In addition to praised performances such as the one discussed above, I have observed performances which can be understood as “dark performances”, a term inspired by “dark play” (Schechner 2002:108). Occasionally, some artists make performances that are questionable in terms of moral judgments. Among certain performance artistic collectives, there is a culture of pushing one’s own and one’s witnesses’ limits. This often shows through physical demanding performances which can not only become dangerous for the artists, but also, require moral responsibility from those who are present. Dark performances are actions which shift in nature and trick witnesses into participating in a risky situation, which can make them feel responsible to act. I will recount a dark performance that took place at one of the festivals and the reaction to it.

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This performance I will describe here took place in the evening inside of a gallery. Along with some 40 viewers, I stood in the entrance of the gallery and was invited into the room by the artist. Once we had all entered the room, the artist began to pick up stones she had taken from outside, took aim, and began to throw the stones at glass bottles she had lined up on a long roll of white paper. It was reminiscent of a bowling alley. Then, she instructed us to pick up stones and throw down the glass bottles.

Most of us came up, aiming to break the bottles. If you were able to break some bottles you received applause, contributing to a vibrant atmosphere in the room. However then, when most of the bottles were crushed, the artist took a jump rope and started to jump on the glass on the paper carpet. The tension in the room quickly changed from a cheerful spirit to a serious one. The artist kept on jumping and stepped on more glass, which made her feet bleed heavily. She finally reached the end of the paper carpet which now had been colored red with her blood. Members of the audience were beginning to talk with each other and the organizers became more and more concerned. At this point, she had lost a lot of blood and you could sense the smell of it in the room. Some members of the audience left the room at this point. What had initially been a collective joyful activity, had now turned into a serious and frustrating situation.

Figure 5.2. The figures show how the performance unfolded.

When she reached the end of the paper carpet, the organizers and audience members came up to her and asked if she was okay. They began to examine
here feet and decided to take her to the hospital. One of the audience members who knew her followed her in a taxi to the hospital. He stayed there with her overnight.

I later interviewed the organizers of the festival and we spoke about their experience of the action. They told me that as a curator and organizer, you do not interfere in performances. However, they were rather disappointed with the artist in question because she had not informed them about her intentions beforehand. They felt “hoodwinked”, because she had told them that she thought that they would have had stopped her and not allowed her to carry out the performance if they knew what she was going to do. But they explained: “We could have had a medic and we could have scheduled her work as the last one in the program, because the following performances suffered from the atmosphere of that performance” (Organizer, June 2, 2014). They explained that when you work in a festival, you belong to a part of a greater whole. They were disappointed that she did not inform them about such a risky action and had then asked her friend to follow her to the hospital. According to the organizers, she broke their trust: “If she had informed us before, it would not have been a problem. Then we could have done some preparation” (Organizer, June 2, 2014).

The organizers further described how one of them had had a talk with the artist after the festival in which she had apologized. She had written an email in which she had explained herself. So, the organizers explained that they had no “bad vibes” with her. One of them said:

I think she makes strong work. I have seen two strong and two weak ones. But I think she is an interesting artist and she brings with her a color, because she is from another culture, even if she is now based in Berlin, she brings with her something new and interesting (Organizer, June 2, 2014).

They further noted that if she had not cut herself that much, which took over the event, it would have had the chance to become “really good”. But now the focus was on all the blood. In their view, the action would have been better if she had wiped away the glass with the jump rope. Because in their understanding, and in their conversation with the artist, she though that it would wipe away most of the broken glass. The performance could have been stronger if she had used fewer bottles, in their opinion, while still getting her message across.

The organizers further explained that many of the participating artists were sore about the work because they felt that she had “used” them to injure herself. She had made some “basic errors”, by dragging everybody into the space before she began the performance. One of the organizers explained that:

She didn’t let the audience make their own choice, but dragged us in to this swindle of having fun throwing the stones to break the glass bottles. If she had only let us do it voluntarily, but now she pulled us in and it became morally
wrong. It is one thing if you yourself walk into the trap and not think, even if that is also tricky and to some extent wrong, but when she drags you into a trap it is very wrong I think. You feel manipulated. (Organizer, June 2, 2014)

A Spectacle

Above, I have presented two performances which, for different reasons, stood out as singular events during the festivals they took part in. One of them was praised for its poetic meaning, while the other one evoked moral judgments. However, very few performances managed to captivate peer audiences within this art world (that would also be true in most other art worlds), which means that they are most likely to become “non-events” since their post-recognition is likely to be very short (Heinich 2000).

To be able to create a performance that might become an event, artists need to have an understanding of the world’s conventions in order to make something original or surprising. Nothing is, according to Heinich (2000), more limited than the work of the artist who tries to cross borders without becoming excluded. Artists who do not play by the rules of the game are condemned to remain invisible. Heinich notes that:

Only those will remain in the spotlight who successfully abide by this double limitation, this rigorous discipline that is on the one hand the mastery of the rules of the artistic game, while, on the other hand, the mastery of their possible modifications (Heinich 1998:57).

Based on the praise and moral judgments in response to the above presented performances, I will now analyze what I refer to as “non-performance events”. That is, performances that fail to meet the rules of the game.

Performance artists I have spoken with have described how they sometimes feel a bit ill at ease doing performances at festivals, due to the works of other participating artists who are making “spectacles” rather than doing performances. To give some examples, I was standing with one artist in Gothenburg watching one of the other participating artists doing an outdoor performance in which she was lying smoking and coughing on a stretcher, carried around by two of the other artists, dressed as doctors. We discussed the work as it unfolded and although the artist beside me found some meaning in the work, he said that it was: “A ridiculous way to promote it” (Artist, May 31, 2014). He then told me that: “How could I possible do something after this?” (Artist, May 31, 2014)

My experience and interpretation was that he felt like an outsider in this company, a festival which was promoted as a performance art festival, but where the trained eye could soon recognize that the majority of the invited artists came from very different artistic backgrounds and cultures. It became
clear for me that some artists that adhere strongly to the concept of performance did feel like outsiders at this particular festival. I came across one of them talking to the organizer at the end of the festival, explaining that the festival’s curatorial concept had been somewhat unclear to him. The organizer seemed to agree and told the artist in question that he had been disappointed with some of the artists who had made what he felt was bad work. Especially, he spoke about one that took place during a day session, in which two of the artists had dressed up as star boys (stjärngossar), and walked around an outdoor market. The organizer explained that he had felt embarrassed, both on his own behalf and on the behalf some of the other artists who believed such actions made a fool of them and the festival.

![Figure 5.3. The two artists walking around an outdoor market dressed as star boys.](image)

What I try to show here is that even though these actions presented above can be considered meaningful, they failed to convince their peers, based on how they were executed. I have come across a saying in the performance art world that goes, “there are no bad performance ideas, but there are thousands of lousy ways of realizing them”. Drawing from this notion, artists that amplify their performances, are likely to become recognized as “spectacles” by members of the convaluation of performance art. This, however, does not mean that there is no place for such actions; there are other festivals that admire such work, but the performance art festivals I have attended are not the places to bring such work. Consequently, artists who have been known to pro-
duce spectacles have little chance of being invited to the festivals I have attended. Nonetheless, I have seen how so-called spectacles can turn into performances.

From Spectacle to Performance

In a festival in China, I witnessed an action which, from the start, was labelled as a spectacle due to its theatrical features, but that would become recognized as a performance based on the act of another artist from the audience. The action took place in a village in Guangzhou. The artist in question had let three goldfish out into a small creek that surrounded the ancient village where the festival took place. He climbed down into the creek and took one of the fish in his mouth and began to crawl up against the wall of the creek. He continued crawling like a lizard crossing the town square into the gallery, which was the main space of the festival, keeping the fish in his mouth the whole time. When he entered the gallery space, he put the fish down in a bowl and put on the costume that covered some wooden boxes that he used as legs to become taller, taking the shape of a godlike creature. After a while, the artist began to eat the red roses and ended the action by picking up the fish bowl and dropping it on the floor, leaving the fish splattering on the stone floor.

Figure 5.4. The images show how the artist began his action in the creek and continued his action inside the gallery space.
Soon after the action ended, one of the other participating artists in the festival grabbed the fish that was lying on the floor, and ran outside and put it back in the creek. Some of the audience members followed him and applauded him for saving the fish. His interaction in the action added another dimension to it by changing the attention from the previous performer to his “moral” act to save the fish that had been left to its own destiny.

This action exemplifies various reactions and strategies that performance artists make use of in the construction of their performances. First, it shows how an action, considered among performance artists, to be a spectacle due to its theatrical presentation (acting like some kind of animal turning into a godlike creature, which might be praised more for its aesthetics than its concept). Second, it made one of the audience members interact, saving the fish. I could not figure out if the artist doing the action intentionally left the fish on the floor hoping that someone would save it, or if it did not matter to the artist whether someone would react to it. Based on similar actions, in which artists have used living animals, one does not harm animals in performances. The evaluative culture among members of the convaluation of performance art allows one to include animals, but any sign of abuse or putting it at risk, is not likely to be accepted. The action presented above, is the only action I witnessed where the animal was left to its own destiny, resulting in another artist saving it. Intentionally or not, the performance came to be about the saving of
the fish rather than the using of the fish in the action, which based on my interpretation of the peers’ reaction to it, was morally wrong.

Summary

In this chapter, we have seen evidence of what is valorized in the convaluation of performance art. I have taken a pragmatist approach, studying the work of art. We have seen how praise value made one of the performances rise in objectivity, based on its post-recognition on social media. This performance was recognized for its “presence” comprising of the mixing of the elements of time, the space, the body, the material, and the concept in a balanced manner. Then, I presented a so-called dark performance, in which the artist in question was judged based on her manipulative methods. In her performance, she invited the audience to break glass bottles, which she later jumped on, making her feet bleed so heavily that she needed to visit the hospital. Even though this became a recognized performance, it showed how the evaluative culture among performance art organizers wants to be prepared if a performance might become dangerous, and that there are limits to how manipulative one can be in constructing performances.

Third, we saw how some actions were judged to be spectacles, based on their theatrical orientation. We saw how one artist explained that he felt uneased going through with his actions after witnessing other artists carrying out what he recognized as spectacles. This shows that artists who make more theatrically oriented work, such as dressing up in a particular manner (which did not symbolize any particular feature of its surrounding), or amplify a situation to unfold a narrative, are the odd ones out in performance art festivals.

Further, I presented how a so-called spectacle turned into a performance based on one of the audience member’s reaction to it. In the action, a goldfish was left to its own destiny splattering on the ground when suddenly, another participating artist came to its rescue and put it back in the creek from where it first came. This action emphasized the culture I have observed among performance artists concerning the use of living animals in their actions.
6. Conclusion

The purpose and aim of this thesis has been to study cultural valorization among contemporary performance artists. Based on ethnographic fieldwork at festivals, I have examined how contemporary performance artists valuate one another and their practices in situ. Theoretically, I have taken a structural approach and examined the social form called convaluation, whose structure brings order to social life by producing and reproducing values, roles and as a consequence, identities of performance artists and organizers/curators. The study has addressed the overreaching question: *how do performance artists valuate one another?* To answer this question, the study aims to address the general question of *how art becomes valorized.* In this concluding chapter, I will summarize my empirical findings through the use of the analytical model convaluation—an alternative model to existing literature on cultural valorization.

**The Convaluation of Performance Art**

In this study, I have provided an overview of the convaluation of performance art—a partial order within the world of art at large. In so doing, this study has aimed to contribute to the discourse on how art becomes valorized. I claim that, by studying performance art, we can inform on value making and value constitution in many other cases as well, particularly in other aesthetic fields. My finding in this largely autonomous social world is accounted for by the notion of convaluations (Aspers 2008). However, I also claim that by gaining this knowledge, we learn more what is characteristic of more traditional art worlds, such as when painters are included to present on the walls of the Salon in Paris, organized by the Academie des Beaux-Arts (White & White 1965). Finally, I claim that by studying autonomous art worlds, we also learn much about other autonomous convaluations, such as when academics give out awards and scholarships (Lamont 2009).

To address the question of how performance art becomes valorized, I draw on Patrik Aspers’ (2008) notion of convaluation, which focuses on form rather than content, and analyzes the structural conditions of valorization. The starting point is that no single individual is able to valorize an object or person: to do this takes several people. People do not necessarily valuate in concert, but it is neither a process of chaos. The idea is that concrete values are established
through the structural form called convaluation. In the world of performance art, the existence of this form is in fact a condition of the order.

In many areas of life, order is the result of a decision by actors who have the authority to decide, such as when the state decides what is right and wrong, manifested in law. Much of social life, however, is not coordinated through means of the bureaucracy and its chain of command. Without one central actor with power, the power is often distributed amongst many hands, and notions like status, identity and esteem are frequently used to account for how order emerges and is maintained.

What is good or bad, of high or low value can of course be decided, but runs the risk of lacking any form of legitimacy or support. Much of what we value is, in contrast, consequences of interaction in which several actors take part. This, however, is only exceptionally the result of mutual adjustment of individuals, so that one can speak of a grown order. Aspers (2008) suggests that valorization processes should be accounted for using the notion of convaluation.

Convaluation refers to the structure of interrelated roles, which is at least stable enough in relation to its environment (e.g., performing arts and other art worlds). The convaluation can either become ordered based on an already established value, a standard convaluation, or it can be based on the specific actors who make it up; their interaction is in this case fixating on what is valued. Performance art can be analyzed using the idea of status convaluation, since it is the actors filling the positions in the structure who define what is “good” and “bad” rather than an existing value determining the status of the actors, such as performance artists.

Convaluations are made up of interrelated roles filled with incumbents, and values that exist over some time. Thus, convaluation is form, in contrast to decision, viewpoints and the like that are made by single actors “unrelated” to one another. In a convaluation a “decision”, i.e., an attempt to affect others, or the outcome of the process, has an effect because of the legitimacy of the convaluations’ actors. Culture — with norms of interaction and its specific rules — contributes to recognition and perpetuation of a convaluation.

To address the question of how performance art is valued, I have aimed to provide a structural explanation. The explanation thus takes a step back from the concrete observations. To establish the explanation, I have traced the acts of valorization, and identified the position of those valorizing “decisions”. I have traced actors separated from positions, and investigated how they switch positions in the social structure, from being performers to evaluators and vice versa. Thereby we can identify the form of the convaluation. I have also studied the culture that helps to bring order to their collective. Finally, I have looked at the concrete values—i.e., what is behind the concrete activities that are selected to take part in the performance festivals. In the following sections, I will provide a summary of each empirical chapter, following the logic of the
key concept of the convaluation of performance art; its social structure, culture, and “orthogonal” value (cf. Heinich 2011). An orthogonal value encompasses several values (qualities) which either reinforce or weaken a more general value. In the case of performance art, ”presence” can be considered an orthogonal value which can be judged as more or less real, depending on whether the perceiver experiences the performer’s action to be real or staged.

Switching Roles: Evaluating and Being Evaluated

To begin with, we have seen that the social structure of the convaluation of performance art is characterized by a switch role structure—meaning that actors operate as both artists and curators and as such, switch from being evaluated to evaluating others. Taking on the role of curating performance art is considered to be a noble practice involving a spirit of spontaneity. Curating performance art is different from more traditional forms of curating, since the work being presented is often unknown beforehand. This is considered a quality of performance art and one of its main characteristics. However, in order to establish tolerable performances, some dialogue between curator and artists is often preferable in the interest of limiting the possible meaning differences and misunderstandings between them. Some curators make use of written contracts to ensure that artists do not endanger themselves and others. But in general, curators and organizers aim to make the invited artists as free as possible in their production, since they themselves want to feel free in when they are invited to other festivals. However, as we have seen, depending on the context of the festival, some performances can be considered problematic because they can endanger the existence of a festival. In one of the festivals in China, we saw how the curator ended two performances; one because of its political statement; and the other for its risk of injuring passersby.

An essential part of curating performance art is to select and invite artists. I found that there exist essentially four types of artists. There exists a so-called guest of honor. A guest of honor is a recognized artist within the world of performance art and has had a significant impact. Guest of honor can play a significant role in increasing the status of a festival. There are also what I refer to as social artists. Social artists stand out as bringing good atmosphere to festivals and contributing to the festivals’ community spirit. They are valued for their social ability to glue the festival’s participants together. Another type of artists is a hardworking artist. Hardworking artists make the most of their festival participation by constructing several performances and operating as a helping hand throughout a festival. They are valued for their dedication to the performance art form. Finally, we saw how newcomers play a significant role in festivals’ development and (re)production, and are considered to inspire older artists, who need to be on their toes when doing actions in front the new generation of artists, which in turn increases the quality of festivals. And as
noted, some artists tend to have a mixture of these qualities. For instance, a
guest of honor is often an artist that is praised for holding the combined fea-
tures of the three other types of artistic features mentioned above. In other
words, an artist that contributes to the future of the performance art convalu-
ation by representing the core qualities’ peer value in one another.

To be regarded as a successful curator of performance art festivals, one
should be skilled in seeking funding and writing good applications. It is also
important to create a creative environment making artists feel comfortable by
maintaining dialogue and organizing activities to spice up the festival. For
instance, as we saw, one of the curators is known to offer a celebrated cuisine
that has become renowned by actors in this convaluation. Other curators have
been recognized for their strong will and vision to bring performance art into
the streets, aiming to contribute to cultural democracy in their local commu-
nities. We saw how one of the festivals was recognized for its strategic loca-
tion outside the walls of the Venice Biennale, making it a pirate festival and
alternative to contemporary mainstream art by deframing what is considered
“contemporary” in the art world.

The Culture of Festivals

In addition to the analysis of the social structure of the convaluation of perfor-
mance art, we have also seen the culture (how things are done) at performance
art festivals. Performance art festivals share similar activities. Festivals usu-
ally begin with an opening ceremony, in which the curator(s) present(s) their
aim and vision of the festival. Then, some performances usually take place.
Performance festivals usually organize lectures held by an invited artist and
focus on some relevant issue concerning the performance art world. Addition-
ally, there are sometimes artist talks or panel discussions, in which hot button
issues are discussed. Artist talks have been praised by many artists, since they
provide opportunities to discuss and learn from each other how to think about
and organize events in their local communities. Performance festivals often
have a day and an evening session. In the day session, most performances are
distributed in public space and aim to interact with public audiences, while in
the evening, most performances are held in an indoor space and mainly ob-
served by peers. Festivals usually end with some sort of ending rituals before
everyone involved returns home.

We have also seen how the culture of producing performance artworks is
characterized by two common strategies artists used in their construction of
performances: site-specific performances and ethnographic performances.
The first strategy refers to performances that are based on some research of
the specific context in which the performance will be executed, while ethno-
graphic performances often come into existence in situ based on artists’ creative observational skills. Artists commonly make use of both of these strategies in their construction of performance art events.

Moreover, performance art festivals sometimes provide workshops in which artists can take part to develop their performance skills. I described my own partaking in one of the workshops, which comprised of two parts: one that took place indoors and in which we were supposed to investigate ourselves in a space with an object; the other part focused on how to integrate with a social system, in which I confronted people down at a dock, asking them for help. These methods were like phenomenological and sociological investigations of presence and social systems. The tutor used tools such as objects, space, witnesses, written considerations, and interactions with people in their everyday life to stimulate our experience of how a performance artwork can be constructed.

Finally, I showed how public audiences can react to performances in public space and how they are confronted by festival participants. Most performances I witnessed failed to attract large crowds, but if they were provocative in some sense, and challenged normative values around nudity, violence, fire, or destruction, people were more likely to stop and observe/engage in such performances. However, as we saw, festivals organizers do not have any agenda of making a disturbance in public rooms, but rather, to stimulate an interest in performance art activities among general audiences. Hence, they often act when a performance evokes strong reactions by informing people about the situation and explaining the purpose and aim of such actions. However, regarding the sometimes seemingly provocative performances I have witnessed during my time at festivals, very few have caused any major disturbance, but rather, performances have gone unnoticed or engaged people in the performance in a calm and explanatory way.

**Valorizing Presence**

Finally, we have seen evidence of what is valorized in the convaluation of performance art. I took a pragmatist approach, studying the work of the work of art. I showed how the process of praise made one of the performances rise in objectivity, based on its post-recognition on social media. This performance was recognized for its “presence” comprising the mixing of the elements of time, the space, the body, the material, and the concept in a balanced manner. Then, we saw a so-called dark performance, in which the artist in question was judged based on her manipulative methods. The artist in question, invited the audience to break glass bottles, onto which the artist later jumped, making her feet bleed so heavily that the artist needed to visit the hospital. Even though this became a recognized performance, it showed how the evaluative
culture among performance art organizers requires forewarning if a performance might become dangerous, and that there are limits on how manipulative one can be in constructing performances.

Moreover, I showed some actions that were judged as spectacles, based on their theatrical orientation. One artist explained that he had felt ill at ease carrying out his performances after witnessing other artists carrying out what he recognized as spectacles. This demonstrates one of my main findings concerning values, that artists that make more theatrically oriented work, such as dressing up in a particular manner (which does not symbolize any particular feature of its surroundings), or amplifying a situation to unfold a narrative, are the odd ones out in the performance art festivals that I attended.

However, we also learned that some “spectacles” can turn into performances based on its interaction. I showed an example from a festival in China, in which an artist used a goldfish in his performance, leaving it to its own destiny splattering on the ground when suddenly, another participating artist came to its rescue and put it back into the creek from where it first came. In doing so, the artist who had saved the fish stole the attention and brought the action another dimension, making it one of the most discussed performances in that festival.

Contribution

In this study, I have provided an analysis of the convaluation of performance art—a partial order within the world of art at large. In taking on this form, this study has aimed to contribute to the scholarly discourse on how art becomes valorized. This approach allows one to analyze a world of art (field/system/network) from a different angle than what is commonly done by cultural theorists (e.g., Becker 1982; Bourdieu 1993; 1996; Heinich 1996; 2009). We can thereby address new questions and get other answers than what, for example, the approach of Bourdieu (1996) enables. I certainly confirm the received view that art for art’s sake is central; a parallel argument to the inverted economy of art. However, Bourdieu’s geometric space presupposes what it is supposed to explain, namely the ordered distribution of capital of the field.

In addition to Becker’s (1982) notion of art worlds, the analytical model of convaluation provides focus to some of the essential concerns that the notion of an art world seeks answer to (Becker 1982:36). Becker’s notion of art worlds was criticized by Bourdieu, who argued that “what is lacking, among other things, from this purely descriptive and enumerative evocation are the objective relations which are constitutive of the structure of the field and which orient the struggle aiming to conserve or transform it” (Bourdieu 1996:205). By employing the model of convaluation, one can extend Becker’s analysis of art worlds, focusing on how (e)valuative practices order and differentiate art worlds.
In a similar manner to Heinich’s (1996;1998;2009) pragmatist perspective on art, the model of convaluation provides a set of concepts which offer a focus of investigation to explain the consequences of artistic valorization. Heinich’s sociology of art focuses on the concepts of “singularity”, “pragma-tism”, and “objectivity” (van Maanen 2009:95-101). Inspired by an actor-network perspective, Heinich blames sociologists such as Becker and Bourdieu for neglecting the value of the exceptional, instead only valuing the general powers that determine creative work from the outside: the market or the social environment (Heinich 2000b:201).

In her analysis of how art becomes valued, Heinich (1996) claims that artistic processes of argumentation are directed by both a communal and a singular value regime. In this case, communal values are all possible observations and forms of reasoning that presuppose the conformity to the group and social conventions. Within this regime, the evaluation of the artifact as well as that of the artist depends on a relational context. Within the singular regime, on the other hand, artifacts and artists are considered as such. The observer looks for the distinction, the deviant, etc. The evaluator approaches the artifact or the artist according to the dichotomy between adoration/no adoration, and tries to construct a line of argumentation on this basis. Whereas the communal regime relates the value of a work of art to conventions, the artistic standard and the history of art, the singular regime pays attention to abnormality, excess and deviation. Heinich (1996) argues that both of these regimes form the art world. Moreover, the deviation from the standard or from a historical frame of reference can only be determined if one has some notion of the collective standard or of a shared historical frame. Yet, the two regimes do constantly function in a state of tension within the same network. A work of art or an artist is related to the knowledge of artistic conventions, the history of art, etc. that it or s/he expresses.

However, in her critique of Becker and Bourdieu, Heinich presumes a “hidden coherence” although pushing for a descriptive approach, arguing that there are underlying criteria gluing collectives together (e.g., Heinich 2011 and van Maanen 2009:98). Hence, the model of convaluation can provide an answer to the ordering principles of cultural valorization (in this case peer recognition) by examining how value regimes are anchored in social structure and culture. This makes it possible to analyze peer evaluations—taking both a pragmatic and structural perspective.

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12 In her analysis of the glory of van Gogh, Heinich (1996) shows how van Gogh functions as a stepping-stone to describe how judgments of contemporary art changed from valuing the common to value the unique (the person).
Outlook

An interesting topic for further research would be an exploration of convaluations in other spheres of social life. Following the recent trend among economic sociologists and organizational researchers, who have extended Bourdieu’s theory of fields of cultural production to argue that (e)valuation processes in cultural fields are not different from other domains of society, more investigations on convaluations in various domains provide a comparative study of sociology of (e)valuation. And in addition to the examination of evaluative practices such as conventions, the self-concept of evaluators, criteria of evaluation, the role of non-human actors in the evaluation process, and emotional aspects of evaluations, examining convaluations also sheds light on theories of valuation, once emphasized by John Dewey (1939). For instance, we can learn more about (e)valuations by addressing issues concerning: When is valuation and when is evaluation employed? How is valuation carried out when there is no standard according to which actions, things, and people can be evaluated? Is there a difference between evaluations of people and things? By examining such inquiries, we can learn more about how processes of valuation, evaluation, and valorization affect social life in general.
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Web sites


Video clips

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Interviews
