One of the great and dramatic confrontations in the art of the twentieth century was the struggle between anti-theoretical and pro-theoretical principle in the approach to modern art and culture.

Anti-theoretical modernism in painting, theatre, dance, poetry, prose, or film was the foundation of the modernist civil mainstream. Anti-theoretical modernism or high modernism was based on the canonical ideas of the autonomy of art within society, the intuitive creation and reaching super- or pre-verbal existential experiences and aesthetic values. In high modernism, the knowledge of art was as a rule treated like synthetic (or experiential) knowledge of the appearance of a work of art. As far as high modernism is concerned, the theory always followed the creation as the critical and poetical interpretation of a work of art that came into being from non-transparent creative intuitions, which meant that the criticism and theory of art possessed subsequent representational functions in the processes of understanding, archiving and valuing the unattainable creative act and its effect, or in other words, its product. Anti-theoretical modernism saw theory as more or less useful, but certainly not as unavoidable surplus of social value.

Pro-theoretical approach within modernism was connected with the interdisciplinary tactics of the avant-guard (Artaud, Brecht) and neo avant-guard (Richard Schnechner) phenomena, which were the result of the critical or subversive resistance to the high modernist mainstream. Pro-theoretical approach was based on anti-canonical notions that the autonomy of art is relative and functionally determined by the political organisation of the public and the private domain, that is to say, of free time and working hours, or of the controlled and uncontrolled institutionalised creative context. Therefore, the creation is seen as something coming from the conceptually envisaged or theoretically determined starting points while the notion of non-transparency of intuitions in high modernism is critically seen as one important and determining, but tacit conceptual or theoretical construction. In this sense, the theory of art is not the superstructure of receptive and aesthetical experience but constitutive and constructive practice of every artistic creation, even the one that presents itself as anti-theoretical. From this point of view, the anti-theoretical nature of high modernism is shown as a developed theoretical system of the horizon of identification the impossibility of artistic expression and articulation. Pro-theoretical approach is in principle developed as:

- self-reflexive approach, when artistic work becomes the research of a specific process of artistic creation and the function of art in the world of art, culture, and society;
- conceptual approach, when the artist plans, executes and offers the work for reception on the basis of exhibiting concepts (ideas, notions, mental representations) leading to the problematic provocation of the artistic practice, although the concept itself does not necessarily acquires theoretical interpretation or verbal utterance, and
- theoretical approach, when the work of art or the artistic practice are executed within theoretical intentions, theoretical networks of interpretation, theoretical objects as examples of art or theoretical practices.
Pro-theoretical approach in art most often becomes *performance* practice because it is based on the tactics (concepts and procedures) of *performing* the self-reflexive, the conceptual or the theoretical within the artistic practice itself. The history of pro-theoretical approaches leading to *performance art*, results from two areas of action of artistic avant-guards and neovanguard-arts: (1) from experimental work in the theatre, and (2) from performing procedures within art (painting, sculpture, poetry, film).

*Performance art* in the theatre designates such theatrical practice, which moves from the concept of the theatre as a representational art to the theatre as a researching performance practice. For example, the idea of the theatre as a laboratory, as artistically institutionalised space where theatrical art is experimentally and theoretically researched (acting, dance, direction, choreography, scenography, ritualisation of everyday life, theory of theatre or theory of culture and society) is typical of modernism and avant-guard: the research of psychological aspects of acting introduced by Constantin Stanislavsky, the biomechanical experiments by Vsevolod Meyerhold, mechanical/mathematical ballet by Oscar Schlemmer in the Bauhaus, the dance school by Rudolph von Laban. Modernist and avant-guard theatrical laboratories are characterised by (a) a utopian project of the transformation of the theatre into an all-encompassing work of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), and (b) poetical and pedagogical function of the laboratory as a domain of theoretical and practical preparation for public appearance. In neovanguard-arts and post avant-guard sense, the notion of theatrical laboratory was introduced and developed by a Polish artist Jerzy Grotowski from the early 50s until early 70s (Teatar Laboratorijum – Vroclav, and his later work in the USA). Grotowski’s work went through the formative period of critical examination of avant-guard tradition, of the formulation of *poor theatre* (pure theatre), in the late 60s, giving up the normal theatrical practice for the total experiment and research of borderline areas of ritual and spiritual micro-relations (spiritual and existentialist education) of a group of associates at the beginning of the 70s. Theatrical/performance work is understood as an incentive for researching and verifying both the spiritual and physical existence of the individuals involved in the process of the theatre as art. The idea, the spiritual condition, or the interpersonal relations among the individuals transposed into the scenic, or as scenic-like, or as proper to laboratory, or to extra-theatrical space become a model for factual, fictional, and spiritual learning of the accomplices. In other words, the institutions of the writer, dramatist, director, scenographer, costume designer, etc., merge in an open and critical institution of the accomplices/performers.

The move from the neovanguard-arts (the examination of the avant-guard tradition and the immanent criticism of modern theatre) and subsequently from Grotowski’s post avant-guard laboratory (post historical evocation of the theatrical, artistic and cultural traces) to postmodern theatrical laboratory-school-workshop was done by Peter Brook, Julian Beck from *Living theatre*, Richard Schechner and Richard Foreman from *Performance group*, Eugenio Barba’s *Odin Theatre*, Robert Wilson, the school of the group *The Thing: Theatre of Mistakes* (London). The development of post-laboratory work, that is, the performance work, leads to the conception of post-theatrical practice as the metaresearch of theatrical concepts as art and social practice (metatheatre) in the following ways: (1) to formal physical, spatial, and temporal research of discursive and non-discursive theatre as well as to the examination of avant-guard tradition; (2) to the theoretical and political formulation of the nature of theatrical experiment (post avant-guard phase on the turn of the 60s to the 70s; typical is the politisation of *Living Theatre* and the equalising the domain of theatrical action with the domain of political action in
the physical and environmental event; (3) to the criticism and deconstruction of an exclusive and autonomous modernism – returning to the ritual shamanist break of fundamental theatrical relationship between the actor and the audience (Grotowski), to the research of cultural post theatrical relationships (Schechner) and extra-European rituals, dancing and theatrical rituals and magical systems (Barba), so that it was possible to establish a multi-genre, pluralist and eclectic theatre of ritual typical of postmodernist nomadic or trans-movement from metatheatre to pararitual archetypal act. Schechner developed a complex field of performance studies that steps out of the domain of the theatre as art and enters a field of performance as the instrument of exhibiting cultural and societal practices in articulating the public and the private, or, micro and macro space. Richard Foreman, Richard Schechner or Herbert Blau worked since late 1960s on the research of a theoretically oriented theatre and performance. Robert Wilson, simultaneously with his work as a director in the field of theatre-spectacle, developed systems of pedagogical or exhibiting workshops where he used performance art to show through self-reflexion or pedagogy the poetic aspects of his creation.

Another significant area of execution of theoretical performance is the one out of the theatre in the field of other arts. Artistic work of Marcel Duchamps led from the sensual to the conceptual. In his ready-made works he avoided the didacticism of theory, remaining in the sphere of subtle and sophisticated conceptual provocations of the canon or the functions of modernist world of art. In difference to Duchamp, younger generation of artists, which can be called neoDadaists because of their claim to Duchamp, turn away from Duchamp’s critical conceptualism towards theoretical didacticism. That is how John Cage’s theoretical performances were born. In John Cage’s work, from the 40s towards the 90s, we can see theory in action. The development of Cage’s work led out of music, that is, to the establishment of music as a widened activity that can be in the intertextual or interbehavioural relationship with music of the Other, other arts or forms of discursive expression and representation. What with Cage appears as theoretical discourse simultaneously with his artistic work or through it can be identified as: a) the principles of metamusic – dealing with the relocation of the ontology of music entry (intentional expression using sounds) into the theoretically-textual discourse on music which is brought into being in places and in conditions where the execution of a musical work (intentional creation or execution of structured sounds) is expected; b) lecture poetry – dealing with the relocation of one artistic discipline (music) into other artistic disciplines (poetry, rhetoric, political canvassing, performance art), and c) textual production – dealing with the text that is not poetry or music but textual productivity in art. Cage in fact developed, with his verbal or lecture performances, the first obvious model of theoretical performance. Characteristic verbal performances are 45’ for a Speaker (1954), Composition as Process (1958), Lecture on Nothing (1959), Mureau (1962), John Cage Talking to Hans G. Helms on Music & Politics (1972), Composition in Retrospect (1981), Diary: How to Improve the World (1965- until death) or I-VI (1988-89). Within experimental poetry, post fluxux artists like David Antin and Jerome Rothenberg gave pro-theoretical performances during the 1960s and 1970s. After Cage, Henry Flynt based his pro-theoretical work in fluxus and developed concept art. He called concept art the artistic practice based on the artistic intervention on ideas. Flynt gave lectures-as-performance on art, politics, mathematics, and economics (Lecture, 1963). Pro-theoretical or conceptual, but also ironical and satirical performances were given by Georg Brecht (Drip music, 1963), George Maciunas (In Memoriam Adriano Olivetti, 1964) or Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles (Solo for Voice no. 2, 1962). German artist Joseph Beuys, who
was close to fluxux and conceptual art, developed a practice of lecture performances in order to prepare and perform his social sculpture. Social sculpture is a utopian project, which defines society (social organism) as an area of artistic act and of shaping a new civilisation stage. Joseph Beuys has given a certain number of political and initiation lectures (in New York, Chicago, London, Oxford, Belgrade) since 1973. On the occasion of the exhibition called Document 6, he also organised one hundred days of work of Free International University in Kassel in 1977. These public lectures enabled him to lay the foundation for a form of work with individual and social creativity as well as the evolution of society. Beuys expressed his theoretical positions in The Theory of Sculpture and The Energy Plan for the Western Man (1973-74). His artistic anthropology is based on: (1) the emancipating activity of fluxux; (2) the theoretical analysis of society as established in the European critically oriented conceptual art; (3) the social, economical, and spiritual theory of spiritual evolution of mankind by Rudolph Steiner, the founder of anthroposophy; (4) the critical new-leftist practice of the German neoanarchism from the 1960s and 1970s; (5) the ideas of alternative ecological movements (the greens, feminists). Beuys’s purpose was to create a total work of art (Gesamtkunstwerk) by the evolutionist and revolutionist transformations of materialistic bureaucratic societies of the Western private capitalism and the Eastern state capitalism: “Because only human power of thought can create a new cause in the world and in this way determine the future course of history”.

Within the situational movement critical and materialistic theory and practice of subverting mass and popular culture of the late capitalist society was developed. The Situational International was established in 1957 as an international European group (movement), consisting of artists and theoreticians. On the founding conventions were present the members of Letrist International, the International Union of Bauhaus Picturalists, architects Guy Debord and Constant as well as Danish painter Asgern Jom, the member of the COBRA group. The headquarters of the situational movement were in France, and situational groups were active in Sweden, Germany, and Italy. The activity of the Situational International was theoretical and propagandist, guided by analyses and discussions concerning the change of modern society, culture, and art. The situationalists dealt with writing manifestos, statements, and resolutions; they gave lectures and exerted influence at the University of Strasbourg where in 1966 the students under their influence organised a revolt that started by physical attack on Abraham Moles, the professor of cybernetics. They experienced the students’ demonstrations in May 1968, as the realisation of their theories of spontaneous revolution so that they took part in practical political action. For situationalists, political action was the form of performance art. Situationalists developed open pro-marxist analysis and exhibiting performance practice criticism of everyday consumer society. Their credo was: “We want ideas to become dangerous”, expressing the strategic ambition of intellectually and theoretically based terrorism. Avoiding the interpretative speculative truths, they tended to discover individual and fragmentary truths in everyday behaviour itself, which they called anarcho-marxist truths. They oriented the initial discussions towards the criticism of the historical left, claiming that the real-communism in the Soviet Union had created a new form of exploitation that they called state bureaucrat capitalism. The main subject of their discussions was capitalist consumer society. The purpose of their criticism was to expose the logic of commercial or commodity production, which in modernist capitalist society prevents individual freedom and emancipation: “Commodity is the first and the last sense of contemporary society; it is the basis
of totalitarian self-regulation of the capitalist society”. In order to attack totalitarian consumer society of spectacle, it is not enough to revolt against its structures and institutions but also against its values. First of all, it is necessary to produce the criticism of work. The abolishment of work, according to them, is not a utopian concept but the first pre-condition for overpowering the society of commodity. The abolishment of work is the condition for overpowering the imposed division between free time and working hours. In order to be free, human activity should be artistic and based on play. Art and play are the only activities that can bring back the rational and the concrete to everyday life. They were preoccupied with the intention to reshape the life of people into art by spontaneous revolt of masses. They were against the idea that life should be transformed into art. The ideal situationist was an amateur expert and an anti-specialist.

In conceptual art, the idea of artistic execution is connected with theoretical work in the area of non-theoretical expectations in the world of art. Theoretical performance does not exist as a separate genre or stream in conceptual art, but certain activities of destruction and theorisation of artistic practice are established in the way of performance art. Belgian proto-conceptual artist Marcel Broodthaers organised his life and work as a deconstruction of cultural industry, for example, the performance of museum situations with audience (Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des Figures, 1972). A conversation between two persons, the announcement of theoretical conversation, or the documentation originating from theoretical or everyday life, Ian Wilson proclaimed for a work of art: “Ian Wilson came to Paris in 1970 and discussed the idea of oral communication as artistic form”. Bernard Venet organised public lectures given by scientists (mathematicians, physicists, chemists, and anthropologists) during the early 1970s as works of art. However, these public performances were not a synthesis of science and art or the aesthetisation of science but genuine scientific lectures relocated and performed within the institutionalised system of arts. Venet wanted to show that it was possible to execute a scientific lecture as such in the system of arts, by a metalanguage action on the conventions and regulations of the institutions, that is, in the world of art. Douglas Houbler, Lawrence Weiner, and Robert Barry worked with meta-performances, creating verbal expressions that can be executed materially or behaviourally but which are not executed and remain ideal analytical propositions of art. Art & Language group based its work as a conversation and learning among the members of the group (“if X is a member of A & L group, then there is a certain Y from whom X can learn, while X and Y are different from each other”). In this sense Art & Language did not realise theoretical performances as events before an audience but as a complex behavioural situation of research (conversation and learning) in the world of art. Their complex, but cognitively feasible work is an installation for theoretical performance of the audience (Index 01, 1972) on the exhibition of Document5.

In the age of eclectical postmodernism, on the turn of the 70s to 80s, there was a strong anti-theoretical impulse, led by the change from comprehending the text towards enjoying the text. But, the essential thing for postmodernism was the shift from the interest in theoretical explication to relying and acting through theoretical or discursive atmosphere of history, culture, and society. Certain authors (Beuys, Victor Burgin, Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman, and even Robert Wilson or Jan Fabre) do not base their performances as rational or pragmatic theoretical criticism of the world of art but as the manipulation or simulation of the artistic act in theoretical, political, cultural, or everyday atmosphere which stands in referential relationship towards uncertain theories, above all, those of post structuralism.
In the epoch that certain theoreticians call *art in the age of culture* on the turn of the 20th into the 21st century, in some areas appears an interest for *theoretical performance*. *Theoretical performance* becomes an instrument in the critical practice of those artists who work with cultural identities – referring to the theories of race, nation, gender, or generation. Female or male artists give private or public *performances*, most often behavioural events, in order to provoke, simulate, deconstruct or satirise a specific identity and its supportive discourses or normative ideologies. For example, Adrian Piper works with behavioural, theoretical, and socially normative discourses of the interaction between gender (bisexual), race (of mixed blood), and class (working and middle class), while Holly Hughes works with lesbian, Marina Abramovic with heterosexual, and Tim Miller with queer identity. For these authors, the theoretical is one of the instruments for the explication of critical, traumatic or repressive policies of identity in contemporary geographical and historical societies. Within the techno-performance practices that have established themselves as *net theatre*, *cyber art*, the art of systems or relational art (Orlan, Stelarc, Marko Kosnik, Igor Stromajer, Marko Peljhan) the theory has the necessary function of instrumental discourse used to form a new artistic field of media practices. It is possible to differentiate between theories belonging to the corpus of media or techno-theories, then, the theories of culture, and specific art or self-poetic theories. For example, Orlan works with the indexing of biomedical cultural theories in relation to gender theories. Marko Peljhan intervenes within the determined scope of applied arts (cybernetics, ecology, meteorology), using scientific infrastructure for the execution of his works. Marko Kosnik puts into effect the aesthetisation of scientific that is, cybernetic systems, while Stelarc, on the contrary, uses theoretical references, technological knowledge, and cultural ends to exert a de-aesthetisation of the behavioural body of everyday life. Certain former East European artists (Kulik, Irwin, Dragan Zivadinov, Petar Mlakar, Mike Hentz) put their work in the field of *political problems or ideological cracks* in macro- and micro-policies of the late socialist societies or those in transition. For example, Irwin group’s performances called *NSK guard* from the 90s are not explicitly theoretical performances but they cannot be understood without conceptual and theoretical problematisation of the ideological and political role of the army in socialist and societies in transition. The case of theoretical and theoretical/practical problematisation of the status of theory of art on the universal level and on the level of claustraphobic and theory-phobic societies in transition is the subject of research by a series of authors linked to the TkH-centre (*Walking Theory*) in Belgrade. Laurie Anderson with her *rock performances* executes the spectacle as theoretical symptom of borders or confrontations between mass and popular culture. The examples of pro-theoretical deconstructions of the theatre towards the exhibiting theatre can be found in completely different works such as those by Emil Hrvatin or Coco Fusco. The experiments with the dance were, in their long twentieth century history, anti-theoretical and if the role of theory appeared it had pedagogical or poetical functions (Rudolf von Laban, Mary Wigman, Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown); one of the rare examples was Yvonna Rainer who in the early 60s executed exhibiting *performances* (*Trio A*) in order to test the theoretical premises of the new or minimal dance. The generation of choreographers and dancers, which appeared during the late 1990s, conducted an unusual change towards the theoretisation of choreographical and dance work. This new dance coming after postmodernism, and called choreographical or conceptual dance appeared as the practice resulting from critical/theoretical research and deconstruction of dance paradigms (the institution of dance, dance techniques, the status of constitutive relations within the dance as...
These choreographers and performers (Jérôme Bel, Xavier Le Roy, Matrten Spangberg, Tina Sehgal) are interested in the introduction of the conceptually or theoretically constructed positioning into the rhetorical systems of modernist and postmodernist dance, but also in the execution of theoretical performances (verbally determined dances, performances, workshops, lectures). The role of theoretical performance in dance is dramatically obvious since the theory represents the means of attack on technical fetishism of dance as well as on choreographical rhetorical aestheticism.

There is a metaphorical, almost allegorical use of the notion of theoretical performance in the sense of theatricalisation of philosophy or of philosophical performance. Theatricalisation of philosophy, according to Peter Sloterdijk, occurs with Frédéric Nietzsche and denotes the end of philosophical metaphysics, becoming rhetoric (from Martin Heidegger through Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida to Jean Baudrillard, Sloterdijk) or language game (Ludwig Wittgenstein). Ludwig Wittgenstein turned his lectures on philosophy of everyday language into the demonstrations of thinking experiments which he made using his speech or behaviour. There are stories about how old Heidegger walked along the Alps paths singing philosophical sentences on being, in order to achieve the longing of the ancient Greeks towards the truth itself. At the end of modernism, Lacan organised his lectures on theoretical psychoanalysis as psychoanalytic sessions or shamanist rituals of initiation, establishing his learning as the process of initialising the transfer and counter-transfer between the subject, object, and the Other. The philosophers and theoreticians belonging to the epoch of postmodernism or the epoch of culture like Lyotard, Baudrillard, Derrida, or Sloterdijk take their discourses out to the scenes/screens of mass culture, creating mass spectacles. Philosophical or theoretical constructions become the instruments of mass media performances. Philosophy ceases to be only a discourse of analysis, discussion, and hermeneutical speculation but also becomes its own demonstration or intervention on the scene/screen. Philosophy is increasingly the demonstration of media breakthrough of the signifier into the ideal, smooth, and sexless body of traditional philosophy, in other words, into metalanguage which in this way starts to present its illegitimacy. Sloterdijk developed in his work the idea of theatricalisation, effacing the borders between the philosopher as a thinking figure and the philosopher as the scenic figure. Speaking about the denial of power, Sloterdijk at one point exclaims: “Better a cynical dog than an integrated swine!” He would like Marx to speak the language of Kierkegaard, and Kierkegaard to speak of Marx’s topics. The denial of power can be seen in the rejection and in evaporation of the hypotheses of subjectivity. The evaporation of the subject of instrumental repression, the subject resulting from repressive limitations of consecrated social autonomies and institutions, represents for Sloterdijk the basic philosophical problem. In such context, philosophy becomes softer, rhythmical, devoid of its polemical combativeness. However, it is paradoxically critical (cynical) and post critical (soft in the postmodernist manner). It is fickle, seductive, theatrical, paradoxical, and dilutingly all encompassing. Sloterdijk initiates the theatricalisation of philosophy, bringing the thinker onto the stage. His discourse is soft, literary-didactic and subversive, speculative, aestheticised, and devoid of feeling for sentimentality and respect: he talked in the clothes of a Buddhist monk and preached his philosophy from the pulpit of a Christian church. His discourse is simultaneously placed: (1) behind the end of modern philosophy, and (2) in order to thematise modernity, and (3) to theatricalise the philosophical points of departure (to be a dog on the philosophical scene means to be a philosopher after Nietzsche). Slavoj Zizek, on the contrary, and in difference to
Sloterdijk, is not a philosopher of postmodernist spectacle but a critically minded philosopher of the epoch of globalisation, which means that Zizek’s *performance* is not the aesthetisation of philosophy as in postmodern period but a dramatic face-to-face between the area of transfer/counter-transfer of philosophers or theoreticians with the media-multifold *other*. Zizek inscribes himself as a critical materialist philosopher into a structural position of mass media *other* (for example, in numerous polemics about 11th September 2002). He presents *himself as the one* who with the help of discourse interprets media horizons of the dominant ideologies and policies, but who also, simultaneously, is subjected to transfiguration by the powers or potentials of the discourse performed by mass media. The appearance of the philosopher in the media transfigures his interpretation into massive and global spectacle of consumption/enjoyment of meaning. The theatricalisation of philosophy nowadays is not, as in postmodern period a hybrid and dispersed aesthetisation of philosophy, but the media performance of global representatives of particular framing, editing, and the presentation of the contextualised or decontextualised discourse of the philosopher. Even though we had at the end of 19th century a philosopher who showed his *dirty hands* of philosophy (Nietzsche) in the heart of universality, we have at the beginning of 20th century a philosopher who in global production of the media becomes a hybrid field to the media of distributed philosophical *organs* without a *body* in struggle for the regulation or deregulation of the dominant and marginal knowledge of the contemporary world (Zizek). Afterwards, Martin Jay in the text entitled “The Academic Woman as Performance Artist” offers a provoking theoretical thesis that some of the leading women theoreticians of cultural, and especially gender studies (Judith Butler, Jane Gallop, Avital Ronell, Eve Kosowsky Sedgwick or Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) have become some sort of women *performers*. Having said that, it does not mean that they have really become women performers in the world of art but that their behaviour in the academic world is manifested in a specific, atypical way in relation to academic norms in the way that by their behaviour they demonstrate, execute and re-construct their theories. The theory becomes possible by moving the body in its relational and interactive micro- or macro-cultural space. In this way, the traditionally modern distinction between the *body* and *soul* is deconstructed to the opinion, which is the manifestation of the body in its interaction with environmental potentials and current events. If *thought is body*, then it is part of the theoretical, meaning the cultural, meaning the political, and meaning the existential *performance*. In this way, the theory ceases to be an area of reflection (the mimesis of the world by the process of thinking) and it becomes the time and space of the performing body through which the world manifests itself.

**NOTES:**


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