Contrary to the idea of an anthropological constant, almost nothing concerning the matters of life remains as it was: while modernist avant-gardes could still postulate an existence transformed by art in terms of a liberation from commodification and alienation, after the Second World War it had to dawn even on the apologists of an aesthetics of vitality that the "new spirit of capitalism" knows how to adroitly commercialize every artistic promise of liberation.

Nevertheless, it is still worthwhile to take a differentiated retrospective view on the discourses around the charged and ambivalent relationship of art and life since the beginning of the sixties. From the discourse around "Action Painting", Happening, and an extended notion of performance emerges an aesthetical mode of the act which may set an ethical project against the current post-Fordist "forms of life".

"History has emerged as a drama seen from within by a spectator who, willy nilly, is also an actor and in some indefinable sense an author. No wonder that the paradigm of modern man is the artist — and that the paradigm of modern art is the painting complete in each gesture and never finished."

Harold Rosenberg

In 1971, Allan Kaprow proposed that the artist might "change jobs" and take on another profession. The "un-artist" would "slyly shift the whole un-artistic operation away from where the arts customarily congregate to become, for instance, an accountant executive, an ecologist, a stunt rider, a politician, a beach bum". Kaprow is not writing about a simple change in career, about an artist completely giving up art to do something unrelated. Rather, in his new job art would "operate indirectly as a stored code" and thereby "facilitate an attitude of deliberate fullness toward all professional activities well beyond art". In other words: liberated from institutional constraints and the cliquish nature of the art audience, the un-artist would be free to engage in acts whose "deliberate fullness" reveals to be the realization of art's potential, a realization that can only take the form of un-art. Using other professions as media, the un-artist would subtly infuse them with new aesthetic life. The world would be his stage.

When Schiller developed his notion of the Spieltrieb as bridging the Kantian gap between the world of the senses and reason, he declared that his theory of aesthetic play as the highest fulfillment of humanity was capable "of bearing the whole edifice of the art of the beautiful and of the still more difficult art of living". As Jacques Rancière had noted, this is crucial for the modern understanding of the aesthetic: "In the aesthetic regime of art, art is art to the extent that it is something else than art. It is always 'aestheticized', meaning that it is always posed as a 'form of life'. The key formula of the aesthetic regime of art is that art is an autonomous form of life. Conversely, for the early Marx life under communism would be an art of the act, an aesthetic praxis beyond alienating capitalist labour; whereas in capitalism "man's own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him", under communism "society regulated the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have in mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman, or critic". In communist society, changing jobs is the rule — which is why in it, activities are not in fact jobs. This is communism's aesthetic-political promise.
Kaprow’s fantasy can be seen as a late, depoliticized version of the nineteenth-century aesthetic utopia, formulated at a historical tipping point. Rancière has a tendency to make rather sweeping statements on the “aesthetic regime of art” in terms of structural antinomies, without paying too much attention to the historical transformations of those antinomies. When he notes that “Aesthetic art promises a political accomplishment that it cannot satisfy, and thrives on that ambiguity”, and that “those who want to isolate it from politics are somewhat beside the point” just as “those who want it to fulfill its political promise are condemned to a certain melancholy” this is true enough, but a conclusion that is equally true: for 1971 as it is for 1871 or 2010 runs the risk of being a truism—in other words, irrelevant.7 For Kaprow, “changing jobs” was a way to rejuvenate both art and life through a series of playful acts in a variety of settings. But why “change jobs” if the nature of jobs is itself undergoing radical change? As the Constructivist critic Nikolai Tarabukin once put it, the future art under communism would be transformed work.8 From the 1970s on, this goal was coming true in unexpected ways, throwing into question the notion that one has to change jobs from art to un-art occupations in order to arrive at authentic acts—to wrestle “man’s own deed” from alienating appropriation.

One important factor in Kaprow’s move from object making to happenings in the late 1960s had been Harold Rosenberg’s notion of the artistic act. In going beyond Kaprow to the present, it may also prove to be useful to revisit Rosenberg’s discourse on the act and examine its potential and its limitations for a culture of planned events and market-driven performance.

1. ACTS AGAINST ANIMATED DEATH
Kaprow first developed his notion and practice of the happening under the sign (or spell) of Jackson Pollock, but in particular of Pollock as mediated by Hans Namuth’s photographs and Rosenberg’s writings on Action painting.9 If, as Rosenberg had observed, with Action painting the canvas had become “an arena in which to act” and that what “was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event”, then why not do away with the end product (a painting) altogether and develop a living arts of acts, of happenings?10 Rosenberg, however, did not approve of Kaprow’s “logical” conclusions, noting that while happenings, in abandoning the painting-object, appeared to escape commodification, in fact “the audience is the personification of the art market; in a Happening, the dubious social aspect of an Action painting is all there is. […] Ultimately, there is more for the individual to ‘perform’ in examining a Hofmann or Kline than in joining a Kaprow team pushing furniture through the streets.”11

Rosenberg’s notion of the act was ambiguous and sometimes dissolved into rhetorical sophistry. If, for Kaprow, the blurring of art and life involved avoiding the art world as much as possible, Rosenberg argued against “merging art into the environment” along Kaprowian lines: what mattered was “engaging in art as a real (that is, total) activity”.12 There was no need to change jobs, because the act of making art is always, qua act, something else than art. Crucial to any understanding of Rosenberg’s writings on the act from “The American Action Painters” (1952) to his texts of the late 1960s and early 1970s is his background in the Trotskyist circles of the Partisan Review during the late 1930s. At the time, it had seemed faintly possible to combine revolutionary and artistic action in the “free revolutionary art” proposed by André Breton and Leo Trotsky, so as to jointly fight the reified, commodified world of capitalism that Rosenberg would later describe as a sphere of “animated death”.13 Even while Rosenberg, like many others, adopted to the conservative climate in post-war America and presented a depoliticized and dehistoricized theory of the act for use in a context dominated by the Cold War, the notion of the revolutionary historical act would continue to haunt his writings; in many ways, in Rosenberg’s work the artistic act became the stand-in for the blocked possibility of political action.

If perhaps this sounds all too familiar, the
details of Rosenberg’s maneuvers are worth examining. Using a Dadaist/Surrealist-inspired jargon that was calculated to rile Clement Greenberg, Rosenberg of “The American Action Painters” stated that “[a] painting that is an act is inseparable from the biography of the artist. [...] The new painting has broken down every distinction between art and life.”

Rosenberg went so far as to state that it is unfair if certain painters “claim admiration for the act as art”, for if “the picture is an act, it cannot be justified as an act of genius in a field whose whole measuring apparatus has been sent to the devil. Its value must be found apart from art. Otherwise the ‘act’ gets to be ‘making a painting’ at sufficient speed to meet an exhibition date.”

He also stressed that “[a]n action is not a matter of taste”, since “[you] don’t let taste decide the firing of a pistol or the building of a maze. As the Marquis de Sade understood, even experiments in sensation, if deliberately repeated, presuppose a morality.”

In the view of critics such as Greenberg and William Rubin, Rosenberg had managed to float a cultural myth that had very little to do with actual art—and indeed, Rosenberg himself embraced the notion of the act of Action painting being a “mythic” one that exceeded positivist description or formalist analysis. Categories collapse, as Action painting is based on an act that is never just pure art, being related to other types of action and acting. Arguably, Rosenberg’s finest critical passages are not on painting but on subjects such as Marx’s theory of revolution and repetition; on the proletariat as revolutionary subject; on Malraux and Sartre, on drama and psychoanalysis. What characterizes all these writings is a constant slippage that Rosenberg himself detects in the work of André Malraux: “In Malraux’s thinking, action constantly blends into acting: with historical script in hand, the only problem is which part to play and how to play it.”

Rosenberg was fascinated by Marx’s passages on the “Resurrected Romans” of the French revolution; historical reenactment could be all but indistinguishable from historical acts. And since socialism’s basic proposition is “an aesthetic one”, the re-making of man and of society, why would such slippages not be possible and productive?

“The American Action Painters” does not mention a single artist by name. Rosenberg tantalizingly states that those artists whose work completely matches a theory are usually not the “deepest”; while most people thought that the essay was mostly based on Pollock, this remark suggests that De Kooning, whom Rosenberg admired, was in fact a greater painter for being less of an Action painter. One may say that Rosenberg’s writings constitute a missed encounter with works by either De Kooning or Pollock as sensuous fact; yet these works, in their factuality, are also a missed encounter with Rosenberg’s writings. It has often been noted that Rosenberg had no “eye” for painting. Although some of his later reviews go into more detail, by and large Rosenberg had little to say about specific achievements. But if Rosenberg failed the art, the art also failed him; curatorial inventories of Action painting, such as the recent Düsseldorf exhibition “Le grand geste!”, are lacking something decisive.

It was Rosenberg’s contention that Greenberg’s reduction of art to series of observable facts was wrong; in so far as it becomes fact, the act is realized but its potential is curtailed. Yves Klein, who like Kaprow drew literal-theatrical conclusions from abstract expressionism, expressed this when he stated that his paintings were only the ashes of his art.

The developments of the late 1950s and 1960s forced Rosenberg to argue that, after all, it was crucial that the act did result in material traces. “In emphasizing the creative act rather than the object created, Action painting, or—by the testimony of Allan Kaprow—the idea of Action painting, led logically to the Happening. Action painting is ambiguous; it asserts the primacy of the creative act, but it looks to the object, the painting, for a confirmation of the worth of that act [...]. Action painting is subjective, yet it is bound to a thing, even though a thing in process”.

Against happening and Fluxus artists, Rosenberg now
stated that "To dissolve 'the barriers that separate art from life' is an impossible ideal – the dream of a world in which all actions are intended to be forgotten at their moment of fulfillment".\textsuperscript{23} While Kaprow had drawn logical conclusions from the notion of action painting, "in art it is always a mistake to push a concept to its logical conclusion".\textsuperscript{24}

In a piece about the May '68 uprising in Paris titled "Surrealism in the Streets", Rosenberg remarked that the wall slogan "Culture is the inversion of life" is itself culture, "since it is inherited from the radical art movements of fifty years ago".\textsuperscript{25} However, Rosenberg showed no sign of being aware of the specific group behind such graffiti – a group which had truly mastered the dangerous art of pushing concepts to their logical conclusion, and which repoliticized the notion of the act even as, in different quarters, a new focus on the event emerged.

2. ENTER THE EVENT

The Situationists swapped the canvas as "arena in which to act" for that of daily life – and, on the collective level, that of political struggle. If the aim was the realization of Marx's utopia of work-as-play, the simulation of the future liberated life under present conditions could only be counter-revolutionary. Most art, including most happenings and Fluxus events, functioned in this manner; in giving a false glimpse of the future, in suggesting that it has already arrived, art helps to prevent the emergence of a type of revolutionary activities that could realize art in life. Happenings and events present the spectacle of a future they help to forestall.\textsuperscript{26}

Rosenberg too was weary of events and happenings, as we have noted; while his position was rather conservative, some of his criticisms come close to the Situationist position. He observed that a number of theoretical and practical developments had conspired to undermine the act of the individual into "movements of nature and history, into a measureless complex of organic and mechanical transformations"; it "melts into events".\textsuperscript{27} Earlier on, Rosenberg had lauded the Action painting for being an event rather than a picture, and occasionally he would repeat this phrase, but increasingly the term event took on negative connotations – the "events" and "happenings" seemed to indicate an abandonment of history, its transformation into a quasi-natural series of occurrences rather than a constantly shifting field for action, for human intervention.\textsuperscript{28} Discussing the Eichmann trial and its insights into the apparent dissolution of any personal responsibility, Rosenberg went on to contrast "the emphasis of happenings on group improvisation, chance and play" with "action as a medium of willed chance" in Action painting.\textsuperscript{29} Using the stern intonations of the post-war humanist Rosenberg noted that "A society that lacks the presence of self-developing individuals – but in which passive people are acted upon by their environment – hardly deserved to be called a human society".\textsuperscript{30}

The Rosenberg of the 1950s and 1960s was no longer the Trotskyist-Marxist he had been in the late 1930s, but the central role of the act in his philosophy betrays his continuing indebtedness to Marx and to post-Hegelian philosophy in general. In the 1830s, in a move that did not escape the young Marx's attention, the Young Hegelian August von Cieszkowski had announced a new historical epoch that would no longer be dominated either by art (like Antiquity) or by philosophy (Christian culture up to and including Hegel) but by the act, by praxis. This new enacted, properly historical culture would be the synthesis of earlier artistic and philosophical cultures; it would sublate them both.\textsuperscript{31} Guy Debord would adopt Cieszkowski as one of his intellectual forebears and arrange for a French translation of his treatise; like Debord, Cieszkowski seems to exemplify some of the much-lambasted faults of dialectical thinking, including a reduction of history to schematic and apparently inevitable progressions, as well as a voluntarist "actionism".\textsuperscript{32}

In the 1960s, Gilles Deleuze referred to Rosenberg's comments on Marx's "18th Brumaire", but the Deleuzian theorization of the event and of
repetition could hardly be more different from Rosenberg’s focus on the act. Rejecting Hegel and Marx, Deleuze embraced Nietzsche as “the thinker who conceived the autonomy, the lightness of the event, the happening of the singular event at the outside of any teleological perspective”, swapping dialectics for an “eventology” that would be “the science of the unrepeatable, of the constant. The experience is the happening in its singularity”. A practical “eventology” was of course also developed in much 1960s art, especially by Cage-inspired artists, and its effects are as problematic as that of Deleuzian philosophy.

One card in George Brecht’s “Water-Yam”, the box containing his collected (proto-) Fluxus score cards, reads “DELIVERY. An area is set aside. Delivery of Objects to the area is arranged”. Such a score can obviously be actualized in any number of ways – or it can remain as it is, as a score forever suggesting but never quite necessitating actualizations. (Fluxus boxes and other objects that obliquely hint at underdetermined uses are “thingified” event scores.) The suggestion can be aesthetically compelling, like that of Deleuzian rhetoric; it suggests infinite possibilities in abstraction. In seeking to liberate history from its subjugation to dialectics (reduced to a convenient caricature), Deleuzian philosophy ends up abstractly negating history itself. It wants to reach the utopia of pure difference, of pure events freed from any “teleology”, right now, and in doing so it abandons the tools for analyzing events as imperfect, incomplete, or deferred – in other words, as historical. Because of this, the Deleuzian event is always already to collapse into the planned pseudo-event decried by Daniel Boorstin in 1961 – the staged event for the media, such as a press conference. The same danger exists for events in 1960s art; the pseudo-event is indeed the bad dream of much of the avant-garde performance of this period, as Carrie Lambert Beatty puts it. Fluxus festivals, which realized even scores as Neo-Dada spectacle, can be seen as subversive deconstructions of the pseudo-event, but do they not ultimately remain enthralled by the pseudo-event’s logic of staged sensations? This is the trap that Kaprow tried to avoid in his increasing reluctance to publicize his happenings and his desire to “change jobs”.

For Rosenberg, the rise of the event in the 1960s was linked to that of the system, of systems theory and cybernetics; he published caustic comments on Jack Burnham’s software show, which was predicated on the curator/theorist’s interest in real-time systems – “data processing systems [that are] built into and become a part of the events they monitor”. For Rosenberg, such events do not amount to history; subject to endless feedback and monitoring, they are pseudo-historical at best, whether in art or in politics. Since “art has entered into the media system”, artistic acts increasingly became performances in media events. Even when artists seemed to follow Kaprow in his desire to leave the art world, “changing jobs” sometimes took the form of alternative event planning; to name one example of an artist in the Fluxus lineage, Ulises Carrión’s “Lilia Prado Superstar Filmmfestival”, organized with the support of De Appel in Amsterdam in 1984, gave full star treatment to an obscure Mexican actress from the 1950s and 1960s, and was only visible as an art project to a small art-world audience.

Any eventology worth its salt would also be a historical dialectics and vice versa; this, in fact, is the contention of the recent theorization of the historical event by Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek. However, what does it mean to act in relation to – after, in, or towards – historical events in a situation in which systemic events forestall change? Systemic events, of which the planned media and/or social event is the paradigm, sustain rather than disrupt the system and block rather than generate change that goes beyond permanent fine-tuning. In this respect, the practice developed by Nicoline van Harskamp in recent years is highly significant. Van Harskamp frequently stages conferences and lectures; “Any Other Business” (2009) was billed as a conference on Communicative Excellence in Civil Society and Politics.
Van Harskamp’s events, which mimic those conferences and lectures that profess to help organizations solve issues by proffering communication models and strategies for organizational psychology (effectively suggesting that political antagonism can be dissolved via the miracle that is “communicative excellence”), are completely scripted, including their disturbances: “An intriguing narrative will develop over the course of the afternoon, as the ‘speakers’ increasingly struggle to suppress their urge to act rather than talk. The audience of ‘conference visitors’ will witness how every single meeting fails to meet the conference’s aim of ‘Communicative Excellence in Civil Society and Politics’. The breakdown of regulated communication is itself scripted, regulated. Acts are staged, and audience members are distanced. Job-changing now definitely having become its own simulation, Van Harskamp creates an arena in which the acting is done by actors, amidst an audience that is in on the game; the result is like a Lehrstück that rams down a paradoxical lesson: can acts that break up a closed discursive system only be imagined as theatre by third-rate ex-pat American comedians?

Van Harskamp’s events simulate what some of Hans Haacke’s work from the early 1970s demonstrated: developing cues from his friend Jack Burnham, Haacke provided social systems with mutant feedback. The excessive institutional responses to pieces such as “Shapsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971” and “Manet-Projekt ’74” suggest that in those cases Haacke succeeded in finding the point where the antagonisms within the system come to the surface and erupt. As Marina Vishmidt has argued, ultimately the opposition between systems theory and dialectics is a relative one, even though in today’s society, with the “rise of self-employment and short contracts”, “exploitation becomes as fragmented and individualised as the conditions of work themselves, and antagonism between the goals of workers and capital becomes something quite abstract, dissolving into meaninglessness”.

Van Harskamp’s staged skirmishes are epiphenomena, symptoms that do not fully erupt; more is needed to make antagonisms crystallize and become operative. However, as self-performers that epitomize exploitation’s fragmented an individualized condition, her self-employed gurus and their interlocutors also have the potential – excessively difficult to actualize though it may be – to act in and beyond their performance.

3. ENACTING PERFORMANCE

If Greenberg traced modernism back to Kant, Rosenberg inscribed Action painting in the “revolution against the given, in the self and in the world, which since Hegel has provided European vanguard art with theories of a New Reality”. Action painting, Rosenberg stressed time and again, was not about self-expression but about self-creation. Ultimately, this celebration of the artist-subject’s self-fashioning goes back to the fundamental insight of Hegelian philosophy that truth is not immediate, that it can only come from a displacement, an action, from a cut; it is to be realised in time, in history. The fundamental negation of immediacy is the subject, which is the product of its own making, a becoming that comes into being by distinguishing itself from object. Hegel posited the absolute Spirit as the ultimate subject, and Marx argued that the proletariat as a class was the historical subject that would ultimately, via a revolution, bring about a classless society. Having once subscribed to the Trotskyist version of this narrative, Rosenberg later declared that Marxist politics had foundered, “on the issue of the subjectivity of the proletariat”. He saw an irresolvable tension between Marx’s insistence that the objective conditions of the proletariat would lead it to revolution and the activities of Marxist “revolutionary specialists” trying to bring that subjectivity about, effectively using the workers as tools.

In the 1960s, Guy Debord and the Situationist International fashioned themselves as such a group of revolutionary specialists, and in Debord’s view “May 68” was more or less a
reenactment of the October Revolution. What he failed to perceive is that the proletarian class subject was showing signs of disintegration. In the wake of 1968, the notion of a "classical" communist revolution became increasingly untenable, and many came to share a conclusion that Harold Rosenberg had reached at an earlier stage: "In our century the intelligible plot of history presumed by various philosophies has to all appearances broken down [...] To the Hegelian Marx it was inconceivable that a historical situation should not ultimately produce its true protagonist. With us, however, the surrender of identity seems the first condition of historical action."  

Felix Guattari rightly criticised the traditional notion of the subject, writing instead about a continuing production of subjectivity that never coalesces into one definite subject. There is much to be said for this rethinking of the issue of subjectivity, but it does have a rather ambiguous relationship with an economic regime – Post-Fordism – in which the production of subjectivities plays a crucial part. In this context, the cultural sector has become something of an avant-garde for the economy as a whole: as self-exploitative performers, ever flexible and adaptable, cultural workers act out a constantly changing script. While old notions of the subject and of the act could lead to delusional macho rhetoric and a refusal to consider the historical event in its complexity, the cult of open and plural subjectivities can end up being complicit with new forms of subjection that would only be hindered by subjecthood.

We live in a culture of performance, and this "performance" is as ambiguous as Rosenberg's "acting", standing both for one's quasi-dramatic self-performance and for one's economic achievement – and increasingly, the former is essential to the latter. If the act of old was, in theory, its own norm, contemporary performance constantly tries to meet external targets. To act is to move beyond one's previous identity and position, whereas to perform is to "get with the programme", to be in the event, to readjust and recalibrate. To act is to step beyond the now; to perform is to extend the now, to prolong the present. But this need not be a static opposition. What is a failed performance if not an act, whether intentional or not?

Using the term "virtuosity" to refer to "the special capabilities of a performing artist", Paolo Virno stresses that virtuosity is "An activity without an end product: the performance of a pianist or of a dancer does not leave us with a defined object distinguishable from the performance itself, capable of continuing after the performance has ended". On some basic level, all of us are virtuosos, even if we are clumsy virtuosos; speaking is the most basic act of virtuosity. Of course, the term is traditionally associated with great opera singers or musicians; but while artistic and intellectual labour long were exceptions within developing industrial capitalism, Virno notes that "Virtuosity becomes labor for the masses with the onset of the culture industry. It is here that the virtuoso begins to punch a time card". Time cards, of course, have become an anachronism; the screenwriter working for one of the classic Hollywood studios in the 1930s or 40s had to subject to this temporal regime, but the contemporary freelance writer is on duty all the time.

In a number of interconnected and overlapping texts, Jan Verwoert has reflected on the problematic position of the act in a society marked by the pressure to perform: "Where do the barricades stand today, anyway? We are the avant-garde, but we are also the job slaves. We serve the customers who consume the communication and sociability that we produce. We work in the kitchens and call centres of the newly opened restaurants and companies of the prospectively burgeoning new urban centres of the service society. To offer our services we are willing to travel. Being mobile is part of our performance. So we travel, we go west to work, we go north to work, we are all around, we fix the minds, houses and cars of those who stay in their offices [...] What would it mean to put up resistance against a social order in which performativity has become a growing demand, if not the norm? What would it mean to resist the need
to perform? Is 'resistance' even a concept that would be useful to evoke in this context?" What Vervoort proposes is basically the development of strategies for turning performances back into acts, for making the leap from the implementation of an economic imperative to forms of action – that may in fact take the form of choosing not to act. While this could certainly be the nucleus for an ethic of performance, individual ethics need to be placed in a constellation that would ultimately delineate a political-aesthetical project.

Jérôme Bel’s choreography "Cédric Andrieux" (2009) is part of Bel’s series on individual dancers, who tell the audience about their lives and dance extracts from various pieces. Cédric Andrieux danced for Merce Cunningham for years; when he extracts extract from pieces by Cunningham and others, there is no music; his breath is clearly audible, stressing the intense labour required for performing Cunningham’s choreography – which, as Andrieux emphasizes, regularly push dancers to and beyond the limits of their possibilities. Practice with Cunningham was a “slow and laborious process”; the nearly impossible things Cunningham demanded resulted in a feeling of humiliation, as Andrieux cannot keep his torso in a strictly horizontal position; when balancing on one leg, he makes little jumps so as not to lose balance. During daily practice, Cunningham had the dancers do the same exercises every morning. Noting that it was a Cagean “zen thing” for Cunningham, a way of emphasizing that every moment is unique and that there is in fact no such thing as repetition, Andrieux adds that "for me, mostly it’s totally depressing". The performance is not, however, some kind of debunking exercise; Andrieux notes that Cunningham never remarked on mistakes, stressing that “it’s when movement starts to be awkward that it becomes interesting”. Still, the dancer mentions his relief upon leaving Cunningham and the dreaded "unitard" outfit. He wore more comfortable clothes and experienced less physical pain dancing for Trisha Brown or Jérôme Bel – with the latter, “We are people before we are dancers”.

Repeating Cunningham’s repetitions, Andrieux examines himself as a quasi-subject and quasi-object, as body in perpetual training.

“Cédric Andrieux” examines the labour behind and in the dance; it is performative treatise on the aesthetico-political economy. Bel no longer looks for life elsewhere, à la Kaprow; he locates it in the practice at hand. Nor does he engage in an ultimately empty celebration of the artistic act as free and therefore universal, as a mythical substitute for political action, à la Rosenberg; instead, he examines artistic acts as being universal precisely in so far as they are concrete examples of contemporary labor. To be sure, to the extent that such a practice becomes hardened fact, becomes a defined œuvre, it also needs to be negated – with precision, with attention to its specific successes and failures. To this end, it needs to be put in a provisional montage with other performances – performances that may or may not be art, but that together form a constellation of acts that evince various admixtures of forethought and improvisation, of refusal and over-acting, of planning and breakdown.

One important practice in this respect is constituted by Wendelien van Oldenborgh’s film and slide pieces, which complement filmic montage in the cinematic sense with social montage, bringing together different groups of performers who may appear (in some senses) as themselves or read other people’s texts, or combine both. In the slide piece “Après la reprise, la prise” (2009), women who were once involved in a strike against the closure of the factory where they worked tell young students in a vocational school about this, and the play about this industrial conflict in which one of the women acted after the closure. Another piece that should at least be mentioned, in deferral of a proper interpretive act, is Paul Chan’s 2007 staging of Waiting for Godot in New Orleans, on sites razed by Hurricane Katrina. Chan uses Beckett’s play as a medium to link the performances by director and actors from New York to the precarious existences of abandoned locales, just as he uses this social montage to reexamine the play.46
From laid-off labourers to burnt-out cultural workers and sans-papiers, the specificity of individual habitus needs to be integrated into a constellation of interrelated performances at the fraying edge of art — performances that may become acts precisely in such a constellation. This is aesthetic and political life today. The issue is not to change jobs, but to intervene in the changes in work that subject and subjectify us.

Notes
9 Kaprow does not mention Rosenberg by name in "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" (1958), but the influence is unmistakable. Rosenberg is reference in later essays, for instance, "The Artist as a Man of the World" (1964), in: Kaprow, Essays, op. cit., pp. 47, 60.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., p. 47.
17 Rosenberg used the notion of the "mythic act" quite frequently, including as title for an essay on Pollock, in: Artworks and Packages, op. cit., pp. 58–74.
21 "Le grand geste!", Museum kunst palast, Düsseldorf, 10 April – 1 August 2010.
26 Hence the Situationists themselves moved away from an emphasis on play and on "constructed situations" to the project of full-scale social revolution. For an early critical appraisal of happenings (on the basis of what would appear to be rather scant information about American happenings), see "L'avant-garde de la présence", in: Internationale Situationiste, no. 8, January 1963, pp. 20–21.
28 For a later example of the use of "event" along the lines of established in "The American Action Painters", see "The Concept", op. cit., p. 219.
33 Gilles Deleuze, Différence et Répétition, Paris: PUF, 1968, p. 132. Thanks to Juan A. Gaitan for reminding me of this.
38 http://www.vanquarkemp.net/aoa.html.
to demonstrate for museum reforms (including those addressing the underrepresentation of Black and Puerto Rican artists) and greater control over the copyright, exhibition, and reproduction of artists' work, issues that soon grew to encompass museums' connections (particularly through their trustees) to policies supporting the Vietnam War. Uncharacteristic of the tenor of the Open Hearing, Lozano's pronouncement bluntly and forcefully rejected the coalition's underlying premise: that art could function as a semiautonomous realm of social struggle. "For me", she began, in a three-sentence proclamation that stands out as much for its brevity as for its content, "there can be no art revolution that is separate from a science revolution, a political revolution, an education revolution, a drug revolution, a sex revolution or a personal revolution". After refusing to separate museum reforms from those of galleries and magazines (a contention echoed by some of the meeting's other speakers despite the group's almost exclusive focus on MoMA), she concluded by maintaining, "I will not call myself an art worker but rather an art dreamer and I will participate only in a total revolution simultaneously personal and public".

Most troublesome to critically minded scholars is Lozano's use of "dreamer", a term redolent of the most regressive tendencies of nineteenth-century romanticism. Understood in this manner, her comments appear peculiarly out of time, as though, despite a decade of art-world developments (including Lozano's own conceptualism), she extolled the most traditional attributes of artistic creativity — art as an imaginary refuge from the "real world" social, political, and economic struggles that the AWC explicitly sought to engage. Lozano's "total revolution" seems like sheer idealism, confounding but easily dismissible.

Lozano's statement is anomalous within the context of the Open Hearing, but not necessarily in the way it has been received. Thus far overlooked is how closely her declarations echo those of the period's radical, Situationist-affiliated left.