Writing performance : on relations between texts and performances

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Interview with Marga van Mechelen

The following text is the transcription of a recorded interview with the Dutch art historian Marga von Mechelen about her historic view on the relations between performance and other media. The interview was conducted in May 2013 at UVA, University of Amsterdam.

Lilo Nein: I read your book *Performances, Installations, Video, Projects, 1975 to 1978*, and I have prepared, first, some questions about the relations between performances and texts. Let me give you a quick overview before we go into the details. My main questions will be these: What role do announcement texts versus spontaneity play? The second question concerns publishing and publications; the third, audiovisual documentation; and the fourth, the archive. My fifth question concerns the relation between performances and exhibitions. Afterwards, I will have four general questions, which are more related to the last chapter of your book. On the conceptualization of performance, my questions come from my own perspective – that is, from the here and now, me as an artist; but of course I am concerned with your background as a historian and how different attributes were attached to the term "performance" and how apparent they might be. This refers to performance ontology and written pieces about performance. This will be my program.

I will start now with a short statement from my side, so you also know what I am doing. I am interested in the relations of live-acts to other media – namely, text and documents. For me as an artist working with performance means negotiating those relations. Negotiating between different media within the live situation: the body, as I also work with performers; space, but also visual media; and types of presentations: presentation on the internet, the live presentation again; and finally, publications as another kind of format. How can all of this create an entire overview; or, what then is the object at the end of performance art? Can there be one, or is this even necessary? Is it only the experience? Maybe this is fine, I don't know. I have the feeling that performance artists have always had to deal with other media being around and with the relation to them; but my guess is that in the beginning, in the early time of performance, this was not deeply reflected upon. I think the reflection came during the 1990s, after the period we'll mostly be speaking about. So, I am kind of on the other side, so to speak. I am interested in you as a historian, and I have the

feeling that the relations were always there. I will try to develop an understanding that is not reduced to the live-act, but rather understanding the performance within those many relations.

I am interested, finally, in talking with you about the historic dimension of those relations, especially the performances at De Appel, which you wrote about in your, and although I have the feeling that your main concern is performance, you have named some different terms in your title; they may form an associative chain that links them in some ways. Maybe we could start with that then – with your decision to already link performance to other terms, other media, other formats.

Marga van Mechelen: Yes, it's quite problematic in a way, in different respects. You mention this book, but my latest book also has the subtitle *Through Performance and Installation Art*, but the main title is *Art at Large*; the title is based on a statement that is considering the development in the 70s, especially in this field of new media art. You cannot speak any longer of media-based or media-specific art forms; my statement – which may seem to be in contrast to the subtitle of this book – but my main statement in this book, as well of the articles I published afterwards and in my latest book, is that performance and installation art were intertwined right from the start. The examples that I give in this book are the examples of two Dutch artists, Ben d'Armagnac and Gerrit Dekker, who would not use the concept of performance or installation – that is to say, they would not say "this is a performance I am doing" or "this is an installation I made." They used another concept, namely "event." Of course, I know one of the artists quite well, Gerrit Dekker; he's still alive and I have written about him before, but Ben d'Armagnac has been dead now for already a very long time. However, it is still very unclear to me why they chose that word, that concept. It is a concept that we know from Fluxus, but it is also a concept that recently has become more topical as it is a concept of Alain Badiou, the French philosopher. Of course, he is quite topical and popular at the moment, in the Netherlands especially because a lot of his publications have been translated into Dutch and many articles have been written about him. He is a philosopher in his seventies, I suppose, but I am not entirely sure. But, anyway, he is quite an old philosopher who had already published about the "event" and of "l'événement" already in the 60s, I think. So, there is another connection there.

LN: I do not know this concept of Badiou; I only know the concept of event in Derrida's sense and also Deleuze's, and it is always connected with a revolutionary aspect or as a singularity that happens at a certain time. Does this count also for Badiou?

MM: Of course, there are different traditions and lines of thought for the event. There is a notion of event as it is used in Fluxus, but it is also used in connection to the Situationists. We also had in the 60s a group called the Event Structure Research Group, and there was also a connection with the French Situationists. Also in England there was a connection. From the Netherlands to England, from England to France. So, it is a concept of the 60s, the concept of the event. However, they applied it to their work, which we would now conceptualize as performance or as installation art. It is my point of view that if you really look at those projects – of course, this is really my speculation on it – there is always a development in time in a certain place, which gives meaning to that certain place, and then at a certain time there is a confrontation with a certain public. You can say both are performative in a way, but the communication with the certain public is, you could say, more the moment of the performance. So, the example I give in this book is that Ben d'Armagnac got a commission from the Goethe Institut – the Goethe Institut had a building here in Amsterdam, it was not yet the Goethe Institut, but it would become so – it was an empty space still. The artist was invited to live and work in that space on his own without any public, but he was free to show things that he was doing there to the public at a certain moment. So, there was a kind of cage and various things were bought into that space, into that cage. He was, in a way, moving from his house and the way he had lived in his house, and moving that into that performance space. Of course, it wasn't really a performance space; it was just an empty building. What people at that time found so interesting in that person, that artist, Ben d'Armagnac, was that his house was a kind of artistic room. He was always reworking his surroundings, building his surroundings.

Of course, there were people at that time who were building their own chairs and furniture, but then there were ways that he would build his bed. I think there is maybe a photo of it; he made an installation in Germany of three beds that were really very simple beds, made of about eight shelves. Four shelves like this, four shelves like that, making three boxes like three beds: one for himself and two for his women, as

he was living with more than one wife. That was not really so very exceptional in the Netherlands at that time; there were more communities around in which men had more than one partner.

LN: The other way around – woman having more than one man – was not so common at that time, I guess.

MM: Yes, this was not so common at that time, but to show that in a way – to make it public by showing three very simple beds for one person – it was not a double bed, it was three singles beds beside one another. It looked more like a stable you could say, more a place for animals than for human beings. Very elementary, you could say, very basic.

LN: So, this was used as a performance rather than as an installation or a sculpture?

MM: You could see it as a sculpture, or as installation, but in your imagination it represents a performance – a performance of a way of living. That was interesting to a number of people from the art world at that time, such as Ritsaert ten Cate, and Johannes Gachnang, who was the director and curator of the Goethe Institut, and they wanted him to bring his way of living from his home place to an artistic surrounding and to continue his way of living for moments, such as two weeks, for example, in another area. Not really an artistic place but coined as an artistic place for a certain moment in time. So, he was again performing and making a kind of installation, doing something with the space and bringing things into the space, and then at a certain moment the audience, the viewers, the public, were invited to come into that space and to watch not only what he was doing but also to become aware of the things that he had done so far, and really see the connection between what was actually there and his way of living. So, you could of course say that the performance artist is an actor, especially because Marina Abramović stressed this even later that the performer is an actor in his performance, but what was interesting to people at that time – people like Richard de Carter, Johannes Gachnang and a number of other people – was that they got the idea that there was another reality other than the normal reality of … how does one call that?

LN: The artificial space of an exhibition?

MM: No, I mean more the setting of a normal family situation – there is normally a man, a woman, a father, mother, children, et cetera. They have an ordinary house, they buy their stuff in IKEA and those kind of stores, but the way of living of Ben d'Armagnac and Gerrit Dekker was different from that. It was their reality – you could look at it as being a kind of artistic practice, but still is was their reality. Art and life intertwined. They came together. So, they bought their reality and their way of living to a place where an audience could see it and could watch it.

LN: And what happened at the opening? Did they perform themselves, did they present themselves or did they try to hide [their personal relation to the artwork]?

MM: I think that is the important issue, because that is the main problem with contemporary reception compared to the reception in that time. Someone like Marina Abramović stresses today that because there is always a level of representation it is not reality – you bring it [one's reality] to another context, another audience, and in that sense you are representing your life and not presenting it. However, part of the myth of performance art and its reception at that time was that it was reality – that the performance was reality, that the artist was not performing, that you really had contact with a living being.

LN: I would say that both are true – but what did he do at the openings? Did he prepare a presentation?

MM: I saw the installation, but I was not there at a moment when he was. The public could go and see what he has actually done without him being present. Let's take another example of Ben d'Armagnac – the box.

LN: I think you wrote about it.

MM: Yes, the white box. In the white space of De Appel, people entered the room not knowing anything about what would happen in that white space. In relation to scores and text, there was a lot of information about Ben d'Armagnac and people knew already about what he had done so far and they knew about his Goethe Institut performance-installation. They knew about the motifs in his work and they knew about his personality, about his personal background and the problems related to that personal background. Of course, all that kind of information was there, but that was not the score yet – that was not the plan yet. It was a point of reference for the

public. So, when they entered the room it was not, I think, clear for anyone there what he was going to do; maybe it was not even clear if there was someone inside that box. You could, of course, expect that there would only be an object – an installation, that box – and not a performance. Of course, you enter nevertheless a performance space.

LN: So, it was not announced at all?

MM: It was an announced as an "event."

LN: Ah, as an event.

MM: As an event, not as a performance or as an installation; that is such a concept that could imply different kind of things.

LN: That could also imply an environment without acting.

MM: Yes, of course.

LN: Were all the performances at De Appel announced as events?

MM: No, only those of those two artists, as it was their concept. Of course, the concept was not solely of those two artists, as it had already been used in different contexts, and I am not sure what kind of contexts influenced their conceptualization, but they both used the word "event" and not the word "performance," and of course not the word "installation" as it was not really a concept at that time. You had concepts of environments, and so it was De Appel described it as an "environment" and Gerrit Dekker described it also as an "environment." So, the title was *Event*, and of course a title like "Event" describes also a type of art form, and in that sense it is something different than if you were to say the title is "Love," "Intercourse," or something else.

LN: And there was no title of the artwork either?

MM: There was only the title *Event*. So, you saw a white box and you knew nothing besides the fact that it was a white box. You could come close to it as you weren't prevented from walking around, and then you could see the materials of the box – plastic and glass – and maybe you could also see that the glass was painted white. You saw the scissors and maybe then you would have the association, as with zips,

that this is a box that can be opened, so maybe there is someone inside. Of course, there are all types of associations that you could have, and they bring you to the idea that a performance will take place there. So, the expectation related to what you could actually see, and also to that certain location – the performance space of De Appel – make people expect that what will take place will be a certain kind of performance. So, after a while, people begin to notice that there is someone inside the box – that person was scratching at the glass window and was removing the paint – after a while, people could recognize him and see that it is Ben d'Armagnac inside the box. Of course, that is not so much of a surprise. The moment you know that there is someone inside you know it will be the performance artists, as at that time most of the performances were done by the artist themselves. However, at quite a lot of performances at that time the people did not know how long the performance would take. In the end it took around two hours and people could see more and more – he had removed the paint and people could see that he had bandages all along his arms, that he had wounded himself, and of course that had a connection to the things he had done before – it fitted very well into the biography of this artist. They saw that there were thousands of flies in that same box and that there was a kind of liquid and that the flies were moving towards the liquid or the wounded arm. You can have a kind of imagination as to what kind of liquid that may be, what may be more attractive – blood or perhaps honey, something like that. So, then you are making a kind of story, a kind of narrative out of it, and at the same time you are experiencing on an emotional level a relationship with the artist, who is presenting part of his emotional life. That's the difference with theater, in which the actor plays a role and the content is written and made by someone else. You are really made aware of the fact that these are elements of the biography that is being bought to public space.

LN: So, now let's get back to the title of your book.

MM: Yes, it is therefore I say that it is very problematic. I choose those titles for different reasons. One reason is because we are still talking about performance and installation, and we use the concept of installation as a kind of umbrella for things that were mentioned in the past – for example, situation art, environments, events, different kinds of assemblage, but essentially all kinds of concepts that are related to or combine physical objects and certain spaces. Installation has that connection to physical objects and spaces. So, I use a concept that has its origins in the late 70s –

1978, 1979 – although it was of course used before, but not in the exact same sense; I used it now because it is now a familiar concept, and of course I could have used the words “assemblage” or “environment” instead of “installation,” but because the concept of installation was introduced in the Netherlands in the context of De Appel as a new concept I thought it was important to have it in the title.

LN: And was it also introduced in connection to performance?

MM: It is described in a way as “*Übergang*”

LN: I understand, as “transition.”

MM: The transition of artists who had been working with performance to a new situation, a situation that you could say was the situation of installation art.

LN: From the 80s to the 90s?

MM: From 1977 to 1978 or to 1979. Every year De Appel made a program – for example, ten events and ten performances; five were subsidized by the local government and five by the national government. They were mainly introduced as performances, but in 1978 for the first time they used the concept of installation. They used it, for example, for a project by Marina Abramović and Ulay, a project – or an installation – called *Installation One*. So, in the title the word “installation” is used for the first time. There was also a project by Vito Acconci that used the word “installation.” For Marina Abramović and Ulay, who were of course, very influential for De Appel, it was introduced as a means of saying goodbye to the medium of performance.

LN: Did they perform live?

MM: They did performances until 1978 – a lot of performances – but then they announced that from their perspective the medium of performance had been exhausted.

LN: But my question is that within the installation did they include performances or not?

MM: Yes, that’s the way I look at it. On the one hand, they said at that moment that the medium of performance is for us exhausted – *uitgeput*, we say in Dutch – so we

are going to develop in another direction, and the first sign of this is *Installation One*. A lot of other artists were following them; there were artists from De Appel who did performances at De Appel in the mid-70s – the years before – who also started to work in a direction that was called "installation art." However, from my perspective, when you look at that work they named "installation art" – and I look at it in the same way that I have looked at the examples that I have discussed so far, of Ben d'Armagnac and Gerrit Dekker – it is still a combination of performance and installation. For example, that project of installation art, *Installation One*, took place in two different spaces of De Appel – the performance space and the exhibition space. In the performance space, there was a propeller turning around and around. It was very difficult for people to walk around a propeller; you have to take care you don't touch it. So, the propeller, although an object, was a different figure – it was a dangerous figure. It was, you could say, a kind of performer – replacing the dangerous elements of the performances of Marina and Ulay. In the other space, the exhibition space, there was a large projection of a film and that film was recorded in that same space – the exhibition space. You could see in that film Marina and Ulay sitting in front of each other; Ulay with an erection and naked and Marina also naked. So, in that exhibition space, there had been a performance and that performance had been recorded; that recording was projected and integrated in that exhibition space. It was not just a projection of a film. It was, of course, an installation in itself, and at the same time it was part of a more abstract installation together with the propeller in the other space. This is one of my propositions or theses within this book – that the concept of installation is not the concept of an art form that has to have a physical feature as a crucial, elementary feature or as a sign of the art form – rather, installation is more a mental concept. In this way I discussed a work of Madelon Hooykaas and Elsa Stansfield, *Memory Window*. They also used different spaces in the building of De Appel – the entrance space, the performance space, and the exhibition space. They brought something into those spaces, but the installation as a whole was a combination of all those physical things and experiences. The work of *Memory Window* is made by the onlooker; the onlooker, the viewer, makes in his head a kind of concept, a kind of image out of all those ingredients bought into the different spaces by the artists.

So, for me, the concepts are not really physical art forms, but they have, as I have said, an intertwinement, and they also have a more conceptual existence. In the

beginning, De Appel said that “video” is an object, it is a tape, video you can collect, you can show it in the museum or whenever you like, but if you look at the way artists were working with that medium of video there’s no difference between how they were working with video than how performance artists worked with intestines or other human organs. The video artists were also working with live situations and with their own histories, their own biographies; they were not only making an object, there was also a kind of process going on and for that reason they needed a kind of institution like De Appel where your process – the way of working – was accepted as the artistic practice. So, not the painting or video tape – that’s not the output, that is not the main thing – the main thing is, you could say, the conceptual way of working, or the scientific way of working, or the personal autobiographical way of working, any way the process was the main thing. Also the concept of “project” is more an umbrella concept that was introduced by De Appel the moment that they realized that artists don’t want De Appel as a building any longer, not the four walls in between everything that can take place; artists want to go to a public space, want to go to historical spaces, and they don’t want that traditional division any longer between an artist and a scientist. They want to do artistic research, which is what we have nowadays. “Project” is a kind of pre-figuration of our contemporary concept of artistic research. Also, of course, the artists who were doing those kind of projects were different from the performance artists of the early and mid-70s, because they were more orientated towards science and conceptual things. It also has to do with the new generation.

You can look at all those concepts in different ways, you can look at how they were applied, how they became part of a myth. You can look at it also as a development: out of performance to installation to projects. You could defend that the name “projects” is more fitting to the new generation of the early 80s, but on the other hand, you could also defend the idea that the things that took place in the 70s were more performance, or that at the end of the 70s the installations were also projects. But as a historical concept, projects were introduced later on and installations were introduced later than the concept of performance.

LN: And would you say that they all have things in common that are opposed to the old conception of autonomous artworks, such as in sculpture and painting? I ask because it seems that there are two ways of thinking and those are connected, but it

is maybe not yet clear how [they are connected], as we are still moving on in history. But still, they both seem to have performative aspects, including a more open concept of authorship, for example.

MM: Yes, yes, to take an example that is quite illustrative I think: Jackson Pollock. Up until that moment when that film was made of his action painting everyone was talking about him as a painter and as a maker of paintings. Of course, everyone knew that you could see the signals – the symptoms – of an action; the drippings are the traces of an action. But the moment that the film was made and all those photos were distributed of that filmmaking, and a new generation was integrating that way of receiving Pollock, Pollock was no longer a traditional painter.

LN: Yes, but it depends; I mean, it's a working process, and every artwork has involved the body of the producer as part of its working process.

MM: For example, when you look at Kurt Schwitters and other Dada artists you could say that they were making poems but the [published] poems are the remains of the poems spoken in the performances. The main thing was the performance, in which they used sounds and words. When you have a book and there are those poems in it they are only a remainder of the performance. So, it is the other way around: usually, you are interested in scores as the textual thing that forms the basis – the starting point – for the performance, and usually you are interested in all the different ways of documenting a performance by texts, by video and so on. However, if you take that example and you look at it from a traditional perspective, usually a writer writes poems – and, of course, everyone knows how good an experience it can be if a poet reads his own poems – but still one has the idea that the published poem in the book is still the artwork. But if you look at Kurt Schwitters and Tristan Tzara, I would defend the idea that if you really want to talk about what really is the artwork – if you want to have a moment in time in which to say: "that is the artwork" – I would rather say that it is the performance that is the artwork and not the published poem.

LN: Of course, I as an artist always think: what is the artwork? So I think what the artist decides and says is that is the artwork. But you have a broader [historic] view…

MM: I have a semiotic view, which I think is important to explain a bit. For me it is quite a simple way of looking at things. It makes things easier for me, because I can say that our perspective on those artworks, or those performances, is what Umberto

Ecco calls the “intention of the viewer,” which is for him more important than the intention of the author, the artist. From the point of view of the semiotician, there are only two things that important: the intention of the opus – the work – and the intention of the viewer. There is a supposed intention of the *modus operandis*, but what kind of ingredients does the work have that make signs for the viewer? When I look at an artwork, I figure out these kind of signs, I see a number of signs and they are signs because I know that there are other people who have the same idea about what is significant in the work. What are the signs of the work? The concept of the sign is derived from the idea that it can only be a sign if there are at least two people who think that this is a sign of something.

LN: Yes, but you can only look at an artwork when it is presented to you as an artwork. So, when we ask now if what Pollock did was a painting or a performance, or if what Kurt Schwitters did was a poem or if it was it a theater piece or a performance, this is the whole historical dimension. It is why I wanted to talk to you because at certain periods certain things are understood as particular things, and the artist needs this terms – I need the term, the notion of performance and everything that is connected to it historically in order to understand what it is that I do.

MM: But also the viewer needs that – or at least, you could say that it is implied in the way that the viewer looks at a certain thing. As I said to you about the example of Ben d’Armagnac, when you enter that performance space at De Appel and you see that box there are a number of signs. There are a number of recognizable things that are meaningful, but the viewer – and, of course, one viewer is different from the other viewer – brings his knowledge, his context, his references with him or her, and that influences the way he looks at that piece of work and forms his interpretations of that work. As I said, at that time there were a number of people and also a number of viewers who were inclined to negate the fact that the artist was representing his life in that specific situation. They were more inclined to think that he is showing us his way of living and that he has brought his way of living to us. But a young generation who was not present during that performance and was not representative of that generation but rather a younger generation, who are maybe influenced by what Marina Abramović wrote in the 90s about presenting and representing, will have a very different interpretation because they will say that it is not a presentation but a representation of the artist and his way of living. So, for me, there’s not one truth; it is

not that truth of the contemporary viewer in 1975, who looked at those performances and installations, is more useful or a better way of looking at it than someone who has only read about the performance and made an interpretation of that performance only by what he saw in the form of documentation: texts, video, photos, and so on. Of course, you will want to end with my last chapter because there all those theories in it – I am quite critical of Peggy Phelan, for example.

From my perspective as a semiotician, there are two things important: the signs of the work and the additional knowledge and experience that the viewer brings with him, which forms part of a certain context for a certain generation. It informs his way of looking and that makes another interpretation of the work than the interpretation of someone from an older generation or from another background. So, from the point of view of semiotician, the intention of the artist is really less important. Of course, I am aware of the fact that all the information I have about the artwork is information that is partly given to me by the artist and in different forms – by other works, performances or installation, by what he wrote beforehand or afterwards, in the form of a score or a report – and all that information is of course important and influences me. That is also a semiotic point of view – that all that information is bought to me in a different language: the language of a score, the language of an actual performance that I watch, the language of a visual recording or the language of a written report. These are all different languages and they have all a different relation. You cannot say that that there is only one thing – it is a combination in the interaction.

LN: So the definition of the artist – the fact that I say now that this is performance, or a painting, or my life, or whatever – this would be for you one bit of information in a net of other information?

MM: Yes, in my dissertation, I discuss extensively in Chapter Three publications of two semioticians, Felix Thürlemann and Jean-Marie Floch, a Swiss art historian and a French semiotician, not an art historian. Both of them are semioticians who wrote about Kandinsky. Kandinsky is an artist who wrote a lot about his work and there are a lot of publications that have some relation to his paintings, but it is interesting to see what exactly the word-image relation is in his work. Are those texts a kind of score? Or are they a kind of report? And how do they relate exactly to the image structure? To the power system of his work? Or the level of abstraction? One semiotician is inclined to say that you should not look to the development of his work to really have

a good understanding of his abstract work. Of course, you can say he developed slowly from figurative work to more abstract work, and you can understand his abstract work by looking back to his more figurative work. That's possible but you should not do it, otherwise why should the artist have made those abstract works? The abstract work is an intentional decision of the artist. So, you should look at that abstract painting as a new way of giving meaning to an artwork, and not try to explain it by comparing it to the works he made before.

LN: So it's not reducing in meaning, but it's another relation to meaning?

MM: Yes, another relation to meaning. The other semiotician has a different approach. There's a nice discussion between the two; I construct a kind of discussion between those two points of view and I also give my own opinion about that. That is, I think, an interesting case to look at for the question of "what is the artwork and how does it relate to other ways of communicating about the work, such as the score, video documentation, and so on?"

LN: I would like to continue by asking about the different texts – we already mentioned a few of them – that are around performances. Maybe we can start with announcement texts, as I am especially interested in these announcement texts; it can be the title, what will happen or is going to happen, or also what it is: is it a performance? Is it an event? What are the expectations connected to or arise from these titles? Did De Appel – we are speaking now about this time, these early performances that happened in the Netherlands – did they also send out or print a small description of what will happen? It also has to do with the curatorial concept, whether the director, Wies Smals, curated particular performances or invited artists. It has to do with what is communicated to the audience.

MM: There are a few principles that I could prescribe. Of course, those principles were always in the background, but the practice was sometimes quite different. I think there were two principles that were very important to Wies Smals and also to the other members of staff.

The first principle was that they felt a responsibility towards the audience – to the visitors – to inform the visitors and in quite a broad way: to give personal information about the artist, to give information about the development of the work of the artist, and to give information about the broader artistic and sometimes cultural context of

the work of art or the artist himself. She studied art history, she worked within the museum, and although it was not really so obvious that the museum presented artworks and gave a lot of information about the artwork – it could also just be hanging on the wall – for her personally it was quite important to have that role as a mediator between the public and the artist, and the artwork. Maybe more the artwork than the artist. That was an important principle to her.

The other principle, which was also one of the reasons why she founded De Appel, was that this generation – this type of artist, if you would like to call him – needed a different platform than the platforms that were there before. The gallery space was not a good platform for the artist, a museum was not a good platform, the theater was not a good platform. For a number of reasons – I won't elaborate upon that – but you could imagine that there are reasons why they were not a good platform for this type of artist. So, De Appel offered a place within which the artists were really well placed. It was a safe place, it was a closed space – people could not just enter the space, they had to ring the bell. Of course, that is more on a concrete level, but in a broader sense De Appel wanted to offer to the artist a really free mental space. So "you can do whatever you like within our institution." Of course, that is the principle. The practice was sometimes different. There is one example in the book that was really quite different. It was the work of a German artist. So, there are two, sometimes conflicting principles: one, the responsibility for your public, for your visitors; and two, the responsibility towards the artist; you want to give him all the possibilities to develop things the way he would like to do it.

LN: Yes, but was it communicated in advance what people wanted to do?

MM: Of course, the artists were invited by the institution, De Appel, and then there was a discussion between the artist and the curator, or the director. We cannot know what those discussions were, so it is more second-hand information, but what I do know is that there was really, as I said, a discussion between them because there was always the need to find a kind of compromise between those two principles. So, even if artists said "I don't want to know anything about what I am going to do," De Appel would accept that, but the moment that De Appel got the impression that it would be very harmful for the visitors the discussion would continue. And there is one example in which that happened – that De Appel did not accept what the artist intended to do.

LN: The kidnapping?

MM: Yes, kidnapping. Of course, it is a very exceptional example, but, on the other hand, it is very illuminating because the artist noticed that he was not able to convince De Appel of his project, and the only possibility to realize it was really to suggest that he had accepted the limits they had drawn, and then to kidnap the staff in order to do his original plan, but that was really an exception. In all the other cases there was a kind of negotiation between the staff and the artist, in which De Appel, on the one hand, wanted to realize the principle about information in relation to the viewers, but also give the artist the room he needed, literally and in a metaphorical sense, for his project. So, there was always an announcement of the performance, but the content of the announcement was, of course, the result of the discussion between the artist, the director and the staff.

De Appel was really quite convincing, I think, towards the artist, that it was really necessary to inform the public beforehand, but also to have documentation about the work afterwards. They had a photographer who was almost always present and made photos and documentation. De Appel, already in the very early stages, was aware that for that time frame it was important to make moving images, and that film was not the most suitable medium anymore but that video was, because you can turn it on, work in daylight, and you can make a recording from the moment the performance starts until the end. That is of course not possible with a film. So, they got money from the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds to buy a Sony camera and they taught themselves how to work with it; although not always, a lot of the performances were recorded on video. So, they thought that there is not just one way of recording, documenting. Photos are important, videos are important, and then, later on, they also asked a number of people – art critics and such – to make a written report of the performance, a written description.

That is obviously a very clear choice to not choose just one medium but to think about the combination of different media for the recording of the performance, because that generation – especially the European performance art generation – was not so eager to repeat performances. The idea of “once only” was part of the whole concept of performance art in Europe, in contrast to American performance artists, who were also working more in a theatrical context. In theory, you can have sometimes hundreds of performances of one theater play; although, of course, every

performance is slightly different. In that way you can have a large audience who have all seen that specific Hamlet performance.

They always asked the performer if he was accepting to do it at another time, to not do it once only.

LN: And did artist do performances twice at De Appel?

MM: There are some examples when the artist did it another time. But, in general, you could say that this generation of European artists had some difficulties with doing it another time.

LN: What about the relation to the video documentation? Did De Appel ask the artists…?

MM: To give permission? Yes.

LN: To give permission to the photographer. Did they work together? Did the artist inform the photographer in advance what was going to happen? Did the artist select [photographs to be published] afterwards?

MM: I don't think so but I am not sure. Oscar van Alphen was the photographer … He is not alive anymore, otherwise we could have asked him. I don't know if he got information beforehand about the performance.

LN: Was he free to move, for example?

MM: He was free to move, yes. He was free to move, that is for sure.

LN: This is also something that could be disturbing for the artist.

MM: Yes, yes.

LN: And some artists don't like the documentation, so…

MM: When I say "he was free to move" it is from the perspective of De Appel. But, of course, if an artist said "I don't want a photographer," or "I don't want the photographer to use the flash light" or whatever else … Then they had to accept that.

LN: Okay, and then what about the copyright afterwards? To whom did these photographs belong?

MM: To the photographer, but there are a few examples in which it was quite important. They were not the examples of Oscar van Alphen as the photographer, but of Gina Pane, who brought her own photographer with her. She was already quite an important artist before she became a performance artist. She worked with a gallery in France. The drawings she made in relation to her performance, and also the photos she let her own photographer make of the performance, were considered artworks in a way. At least, they were considered to be commercial objects.

LN: And in this case the photographer of De Appel would not be allowed to take pictures?

MM: No, he would not be allowed to make additional photographs. But that really is quite an exception.

LN: And apart from that, did every artist agree to give the photographer of De Appel the rights of the pictures? Would De Appel pay the photographer?

MM: Yes.

LN: But still the rights belonged to him?

MM: Yes, the negatives are still with the photographer. The negatives were not bought by De Appel, but when I was working on this book there weren't any problems with using his photos, because the photos are owned by De Appel. But there is another photographer who worked on commission – not as the photographer of De Appel – and he always wanted to be paid twice for his photos. He was paid in the past, but he also wanted to be paid when the photos were used again. I was really angry about him because in the beginning he said something like: "I was already paid, so you don't have to pay so much; if you want just fifty photos I'll make a good price," and then the moment we said: "yes, we need all of those photos," the price became higher and higher. But, anyway, the mentality of Oscar van Alphen was a different case, he was really different. He of course considered himself as an artist photographer, but what he did for De Appel was considered by himself to be a tool – an instrument – for the artist and the institute to document the performance. So, it was a very different attitude.

LN: Hmm, interesting, and what about the video documentation? Who did it?

MM: The De Appel staff themselves.

LN: So, it was different people?

MM: In the beginning it was always Wies Smals, the director, and when Josine van Droffelaar became a member of staff – she came from the Stedelijk Museum – she had quite a lot of experience working with video already and she did it quite a number of times.

LN: And what about the authorship of these documentations?

MM: It belonged to De Appel.

LN: They owned it?

MM: Yes, they own it and later on there were different institutions concerning video art. One was founded by an artist, René Coelho. Video was still a difficult topic for De Appel; as I said, the artist felt the necessity to have an institution like De Appel for their development, but De Appel from the beginning had the feeling that video art needed a different institution, so then they founded a new institution: Time Based Arts. So, in the Netherlands there were two institutions – well, there were more institutions but in Amsterdam there were at least two institutions – MonteVideo and Time Based Arts. Those two institutions became a combination, a fusion of both, and that is the Nederlands Instituut voor Mediakunst. It was an archive, it was a research institute, it was a production house and an exhibition space in the Netherlands until a couple of years ago. Because of the cuts it was necessary to close that building, the institution. So, it was really a big institution with different divisions, and in the collection of that institution there were different smaller collections, and one of those collections was the collection of the videotapes of De Appel. So, it was the Dutch institution for video art. It was a collection of the Lijnbaan Centre in Rotterdam – De Appel, Time Based Art – of the videos themselves, et cetera.

LN: And these documentations, they were part of the video art collection? But it was a document, so the author in that case is Wies Smals or…?

MM: Wies Smals was, of course, the director of the video.

LN: Was it cut, or was it just as it was recorded?

MM: It was recorded mostly from the beginning to the end, but later on there were cuts made.

LN: And who did this?

MM: I think … I'm not sure. Gina Pane, *Discours mou et mat*, that performance was recorded by De Appel, and as I said she worked with her own photographer but not with her own videographer. So, that was done by De Appel, and it could be that the cuts were done by, or not done by the artist but on the initiative of the artist, that's possible, but I'm not sure …

LN: But there is no authorization from the artist? If the rights belong to De Appel, the artist never authorized the material, I guess …

MM: Yes, I guess, but I'm not sure. I think I could mention a few names who may know this …

LN: Maybe I can write down these names afterwards. Let's move onto the next topic: publishing and publications. Could you say a few words about this?

MM: Yes, there were a number of regular publications in art journals, and also in Dutch newspapers. This was not too difficult for the De Appel, on the one hand, because the close circle around De Appel – the people who were really interested in things going on in De Appel – consisted of people who were art historians or art critics. A number of them were regularly publishing in the Dutch art journals and newspapers. For example, Antje van Graevenitz and Paul Hefting. So, they had direct access to the main art journals and newspapers in the Netherlands and, as you said you read the book, maybe you have seen that I published small photos in the book of covers of a very important Dutch art journal, financed by a number of contemporary art museums in the Netherlands, called *Museumjournaal*. Until 1980 to 1981, most of the covers bore photos related to things in De Appel or things that had been organized by De Appel, or the same artists that had presented in De Appel. Anyway, there was a connection between the covers of the *Museumjournaal* – most of the covers – and De Appel. The reason was the editor-in-chief of the *Museumjournaal* was also a member of the board of De Appel, so there was really that close connection.

So, those were the huge platforms in the art world that they had access to. Besides that, there was a small art journal, an initiative of an artist, art critic and translator – it was one of the artists doing performances in De Appel, who was also an art critic and an English person who did a lot of translations and who also translated this book – Michael Gibbs. De Appel gave a commission to that art critic to publish written reports of the performances in that journal, *Artzien*, that was the title of the journal. So, that was a kind of channel for De Appel to make recordings – written recordings of the public. So, of course, it is a different way of looking for a platform, because there were those connections, these personal relations between De Appel and those important art journals. Still, of course, the art critics had their own responsibility of what to write, and how to look at the performance, et cetera. In general, they were quite positive, as you can imagine, but it was still their responsibility. But *Artzien*, as I said, commissioned by De Appel, so that was a different story.

LN: And when did the idea come up to build an archive?

MM: From the start.

LN: If it was from the beginning was it connected to the idea that performances require a bigger need to have an archive.

MM: As I said, it was the feeling of being responsible. For the future, you have a historical responsibility. You are a part of things that have a historical meaning, so that was really quite important. Also, there were, of course, a number of artists involved at De Appel who felt the same need to let future generations be informed about performance art. Marina Abramović is the main example. What she is doing now – or rather, lately in the last couple of years – you could, of course, say that it makes her even more famous, but you can be quite critical about the glamorous side of it. I think that her motives are really much related to her feeling of being responsible for the survival and maybe even the future of performance art. She as a performance artist and performance art as something that is not exceptional, not to only to be placed in the 70s and in the 90s, but as an art form with its own possibilities and its own meanings and it owns effects and affects, it has a history, it has a future – and she as a key figure in performance art, she as Marina Abramović, feels that responsibility. She does reenactments as a form of giving performance an

afterlife. She will find a situation for performance art – what she is working on right now – she does workshops, she teaches, et cetera.

LN: Back to De Appel, it has now changed the whole area of this understanding, and also Abramović was a key figure in changing this understanding. I am interested in what was there from the beginning. How did Wies Smals, or the board of De Appel, how did they conceive the connection between archiving, documenting and the performances?

MM: Yes, of course they were aware of the "once-only" character of performance art as being part of its contents – an important part of its content. But as I said, there was that relation to art history; not only Wies Smals but also members of the board were art historians and art critics at the same time. It was also a period that was quite important in the development of educational practices in the world. Art teachers were very active in public debate; there were interesting conferences, there were side-programs in art schools, there were lectures, et cetera. So, it was really – and there were remains still of this echo of 1968 – the feeling of responsibility that what you are doing should be accessible to anyone. That political attitude was very much alive in this generation. Besides that, Wies Smals worked in the library of the Stedelijk Museum, so she was really used to collecting, to documenting, to archiving, et cetera. It was so obvious for them. She asked me in the beginning of De Appel … I was a student still at that time … I said she studied art history for a moment, not so very long as she had not the right diploma and she could not have official access to the university, but just because she was motivated she was accepted to follow a few lectures at the university. She could not read very well, nor write very well, and so she asked me as just a good student to be an advisor for publications that could be relevant for the library of De Appel. Not only books, but also art journals, international art journals. I remember that, for example, a Canadian art journal, *Parachute* was advised by me to collect for the archive. A number of other things I was advising on. So, she was really eager to be up to date in a way. Also in more theoretical aspects.

LN: But she was not into theory?

MM: She was not into theory because she was dyslexic; she was not really able to read all those things. But she still was really eager to give other people the

opportunity to give suggestions as to what to collect. Of course, that's possible at the same time.

LN: Yes, interesting!

MM: Even if you're not capable yourself, you can be convinced of the necessity of building an archive.

LN: Interesting … And was there a clash? Because this educational trajectory and everything that has to do with documenting and archiving, this is certainly a clash with the myth of performance art. I wonder if that was ever discussed.

MM: Yes, I think that on the one hand, De Appel did not really build the myth in a way intentionally because, as I said, they wanted to give as much information as possible as permitted by the artist. But, on the other hand, if you were going to that building, De Appel, you will see that there are really small spaces, so the public was also a very small public, and even if a performance happened twice there were not more than eighty people who could actually attend the performance. But, of course, a lot of people who weren't actually there talked about it, and then a second-life developed after the performance – of all the stories and of all the telling about experiencing, et cetera, and a lot of performances had no clear content. It was based upon experience and of feeling – maybe even shivering and whatever else, you know – it was not something that you could only look at from a rational perspective. People felt the identification, the empathy, et cetera. So, if you want to make that clear to an audience that was not there, it is very difficult to avoid a kind of growing of myth, as you can imagine. Of course, De Appel, when they asked art critics to write that written report, there were number of descriptions and facts, et cetera.

LN: How long were these reports?

MM: It depends, what was published in *Art Scene* was maybe about six hundred words, something like that. Not more than four hundred to six hundred words. But there was another art critic who also wrote the monograph about Ben d'Armagnac.

LN: What is the name?

MM: Louwrien Wijers. She is still alive, you could go and see her. She does not live in Amsterdam, she lives quite far away, but often she is here. What she did was, on

the one hand, make a lot of interviews with artists – not only performance artists … well, Joseph Beuys was also a performance artist – but with people like Joseph Beuys. She knew him very well and she was also one of the very close friends of Ben d'Armagnac and, as I said, she wrote a monograph about him. She made a lot of interviews with those artists, in which she gave the artist a platform to say whatever he liked. They were not really critical interviews; it was more a way of giving the floor to the artist.

LN: And were those interviews published?

MM: Yes, they were published. They were made into collections, those interviews. But they were distributed also just by making prints of them. We have now all kinds of methods of printing on demand, and although it was technically different back then it was a kind of print on demand.

LN: Was it copied?

MM: Yes, copied and distributed; those texts were of the interviews and text with descriptions. Though she was quite a holistic figure, and she still is a holistic figure, they were really descriptions and not so much interpretations. She was very informed with hardly any distance to the art.

LN: Okay. The last relation I am interested in is the relation between the exhibition space and the performance space. I read in your book that when an artist would be invited to De Appel he or she had both floors, and on one floor there was the exhibition and on the other floor there was the performance.

MM: That was possible. In fact they were three different spaces: there was the office part of the building, and the office part of the building was divided into three, you could say. So, you had the desk when you entered, then you had a square table in the back.

LN: Ah, yes, there is a picture.

MM: Yes, and there were also the shelves and all the documentations, the library

LN: And also the tapes?

MM: Yes, the tapes and a video monitor so you could also watch recordings or videotapes of the artists. So, that was the second part of that room, and then you had the wall – one large wall – and there was always an exhibition, but then that was an exhibition of documentation materials. So, for example, reviews in newspapers or art journals of performances the artist did before, or the working material of the artist – in any way, information, just information, context information. Then the artist could use the performance space to do the performance, but some artists also used the exhibition space to do performances. Some artists did not use the exhibition space at all and did only performance. There was always that possibility to make use of different spaces.

LN: And did those two spaces have a different lighting system?

MM: They were quite different because the exhibition space had a very close ceiling; it was a very rectangular space, with only one or two doors for access and there were windows on one side. Usually the windows just let in daylight. The performance space had the balcony; it was a kind of cellar. On the ground floor, the measure of the ground floor was about the same as the height of the room. You had the floor and a kind of balcony inside the room, so there was a kind of balcony. You could watch also from the balcony down to the performance floor. There were windows, but they were almost always closed, so there was no daylight. It was a white space but they were bricks were painted white; it was not the walls of a museum, it was not that clean, white space of a museum, it was brick.

LN: That was why it was not so good to exhibit there?

MM: So, you could enter by just one door, or you could go by a few steps to that balcony, that balcony, and watch down, but that was an exception that people watched from that position. That space, that balcony, was used as a sleeping bedroom, so the artist could stay there. So, it was more the private space of the artist usually.

LN: So, sometimes it was open to the public and sometimes it was not?

MM: Sometimes it was open, and sometimes it was allowed for the photographer to go and make pictures from above. That was possible. So, there was no daylight, there was just one door to gain access to it. So, it was also possible to prevent

people from entering up until a certain moment, like in a theater in a way and unlike the gallery space. In that way it is a little bit comparable to a theater, but for the rest it was not really a black box, although there was no daylight. I think most people did not compare it with a theater, but they also did not compare it with a museum or an exhibition space. It was really a warehouse and it was turned into a performance space. So, it had its own identity in a way, you could say.

LN: Okay, and when a performance happened in the performance space and in the other space the artist had decided to make an exhibition, after the opening and after the performance evening would the exhibition stay? And would the other space, the performance space, be closed?

MM: No, not always.

LN: So there would be left the traces?

MM: Yes.

LN: And the other exhibition?

MM: Yes, I could give a few examples of artists who did a performance and left the traces as a kind of installation, you could say. Of course, those traces were traces back to the performance.

LN: Could you mention a few examples? I remember the wet floor …

MM: Yes, the wet floor, but I am thinking about these sound environments, maybe? The performance/installations of Sef Peeters and Servie Jansen would be other examples.

LN: So, this installations was produced during the performance, one could say?

MM: Yes, and partly before the performance. There is another example that I am thinking about. This is an example of what you could call an environmental installation, for which the artist, Marco Bagnoli, used the whole building, so it went through the whole building. He denied the specific characters of the rooms.

LN: Okay, then I start with my first general question. I will read it, otherwise it will be too confusing: to work with performance for me precisely means to cope with the paradox of performance as live-art stated by Philip Auslander. It means that it has to

be ephemeral in order to be a performance, but it also has to be recorded to be a performance, which creates a paradoxical situation. It also means to cope with its ontology – I refer here to Peggy Phelan – and also with exploring and questioning those preconceived things with performance, and I was wondering how artists conceived of performance before its ontology was defined as live. Would you say that historically the artists' understanding of performance positioned it as an authentic, unique live experience? Which, for me, kind of burdens performance till today at least performance in a visual context. Or do you think that it is more the other way around, that this live experience and authentic moment was ascribed later to the performances and also from "outside"?

MM: My opinion is that you could say that until maybe about 1973, and then I am only talking in the European performance tradition. Of course there were artists doing performances in Europe, like Der Wiener Aktionismus, and those Actionists had no idea of what you are describing, of the "once-only-ness" and the ephemerality, and that particular kind of conceptualization of performance art. They had an elaborate score.

LN: The Viennese especially? Or do you have other examples?

MM: Yes, and Carolee Schneeman is also a good example. Of course she is an American artist, but she worked quite a lot in Europe, in France and in England especially. You could say that the generation of the 60s, that they came with something completely different compared with theater plays, but I don't want to see this as the birth of the real performance art, in that sense. In the sense of the "once-only-ness," the being ephemeral, et cetera.

LN: So this came later?

MM: This came later, yes.

LN: When?

MM: An important turning point is about 1972 to 1973, I think. There was that exhibition in Luzern, *Transformer*; the artists who were there all dealt with their personal – and personal in the largest sense: sexual identity and the idea of transforming one's identity, the in-between-ness of gender, et cetera. When Wies Smals became informed about these developments and these type of artists who

realized it and who were an important representative of this kind of new development, she immediately saw that this was really quite different from the art so far. So, it had everything to do with vulnerability, identity, intimacy, et cetera. Of course, the Viennese artists were always looking for a large audience. They had different motives for what they did, it had to do with the memory of the Second World War, it had to do with Georges Bataille's transgressive and abject conceptions, and with Antonin Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*; it had to do with Viennese Expressionism. It had all kinds of cultural backgrounds, and, of course, Artaud was a soldier during the First World War. They had also their personal histories, but I think their personal histories were less important than their cultural knowledge and the cultural messages that they felt important to communicate. They really looked for a large audience.

LN: They prepared, but then they pretended that it was spontaneous, for example. This tension interests me.

MM: Yes, it was not spontaneous. Of course, it was also, in the case of Hermann Nitsch, based on the principle of a ritual. The ritual is, of course, based upon repetition: repetition within one performance and repetition of one performance to another performance. So, yes, repetition and ritual is something you can teach your audience – your audience learns quite quickly to see a kind of pattern in a performance – and in the actions of Otto Mühl and Hermann Nitsch there is a kind of pattern.

LN: The ritualistic aspect?

MM: Yes, the ritualistic aspect. In the case of performances, for example, by Marina Abramović, there are two main concepts therein – and also in the book – the fact that how long a performance will last and when a performance will end are uncertain features of the performance and these are important features of the performance.

LN: For her?

MM: For her, but also for the audience.

LN: But this concept of unfixed duration doesn't belong to all the early performances, right? I guess some artists had fix duration … or not?

MM: Yes, it could also work the other way around. For example, I mentioned a Hungarian artist in the book, Tibor Hajas, and he wanted his performance in Warsaw to last forty minutes, but he lost so much energy during the performance he was not able to end the performance in the way he had planned to. That was something out of control. Marina Abramović planned to be out of control.

LN: But still it is a plan.

MM: Yes, still it is a plan, there are rules. But the implications of those rules are that the audience is in an insecure and unsure position. Of course, you can have a lot of confidence in the artist and think they will manage to fulfill their plan – or you have no confidence in the artist, that is something an audience can have – but it was still completely different from a theater play, in which you know there will be a break at half nine in the evening. There is still that big difference.

LN: But, when would you say that this authentic was only live-experience, which also has to do with it being a kind of myth – not only true – at what time was this ascribed, attached or connected to the notion of performance? Now you have said that the really early performances in the 60s did not have those things. That they would be either ritualistic or there would be other examples of just actions – doing something in public space would be an example – one could do it again, it doesn't matter for the action itself. For example Valie Export's *Tapp und Tastkino* or the action that she made with Peter Weibel as a dog, it is not part of the concept that it is once only, and it's not that important I would say. It's an action, and for the ritual …

MM: I still think that Peggy Phelan is very important for this …

LN: Ah, you think so late?

MM: Yes, it was very late. As I said, that people who were not attending the performance were getting the idea themselves or via the people who told them about the performance and who were actually present during the performance, they really missed something that could not be replaced. That element was already very present during the first years of De Appel. But it was not really made part of a theory, or part of conception at that time. I would just look at myself: I lived in Arnhem during that time, I was not yet working in Amsterdam – the first years I was a student, later on I had a job in Utrecht – so, I was not able to attend all the performances, especially

when they were on Thursday evening, for example. The weekend was a different case, but on the Thursdays I missed quite a number of performances, but every week I went to De Appel to see the recording. So, for me, I still had the feeling that the recording was enough, was useful, that I could imagine how the performance was to be experienced yourself, that you could use your imagination to bridge the gap between the video recording and the actual performance.

LN: Do you think this has to do with the fact that you watched it right one week after …

MM: One day after sometimes!

LN: … and also in the same space? Because if I would go now … for me it would not be so close.

MM: No … and there were still people there; for example, there would be Wies Smals who could tell me a lot about the performance. Of course, that was a different case, but still, if at that moment the staff of De Appel or the people around De Appel had really worked on the mythologization of the performance art, like Peggy Phelan did later on, I probably would have behaved a bit differently, I think.

LN: You would not watch the documentation?

MM: Maybe not …

LN: Because you had the feeling that you had missed it and it was not worth seeing?

MM: Or maybe I would have decided to see all the performances whenever possible.

LN: Interesting, I think it's also interesting that you watched the document but still you were quite close to the performance. From the point of ontology, we would say the medium is always the same. The recording itself doesn't change, so it doesn't matter when you watch it. But actually, it matters, because the performance seems to live longer within the space also because of the memory of people, because of traces, of people around, of those things.

MM: Yes, yes.

LN: Okay, yes, good. So, then, the second question is again, a mixture of statement and question: in theater before the post-dramatic period, the written text – the drama

– was the preceding and also remained the unchanged original of each performed piece. And, I guess, but this is also a question to you, the denial that there was no script or score for early performances had to do with the fact that artists wanted to differentiate their work from then theater performances. I was wondering why artists didn't say "well, we are building new relations to text and theater," but they just said that there is no text, which is a bit … there's always text, a concept. Everything that we know and spoke about today, context is text. Could you tell a little bit about how this opposition between text and performance came about? Do you think it's the same answer with Peggy Phelan?

MM: No, no. Marina Abramović first made statements about this from a very early date.

LN: From when?

MM: I think 1974 or something like that.

LN: Okay, and what kind of statement?

MM: So, the "anti-theater" attitude …

LN: That this has to do with the relation to text, of performance to text?

MM: To texts, because it's an obstacle when you want to keep the performance as real as possible. The theater, as you said, has a text, and the text is performed and it is brought into a different reality, it is not reality itself, the actors are of course acting. There are fake elements.

LN: Of course, there are differentiations, but I'm interested in the point between text and performance, in that relation. I was wondering when this division came about and why artists needed to claim that there is no text. Now we know that they drew before, they wrote down, they did know in advance what they were going to do. These are all scripts. These are all texts. So, I was wondering when and why artists need to deny that there is a text.

MM: I think it has everything to do with how texts are an obstacle, or at least diminishes the level of experience of the performance, whether that be the physical experience, the visual experience of the performance. For example, Benjamin Buchloh had a very different context and sense about artists in the 90s. They really

wanted to hit – those artists in the 90s – they wanted to hit the viewer between the eyes, so that means to not give the viewer the opportunity to distance himself from what is happening, to confront the viewer directly with what is happening in time and place.

LN: But this is also a concept: this is my text, when I am a performer, then this is my text, my concept, is to hit between your eyes. This is my score. The performance – how I do it and how this is then experienced live – I don't know because I have never rehearsed it before and it may change depending on what space we are in – if we are in a bigger space then maybe it will be a bigger distance – this is really a unique moment. But what I don't understand is where this division comes from.

MM: Because, as I said, if you have that information and you have a score … For example, if you're a theater critic, you read Shakespeare's text and you have seen director A make a performance out of that text, and director B is doing it in a different way. Then, when you watch that second performance of *Hamlet*, for example, you are comparing the performance with the other performance and with the text.

LN: But then I could say that I do this score only once, then it is the same. Or I could not hide the score, or say that there was concept. I do know what I am doing. Also, when an artist paints a painting, the artist does not say: "I have no idea who did this painting," but in performance it is "it just came out of me and I don't know."

MM: But that's not the problem. Of course, it is possible that an artist makes some notes, some drawings and has some plans, but what kind of information do you want your audience to have beforehand? What kind of information prevents your audience from having the kind of experience you want them to have? That, I think, in the case of Marina and Ulay, for example, is a really important issue; as they were really working for months and months, there is no actual rehearsal for the performance, but there is such a training in a mental and physical sense, they really made as much effort as a theater actor. Only, they don't want themselves to rehearse it, they want to maintain something of a spontaneous act. The presupposition of that is that they think that the audience will have a different feeling when there is no rehearsal than if there had been.

LN: Okay, do you think that the relations that live-performance has to its documentations, or performative acts to their medializations, do you think this relation

has changed since the early performance works? When we talk now about performance documentations we already talk about a genre, and I was wondering how artists did deal with it before it was coined as such, before it was called performance documentation. I don't ask if it became more or less … I am interested in how the awareness changed the medium or the way it was dealt with it.

MM: In the beginning you had a feeling that in the 90s a lot had changed, and I think that we should be aware of the influence, for example, of the internet. We have become used to communicating in quite different ways since the internet is there. It is not only the direct application of the internet, but the idea that there is no longer something like the "real place" and other places, because the internet is everywhere. So, everything is everywhere present in a way. Of course, it is a fiction, but that is also the implicit method of the internet – that all the information you can get is everywhere. I think also it has two reactions: on the one hand, the revival of performance art has everything to do with that, that there was a kind of longing of a time in which there were those experiences – those real and once only experiences, that things still matter – while now, since the internet, everything can be changed for something else, you know. There are no things anymore that have intrinsically more value than anything else. So, that reaction, that response to the longing for real experience, is one reaction to the age of the internet, but the normal effects of communication since internet is that we don't take care so much about the quality of information and the way we get the information, the medium of information.

LN: Do you mean by "information" the documents?

MM: Yes, the documentation. So for example if a student at the university or secondary school writes a thesis or paper he collects information from books and from the internet till the moment where he thinks I have enough information. The quantity of the information ranges much more than it did before. So, in the past, people were probably more developing themselves in small environments and surroundings, this was an obvious choice and a choice they made because these are the kind of ideas they wanted to identify with – they wanted to belong to that group of people that have those kind of opinions and viewpoints. Then you of course add information, but at the same time you value that information, so it's more information that is selected by criteria – was more often selected, rather – by quality rather than quantity. I think that's quite important.

LN: So, do you think there is a lot of performance documentation today, or too much?

MM: I don't say too much, I think more that people at a certain moment have the idea of … Well, you are interested in comparison between different documentation media, so "comparison" means a qualitative way of looking at the intrinsic qualities certain ways of documentation have – what can I attain with one medium in comparison to another? – but I think in general people are satisfied as long as they get information. What kind of medium doesn't matter so much, but the quantity of the information to get a certain picture, and to maybe have enough, have a certain amount of material to communicate about that subject. So, the experience is not so important anymore as the information level you need to situate something and to maybe communicate with others about it.

LN: But when we talked about De Appel, you said that there would more or less always be the camera and I guess it would be in the middle of the room, or…? So there seems to be an awareness of the document, but it doesn't seem that much reflected or talked about how this looks, who makes it, how it is made, who owns the rights, where it is shown afterwards – all these questions that we have today as young artists working with different media. I was wondering about this awareness, these kind of things … I thought that in the 90s it might have changed because in the 90s performance became broadly exhibited and performance documents were being sold. So, yes, I think the relation between performance changed in this moment of talking about it and looking at it through these mediums.

MM: At that time, up until 1983, I am quite sure, that the more commercial – I call it commercial marketing – aspects of documentation were really not an issue or topic of De Appel. So, we were discussing their feeling of responsibility towards the future, towards history, that's an important issue, but that's something of the long-term. On the short-term, they used those video tapes to go to art schools – mainly to art schools but also university – and to tell students about performance art and to show them that videotape so that they can get an idea, or clue, as to what performance art was or is.

LN: And it was not yet an issue that what we see we see through the medium, which means that this also immediately changes …

MM: The video is the most transparent medium we have right now.

LN: This is what I thought, that this relation in the beginning was kind of natural or unreflected, it was done, in the doing, in the practice. Now, and maybe since the 90s there is a kind of ontology concept …

MM: There was a certain reflection, because otherwise De Appel would have not asked people to write the written report. They had an idea that video recordings may not be the ideal … It was new and it's better than film, but still of course they had the idea that you could not miss a written report of a performance.

LN: I remember you write in the introduction that, in your opinion, a performance should not be repeated. Is this right? And I guess you said so, because the context cannot be repeated? I don't recall the argument entirely.

MM: Yes, I mean it in a semiotic way. Every performance has its own meaning, so in a semiotic way a performance can be repeated but every repetition is not the same as it was the day before. There is always a difference. Only the difference, or the focus, the emphasis within performance art when a performance is repeated is still … the character or the level of repetition, and the … how is called it? …the measure, to how far it or what extent it is a repetition …

LN: Yes, I understand.

MM: … is dependent upon the artist himself, and to his capacities.

LN: Also by the performance itself, because by my performance I can put this … move an object one meter, and then it is quite easy to repeat it. I can come tomorrow and I can do this more or less the same. But when we try to repeat the entire conservation tomorrow it would be a bit much …

MM: Yes, but at the same time you realize that in a performance a performance artist can make the decision not really to repeat the performance, to make changes. Not only because he feels different than the day before, but because he had another intuition or a different conceptualization of the performance.

LN: But isn't it then another performance?

MM: If it is, of course, a repetition. People first start with that idea, and then maybe they have information and they notice that it is different from the day before or later

on they recognize that it is different from the day before. Nobody cares, in a way. Nobody goes to the artist and says “please give me my money back.”

LN: Yes, because the performance has no value anyway – only the document. The document you can only sell once.

MM: But also because you are aware that you don’t pay for the repetition. You pay for the performance.

LN: I don’t understand the difference.

MM: When you go to the theater play.

LN: I pay today ten euros and tomorrow I will also pay ten euros.

MM: Yes, you will pay ten euros tomorrow. But when the actors decide during the break: “we will not continue after the break” … then people will say: “give me my money back.” But still, if a performance artist promised to do the performance again, but changes the content of his performance instantly …

LN: Yes, instantly, but when I change the concept of the work I also have to change the title usually, because then it is a different work.

MM: But still I think it is possible that artists make the decision to do it, halfway through a performance to come to a different ending or whatever else. Not only because they are physically incapable of doing the same thing, or they have a different emotion, a different charisma, maybe also because they just don’t want to … don’t want to again that very emotional element, that pathetic element, it was too pathetic.

LN: A little bit of censorship?

MM: Yes, a little bit of censorship. But I think that is the autonomy of the visual arts, that tradition especially of performance art, makes it so that people will accept those changes and won’t say that they want their money back.

LN: So, you would say that performance has no autonomy in the sense that a picture does? When I have a picture I can exhibit it twice and no one will say: “hey, that’s another context.” Context always matters and makes a difference – where I exhibit the picture: in my flat, in your bedroom, or at the Stedelijk museum – but everyone

will say that this picture is of Lilo Nein and it is autonomous and she can exhibit it here and there but the picture is always the same.

MM: Michael Fried, for example, says that every good picture has its meaning and its importance and its significance wherever it is exposed, wherever it is shown.

LN: This is the autonomy of an artwork.

MM: Yes, but of course there are a lot of artists who have a different view, because we think that context matters.

LN: But I just wonder when we compare this now to performance, everyone would say: “you did this performance in the bedroom of Marga van Mechelen, so this is the performance, you cannot do it in Stedelijk museum now.” I wonder if performance from the beginning was against this autonomy, or is it more dependent on the context, or would you say it is not autonomous anyway … or can it be different?

MM: I think that is more the autonomy of the artist. Not of the artwork but the artist, that it is accepted of a performance artist that he, on the one hand, has his own ordeal. There is a kind of vow there: I want to reach this, I want to attain this goal, I promise you that I want to attain that goal, I promise it to myself, it is a chance for me to get there, to achieve that goal. But if an artist does not succeed, like for example Tibor Hajas, who wanted to hang on the ceiling for forty minutes but was not able to do it more than twenty minutes, I did not go to him and say I want my money back. When I go to a circus and an acrobat is not able to do any performance then I would go to them and say I want my money back. That’s the difference. Of course a circus is an acrobat theater in a way. I mention that example because these things are connected more to performance art than to traditional theater. But still, when you go and see an acrobat, you have confidence that he will survive, you know that it is a kind of ritual, he’s done it twenty or thirty times before and there has been a lot of repetition. But still, the fact that you are really concentrated when you watch the acrobat is because there is still a lot of risk. But, as I said, when an accident happens during that act, you accept that; there is still an element of risk in circus, yet when the acrobat really doesn’t succeed in any act you want your money back because that is not part of the deal. I think your audience has a really different attitude as a performance artist because of the fact that he probably did not repeat it. It’s a mental vow.

LN: Do you think this still is, or do you only talk about this period?

MM: As I said, there has been a reaction, especially in the 90s, of artists and of the audience also, who long for that old performance art. Here in the Netherlands there is a performance artist who founded a foundation … I don't know the exact title of the foundation … it is something like Performance No Tech. What she wants is to organize performance – and she is doing performance herself as well – she wants to organize performances of performance artists who do not use technology, props – a little bit of props, but not very dominant props or technology in the performance art – who stay close to their own physical possibilities and limits. That is her idea and that you could say is quite romantic in a way; it is romantic because it goes back to that earlier idea of performance art. So, there are those kinds of performance artists, and at the same time in the 90s you had a number of reenactments. Often the reenactments, certainly in the beginning, were a kind of "ironization" the performance art, making it ironic, to play with it.

LN: Do you mean reenactments by the artists themselves?

MM: No, these were by other artists. Although, I must say that the reenactments by Yoko Ono of her performances were not as serious as her old performances. I would not say that there was a lot of irony or cynicism in her reenactments … more neutral … a more neutral way of doing the reenactments.

There are a number of younger generation performance artists who actually play with the old concepts: sometimes literal reenactments, or almost literal reenactments, but sometimes also with a play on the crucial themes of performance art, and sometimes also with different layers. One example was a performance artist who had cream –not cream that you use for mixing things – and she took her arm until about here into that cream and clotted the cream until it was really clotted cream. Of course, that is really funny to see someone doing that for an hour, making clotted cream out of it. But there was a moment also when the audience would realize how much pain it would cause, so people felt pity towards her at a certain moment, and she was very anxious to realize her goal. She was not laughing at the public, saying: "see me doing this." At the beginning there was a kind of laughter for a moment, and then there came a moment of identification for the pain. So, this is a typical example of the 90s and how they worked with traditions of performance art.

Then you had the twins who did performances – they are anorexic, these twins, Liesbeth and Angélique Raeven – they did a performance in which they used the Bologna performance of Marina and Ulay, in which Marina and Ulay stood opposite each other naked and everyone who wanted to enter the art gallery had to go pass the body and touch either the male or female body. The twins were also standing in the same position although they were not naked, of course, but you could see that they were anorexic, you could still feel their bones if you passed them, but of course that is quite an experience. As soon as you passed them, you did not notice but your own weight was projected full screen for the whole audience. The artists they had hardly any weight – forty-five or forty-two kilos – and then you had to go between them and then you would see your own weight projected. That is funny to have again those different emotions, and I think that is quite typical for a lot of performance artists that started to do performances again in the 90s. On the one hand, really aware that you want to reach a real emotion, but then on the other hand being aware of the fact that you have distance to that history [the 1970s] and that spectacle look of the history.

LN: And, also, wanting to create that emotion is also a concept or is also an artwork. Also, the performance ontology came up at the end of the 90s. Maybe you can say the last little bit about this? What is your feeling and what is this term, or how its claim changed the way of how we look at performance art today.

MM: Quite a number of people are asking me, for example, a radio program asked me: can you deliver a performance artist who we can talk about, a performance artist who is doing still such awful things, something like that, you know. There still is a kind of image of performance art that is still related to all those very risky performance artists of the 70s, especially Marina Abramović. I must say, that on the one hand I am also responsible for that when I teach about abjection and transgression and I take as examples of the 60s and 70s the Viennese Actionists, Marina Abramović, Carolee Schneemann, Ana Mendieta, et cetera. Then you confirm that picture of performance art, and in confirming that picture you also confirm that there is also something like an ontology of performance art. Then on the other hand – and this is also my response – when people ask me to deliver a performance artist and ask are there any performance artists left, I tell them that there are hardly any exhibitions nowadays in which there are no performance artists present in the exhibition itself, during the

opening of the exhibition, in the course of the exhibition, et cetera. It is so integrated in everything, but that does not imply that those performances have the same character as the performances of the 70s. They are very different, the variety of subjects within performance art nowadays. I think because it is so normal now, that is perhaps the reason why people are looking for performance art now. Because they are looking for the 70s art, the 70s performance art and they are not aware that it is actually everything and is very visible in a way.

I think that's … I cannot imagine it will be over within a couple of years, performance art. I don't think so … Also because there is a completely another argument for it, the same argument as for installation art: art is a global art and artists are travelling from one place to another, and most art that is going on in contemporary art is shown in contemporary exhibitions; for example, the Biennales all over the world, exhibitions that are bound to a certain location and time period, where artists are going to and they are there and they don't have anything with them. They go to a shop and they buy their stuff and they make their installation, and after their exhibition it goes as rubbish, it goes away, and they travel by plane or whatever else and go to the next biennale and make a different thing, or make the same thing. So, today, installations are also ephemeral, the main part is ephemeral. The same thing happens with performance. Performance also belongs to that global art world. That is also a reason why I don't think performance will be over in a couple of years.

LN: And then the museums started to buy the written stuff, they collect now all the scripts. Okay, well thank you very much for the long conversation!