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## The War of the Concepts What Is Conceptual Performing Arts?

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# **The War of the Concepts**

## **What Is Conceptual Performing Arts?**

Projektarbete, Lärarrollen i konstnärlig utbildning, February 2021  
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## Introducing Conceptual Performing Arts

On 22 Jan 2021, at 12:11, Sofie Lebech <[sofie.lebech@thm.lu.se](mailto:sofie.lebech@thm.lu.se)> wrote:

Hi all you great teachers who have taught or will teach at KOS (konceptuell scenkonst/Conceptual Performing Arts) Etta, Jonas, Iggy, John, Erik, Steinunn, Charlotte, and Tanja.

I am doing a course in university pedagogy. As part of this I will write a short uppsats on the theme “What is conceptual performing arts?”

I would like to ask if you can write a 2-3 lines definition of what it is for you – personal rather than theoretical – just what you think when you teach. I’m interested to see how we all think about it. It will be of great help.

Any language.

Best

Sofie

Generously, the mails began ticking in. Here are some extracts of the answers:<sup>1</sup>

Having a conceptual approach to creating performing art is to begin working with the question: HOW do I want to work and what is my topic or mission with the work? So rather than already knowing that you want to order a written text from a script-writer about a certain topic, or you choose a piece of music for a choreography, to enter into a sort of “pre defined” approach to creating a piece for the stage, you question this approach from the beginning and choose a format as a starting point that may challenge traditional approaches to producing theatre, dance, musicals etc.

Erik Pold, theatre maker, teacher at Conceptual Performing Arts.

I see KOS as an experimental approach to performance art/live art/scenic art where it is possible to enter the creation process from many different ways and where the desired outcome is negotiated and in constant process. Where the ability of performance making is developed, not taught, and where the crafts that is required is not pre-scribed but rather discovered, brought, learned and stolen during the process. John Hanse, theatre maker, teacher at Conceptual Performing Arts and PhD-fellow at (THM).

My way to work with it is from a very practical perspective, based on the experience from working with the courses over the last years. A big part of it I believe is to try to teach the students how to create or shape conditions for an open and visionary process regarding both form and content while still working in a collaborative and practical context. And to be able to combine theoretical and physical/practical work from beginning to end. And take decisions.

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<sup>1</sup> The full answers can be found in appendix 1.

Jonas Åkesson, video and light designer, teacher at Conceptual Performing Arts.

Conceptual Performing Arts uses concept as its point of departure rather than a prewritten script/story/narrative, where the methods are chosen to serve that particular concept and is presented in a form that is not given and also serves the concept.

Steinunn Knúts-Önnudóttir, theatre maker, teacher at Conceptual Performing Arts and PhD-fellow at THM.

I think that conceptual Performing Arts raises from a concept or a thematic idea or question, and then chooses the form, material and working methods to correspond with that idea/concept/question.

This, for me, in my own processes, means that all aspects of the work co-relate with what it is that one wants to ask/say/communicate- meaning that one doesn't have a fixed idea on how it will be represented, or the outcome, to begin with, but rather try out different methods/material/ways along the way.

Etta Säfve, artist, teacher at Conceptual Performing Arts.

Conceptual Performing Arts potentially can liberate artists from positions in the sense that the borders between disciplines can be blurred as well as that hierarchal position between disciplines can be re-negotiated.

Charlotte Østergård, costumedriven theatre maker, teacher at Conceptual Performing Arts and PhD-fellow at THM.

Den konceptuella scenkonsten är en praktik som inte utgår från en definierad genre i första hand, utan är idéburen. Den fria konstens experimenterade med alla sorters material, såväl idémässiga som materiella vilket ledde till att konstverket inte kunde identifieras med ett speciellt slags objekt och inte heller alltid behövde visas i någon speciell lokal eller institution.

Jörgen Dahlqvist and Fredrik Haller, teachers and founders of Conceptual Performing Arts.<sup>2</sup>

## Overview. Field and Thesis

All the above quotes have been formulated by teachers at Conceptual Performing Arts (KOS) at Teaterhögskolan in Malmö (THM). Together they testify to how the artform and/or the three-course program Conceptual Performing Arts can be approached and understood.<sup>3</sup>

Importantly, they do not bring one clear definition of the *artform* Conceptual Performing Arts but rather different understandings of what the course is about, this counts both for the

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<sup>2</sup> From "Utredning kring grundutbildning i Konceptuell scenkonst". See appendix 2.

<sup>3</sup> "The three courses in Conceptual Performing Arts are of 30 credits each. The courses are designed for students whose ambitions are to explore intermedial and documentary narratives, audience participation and dramaturgical strategies in contemporary performing arts." <https://www.thm.lu.se/en/programmes-and-courses/specialisation-conceptual-performing-arts>. If the student has 90 credits from studies before the courses in Conceptual Performing Arts, the student can achieve a BA of Arts.

teachers' individual understandings but also at the description at the webpage and in the Utredning kring grundutbildning i Konceptuell scenkonst".<sup>4</sup> As teacher John Hanse writes:

What KOS means to me is based on the experience from working with the students, talking to the other teachers and supervisors and from participating as audience in the students' projects. *It is not based on what happens if you take the term conceptual art and put performance in the middle of it.* [My accentuation]. (Appendix 1).

Hanse highlights a recurring theme in the answers from the teachers, namely that the teaching is driven partly by the frames of the course and by the teachers' own understanding of what conceptual performing arts is or could be. Whereas conceptual art within a visual arts context has a contextual and aesthetical defined frame – which I will get back to below – there is not a clear understanding of the term conceptual *performing* arts and it is rarely used outside an educational context in the field of performing arts.

Without being an exhaustive representation of the definitions of the field, the above examples reveal the manifold use of the concept of conceptual performing arts within an educational and aesthetic frame at THM. What is clear is that the understanding shifts between describing the program and describing an artform that has not yet been defined.

## Background: Conceptual Performing Arts at Teaterhögskolan

I began working as head of Conceptual Performing Arts in 2019. The three-course program is often referred to as "KOS" for Konceptuell scenkonst and this abbreviation contributes to a confusion about what the course is: What does KOS mean and why is it three courses instead of a 3-year program?

KOS has no permanent teachers; the education consists of a group of recurring and visiting guest teachers, whose main occupation is their artistic practice, and me. Each time a new guest teacher arrives they ask me: what is conceptual performing arts? We have a text at the webpage about the course, but the question is not so much directed at the content of the course but rather: what is "conceptual performing arts"?

This paper sets out to investigate this question and define how one could begin to fill out the lack of a definition. I have not had time to do this conceptualizing work in the one and a half years I have been at the school where the day-to-day running of the education keeps me busy and sometimes has the character of firefighting.

In a lecture given with Jörgen Dahlqvist (founder of KOS and teacher at THM) in the autumn 2020 it became clear that we also have different definitions of conceptual performing arts within the school. He mainly focused on the aspect of *narrative in time with different media* while I mainly focused on a *research-based approach in which the concept is a continues motor in the artistic process*. Our different perceptions are clearly connected to our

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<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.thm.lu.se/utbildning-0/konceptuell-scenkonst> and "Utredning kring grundutbildning i Konceptuell scenkonst", appendix 2.

own individual art practices, in which I have a research-based approach and he has an intermedial approach.<sup>5</sup>

In the following I will contextualize conceptual performing arts from an artistic and philosophical perspective. Within both conceptual poetry, and conceptual art, there are elements that can enrich the discussion about conceptual performing arts, while a philosophical perspective can encircle what a concept is and how to think with concepts. Given the limited space of this paper my examples will be few and the choices I have made will be highly subjective based on what I find most important at present day. In relation to conceptual poetry I have chosen to focus on the definition provided by professor in literature Marjorie Perloff, while my understanding of conceptual art is linked to the writing of visual artist Sol LeWitt. At the end I will give a brief philosophical perspective introducing philosophers Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's understanding of concepts and ask how we can use them in art and in the teaching of conceptual performing arts.

## Conceptual Art

Conceptual artist Sol LeWitt was one of the first to define conceptual art, and he points to the importance of the artistic process in which the concept is formulated. As he writes in his 1967 manifesto for *Artforum*:

In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair [...] If the artist carries through his idea and makes it into visible form, then all the steps in the process are of importance. The idea itself, even if not made visual, is as much a work of art as any finished product. All intervening steps – scribbles, sketches, drawings, failed works, models, studies, thoughts, conversations – are of interest. Those that show the thought process of the artist are sometimes more interesting than the final product. (Sol LeWitt, 1967, 79–83).

As is clear in the quote, conceptual art is created on the basis of a concept, and the concept is more important than aesthetic or material concerns. LeWitt captures how the *presentation* of the artwork is less interesting than the *making* of the artwork. His focus on process resonates with several of the teachers' understanding of conceptual performing arts quoted above. More than give life to an existing material such as a dramatic text, the conceptual performing artist begins with a concept and find out how to represent it during an exploratory process, in which research, ideas and aesthetics develop into an unknown form.

LeWitt describes how the artist carries through an idea and make it into visible form. What distinguishes conceptual performing arts from conceptual art, I would argue, is that the artist always work with a *performative* dimension. Thus, it is not so important if the performance is with or without people, with non-human objects, or is an audio installation,

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<sup>5</sup> We named the lecture "The War of the Concepts" referring to the radio play by Orson Wells (1938) which caused panic among its audience because they thought it was real.

somehow the performative aspect will always be key, and the relation to the audience will always be central. “What do you want to tell the audience?” I ask the student. “I don’t care about the audience,” the student says. “Well, yes. You have to!” I say.

## Process over Product

Conceptual art and conceptual performing arts are both immersed in an investigation of a question, a form, or a problem. However, a common challenge among our students at KOS is how to move on from the formulation of a concept to an artistic process in which they rehearse and challenge this concept. Sometimes the student ends up “showing” the concept unchanged six weeks after they formulated it. This is not ideal for a learning context. As LeWitt points out, the process is an integral part of the artistic practice and this seems to be the big challenge for us when trying to build up a field of conceptual performing arts because we do not challenge the processual character of theatre, that is on KOS we still have a production design of six weeks, which does not leave much time to “process” or what for a visual artist would be a continuous artistic practice in the studio.

Examples of the first wave conceptual artists (the term usually refers to art made from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s) are LeWitt, Joseph Beyus, Joseph Kosuth and Ewa Partum.<sup>6</sup> While there are performances among these (e.g. Beuys’ iconic performance *I Like America and America likes Me* from 1974 or several of Yoko Ono’s performances), most works are objects or installations. When we look at examples of conceptual performing arts, it is clear that *the performative temporality* of the work is key. Examples could refer back to collaborations between John Cage and Robert Wilson or to a later Romeo Castellucci, but this type of theatre has now been absorbed by the institutions as “post-dramatic theatre”.<sup>7</sup>

Today I would rather refer to Tino Sehgal, Nature Theatre of Oklahoma, Instituttet, Poste Restante, Florentina Holzinger, Mette Ingvarsen, Mette Edvardsen, Ivana Müller, Eva Marie Keller, Jérôme Bel, and many more. The last six mentioned here are choreographers. Does this say something about the production mode within choreography? Are the frames around choreography better at facilitating thinking, testing, and making new formats within the production process? These are questions to be asked and discussed within the teacher collegium at KOS.

Can something more be said of what to do in the conceptual artistic process? Let us turn to conceptual poetry.

## Conceptual Poetry

Perloff has argued that when it comes to conceptual literature and conceptual art, what matters are *choice, framing, perspective, and sampling*; “these are what transform the

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<sup>6</sup> For more on conceptual art see for instance Joseph Kosuth’s manifesto *Art After Philosophy* (1969), Peter Osborne’s contextualizing book *Conceptual Art* (2002), and Lucy Lippard’s defining book *Six Years* from 1973 (1997).

<sup>7</sup> Concept coined by Hans Thies Lehman (1999).



“ordinary” into something else.” (Perloff, 2015, 8).<sup>8</sup> Perloff draws a line of thought from Ludwig Wittgenstein’s description of the connection between ethics and aesthetics to Marcel Duchamp’s readymades – some of the first examples of conceptual art it could be argued – showing how both emphasise the importance of choice, framing, perspective, and in the case of Duchamp also sampling.<sup>9</sup> Perloff scrutinizes how each of these notions plays out in what she names “the conceptual turn” within poetry with particular focus on “conceptual performance poets” such as Vanessa Place, Caroline Bergvall, Kenneth Goldsmith and also the writing of artist Sophie Calle.

I think that Perloff’s analysis of conceptual poetry is useful for thinking about the unfolding of choice, framing, perspective, and sampling in conceptual performing arts. In the following I will briefly outline Perloff’s argument before returning to conceptual performing arts.

Drawing on a number of references to Wittgenstein’s notebooks and lectures, Perloff shows how “perspective” and “framing” affect his perception of art. In a notebook entry, dating from 9 February 1930, Wittgenstein contemplates that everyday scenarios can become works of art when framed through the perspective of the artist: “[...] only the artist can represent the individual thing so that it appears to us as a work of art [...]” (Ibid. 2).<sup>10</sup> What differentiates an artwork from other representations of everyday life is “a matter of perspective, of *framing*.” (Ibid. 3).

In Perloff’s reading of Wittgenstein she accentuates his insistence on the authorial intention, how the artist makes choices when creating something artistic. Perloff pursues the importance of “choice” in the artistic process by looking at Duchamp’s ready-mades and his way of describing them – “Can one make works that are not works of art?” – and then she quotes his description of *Fountain* (1917):

Whether Mr. Mutt [the comic name inscribed on the urinal, with its play on Mutt and Jeff, or on a mongrel dog or mutt] with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. HE CHOSE IT. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object. (Ibid. 7).<sup>11</sup>

Perloff demonstrates how Duchamp gives the object a conceptual value, and how the object becomes an artwork through the artist’s choice and selection. “Choice, framing, perspective, and sampling,” she concludes and points forward to the conceptualist movement in art

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted from the lecture “The Conceptualist Turn: Wittgenstein and the New Writing” given at The University of Copenhagen, December 7, 2015. The lecture has not been published, but Perloff has provided me with the written paper and confirmed the quote.

<sup>9</sup> Perloff refers to a number of Wittgenstein’s notebooks and lectures published posthumous, among others: *Culture and Value, Notebooks 1914-1916, Denkbewegungen: Tagebucher 1930-1932, 1936-1937, Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*. In relation to Duchamp, she draws on *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp, Marchand due Sel / Salt Seller*, ed. Michel Sanouillet & Elmer Peterson (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975).

<sup>10</sup> Quoted from: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright; rev. ed. Alois Pilcher, trans. Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 44 (1940); Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Da Capo, 1979), 39.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted from: Unsigned editorial, *The Blind Man*, 6 May 1919, 4-5.

showing the similarities in the description of the artwork and the artistic process. Perloff accentuates how *context* and *re-staging* is what makes each conceptual artwork unique. I want to argue that the same applies to conceptual performing arts in which the re-staging and composition of information, knowledge and artistic strategies form each artwork.

## Choice, Framing, Perspective, Sampling

I have allowed myself to quote Perloff in great length because I think that she in a forceful manner provides a historical and philosophical context for concepts in art. In other words she makes a conceptualization of conceptual poetry but one that can be applied to conceptual art and, I would argue, also to conceptual performing arts. Conceptual performing arts does not come out of nowhere. It builds on a before and seek to stage and articulate a conceptual approach within a performative framework.

How does Perloff's "framing, choice, perspective, and sampling" unfold in conceptual performing arts? The *framing* is crucial.<sup>12</sup> When a performance is *framed* as a conceptual piece, the audience expects that it is based on a strong formal or thematic concept rather than for instance a dramatic text. Further, there is an expectation of experiment.

*Choice* is important on several levels. As Duchamp's quote above demonstrates it is not decisive that the artist made the work with her/his/their own hands, but rather that the artist chose that this is the work. This of course is a goodbye to authenticity. One of the clearest examples of this within performance art is when performance artists re-enact an already made performance work and thereby make a new work. Within performing arts it could indeed also be a performative readymade staging found footage or other material on stage. Choice is part of every artistic process, but here I want to stress that the choices made in conceptual performing sometimes become the structure of the performance.

*The perspective*, here understood as *context*, the *where and when* of the performance, affect how we perceive the artwork. In relation to conceptual performing arts this is most important because no space is considered as a neutral place for representation. The black box can in no way be considered neutral as a white cube within visual arts is also not neutral. Further, conceptual performing arts often work site specific or in social contexts where time and surrounding plays an active role in the performance. These contextual frames inevitably affect how the spectator "enters" the work.

And finally, *sampling*, which can be seen in the way that different quotes are staged and re-staged under new circumstances as Perloff would formulate it. Further sampling could be understood as Nicolas Bourriaud describes it in *Postproduction* as a strategy that artists use to create works on the basis of pre-existing works. The process of making conceptual performing arts is highly engaged with the forms, concepts and content of pre-existing works preoccupied with some of the same issues as the artist is dealing with. Further, many performances play with intertextual codes for instance in relation to pop culture or earlier examples of either classical theatre (e.g. the staging of Swan Lake in a conceptual – often

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<sup>12</sup> An example: I felt disappointed watching *Mitleid* (2015) directed by Milo Rau because the framing of International Institute of Political Murder is that they focus on the *re-enactment* or *re-production* of historical events and the people on stage were actors rather than "real people". See <http://international-institute.de/en/about-iipm-2/>. I have later adjusted my ethical and artistic perspective on this matter.

critical – frame) or performance art (e.g. the restaging of one of Carolee Schneemann's performances).

The terms “framing, choice, perspective, sampling” can be used to point out differences between different students' processes. They make different choices; they want to frame themselves and their work in different ways, they have different perspectives on the surrounding reality; and they sample or represent their material in very different ways. As I see it, conceptual performing arts is closely linked to conceptual art and conceptual poetry but the material – the concept – is developed and presented within a performative frame with a constant consciousness of a present audience.

As a final way to contextualize the question *What is a concept?* I want to end this trajectory by turning to one – out of many – philosophical understanding of the relation between art and concepts.

## Philosophy

*There is no creation without experiment.*  
(Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, 127).

In *What Is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari identify three planes of thinking: philosophy, science, and art. Deleuze and Guattari draw a distinction between the three fields, but at the same time they demonstrate the potential crossovers between them. I will focus here on philosophy and art, not on science. Philosophy is the continuous creation of concepts. A concept is characterised by “the sum of its components” (Ibid. 15). If we add a component to a concept, the concept will dissolve or change into something completely different. Concepts can exist in art, but art does not *make* them as philosophy does: “Art thinks no less than philosophy, but it thinks through affects and percepts.” (Ibid. 66). According to Deleuze and Guattari, the artwork is an entity that preserves. It is “a bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects” (Ibid. 164). The bloc of sensations can be transported independently of the sensing body and this gives the work its inexhaustibility. The artwork is made with sensation and makes sensations.

Thinking takes place in art as well as in philosophy, but thinking in art materialises through other modes. The artwork creates thinking – even more: it affects the way we think – not by creating concepts but by “thinking” through different artistic entities.<sup>13</sup> Deleuze and Guattari observe that both abstract art and conceptual art are attempts to bring philosophy and art together, but that they still create sensations and not concepts. Even if conceptual performing arts does not create concepts, I would argue that it contains conceptual *thinking* both in the artistic process and in the artistic enunciation. The same can be said of Conceptual performing art. It builds on a concept while at the same time it creates sensations, percepts, and affects.

When we teach conceptual performing arts, I think we operate in a field in which sensory becoming and conceptual thinking overlap and contribute to a strong learning process

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<sup>13</sup> Claire Colebrook (2010) has argued that Deleuze and Guattari perceive art as the place where we can see how our representations and thinking work.

(and eventually also to a strong artwork). These operations between affective, sensory and conceptual artmaking hopefully enable the student to engage in a work process where thinking, intuition and personal transgressions of earlier principles can be unfolded. Deleuze and Guattari writes that science, philosophy, and art all work with an “*I do not know* that has become positive and creative, the condition of creation itself, and that consists in determining *by* what one does not know” (Ibid., 128). As is clear from the teachers’ quotes in the beginning this *I do not know* is central in the teaching and making of conceptual performing arts.

Elsewhere I have proposed that we are entering, or are already situated in, an artistic and learning landscape where the boundaries between science, art, and philosophy are becoming blurred (Lebech, 2019). In this context we may ask if art in fact will be able to make concepts? This is an open question and perhaps it is not possible to answer right now. What is important is that both within an educational, institutional and artistic context there is a growing focus on the process of making and thinking about art. Artists work research-based, art institutions make seminars on work sharing (after 15 years of “knowledge-production”) and students in performing arts schools are often asked to do artistic research if not on BA level then on MA level. With a strong focus on process, thinking, and peer-to-peer sharing, conceptual performing arts as an artform *and* as an education at THM have the possibility to explore concepts and sensations in a way that develop performing arts and examine questions that are not solved elsewhere.

## The Teaching at Teaterhögskolan Now and In the Future

In her answer to my initial question Knúts-Önnudóttir writes:

In practice it [conceptual performing arts] has different recognisable embodiments that belong to established traditions. It is a term that probably serves best against something else because it is so open in terms of methods and form. It can stand e.g. against, conventional theatre, dramatic theatre or institutional theatre. (Appendix 1).

Knúts-Önnudóttir highlights something crucial when trying to define conceptual performing arts, it serves best against something, it may be necessary to define it from what it is not, to define it from a lack of certain traditional theater elements. Definitions are difficult: does not all theatre have a concept, make choices, depend on its framing and sample different historical or artistic predecessors? In this paper I have tried to come closer to what distinguishes conceptual performing arts from other theatre and performance expressions. From the outset my aim was not to define the artform but rather our education in conceptual performing arts. However it proved difficult to approach the education before clarifying the artform – if it can be called an artform.

As a starting point I contextualized conceptual performing arts by looking at the historical movement of conceptual art in the 60s and 70s. It became clear that conceptual performing arts builds on a before, a defined movement within visual art (but with performance works). A learning from this is that we must provide this historical context to

the students so that they understand why the concept is decisive for the work and why the process is as important as the finished work in our education.

I continued by looking at conceptual poetry incorporating Perloff's choice, framing, perspective, and sampling to define important steps in the artistic process where the student of conceptual performing arts has to define and think about her/his/their own method. Finally, I visited Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of the relations between philosophical concepts and artistic percepts and affects. I argued that perhaps conceptual performing arts does not make concepts, but it uses concepts in the artistic enunciation thereby creating new modes of thinking through and beyond these concepts. Conceptual performing art gives room for thinking differently by crosscutting the staging of concepts with the composition of artistic entities.

This paper serves as a preliminary mapping of conceptual performing arts which can serve as a foundation for discussion at the teacher collegium. However, I see several further research perspectives on this topic. In order to develop a theoretical framework of conceptual performing arts, I would have to expand and deepen my historical and theoretical mapping of conceptual performing arts. I could follow different specific art practices through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and examine key moments in the development of conceptual art and conceptual performing arts. This trajectory includes an elaboration on different artistic influences and examples of how concepts are being formulated and developed in the artistic process and how they are modulated into a work of art. Further, it is necessary to discuss the role and potential of conceptual performing arts, that is to move from the question *what* is conceptual performing arts to the question *why* conceptual performing arts?

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## APPENDIX 1

Answers from teachers at conceptual performing arts on the question: What is conceptual performing arts?

On 22 Jan 2021, at 12:11, Sofie Lebech wrote:

Hi all you great teachers who have taught or will teach at KOS Etta, Jonas, Iggy, John, Erik, Steinunn, Charlotte, and Tanja

I have to do this course in pedagogy. As part of this I will write a short uppsats on the theme "What is conceptual performing arts?"

I would like to ask if you can write a 2-3 line definition of what it is for you – personal rather than theoretical – just what you think when you teach. I'm interested to see how we all think about it. It will be of great help.

Any language.

Best

Sofie

On 24 Jan 2021, at 10:45, Erik Pold wrote:

Dear all

I have tried to formulate something, maybe this opens up for discussion or could be used in trying to reach a definition:

Having a conceptual approach to creating performing art is to begin working with the question: HOW do I want to work and what is my topic or mission with the work? So rather than already knowing that you want to order a written text from a script-writer about a certain topic, or you choose a piece of music for a choreography, to enter into a sort of "pre defined" approach to creating a piece for the stage, you question this approach from the beginning and choose a format as a starting point that may challenge traditional approaches to producing theatre, dance, musicals etc.

You formulate a concept that includes formulating the approach to "how" you work, and not just "what" you want to talk about. I.e. you could choose that you want a project to take place in the public space, in a park, or on a bus, because this approach maybe allows you to play with the relationship between fiction and reality, and you may even discover that the approach is there before the theme of the work. So maybe it is when you encounter some random person in a public space that you discover that the theme of the work is "unemployment and homelessness" or "love and the struggle to find it", even if this was not included in your thinking when choosing the concept. And then there is a possibility to challenge theatre as a genre and hopefully discover that there are many ways of creating

performing arts that are often not considered within the context, we consider theatre to be right now. And thus the idea is to create the possibility for change in the future.

Best  
Erik

On 24 Jan 2021, at 22:53, John Hanse wrote:

Dear all,  
for me conceptual performance art is a confusing label. I think this confusion works both in favour and as a problem for the students and the teachers.

What KOS means to me is based on the experience from working with the students, talking to the other teachers and supervisors and from participating as audience in the students' projects. It is not based on what happens if you take the term conceptual art and put performance in the middle of it.

I see KOS as an experimental approach to performance art/live art/scenic art where it is possible to enter the creation process from many different ways and where the desired outcome is negotiated and in constant process. Where the ability of performance making is developed, not taught, and where the crafts that is required is not pre-scribed but rather discovered, brought, learned and stolen during the process.

Best  
John

On 25 Jan 2021, at 11:42, Jonas Åkesson wrote:

Dear all  
For me when working with KOS, I believe it is much about letting the students create the process, form and content from scratch and based on real circumstances. With these areas in interplay with each other. Finding what their individual starting point is, in one or more of those areas. And to be open to let the other aspects be shaped by that starting point together with the context of the project, and then cautiously but continuously reshape them all based on the steps they take. Looking at those areas or aspects as undividable and totally dependent on each other. That a step or change in one of them affect the others. And that the result is something they don't know when they start. A combination of being open minded about things and at the same time having the competence to take all necessary steps forward.

My way to work with it is from a very practical perspective, based on the experience from working with the courses over the last years. A big part of it I believe is to try to teach the students how to create or shape conditions for an open and visionary process regarding both



form and content while still working in a collaborative and practical context. And to be able to combine theoretical and physical/practical work from beginning to end. And take decisions.

Jonas

On 25 Jan 2021, at 13:00, Steinunn Knúts-Önnudóttir wrote:

hi,  
my answer is very pragmatic:

For me:

Conceptual Performing Arts uses concept as its point of departure rather than a prewritten script/story/narrative, where the methods are chosen to serve that particular concept and is presented in a form that is not given and also serves the concept. It implies an experiment of some sorts. The term can refer to the process, mediation and context/situatedness.

In practice it has different recognisable embodiments that belong to established traditions. It is a term that probably serves best against something else because it is so open in terms of methods and form. It can stand fx. against, conventional theatre, dramatic theatre or institutional theatre.

best Steinunn

On 25 Jan 2021, at 14:15, Etta Safve wrote:

Hi all,

what a nice mail read!

I think that conceptual Performing Arts raises from a concept or a thematic idea or question, and then chooses the form, material and working methods to correspond with that idea/concept/question.

This, for me, in my own processes, means that all aspects of the work co-relate with what it is that one wants to ask/say/communicate- meaning that one doesn't have a fixed idea on how it will be represented, or the outcome, to begin with, but rather try out different methods/material/ways along the way.

It also mean that I throughout the process keep on asking - what does it say if I do it this or that way, if I add this material, if I use video.. etc...does it add meaning to the concept/idea/question?

At the same time I think it is important to stay open to changes of the original idea/concept through the process of trying different ways of expression. Allowing the

material, tryouts "on the floor", different combinations of text, performing, room, visuals and so on, to influence the original point of departure.

Let the work itself lead the process and tell me what needs to be done.

Let the work become the director, so to speak. This I find especially important in collaborative processes, so that one doesn't get caught up in one's own ego or get protective of ideas that doesn't lead the work forward.

For me it is important to be prepared to re-learn and let the work/work process surprise and teach you, rather than you are teaching it, or trying to fit it in to some prefabricated form.

Sorry for my English grammar and spelling...

All the best

Etta

On 26 Jan 2021, at 9:13, Charlotte Østergaard wrote:

Hi all,

Great question Sofie and great answers to read.

For now I will just keep my answer short.

Conceptual Performing Arts potentially can liberate artists from positions in the sense that the borders between disciplines can be blurred as well as that hierarchal position between disciplines can be re-negotiated. In collaborations artists can cross disciplinary borders and meet *between* rather than *from* (individual) disciplines. For example, in collaborative processes I as artist are more than 'just' a costume designer and that a performer is more than a performer on stage - in the collaborative process we can change roles and meet in between our fields.

Moreover, conceptual performing arts offers the opportunity to depart from any concept that is interesting to the collaborators. It can be a text, but it could also be departing from an investigation, for example, 'material and movement'.

Best,

Charlotte

## APPENDIX 2

”Utredning kring grundutbildning i Konceptuell scenkonst”.