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TYPES OF INTERACTIVITY VERSUS PERFORMATIVITY

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to show a trend in contemporary art which comes from the development of interactivity, including performativity which is related to it. Interactivity is approached in a methodological manner with a variety of features inherent in the artwork. Therefore, we talk about interactive structure. However, performativity is interpreted as a quality feature related to the progress of the aesthetic experience, e.g. due to the deciphering of the content in the work of art. The two abovementioned processes reveal the subject/object nature of the interaction between viewers and the object of art, which contributes to establishing a dialogical relation and the possibility to start a negotiation process between the recipient and the work of art. This form of dialogue is developed by the specific nature of the interactive structure which has been earlier prepared in the creative process to express the content intended by the artist. This dialogue may be intimate, but it may also refer to highly controversial political or social issues, or include a broadly understood cultural dimension, though such a debate shall always preserve cognitive values.

Keywords: interactive art, performativity, dialogue, relationality, aesthetic negotiation

Interactivity vs. performativity

I interpret the concept of interactivity in art in a methodological manner which describes a given type (class) of artworks. I discern three types of interactivity with regard to three kinds of interactive[1] structures. In my opinion, interactivity is linked with a work of art and not with the viewer, which means that it is related with the objective aspect.[2] For the purpose of describing the interactive structure, the type of the interface is also important, also including e.g. remote controls and software which are at the viewer's disposal, creating the total potential to transform the artwork.[3]

My claim is that performativity is related to the subject, I mean mainly to their mental process which is initiated and directed by the interactive structure of the work of art. You may say that the difference between interactivity and performativity is that the former is determined by its specific structure, while the latter generates values, influences, emotions and the understanding of problems which are touched by the artwork. Owing to performativity, viewers may transform ideas contained in the work of art into meanings in their minds and therefore bring forth its conceptual content.

"Indeed, interactive art pieces can be analysed aesthetically from the point of view of appearance or in relation to the technology of the time. But according to the approach proposed here, it is in terms of performativity, of behaviour, that are most relevant."[4]

While entering the process of interactive perception, the viewer should be aware of the possibility to confront the conceptual potential of the work, which

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[1]   The differentiation between the forms of interactivity has been suggested by me in my book *Wirtualne* realis. *Estetyka w epoce elektroniki* (2006). Nowadays, it is elaborated alongside with the development of new media arts, e.g. web artworks.

[2]   K. Brown (ed.), *Interactive Contemporary Art: Participation in Practice*, I. B. Tauris, London 2014, pp. 6-8.

[3]   This statement refers to interfaces frequently used in head-mounted displays, owing to which it is possible to create a reality-like virtual environment surrounding the addressee, thus increasing the level of expression and intensity of the aesthetic experience. A good example of such a work could be the ambisonic installation by Maciej Glowiak, Maciej Jaskiewicz, Leszek Nowak, Wojciech Raszewski, Jan Skorupa and Eryka Skotarczak, *Immersify: Immersive Ambisonic Audio* (2019); Ars Electronica: https://ars.electronica.art/outofthebox/de/immersive-audio/ and Leopoldseder Hannes, Schopf Christine, Stocker Gerfried (2019) *CyberArts – Prix Ars Electronica 2019*, Hatje Cantz, Berlin-Linz, pp. 138-139, https://ars.electronica.art/outofthebox/files/2019/08/cyberarts2019.pdf

[4]   J. Soler-Adillon, *The intangible material of interactive art: agency, behavior and emergence*, "Artnodes – E-Journal on Art, Science and Technology" (Art Matters II), Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona, no. 16 (2015), p. 46, DOI: https://doi.org/10.7238/a.v0i16.2744

may lead to aesthetic negotiation with frequently exceptional and important ideas affecting their consciousness, e.g. of social, national and/or ethnicity, sometimes personal issues and experience, and/or, consequently, changing their views on everyday behaviours as the aesthetic experience progresses.

My point is to concentrate on issues referring to the types of interactivity discussed in this paper[5] and show the difference between performativity types in cases of various interactive structures:

"Each work of interactive computer art establishes a particular kind of re-relationship between live inter-actor and computer-controlled media. The extent to which a work is performative is a function of this relationship."[6]

I advocate the claim that there are three types of interactivity in art. The first one is dissimilative interactivity which refers to local installations that have not been connected to the Internet and are intended for a single viewer. The second one is relative interactivity which involves works whose reception is only possible by a few people at a time. Finally, identity interactivity covers web artworks having a dispersed structure, intended for mass audiences.

Dissimilative Interactivity

Dissimilative interactivity covers artworks exhibited locally in a given exhibition space, though you may note that most frequently there are works which are not connected to the Internet during the aesthetic experience. Information inherent in the work can be transformed by the viewer, which may lead to diverse interpretations in the process of dissimilation. You may find this structure e.g. in the historic work *Portrait One*[7] (1990) by Luca Courchesne and in the recent installation *Wandering Gaze*[8] (2019) by Ana Teresa Vicente. In both cases, the aforementioned viewer may experience them aesthetically through the potential of the interactive structure. In the first case, it is a personal co-

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[5] S. Uddin Ahmed, *Interaction and Interactivity: In the Context of Digital Interactive Art Installation*, in: *Human-Computer Interaction. Interaction in Context*, ed. M. Kurosu, 20th International Conference, HCI International 2018, Las Vegas, Proceedings, Part II, Springer 2018, pp. 249-250, DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-91244-8_20

[6] D. Z. Saltz, *The Art of Interaction: Interactivity, Performativity, and Computers*, "The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism (Perspectives on the Arts and Technology)", the American Society for Aesthetics, Denver, Spring 1997, Vol. 55, No. 2, p. 120, DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/431258

[7] L. Courchesne, *Portrait One*, ZKM – Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe: http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/portrait-one/

[8] A. T. Vicente, *Wandering Gaze*: http://anateresavicente.com/index.php/wandering-gaze/

nversation with an avatar of a woman which is displayed on an old-fashioned CRT and additionally reflected in a mirror. In the second work, you may see a remotely controlled plotter which is prompted by the viewer's eye movements traced by intelligent software, which consequently leads to the destruction of a photocopy in the plotter. In the first example, performativity is expressed by the viewer's emotional commitment in the dialogue with the displayed figure of the woman named Mary and by using a menu with a few buttons. The people entering a conversation with Mary were engaged in this arranged situation even for several minutes. In this situation, performativity refers to mental and emotional meandering through a limited menu in order to pry personal information from Mary and, perhaps, it may comprise the viewer's experience, or sometimes their intentions to share their hidden emotions with her. This happens due to the warm and romantic atmosphere of the conversation pattern which is somewhat mysterious and exceptional. The conversation could flow without prejudices and with randomized interactions. It is essential that viewers could feel the uniqueness of the relationship in a given moment that could only result from personal commitment. The aforesaid aesthetic experience does not change due to the awareness of the fact that the conversation is arranged with purposefully programmed software. This fact does not need to repel the viewer, while their emotions coming from the conversation with Mary dominate the entire situation when appropriate personal engagement is established. Consequently, this may prove that when a human enters a mutual relationship with intelligent robots like Mary, it may turn out to be acceptable and could bring satisfaction to them. Similarly, it may happen when building attachment to e.g. cats and dogs, because a human can start emotional relationships with any being that is able to respond to their behaviour by fulfilling their needs and/or expectations.

In the case of *Wandering Gaze*, we deal with an installed eye-tracking system and a plotter arm which moves around the surface of a photo with a magnet to which metal scraps have been attached. This movement is synchronised with the viewer's eye movement which causes slow erasing of the old photo surface being eroded by metal. This work relies on the inherent contradiction of the installation's destructive impact on the viewer who faces a dilemma whether to look through the viewfinder and thus erode the photo, or tame their curiosity, which could stop the process of destruction. Most often curiosity wins, because the old photo may not be as attractive as the desire to experience this artwork and/or even the process of destruction. This dilemma may arouse a feeling of nostalgia for the lost photo depicting a scene from the past. My question is whether similar nostalgia could arise in the case of browsing old photos, e.g. with family members who are unable to be identified though all the characters may be clearly visible. Fading, forgetting and/or destruction may be expressed

in many ways: physically, mentally and/or due to a missing interest. Old photos can be easily eroded both physically and in the human consciousness. Such aesthetic experience suggests that the fading of the past in human memory may be easy and it may take place symbolically by blurring the past, like in the case of *Wandering Gaze*.

The interactive structure of the aforesaid works also prompts the viewer to initiate a dialogue with themselves.[9] The viewer may feel immersed in and united with the object of their aesthetic experience, especially if they are under the influence of intelligent behaviours coming from the installation. If so, the addressee remains in a unique relationship with the work whose interactive structure is a major factor that affects their minds by stimulating them or prompting them to reflect on the values of the work.

Another work, *Appropriate Response* by Mario Klingemann (2020), is also a local installation which forces the viewer to kneel down on a stool with hidden detectors sensing the pressure of the knees and triggering the installation. The action of kneeling down is a type of domination over the addressee who at once may think that their role is to stay in that anticipating position. The installation prompts a phrase on a display, which is a sequence randomly generated by AI to be freely interpreted by the addressee:

"Each phrase is written by the machine's neural networks and is entirely unique; no two visitors will ever receive the same line of distilled wisdom from *Appropriate Response*. [...] Viewers participate by kneeling but also by processing the text shown on the display. *Appropriate Response* generates coherent aphorisms but it is human viewers that furnish them with meaning."[10]

The viewer kneels in front of the AI in a situation suggesting that this sequence is uniquely arranged. By suggesting a randomly selected text to the viewer, the AI makes an impact on their performativity. If they feel personally addressed, they will try to discover the sense of the formula and decipher its personal meaning. Such an artistically built communication situation may evoke the message received from the AI, which may trigger concentration in the viewer and prompt them to ponder on its meaning. The importance of this work lies in its demystification of the situation which has randomly generated a "teaching" which could significantly impact an aspect of the addressee's life. This work shows that a process similar to the one from *Appropriate Response* may be continued in the mind of the recipient who could draw some conclusions on their

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9   M. Ożóg, *Authorial Strategies in Interactive Art*, in: A. Porczak, *Interactive Media Arts*, Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, Kraków 2009, p. 77.
10   Mario Klingemann: https://onkaos.com/mario-klingemann/

real decisions. I do not mean that it is important to search for an appropriate interpretation which is obviously absent in this work, but for the viewer's own path which could take the form of rejecting the seriousness of this event or, on the contrary, making an effort to interpret the mysterious, enigmatic, randomly generated phrase to learn for their life. This type of performativity may in a way overwhelm the viewer who may not rationalise this involvement, but follow blindly the suggested steps using a hardly expressed obligation to understand each interpretation of the teaching.

Another artwork for consideration is the 3D interactive film *Manic VR* (2018) by Kalina Bertin, Fred Casia, Sandra Rodriguez and Nicolas S. Roy:

"*ManicVR* is a virtual reality documentary that introduces users to the complex world of bipolar disorder. Guided by the voices of Felicia and François Bertin who, for the past 3 years, have used their sister Kalina Bertin's voicemail as their personal diary, the user embarks on a journey to decipher the cycling whirlwind of mania, psychosis and depression. Through room-scale, real-time interaction and 3D worlds, we discover the destabilizing effects of bipolarity – the heightening of senses and the untamed imagination that accompanies this complex and mysterious condition. [...] *ManicVR* humbly seeks to bridge this gap by offering a journey into the destabilizing and mesmerizing world of bipolarity, by enabling visitors to see and experience the highs and lows which characterize manic depression. This immersive experience aims to raise awareness and build empathy around the real life conditions of bipolar disorder."[11]

The interactive structure of this nearly 11-minute film consists of a round 3D presentation which is in contact with the viewer using the immersive interface of a head-mounted display and remote controls in hands ensuring partially interactive reception. The mood of the film is gloomy. It is accompanied by narrator's comments on bipolar disorder. This experience is so intense that the viewer may also get into the same mood, gaining, at least partially, the same experience of the illness. It may also allow them to understand the suffering of the ill person. This artwork allows the viewer not only to observe the illness, but also to penetrate the surrounding images related to the illness and to be able to have a similar experience to that of the sick person. Beside the possibility to change the perspective, this interactive structure allows for splitting the visual effect through the animation arising from the effect of approaching and going away from images, caused by the remote controls held in one's hands.

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[11] H. Leopoldseder, Ch. Schopf, G. Stocker, *CyberArts*...(2019), p. 25: https://ars.electronica. art/outofthebox/files/2019/08/cyberarts2019.pdf

The film is immersive by causing a split with the physical world, which, in turn, deepens the experience of the viewer who is isolated in the virtual environment. The concept of performativity here is related with "absorbing" the content of bipolar disorder. It is unprecedented in this case in terms of how effective the illusion of making the viewer aware of the character of the illness and suffering of the ill person is. Experience drawn from this artwork may deepen the viewer's understanding of the nature of bipolar disorder, which is impossible using other methods, e.g. a conversation with a sick person.

Relation Interactivity

Another example of interactivity is relation interactivity. It includes a not too high number of viewers forming a group of people who accept their joint experience. The course of the aesthetic experience is usually local, which means that such artworks do not appear on the web, but if they do, access to them is limited to the participation of a few viewers at a time. Performativity here is related to dialogue in groups and cooperation, which may establish a sense of community and the need to follow joint objectives to achieve common goals. A good example of such an interactive structure is the installation *Conspiracy: Conjoining the Virtual*[12] (2017 by Kristin McWharter) and the artwork *I' Human*[13] (2019) by Saint Machine (an artistic name). In the aforementioned examples, performativity involves the commitment of the participants and each viewer has a sense of co-relations and creative co-participation.

In the case of the first work mentioned above, we deal with a form of a computer game. The installation resembles a five-leg spider whose legs create moveable, ca. 1.5 metre-long sleeves in three directions, but whose thorax is located where the sleeves are united. In aesthetic contact with this work, viewers use head-mounted displays located at the wooden handles at the ends of the sleeves. Yet, the form itself suggests that there is a common target, because each sleeve is hooked in the joint place which is the "heart" of this installation. The viewers' role is to grab a virtual and freely moving flag, and put it in a specified location of the virtual world. This action is accompanied by viewers' movements in physical space which is often forgotten during reception, as the virtual world plays a major role, while the physical aspect becomes less important. During reception you may hear an alarming voice which is to hurry up the viewers as well as shouts and makes assessments, which may be interpreted as an attempt to put pressure on the viewers or give them a lesson. It is a major

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[12] K. McWharter, *Conspiracy: Conjoining the Virtual:* https://kristinmcwharter.com/conspire/
[13] Saint Machine: https://saintmachine.ro/portfolio/i-human/

component of the installation and its reception, because the voice seems to be annoying, so it is hard not to pay attention to it. For a few minutes, five people who are alien to each other may cooperate and get to know about their potential in a short time. Other matters cease to be important for them, as they become concentrated on their joint action. They may show the symptoms of competitiveness, though they play in the same team:

"In my work I am most immediately trying to understand how people experience relationships, and specifically how people experience the tension between competition and intimacy. I use these tensions within participatory sculpture as tools to re-frame how we see or identify with this larger social context. This work investigates how virtual reality can give us new perspective on the role of the individual in a collective intention and seeks to expose the fallacy of the hivemind".[14]

In the case of the other artwork, *I' Human*, we deal with a more sublime activity, as:

"(the) project uses human emotional cohesion mediated by technology to influence the feeding conditions of unicellular organisms, in an attempt to identify emergent properties at different scales. A circuit of interconnected masks howls like wolves asking to be fed with emotions."[15]

The intended reception of this work consists in viewers putting their heads inside biomorphic capsules combined with several-meter-long cables. Inside the capsules there are displays showing the countenances of other people taking part in this project. Each person hears a different sound. Performativity in this case consists in initiating non-verbal contact and dialogue by using facial expressions. This is inspired by web contacts where the emotions of those engaged reveal their need to communicate using this form of expression; they may write a text and/or use an avatar. This situation may become cosy as the people committed to the project look at each other. Remote contact between them may create different types of relations, unlike in the physical world, as it is fragile and may shortly disappear, and/or trigger excessive self-assurance due to comfort coming from remote communication, which may lead to acts of hate speech. This installation inclines the participants to verify their facial expressions, evaluate their partners and initiate contacts. For a few minutes of

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[14] H. Leopoldseder, Ch. Schopf, G. Stocker, *CyberArts – Prix Ars Electronica 2018*, Hatje Cantz, Berlin-Linz 2019, p. 71.
[15] Saint Machine: https://saintmachine.ro/portfolio/i-human/

participation, the installation stimulates reactions such as a smile and/or even misunderstanding leading to discomfort.

The interactive structures of the aforesaid artworks stimulate one to take action, but they may also cause an activity to stop and make one follow a path which may reveal the characteristics of other people. This type of performativity may be called modular, where each viewer has a job to do which may be expected of them, on which you may rely, and/or which might never come true, causing the joint purpose never to come to life due to somebody's insecurity and/or animosity.

Identity Interactivity

The third type of interactivity discussed here is identification interactivity. The phenomenon of performativity appears on a mass scale and may be oriented at politics, world views and/or social issues. In the artworks where it appears, it may refer to values which could encourage viewers' identification with them and trigger emotional commitment in them, which could incite the need to take action in the form of expression of views or supporting a party in real life.[16] The works which include this type of interactivity provoke viewers to define their stance in the web communities which are interested in the given issues. In fact, it may cause them to express their views and/or reveal acceptance or condemnation of certain phenomena. Today, those works are intended for reaching the audience globally and to a major extent, they are published on the Web. In my view, this type of interactive art developed most significantly in recent years in comparison to the two aforementioned ones by changing due to web technologies. Good instances of such art are highly conceptualised works which won awards at Ars Electronica 2020, like the installation *Someone*[17] (2019) by Lauren Lee McCarthy, exhibited in Hudson Gallery 205 in New York, with the theme of continuous participation and surveillance on the Internet. Another example is the collective work *Be Water by Hong Kongers*[18] (2019) who are anonymous artists belonging to a social movement in Hong-Kong. In both these works we deal with an unlimited number of viewers, which is typical of works dispersed on the Web, accessible to anyone. Such types of works are becoming more and more popular, and meaningful, as they include a form of dialogue or negotiation which inclines or stimulates viewers to parti-

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[16] G. Sztabiński, *Art, Participation and Aesthetics,* "Art Inquiry. Recherches sur les arts – Participation in Art", Łódzkie Towarzystwo Naukowe, Łódź 2018, vol. XX (XXIX), p. 52, DOI: https://doi.org/10.26485/AI/2018/20/3

[17] Lauren Lee McCarthy, *Someone*: https://lauren-mccarthy.com/

[18] Be Water by Hong Kongers: https://www.bewater.digital/

cipate, allows them to express their interests and evaluate the ideas which are referred to in them:

"The artistic practice thus resides in the invention of relations between consciousness. Each particular artwork is a proposal to live in a shared world, and the work of every artist is a bundle of relations with the world, giving rise to other relations, and so on and so forth, ad infinitum".[19]

This type of interactive structure may initiate dialogue on a mass scale, which may contribute to the emergence of mass performativity. Identity interactivity allows for the aesthetic experience which could be transformed into an infinite number of iterations on a wide scale of global diversity.

The abovementioned web artwork *Someone* is a hybrid installation, one part of which was located in an art gallery on computer stands where image from private apartments was displayed. Its second element were the viewers who, while visiting the gallery, could watch and partially influence the reality in the apartments. This type of interactive structure inclines viewers to enter performativity by sharing their life experiences and private lives. Artists committed to implementing this work may have the feeling that they are continuously observed in the meaning that they are in the centre of attention without any clear reason, while the viewers may feel they have the upper hand in the relationship with the observed people, or even superiority coming from the one-way communication process. You may see a form of conformism there, because some of the interested people may be satisfied due to their openness and others may be happy because of their feelings of intimacy coming from the possibility to watch the private lives of other people. However, the point is that it is only a tip of the iceberg, as this artwork shows the extent of technology and new types of phenomena it creates. This issue is much broader and meaningful, because watching and user profiling are widespread practices of web corporations, though they have little impact on their abandoning of technologies. An ordinary user is in a trap, which means that if they wish to, and in fact must, use the Internet, they need to agree to the bad practices of monitoring their lives on the Web. The unambiguous artwork *Someone* has a clear message: the use of technology is related with the blind acceptance of given procedures in which we wouldn't participate in our everyday life, as we are unwilling to accept them. This form of performativity is related with a slight and not totally conscious negotiation between the profit and the loss, openness and closure, and their extent. But the final outcome is clear, because in practice there is no choice and now it is

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[19]   N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, transl. Simon Pleasance, Fronza Woods, Les presses du réel, Dijon 2002 p. 22.

not possible to function without web technology. The human mind is learning that and has stopped reacting to negative system practices which change and weaken the human being.

Another example of identity interactivity is the artwork *Sazae Bot* (2010) by Machiko Hasegawa and Hitoyo Nakano. *Sazae Bot* is a bot which could be accessed by any Twitter user who has placed posts on its account. The bot evolved while being at the disposal of its users, specifically those who wished to access Sazae while preserving their anonymity. On the one hand, *Sazae Bot* is open to massive flow of information from many people and to a variety of topics, but on the other one, the preservation of users' anonymity is so important to them that when meetings were arranged in physical space, the gathered people put paper bags on their heads to express their adherence to anonymity:

"Sazae Bot aims to make humans conscious of our need to free ourselves from our status and titles, and our need to express actions with deeper consciousness – especially when we are anonymous, which is when our soul is closest to the world."[20]

Anonymous activities on the Web may serve as ordinary compensation or take a refined form, as a person may wish to radically and consequently become anonymous, which may lead to them behaving in a different way in the physical world and on the Web. The aspect of technological tools seems important here, which means that to secure a user's identity in their physical world, you need to use a variety of devices, e.g. in the case of a mobile phone you need separate SIM cards and even cameras, while in the case of computers you need to use a variety of gear assigned for different purposes, which may protect you against unwanted thread mixing (e.g. joining accounts with different apps). Those practices are used in business and in politics. They rely on the maximisation of content implementation, using phatic functions and reusing information. The addressee of such content may identify with it and sometimes lose their capacity to discern facts and verify them. Their validity becomes less important than the intense experience of a given topic.

The above artworks reveal identity interactivity pointing to a broader perspective, i.e. the nature of the functioning of the human in the Web. Such openness, like in *Someone*, may be intriguing due to the constant watching of someone's life, similar or different behaviours, or comparing them in a safe situation. As for *Sazae Bot*, a different need than in *Someone* may be a source of performative behaviours – one that is far more grounded in the wish to preserve

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[20]   M. Matsuda, *Sazae Bot (2010-2017) – Anonism*: https://www.masahidematsuda.com/sazaebot

anonymity which allows for personal accounts and/or outright criticism in the form of a bot. Anonymity is invaluable in this case.

The examples of interactive art quoted above were supposed to reveal that an artistic interactive structure encouraging participation in dialogue also influences performativity in its mental form. This may have a personal dimension, but it may also refer to the themes on a global scale. This type of art is an important communication medium which, to a certain extent, replaces text and/or film messages, allowing one to comprehend a given situation in the process of dialogue, stressing the viewer's commitment which influences their attitude to the content and values inherent in a given artwork.

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RODZAJE INTERAKTYWNOŚCI A PERFORMATYWNOŚĆ (streszczenie)

Celem artykułu jest pokazanie jednego z trendów w sztuce współczesnej wynikającego z rozwoju interaktywności, z uwzględnieniem idącej za tym performatywności. Interaktywność potraktowana jest tu metodologicznie, jako różnorodnie chrakteryzująca dzieła sztuki, przez co mówimy o strukturze interaktywnej, a performatywność traktowana jest jakościowo, jako dotycząca przebiegu doświadczenia estetycznego, np. ze względu na rozpoznanie treści zawartych w danym dziele sztuki. Te dwa wskazane procesy mają pokazać na czym polega podmiotowo-przedmiotowy charakter interakcji z dziełem sztuki, co stwarza sytuację dialogu i możliwość podjęcia wzajemnej negocjacji odbiorcy i dzieła. Dialog ten kształtowany jest specyfiką interaktywnej struktury, przygotowanej w procesie twórczym do ekspresji zamierzonych przez artystkę/artystę treści. Może mieć on osobisty wymiar, ale może również dotyczyć np. gorących spraw politycznych lub społecznych oraz może wiązać się z szeroko rozumianą kulturą, przy czym zawsze dialog ten będzie zachowywał walor poznawczy.

Słowa kluczowe: sztuka interaktywna, performatywność, dialog, relacyjność, negocjacja.

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