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PERFORMATIVE ASPECTS OF ART

The concept of performativity has been usually evoked in the discussions on the philosophy of language and the reflection on theatre and performance art. However, in recent years there have been some attempts to broaden its scope. The theoretically inclined researchers have been working out the main assumptions of the aesthetics of performativity. These are claimed to include the challenging of the boundaries of artistic disciplines, and emphasizing the active role of the recipients, for whom the art works become events developing in consequence of their actions. Besides those attempts to grasp the theoretical consequences of “the performative turn”, one should also note some very interesting practical analyses, employing the theory in the discussion on concrete works from different domain of art. It appears that one can discover transformational potential, focus on change rather than just existence, even in the domains traditionally regarded as “artifactual” (painting, sculpture, installations).

The planned volume of “Art Inquiry” will be devoted to the reflection on both directions of expansion of the concept of performativity. We would like the authors to consider its general significance for aesthetics and for the theory of various domains of art. We also hope that they will show the changes occurring when its unique perspective is adopted in the discussion on both theatre, paratheatrical experiments, and film, and the domains which have traditionally emphasized the role of the artistic artifact. The title of this volume invites questions about the possible scope of performativity and its kinds.

PERFORMATYWNE ASPEKTY SZTUKI

Zagadnienie performatywności podejmowane było najczęściej w rozważaniach z zakresu filozofii języka oraz w refleksji nad teatrem i sztuką performance. W ostatnich latach zauważyć można jednak próby jego rozszerzenia. Z jednej strony zmierzają one do wypracowania założeń estetyki performatywności. Wśród jej cech wskazywane jest kwestionowanie granic poszczególnych dziedzin artystycznych, zaakcentowanie aktywnej roli odbiorców, dla których utwory stają się wydarzeniami rozwijającymi się w wyniku ich działań itd. Oprócz prób sformułowania teoretycznych konsekwencji „zwrotu performatywnego” zauważyć można także bardzo interesujące konkretne analizy polegające na uwzględnieniu właściwych dla niego założeń przy rozważaniu dokonania z różnych obszarów sztuki. Okazuje się, że nawet w obszarach twórczości uważanych tradycyjnie za „wytwórcze” (malarstwo, rzeźba, instalacja) odkryć można aspekty transformacyjne, zakładające nie trwanie, a przemiany.

W najnowszym tomie „Art Inquiry” przewidywane jest rozważenie obu zasugerowanych wyżej obszarów ekspansji idei performatywności. Z jednej strony rozważone mają być jej ogólne konsekwencje dla estetyki i teorii różnych dziedzin sztuki. Z drugiej, pokazane zmiany występujące, gdy właściwy dla niej punkt widzenia zostanie uwzględniony zarówno w obszarze refleksji teatralnej, parateatralnej, filmowej, jak w dziedzinach, w których tradycyjnie akcentowano rolę wytwarzanego przedmiotu (dzieła). Tytuł tego tomu ma właściwie charakter pytania o możliwy zakres performatywności i jej odmiany.

PERFORMANCE ART:
HISTORY AND ACTIONS

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ON A PERFORMATIVE ARTIST AND THE PERFORMATIVE CONCEPT OF AN ARTIST

Abstract: The term *performative artist* is usually applied to a person practicing one of the “performing arts” (such as music, theater, dance, etc.). Attempts have also been made to include happenings and performance art in this category. Some authors have emphasized the separate-ness of these phenomena, pointing, for example, to the “matrixed” activity of a theater actor and the “non-matrixed” behavior of a performer (M. Kirby) or the ongoing restoration of the limits of the actions (S. Gova). This prompted some representatives of the aesthetics of performativity (developing for over a decade) to treat these activities as a model for reflection on various artistic genres, including those which have been focused on artifacts. The “performative turn” consists in accentuating the practical aspect of the production of meanings, directing attention to the process of “displaying”, “staging”.

The author of the article focuses on the changes in the understanding of the concept of an artist associated with that turn. Citing Judith Butler’s ideas on the performative development of gender, he poses the question of whether the establishment of a creative identity through a stylized repetition of acts also occurs in art, especially contemporary art. He points out that in both cases, the essentialist belief in the innate nature of human identity is rejected, which leads to the rejection of the expressive nature of actions. Their nature is performative and creates, rather than expresses, the self. Giving up the idea of natural determination also leads to emphasizing the possibility of transformation.

Those issues are illustrated by a brief presentation of the ways in which Joseph Beuys and Sophie Calle shaped their artistic “selves”. The former exemplifies a model based on the universalization of the features previously associated only with art. Life itself is claimed to be a work of art, and everyone is viewed as potentially creative. In the second case, identity as the “locus of action” is given up in favor of an open process of becoming documented through performed works. Calle’s work gives the impression of someone else still deciding about her art, which is a departure from the essentialist and expression-oriented understanding of an artist’s activity.

Keywords: performing arts – performance art – performative turn in art – performative concept of artist – Joseph Beuys – Sophie Calle

The term *performative artist* is usually applied to a person practicing one of the “performing arts”. This English expression has been traditionally used in reference to such genres as music, theater, dance, etc. In their case, what comes

to the fore is their successful or innovative execution, sometimes leading to the autonomization of the acts of interpretation and to regarding them as the source of specific aesthetic values¹. Usually, however, performing arts have been simultaneously included in various classifications of fine arts, whose general principles have been applied to the issues under consideration as a result. For example, it has been emphasized that in their case we are also dealing with the activities aimed at the creation of a work of art. Of course, it has been pointed out that such a work is special, processual, consisting of a succession of verbal or musical sounds or of dancers' movements, involving actions performed by living people, associated with the use of certain props, engaging their physical and mental faculties – but still reducible to the category of a specific, broadly defined art object. As a result, also in this type of artistic activity, there is a tendency to take into account such aesthetic issues as the type of base, the depth of the “dip in the base”, the number of layers and so on². These characteristics have been regarded in different ways, depending on the concept of a work of art in different theories; in general, however, performing arts have been approached from an essentially non-performative perspective.

The issue has occasionally become complicated when considering the question of authorship. In the case of painting or sculpture, the persons involved only in the physical realization of the work have not been treated as its co-authors. Even if apprentices painted and sculpted large parts of the works in their master's workshop, their involvement was not credited and they themselves remained anonymous. An artist was the creator of the overall concept of the work, although his actual contribution to its physical execution (as shown by research in the history of art) was in many cases small. However, in theater or ballet, the performers, directors, and choreographers are all regarded as artists, although in what way and to what extent the status of authors could be assigned to them has been a variable issue. Sometimes, in reference to this, attempts are made to differentiate between the concept of traditional and contemporary theater or ballet³. However, these differences are usually moderated due to the belief that the purpose of creative activities is the

¹ Cf. E. Souriau, *Vocabulaire d'esthétique*, Paris 1990, p. 1122-1123.

² Cf. eg. J. Makota, *O klasyfikacji sztuk pięknych. Z badań nad estetyką współczesną*, Kraków 1964.

³ According to Wojciech Klimczyk, “In classical ballet, the distinction between the creator and the performer is very strong. Working in the studio mainly involves teaching dancers the material created by choreographer.” Such a model “reducing the creative process to the choreographer's lone genius” was replaced by artists such as Kurt Jooss and Pina Bausch with a “dialogue dancers”. “Rehearsals became group process of searching such movement sequences that would correspond well with the concept of the show and be fair to the creative temperament of each of the performers. This path is chosen by many choreographers working today.” (*Wizjonerzy ciała*, Kraków 2010, p. 209).

joint creation of a performance defined as a work of art. From this point of view, performance art can be considered a unique phenomenon.

It is difficult to reduce performance art to general categories⁴. The multiplicity and diversity of the works given this label sometimes makes it difficult to say who can actually be called a performer. However, there are good reasons to distinguish such an artist from a representative of performing arts understood as above.⁵ Some theories of performance art, especially in the 1970s, stressed the fact that those performances are carried out without a script – a pre-produced written text. They also do without a director. The performer thus becomes the creator of his own “role”. However, these qualities have not always been taken into consideration. A written script was often replaced by a more or less explicit intention, an idea of what was going to happen, existing prior to the action. This intention, however, did not have to be realized. In addition, since the early 1980s, some performers have begun to assume roles in their performances, impersonating someone else (such as a singer or a postman). What distinguished this situation from theatrical role-play was the fact that it was not pre-set by clearly defined models of conduct or matrices. There was room for ad hoc initiative and unforeseen turns of actions. The performer, even acting within the confines of his role, still had individual creative control over it, which meant that the action could never be exactly replicated.

These problems were addressed by Michael Kirby as early as in the 1960s. He distinguished between “matrixed” and “non-matrixed” actions. As an example of the former, he quoted the behavior of an actor playing a certain role in a theater spectacle, who “functions within subjective or objective person-place matrices”⁶. In order to act on stage, he has to know “who” and “where” he is. Kirby also stressed that such “imaginary information” is essential in “real life” to an athlete (such as a football player), a participant in religious and secular rituals, political conventions, etc. Assuming the matrix, behavior can be divided into logical and illogical. The former is consistent with practical principles and dominates in everyday life and in realistic theater performances. The latter variant is present in dreams and surreal or absurd plays. Defining them as illogical depends on what we mean by logic.

⁴ Rose Lee Goldberg emphasizes that the notion of „performance” is open: “performance art actually defies precise or easy definition beyond the simple declaration that it is live art by artists, and this still holds, although each emerging performance artist, and each new writer on performance, inevitably expands the scope of that definition” (*Performance. Live Art Since 1960*, London-New York 1998, p. 12).

⁵ The authors of happenings pointed out that theater actors and dancers do not work well in this type of activity, as they are accustomed to performing, that is play a specific role assigned by the developed stage work. When instructed that they should behave normally, like in life, it turned out that they were helpless.

⁶ M. Kirby, *The Art of Time. Essays on the Avant-Garde*, New York 1969, p. 78.

Non-matrixed behavior, in contrast, exceeds these divisions. Kirby describes it as alogical, i.e. going beyond the dichotomy of logic and illogic. "Alogical structure stands completely outside these relationships,"⁷ he writes. Kirby saw such behavior in different varieties of happenings. They are characterized by indeterminacy. Explaining the problem, he emphasized that this quality should not be confused with improvisation. Often, both indeterminacy and improvisation are reduced to spontaneity. Yet the main difference between them is the "amount of momentary" in the performance of actions. "In indeterminacy the alternatives are quite clear, although the exact choice may not be made until performance."⁸ In this case, in fact, alternatives do not mean anything; each of them is as good as any other.

I believe that Kirby's observations relating to happenings may be extended to performance art. In its case, it is also important that the performance is not governed by a defined matrix that would make it predictable. It is realized in a specific, changeable reality and it is therefore accompanied by uncertainty and larger risk than in the case of an actor or a dancer performing in a play or ballet. The performer is always experiencing tension associated with the possibility of chance events, which theater or ballet performances seek to eliminate. What characterizes it is the need to make choices that have not been determined by pre-existing structure. This is why Sabine Gova, writing about performance art, emphasized that it is a "movement of moments". A performance does not have a purpose as such: through the act of self-constitution, it simultaneously annihilates itself and remains forever just as it was before. Such an act transgresses the limits and at the same time negates them⁹. It may be assumed, therefore, that in contrast to performing arts, there is no work of art as the final product of the chosen actions. A performance is important first and foremost because of the decisions made here and now by the artist. From the point of view of its principles, the presence of an audience is of secondary importance, although in many cases it may be a factor in the development of the action. This is not a spectacle in the traditional sense. Its point is, Gova concludes, a decantation process – clarification or separation, which corresponds to taking a certain stance on something already made, possessed, in contrast to the inability to take such a stance on the limits that are continually renewed or requiring renewal¹⁰. A performance is, therefore, an

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 81.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

⁹ S. Gova, *Pojęcie techniki ekspresyjnej zwanej performance*, in: G. Dziamski, H. Gajewski, J.S. Wojciechowski (ed.), *Performance. Praca zbiorowa*, transl. K. Biwojno, M. Gutkowska, H. Siodlak, M. Śpik-Dziamska, M. Zamecka, Warszawa 1984, p. 74.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

activity in which movement is only a method of moving within a space that one can organize¹¹.

The features presented here (along with some others, which I will not discuss here but which have been noted by the performers themselves and the theorists writing about their actions) suggest that performance art is a unique artistic (or post-artistic) phenomenon which cannot be reduced to the mixture of artistic genres of the 1960s and 1970s, consisting in a combination of means and modes of action relevant to many areas.¹² Its special nature led some theorists to assume that it was an important source of the performative turn in contemporary reflection in art and the humanities. This thesis is emphasized in the book by Erika Fischer-Lichte, which opens with a detailed analysis of the 1975 performance by Marina Abramović. Concluding, the author wrote: “the performer and the audience took part in an event which is neither included nor sanctioned by tradition or current convention of visual arts and spectacles. Through her actions, the artist did not establish the existence of any artifact; she did not create any autonomous work which would have a specific shape and which could be exhibited in another time and place. She was hardly presenting anything.”¹³ Thus, Fischer-Lichte saw in Abramović’s action certain singular qualities which she deemed essential for the aesthetics of performativity, the principles of which she presented in the subsequent chapters of her book.

Highlighting the role of performance art provokes a question about its creator. Certainly, he cannot be treated (in accordance with the European tradition of understanding art) as a conscious maker of things (even broadly defined), regardless of whether he is acting according to certain rules or opposing them. In the case of an artist-performer, his work cannot be viewed as completed, closed. On the contrary, it should rather be seen as in progress, and the new realizations as its manifestations. This necessitates the transfer of attention from specific achievements to a broader process, which also takes into account what happens between the performances and what are their

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² This belief was emphasized by an outstanding Polish performer and performance art theoretician, Zbigniew Warpechowski, in his book *Podręcznik*, distinguishing between “synthetic nature” of art and synthesis of arts (Warszawa 1990, p. 141). Other performers, such as Laurie Anderson, wrote about performance as “a «new» hybrid” (cf. L. Anderson, *This Is The Time and This Is The Record Of The Times*, in: R. Goldberg, *op.cit.*, p. 6). I believe, however, that this wording should be properly understood. A hybrid is not any conglomeration of ingredients but a vivid mixture resulting from the crossing of parents belonging to different races, species, etc. If we assume that performance is a hybrid, it means that it combines all the components previously assigned to other areas of art into a living whole. A significant change that occurs when they are included in performance, however, is that they are energized. This changes their character significantly.

¹³ E. Fischer-Lichte, *Estetyka performatywności*, transl. M. Borowski, M. Sugiera, Kraków 2008, p. 12.

consequences. From this point of view, it becomes clear why performers talk of being an artist as an extension of performance.

I would now like to consider the performative turn in contemporary art, focusing on the problem of the artist. However, I will not be concentrating solely on his place and his role in the course of the performance. The task I have set for myself is broader and does not just concern action art. I would like to use the perspective of aesthetics of performativity to look at the works that belong to different genres (also traditionally those whose aim is to produce an artifact¹⁴). In addition, instead of focusing on the process of forming a single realization, I would rather consider the general process of becoming an artist.

I would like to start with Judith Butler's reflections on performative development of gender. Referring to the well-known theory of Simone de Beauvoir, who stated that one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one, the American feminist decided that gender does not determine a person's identity, or his/her mode of action. On the contrary, it is the "stylized repetition of acts" that establishes identity. Every day, "bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self"¹⁵. This leads to the rejection of essentialism. One should not think of gender as given, innate. It is the result of specific procedures which constitute everyday performative acts. However, both the "actors" themselves and the viewers fall for "the appearance of substance". They believe that gender precedes various acts, attitudes and gestures which only represent it. Butler firmly rejects this view. She says that gender attributes "are not expressive but performative" and they "effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal"¹⁶. She also emphasizes the significance of this difference, since assuming their performative nature leads to the conclusion that "there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction."¹⁷

¹⁴ Kaprow had previously proposed to use the perspective of happening to consider abstract expressionists, for whom the act of painting was more important than the finished work, and the assemblage (*op.cit.*, p. 98). Nowadays, many authors emphasize that the performative turn involves all arts beginning to manifest a tendency to be fulfilled as and through performance. Fischer-Lichte wrote about it, emphasizing "the questioning of the boundaries of art proclaimed and observed by artists, critics, theorists and philosophers from the early 1960s." (*Ibidem*, p. 29). Richard Schechner, on the other hand, stressed that when texts, architecture, visual arts, or anything else are looked at, they are studied "as" performances (*Performance Studies. An Introduction*, New York 2002).

¹⁵ J. Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, No. 4, (Dec. 1988), p. 519.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 528.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

Is this where the belief in the reified status of gender, dominating in the cultural tradition, comes from? Butler believes that it has been enforced on us by social sanctions and taboos. As a result, the body has been treated, to use Merleau-Ponty's formulation, more as "a natural species" than "a historical idea". The performative approach, on the other hand, entails the consideration of various situational possibilities, both cultural and historical. This accentuates transformational opportunities. Butler writes that "If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style."¹⁸ The chances of transformation are, therefore, based on the fact that gender, which was previously considered preexisting, a given, turned out to be a construct. Certain rules of its acceptance, however, were enforced by the prevailing social discourse. As a result, gender became "a publically regulated and sanctioned form of essence fabrication."¹⁹ It should, according to the cultural discourse, be clear, stable, polarized, described as an essence and a mystery. Gender had to conform to the socially accepted model of truth/falsity. This conformity was praised and any dissent was repressed. Butler observes that "Performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all."²⁰ Such a reassurance was to eliminate any anxiety and punishment or social marginalization were to ensure order. However, when what seemed an "ontological necessity" turns out to be the result of a repetition of performative acts, there is a chance for a change. It is made possible by the loss of faith in the need for and naturalness of certain acts and practices. Butler writes that "Feminist theory has sought to understand the way in which systemic or pervasive political and cultural structures are enacted and reproduced through individual acts and practices, and how the analysis of ostensibly personal situations is clarified through situating the issues in a broader and shared cultural context."²¹

The ideas outlined here allow a new outlook on many aspects of the concept of an artist. First of all, they allow us to challenge the idea of an artist's identity understood in an essentialist manner. To paraphrase de Beauvoir's quote, it could be said that one is not born an artist, but rather becomes one throughout the course of his/her life. This thesis certainly seems less revolutionary than in the case of the analogous statement about gender. With gender, the belief in its natural essential nature seems to be rooted much

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 520.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 528.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 522.

deeper, and be much more settled than the faith in innate artistic determination. Therefore, an attempt to undermine the latter of these beliefs is less shocking and is easier to accept. However, we should not forget that in many periods of aesthetic thought, the essentialist conception of an artist's identity was dominant. Often it also had an evaluative character. A true artist, in the sense of an eminent one, was supposed to be the one who has innate attributes, whose identity is characterized by an "artistic personality" preceding his creative acts. This belief led to a search for the innate stimuli to creation, causing the artist to stick to art even in adverse circumstances. In ancient times, this "artistic essence" was associated with the influence of Gods or Muses. Plato wrote about it, pointing out that mere mastery of technique does not make one a great artist, and the "work of madmen" will eclipse the art resulting from knowledge and skills. Cicero held a similar position. Aristotle, on the other hand, rejected this view. In modern times, the dispute returned in the discussion on the issue of genius. The word first appeared in English in the 16th century and meant a "native talent"²². However, the Romantics distinguished between talent and genius. In his essays, William Hazlitt considered the relationship between common sense and genius, and asked if genius must be aware of its power. Also the German Romantic thinkers, who initially assumed that genius is a universal quality, latent in every human being, especially in a child, later gave it decidedly elitist connotations. In the 19th century, the cult of genius was born, involving, inter alia, the treatment of a work of art as its manifestation. The actions, attitudes, gestures and works of an artist confirm his genius.

The performative concept of an artist is based on a fundamental questioning of such beliefs. It challenges the belief in the expressive nature of an artist's activities and works. Innate traits do not determine the identity of an artist; they do not give him the status of a genius²³. Furthermore, there is no identity preceding and conditioning creativity and determining its value. The claims of its existence turn out to be based on fiction. It is the artist's actions that create the identity which they are supposed to reveal. Therefore, there are no true or false, sincere or perverted acts of art. Their performative nature consists in the fact that they establish the identity of an artist, from which they were purported to be derived. Being an artist is not the realization of some original, given capabilities, but "non-matrixed" and "indeterminate" activities described by Kirby, or a "movement of moments", as Sabine Gova put it in reference to performance art.

²² *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. A. Preminger, Princeton 1974, p. 397.

²³ From this point of view, the idea of unfulfilled genius, discussed especially in the 19th century, turns out to be a misunderstanding – the concept of an outstanding artist who is unable to express his innate talent in his works.

The second aspect of the performative concept of an artist is related to his/her social role. Traditionally, it was conceived as that which determines the place of the artist in the life of a collective or designates his vocation. According to Butler, it is the dominant social discourse that enforces certain behavior under the threat of punishment. Even before, it was stressed that the role of an artist evolved over the centuries. Trying to summarize the various social functions performed by an artist, Edmund B. Feldman takes into account a shaman, a craftsman, a member of the medieval guild, a Renaissance genius, a revolutionary artist, a bohemian, an illustrator of religious and political content as well as everyday forms of social life, an industrial designer, a gallery idol, an artist siding with racial, national, religious or sexual minorities²⁴. Each of them was at one time a model for individual strategies of identification. An artistic lifestyle consisted in assuming the role as a given (similar to Butler's concept of gender) and a commitment to acting in accordance with it. It was necessary to adopt specific modes of behavior, to experience appropriate dilemmas, to pursue certain values. From the point of view of the performative concept of an artist, the order considered earlier as a given, found, turns out to be a construct dependent on the acceptance of the participants ("actors" and "recipients"). Therefore, certain behavior enforced by the dominant social discourse, a publically regulated and sanctioned form of essence fabrication – as Butler puts it in relation to gender – can be accepted or subjected to transformations. Their construction can be supported by certain performative acts, which entails a strategy typical for coercion. But it is also possible to adopt a different strategy – one based on pursuing change, or a free manipulation of performative factors. This is suggested by the idea of performativism, according to which there is no essence of natural or social "artistry" preceding acts. Acts, in turn, do not express identity, but rather create it. As Butler emphasized, it is not the self that takes on and changes roles, but the taken and changed roles make up one's self.²⁵

The contemporary performative turn has taken various forms. First of all, it appeared in cultural studies, where it was marked by a departure from structuralist concepts. Doris Bachmann-Medick characterized it as emphasizing the "practical aspect of the production of cultural meanings and experiences" and "directing increased attention to the aspects of exhibiting,

²⁴ E.B. Feldman, *The Artist*, New Jersey 1982.

²⁵ Butler writes: "As opposed to a view such as Erving Goffman's which posits a self which assumes and exchanges various 'roles' within the complex social expectations of the 'game' of modern life, I am suggesting that this self is not only irretrievably 'outside,' constituted in social discourse, but that the ascription of interiority is itself a publically regulated and sanctioned form of essence fabrication." (*op.cit.*, p. 528).

presentation and staging, to the culture as *performance*”²⁶. From this point of view, the suggested change in the understanding of the concept of an artist can be a project in which staging can be considered as a way of recognizing affinity. Such an affinity will not be so essentialistically conditioned and shaped by taking differences into account. The possibility of change and transformation is given an important role. In addition, however, it can be traced in contemporary art, in specific kinds of artistic activity. They consist in the creative actions which, regardless of the genre, contain elements typical of performance art. Some of them, such as questioning the boundaries of art, replacing the concept of a work by that of an event, changes in time establishing a new state of affairs, dynamic oscillations, playing with frames and collisions were pointed out by Fischer-Lichte with regard to theater, although she suggested that they also exist outside of it. Considering the arguments presented here, we can, however, reflect on the contemporary approach of performative artists to their role. It no longer involves an acceptance of its essentialist grounding, which would lead to a desire to discover an inner principle, a creative truth, which would be gradually revealed. The understanding of creativity as expressing one’s self is giving way to designing oneself as an artist. The old tension between sensing one’s creative self and finding possible ways of its expression is replaced by the tension between one’s current self and the designed one. Nor is it about the strategies of fighting against coercion. Today’s understanding of the concept of an artist is so free and broad that it is possible to move from one of the socially sanctioned roles to another.

In order to partially illustrate these theses, I would like to consider two examples. Despite their closeness in time, they point to some differences in the performative understanding of the concept of an artist. In both cases, creating oneself occurs through creative expression, but the way in which this is carried out and the presented image of the self are definitely different.

The first example concerns Joseph Beuys. Was he a “born artist”? The inadequacy of such a formulation relates to the fact that it is usually used with an evaluative intention. It is meant to point to a particular, essential disposition of a specific individual, distinguishing that person from other people. Beuys, meanwhile, claimed that everyone is an artist, because everyone is creative. This feature may be manifested in all types of activity. Thus, qualitative varieties of creative dispositions are irrelevant. There is no such thing as particular artistic creative abilities. Beuys wrote: “While an isolated point of view represented by a specialist places art and other types of work in sharp contrast, it is in fact of crucial importance to recognize that structural, formal

²⁶ D. Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns. Nowe kierunki w naukach o kulturze*, transl. K. Krzemieniowa, Warszawa 2012, p. 119.

and thematic issues that occur in a variety of procedures, in the café of work should be constantly related to one another". He tried to put this idea into practice in the concept of "social sculpture" and to give it an educational form as a part of the Free International University.

Beuys is extremely radical when it comes to crossing the borders of the traditional concepts of art. This is usually interpreted in the spirit of the expressive concept of art: an artist wishing to express his self (which is innate and further shaped by tumultuous experiences) cannot express it with any traditional means appropriate for a particular genre of art. Therefore, engaging in sculpture or painting, he uses unusual materials and techniques, combines them with happening or performance, etc. From the perspective of the concept of performativity, this problem can be reversed. The self does not demand to be expressed with unconventional media, but it is constituted by them instead. It is the performative acts that shape identity. An example would be Beuys's use of felt and fat in many of his works. Usually, this is interpreted as an expression of the experiences relating to his healing by Tartars during World War II after a plane crash. However, as some art critics pointed out, the artist did not use these materials in a narrative manner. He used them to recall the described event.²⁷ He used felt and fat because of the impact that the energy contained in them had on people, and not to express the artist's mental states. The character of the "artistic expressions" by Beuys (such as *Fat Chair*) was, therefore, not referential (constative in Austin's sense), but performative.²⁸ Thus, it can be said that through his modes of using his materials (understood as performative acts), he not did not express his self, but further shaped it instead. He did not enact any sanctioned ways of defining himself as an artist by making his hybrid works, but rather he exceeded them, both in the means that he used and the nature of the acts he performed.

Beuys's activity should not therefore be treated as the activity of an essentially given or pre-formed self, assuming and changing social roles, but as a performative constitution of identity. Therefore, it is important how he understood his social mission. It was described as the role of a Shaman, a Therapist and a Teacher²⁹. Usually, it is pointed out that these terms should not be understood in a literal or traditional sense. Beuys rejected the reified social status associated with these concepts. If he regarded himself as

²⁷ J. Beuys, ***, transl. J. Jedliński, *Ibidem*, p. 27.

²⁸ Other materials used by Beuys also had performative character. In the introduction to the catalog of the exhibition at The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1979, the artist wrote, "This is why the nature of my sculptures is that they are unspecified and unfinished. In most of them processes are still occurring: chemical reactions, fermentations, color changes, the distribution of drying. Everything is in a state of transformation" (transl. J. Jedliński, *Ibidem*, p. 18). These changes became the starting point for thinking about modifications of the artist's "I" and social processes.

²⁹ Cf. J. Jedliński, "Joseph Beuys – autokomentarz kategoriyczny", *Ibidem*, p. 7.

a “modern shaman”, it was not because of any innate “gift” or mysterious psychic abilities.³⁰ This also applies to the role of a therapist. He did not want to treat mental disorders or create an outlet for accumulated tensions with the techniques he used. The therapy was to reach deeply into the “general cognitive process”³¹ – to treat the way of thinking of the people who consider themselves normal. However, according to Beuys, the role of a teacher should “start with itself”. A teacher first and foremost constantly teaches himself through his contact with the changing reality. His social function should be liberated from an authoritarian transmission of knowledge and consist instead in the development and expansion of consciousness in every individual in the universal interpersonal relationship³². In each case, the German artist did not so much enact the existing cultural and historical patterns, as created their new meanings by “performing” or “presenting” them. From this point of view, one can consider as important both Beuys obtaining his professorship and taking a job at the State Academy of Art in Düsseldorf, and his performances reminiscent of the forms of ritual, lessons, etc.

The performative nature of the concepts discussed above has a substantial modernist component. It entails a clear direction of the performed acts. They are not derived, as I have been trying to point out, from essence and necessity. Instead, they are performed with the awareness of tendency and purpose. This tendency is primarily universalization. It can be seen especially in the extended concept of sculpture. It is realized first by including unusual materials and themes. Later, it manifests itself in the blurring of boundaries between sculpture and a performance or happening. Finally, it is identified with the entire province of art.

The second scope of universalization involves the expansion of the creative idea characteristic of art to science and politics. “Science is only a branch of general creativity,”³³ Beuys wrote. He also stressed that every human creative ability “is derived from human aptitude for art... For where else could it come from?”³⁴ The use of the principle of human creativity in politics led to the concept of “social sculpture”.

The third phase of universalization is cosmic in character. The first stage is “recognition of life as a work of art”³⁵. This includes creative “individuality of

³⁰ The need for the existence of such an innate “gift” in the artist-shaman is emphasized by Feldman. Looking for modern equivalents, he refers to the Jungian concept of archetypes (*op.cit.*, s. 12-15).

³¹ J. Beuys, “Każdy artystą”, transl. K. Krzemień, in: *Zmierzch estetyki – rzekomy czy autentyczny?*, selection and foreword by S. Morawski, vol. II, Warszawa 1987, p. 269.

³² *Ibidem*, s. 271.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 268.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ Cited after J. Kaczmarek, *Joseph Beuys. Od sztuki do społecznej utopii*, Poznań 2001, p. 15.

all people". Beuys, however, poses further questions about the sources of creativity as energy that exists in the world, that transforms all forms. He finds them in Christ and his resurrection. The substance of Christ (*Christussubstanz*) manifests itself in man and everywhere else. Here, however, this substance boils down to creative activity. Beuys writes that "He [Christ] is active in all possible ways of being active, including experiencing pain. Why would he not be still active today? He is therefore a collaborator, co-worker."³⁶ Performative acts of human creativity have therefore acquired a cosmic and metaphysical context.

In the post-modern performative concept of an artist the quest for universalistic references disappears, not only in its cosmic and metaphysical version, but also in the version referring to what is universally human. Man acts without the faith that he is taking part in broader, universal processes. The principle of freedom is realized as a potential of making free decisions, without even having to consider the references to default cultural or social structures. One does not need to conform to a specific role of an artist, nor battle with its conventional understanding. One does not even need to identify oneself as an artist. Performative acts are thus liberated from any obligations. There is no need to realize in them a particular "style" or "stylistics" of existence, maintain continuity or seek any uniformity³⁷.

I will discuss the postmodern performative concept of an artist based on the example of Sophie Calle. It is difficult to determine the nature of her work. Initially, she took up photography, specifically narrative photography or narrative art, as she presented work consisting of images and text. It was even debated which of the two components was more important. Some authors argued, for example, that she sought to communicate what can be expressed only in words, and therefore thought photography to be only an aid. Others have viewed her work as performance art. It was, therefore, assumed that there must have existed a specific impulse preceding the photographic and textual narrative. Calle's work was considered at the time in terms of "art as documentation"³⁸. Sometimes, however, it was the words that provoked actions (I will return to this further on). Her work is, therefore, performative in the sense that it does not fit in the existing classifications of the arts; even more, it eludes the newly created categories. Her new projects not only do not fit the pre-existing distinctions between artistic genres; they do not create any new

³⁶ Cited *Ibidem*, p. 27. It is worth noting that Beuys does not treat Christ as the source of human creativity, but as one with whom man cooperates acting creatively.

³⁷ I addressed these issues, but without reference to performativism, in the article "The Artist: Definition, Re-Definition, De-Definition", *Art. Inquiry* 2004, vol. VI and in the extended version *Inne idee awangardy. Wspólnota, wolność, autorytet*, Warszawa 2011.

³⁸ Cf. G. Dziamski, *Przełom konceptualny i jego wpływ na praktykę i teorię sztuki*, Poznań 2010, p. 260-261.

divisions, which would replace the old ones, as they are immediately undermined.

The concept of an artist also escapes here the different varieties of essentialism. In her 2000 book *The Sleepers*, Calle wrote: “In fact, it was he who decided that I was an artist”³⁹. That “he” was Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, an artist and art critic, who suggested that she might show her works at the Paris Youth Biennale in 1980. He learned about her activities not from herself, but from one of the participants of an action realized in 1979, when she invited twenty-eight people to sleep in her bed one after another. Before they went to sleep, she talked to them, recording the conversation without their knowledge, and while they were sleeping, she photographed them and made various notes. She did not treat this action intentionally as art. Those actions, as she emphasizes in interviews, were often accidental, resulting from boredom.

Calle’s later creative practice was also characterized by anti-essentialist attitude. For her, identity was not a “locus of action”. On the one hand, she was still carrying out the kind of actions she was associated with. In 1980 in Paris, she followed a stranger, who was then introduced to her. When she learned that he was leaving for Venice, she continued following him in Italy, taking pictures and making notes. In 1992, she went on a trip with Greg Shephard from New York to California. They parted before the end of the trip. Basing on the materials collected by both of them, she created an installation *No sex last night*, and used them along with her writings in the book *True Stories*⁴⁰. On the other hand, however, in all these situations she manifested no fixed character traits. Thus, they cannot be described as an expression of personality.

In one of the few critical texts written in Poland about Calle’s works, Mariola Szafarz writes: “irrespective of the materials she used, her bracing spirit usually has the same source: her own life, her lovers, or completely random people. Calle explores them up to the deepest levels of intimacy. Nothing is unworthy of becoming the subject of books, films and art installations. There is only one condition: the artist must find herself in it, give it the character of personal experience, somehow absorb other people’s experiences and make herself the axis of events. Mark the reality with one’s presence – this is enough to create art.”⁴¹ However, one can ask: what does that “mark” actually entail? In fact, after all, it comes down to physical participation, observation, photographic or video registration, asking questions, noting answers, etc. The artist is basically a participant and a recorder of

³⁹ S. Calle, *Les dormeurs*, Arles 2000, p. 7.

⁴⁰ S. Calle, *Des histoires vraies + dix*, Arles 2002.

⁴¹ M. Szafarz, “Moje życie moją sztuką. Sophie Calle”, in: *Dziedzictwo i tożsamość w literaturze i sztuce czasów nowoczesnych i w epoce postmodernizmu. Ujęcie transdyscyplinarne*, ed. S. Sobolewski, R. Solewski, B. Stano (in print).

events rather than their creator. She does not “absorb other people’s experiences” in order to express them later in her own way. Her self is not, according to traditional concepts of identity, an internally coherent structure, something uniform, separated from the society, which is to be expressed by art. As a unit, according to Jean-Claude Kaufmann, it is not a circle within a square but “is a square, is nothing other than a square”⁴², through which a tangle of conflicting forces are flowing. Calle seems to accept this flow. The evidence can be found in the story she recounts in her book *To Be Continued*⁴³. In his novel *Leviathan*, Paul Auster writing about Mary Turner, one of the heroines, used a certain episode from Calle’s life, thus mixing reality with fiction. The French artist did not just accept the situation; she decided to take on certain features of the novel’s heroine. For example, she went on a diet consisting of food products of a certain color for each day. She would spend entire days fixated on certain letters of the alphabet. Later, she decided that since she had contributed to literature, the situation may be reversed. She asked Auster to invent a character on whom she would base her own life. “In this way, I (?) let him do to me whatever he wants”⁴⁴, she wrote.

This example shows a fundamental difference between the performative concept of an avant-garde or neo-avant-garde artist, and the way s/he is defined in post-modern art. An avant-garde artist wanted to shape himself and the world according to certain assumptions. By way of personal example, he wanted to show others the way to liberation, de-alienation and creativity. A postmodern artist feels no such need. One could even say that, on the contrary, he allows the world to shape him. He wants to be like his contemporaries, especially the young ones. Therefore, the model of bringing art closer to life is changed. While the avant-garde artist did not accept the mediocrity of existence, wanting to shape lives – his own and other people’s, to find the purpose of existence in the historical or the cosmic, metaphysical sense, a post-modern artist renounces form-making acts even in the works he creates. Not only does art not shape life, it is expected that life will give form to art. That is why reality is often annexed, presented as an unframed or intentionally edited recording. Calle’s work is an excellent example of this. What gives her oeuvre a particularly dramatic nature, however, is the suspicion that she did not take a conscious decision to be an artist. She gives an impression of allowing someone else to decide on the nature of her works, and to decide that they are works of art. If they are to be treated as performative realizations, not only do they not define the artist’s identity, but they indicate its non-existence or complete fluidity. The French postmodernist manifests freedom from social standards, sanctions and taboos, but not just in order to create new rules

⁴² J.-C. Kaufmann, *Ego. Socjologia jednostki*, transl. K. Wakar, Warszawa 2004, p. 214.

⁴³ S. Calle, *À suivre*, Arles 1998.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

herself. Her performative acts do not establish her identity; on the contrary, they continue to disrupt and transform it.

Approaching the issue of performativism from a grammatical point of view, Butler wrote that “it is, however, clearly unfortunate grammar to claim that there is a ‘we’ or an ‘I’ that does its body.”⁴⁵ It would be more appropriate to use the vocabulary that resists the substance metaphysics expressed by means of the subject-verb formulations and relies instead on an ontology of present participles. Referring this remark to the performative concept of an artist discussed here, we should refrain (at least in the case of contemporary art; in other cases, the situation needs to be considered) from such statements as “the artist creates art”. The suggested present participle form would lead to such formulations as “creating art” or “art-creating”. Commenting on this, Butler claimed that the “self” in such participle formulations “is, of necessity, a mode of embodying, and the ‘what’ that it embodies is possibilities.”⁴⁶ With this mode of expression, identity as a pre-determined locus of creativity disappears. The “I” of an artist is still an unmarked, open to change mode of determination. His artistic activity will gradually fulfill these possibilities. This concept seems to correspond to the nature of contemporary artistic creation, liberating the speaking and writing about it from present difficulties. The question of whether the performative concept of an artist also applies in the case of earlier art, freeing it from its personalistic burden usually assumed by aestheticians or art critics, remains a question to consider.

Translated by Katarzyna Gucio

O ARTYŚCIE PERFORMATYWNYM I PERFORMATYWNEJ KONCEPCJI ARTYSTY (streszczenie)

Określenie „artysta performatywny” odnoszone jest zwykle do osoby uprawiającej jedną z *performing arts* (muzykę, teatr, balet itp.). W ramach kategorii teoretycznych wypracowanych w związku z nimi próbowano rozważać także happening i sztukę performance. Niektórzy autorzy podkreślali jednak odrębność tych zjawisk wskazując np. na „zmatrycowane” działanie aktora teatralnego i „niezmatrycowane” zachowanie się performerera (M. Kirby) lub występujące u niego nieustanne odnawianie granic akcji (S. Gova). Skłoniło to reprezentantów rozwijanej od kilkunastu lat estetyki performatywności do potraktowania tych działań jako modelu refleksji nad różnymi dziedzinami sztuki, także tymi, gdzie wcześniej dominowała koncentracja na wykonanym dziele. „Zwrot performatywny” polega na zaakcentowaniu praktycznego aspektu wytworzenia znaczeń, skierowaniu uwagi na proces wystawiania, inscenizacji. W artykule autor

⁴⁵ J. Butler, *op.cit.*, p. 521.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

koncentruje się na zmianach w pojmowaniu artysty związanych z owym zwrotem. Powołując się na sformułowaną przez Judith Butler koncepcję performatywnego kształtowania płci kulturowej zadaje pytanie, czy ustanawianie tożsamości twórczej przez stylizowane powtarzanie aktów zachodzi również w sztuce, zwłaszcza współczesnej. Zwraca uwagę, że w obu przypadkach następuje odrzucenie esencjalistycznego przeświadczenia o wrodzonym charakterze tożsamości człowieka, co prowadzi do zakwestionowania ekspresywnego charakteru działań artystycznych. Ich natura jest performatywna i tworzy, a nie wyraża „ja” artysty. Rezygnacja z naturalnej determinacji prowadzi też do zaakcentowania możliwości transformacyjnych.

Problematyka ta zilustrowana jest krótką prezentacją sposobów, w jakie kształtowali swe artystyczne „ja” Joseph Beuys i Sophie Calle. Pierwszy przykład ukazuje model oparty na uniwersalizacji cech odnoszonych wcześniej tylko do sztuki. Życie uznane zostaje za dzieło sztuki, a kreatywność dotyczy wszystkich ludzi. W drugim przypadku następuje rezygnacja z tożsamości jako „miejsca działania” na rzecz otwartego procesu stawania się dokumentowanego wykonywanymi pracami. Twórczość Calle sprawia wrażenie jakby ktoś inny wciąż decydował o jej sztuce, przez co wyłamuje się z esencjalistycznego i ekspresyjnego pojmowania działalności artysty.

Słowa kluczowe: performing arts – sztuka performance – „zwrot performatywny” w sztuce – performatywna koncepcja artysty – Joseph Beuys – Sophie Calle.

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PERFORMATIVE HISTORIES

Abstract: The article discusses the aesthetic approach to history treated as an example of performative actions. The changes in understanding the past, observable in culture, can be examined in two ways: on a macro-scale, as manifestations of the processes known as the theatricalization and aestheticization of reality, and on a micro-scale, the objects of interest being concrete examples of artistic and social events referring to history.

The article presents the main stages in the development of art which contributed to giving it the attributes of performance and provides examples of artistic and social narratives alternative to official history. The author analyzes the circumstances that have been conducive to the development of certain similarities between modern representations of history in art and the attitudes towards the past in daily life. The scope of this study covers the period from the division of arts into spatial and temporal through the happening and performance of the neo-avant-garde period, to the artistic representations of the past in the recent decades. The activity of the performers have contributed to the increased interest in the problems of individual and collective identity. An immense role in changing the attitude towards history has been also played by the use of the new media, revealing the mechanisms for constructing historical narratives. The examples of performative histories include, among many others, the activities of Ośrodek Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN [the Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre] in Lublin, representations of the Holocaust by critical art, and individual and collective forms of constructing images of the past in popular culture.

Keywords: aestheticization, history, the past, art, performance, happening, representation, narrative.

One of the new tendencies in aesthetics is a research trend that may be described as the aesthetics of the past. It has little to do with the history of aesthetics or the analysis of the works of old masters. It treats both history and art as the sources of knowledge in an unconventional way. Its object of interest is the activities of many actors that make history; it brings to the fore the emotive function of the artistic images of the past, and insists on blurring the boundaries between academic history and other narratives of the past. The aesthetic approach to history is becoming part of the process of the criticism of academic history, which, as the man of the late modernity believes, is unable

to meet his demand for discovering his “roots”, and bonding with his ancestors. When it comes to enhancing individual experiences and biographical memory, art seems to be closer to the sources of meaning than history. Artistic representations of history are believed to be superior to others owing to their ability to render the atmosphere, moods, feelings and emotions. Without trying to assess this conviction at this point, I will only take into consideration the circumstances that have contributed to the development of certain similarities between modern representations of history in art and the attitudes towards the past in our daily life.

The leading theme of this article is the issue of performativity which was signaled in the title of this article. I will outline the main stages in the development of art which contributed to giving it the attributes of performance, and then discuss some examples of narratives alternative to the official history. I have chosen this subject because I am firmly convinced that the dynamically changing attitudes towards the past in art and the daily life, with their associated axiological basis, embrace most of the features with which we associate the concept of performativity. This has been caused by a number of processes that have been taking place in the Western culture for over a century.

Changes in art tending towards the currently observable phenomena of contextualization, discursivity, and, in particular, the instances in which the autonomy of art was given up for its involvement in social life were all introduced on a large scale by the avant-garde movements. The harbingers of radical transformations that took place in the 20th century can be found much earlier. The scale of the changes, however, was different in different areas of art. There is a commonly accepted belief that temporal arts are more open to happening/performance than spatial arts, which are just there to contemplate. The arts developing in time are more responsive to the receiver’s activity, and it is their products that can become major events. For the sake of historical accuracy, it should be noted that although the classifications of the arts has been based on various criteria, the opposition between the spatial and the temporal is a recurrent one. Max Dessoir classifies sculpture, painting and architecture among the spatial, immobile arts, which use images. He places poetry, dancing and music in the group of temporal arts which employ movements and sounds. Dessoir’s division was closer to the actually practiced arts than to the *a priori* divisions characteristic of the great nineteenth-century philosophical systems. Nevertheless, already in that period, the author of the classification showed the difficulties and insufficiencies of the division based on the empirical criterion. Wagner’s vision of opera as *Gesamtkunstwerk* began the process of the synthesis of the arts, and the blurring of the boundaries between artistic types and genres. The theatre of surprise described by Marinetti, which used all possible devices, objects and ideas, and the total theatre of the Bauhaus completed the picture of a new overall vision of art.

The history of twentieth-century art finally revised the view on the division of arts into spatial and temporal, and has provided many examples of activities which documented the new role of the spectator, not associated with the traditional divisions.

Changeability, surprise and unpredictability have become synonymous with the art of “performance”. In a narrow sense, the term denotes a distinct, original kind of art resembling a happening; in a broad sense, it serves to describe all artistic events and actions aimed at activating the audiences. Before we focus on other meanings of the term, including non-artistic ones, it should be added that the broad understanding of “performative arts” precludes the opposition between the art focused on the object and process-based art. The distinction, derived from the division of the arts into temporal and spatial, does not apply in this case. At the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, pop art and happenings, despite their entirely different origin, played a similar stimulating role in solving the problem of time. The kinship of both trends was aptly captured by Vostell, who claimed that pop art is frozen happenings, while happenings are pop art come to life¹.

The difference between a happening and pop art lies in the fact that the latter lacks the physical presence of the persons performing some activity, which, according to Marvin Carlson, is a definitional feature of a performance during which skills are displayed, often manifested in public². Modern art has changed the character of the artistic message so effectively that the highlighted element will be often the object playing a different role in the spectacle than in a traditional scenery. The existence of specific objects, as in rites, is a necessary condition for breaking the audience’s habitual patterns of thought and behaviour. This is clearly observable in the investigated attitudes of individuals and communities towards the past. Examples of a similar relationship between people and objects include the celebrations of the anniversaries of historical events by gathering around such objects, but also collecting them, assembling private photo albums, gathering natural finds and memorabilia. Carlson’s condition for the performance to occur, which is the physical presence of people manifesting certain attitudes, is thus satisfied. Public performance therefore does not necessarily apply to playing roles on stage; it embraces both artistic and social activities that are distinguished by “any behaviour consciously separated from the person doing it – theatre and other role playing, trances, shamanism, rituals.”³

¹ W. Vostell, *Aktionen: Happenings und Demonstrationen seit 1965. Eine Dokumentation visualisiert und herausg. von Wolf Vostell*, eds. J. Becker and W. Vostell, Reinbek bei Rowohlt, Hamburg 1965, p. 58.

² M. Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge, New York 1996, p. 3.

³ M. Carlson, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

The term *performance* is ambiguous, and it applies to very different activities even within the area limited to art. Richard Schechner believes that what determines each time whether something is performance or “performance-like” is its historical or social context, convention, usage, or tradition⁴.

This is also the case with the artistic activities whose goal is to remind us of, represent, or make the past manifest. Despite their great diversity, certain references to the artistic forms which developed in the twentieth century are noticeable. Some of the ways of re-examining remembrance in an individual dimension, and some spectacles of the past have characteristic features of the happenings of the 1960s and of the performances of the 1970s. In today’s studies of individual historical narratives, undertaken from different positions, and in the reflection on the use of tradition by pop culture, the already conceptualized divisions and classifications may prove useful. The activities of the neo-avant-garde seen from a distance provide a certain amount of valuable information on the role played by their performances in the transition from theatrical performances, non-performative by nature, to “performizing” social spectacles. The essence of this change is, among other things, the restoration of the elements of ritual to modern culture, which, in the context of art, can be understood as a transition from artistic representation to actual action/doing. Participation theatre and social spectacle owe their origin to the avant-gardes, which sped up the already ongoing process of transformation of a static art work into one open to audiences and the social environment.

The artistic endeavors of happeners and performers to gain access to public space, which were a form of reaction to its political appropriation, embraced with time the forms of commemorating history and updating the past. Differences between alternative forms of memory, of the individuals and communities, are perceptible at a rhetorical rather than a factual level. The understanding of the structure of the message and the role of its sender-subject (increasingly often of senders-subjects) may thus make it easier to use the forms from which they derive, and to which they refer, more or less consciously.

The conceptions of the dramatization of reality and the aestheticization of daily life have provided research tools to look at the avant-garde legacy also from this angle. The so-defined research perspective makes it easier to understand the way in which the formally rich aesthetics of narratives alternative to official history developed, and how the ideas for the currently applied location and space solutions were born. The first solutions of this type were proposed by the creators of happenings.

⁴ R. Schechner, *Performance Theory*, Routledge, New York 2003, p. 30.

Allan Kaprow distinguished several basic groups among the diversity of happenings in the 1960s: small-audience activities in small rooms based on close, physical contact between spectators and actors; large-scale shows combining different kinds of art on stages and arenas; the so-called 'event' – an artistic event with the traditional division into the house and stage; 'showing' spectators around urban space; the art of ideas, akin to conceptualism; the 'activity' happening related to holiday celebrations, sporting events, carnivals, or fairs. This group is distinguished by the spontaneous form of combining artistic activities with daily life. The author of the most characteristic happenings taking place in the urban space was Vostell. He treated the town with its sounds and pictures and responses of artists and spectators as an overall event constituting one integrated art. Despite detailed scenarios, Vostell's happenings could not be repeated because their leading idea was the individual, imaginative skills of participants. By means of the artistic devices, the boundaries separating the truth of life from the appearance of art, or the authentic from the theatrical, were called into question. Generally, it should be said that the first period in the history of the happening is characterized by spontaneity and aleatoricism, without losing the features of a planned artistic event. The activity of artists consists in stimulating spectators to act, making them change their attitude to life, and eventually in seeing their roles as actors in everyday life theatre. Theoretical consciousness going beyond immediate-purpose descriptions of the meaning of the activities of the time came later, when the happening completed the next stage of its development. In the 1970s, performance art shifted emphasis from action to documenting and lost its unique character. As P. Krakowski writes, this resulted in "an analytical attitude, in presenting some concepts in a less spontaneous and more reflective way"⁵. Attitudes evolved owing to the large-scale introduction of the electronic media; it was at that time that 'film-performances' and 'video-performances' were created. The possibilities of documenting by means of the new media, discovered by artists, began the phenomenon of recording, filming, and photographing on an unprecedented scale everything that was associated in any way with the artist's personality. This tendency is still present in culture. The clear individuation of performances in the 1970s is particularly expressed in 'body art', and it elevates art by body discourse. Performance becomes an analytical medium and the artist's self-expression constructed by means of it begins to compete with other discourses. Furthermore, artists enter the public sphere more and more confidently, their appearances having many forms, from contestation to provocation.

I have outlined the basic stages in the development of art based on initiating and provoking all kinds of events, i.e. integrated art fulfilling the postulates

⁵ P. Krakowski, *op.cit.*, pp. 64-65.

for the synthesis of arts. The purpose of this sketchy survey was to draw attention to the complex origin and diversity of this type of art. The process of the disappearance of boundaries, observable within the family of arts, embraced more spheres of culture, while changes in art dynamized the pace of transformations in late modernity. Out of the many symptoms of the transformations now taking place, I am interested in those concerning the understanding of history and attitude to individual memory. I believe that the above-mentioned activities of happeners and performers have provided many reasons for becoming interested in the problems of individual and collective identity. An immense role in changing the attitude towards history was also played by the use or sometimes even fetishization of the new media, revealing the mechanisms for constructing historical narratives and making memory clichés. The devices introduced in early happenings: transformations, the mingling of real events and those artificially reconstructed, or faked 'self-annihilations' were not yet able to effect a perceptible change in attitudes to the past, despite the fact that they introduced a number of excluded themes into public circulation, including those disregarded by academic history. It was only performances utilizing the new media that directly exposed the processes of simulation, revealed the opportunities for and threats to creating pictures which will unreflectively become history in the next moment. The centre of gravity shifted from the question of 'what' history speaks of the past to the question of 'how' this knowledge is formulated, constructed, and processed⁶.

One should not overestimate the contribution of art to the change of modern man's attitude towards the past, yet it should be admitted that without art's contribution, as without the performative turn in historical science, micro-histories would have far fewer chances to compete with the official interpretations of history. The performative role of works of art in making up the historical process is not a new phenomenon. Art has always provided different pictures of the past which the audience received mainly in an attitude of contemplation, as a general interpretation of the meaning of, or the truth hidden in, symbols and allegory. This is, after all, what 'superiority of poetry over history' consisted in. Not long ago, philosophical superiority was the only one that artistic narratives of history had. The historical truth was reserved for historians. It was necessary to disperse, in a way, the homogenous structure of art into a number of events, which are no longer subordinated to the overriding narrative, in order to ask the question about the subject who creates it, and thereby about his/her preferences and instruments of access to the past. The doing-away with the division into actors and spectators, already present in

⁶ Cf. M. Carlson, *op.cit.*, pp. 19-20; see also: A. Szpociński, "O współczesnej kulturze historycznej Polaków", in: *Przemiany pamięci społecznej a teoria kultury*, (ed.) B. Korzeniowski, Instytut Zachodni, Poznań, 2007, p. 35; Cf. I. Skórzyńska, *Widowiska przeszłości. Alternatywne polityki pamięci 1989-2009*, Instytut Historii UAM, Poznań 2010, p. 28.

early performances, was a kind of emotional and intellectual training before appearing in social spectacles. It was conducive to perceiving one's own role as an actor in the theatre of daily life, in which individual memory is so often compared with its handbook vision.

One could say that, in general, the effects of rejecting traditional divisions, like those that have changed the image of art, occur in all of culture. When describing the changing relations between theatre, ethics, and philosophy, Samuel Weber points, among other things, to the special role of theatricality in discovering a different way of remembering and being remembered. "Staged stories do not define their 'middle' as a natural, necessary and totalizing transition from a beginning to an end but rather recognize that beginnings and endings are always the media of other stories. [...] The kind of listening and memory to which they appeal do not seek to recover a self-contained meaning or resurrect the dead. Rather such memory knows itself to be inseparable from forgetting rather than its simple opposite"⁷.

The analogies and actual similarities between transformations in art and transformations in understanding the past can be examined in two ways: on a macro-scale, as manifestations of the processes known as the theatricalization and aestheticization of reality, and on a micro-scale, the objects of interest being concrete examples of artistic and social events referring to history. The advocates of theatricalization of reality regard performativity permeating from art into daily life as a confirmation of their diagnosis of society. Metaphors borrowed from the language of theatre are not accidental, and, with the absence of another vocabulary, they seem to properly describe the innovative activities on the borderline of art, holiday, and spectacle, termed, *nomen omen*, 'paratheatrical'. As Samuel Weber contended, theatricality is a special medium combining different kinds of art from the beginning of theatre. The tradition of street theatre shows, moreover, that this is also the kind of art which, being a synthesis of arts, is the most open to the synthesis of art and life.

The theatrical metaphors used by the proponents of the theatricalization of reality correspond to the generalized image of the similarity of stage and life, between which boundaries appear fluid. In this context, references are made to the de-realizing influence of the media, to mass entertainment phenomena, and the techniques of the reproduction and decline of aura already described by Walter Benjamin. Scholars emphasize the spectatorship of the political scene and social spectacle as a form of interpersonal communication. Owing to Guy Debord, Erving Goffman, and Victor Turner the terms 'spectacle', 'stage appearance', 'stage/scene' and 'social drama' have become tools for describing transformations in social life, consisting in making daily life resemble

⁷ S. Weber, *Teatralność jako medium*, [Theatricality as Medium], transl. J. Burzyński, Wyd. UJ, Krakow 2009, p. 214. Quoted from the original.

a stage show. The theatrical origin of contemporary shows takes into account both the traditional model of stage/backstage, spectator/actor, and, as in Schechner, the avant-garde forms of theatrical practices such as happening, performance, the wandering theatre and street theatre. The term spectacle is also frequently applied to sporting events, or public and religious ceremonies. Even a list of conceptual tools serving to analyze qualitatively different phenomena confirms the thesis about profound transformations within culture. This is also the case with the area of our interest. Changes in attitudes to the past, observable at the meeting point of artistic activities and everyday life, are not confined to a superficial aestheticization of history, although it is this aestheticization that is the most visible. A certain line of division is marked by the distinction that appeared already in the late 1960 and in the beginning of the 1970s in the field of performances concerning the form (the place of action, number of actors/participants, the duration, conditions of reception), and the attitude towards the presented ideas – more emotional, spontaneous or reflective, and analytical. In each situation, a performance at that time and now retains its creative potential for producing situations capable of changing our views, especially in terms of daily relationships with the environment.

This fully applies to the artistic, para-artistic as well as social (individual and collective) representations of history. These, among others, include individual constructions of one's own history, based on genuinely preserved traces like places and objects such as buildings, gardens, churches and cemeteries, but also clothing, toys, books, diaries, collections of postcards, and bric-a-brac. These individual narratives are complemented with the oral history of others and, increasingly often, by the part of memory which is only a cliché of experiences treated as one's own. The awakened historical consciousness of modern man makes him/her treat his/her past as the material for processing; s/he continually rectifies it, adjusting it to the currently played role in the daily theatre. These types of performative micro-histories are characterized by reflectiveness, their plot being a dynamic connection between the past and the present, between what is physically preserved and imagination. It should be added that a significant role in arousing the need to have a history, to have "roots", is played by popular culture. The new media facilitate the satisfaction of this need; they make it easier to yield to the temptation of creating fictitious traces or copies of non-existent pictures. History, and in particular recent history, has become an arena of individual choices. The attitude to one's own biography and the history of one's family, or a related community, is an element of the individually constructed identity. It is also in the dimension of macro-social processes that the approach to tradition changes, which is characterized by greater arbitrariness than at the beginning of modern societies. This special activity of the recipient of tradition is stressed by the supporters of constructivist theories. They, in particular,

draw attention to the way history is made. Mechanisms for the choice of tradition, as well as for creating a history of one's own life or family, reveal the structure of narrative about the past, which is never directly accessible. In the same sense, Heyden White spoke of political discourse that it is 'poetic' and 'creative'. At this stage of discussion, we are more interested in the narrating subject of the narrative rather than in the structure of narratives relating to the past. The weakening of the difference between literary (or, more generally, artistic) stories and historical ones, *inter alia* by narrativism, was another step towards the reflective and analytical treatment of the past, and the critical attitude towards history. Late modernity is often characterized precisely by extended reflectiveness; this is what its "maturity" and superiority to earlier stages consist in. Tradition also becomes "the chosen way of 'being-in-the-world' and a form of individual or personal obligation to the past. Under these circumstances tradition is no longer a systemic mechanism for reconstructing the past, it becomes an individually constructed and selected context of interpretation and reinterpretation of the participant's current experience"⁸.

Apart from individual ones, the trend of reflective microhistories with performative features also embraces some collective (group), usually local forms of communing with the past. The memory of local communities is tightly connected with the biographical memory and the gap-filling memories of the family, close friends and their milieu. Local memory is formed in reference to places, objects, oral accounts, and local customs; this, however, does not take place in accordance with the rule of subordination to one overriding narrative. On the contrary, we are dealing with a process of negotiation between different memories. The process of seeking local genealogies made itself particularly conspicuous in the countries where the effects of being uprooted were experienced most acutely. The performances of local memory have been described in detail by Izabela Skórzyńska, who used the term "the theatre of little homelands"⁹. Supplementing her theses with the subject of our interest, it should be observed that the alternative theatre, presented as a carrier of the idea of restructuring, and then redeveloping public space, has provided artists and socio-cultural animators with specific models of how to rework memory. We will use the example from the nearest "little homeland" of Lublin, the history leading from the NN Theatre (*Teatr NN*) to the Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre (*Ośrodek Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN*). On this path from the alternative theatre to the centre for animation of Lublin's multi-cultural past, the following stages can be distinguished: from small-audience activities in the small room of the *Czarna Sala* (Black Hall), based on close

⁸ M. Jacyno, "Tradycja jako kontekst. Strategie rekonstrukcji przeszłości w autonarracji biograficznej", in: J. Kurczewska (ed.), *Oblicza lokalności. Tradycja i współczesność*, IFiS PAN, Warszawa 2004, p. 133.

⁹ A. Skórzyńska, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-60.

physical contact of spectators and actors, to artistic events with the traditional division into the audience and stage, taking place in Grodzka street, later expanded into 'showing around' the larger space of the city, sometimes combined with an activity-type happening ('One land – two temples' [*Jedna ziemia – dwie świątynie*]), to large-scale shows, embracing all kinds of arts, and using the new media, like 'The Gate to the Nonexistent Town [*Brama do nieistniejącego miasta*], akin to holidays and mystery plays, involving large numbers of non-professional spectators ('The Day of Five Prayers' [*Dzień pięciu modlitw*]). All these activities are performances that smoothly transform from staged artistic shows into social spectacles, where the roles of professional actors and social actors are indeterminate, the whole situation being open to chanciness and spontaneity. The 'reworking of memory' taking place during these kinds of performances is not final, but, at the same time, it cannot be repeated. Such is the memory of the no longer existing Lublin, divided by the Grodzka Gate into two communities – the memory being locked at the moment when the performance is taking place, and built each time anew out of the accounts of witnesses and substitute witnesses. New meanings are also acquired by the physical space influenced by the adaptation of old buildings, with their revitalization drawing on the existing architectural plans, or by the act of the conscious alteration of the function of the building in order to 'age' it.

In the foregoing forms of communing with the past, the prevailing one was the reflective attitude, worked out in the later stage of the development of the performance. This does not mean that they were deprived of the features of the theatre of surprise, or of the spectacularity of large-scale events, and sometimes of intended fictionalization. For lack of space, many intermediate forms which do not avoid the ludic function, which enhances their critical and educational potential, have not been discussed here.

A separate position in the reflective trend is occupied by the critical art referring to the past. Its characteristic trait is an investigative attitude, the presentation of previously ignored subjects, and the demythologization of history. Art is simply treated as a kind of discourse on the past, competing with others in the dispute over history. Critical art, chiefly that of the 1980s and the 1990s, introduces, among others, the subject of the aestheticization of the Holocaust into public discourse; for instance, in the productions of Zbigniew Libera, ranging from his earlier works to the work created jointly with Darek Foks *Co robi łączniczka* [*What is the female messenger doing*], one can trace the reviving of the levels of the emotional and existential memory excluded from the duty to remember. These controversial pictures are a singular form of studying the past, exploring its murky, and sometimes embarrassing, recesses. The problems of the aestheticization of the Holocaust and interpretations of history in critical art were discussed by Izabela Kowalczyk in her

recent book¹⁰. Out of the reflections on critical art, what seems essential for our discussion is a shift of emphasis from the “reworking of memory” to the antagonizing of memory. When art is treated as a discourse on the past, the features of performativity should be sought in the nature of this discourse. Categories that indicate art to be the discourse which analyzes and studies the past seem to be reserved for science rather than art. Nevertheless, works of art sometimes also resemble scientific treatises. The problem is too complicated to deal with at this point. I bring up this question because critical art drawing on the past has significantly contributed to the change of attitudes towards history, the change which consists – as in performance – in urging interpreters into activity. At the same time, when we recall that the early twenty-first-century critical art almost exclusively uses postmemory, a conclusion arises that what art speaks of and how it speaks of it is becoming not only performative history but also a new form of historical art.

The last, usually most observable group of attitudes towards the past is its forms that have been propagated by popular culture. It has adopted selected elements of ludic culture not necessarily distributed through media channels, such as festivities, fairs, or church fetes, which are, however, becoming secondarily popular owing to these channels¹¹. Large-scale shows such as knight tournaments, reenactments of battles and other historical events complete the picture of mass events whose purpose is to construct the image of the past in such a way that it will suit the tourist, who seeks intense, pleasurable experiences. Cultural legacy in countries with a high living standard is a consumer good. An increasingly autonomized and pluralizing culture produces the need to distinguish oneself through contact with unique local color; mass tourism tries to satisfy these needs. The brand of authenticity is desirable but not necessary. Replicas of medieval strongholds, theme parks, and even entirely new architectural visions, stylized as indeterminate antiquity, will do. Popular culture continuously puts new literary themes into circulation, most eagerly those that, on account of the cultural taboo particularly sanctioned by Christian culture, show an alternative picture of our history. The Da Vinci code, the Shakespeare code, Umberto Eco’s search for the lost book of laughter, the famous Foucault Pendulum, gendered biographies of Mary Magdalene, different versions of the life of Jesus and various stories showing a close relation between contemporary scientific theories and the knowledge of the ancients – as in Dan Brown’s bestsellers – all attempt to restore man’s ability to feel mysteries: the ability of the man who is overwhelmed with too much information, including a surplus of memory. They refresh aesthetic

¹⁰ I. Kowalczyk, *Podróż do przeszłości. Interpretacje najnowszej historii w polskiej sztuce krytycznej*, Academica, Wyd. SWPS, Warszawa 2010.

¹¹ Cf. E. Nieroba, A. Czerner, M. S. Szczepański, *Flirty tradycji z popkulturą. Dziedzictwo kulturowe w późnej nowoczesności*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2010, p. 49.

sensitivity to detail, remind one about the profound meaning of symbols in cognition, and also prompt one to reflect on the allegorical sense of historical transmission. However, the histories thus constructed are first of all products of popular culture, whose main objective is to provide pleasure. This does not exclude the possibility of initiating a special kind of aesthetically characterized experience. Making pilgrimages following the traces of fictitious histories has all the characteristics of an event on the borderline of theatre and everyday life, in which we willingly play the role of a participant involved in a ritual. The feeling of unreal time, of the manipulative power of the media is so dominant that those, and other similar forms, become a way of contestation. The places that create particularly favourable conditions for developing attitudes towards the past are modern museums, which have lost the character of art temples in favour of becoming spaces open to individual perception. The European Museum Nights enjoy huge popularity because they have the features of an exceptional event oriented towards the intensification of sensuality, including touch, once prohibited in museums. Another, collective form of participation in creating little histories are local initiatives not so much for restoring local remembrance as for rebuilding the community by appealing to local legends, memories, or tales, which are later sold to tourists in an attractive wrapping. These historicizing details will soon become the distinctive feature of a region or a town, while, globally, they blur the boundaries between what is historically important and what only passes as such.

The abovementioned forms of communing with the past, on an individual and group level, are a serious rival of history, which is based on the study of sources. Modern historiography uses many tools which have been advanced by unconventional histories. It should be remembered, however, that it is culture industries that are very often behind them, especially the tourism business. In the long run, changes in attitudes towards the past are unavoidable. The present article mainly highlighted the feature of performativity in contemporary forms of behaviour towards the past. As for its definition, it was not precisely clarified anywhere, because the concept of performativity is an open one, with a clear-cut core yet blurred boundaries. Therefore, in reference to Schechner's ideas, we can say that some spectacles of the past are performances, while other forms of treating the past are only like performances. The fact that, with time, only specialists will be able to distinguish these forms, is not as worrying as the fact that, as years go by, only specialists will be able to distinguish old objects/buildings from the aged ones, and literary histories from historical ones.

**HISTORIE PERFORMATYWNE
(streszczenie)**

Przedmiotem rozważań jest estetyczne podejście do historii traktowane jako przykład działań performatywnych. Obserwowane w kulturze zmiany w rozumieniu przeszłości można analizować dwojako: w skali makro jako objawy procesów określanych mianem teatralizacji i estetyzacji rzeczywistości i w skali mikro, czyniąc przedmiotem zainteresowania konkretne przykłady wydarzeń artystycznych i społecznych nawiązujących do historii.

W tekście przedstawione są główne etapy w rozwoju sztuki prowadzące do nadania jej cech performansu, a następnie przykłady artystycznych i społecznych narracji alternatywnych wobec historii oficjalnej. Analizowane są okoliczności, które doprowadziły do wykształcenia się podobieństw między nowoczesnymi reprezentacjami historii w sztuce a postawami wobec przeszłości w życiu codziennym. Zakres badań obejmuje okres od podziału sztuk na przestrzenne i czasowe, przez happening i performance okresu neowanagardy aż do artystycznych reprezentacji przeszłości ostatnich dziesięcioleci. Działania happenerów i performerów przyczyniły się do zainteresowania problemami tożsamości jednostkowej i kolektywnej. Ogromną rolę w zmianie nastawienia do historii odegrało również wykorzystanie nowych mediów, prowadzące do odsłonięcia mechanizmów konstruowania narracji historycznych. Wśród przykładów historii performatywnych wymieniono między innymi działania Ośrodka Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN w Lublinie, reprezentacje Zagłady przez sztukę krytyczną oraz indywidualne i kolektywne formy konstruowania wyobrażeń o przeszłości w kulturze popularnej.

Słowa kluczowe: estetyzacja, historia, przeszłość, sztuka, performance, happening, reprezentacja, narracja.

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DEFACEMENT – PERFORMATIVITY AND NOVEL MEANINGS

Abstract: Despite its connection with ancient rituals, performance art tends to be seen as a controversial novelty. The paper focuses on the artistic understanding of performance, questioning its reality-changing quality. Referring to Erika Fischer-Lichte, I suggest an examination of the impact of performance art on culture, using the terms derived from the theory of rites of passage – *liminality* and *passage*. One of the characteristics of performance is the blurring of dichotomies by minimizing not only gender oppositions, but also other dualisms existing in culture. Thus, the analysis of blurred dichotomies in contemporary art is made on the example of the face-body relation. The division between face and body – where the former stands for the spiritual, cultural, and human, and the latter stands for the animalistic and natural – is contested in most actions of performance art. I aim to show that annihilating face in artistic practices by reintegrating it into the body is both part of the desemantization processes in performance art and may constitute a way of generating new meanings obtained by way of profanation and desacralization. Defacement may be perceived as a philosophical tool of art.

Keywords: defacement, ritual, performance, desemantization, profanation, face, body.

PERFORMANCES VS. RITUALS

The story of performance to some extent emanates from the history of the verb *perform*. A breakthrough in this theory comes with J.L. Austin's theory of performatives described in his book *How to Do Things with Words*. Austin notices that, in specific situations, some sentences actually change reality. The examples to illustrate Austin's thesis include the ceremonies of baptism and marriage, where uttering certain phrases changes the social landscape. He demonstrates that words can actually *act*. Indeed, the verb *perform* – with which *performatives* share a common core – means “to act, to accomplish an action”; it is also used for actors acting on stage. Austin's followers, to mention such renowned scholars as John Searle or Maurice Merleau-Ponty, also sought to explicate the relationship between language and reality.

Apart from the linguistic aspect of performance, its anthropological dimension also plays an important role in the development of performance theory. Anthropologists analyze exotic tribes and local customs to assert the impact of performances on reality.

There are of course different typologies of performances, covering such areas as everyday life, art, sport and entertainment, or business and technology. Sacred rituals or plays may also be found in these typologies. Nevertheless, all of them share an important feature – the impact of performances on the shape of the surrounding world, their reality-forming quality.

In his book *Performance Studies*, Richard Schechner suggests a definition of performance that embraces all actions, emanations of being, and explications of actions. Therefore, his definition concerns both theory and practice: art as well as all forms of activity on all levels of reality – from the human level to the level of particles. The openness of his definition, which takes into account the development of the genre of performance, signals an important feature of performance – it evades theory. This paper, however, shall focus on the artistic aspect of performance and its impact on the cultural landscape.

Tracing the conceptual genealogy of performance can take us back thousands of years if we take rituals to be the ancient root of performance art. The connection between performance art and rituals is visible in many respects. These are, to name just a few, using animals, transgressing the limits of one's body and the threshold of pain, or the collective character of performance acts aiming at changing the dynamics within a certain community.

While rituals have been present in culture since its very outset, performance art tends to be viewed by participants as new and controversial. It is interesting that this “novelty” does not exhaust itself and retains its character despite the repetitive scheme of performance versus ritual. One possible reason for this is that we may have a diminishing memory and awareness of rituals, and that in Occidental culture we are most probably becoming increasingly disconnected from most of them. We still do experience sets of formalized or theaterized acts and utterances on different occasions in our life, but one may get the impression that those acts have become automatized habits. Meanwhile, Erika Fischer-Lichte, a scholar in performance art, stresses that the characteristic feature of performance is that it focuses the participants' attention.¹ This could mean that the success of performance depends on the full concentration of its participants.

A particular similarity can be traced between performances and rites of passage. The question arises whether there is any continuity of experience of the rites of passage. The ones that are continuous with the past seem to belong

¹ See: E. Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics*, transl. Saskya Iris Jain, Routledge, Oxon 2008.

to religious traditions, while the so called “exotic” rituals are no longer vivid in our experience. Religious rituals in our culture have also possibly experienced a certain erosion of resonance. To sum up, the question to be posed is whether we feel disconnected from ritual life, ritual mentality or mindset, and whether it makes us incapable of truly experiencing performances.²

One seemingly important factor is whether participants feel that they belong to a culture in which rituals shape their identity. What seems to highly differentiate artistic performance from a sacred ritual – especially religious rites – is that the latter is inscribed and entwined in a cultural and linguistic net which, to a large degree, makes its purpose and outcome comprehensible and predictable for the given community. This is not the case with performance art, where unpredictability is used to attract and retain the participants’ attention.

Thus, another possible reason for performance to be perceived as new and controversial is the very element of unpredictability. The aspect of unpredictability is present on both sides – on the side of the viewer and on the side of the performer. The viewer does not know what to expect; performances are usually based on actions that attract attention and have an out-of-ordinary effect. Nevertheless, the performer himself is also subject to the unknown outcome of his actions. He cannot predict the reactions of the animals that accompany him or the reactions of his own body, nor can he predict how the participants of the show will react and what this will entail. Therefore, unpredictability could be viewed as a way of explaining the ever-present quality of “novelty” associated with the genre of performance.

Unpredictability also constitutes an element of liminality as it triggers the sense of ambivalence and disorientation. This is where we find liminality, since participants find themselves in a new situation and a new order of events, but they have not yet reached a transition as a group or as individuals. Adopting a skeptical view on the described situation, one may ask a series of questions. How do we know that liminality actually occurs in artistic performances? How do we know that there is any transition taking place and that it has taken place? The problem of a skeptic in such a situation is made worse by the fact that the participants often feel like viewers rather than participants, even though theoretical writings on performance constantly stress the blurring of the line between the acting performer/artist and the audience, since both are supposed to be active. Another question is where to search for the ongoing liminality or transition if not in the minds of the participants and in the

² It can be argued that rituals nowadays can take the form of shopping or just window-shopping – simply consisting of excursions to shopping centers – or of celebrations of major sporting events. However, the question remains as to what would then constitute the cultural purpose of such rituals.

community created by the performance act itself? We seem to be stuck at the liminal stage, judging by the confusion of the viewers.

This can actually be the case, as Victor Turner states in *Ritual Process*,³ declaring that a passage may sometimes become a permanent state. Van Gennep also notes that the time needed for passage in the case of a group or an individual varies greatly. Turner shows the differences between the liminal stage and the hierarchic system in the form of binary oppositions. Some of these oppositions are as follows:

- Passage/state
- Whole/part
- Communitas/structure
- Anonymity/system of names
- Nakedness or uniformisation/different clothes
- Minimalization of gender differences/maximalization of gender differences.

What may be intriguing is that the left column of the oppositions, i.e. those attributed to the liminal stage, are similar to the features of performance art. Moreover, they may also be associated with the contemporary changes in Western societies.

As Arnold van Gennep, an ethnographer, writes, rites of passage can be divided into three phases: separation, transition, and reincorporation. The first stage consists of withdrawing from one's present status to prepare oneself to embrace a new status. Then comes the 'in-between' state – the liminal state characterized by ambiguity. In the last stage the new identity is assumed. Adopting an enthusiastic perspective, it can be argued that the processes connected to performance art should be perceived from a much wider perspective. That is to say, they should be viewed not from the perspective of a single performance act – where viewers may feel disappointed or disoriented by the end of a show – but rather from a perspective of the entire evolution taking place in culture by means of different artistic interventions which with time form a new and consistent cultural landscape. This may also result in a wholesale evolution in the mindset of the participants of culture. The importance of such a perspective lies in the hypothesis that what we are currently experiencing as the community of Occidental culture finds itself in a liminal phase.

³ See V.W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure Process*, Transaction Publishers, New Jersey 1969/2008.

BLURRING THE FACE-BODY RELATION AS AN EXAMPLE OF GETTING RID OF DICHOTOMIES

The possibility of such a change and its consequences can be seen on the example of face-body relations and the consequences of the changes therein for aesthetics and culture as a whole. The Chinese artist Zhang Huan's description of one of his performances can serve as an introductory illustration to a theoretical analysis:

Modern culture is slowly smothering us and turning our faces black. It is impossible to take away your inborn blood and personality. From a shadow in the morning, then suddenly into the dark night, the first cry of life to a white-haired man, standing lonely in front of a window, a last peek of the world and a remembrance of an illusory life.⁴

In another of his essays, Zhang Huan notes:

In my serial self-portrait I found a world which Rembrandt forgot. I am trying to extend his moment. I invited 3 calligraphers to write texts on my face from early morning until night. I told them what they should write and to always keep a serious attitude when writing the texts even when my face turns to dark. My face followed the daylight till it slowly darkened. I cannot tell who I am. My identity has disappeared.⁵

What Zhang Huan describes in poetic terms is a process of desemantization, which constitutes an essential part of performance and its role in contemporary culture. Erika Fischer-Lichte describes desemantization as an indispensable part of the performative turn in art. To read Zhang Huan's performance it is probably best to start with the Far Eastern tradition of treating the face as "a thing to write on," as Roland Barthes put it in *The Empire of Signs*. In Japanese culture there is a movement of abstracting face from its visuality. In Japanese theatre, face is not a painting to be covered with paint but rather a sheet of white paper to write on. Barthes draws attention to an interesting detail showing a similar aspect to Austin's discovery – the fact that there are no intransgressible gaps between words, images and actions. Barthes notices in *The Empire of Signs* that both writing and painting in Japan are performed by the use of a brush; the distance between writing and painting becomes blurred.

The signs that cover the face are connected to the nets of cultural discourse which veil the face with cultural conventions and metaphors. In his account of his performance, Zhang Huan reveals a strong distrust towards words and modern culture, and also towards symbolic and metaphorical nets in culture.

⁴ <http://www.zhanghuan.com/>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

He expresses the belief that they erase the true identity present in the blood, in what is inborn, that is in the body and in its impulses.

This illustration shows a ready conflict in culture: a conflict between the face engrained by cultural discourse – a human *differentia specifica* – and the body understood in its animalistic vitality and primordality. One stands for culture, the other for nature; one for the soul, the other for the senses. It is one of the versions of the ever-present conflict. What we are experiencing today, however, is a new turn. It is a conflict for domination between the two symbols of human identity: face and body. It is the body that dominates the artistic landscape of today. Nevertheless, this tension and implicit rivalry is still present in culture. The face-body relation constitutes a vivid reflection of the changes taking place on a broader scale. It “embodies” the contemporary blurring of cultural dichotomies and dualisms.

In the way of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans Belting fights dualism that has so far dominated European culture due to its Greek (Platonic) and Christian tradition. The differentiation between soul and body is reflected in the dualism of face and body. In the aesthetic realm, there is a dualism of form and matter into which an idea can be introduced. Hence, Belting talks of the medium in the same way that Merleau-Ponty talks of the intelligible body.

The blurring of dichotomies takes place not only in performative theatre, but also in painting. Gilles Deleuze shows how the division between body, face and head became blurred in Francis Bacon’s paintings: “The body is the Figure, not the structure. Conversely, the Figure, being a body, is not the face, and does not even have a face. It does have a head, because the head is an integral part of the body. It can even be reduced to the head. As a portraitist, Bacon is a painter of heads, not faces, and there is a great difference between the two.”⁶ This “great difference between the two” – the face and the head – is that the head is an integral part of the body, whereas the face conceals the head. The face is like a secret part of a being human, the greatest taboo. These are the meanings resulting from the symbolic net of words and images which for centuries have been covering our bodies.

Is the face reentering the body? What Zhang Huan would call “a Rembrandt moment” means differentiating between face and body: body standing for what is physiological, organic, animal-like, natural, and face for the spiritual, human, cultural. Face and head are not the same. Performance art often does not draw any attention to the face. The face in performance art becomes a head, reintegrates into the body. Gilles Deleuze shows a similar convention in painting, analyzing Francis Bacon’s oeuvre: “For the face is a structured, spatial organization that conceals the head, whereas the head is dependent on

⁶ G. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, transl. Daniel W. Smith, University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p. 19.

the body, even if it is the point of the body, its culmination. It is not the head that lacks spirit; but it is a spirit in bodily form, a corporeal and vital breath, an animal spirit. It is the animal spirit of man: a pig-spirit, a buffalo-spirit, a dog-spirit, a bat-spirit... Bacon thus pursues a very peculiar project as a portrait painter : to dismantle the face, to rediscover the head or make it emerge from beneath the face.”⁷ Through Deleuze’s words we may discover what Zhang Huan means by “a Rembrandt moment”. It is a moment of the face, of portraiture focused on facial expression. The present turn seems to be well-described by Deleuze and to drift towards annihilating the face and rediscovering the animal power of the body.

What is obtained as a result of many art performances is the neutralization of the meanings of face and body – desymbolization. The controversy aroused by performances may also stem from the fact that part of performance is to desemantize, neutralize meaning, and profane. Giorgio Agamben states in *Profanations* that profanation neutralizes its object; what used to be divided and unattainable loses its aura and re-enters into usage.⁸ Walter Benjamin expresses a similar intuition about the aura being connected to its unattainability. He says: “What, then, is the aura? A strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance however near it may be.”⁹

These words hold true for both body and face. In many performances, the body treated as an object becomes desacralized, deprived of taboos; it reenters the cultural sphere as if anew and the net of symbols or metaphors surrounding it often becomes deconstructed. To use the body is to act; it is action that can neutralize previous meanings. To use also means to profane, to make space for a new meaning to be born.

Desemantization could therefore be seen as an element of liminality – an in-between stage of the loss of meaning. Desemantization can entail depriving the face of its privileged character, re-connecting it to the body. Profanation concerns what is sacred, what belongs to God or the gods. The sacred should be divided from the rest; *sacer* means both excluded and devoted to the gods.¹⁰

Giorgio Agamben writes that pieces of meat which are touched by the participants of a ritual become profane. Thereby, what was sacred returns to use; it is no longer petrified and separated from the rest.¹¹ In many performances body and face are subjected to a sort of montage; they are no longer

⁷ G. Deleuze, *ibidem*.

⁸ See: G. Agamben, *Profanations*, transl. Jeff Fort, Zone Books, New York, 2007.

⁹ W. Benjamin *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media* ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty and Thomas Y. Levin, transl. Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone *et al.*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 23

¹⁰ See: G. Agamben, *op.cit.*

¹¹ See: G. Agamben, *op.cit.*

divided by the blackness of the background or clothes (as in Velasquez's paintings) or by sacred meanings. This process could be compared to a sort of 'collective transcendental reduction', a process of depriving ourselves of symbolic meanings grown into bodies. This would be the power of art performances – liminality where all symbols and metaphors freeze for a moment and make room for new meanings.

Agamben sees desacralization, profanation as a way of reconstituting a new, strong significance of things, actions, and gestures in culture. Erika Fischer-Lichte seems to claim the same about what she calls "desemantization," which in fact entails desacralization and profanation in art performances, aimed at depriving the community of the layers of previous meanings covering their bodies, of the layers of what they see.

Certain doubts about the Occident's readiness to embrace rituals as its own cultural reality were expressed at the beginning of this paper. Anthropologist Michael Taussig also seems to perceive modern society as dispassionate, passive, and disenchanting. He declares: "Around me there is no sacrifice, nor much passion about sacred things. The disenchantment of the world still seems to me a largely accomplished fact. What exists now is perhaps best thought of as a new amalgam of enchantment and disenchantment, the sacred existing in muted but powerful forms, especially – and this is my central preoccupation – in its „negative“ form as desecration."¹²

The above quotation may bring to mind the role of face in contemporary art as a desecrated, muted but powerful version of the sacred, existing mainly in its negative form as a blurred, distorted image, sometimes vanishing into the body or not present at all. It is no coincidence that the quotation comes from a book entitled *Defacement*. The verb "to deface" mainly concerns images, where the act of defacing means removing part of an object, marking or destroying it. It is especially used to refer to objects designed to attract viewer's attention, like book covers, monuments, paintings in galleries, etc. "To deface" means to deprive of a sacred, formal, important meaning. If we take the word literally, it would mean depriving something or somebody of the face. Here again we may notice the sacred aspect ascribed to face, not only in images, such as icons and portraits, but also in language.

Similarly to Agamben and Fischer-Lichte, Taussig notices an important moment in desacralization – a sacred moment. He even goes so far as to say that in the present day desacralization is the closest we can get to the sacred: "When the human body, a nation's flag, money, or a public statue is *defaced*, a strange surplus of negative energy is likely to be aroused from within the defaced thing itself. It is now in the state of *desecration*, the closest many of us

¹² M. Taussig, *Defacement. Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative*, Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 13.

are going to get to the sacred in this modern world.”¹³ Nevertheless, contrary to Fischer-Lichte, he seems to see desacralization and desemantization not as a neutralization of meaning, but quite the opposite – as a power fortifying meaning, albeit in its negative form.

Is this process of desemantization, desacralization what happens in contemporary art or is it a constant process of renewal of meanings?

WAITING FOR THE PASSAGE

There is a constant struggle to sacralize the face, on the one hand, and, on the other, to show its animalistic provenance. Courtine and Haroche, the authors of “History of the face”, claim that a special moment for the relation between face and soul – where face stands for soul – comes with the lectures of the painter Charles Le Brun, entitled *Conferences sur l’expression des passions*, given in 1668 at L’Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture. In his lectures, face – instead of being the mirror or language of the soul – is shown as a physical expression of passions.

Comparing human and animal looks and spirits was quite obviously not the invention of Francis Bacon or Gilles Deleuze. It is inscribed in the tradition of physiognomy – a belief that it is possible to read personality traits or social status from one’s facial features. Analogically, defacement is not an invention of contemporary painting, nor of performance art. Defacement was a form of violence as far back as the late Middle Ages. The historian Valentin Groebner states: “Certain motifs of *Ungestalt* as absolute terror in texts and images of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries seemed oddly familiar to me.”¹⁴ According to Groebner, cutting off a person’s nose in the late Middle Ages was used as a form of punishment, thus rendering a person ugly and *Ungestalt* – formless – since the face was believed to be the noblest part of the body.

Does this mean that, contrary to linguistic intuitions inscribed in *performance art*, it does not impact cultural reality? By being autoreferential towards the body – by indicating it – performative art re-invents the body. The goal is to show that which is already unveiled and present, but at the same time absolutely masked by the nets of symbols and metaphors. Thus, the aim is highly philosophical or, more precisely, phenomenological in nature. Performance art may then be seen as a confrontation, a clash with the taboo meant to produce an emergence of meanings in the numbed universe of culture.

¹³ M. Taussig, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

¹⁴ V. Groebner, *Defaced. The Visual Culture of Violence in the Late Middle Ages*, transl. P. Selwyn, Zone Books, New York, 2008, p. 14.

**PO-TWARZ CZYLI PERFORMATYWNOŚĆ A NOWE ZNACZENIA
(streszczenie)**

Sztuka performansu postrzegana jest jako kontrowersyjna nowość pomimo jej związków z prastarymi rytuałami. Artykuł koncentruje się na artystycznym rozumieniu performansu pytając o jego potencjał zmieniający rzeczywistość. Sugeruję analizę wpływu sztuki performansu na kulturę, odnosząc się do Eriki Fischer-Lichte i używając terminów zaczerpniętych z teorii rytuałów przejścia – „liminalność”, „przejście”. Jedną z cech performansu jest zacieranie dychotomii nie tylko poprzez minimalizowanie różnic płciowych, ale również innych istniejących w kulturze dualizmów. Analiza zacierania dychotomii we współczesnej sztuce poczyniona została na przykładzie relacji twarz–ciało. Podział pomiędzy twarzą a ciałem, gdzie twarz oznacza to, co duchowe, kulturowe, ludzkie, a ciało to, co zwierzęce i naturalne zostaje poddane w wątpliwość w większości artystycznych performansów. Pragnę pokazać, że usuwanie twarzy poprzez jej reintegrowanie w ciało w artystycznych interwencjach stanowi część procesu desemantyzacji, a także może stanowić sposób uzyskiwania nowych znaczeń osiągniętych na drodze desakralizacji i profanacji. *Po-twarz* traktować można jako filozoficzne narzędzie sztuki.

Słowa kluczowe: potwarz, rytuał, performans, desemantyzacja, profanacja, twarz, ciało.

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LIFE, LIVELINESS, LIVENESS VERSUS PERFORMATIVITY IN ACTION ART

Abstract: In my article I try to highlight the relations between life and art. I suggest looking at this problem through the perspective of history and the notion of performance (as radical and declarative connection of art and life), and refer it to performative efficiency, which is believed to be the constitutive trait of cultural performance. My intention is also to elucidate two dubious questions of the relations between art and life: 1. To what extent the presence of a living subject guarantees the performative character of an action; 2. How much is the significance of the subject's presence being reduced in order to efficiently perform through art. It seems that the art of performance offers us an enlightening lesson in art-life rhetoric, which has – possibly – replaced the slightly devalued notion of aestheticization. The point is that the history of performance not only clarifies how art can come into relations with *life*, but it also elucidates the metaphorical ways of their description as *liveliness* or vitality. It also explains the conditions of *liveness*, when something exists and is being perceived as “live”.

Keywords: performance art, performativity, performance studies, liveness.

Up to a certain moment I believed that Walter Pater in his “Conclusion”, finally turned life and art into a happy relationship, even if it is a relationship impossible to depict as it consists of perpetual small, but complex and intensive experiences¹. It was an attractive conclusion for the numerous generations of aestheticians who were offhandedly transforming this promising utopia into doctrines. Later, Georg Simmel, while depicting the notion of autonomy, pointed out that life and art are neither synonymous, nor are they two sides of the same coin. Instead, they appropriate each other, alternately, one at the expense of the other. At the same time, Simmel maintained that this

¹ W. Pater, “Conclusion”, in: W. Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, Oxford University Press, 1990, available online at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2398/2398-h/2398-h.htm#conclusion> .

was the cost of the existence of culture². The case of the relations between art and life seemed to be solved, although the solution was not sufficiently positive. Still, the rapidly developing performance studies of the 1970s and 1980s started questioning the category of presence and, linked to it, the efficiency of the body's interactions³. Thus, the infallible means of mediation between life and art was discredited.

It is intriguing that today, in the age of a developed and self-critical reflection, such a renaissance of the equation of art = life can be observed under the banner of performance studies. This notion comes in handy while depicting all kinds of activities: spiritual, physical, artistic, efficiency, business projects, social campaigns, medical practices, stylists' opinions, and others. It is being adopted as if the connection was undisputedly natural, unproblematic, and efficient. In my opinion, it has never been such.

I suggest looking at the art-life relations through the perspective of history and the notion of performance as a radical and declarative connection of art and life, and refer it to performative efficiency, which is believed to be the constitutive trait of cultural performance⁴. My intention is also to elucidate the two dubious questions of the relations between art and life: 1. To what extent the presence of a living subject guarantees the performative character of an action; 2. How much, at times, is the significance of the subject's presence being reduced in order to efficiently perform through art. It seems that the art of performance offers us an enlightening lesson in art-life rhetoric, which has – possibly – replaced a slightly devalued notion of aestheticization. The point is that the history of performance not only clarifies how art can come into relations with *life*, but it also elucidates the metaphorical ways of their description as *liveliness* or vitality. It also explains the conditions of *liveness*, when something exists and is being perceived as “live”.

PERFORMANCE – THE MAIN VARIETIES OF THE NOTION IN THE FIELD OF ART

The term *performance* originates from an English verb *perform*, of complex Anglo-French etymology, which originally meant “to fulfill, to do in a formal manner or according to prescribed ritual” or “to achieve, to accomplish, to

² G. Simmel, “L'art pour l'art”, *Sztuka i Filozofia* 1994, vol. 9, p.146. Cf. G. Simmel, “The Concept and Tragedy of Culture”, in: *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, eds. M. Featherstone, D. Patrick, 2000. London: SAGE; pp. 57-74.

³ J. McKenzie 2001, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*, London: Routledge, London, pp. 39, 40.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 29-54.

complete”⁵. It was not until the 17th century that it began to mean “to give a performance, to play, to carry off, to execute, to perform a piece of music”⁶. Colloquially, the notion of performance exposes the second meaning, simplifying its sense – commonly, performances are various kinds of public events. However, the original meaning brings out the causative and creative aspects of performance. In brief, it legitimizes John Austin’s decision to create the term *performative*, a neologism, and his assumption that performative expressions establish reality, influence the course of life, and their success depends on life’s circumstances⁷.

The narrowest meaning of *performance* is – briefly in this case – “a type of art”, named more precisely *performance art*, developing since 1967, that in its classic version relies on individual actions of an artist in the presence of an audience and in a certain time and place. It is the type of art that by definition escapes the generalizing rules of artistic goals, means, and techniques, that is unfettered, without principles, evolving in different directions⁸.

In the second meaning, *performing arts* are “carrying out” arts, performed on stage or as shows involving direct participation of an artist, such as theater, dance, pop music, opera, music-hall, musical, circus, and cabaret. Though it is common, in this case, to use the term *performative arts* meaning “performance-type arts”, it is not the correct use of the term *performative*⁹. The presence of an artist is frequently the only link between *performance art* and *performing arts*, the basic differences being that the latter are repetitive, reproduced, independent of place and time, and not requiring direct participation of the recipient. Certainly, *performance art* may include some elements of the particular *performing arts*, and artistic events, in some respects, could be interpreted as artistic performances. Specific cases are events that emphasize the role of a rite or the significance of a solo show, such as post dramatic theater, *one-person show*, and *solo performance*¹⁰.

⁵ T. Kubikowski, „Poślowie tłumacza”, in: R. Schechner, *Performatyka. Wstęp*, transl. by T. Kubikowski, Ośrodek Badań Twórczości Jerzego Grotowskiego i Poszukiwań Teatralno-Kulturowych, Wrocław 2006, p. 391.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ J.L. Austin, “Lecture X”, in: J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1975, pp. 121-132.

⁸ See: G. Dziamski, „Performance, czyli otwarcie na codzienność życia”, in: G. Dziamski, *Awangarda po awangardzie. Od neoawangardy do postmodernizmu*, Wydawnictwo Fundacji Humaniora, Poznań 1995, p.106; M. Carlson, *Performance: Critical introduction*, Routledge, New York 2004, p. 110; P. Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Routledge, New York 1997, p.146.

⁹ R. Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, Routledge New York 2005, p.110.

¹⁰ See generally: Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, transl. by K. Jürs-Munby, Routledge, New York 2006; J. Bonney, *Extreme Exposure: An Anthology of Solo Performance Texts from the Twentieth Century*, Theatre Communications Group, New York 2000.

The above distinction practically abolishes the third meaning of *performance*, that is the subject matter of *performance studies*. Firstly, *performance studies* broaden the scope of performance to include non-artistic disciplines, such as everyday and social life, cuisine, sports, entertainment, business, technology, sex, secular and religious rites, and pastime.

Secondly, performance studies perceive the repetitiveness of human practices, “restored behaviors”¹¹, and their social contexts as the essence of functioning in the world. Yet, performance studies presuppose, at the same time, that everything could be examined as performance, and that it is this area of knowledge that most effectively meets contemporary world – its dynamics, multi-leveled information codes, manipulations, socio-technical systems, etc.¹²

Finally, the researchers of performance are unanimous in emphasizing that putting boundaries between particular artistic genres, between art and cultural performance¹³, and between cultural performance and everyday life, is only possible on an institutional level. In practice, they all merge at different points. The essence of experiencing art consists not so much in eradicating such boundaries, which proved to be utopian on numerous occasions, but more in the possibility of crossing those boundaries or turning them into thresholds¹⁴. The performative character of experiencing art lies in art’s ability to “act” and, by means of performances, to “establish reality”, producing specific attributes of a particular materiality: corporeality, spaciousness, soundness, and temporality (just like the performative function of language establishes marriage links¹⁵, and certain gestures and behaviors create cultural gender¹⁶). This enables the recipient to move, at least for a while, to a different world or to

¹¹ This term introduced by Richard Schechner denotes activities that are repeated, reliable, prepared in advance. Those activities are restored, acted out usually without awareness of their theatricality. They develop habits, rituals, and constitute habitual behaviors of everyday life. R. Schechner, *Performance Studies*, *ibidem*, pp. 22, 28.

¹² R. Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, *ibid.*, pp. 24-25; J. McKenzie, *Perform or Else*, *ibidem*, pp. 29-54; P. Phelan, ‘Introduction: The Ends of Performance’, in: *The Ends of Performance*, eds. P. Phelan, J. Lane, New York University Press, New York 1998, pp. 3-5; D. Conquergood, ‘Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics’, *Communication Monographs* 1991, vol. 58, pp. 180-191.

¹³ The notion of ‘cultural performance’ was introduced by Milton Singer in 1959 and referred to events understood as certain cultural structures, restored and passed onto others, with limited time, program, performers’ group, audience, place, and a particular occasion. Famous modifications of the cultural performance theory were proposed by Kenneth Burke, Victor Turner, and Richard Schechner. M. Carlson, *Performance*, *ibidem*, pp.13-18.

¹⁴ E. Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics*, transl. by S. I. Jain, Routledge, London & New York 2008, pp. 195-196.

¹⁵ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, *ibidem*, pp. 117-119.

¹⁶ J. Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution. An Essay in Phenomenology in Feminists Theory’, in: *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. H. Bial, Routledge, London 2004, p. 25-35.

experience a different state of mind. Still, that liminal experience¹⁷ does not belong exclusively to the domain of art, but is very distinct in many cultural performances¹⁸, especially in sports, politics, games, and festive customs¹⁹.

ANTECEDENCIES AND THE ORIGINS OF PERFORMANCE ART

On the one hand, much effort was put to analyze performance from a historical point of view. On the other hand, all that effort is being destroyed by the authoritarian opinions of the performers themselves, who believe the performance is something absolutely independent and original²⁰. Yet, paradoxically, both the historians and creators of performance refer to the same criterions while defining performance. Regardless of whether performance is depicted as a link in art development or as cultural revolt, generally against the notion of art, it is characterized as the manifestation of an authentic life, liveliness of the art world, and liveness.

For two main reasons cabaret shows, paratheatrical and polimedia events, poetry readings, complex art exhibitions, and other events performed by avant-garde artists in the first half of the 20th century, mainly by the Futurists, Dadaists, and Surrealists, are regarded as events preceding performance, although rather remotely. It is notable that they are variations of the artists' conscious, physical presence, which in a way "belongs" to the artworks and is their constitutive element, but is different from an actor's presence in theatre²¹. The actions of the avant-garde artists evolved towards reducing the artistic means, exposing the materiality and sensuality of the action, while decreasing the purposefulness of the used objects, and the legibility of the conveyed

¹⁷ The notion of liminality was popularized by Victor Turner, who referred to ethnographic analyses by Arnold van Gennep. Turner developed Gennep's ideas and introduced an additional term of 'liminoid'. Erika Fischer-Lichte borrowed the term 'liminal' and used it to describe aesthetic experience, emphasizing its performative aspects: the possibility of transgressing the threshold between life and art (both by the artists and recipients, although with different consequences for both groups) and the changes in material sphere. E. Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, *ibidem*, pp. 179-180.

¹⁸ The notion of 'cultural performance', in its classic form, refers to events as certain cultural structures, acted out and passed on to other people, with limited time, a program, performers' group, audience, location, and particular occasion. M. Carlson, *Performance: Critical introduction*, *ibidem*, p. 13.

¹⁹ See generally: V. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, PAJ Publications, New York 1982.

²⁰ See e.g. Z. Warpechowski, *Podręcznik*, Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej, Warszawa 1990, p. 141.

²¹ G. Dziamski, 'Performance, czyli otwarcie na codzienność życia', *ibidem*, p. 103. Cf. M. Carlson, *Performance: Critical introduction*, *ibidem*, pp. 110-111.

meanings.²² They were produced “live” and, indeed, they livened up the so-called “art life”. In this case, the experimental avant-garde trends in dance and theatre, such as emphasizing the body’s expressive features, were significantly influential.²³

The origins of performance are directly derived from fine arts, specifically from the narration on Jackson Pollock’s works developed by Harold Rosenberg, who, in 1952, coined the term *action painting* and redefined the role of an artist. He indicated that art, which is an act, could not be reduced to an object. Moreover, both Pollock’s existence as well as his work are the same substance, which reduces the difference between art and life. The American critic suggests that a spectator has to find the value of the painting beyond art, and needs to think through the vocabulary of action.²⁴ Simultaneously, the Japanese group Gutai²⁵ started its activities combining painting events with action. However, the elements of corporality, theatricality, spaciousness, energetics, and pageantry of 20th century painting constitute a much broader group of inspiration for *performance art*. Among the most famous ones are: Yves Klein’s *Antropometrie*; Robert Rauschenberg’s painting that was not seen by the public but, instead, was ‘heard’ by them as the process of painting was broadcast via a sound system; TV broadcasts of Georges Mathieu’s painting shows; Lucio Fontana’s cut and torn canvases; ‘target’ paintings by Niki de Saint Phalle.

In Poland, it was not until 1980 that Franciszek Starowieyski referred to the tradition of painting activities by creating his unique *Theatre of Drawing*. Still, it is worth mentioning that the performance origins of painting favor especially the category of ‘live’, which indeed ‘enlivens’ the painting and makes it more attractive and spectacular. Here, specifically, life becomes theatrically artificial. Pollock willingly posing for pictures and movies during his work, Klein’s posing models, Mathieu (as a matter of fact) fooling around, or Starowieyski calling his action simply ‘theater’ – they all feel like actors using abundantly what film and theater media have to offer. What is peculiar is the speed of their work, their expressiveness and action, which they derive from their technical skills and from their confident movements. Their routine enables them to enter their role effortlessly – ‘a role’ indeed. The earlier mentioned meta-artistic or anti-artistic gestures by Rauschenberg, de Saint Phalle, and Fontana have to be evaluated differently as what they test is not

²² E. Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, *ibidem*, p. 195.

²³ M. Carlson, *Performance: Critical introduction*, *ibidem*, pp. 110-111.

²⁴ H. Rosenberg, ‘The American Action Painters’, in: *The Artist’s Body*, ed. T. Warr, Phaidon Press Inc., New York 2002, p. 193.

²⁵ The Gutai group was an artistic movement and association of artists founded in Japan (according to different sources) in 1952 or 1954.

life but the notion of painting, even though they work – it would seem – in a common, popular, and non-artistic way.

Performance can also be directly derived from ‘The Fluxus Movement’ and happening, particularly from the circles animated by John Cage to which Allan Kaprow – the creator of the first happenings from 1958 – also belonged. Kaprow questioned the action character of Pollock’s work and was writing about Pollock’s merely “metaphorical presence in his work”.²⁶ Kaprow wanted the presence of an artist to be more real and permanent, not just theatrical and occasional, to be closer to current life in order to establish a certain continuum of actions and events. Happening artists were also irritated by the artistic object, an academic fetish, sanctioning the institutionalized division of arts. Tadeusz Kantor, the first Polish author of a happening,²⁷ postulated a similar point of view claiming that art would be exclusively a process.²⁸ But a happening – unlike a performance that focuses on the subject – is just art with a particular importance of an object. Even if it is a common object, it is still a demonstrative one, frequently used in motion, gathered in large quantities, such as in Kaprow’s *Yard* (1961). The links between performance and happening, although often emphasized, are very elusive, especially when the tangent point of both is their theatricality. The evolving performance of the 1990s even approached the conventions of theater monodrama.²⁹ Still, happening, generally, was exposing and debunking the theatricality of everyday life rather than taking inspiration from theater.³⁰ Undoubtedly, just like performance, happening was created with ready-made elements of reality, its objects, subjects, and situations. And indeed, the art of happening emphasizes the complexity of the notion of ‘theater’, not its juxtaposition to life, and shows that theater is a form of social life where the subject adopts a different – in fact, one of the many – common life roles, like the role of a spectator, and it has to separate everyday life from theater ‘images’. A theater play retains its identity in this separation and life always retains context here.³¹ In Poland, the origins of performance are also traced in theater events; however, they are defined as performance *ex post*, which complicates their classification. We can

²⁶ G. Dziamski, ‘Performance – tradycje, źródła obce i rodzime przejawy. Rozpoznanie zjawiska’, in: *Performance. Wybór tekstów*, eds. G. Dziamski, H. Gajewski, J.S. Wojciechowski, Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1984, p. 21.

²⁷ The first happenings in Poland were *Cricotage* and *Linia podziału* in 1962.

²⁸ G. Dziamski, ‘Performance – tradycje, źródła obce i rodzime przejawy. Rozpoznanie zjawiska’, *ibidem*, p. 22.

²⁹ M. Giżycki, ‘Performance art dziś: perspektywa amerykańska’, in: M. Giżycki, *Koniec i co dalej? Szkice o postmodernizmie, sztuce współczesnej i końcu wieku*, słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2001, p. 118.

³⁰ G. Dziamski, ‘Performance, czyli otwarcie na codzienność życia’, *ibidem*, pp. 103-104.

³¹ See generally: G. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, transl. by D. Nicholson-Smith, Zone Books, New York 1995.

mention here *Sensibilistic Theater* (1957), *Catastrophic Theater* of Michał Kosma Jędrzejewski (1958), and ‘*The Coffin*’ theater group (1966-62).³²

Performance also derives from simultaneously developing conceptualism, although it is often sharply juxtaposed with it.³³ Conceptual art provides a meta-artistic impulse whose vital part is the reflection upon the appropriate art medium. It can be easily observed in Polish art on the examples of Zbigniew Werpechowski’s *Improvisations*, *Poetic Quarter Hour with Piano and Record Player* (combining poetry, music, and paratheatrical activities), and *Prophecy I* (1968) by Jerzy Bereś (combining sculpture and manifestation). Those intermedial events, at the time not yet called ‘performance’, are the earliest cases that are the closest to world performance art. However, the prototypical example of a Polish performance should probably be *Furnace offering* (1966) by Włodzimierz Borowski, because of his use of a performative aspect of both language and event. The artist started the chain of his actions with business-like meetings with the board of directors of Nitrogen Plants in Puławy, having the engineers watch over the production of nitric fertilizers. For the workers they were just cases of a particular course of life, certain life experiences. For the artist, however, they were the imitation of life.

Borowski then expanded the script of his performance towards a show or a spectacle. He took care of lighting, sound system, musical setting, stylization (the artist was wearing a tuxedo), and auditorium planning. The workers could have been expected to lose touch with reality, or to feel the reality to be suspended. The artist stood on the scaffolding of one of the furnaces and offered it to its owner – the plant – ‘as a work of art’. The solemn form of homage paid to the industrial scenery and its product – urea – supported by a chant evolving into the national anthem, successfully questioned the habits connected to what is generally associated with art and life: it mixed its attributes and shifted its functions. Let alone the socio-critical and ironic meaning of this event, it should be highlighted that it primarily revealed how life became artificial in the forms of social functioning, and how the artistically and aesthetically appealing features (the aesthetic of industrial forms) were lost in life. The above event hardly made its way to the canon of Polish performance;³⁴ rather, it highlighted the specific character of Borowski’s actions and his own terminology – “syncretic shows”.³⁵

³² G. Dziamski, ‘Performance, czyli otwarcie na codzienność życia’, *ibidem*, pp. 103-104.

³³ J. Donguy, ‘Body art’, in: *Art Action 1958-1998*, ed. R. Martel, Intervention Editions, Quebec 1998, p. 126; W. Kaźmierczak, *Historia – performance*, available online at: <http://historia-performance.wizytowka.pl/>.

³⁴ Władysław Kaźmierczak attempts to reconstruct the history of Polish performance – a performer himself, the creator of thirteen editions of the International Performance Art Festival ‘Castle of Imagination’. He characterizes main centers of performance, singles out its four historical periods, mentions artistic events connected to performance, and lists two hundred names of performance artists and artistic groups that have worked in Poland (W. Kaźmierczak,

Certainly, “performance”, a common term in English, anticipates the notion of life differently. Additionally, performative studies, developing since the 50s, constantly revise the notion of performance itself, debunking too obvious conclusions about its specific features, such as its independence from theater. The theatrical form that Borowski adopted was mostly characterized by performative efficiency: to arouse lack of confidence to prelocutionary act of speech, official schemata of organization, etc. It did not fulfill numerous conditions defined by the classics of performance: it was not the ‘artist’s ego’ type of art, or the art of his psycho-physical condition. It did not limit the number or the roles of objects, either.³⁶ In Poland, the notion of performance was not popularized until 1978, in connection to the following festivals: *International Artists Meeting – I am* in ‘Remont’ gallery in Warsaw and *Performance and Body* in ‘Labyrinth’ gallery in Lublin,³⁷ and it is used in a specific, narrow meaning. It is linked to a particular ethos, almost a declaration of being a performer, with a life responsibility for every element of life, including the private one.³⁸

PERFORMANCE AS INTERMEDIUM

Performance artists are heirs to the avant-garde tradition. The culture crisis, which was the prime mover for the avant-garde, in spite of everything generated numerous ‘isms’. The crisis that neo-avant-garde artists experienced turned out to be much deeper: the world alienation and the artists’ redundancy resulted in even more intense confrontations between art and life. Consequently,

Historia – performance, ibidem). Records of Polish performance, called ‘Open Archive’, are kept by The Performance Art Centre, the division of The Centre of Culture in Lublin, available online at: <http://www.openarchive.pl/>. At the same time, a platform for performance studies (within the broader project on modern art, particularly ephemeral art) gathering academics, artists, art critics, and art curators, is being formed by Art & Documentation Association, initiated and run by Łukasz Guzek. His work mainly includes organization of the annual ‘Art & Documentation Festival’ taking place in Łódź, and issuing an academic journal ‘Art & Documentation’, available online at: <http://doc.art.pl/stowarzyszenie/projekty.htm>.

³⁵ I shall refer to it further on in this article.

³⁶ V. De Rosa Conti, ‘Co to jest performance?’, in: *Performance. Wybór tekstów*, eds. G. Dziamski, H. Gajewski, J.S. Wojciechowski, Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1984, p. 65; Z. Warpechowski, *Podręcznik, ibidem*, pp. 64, 141; Ł. Guzek, ‘Przez performance do sztuki’, *Didaskalia* 2005, vol. 69, available on line at: <http://witryna.czasopism.pl/pl/gazeta/1055/1169/1247/>.

³⁷ G. Dziamski, ‘Performance – tradycje, źródła obce i rodzime przejawy. Rozpoznanie zjawiska’, *ibidem*, p. 47.

³⁸ These are the cases of Warpechowski’s and Beres’s attitudes.

traditional classifications in art, the notion of art in general, and art's place in human life were challenged.

Moreover, a man himself/herself, his/her intellectual competence, the thresholds of his/her sensual sensitivity and physical endurance were put into multiple trials.³⁹ By combining various means of expression and mixing them with common knowledge, performers began experimenting with media. Performance was a typical intermedial structure characterized by the lack of certainty about the boundaries between genres and within the work of art.⁴⁰ New names were suggested – 'performance' for example – yet, they were not very successful as they did not render adequately the artists' intentions. Thus, artists began to introduce – like Borowski – their own terminology, emphasizing the differences in understanding the role of traditional media, the functions of object and subject, and the proportions of art and life within a work of art.

Among the most significant of these are: *events*, *actions*, *manifestations*, *demonstrations*, and *interventions*. Those expressions seem adequate for events that are one-time, indispensable, sufficiently motivated, maximally original, personal, risky, yet responsible. The second group of terms, competing with performance, consists of terms that highlight the corporal medium: *body art*, *body sculpture*, *body work*. The term 'performance' was disregarded as its meaning was too close to the role of theater or film, and too remote from life.⁴¹

But when the term caught on, it was narrowed to such a degree that art history recorded the notion of classic performance, juxtaposed mostly with *body art*, *video-performance*, and *TV-performance*.⁴² In practice, it is difficult to capture the types of particular actions; besides, some artists consciously worked beyond artistic genres, and actually did not pay attention to the genre identity of the art they were producing. In Poland, the most radical example of a strategy which combines different media in actions and theories is *KwieKulik* duet. Their postulate of art integration, promoting inclusion of artistic, cultural, and ideological contexts, is in fact a trans-disciplinary and trans-media project.⁴³ In contrast, in the case of Krzysztof Zarębski's works, the specific

³⁹ S. Morawski, *Na zakręcie. Od sztuki do po-sztuki*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1985, pp. 326-347.

⁴⁰ See generally: D. Higgins, *Modernism since Postmodernism: Essays on Intermedia*, San Diego State University, 1997.

⁴¹ That is why initially Zbigniew Warpechowski, Jerzy Bereś, and Artur Tajber were reluctant to become 'performers'.

⁴² R.W. Kluszczyński, *Sztuka interaktywna. Od dzieła-instrumentu do interaktywnego spektaklu*, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2010, pp. 77-96; M. Janowska, *Wideo, wideo instalacja, wideo performance w Polsce w latach 1973-1994. Historia, artyści, dzieła*, Neriton, Warszawa 2004, pp. 177-198.

⁴³ T. Załuski, 'Integracja sztuk i transmedialność w *Działaniach KwieKulik*', in: *Sztuki w przestrzeni transmedialnej*, ed. T. Załuski, ASP im. Władysława Strzemińskiego w Łodzi, Łódź 2010, pp. 90-100.

osmosis of theater and performance based on the strongest, perverted, and subversive means of expression of both disciplines is emphasized to such an extent that an attempt to decide if it is still theater or already performance becomes meaningless.⁴⁴ What stands out is the emphasis, an expression of a general crisis, and also the way of addressing that crisis, in which the neo-avant-garde culture found itself. It is another paradox: the combined issues of intermedia and neo-avant-garde – strictly theoretical – explain to the fullest how many connections are to be found between performance, life, authentic crises, existential quandaries, political and ideological dilemmas, and common hardships of life in the 60s and 70s.

PERFORMANCE AND ASPECTS OF LIFE

It is often believed that the most constructive, yet the simplest definition of performance is describing it as *'live art'*. It has a double meaning. Mainly, *'live art'* is defined as an artist's personal appearance, directly in front of an audience. But, it also means that the audience becomes, here and now, an integral element of performance as it is being provoked by suggestive means, or even forced to redefine their beliefs connected to life and art, and to enliven the routine, stereotypical, conventional way of thinking and acting.⁴⁵ By realizing those goals performance becomes radical and anarchic: drastic means of expression, violence and cruelty towards living creatures, auto-aggression, self-mutilation, death are included in the creative process or assumed in a form of a manipulated image, project or possibility (Yves Klein, Chris Burden, and Rudolf Schwarzkogler); it is full of pornography or, at least, body images that break traditional social conventions or contexts known from the official course of art history.⁴⁶ This 'liveness' of performance is frequently linked to the trend of body art,⁴⁷ a sub-genre of performance, a phenomenon preceding it and using performance as a tool. The difficulties in defining both

⁴⁴ K. Piotrowski, 'Skopofilia a problem transmedialności w sztuce', in: *Sztuki w przestrzeni transmedialnej*, ed. T. Załuski, ASP im. Władysława Strzemińskiego w Łodzi, Łódź 2010, pp. 116-122.

⁴⁵ G. Dziamski, 'Performance – tradycje, źródła obce i rodzime przejawy. Rozpoznanie zjawiska', *ibidem*, p. 16.

⁴⁶ S. Morawski, 'Nurt główny aktualnych postaw anarchoartystycznych', *Rocznik Historii Sztuki* 1981, vol. XII, pp. 229-251.

⁴⁷ The term *body art* appeared in 1971. The term *art corporel* appeared simultaneously, but it didn't become popular. J. Donguy, 'Body Art', *ibidem*, p. 126.

phenomena lead to the notion of 'Body Art-Performance'; still, contemporary art history makes a definite distinction between the two.⁴⁸

Regardless of the label, the feature of 'art liveness' or 'live art', a constitutive characteristics of performance, as well as art in general, was debatable from the very beginning. What was 'live' for some people was 'dead' or artificial for others. The issue of a subject's presence, testified by a living body, comes to the front of those doubts. Not everyone was convinced by the suggestive metonymic functions of the body, which was supposed to guarantee a smooth transition between art and life.⁴⁹ Michael Fried emphasized that a living subject requires a physical presence of a spectator for his/her liveness to be confirmed, and this is simply theater.⁵⁰ Furthermore, it was not commonly accepted to treat a human subject as an object.⁵¹

Willoughby Sharp ironically suggested that only a corpse would fulfill such a requirement. We are either dealing with a subject or an object, and objectification of a man is something completely different. Besides, by dividing activities of the so-called 'body workers' into *labor* and *theater*, Sharp, again, challenges their place in art.⁵² It is also noted that the presence of a living artist in performance conditions is specifically artificialized, and becomes remote, overwhelmingly alienated, separated, almost dead; an artist resembles a dummy, Golem, homunculus, puppet, marionette.⁵³

Finally, performance shares features of the presence of a living subject and 'live' topics with other activities, especially happening, which was even described as 'the most consistent incarnation of realism',⁵⁴ and most of all with the ideas of The Fluxus, especially with 'social sculpture' by Joseph Beuys.⁵⁵ Generally speaking, the creator during every moment of his/her actions,

⁴⁸ G. Dziamski, 'Performance – tradycje, źródła obce i rodzime przejawy. Rozpoznanie zjawiska', *ibidem*, p. 30.

⁴⁹ K. O'Dell, *Contract With the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970's*, Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1998, p. 6.

⁵⁰ M. Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews Chicago and London*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1998, p.147, available online at <http://dxarts.washington.edu/courses/472/Fried.pdf>.

⁵¹ See e.g. A. Jones, *Body art/performing the subject*, Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1998; C. Nemser, "Subject-object: Body Art", *Arts Magazine* 1971, 46 (September-October).

⁵² W. Sharp, 'Body Works', *Avalanche* 1970, vol. 1, pp. 14-17.

⁵³ T. Hajas, 'Estetyka potępienia', in: *Performance. Wybór tekstów*, eds. G. Dziamski, H. Gajewski, J.S. Wojciechowski, Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1984, p. 145.

⁵⁴ T. Pawłowski, 'Performance', in: T. Pawłowski, *Wartości estetyczne*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1987, p. 9.

⁵⁵ The main element of socio-artistic utopia by Beuys, called 'social sculpture' assumes that we 'create and model the world we live in'. The famous statement 'everyone is an artist' means that everyone, through his or her creativity in many fields of activity, regardless of educational background, profession, is called to shape human reality, just like a sculptor shapes his/her block. Cf. J. Kaczmarek, *Joseph Beuys. Od sztuki do społecznej utopii*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2001, pp. 133-134.

regardless of the medium he/she is using, remains in 'live' relation with many objects and subjects which can be observed or reproduced 'live'. In conclusion, generally, neo-avant-garde is more about living than creating.

Different references to the category of life are presented by other phenomena, adjacent to performance. In many cases, artists were creating by presenting living people, including themselves, not as performers but rather as art objects, similar to artistic or retail items, for example: Piero Manzoni's signed models (1961); Ben Vautier displaying himself in an art gallery window (1962); or the members of the British duet Gilbert & George, disguised by make-up, standing motionless on pedestals and singing popular songs (the so-called *Living Sculpture* or *Singing Sculpture* presented since 1971). A more modern reference to the above strategy in the context of institutionalized conditionings of art was made by Maurizio Cattelan (*A Perfect Day*, 1999), when he stuck his art dealer to the wall. People living *par excellence* on walls and pedestals lead a double life – one, planned by the author, and the other, their own – but not without difficulties, which is best exemplified by the physically drained, deprived of oxygen character of Massimo de Carlo, who was taken to the hospital as a consequence.

In a peculiar competition under the banner of 'how much and what kind of life can be incorporated in a work of art', a significant place is taken by the earliest and characteristic forms of the doubly live art objects created by Teresa Murak. Since 1972, she has been seeding plants on her own body. The process of their growth and ripening was an integral part of the artwork. It is a specific example since apart from numerous types of organisms involved in the work/process (a man, plants, microorganisms) you could observe, with your own eyes, the biological development of one of them – the plant. We are dealing here with life in the process of its creation – *living live* (?). We could say that it is *living art*. However, this term has already been reserved by art history for different phenomena. As a matter of fact, it is referred to as current art, captured beyond all genres, happening right now, aimed at breaking the barrier between art and life. This term emerged in this meaning in the 60s in magazines titles: *Living Art* issued by The Institute of Contemporary Arts in London and *L'art vivant*.⁵⁶ It was an idea close to two separate phenomena: *Situationist International* and *Sociological Art*. Today, it is a domain of the Art of Engagement or Critical Art.

As can be seen, there are numerous signs of life in art; furthermore, artists expose limited usefulness of life in solving terminology dilemmas. Still, it should be highlighted that, generally, the category of *liveness* understood as the possibility of a direct, almost physical contact between the artist and the

⁵⁶ M. Giżycki, *Słownik kierunków, ruchów i kluczowych pojęć sztuki drugiej połowy XX wieku, słowo/obraz terytoria*, Gdańsk 2002, pp. 89-90.

recipient, and its redefined form, also including media 'live' broadcast, constitute the matter of dispute in defining performance.⁵⁷ Peggy Phelan, the author of *Unmarked. The Politics of Performance*, writes:

Only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction, it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology.⁵⁸

Philip Auslander calls that particular 'live' ontology *classic liveness*. Apart from it he distinguishes and characterizes other five types of 'live' broadcasts which stem from media development: radio and TV broadcasts during the real time of the event – *live broadcast*; recordings on film reel, CD, DVD – *live recording*; communication and co-presence of Internet users – *Internet liveness*; communication via mobile devices – *social liveness*; and interactivity – *Website "goes live"*.⁵⁹ In all the above-mentioned cases, somebody interacts with somebody else or with something else and remains in a 'live' relation. Furthermore, Auslander, following observations and diagnoses of culture by Walter Benjamin, Jean Baudrillard, and Jacques Derrida, states that it has to be admitted that the presence of reproduction is so ubiquitous, the appetite for a repetitive 'sneak peek' at what is beloved is so high, the memory so capacious and selective at the same time, and image and language are so problematic that the relation between what is 'live' and what is a product of media does not rely only on common polarization. To begin with, 'live' broadcast became a problem when media emerged, and *liveness* is an issue of media culture. Furthermore, it is obvious that the phenomenon of *classic liveness* is mainly known through media, that classic performance imitates media performances, and that they are prepared with the thought of being reproduced. Auslander's original proposal has a lot of supporters; still, everyone who holds a memory of a certain theater production or live concert for that one exception will support Phelan, even if they cannot describe their experience without using some kind of mediating context, painting, movie, or other concert.

⁵⁷ P. Auslander, *Liveness. Performance In a Mediatized Culture*, Routledge, New York 2010, pp. 10-72.

⁵⁸ P. Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, *ibidem*, p. 146.

⁵⁹ P. Auslander, *Liveness. Performance In a Mediatized Culture*, *ibidem*, p. 61.

PERFORMANCE AND LIVE AESTHETICS. CONCLUSIONS

Although performance is linked to a typically neo-avant-garde ignorance or denial of the role of aesthetics in art, one can still find significant references to aesthetics, *implicit* as well as *explicit*, made by performers. Frequently, aesthetics is the main performatively created value in performance, especially when life is being affirmed and when ideological and symbolic contexts are not significant.

Thus, the commonly mentioned, frequently together, performance attributes are ugliness, cruelty, and catharsis, as referred to by Antonin Artaud's art conception in which he claimed: 'theater is a disease for it is the supreme equilibrium, which cannot be achieved without destruction'.⁶⁰ Apart from that, a performer's actions were supposed to be shocking for the art world; they were even to be – Denis Oppenheim admitted – 'calculated, mean, and strategic tactic aimed against Minimalists' fascination over object's quintessence'.⁶¹ Similarly, in Poland in the 70s and 80s, performances, as anti-market and anti-object, were supposed to be transfixing both for the 'scientific' avant-garde and the establishment of that time.⁶² The shock strategy, through different aspects of art embodiment, was also directed at customs, habits, and many different stereotypes; its goal was set on discovering, disclosing, and exposing 'difficult pleasures'⁶³: repulsion, disgust, and interests in the *object* sphere.

It was also seen that the sole presence of the artist – exploiting, destroying, and masochistic – does not guarantee, as expected, experiencing catharsis or transcending corporeality.⁶⁴ Instead, it evokes specific aesthetic feelings. This dissonance between the artist's and the spectator's experience, as well as the dissonance between their impressions, was called by Tibor Hajas "aesthetics of condemnation"⁶⁵, and Jerzy Bereś connected it with the overwhelming sense of shame which is supposed to revoke mimetic and sensual interests in the body, thus with anaesthetics.⁶⁶

Everything performance fears in aesthetic is used in *body art*, in which the human body (mostly nude) is a tool, material, or an art object.⁶⁷ *Body art* was

⁶⁰ A. Artaud, 'Theatre and the Plague', in: A. Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, transl. M. C. Richards, Grove Press, New York 1958, p. 54.

⁶¹ R. Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, Harry N. Abrams, New York 1988, p. 157.

⁶² W. Kaźmierczak, *Historia – performance, ibidem*.

⁶³ C. Korsmeyer, 'Difficult Pleasures: Sublimity and Disgust', in: C. Korsmeyer, *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction*, Routledge, New York 2004, pp. 130-151.

⁶⁴ R. Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present, ibidem*, pp. 159-160.

⁶⁵ T. Hajas, 'Estetyka potępienia', *ibidem*, pp. 145-6.

⁶⁶ J. Bereś, *Wstyd*, Otwarta Pracownia, Kraków 2002, p. 88.

⁶⁷ J. Benthall, 'The Body as a Medium of Expression: A Manifesto', in: *The Artist's Body*, ed. T. Warr, Phaidon Press Inc., New York 2002, p. 235.

from beginning treated as performative in itself: for spectators as it was a visible sign that something unusual is happening and that it is happening now; for the creator as it was an act of emphatic embodiment through a body consciously deprived of an abstract context in order to highlight *liveness* as a significant value of a meeting with the viewer.⁶⁸ However, there was a need to escalate the means of expression and to stop at nothing. Finally, the body stopped acting so suggestively; sociologists even began predicting the end of pornography and that intimacy, incorporated into 'life politics', will completely instrumentalize the body. The changes within *body art* perfectly record how the notion of 'live' is changing, especially in respect to what is 'human-live'. Artists question what the body is in general, and whether it adequately represents life. In practice, *body art* – paradoxically – revokes even the necessity of the artist's physical presence. The most famous representatives of body art are photographers and multimedia artists: Cindy Sherman imitating human bodies with plastic and exposing them through the medium of photography; Spencer Tunick organizing clusters of people, taking photos of them, and highlighting body's tragedy in its anonymity.

Frequently, in *body art* there is no trace of moral dilemmas connected to body representation and objectification, so typical for many performers. *Body art* trends, developing since the 90s, could be depicted as performance only or as the extended version of that notion – *expanded performance*,⁶⁹ or as *performing arts*, since they gain the features of a spectacle, are often ticketed, and lose the reflective and existential dimension. They are also a challenge for a different viewer, one who is willing to become a witness, a co-producer, one who is interested in experiencing tension, fear, suffering, and torment.⁷⁰ Bringing liveness to a bored spectator is more vital than life. Penetrating the inside of a man, preparing specimen from human corpse (real or artificial), and post-human or trans-human body narration turn artistic performance into a medical, technological, and scientific one. Bio art, the art which could be perceived, in some aspects, as a type of body art, has a slightly different emphasis. Bio art uses nano-biotechnology and modern anthropology research. Knowledge about the smallest organic particles, about the relationship between man and other microorganisms which co-exist in and on his/her body, results in redefining the place of a man on the ladder of living organisms. It

⁶⁸ M. Carlson, *Performance: Critical introduction, ibidem*, p. 171.

⁶⁹ E. Jappe, *Performance, Ritual, Prozeß. Handbuch der Aktionskunst in Europa*, Prestel Verlag GmbH + Co, München-New York 1993, p. 45.

⁷⁰ F.A. Miglietti, *Extreme Bodies. The Use and Abuse of the Body in Art*, Skira, Milano 2003, p. 21.

also leads to a shift in understanding of what is essentially connected to human corporality.⁷¹ However, this is art completely mediated through media.⁷²

From the angle of aesthetic, what is easy to see is the insignificance of the battle about real life in art, and about how much we are dependable on neo-classic versions of *liveness*. Liveness achieved through artistic novelties or liveliness of new art phenomena are as significant as the height of statistic graphs, depicting the level of communication on a certain subject, on the web or via mobile devices. *Liveness* today – means *online liveness* or *social liveness*.⁷³

Translated by
Kamila Berry and Nick Berry

ŻYCIE, ŻYWOŚĆ, KREACJA „NA ŻYWO” A PERFORMATYWNOŚĆ SZTUKI DZIAŁANIA (streszczenie)

Tematem artykułu jest próba wyjaśnienia relacji życia i sztuki. Proponuję spojrzeć na nie przez pryzmat historii i pojęcia sztuki performansu (jako radyklanego i deklaratywnego połączenia sztuki i życia) oraz odnieść je do performatywnej skuteczności, którą uznaje się za konstytutywną cechę kulturowego performansu. Zamierzam jednocześnie przybliżyć dwa problematyczne konteksty relacji sztuki i życia, a zarazem zwrócić uwagę na dwa uzupełniające się problemy: 1) na ile obecność żywego podmiotu gwarantuje performatywny charakter działania; 2) jak bardzo niekiedy redukuje się znaczenie obecności podmiotu, by móc skutecznie działać poprzez sztukę. Wydaje się, że sztuka performansu może dać pouczającą lekcję w kwestii retoryki art-life'u, która – niewykluczone – zastępuje zdewaluowane nieco pojęcie estetyzacji. Rzecz w tym, że historia performansu wyjaśnia nie tylko, w jaki sposób sztuka może wchodzić w relacje z życiem (*life*), a przybliży także sposoby metaforycznego ich określania jako ożywienia czy żywotności (*liveliness*) oraz warunki istnienia i postrzegania czegoś „na żywo” (*liveness*).

Słowa kluczowe: performans, sztuka performansu, performatyka, życie a sztuka.

⁷¹ M. Bakke, *Bio-transfiguracje. Sztuka i estetyka posthumanizmu*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2010, pp. 146-198.

⁷² See e.g. W. Kazimierska-Jerzyk, 'HOMO NOT-SO-LUDENS – GRAĆ W WIRUS CZY GRAĆ WIRUSEM? Performatywne aspekty sztuki najnowszej (wokół *transgatunkowych* projektów Michała Brzezińskiego)', *Dyskurs* 2012, vol. 13/14, pp. 312-325.

⁷³ See: N. Couldry, Liveness, 'Reality', and the Mediated Habit from Television to the Mobile Phone', *The Communication Review* 2004, vol. 7, pp. 353-361.

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SPACES OF GENERATIVITY AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ART OF WOJCIECH BRUSZEWSKI

Abstract: The art of Wojciech Bruszewski is among the most precious achievements in the area of avant-garde media and new media art in Poland. Since the 1960s the artist was active in the domain of photography, experimental film, video art, installation art and sound art. As a member of the Workshop of Film Form, the avant-garde group founded in 1970, Bruszewski co-created the analytical-conceptual current in Polish art. In this paper I analyze the work of Bruszewski, pointing to the generative tendency accompanied by permutational and stochastic elements as the main characteristic of his work. Its co-existence with another current – also significant for Bruszewski's work: interactive art – outlines the basic vector of his art, ranging from human performativity to the performativity of machines.

Keywords: Wojciech Bruszewski, generative art, interactive art, video art, avant-garde cinema, installation art, permutation art, performance.

INTRODUCTION

The art of Wojciech Bruszewski, developed within the broadly understood field of media art and new media, lies among the most precious achievements in this area of artistic practices in Poland. The artist, who died in 2009, was artistically active mostly in the area of photography, experimental film, video and transmedia art created with the use of computer technologies (or without using them, but still in dialogue with their algorithmic logic). With regard to the two latter domains, he was one of their main originators in Poland. He was also one of the forerunners of interactive installation art in Poland, as well as generative art. In this text, due to its modest capacity, I cannot even be tempted to analyse Bruszewski's art in detail. By focusing on film, video, installations and computer art, I will attempt to point out their most characteristic features. Therefore, I am analysing not individual works but a holistically recognized creation and artistic approach (due to the lack of space, I am not referring here

to photographic achievements, which I consider slightly less significant among Bruszewski's works, although a full analysis of his works must obviously include this field of his artistic life). The reflections taken here should make it possible to outline the vision of Wojciech Bruszewski's art and emphasize its position in the context of the latest trends on the art scene.

SEARCHING FOR THE SENSE OF THE CINEMA

If the beginnings of Wojciech Bruszewski's artistic activity belong to the 1960s (by the end of that decade the artist had joined Zero 61 – a Toruń photographic group), his activity in the area of experimental film began in the 1970s as part of his work within the avant-garde group the Workshop of Film Form begun in 1970. The members of the Workshop, aiming at full recognition and the broadening of the expressive possibilities of audio-visual arts, proclaimed the need to research the properties of film as a medium. The medium analysis carried out by them placed the Workshop of Film Form within the current of conceptual art in its broad sense. In the avant-garde cinema, this current was referred to by P. Adams Sitney as structural film¹.

The Workshop of Film Form was established in the period in which particular stress was placed on the conceptual tendencies in art and the development of the structural avant-garde film; in a natural way, it became part of the artistic environment of the artists who rejected the natural aesthetic approach in favour of the cognitive one and – following the positivists' school of philosophy – acknowledged their own communicative possibilities as the only ones worth being interested in.

The members of the Workshop discovered their own way within the conceptual movement in art in its broad sense, reaching into the Constructivist Polish and Russian artistic avant-garde tradition of the 1920s and 1930s. Thus, the ideology and practice of Constructivism became for them a very important source of artistic and theoretical inspirations. This heritage of Constructivism can be seen particularly clearly in the works of Józef Robakowski, Ryszard Waśko and Wojciech Bruszewski.

In the context of the current of conceptual film, and more precisely its variation referred to in Poland as analytical film, Bruszewski considered with particular care the issue of the relations between reality and its audio-visual representation, and between the viewer and reality and its representation (later transferring these analyses into the domain of video art). He emphasized particularly the dualism of the concept of reality, distinguishing between its

¹ P. Adams Sitney, "Structural Film", *Film Culture* 1969, No. 47.

material aspect (what is beyond us) and the mental one (what it means for us). The latter meaning was treated by him as a product of culture – a collection of conventions leading to the further conclusion that our contact with reality is not of a direct character, but is indirect and mediated through our language. Bruszewski also pointed out that mechanical and electronic media (photography, film, video, etc.) work with a degree of independence from the regulations governing our minds, that the image of the world communicated by them is not identical to our own vision, which is clearly subordinate to the existing cultural cognitive conventions.

In this situation, according to the artist, a perceptive mind is inclined to make use only of that part of the experience provided by media which does not breach those conventions. Bruszewski's films, which are an insightful analysis of the relations between reality and its presentations in various forms, led to a confrontation between the human mind and the representations of reality that it would create against the images of the world created by the media technologies.

Bruszewski referred in a similar way to the issue of the connections between sound and image that he frequently brought up in his films. In his audiovisual experiments, e.g. *Teaspoon* (1974) or *Matchbox (audio-visual experiment, 1975)*, he attempted to show that the connection between visual and acoustic perception is rather an impression created by the human mind than a long-lasting, independent fact.

A conceptual film (structural, structural-materialistic, analytical), by taking the viewers' attention off formal shapes and subjective aspect, eventually encouraged them to undertake a reflection on the media nature of the film. It is worth noting, however, that the totally depersonalised character of conceptual cinema is more (if not most of all) of a theoretical programme than a real attribute of films of such kind. One could even risk a hypothesis that the most interesting conceptual films do not follow it at all. This observation allows us to treat films made by individual artists representing structural cinema not solely as cognitive instruments and the sources of knowledge about the film medium, but also as more detailed, individualized representations of original concepts and approaches².

Things are no different in the case of Polish analytical cinema and Wojciech Bruszewski's art within it. By exploiting the areas between reality and its audio-visual representation, the artist expressed, as if *en passant*, a total reflective distrust towards any message, any form of communication, any value given a priori. He questioned any unambiguous assignment in the communicative space of works of art towards their authors' personality and the

² See: R.W. Kluszczyński, *Analysis and Expression. Meta-reflection in (Multi)media Art*, in: *Analytical Tendencies in Modern Art*, ed. Grzegorz Sztabiński, Lodz 1996, p. 57-72.

expressive potential of art as well. He unveiled the common and fundamental relativism that is usually camouflaged and neutralised by providing conventions with autonomic value. Media art was to unveil the conventionalism that governs the perception of reality, according to Bruszewski. This approach and the consequent anti-expressionism that is its inevitable part, eventually led him to generative art and the concept of the self-generating text as a source of endlessly proliferating forms and meanings that do not, in fact, communicate anything (in the traditional sense of the word), because they represent nothing and no-one.

The works realising the programme of generative art appeared in Bruszewski's oeuvre very early, although in many cases the context of the employed medium provided a more symbolic touch to it than the one that was actually realised. This was precisely the case with the cinema, where artworks take on the form of audio-visual artefacts and not processes, due to the character of their medium. Yet films like *Apnoea* (1972) on the one hand, and *YYAA* (1973), *Test – door* (1974) or *Teaspoon* (1975) on the other, due to their construction, seem to be structures generated by film systems rather than forms of representation or expression. Such films question and reject the narrative functions imposed on them, instead suggesting structures that are less or more close to forms of permutation. On the other hand, the object *New words*, created in parallel, clearly appears to be a form of permutation art and generative *sui generis*. The films, however, in their non-obvious form, place themselves in the hybrid space outlined by the tension between the (self)cognitive and the generative-permuted perspective.

VIDEOTRAPS

Wojciech Bruszewski together with a few other artists from the “Workshop of Film Form” initiated the history of video art in Poland. Apart from participating in the first video presentation at a museum in Poland – the collective “Action Workshop” (Museum of Art, Łódź 1973), he was also, in co-operation with Piotr Biernacki, the author of the first work created on magnetic videotape. *Pictures Language* – a realisation made in 1973 – was an attempt to transfer abstract language symbols into actual pictures of objects (e.g. A-sand, B-rock, C-road, etc.). In 1974 Bruszewski realised another of his works – *Space transmission*, concentrating this time on the issue of the articulation of space. This work emerged from his reflections over narration, register and transmission which all led together to constituting “an inscrutable situation”³.

³ T. Samosionek, *Rozmowa z Wojciechem Bruszewskim* [Conversation with Wojciech Bruszewski], *Zeszyty Artystyczne* nr 7, PWSSP, Poznań 1994.

I mentioned earlier, while characterising Bruszewski's films, that issues undertaken there are also present (in a form slightly modified by the parameters of the new medium) in his video activities. They were analysed best by him in a series of tapes under the common title of *Video touch*, created between 1975-1977. Bruszewski analysed there problems of the relations between reality and its audio-visual representation, referring to concepts connected with the conflict between the idea of direct experience and a real experience mediated by conventions governing our cognition and organizing our knowledge into systems of mental, culturally conditioned representation of reality. Paradoxically, the directness of perception is in his vision possible solely owing to media (mechanical and electronic means of communication). Tapes from the *Video touch* series were then, as intended by Bruszewski, forms of traps set for what exists in the outer and inner world, which were in that way discovering the conventionality of our perception and the knowledge grounded in it.

His video installations functioned in a similar way, for instance *Outside* (1976), or *Installation for Mr Muybridge* (1977). All these video works, just as the films discussed earlier, grew out of the conflict and tension between cognitive aspirations and those which were *sui generis* generative.

IMAGE/OBJECT AS SOUND INTERFACE

By the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, Bruszewski created a series of works focused greatly on sound that remained in an autonomous relationship with the image. These include, for example, the installations *Television music* and *Television hen*, both from 1979 – where sensors, which were attached to the screen of the monitor, steered the sound generator reacting to changes in the visual information, became partly independent, such as in the installation *Sternmusik*, 1979 – where a sound camera reacted to the turning of the pages of the “Stern” magazine placed within its proximity, or finally, gained total autonomy, as was the case with some installations/performances that made the series *Some music* (1982). All these works may be described as multimedia phenomena, as a connection of sound *art*, installation and performative arts within a video art environment, or – more broadly speaking – within the environment of electronic media art. These projects, in connection with the theory developed by Bruszewski which concerned artistic communication, later on laid foundations for his generative radio installation *The Infinite Talk* (1988), realized in “Ruine der Künste Berlin”, where synthesized voices of a pair of virtual interlocutors carried on endless discussions on air, the material to which was based on fragments of classical philosophical works randomly chosen by a computer.

All these installations, due to their hybrid, multimedia and conceptual-interactive character, functioned as pioneers of the currents of interactive arts developed in the decades that were to come. Therefore, I wish to take a closer look at them. I would also like to pay attention to the manner in which Bruszewski realized his generative ideas almost since the very beginning of his artistic work.

In such installations as *Sternmusik*, *Television music* and *Television hen*, Bruszewski dealt with the possibilities of generating sounds using images. At the same time, in the space of the issues undertaken there, the issues of perception analysed before return in connection with the relations between the experiencing subject, reality and its media representation as outlined by the film and video works. In parallel, in this space, there also appear references to stochastic processes in art as well as cognitive processes. In this way, in the recalled installation works of Bruszewski, three fields of artistic tendencies cross, developed within the neo-avant-garde formations and possessing crucial meaning for the character of works done by this artist: conceptual, generative and interactive art.

The interactive installation *Sternmusik* fits interestingly into the domain of interactive art. As Bruszewski himself put it, *Sternmusik* is an “[i]nstallation – an acoustic object with the use of a specially prepared camera. The camera transforms the image into stereophonic sound. Aimed at “Der Stern” magazine while the pages are being turned, it synchronously transforms the visual information of the subsequent pages into music.”⁴

In a way *Sternmusik* becomes a kind of an instrument on which the audience may perform audio-visual compositions, thus expanding or completing the work of art in their performances. In the case of Bruszewski’s art the three layers of the interactive work of art⁵, extracted by Annick Bureaud, outline the architecture of connections between the spheres of artistic practices shown above and present in his creations. The layer of perception is mainly connected with generative art, the conceptual layer with conceptual art, and the layer of performance with interactive art. It is also worth noting that *Sternmusik* and the artistic concepts of Bruszewski play a pioneering role as opposed to the experiments of David Rokeby from the 1980s, particularly his interactive installation *Very Nervous System* that Rokeby was working on between 1986-1990. In the systematic of interactive art strategy⁶ that I suggested, both *Sternmusik* and *Very Nervous System* became part of works realising the

⁴ Wojciech Bruszewski: *Phenomena of perception*, catalogue of the exhibition in the City Art Gallery in Łódź, eds. E. Fuchs, J. Zagrodzki, Łódź 2010, p. 150.

⁵ A. Bureaud, *Les Basiques: Art „multimédia“*, www.olats.org/livre-etudes/basiques/basiques.php [2004].

⁶ R.W. Kluszczyński, *Strategies of interactive art*, *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* (Stockholm), vol. 2, 2010, www.aestheticsandculture.net/index.php/jac/article/view/5525.

strategy of an instrument created around the interface, the accentuated aspect of interactive experience⁷.

Two other works of Bruszewski – *Television music* and *Television hen* – find their place in the context of the system strategy that I described⁸. In these works, the audience have no possibility of directly interfering with the event structure of the work, as it is each time outlined by a current TV programme that plays the role of a score for the sound performance both installations give. Thanks to *Television music* and *Television hen*, installations that have this sort of a clearly generative character, Bruszewski became a pioneer of numerous works representing system strategy in the interactive art systematics I suggested, e.g. of the reward-winning *Listening Post* (2001), an installation of Mark Hansen and Ben Rubin.

The audio-visual object *A four-spoke turntable* (1981) is placed, among the discussed works of Bruszewski, somewhere between the above-mentioned positions, not fitting into any of the extremes designated by them. Similarly to *Television music* and *Television hen*, it can function as an object belonging to generative art, only perceived by the audience, representing the artist's unequivocal choices – “Best results: Pablo Casals «Cello quartet»”⁹. Yet it takes a more interesting position when offered to the public “for service”. Its logic encourages such an interactive presentation, and it then becomes a generative-interactive form. A similar status is held by another of Bruszewski's works – *Music of behaviour* (1982) – which used to take on the form of an original performance done in the space of the installation, the performance of which could also be suggested to the audience.

CONCLUSION

The creations of Wojciech Bruszewski – as I argued elsewhere¹⁰ – are examples of a process within which the conceptual perspective in art is transformed into an interactive perspective by entering the space of the culture of participation that is being shaped in parallel. Yet the basic role at that time was played by another tendency in this author's works: the generative strategy, usually acting on the basis of randomness. It is precisely generative art or its related forms (e.g. permutation structures) which is most broadly present in

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Wojciech Bruszewski: Phenomena of perception, op.cit.*, p. 166.

¹⁰ R.W. Kluszczyński, *Konceptualizm i sztuka interaktywna. Analiza polskich przykładów* [Conceptual Art and Interactive Art. Analyses of Polish Examples], *Art and Documentation*, Spring 2012, nr 6, p. 73-78.

Bruszewski's works. It can be found in films, video works, objects, sound installations or computer art. It is also a significant factor of his interactive works of art. Coming to this conclusion forces me to put forward the thesis that it is a complex created through the co-operation of three connected tendencies, the generative, the permutation and the stochastic one, that outlines the character of Wojciech Bruszewski's art.

All of the above mentioned tendencies that shape Bruszewski's art – conceptual, generative, permutation, stochastic, interactive – did not appear in his works in a chronological way; at times they did appear subsequently, sometimes in parallel, becoming entangled in each case in relations with various media contexts. The configuration of the reflection that I imposed here over the works of the author of *Video touch*, determining the order of the text and the analyses undertaken here (from film, through multimedia activities), does not determine in any significant way the direction of the development or transformation of Bruszewski's art, but it only outlines its range, signalises the spectre of applied media, the artistic disciplines that are entangled and the structures that are created. Generative ideas and randomness are to be found both in the beginnings of his creations and in their final phase, in all creative periods. Consequently then, all works of the author of *Sonnets* become a dialogue space, an area of endless conversation developing between the tendencies which constitute it. However, the omnipresence of permutation/generative concepts is what makes these features particularly far-reaching for the character of Bruszewski's art.

In 1972, in the early phase of his artistic activities, apart from the permutational film *Apnoea* (a linear combination of various systems of the same elements), Bruszewski also created a generative, and at the same time permutational, object *New words*, which made it possible to generate 256 different combinations of ingredients/letters, most of which had no status in the Polish language, though they did have the potential of words.

By entering the synchronic relation of structural relationship with *Apnoea*, the device – as Bruszewski himself called *New words* – referred also, this time in a diachronic system, to his later projects, to *Poetic machine* (1982), then existing only in the form of a concept/project apparatus generating texts in a randomly conditioned continuous way and to *Sonnets* (1992), a generator of poems founded on a digital platform (Atari computer). These three moments, appearing at decade-long intervals, reflect the basic system of tendencies appearing in Bruszewski's works and at the same time show how decisive a role the generative stream of art played in it. Its co-existence with another current – also significant for Bruszewski's approach – interactive art – outlines the basic vector of his art, ranging from human performativity to the performativity of machines.

**PRZESTRZENIE GENERATYWNOŚCI
WPROWADZENIE DO SZTUKI WOJCIECHA BRUSZEWSKIEGO
(streszczenie)**

Twórczość Wojciecha Bruszewskiego należy do najcenniejszych dokonań w dziedzinie awangardowej sztuki mediów i nowych mediów w Polsce. Artysta od lat sześćdziesiątych dwudziestego wieku był aktywny w dziedzinie fotografii, eksperymentalnego filmu, sztuki wideo, sztuki instalacji oraz sound art. Jako członek Warsztatu Formy Filmowej, awangardowej grupy utworzonej w 1970 roku, współtworzył nurt konceptualno-analityczny w polskiej sztuce. W prezentowanym tu artykule dokonuję analizy twórczości Bruszewskiego, zwracając uwagę, że centralną w niej rolę odgrywa tendencja generatywna, wspierana przez permutacyjną i stochastyczną. Ich koegzystencja z innym nurtem, także niezwykle istotnym dla twórczości Bruszewskiego: sztuką interaktywną, buduje podstawowy wektor jego sztuki – rozpięcie pomiędzy performatywnością ludzi a performatywnością maszyn.

Słowa kluczowe: Wojciech Bruszewski, sztuka generatywna, sztuka interaktywna, sztuka wideo, film awangardowy, sztuka instalacji, sztuka permutacyjna, performance.

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LIVE ARTWORK BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF PERFORMANCE: EVA & ADELE

Abstract: The article focuses on the creative work of two Berlin artists, EVA & ADELE, who for over twenty years have frequented the most important art events, including the Venice Biennale, the Documenta in Kassel or the Art Basel fair. The artists describe their actions as performance in public space, in which the general public plays a significant role by documenting the actions and interacting with the artists. Their stylized larger-than-life femininity belying their shaved heads, EVA & ADELE address social issues in their art, postulating the right of individuals to define their own gender freely.

Employing EVA & ADELE as a case study, the article reflects on the contemporary definition of performance: the specific nature of the phenomenon, its semantic range and the role that it plays in the reception of art. EVA & ADELE's work is part of an artistic thread with a rich tradition in contemporary art – the actions based on artists' interventions in the sphere of their own bodies. However, the artists from Berlin have gone further than most of their predecessors, who simply use their body as an artistic medium. EVA & ADELE are a consistent creation, which demands from them great personal commitment and sacrifice. By maintaining their performance 24 hours a day, as they would have us believe, they have crossed new frontiers of body art performance into a brave new world where art becomes synonymous with life itself.

Keywords: performance in public space, living work of art, gender boundaries, identity, somaesthetics.

ON THE GENESIS AND CHARACTERISTIC ATTRIBUTES OF CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE

The beginnings of performance as a phenomenon in contemporary art date back to the 1960s. Some art historians and critics see its signs appearing much earlier, in such movements as Futurism, Russian Constructivism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Bauhaus, and the group of artists working from the 1930s onward

at the Black Mountain College.¹ Performance was often a discipline that straddled theater, dance, and happenings. The early 1960s, however, saw the emergence of the activities that on the one hand struck at the commercial art market, and on the other showed the social and political consciousness of artists regarding the reality they lived in. Among these were most certainly the artists of the Fluxus group, whose actions took place in various cities of Europe, from Wiesbaden to Copenhagen and Poznań. These artists included Joseph Beuys, who wanted to use art to affect human consciousness and revolutionize social life, calling what he did “social sculpture.” His goal was to expand the scope of art, which was meant to go beyond such activities performed by artists.

The actions of the 1970s were highly diverse. The body of the artist/performer was treated as an object, on the one hand, and on the other as a field of artistic activity occurring in a concrete space (e.g. the actions of Vito Acconci, Dennis Oppenheim or Chris Burden). The work of the Viennese Actionists was more expressive and emotionally evocative. The artists dealing with feminist issues also played a major role in socio-political performances (e.g. Hannah Wilke, Lynn Hershman Leeson, and Gina Pane).

In spite of the many phenomena that fell under this heading, the genre of performance has yet to be precisely defined; it undergoes constant change through the appearance of new kinds of activities. Performances can be activities carried out individually or in a group. They can be accompanied by stage elements: added lighting, music, video projections or animation. They are performed in various places – from galleries and institutions associated with art to public and private spaces. They are aimed at the public, often involving its members, getting them to join in, so they become part of the action; at other times they become viewers watching a play.

Initially, performance artists also initiated a discussion with the traditional view of art, i.e. that it needed to produce an artifact in order to exist. The result of performance was not a work of art to be bought or sold, and was thus a form of negation of the art market of the time.² Crucially, however, performance was to reduce the distance between artist and audience.

The body of the artist as well as his/her actions in a concrete space and time now became the tools of artistic expression. Amelia Jones suggests, with reference to feminist artists, that the phrase “the personal is political” applies to every artist involved in body-oriented art. In keeping with this under-

¹ R. Goldberg, *Performance Art. From Futurism to the Present*, Thames & Hudson, London 2011.

² This changed, however, with the appearance of Hermann Nitsch’s Orgy and Mystery Theater, where oil paintings were made over the course of a performance that lasted several days.

standing of performance, the body of the artist becomes the work of art, and simultaneously a means of communicating with others, with society.³

EVA & ADELE'S PERFORMATIVE ACTIONS

Wherever EVA & ADELE (ill. 1)⁴ appear, they temporarily become the focus of attention. This German art duo is an example of a contemporary performance as a lifelong project. For over twenty years, the artists have been appearing at the most important art events, such as the Venice Biennale, the Documenta in Kassel, and the Art Fair in Basel (ill. 2). No one passes them indifferently. These two figures with shaved heads, done up to look ultra-feminine, always smiling and open to people in their every gesture and movement, are utterly premeditated – ultimately it is they who are their own work of art, because, as they say, *WHEREVER WE ARE IS MUSEUM* (ill. 3). Gender is the most immediately apparent and yet complex factor here. Behind the picture they create is the body of a woman, and of a man who has been legally recognized as a woman without any invasive surgery or sex-change operations.

In the light of the above reflections, EVA & ADELE's performances would seem to be a radical execution of the earlier ideas. Their work is interesting not only in that it has prompted a change in how the phenomenon of the performance is perceived by today's theorists and artists involved in the field. It has also brought about major socio-political consequences, indicating something that characterizes our modern reality.

EVA & ADELE is a living art concept planned down to the finest detail. They simultaneously highlight their individuality and unity through their external appearance. Before appearing in the public space, they devote three hours to dressing and make-up. Each of the two has invented a recognizable look, corresponding to her character, to how she perceives herself and how she feels. The only shared elements of their make-up are the red lipstick and the red nail polish, which they both like. Since 1991 the artists have been appearing in identical outfits, designed and tailored specially for them, always grabbing attention with their unique appearance. These bear no resemblance to everyday clothing. The color pink plays a major role in their outfits, symbolizing difference: it alludes to the pink triangle that homosexuals were forced to wear in the concentration camps.

³ A. Jones, *Survey*, in: A. Jones, T. Warr, *The Artist's Body*, Phaidon Press, London 2000, p. 33.

⁴ The artists always request that their names be written in capital letters. The same applies to their guiding principles / watchwords which they want to impose on the world, and also to the titles of their works.

EVA & ADELE have made schedules for their costumes before each trip since 2002, which reflects the artists' meticulous process of preparing for a performance (ill. 4). This allows us to recreate the clothing – from the underwear and the stockings to the skirts, purses, and accessories – that they wore at a given art event. The artists compare their precisely planned appearances to the staging of a play in a theater, in which every detail is significant. Every gesture and step made by the artists is equally well planned. Always smiling and open towards the spectators, the artists are eager to converse on their art. Here too, however, there is a special etiquette – in greeting them, the conversationalist first greets Eva, and then Adele. In calling or writing e-mails, the artists call themselves EVA & ADELE; the same applies to their correspondence. When they speak with someone, they always speak in the plural. Thus, the whole that they create would seem to be quite solid.

The artists have been working together since 1991, when their first performance took place during the opening of the *Metropolis* exhibition at Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin (ill. 5). This was the first exhibition organized at the venue in the reunited Germany. The artists appeared as two brides, holding a symbolic wedding. It was also the moment when these two people of different artistic backgrounds, with different views on art and different ways of being, officially decided to declare themselves a single artist in two bodies. From then on, they began wearing the same outfits and making themselves up in a certain way. What sets them apart from other performances is the fact that they do it all the time, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year: the process has no clear beginning or end.

EVA & ADELE's art concept is predicated upon extensive interaction with the public. The artists have consciously decided not to document their performances, nor to assign this task to someone else, who would accompany them with a camera so as to film or photograph their every appearance. The artists have consciously left it to the viewers to document their presence in the public space. This is why they label such photographs and films as CUM (from the Latin: by) to emphasize that the person who took the picture co-created the work. They see the photographer as a person who creates a self-portrait at the same time as he/she takes their picture. The photographs reveal the photographer's world view or attitude. One example of this is a series of one hundred and seventy Polaroids taken from 1991 to the present (ill. 6-7). When asked to have their photo taken, the artists always ask for an extra copy, specially for them, which they sign or furnish with a dedication.

Since 1991, EVA & ADELE have also been giving postcards from around the world to the people that photograph them. To date, they have distributed around forty thousand of these, with stamps of their main slogans, which are a direct, physical part of the performance which they create. The postcards also feature a request to send the photographs to their atelier in Berlin.

Important art events are the stage upon which EVA & ADELE execute their performances – at first, this was done subversively, because they were not invited. They attracted the world’s leading media, such as *The New York Times*, which featured their photograph in an article devoted to the Venice Biennale, although the artists were not officially taking part. The media spread their images, thus becoming a motor for their work.

Other important shows were the previous *WINGS-Performances*. The first – *WINGS I* – took place during documenta 9 in 1992 and at the Venice Biennale in 1993. *WINGS II* took place during the next Venice Biennale in 1995 (ill. 8). *WINGS III*, in turn, occurred during documenta 10 and the Venice Biennale in 1997. The wings, which were the main element of their costumes, were an unambiguous symbol of freedom, and thus art, as well as of a transgressing of its boundaries.

Initially, the artists encountered miscomprehension, mockery and insults. Today they no longer experience this in the art scene, where they are widely known. For everyday purposes they have set principles to ensure their safety. One of these is not to use public transportation at night in the larger metropolises. The artists are always vigilant as to what is happening around them. They avoid confrontation, and offer everyone a smile or kind words.

The most important thing for them is to be present every day on the streets of big cities, such as Berlin or New York, where they are often anonymous, drawing attention with their appearance and behavior. As they themselves say: “Today everyday life is the space in which art can do the most.” This is also the biggest challenge for them when they are surrounded by passers-by who have no idea what their art is about. Various interactions come as a result. It is here that one of their slogans – *WHEREVER WE ARE IS MUSEUM* – is most fully realized. Until 1995 the artists did not comment on their work; they simply appeared in certain places and at certain events as EVA & ADELE, but did not speak with others. Only in 1995 did they begin to discuss the nature of their work.

ON THE GENDER ASPECTS OF EVA & ADELE’S PERFORMANCES

The free creation of gender identity is one of the most important strains of EVA & ADELE’s performances. The artists oppose typical transsexual behavior, involving the attempt to emulate the gender that one aims to be, mainly through external appearance. This is why they decided to give their creation an utterly new form, fashioning a wholly new image of gender. Gender is, to their mind, a question of inner feeling. They believe that every person should have the basic right to define his/her gender if the one assigned

by society does not quite fit, in terms of nature and behavior. This private definition and its refinement is, to some extent, the justification of their work. The artists claim to fit the social image of neither a man nor a woman; they are something new.

EVA & ADELE's artistic concept of their own identity has been reflected by their legal status, for which they battled long and hard. As such, they are an example of artists whose life is closely and literally linked with their art. In 1999 the artists formed a civil bond, by which they became a two-person civil unit in the eyes of the German law. They introduced a clause to the effect that if either of them resigns from EVA & ADELE out of her own free will, then all the works and material goods will be transferred to the other. This radical step resulted from the nature of their project, which requires enormous unqualified effort and devotion to the chosen idea.

The other form of bringing their art into the sphere of their everyday life was Eva's decision to change her gender, albeit without surgically altering her body. To take part in the transsexual process, performed in 2009, Eva first changed her citizenship from Austrian to German, owing to the more liberal approach to gender in Germany, where the artists live to this day. The procedure itself was quite complex. To be recognized as a woman, Eva had to gain two qualified opinions, and then a judge's verdict to crown the process. She had to write her transsexual résumé, taking into account various stages in her life, and beginning from early childhood. Eva also had to speak in detail about her sexuality. After Eva was officially acknowledged to be a woman, and the change was noted on her birth certificate, the artists also changed their first and last names in 2009. In 2011, following a change in the laws concerning marriage, the artists were also able to have a homosexual wedding.

EVA & ADELE do not, however, reduce their art to this aspect; they do not call what they do transsexual art. They are decidedly more in favor of their concept functioning as aesthetic subversion, and wish to be treated normally, as part of the society. Through their work, they fight for the issue of gender boundaries, so that it may find its place in public life or the media, without being sensationalized.

EVA & ADELE's work is often compared to that of another couple, who have been working in the art world since the late 1960s – Gilbert and George. The latter artists called themselves a “living sculpture,” thus also equating themselves with a work of art. Yet EVA & ADELE themselves cite Claude Cahun's photographic self-portraits of the 1920s and 30s as the genesis of and inspiration for their work. Their main attribute is the gender ambivalence created by the artist.

THE MEANING OF EVA & ADELE'S WORK

Many people denigrate the artistic value of EVA & ADELE, and thus the performative aspect of their work. It would seem, however, that their art merely expands the definition of performance. The very definition of the discipline is broad enough and thus their work may be considered performance in the public space, which has been running continuously for the past twenty years.

The consistency with which the artists have been creating their art project out of their lives for all of these years also applies to the socio-political message found within their work. They literally personify a new social reality, decidedly more tolerant than the one in which we live. This is also revealed in the neologism that they have created – FUTURING – which has also become the main slogan of their work. It can also be understood as the artists' active contribution to creating a future social reality. As EVA & ADELE say themselves: "WE ARE COMING OUT OF THE FUTURE and travelled with a TIME MACHINE (ZEITMASCHINE)."⁵ This is partly why their biographies never include their dates of birth or the art courses that they have completed. Instead, they list the dimensions of the various parts of their bodies.

The artists believe that their work will be fully accepted and comprehended in the future, and in this way they are helping other people to rid themselves of their inhibitions in creating their own (gender) identities. Their work is thus a very interesting phenomenon on the sprawling map of contemporary art. This is the kind of art which actually exerts an active influence on reality.

⁵ *On Various Aspects of Being a Living Work of Art. Delfina Piekarska talks to EVA & ADELE*, in: *EVA & ADELE: The Artist = The Work of Art*, eds. D. Piekarska, M.A. Potocka, MOCAK Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow, Krakow 2012, p. 108.

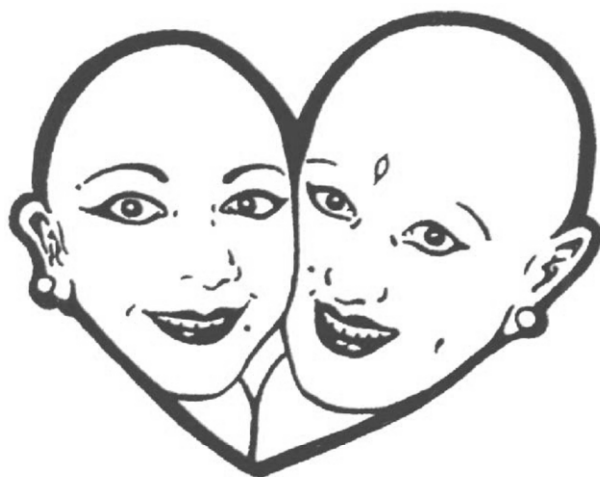


Photo 1. EVA & ADELE's *LOGO*



Photo 2. EVA & ADELE, performance at the Venice Biennale, 2007,
CUM-Foto: M.A. Potocka; VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2012

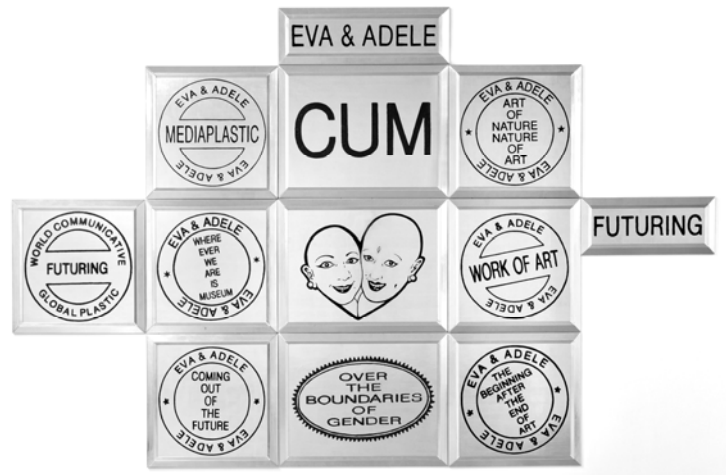


Photo 3. EVA & ADELE, *GOLD MANIFESTO*, 1992-1997, oil on gilded wood, photo: R. Sosin; VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2012

AUSSTELLUNG MIT GAL. MARTIN MERTENS BERLIN
BIENNALE DI VENEZIA UND ITALIENREISE

EVA & ADELE: VIENNA FAIR 2011
BOXERSCHRANK

KOSTÜME	UNTERWÄSCHE	MIEDER	STRÜMPFE	SCHUHE	TASCHEN	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LEINEN JÄCKCHEN + ROSA ROSETTE • HÄCKELHEMDECHEN • SEIDEN RÜSCHEN ROCK • MESSER • FÜR ANREISE INS HOTEL 	/	HAUT ROSA NATURANA MIT STRAPSEN	BRAUN	ROSA BRAUNE ANDRATX	FAHRT PINK BREE LOGOTASCHE	!!
<p>MI 11.5. PREVIEW 15^h-20^h</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BLUMENKLEID • SPITZENJÄCKCHEN MIT • ROSETTE 	/	HAUT ROSA NATURANA MIT STRAPSEN	CHAMPAGNER	WEISSE LEDER	FAHRT PINK BREE LOGOTASCHE	!!
<p>DO 12.5. 11^h-19^h <small>12^h AUSSERLAND</small> 18^h-22^h GALERIEN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ROTGEKLEBTES SEIDENKLEID • SOMMERPELZ 	/	ROSPINK WUNDERBRA MIEDERHÄHNCHEN PINK STRAPSGÜRTEL	BRAUN	WEISS LEDER	GROSSE PECTASCHE	SCHIRM !!
<p>FR 13.5.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PRIMAVERA • MIT SOMMERPELZ ODER • LANGJÄCKCHEN / SEIDENRÜSCHEN ROCK 	/	HAUT ROSA NATURANA MIT STRAPSEN	CHAMPAGNER	VIOLETTE NEUE	GROSSE PECTASCHE	HELLROSA
<p>SA 14.5.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPITZENKLEID MIT SOMMERPELZ 	/	WEISSER RÜSCHEN BH MIEDERHÄHNCHEN STRAPSGÜRTEL	CHAMPAGNER	ROSA BRAUNE ANDRATX	GROSSE PECTASCHE	HELLROSA
FAHRTKLEIDUNG						

Photo 4. EVA & ADELE, *COSTUME PLAN*: Viennafair, 2011 [front]; VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2012



Photo 5. *METROPOLIS WEDDING*, 11.4.1991,
photo: Gerhard Westrich, www.westrichfoto.de; VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2012



Photo 6. *CUM POLAROID P. 129*, Brandenburg, 1993;
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2012

Photo 7. EVA & ADELE, *CUM*
POLAROID P. 175,
 Berlin, 9.9.2010;
 VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2012



Das Dokument zur Nacht vom
 9.9.2010

- Lukas Birk
Lukas Birk

Photo 8. EVA & ADELE, *CUM*
POLAROID P. 57,
 Venice, 1995;
 VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2012



Yorgos & Maxolis.
 HEUAS.

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ŻYWE DZIEŁO SZTUKI.**PRZEKRACZANIE GRANIC PERFORMANCE'U W TWÓRCZOŚCI EVY & ADELE (streszczenie)**

Artykuł poświęcony jest działalności twórczej dwóch artystek mieszkających w Berlinie – EVY & ADELE, które od ponad dwudziestu lat pojawiają się na najważniejszych wydarzeniach artystycznych takich jak m.in. Biennale w Wenecji, documenta w Kassel czy Targi Sztuki w Bazylei. Swoje działania określają one mianem *performance'u* w przestrzeni publicznej, w którym dużą rolę odgrywają odbiorcy, dokumentujący ich działania i wchodzący z nimi w rozmaite interakcje. Te dwie postaci z ogolonymi głowami, ultrakobieco wystylizowane poruszają w swojej twórczości kwestie społeczno-obyczajowe, postulując wolne zdefiniowanie przez każdego człowieka jego płciowości.

Na ich przykładzie zostanie przeprowadzona refleksja nad współczesną definicją *performance'u* – jego zakresem znaczeniowym, specyfiką samego zjawiska i rolą, jaką odgrywa on w odbiorze sztuki. Działalność artystyczna EVY & ADELE jest częścią nurtu, który ma w sztuce współczesnej bogatą tradycję. Wiąże się on zawsze z ingerencją twórcy we własną cielesność. W przypadku pary artystek z Berlina wywołane jest to nie tylko faktem, iż ciało artysty staje się medium działania artystycznego, jak ma to powszechnie miejsce w *performance'ach*. Poprzez rozciągnięcie ich w czasie i zatarcie granicy pomiędzy życiem prywatnym a działalnością artystyczną, stają się one konsekwentną kreacją wymagającą dużego poświęcenia i zaangażowania.

Słowa kluczowe: performance w przestrzeni publicznej, żywe dzieło sztuki, granice płci, tożsamość, somaestetyka.

Eleonora Jedlińska
University of Łódź

TADEUSZ KANTOR: HIS PERFORMING ART AND THE MEMORY OF THE HOLOCAUST

Abstract: Kantor made use of archival materials, photographs as well as historical and commemorative relics in his artistic undertakings (painting, theater, happening, scores). Staying in a close relationship with painting and theater, using music/sounds, reaching for literary sources and documents, hearsay stories, and finally his own nightmares and memory, he created “performative situations”. Therefore, from the point of view of the idea of performativity we can interpret Kantor’s works through an interdisciplinary perspective of research into various phenomena of social and cultural life: history, memory, literature, art, and past experience. In this paper I will be interested in the elements from which he created his art. What seems to be crucial from this perspective is the display and reception of Kantor’s works in Nuremberg in 1996 and – along with the works of Joseph Beuys – in Jerusalem (an exhibition titled *Beuys|Kantor. Remembering*) in 2012. The places of the exhibitions (Nuremberg, Jerusalem) resulted in the perception of Kantor’s creations as strongly connected with the memory of the Holocaust. The memory of the extermination was constantly present in his paintings and plays, in which he questioned the boundaries of what is theatrical, pictorial, or inseparable from history and memory.

The discussion of performativity in Kantor’s creations includes the question of its possible limit, which, according to the artist, results from memory. Kantor understood that the traumatic character of the memory of “the times of war and lords of the world” must make an artist revise the conventions of performance worked out in the past. The new poetics frequently amounted to a readiness to cross the borderline set by such notions as mimesis, illusion, realness and performance. An artist who creates in post-Holocaust times must use his art to commemorate the people and events that he witnessed. The motives which relate the Jewish tradition in Poland to the memory of the Holocaust are present in Kantor’s art through suggestive paintings, objects, figures and signs which are to be found in his “Cricot 2 Theater”. On the one hand his use of music, singing, significant objects, certain paintings and sketches situates Kantor’s achievements within the field of research into the role of performativity in current discussions about his art, and on the other it allows us to categorize him as a performative artist. With his art Kantor transgresses the melancholic idea of trauma and provokes the individual to engage in mourning understood as a social performance.

Keywords: Holocaust, Jews, memory, theater, performance, music, song, literature, paintings, object, tradition, history, tale, melancholy, sarcasm.

In the same way in which Tadeusz Kantor himself used archival materials, photographs and historical and commemorative relics in his performing arts (painting, theater, happening, scores), researchers in the field of Performance Studies may consider his art from various perspectives. Staying in a close relationship with painting and theater, using music/sounds, reaching for literary sources and documents, hearsay stories, and finally his own nightmares and memory, he created “performative situations”. I am particularly interested in two questions, namely: what were the circumstances in which he created some of his works, and in what way the display of his work influences its perception. Therefore, we can interpret Kantor’s work from the point of view of the idea of performativism. With his art Kantor transgresses the melancholic idea of trauma and provokes the individual to engage in mourning understood as social performance.

What seems to be crucial from this perspective is the display and reception of Kantor’s works in Nuremberg in 1996 (an exhibition titled *Tadeusz Kantor. 1915-1990. Leben im Werk*) and – along with the works of Joseph Beuys – in Jerusalem (an exhibition titled *Beuys|Kantor. Remembering*) in 2012¹. The exhibition *Beuys | Kantor* might be described as a parallel narrative about the life and work of Beuys and Kantor – a narrative to be viewed, since it was an exposition of their visual work and their performances. Because of the sites of the displays (Nuremberg, Jerusalem), Kantor’s creations were perceived as strongly connected with the memory of the Holocaust. The memory of the extermination was constantly present in his paintings and plays, in which he questions the boundaries of what is theatrical, pictorial or inseparable from history and memory.

*

As Tadeusz Kantor wrote,

Memory of the past held in contempt by sober-minded and thus highly valued individuals (I have always suspected them of being slow-minded), and by the “gluttons” of the daily life, speeding towards the future and its promises. MEMORY mercilessly pushed off the route of the magnificent march forward, into the future... MEMORY... worth thinking about!

¹ J.R. Malkin and N. Yaari, *Tadeusz Kantor and Cricot 2: The Theatre as Memory Machine*, in: *Beuys|Kantor. Remembering*, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem 2012, p. 110: “In 1985 Kantor and Cricot 2 visited Israel, presenting *The Dead Class* at The Hangar in the port of Jaffa between December 7 and 12. The performance was enthusiastically received; Israel had never seen theatre of this sort. Did Kantor exercise any influence on Israeli theatre? Two moments of confluence can be mentioned: in the theatres of Hanoch Levin and Rina Yerushalami. Levin’s tragic plays come to mind every time the term *theatre of death* is mentioned. Especially congruent with Kantor’s theatre is his *The Child Dreams* (1993), written in 1986, shortly after *The Dead Class* was performed in Israel”.

I discovered it gradually, with delight, and often with despair. I felt that THEATER was the right place for it. I was not mistaken! THE STAGE became its ALTAR!²

On 15 November 1975, Kantor's performance of *The Dead Class* premiered in Cracow's Krzysztofory. Its basic element, the focus of the performance, is memory, for which – after many years of searching – the artist found what he considered to be the right place. The place was Tadeusz Kantor's Theater of Death. All of his subsequent performances: *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980), *I Shall Never Return* (1980), a variety *Let the Artists Die* (1985), and the last, unfinished play, stopped in the late rehearsal stage by the artist's death (December 1990), titled *Today Is My Birthday* (premiered in 1991) – all of them are permeated with the pursuit of truth by getting to the depths of memory.

On the last, forgotten patch of our memory, somewhere in a narrow corner – there stand a few rows of straight wooden school BENCHES... parched BOOKS falling into dust... in two CORNERS, as if on geometrical models drawn on a blackboard with a piece of chalk – there hides a recollection of served punishments ... school LAVATORY, where we got our first taste of freedom... PUPILS oldsters at the threshold of death and those absent... raise their fingers in a commonly known gesture and so they remain... as if they were asking for something ultimate...³

In that confession Tadeusz Kantor revealed the moment of finding memory, grasping the realness of a recollection. *The Dead Class* performance originated from a recollection of an event at the seaside near the Hel peninsula in 1971 or 1972, when he peeped into an empty, poor classroom through a small window:

I glued my face to the pane. Long, long did I look into the dark and dim depth of memory. I was again a little boy, I sat in a poor village school in a bench carved with pocket knives, slobbering my elementary reader open with my ink-blotted fingers. TODAY I KNOW THERE WAS SOMETHING IMPORTANT THAT HAPPENED AT THAT WINDOW. I MADE A CERTAIN DISCOVERY. SOMEHOW MOST VIVIDLY I BECAME AWARE OF THE EXISTENCE OF RECOLLECTION⁴.

The room, a dead classroom, consists of a few rows of school benches. The motionless pupils – oldsters, shapes from the distant past, wearing black funeral clothes, are seated as in an old photograph, resembling wax figures. Memory, recollections and the presence of death, and longing for love, which blended inside Kantor's mind and emotions, became a benchmark of our memory as well.

² T. Kantor, *Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985-1990 (Pamięć)*, t. 3, Wrocław 2005, p. 143.

³ T. Kantor, *Teatr Śmierci. Teksty z lat 1975-1984 (Klasa szkolna)*, t. 2, Wrocław 2004, p. 31.

⁴ As cited in: M. Dziewulska, *Artyści i pielgrzymi*, Wrocław 1995, p. 154.

The discussion of performativeness in Kantor's creations includes the question of its possible limit, which, according to the artist, results from memory. Kantor understood that the traumatic character of memory of "the times of war and lords of the world" must make an artist revise the conventions of performance worked out in the past. The new poetics frequently amounted to a readiness to cross the borderline set by such notions as mimesis, illusion, realness and performance. An artist who creates in post-Holocaust times must use his art to commemorate the people and events that he witnessed. The motives which relate the Jewish tradition in Poland to the memory of the Holocaust are present in Kantor's art through suggestive paintings, objects, figures and signs.

The performances staged in Tadeusz Kantor's Theater of Death between 1975 and 1990, although inseparably linked with his personal experiences, are not the creations of "private" or "biographical theater." He perceived (and demanded such perception from his audience) his theater as an image of the "inhumane period," in which, he said, he was made to live and pursue his creative activity; the period of extermination camps, world wars, slavery and genocide. Deep-rooted in his community, Kantor derived his theater from his own life, trying to distance himself from it, objectivizing it, and giving it universal significance.

Kantor did not treat memory as a device to describe recollections or move back in time. To understand this truth it was necessary to refer to childhood memories with their naiveté and brightness and to use the ability of feeling great possibilities in situations which may take place nowhere but in the theater, on the stage.

It is difficult to define the spatial dimension of memory, he wrote, here, this is the room of my childhood, (*Wielopole, Wielopole*), which I keep reconstructing again and again and that keeps dying again and again. Together with its inhabitants, actually. Inhabitants are the members of my family. They continuously repeat all their activities, as if they were imprinted on A FILM NEGATIVE. Interminably.⁵

Memory and time; endless time – TIME PAST. Everything that was real in life, bereft of its practical function and practical effectiveness in this UNREAL time, was, according to Kantor, artistically purified. "All good and all evil."

Kantor was present in his theater during all performances, from their beginning to the very end; having a habit to urge his actors, he was compared by Jan Kott to Charon, who ferries the dead across the Lethe of Unmindfulness. And, at the same time, Kantor is the Charon who ferries the dead back to our side of the Mindfulness River⁶. Kantor/Charon in dark clothing is the

⁵ T. Kantor, *Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985-1990 (Pamięć)*, t. 3, Wrocław 2005, p. 145.

⁶ Cf. J. Kott, *Kadysz. Strony o Tadeuszu Kantorze*, Gdańsk 1997.

personification of an obsessive memory: of childhood, of a family, of a small Galician town in Poland, the memory of “a poor room of imagination” and experience, in which, in front of the eyes of the audience, tragedies of History happen. The artist’s memory recalls shadows of the world which existed in the past and has been wiped off the face of the earth once and for all. It returns only sometimes, plaguing the memory of subsequent generations with images and sounds: a haunting melody of an old waltz (*The Dead class*) or a tango (danced sophisticatedly by two bishops in red mitres and cassocks, and then by a Priest and a Rabbi in the play *Where Are the Snows of Yesteryear? /Où sont les neiges d’antant?*), a Jewish lullaby, Hasidim’s songs, a prayer, religious strophes – they all fade away, only to rise in a deafening *fortissimo* towards the highest registers of hurt, expelled and regained memory. The same power lies in objects-props of memory trapped in things: a table, a chair, a wardrobe, a window, a faded family photo, a crib, a coffin... – those objects of “a lowest rank”⁷.

Kantor’s theater is also the theater of those returning or called from the beyond by those who carry the memory of them – the dead and dummy doubles of the living or the living doubles of dummies. Recruits from *Wielopole* wear uniforms covered with dust and have sallow, dead faces. They move around like marionettes. “They are not only dead,” writes Jan Kott, “they have been exhumed. In the last scene, after the Last Supper attended by all the characters of the drama (father, mother, grandmother, four uncles, aunts and uncle’s wife), all of them are thrown to a mass, unknown, shallow grave; and so are thrown their naked dummy doubles”⁸.

Objects-props in Kantor’s theater dig into our memory and imagination; they wound, testify, make us suffer and feel inferior. An old-fashioned camera will turn into a machine gun, a wardrobe – poor and molding, brought down from the attic, marked with the past and memories, in whose tiny interior people’s fear as well as safety, even if fragile and humiliated, have to find their place. A wardrobe becomes “a catalyst for numerous people’s affairs and secrets,” wrote Kantor;⁹ a family dinner becomes the Last Supper, a table turns

⁷ An idea of a “poor” object arose during the period of the Clandestine Independent Theater (1942-1944), when Tadeusz Kantor, together with a group of friends, prepared a stage production of “Balladyna” by Juliusz Słowacki and “The Return of Odysseus” by Stanisław Wyspiański in Cracow, occupied by Germans. “It was the object that was the simplest, marked by time, worn out by the fact of being used, at the threshold of garbage. This condition disclosed the object’s deeply hidden objectness, with no hope for serving its purpose. With no practical value. AN OLD WRECK! SIMPLY: POOR! AROUSING COMPASSION!” – Cited after: T. Kantor, *Teatr Śmierci. Teksty z lat 1975-1984 (przedmiot biedny, 1944)*, t. 2, *op.cit.*, p. 415.

⁸ J. Kott, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

⁹ In the performance from 1961, titled *In the Manor House* by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885-1939), Tadeusz Kantor (the period of the Cricot 2 Theater – the Informel Theater) used a wardrobe, where actors were crowded into “the absurdly small space of a wardrobe, squeezed

into a catafalque, labor takes place on the dentist chair, a charwoman wringing out a dirty floor cloth is the Angel of Death...

*

Tadeusz Kantor was born in the second year of the First World War, in a small Galician town of Wielopole Skrzyńskie. In an interview given to Wiesław Borowski, he described his birthplace in the following words:

It was a typical eastern small town, with a large market square, a few miserable lanes. In the square stood a chapel, with some saints for the Catholic faithful and a well at which Jewish weddings were held, primarily when the moon was full. On one side stood a church, the rectory and the Catholic cemetery, and on the other – a synagogue, narrow Jewish lanes, and another cemetery, somewhat different. (...) Catholic ceremonies were spectacular – processions, standards, colorful folk clothes, peasants... On the other side of the square – mysterious ceremonies, fantastic songs and prayers, black gaberdines, fox hats, candlesticks, rabbis, children's cry. Aside from its everyday life, the town was oriented toward eternity¹⁰.

Memory inscribed in his art (theater, happenings, events, performances) focuses mainly on the Great War and its results; although the events of the Second World War are – seemingly – placed in the background, this “placing” is particularly overwhelming. A testimony to the Holocaust crime given in Kantor's art has been passed through memory areas triggering recollections, which mingle and disintegrate; recollections provoked or persistently returning as a nightmare of somebody else's experience. Memory in Kantor's art is sometimes confronted with his present experience of the past. The war filled the artist's memory, and twentieth-century experiences left a stamp on his perception of the world and art; traumatic memory conditioned his reality, this (after Bruno Schultz) “reality of the lowest rank.” Theater art in general – confronted with the awareness and the memory of evil, which Kantor spoke about – cannot serve as a shelter from it. On the contrary, art can be a means of getting to the very depth of evil: here go the deafening sounds of marches (*Wielopole, Wielopole*), in whose rhythm uniformed columns enter mass graves, phrases of a funeral march played over the graves of generations. “The performance, the music is wailing over the illusion which is removed from the world by subsequent cataclysms,” wrote an American theater critic, Frank Rich, after seeing the performance of *Let the Artists Die* in New York in

in between and mixed with dead objects...” – cited after: T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1934-1974 (Teatr Informel, 1961)*, Cracow 2000, pp. 203-206.

¹⁰ W. Borowski, *Tadeusz Kantor*, Warsaw 1982, pp. 18-19.

1985¹¹. Death in Kantor's theater was presented through the "literal" metaphorical nature of mass graves, into which are thrown dead soldiers, neighbors, relatives, friends, actors, the Author himself: a boy with a wooden horse, a Cracow-Nuremberg sculptor Veit Stoss, Marshal Józef Piłsudski... Death and the artist are twentieth-century event chroniclers – this is how the space of reality and autobiography, which constitutes Tadeusz Kantor's theatrical vision, should be understood. The memory of extermination is also manifested in Kantor's words, in pictures that shaped his theater, in those *poor objects-witnesses*.

Tadeusz Kantor, *The Milan Lessons*:
 World War II.
 Genocide,
 Concentration camps
 Crematorium,
 Wild Beasts,
 Death,
 Torture,
 Humankind turn into mud, soap and smoke,
 Degradation,
 Time of contempt...¹²

In the script of *The Water Hen* from 1967, we may find a note in which the author recalls persons, actions and objects constituting a metaphorical picture of a mass grave from the Second World War. Drama characters – nameless citizens of a reconstructed town, weighed down with suitcases, bags and loads, carry objects which are precious for them: a tzaddik carries huge trumpets of the Last Judgment, a tailor – a sewing machine, children – their toys, a girl has a teaspoon, everyone carries their bed clothes, tables, stools, boards... – pushed into the common grave by waiters/torturers.

Slowly, all the characters, objects and activities from the previous acts constitute an absolute assemblage. Dripping wet Water Hen pushes her own bathtub in front of her. Edgar loaded up with suitcases. Father conjoined with his dreadful rucksack, Korbowski with a fatigued dummy. A tzaddik with a huge trumpet of the Last Judgment and countless bed clothes. A man with a dreadful sack (...) A child pushes a jutting metal chair on wheels. Hasidim stretched on a long board in a black cover. (...) Suddenly, waiters in tailcoats change into torturers. They, more and more numerous, surround the gigantic *procession* with rails, more and more tightly and mercilessly. Soldiers march around as if they were machines. They point, aim and shoot. In the middle, in tighter and tighter space, human bodies ghastly commingle with objects. (...)

¹¹ F. Rich, *Stage; Kantor's "Let the Artists Die"*, New York Times, October 15, 1985: C17.

¹² T. Kantor, *Dalej już nic.... Teksty z lat 1985-1990 (Lekcje mediolańskie)*, t. 3, Wrocław 2005, p. 88.

The whole shaking and teeming mass slides, disappears, *melts*. One by one, slowly, stiffly, they lie on the ground. Evenly, precisely, staring at space, wherever they can, one on another.¹³

However, the characters come back to life and the performance goes on. One of the recurring motifs of Tadeusz Kantor's theater is the extermination of all of Kantor's characters, of that realness created by him: the Two Hasidim with the Board of the Last Resort, the Tzaddik from *The Water Hen*, the Little Rabbi from *Wielopole Wielopole*, Uncle Karol and Uncle Olek, Aunt Mańka, Mother Helka and Father Marian. It is as unchangeable a motif as love, wedding, death or a funeral. In his recollections, Kantor depicts the life of Jews and Poles in Wielopole as everyday, usually poor coexistence, going on at its own speed, respecting dissimilarity, where Rev. Józef Radoniewicz¹⁴ had theological disputes with local rabbi Izaak Libschutz¹⁵. "In his art, Kantor intentionally avoids a discourse with the notion of antisemitism," remarks Dominika Łarionow, "which existed in the world of his childhood and youth spent in Tarnow and Cracow. He eliminates it, since he treats Jewish culture as a coherent element of the heritage in which he was brought up"¹⁶.

Two Hasidim and a Tzaddik – unsure, preoccupied, rushing around – enter or rather steal across the stage of Tadeusz Kantor's theater for the first time in the performance of *The Water Hen* (based on a play by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz [1885–1939] bearing the same title, staged in 1922/ Kantor: April 1967). It was also the first time when Kantor had depicted the Extermination using the words of the score.

¹³ T. Kantor, "Kurka Wodna. Partytura", in: J. Kłossowicz, *Tadeusz Kantor. Teatr*, Warsaw 1991, p. 127.

¹⁴ Rev. Jozef Radoniewicz was appointed a vicar in Wielopole Skrzyńskie, near Ropczyce, in 1897. He brought his widowed sister, Katarzyna Berger, her son, Stanislaw, and daughters, Jozefa and Helena, to his rectory. In 1909, Helena Berger, a daughter of Katarzyna Berger, got married to a teacher, Marian Kantor. In 1913, she gave birth to a daughter, Zofia, and in 1915 – to a son, Tadeusz Kantor. When the First World War broke out in 1914, Marian Kantor was sent to the front. In 1921, after his resignation (desertion?) from military service, he did not come back to Wielopole. In 1921, Rev. Radoniewicz died, and three years later Helena Kantor, together with children, moved to Tarnów.

¹⁵ The history of Wielopole Skrzyńskie is inseparably linked to the history of Jews. The first mentions about Jewish people in Wielopole Skrzyńskie appeared in 1641. In 1673, 16 Jewish families lived there. In 1765, the local qahal gathered 309 Jews, and in the town itself there lived 151 citizens of Jewish faith. In 1870, the Jewish community in Wielopole consisted of 500 people. It had a synagogue and a cemetery. The rabbi was Natan Libschutz. Until 1900, the size of the group increased to 715 people. The rabbi was Izaak Libschutz, the son of Natan. Cited after: http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wielopole_Skrzy%C5%84skie; <http://polin.org.pl/cities/118/info>.

¹⁶ D. Łarionow, "Dwaj Chasydzi z Deską Ostatniego Ratunku". Motywy żydowskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora", in: *Żydzi w lustrze dramatu, teatru i krytyki teatralnej*, ed. E. Udalska, Uniwersytet Śląski, Katowice 2004, p. 236.

The Water Hen. The score:

1. Here, a man with suitcases looks around the room, suddenly refers to one audience member: (it seems I have seen you somewhere?) He trots, dragging suitcases. He stops. He arranges suitcases, puts them elsewhere, counts, makes a mistake, counts. Eventually, he calms down, stands in the middle. Waits. Waits for a long time. Eyes fixed on the distance.

(...)

8. Two Jews in black ankle-length gaberdines and yarmulkas run in the unknown direction. They run evenly next to each other, preoccupied, holding small suitcases in black covers.

(...)

17. A Jew in a black ankle-length gaberdine flashes across the room, carrying a long board on his shoulder (...) In the unknown direction and without any particular aim.

18. A man with suitcases undertakes his journey into the unknown.

(...)

20. Someone requests: (don't you like it?).

21. Someone else: (has it started yet?).

22. Two preoccupied Hasidim hurriedly open suitcases, take out little mirrors, cloths, lather their faces, fold toiletries, close suitcases. They undo countless buttons of their gaberdines, absolutely naked beat dust out of gaberdines, do it with rising energy, beat for a very long time, with growing virulence and fanaticism, dress up, do the buttons. They do everything in growing haste, more and more absurdly, aimlessly and disgracefully.

(...)

33. Hasidim wail: (eine ungewöhnliche Geschichte).¹⁷

Nameless characters: “here, the person with...,” “someone demands...,” “some old man with a huge rucksack...,” “some girl drags a huge sack...,” “a man with suitcases searches something restlessly...,” “some nasty person...,” “some girl in a trench coat looks around hesitantly” – all of them are scared and compulsively repeat futile actions and gestures remembered from the past; they seem to act under the pressure of oncoming death, in feverish haste, disorientation and disbelief. That is what a square, a market, a yard in front of the town hall, a gymnasium or a synagogue in an East European town, in The General Government could have looked like in 1942 or 1943, under German occupation, when *the final solution of the Jewish question* was carried out within *Aktion Reinhard*¹⁸. The Yad Vashem (Holocaust

¹⁷ T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1938-1974 (Kurka Wodna. Partytura)*, Cracow 2000, pp. 425-460.

¹⁸ On January 20, 1942, during the conference in Wannsee, near Berlin, Nazi Germany decided about the extermination of all Jews. The conference was chaired by Obergruppenführer SS Reinhard Heydrich – the leader of RSHA. He was appointed a deputy Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia. Heydrich was assassinated in Prague, in May 1942. According to the Nazis, the operation was named “Reinhard” to “honor his memory”.

Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority) archives in Jerusalem and the Jewish Historical Institute Archive preserve testimonies of witnesses who survived the German occupation – their descriptions of subsequent *displacements* of Jewish citizens, *operations*, mass executions, their march towards wagons or to dug holes almost always reveal the same scheme, according to which extermination operations were carried out in the areas occupied by the Germans. In the central point there was a square, where Jews from the town and nearby villages were gathered, loaded up with bundles and suitcases, sometimes carrying their work tools (“suddenly, somebody starts to sew fiercely on a sewing machine. Rattle of the machine is deafening and absolutely aimless”¹⁹), and led to wagons going to Auschwitz, Treblinka, to Bełżec, Sobibor...

Jonasz Stern (1904-1988) – a painter, member of the art association ‘*Grupa Krakowska*’ [*The Cracow Group*], Tadeusz Kantor’s friend, driven by the Germans to the Lviv ghetto in 1941, describes its closure in June 1943: “It started at dawn. They threw us out of homes to the gathering square. They kept on bringing people, dragged out of different buildings and hideaways, smeared, covered with mud (...)”²⁰. Stern’s account would become the basis for an episode in Kantor’s last performance *Today is my birthday* (the character of Stern was played by Zbigniew Gostomski).

The picture of Jewish (and all people’s) homelessness in the world, alienation, eternal wandering and the Holocaust in Kantor’s tragicomical, melancholic and sometimes sarcastic vision triggers affection and sorrow. The artist speaks about the world of his memory, which belongs equally well to him and to us, who now summon from beyond him, his life, fears, loves, his poor childhood room “which I keep reconstructing again and again,” as he wrote, “and that keeps dying again and again”²¹.

In the 5th act (the 5th sequence) of the performance of *Wielopole, Wielopole* from 1980²² there is a scene titled *The celebration* (“*The burial of the Priest*” in the fourth sequence) disturbed by an unpredictable incident. *A LITTLE RABBI, his tingle-tangle “funeral” song and his further – much further – fate*. The Little Rabbi (played by Maria Stangret-Kantor) bursts in, dressed in his “synagogue garments,” frightened, despaired, joins “the strange funeral procession;” wringing his hands, he sings his funeral song in Yiddish: *SZA*

¹⁹ T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy*, *op.cit.*, p. 427.

²⁰ J. Stern, “Z notatek...”, in: *Grupa Krakowska (dokumenty i materiały)*, t. 11, red. J. Chrobak, Stowarzyszenie Artystyczne ‘Grupa Krakowska’, Cracow 1993, pp. 103-113.

²¹ T. Kantor, *Teatr śmierci. Pisma z lat 1975-1984. (Wielopole, Wielopole. Partytura)*, t. 1, *op.cit.*, p. 209.

²² *Wielopole, Wielopole* premiered in Florence on June 23, 1980.

SZA SZA DE REBE GAIT...)²³ A firing squad appears – the poor LITTLE RABBI falls (...) THE PRIEST helps THE LITTLE RABBI. THE LITTLE RABBI takes up his song again. A volley of shots. The Little Rabbi falls to the ground. And so it is repeated for a few times, according to the theater's manner. THE LITTLE RABBI departs for good²⁴. In the next sequence, The Little Rabbi – shot down several times – keeps on rising, more and more fatigued, takes up his song again: “MARSZUTEM MEHTI HURAM! MARSZUTEM MEHTI HURAM!!/ MEHRAM TEHURI HIREM!/ HIREM TEHURI MARSZUTEM!!!”²⁵.

In 1985, Kantor created a performance/cricotage of *Where Are the Snows of Yesteryear?*. The performance space is A STRAIGHT LINE, whose beginning and end is lost for audience members' eyes (...). It may mean anything: victory, failures and collapses, crusades and weary marches, processions and walks,/ dangerous escapes and pathetic returns,/ hopes, despairs, long journey toil,/ obscure fate, birth and death,/ tiny things and grand things, all the virtues and all the crimes²⁶. Death – appearing either as The Grand Geometrician in white clothing/uniform and The Country Surveyor, or as The Mad Gravedigger – in the third sequence assumes the shape of Death sitting on the chair, dressed in an old Hasidic gaberdine. “A skull covered with a yarmulka with hanging sidelocks.” It is The Grand Geometrician who remains the “votary” of tragic fate. He will perform the Death ritual, the ritual which heralds “The War and Human Extinction.” However, after a while, Kantor's Cemetery Memory Storeroom, that Canteen of Memory – escaping, eclectic, generating oneiric, hallucinatory visions of the Extermination, gets transfigured and, thus, the audience witnesses a transformation of The Grand Geometrician into The Rabbi:

But The Grand Geometrician is a somewhat old-fashioned prestidigitator-comedian. He takes off his white clothing and remains barely naked. He tears off the right sleeve of a Hasidic gaberdine together with Death's shinbone./ He lifts it up, triumphally demonstrates to the audience, removes the bone, demonstrates again, then puts the empty sleeve on his hand, puts the bone back to the correct place. He does the same with the second sleeve. Then, he puts on the remaining gaberdine. Eventually, he puts on a yarmulka together with sidelocks as if he was putting on a crown. (...)/ The Rabbi walks quickly towards the exit, he seems to be in a hurry. Disappears. He reappears immediately, holding the hand of a sort of his

²³ SZA SZA SZA DE REBE GAIT (jidisz) – sha sha sha the rabbi comes/... (transl. by P. Piekariski).

²⁴ T. Kantor, *Teatr śmierci. Pisma z lat 1975–1984. (Wielopole, Wielopole. Partytura)*, op.cit., pp. 262-263.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 264.

²⁶ *Ibidem (Gdzie są niegdysiejsze śniegi? Partytura)*, pp. 190-191.

copy – a child, a Little Rabbi. / They both walk like in a dream./ They stop, turn back, walk faster. Flee in a panic... They may survive...²⁷

In the seventh sequence, some people with water-filled buckets burst onto the stage-track. They pour the water from one bucket to another, systematically and aimlessly; anyway, they will save neither themselves, nor their houses. They will not extinguish fires, either. The frightened Rabbi, holding the hand of The Little Rabbi, reappears on the stage: With tails of his gaberdine flapping around, he looks like the ominous Angel of Extermination. The Poor Little Rabbi runs around, mad with grief, grabbing his head and raising his hands. The Rabbi shouts: “Our town is on fire!” – a title of the poem by Mordechaj Gebirtig (1877-1942)²⁸. The lament is raised in all the languages of the world...

The Machine of the Last Judgement (looking like a scaffold or gallows), which suddenly appears on the stage, starts *The Trumpet of Jericho* wrapped in black. It utters the mourning tones of The Ghetto Anthem. We shall notice: for Kantor – and for us as well – a recollection has spatial properties, it is dynamic and tormenting. A recollection of a remote event, in which we may not have participated, repeated continually and processed, eventually becomes an inseparable part of our life and history. Within his theater, Kantor creates pictures in which historical context seems clear – we may well link them to historical events, but it are us, the audience, the readers of his writings and scores, who materialize them. The intensive memory of the artist who founded the Theater of Death finds its way to our imagination, creating the film negatives of *internal images*. The artist places us in front of an object on the stage, whose presence itself triggers the feeling of the past. The tracks to the past do not combine to form the safety of narration – on the contrary: abandoned and useless remains of life, phantoms of memory in spite of the history seem to search dramatically for their place in the present. “My final advice is,” said Kantor, “to remember everything/ and to forget everything”²⁹.

Tadeusz Kantor’s Theater of Memory, “the memory of ours, who remember him in a black felt hat,” wrote Kott, “his finger gesture used to summon the dead and send them back; and subjective memory, long-lasting, trapped in objects”³⁰.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 192.

²⁸ Mordechaj Gebirtig (actual last name: Bertig), born in Cracow, 1877, was killed by the Nazis during a deportation operation in Lagiewniki ghetto in 1942; an Yiddish-writing poet and the last Jewish folk bard, he was particularly famous for his song *S'brent undzer sztetl brent* (*Our town is on fire*). Cited after: *Polski słownik judaistyczny. Dzieje. Kultura. Religia. Ludzie*, t. 1, Warsaw 2003, pp. 460–461.

²⁹ T. Kantor, *Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985-1990 (Lekcje mediolańskie)*, t. 3, *op.cit.*, p. 95.

³⁰ J. Kott, *op.cit.*, p. 48.

A real object and memory stored in it; replacing an artistic object, a theater prop, with a real object, transplanting some authentic piece into the world of art is the core of Kantor's concept of art. An object used during a performance was a real object; it did not serve symbolic or allegorical functions. Kantor was interested in a ready-made object, its basic life function. Real situations and real objects (a chair, a table, a sink, a basin, a bathtub, a suitcase, a wardrobe, a crib, a henhouse, a cross) undergoing manipulation became – using Kantor's words – *dissolute* in comparison to their life functions; that is where, he thought, poetry starts. Invoking the idea of "Realness of the lowest rank," formed by the Polish-Jewish writer Bruno Schulz (1892–1942),³¹ killed by a Gestapo officer in a Drohobycz street, Kantor honored his art and his memory. He himself belonged to "the generation of the epoch which originates from the epoch of genocide and murderous attempts on art and culture"³² – that is what he said during the seminar (*Lesson 12*) at the Elementary School of Dramatic Art in Milan, in 1986.

For the first time, a wardrobe was set on the stage of Kantor's Cricot 2 Theater, founded in 1955, in the year 1957. In 1961, in Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's play *In the Manor House*, staged in Cricot 2 Theater, it became "the stage space. That is the whole world"³³. Memory trapped inside the wardrobe, "the catalyst for many human affairs and mysteries", was perceived by Kantor as a message sent to the future generations. "When a man and his work disappear," wrote Kantor, "memory remains. (...) Memory-message must not be distorted/ It must preserve the vital meaning given to it by its creator/ The message can be rejected, but it cannot be distorted. Memory is a precondition

³¹ Bruno Schulz (1892-1942). *A Treatise on Mannequins* was one of the most important inspirations for Tadeusz Kantor's theater. Cf. B. Schulz, *Opowiadania. Wybór esejów i listów*, oprac. J. Jarzębski, Wrocław 1989. Kantor perceived a mannequin as a living creature, yet deprived of consciousness and purposefulness, through which an "ominous message of Death and Nothingness" is passed to us who are alive. That blend of emotions was – according to Kantor – "at the same time, the reason for excession, rejection and attraction. Accusation and fascination". Cf. T. Kantor, *Teatr śmierci. Pisma z lat 1975-1984 (Teatr śmierci)*, op.cit., pp. 18-19.

The presence of Bruno Schulz in Kantor's theater of memory, his archeological search for the source of memory is indisputable. In his letter to Witkacy, published in "Tygodnik Ilustrowany" in 1935, Schulz wrote: "I have no idea how we come to certain pictures of decisive meaning. (...) These early pictures determine the artist's boundaries of imagination. Creating their work, they do not deduce from ready-made assumptions. They then do not discover anything new, they only learn how to better understand a secret with which they were entrusted at the beginning, and their work is continuous exegesis, a comment to one verse which was set to them."

³² T. Kantor, *Lekcje mediolańskie 1986*, Cracow 1991, p. 88.

³³ T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1938-1974. (Szafa)*, op.cit., p. 207.

for development,/ which is an essence of life./ All our crises are triggered by disrespect towards memory”³⁴.

Having studied memories, notes, oral and written accounts, testimonies and reports passed to the next generations by Jews who hid away during the German occupation in Poland, we become convinced that it was the wardrobe that played, often in an unbelievably effective way, the significant role of a shelter. The word “wardrobe” and all the functions ascribed to it are repeated in these stories like a magical spell, a formula or a prayer³⁵.

Here are some extracts from the accounts given by Ludwik Krasucki, who lived in Lviv during wartime:

(...) At night, Bronek (a fugitive from the Lviv ghetto, a friend and a teacher of Ludwik Krasucki’s father, Jacob) slept on the floor, together with my father. He spent the day on the chair behind the wardrobe which stood in the room corner. In order to put the chair behind the wardrobe, it was necessary to move the wardrobe away from the wall. It looked a bit suspicious that the wardrobe is moved forward if there was very little space inside the room. We had one more wardrobe, unused, taken apart. Parts of that wardrobe were used to fill the empty space at the sides of the wardrobe in the corner. A hideout in the corner could be entered through an open wardrobe door, among clothes and coats hanging inside, and through a hole cut in the back side. If there was no stranger at home, Bronek moved around the room, but every knocking at the door made him get into his hideout³⁶.

In Hanna Krall’s *Evidence of the existence*, the author recalls the wartime childhood of the future pianist and composer Andrzej Czajkowski (1935-1982), hiding in wardrobes of Warsaw apartments after his grandmother had led him out of the ghetto:

You stayed at Miss Monika’s. There was a wardrobe in the room. The apartment was on the first floor, residents passed your door, neighbours called in – a wardrobe was the safest place. There was a chamber pot inside. You could find it with one touch and learned to pee noiselessly. Clothes had

³⁴ T. Kantor, [CRICOTEKA], Cracow, March 7, 1986, in: *Grupa Krakowska (dokumenty i materiały)*, part 12, Cracow 1993, p. 151.

³⁵ Cf. among others: *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej. Polacy z pomocą Żydom. 1939-1945*, oprac. W. Bartoszewski, Z. Lewinówna, Cracow 1969; H. Krall, *Dowody na istnienie*, Poznań 1995, 1996; H. Krall, *Okna*, Oficyna Wydawnicza “Pokolenie”, Warsaw 1987; *Losy żydowskie. Świadectwo żywych*, ed. M. Turski, Warsaw 1996; *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939-1945. Studia i materiały*, ed. A. Żbikowski, Warsaw 2006; G.S. Paulsson, *Utajone miasto. Żydzi po aryjskiej stronie Warszawy (1940-1945)*, Cracow 2007; *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, 2008, no. 4; J. Bauman, *Zima o poranku. Opowieść dziewczynki z warszawskiego getta*, Cracow 2009.

³⁶ Cf. L. Krasucki, “Pan Bronek”, in: *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej. Polacy z pomocą Żydom. 1939-1945*, pp. 608- 610.

been removed; inside the wardrobe there was darkness, a chamber pot and you...³⁷

*

Tadeusz Kantor used to look at life from the perspective of dark humour, irony and melancholy, sarcasm and the grotesque, which he used to hide his fears (“It is not true,” he wrote in *The Small Manifesto*, “that a MODERN man has conquered his fear. Don’t believe that! There is the fear of the external world, the fear of what the future will bring, of death, the fear of the unknown, of nothingness, and of emptiness”) and sorrow, and despair. In 1957, he introduced into his theater what he called *l’objet trouvé* – “a wardrobe”:

To all intents and purposes, a wardrobe is an object of vague and ambiguous properties. It’s worth noticing that a wardrobe becomes distinctive and meaningful only when it is... closed! Then, suddenly, it acquires its significance and its due prestige. It becomes solid.

[...]

Its (wardrobe’s) wings, like backstage, suddenly open up to much deeper and murkier regions of this, one could say domestic, INTERIOR.

Now, in this humid and suffocating atmosphere, dreams are unfolded, nightmares are born, behaviors that hate the life of the day – corrupt, shameless and cruel – are practised. Feverish ravings. Now – and not in some mystical vague location – but here, being separated from the everyday reality with this thin and fragile wall, we feel that we touch upon the condition of nothingness and Death³⁸.

Unintentionally, maybe unknowingly, feeling that it is impossible to touch the indefinable and refusing to depict directly the horror of the Holocaust, Kantor bears evocative testimony to the events that he witnessed and that directly concerned his family and friends.

Memory, its different areas, its repetitiveness, fragmentariness, persistent returns and pointless attempts to capture the image that was remembered or described, was the essence of Kantor’s thought and art. A recollection activates/triggers the pictures of continuously repeated activities and gestures:

banal, elementary and aimless activities with the same expression on their faces. Those trivial activities that stubbornly and oppressively preoccupy us, fill up our life... These DEAD FACADES become real and important through this stubborn REPETITION OF ACTION. This pulsating rhythm that lasts for life, that ends in nothingness, which is futile, is an inherent part of MEMORY³⁹.

³⁷ H. Krall, H. Krall, *Dowody na istnienie*, Poznań 1996, p. 111.

³⁸ T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy (Szafa)*, t. 1, *op.cit.*, pp. 208-209.

³⁹ T. Kantor, *Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985-1990 (Pamięć)*, t. 3, *op.cit.* pp. 145, 422 *et al.*

From this nothingness and futility looms death – THE CONDITION OF DEATH – THE DEAD (...) THE PAST THAT “SLIPS” INTO THE PRESENT. The past exists in memory. IT IS DEAD!” wrote Kantor.

For the first time, Hasidim and a Tzaddik – those emblematic characters of the past – emerged from nothingness in the performance of *The Water Hen*. They came “from eternity and death.” In the first act of the performance, they burst onto the empty stage, and keep on running in an unknown direction, dressed in black, “long ankle-length gaberdines and yarmulkas. They run evenly shoulder to shoulder, preoccupied, holding small suitcases in black covers”⁴⁰.

Overwhelmed by panic, they undo countless buttons of their gaberdines, absolutely naked beat dust out of the gaberdines, do it with rising energy, keep on doing it for a long time (...) dress up, do the buttons⁴¹.

Two Hasidim, still in feverish haste, reappear on the stage, emerging from the dark abyss and disappear in it – in that black hole of the stage/room/world – INFERNUM:⁴² “The room is the world./ Terribly empty/ and in that emptiness – WRECKS. (...) Silence, behind the door/ nothing”⁴³. The overwhelming picture of exile, wandering, homelessness and extermination is compared to trivial everyday activities (eating, shaving, phoning, drinking coffee, usual prudence, etc.), remembered from *a bygone era, a bygone life*. And that picture makes us reread the memories written down/told by those who survived the Holocaust. We shall evoke a unique testimony to the Holocaust – a diary of Celel Perechodnik,⁴⁴ where we can find the record of his attempt to obtain poison for his family, who waited for a transport to Treblinka. A local chemist demands a prescription.

A prescription? How shall I find a doctor? writes Perechodnik. I know! A doctor, [Maksymilian] Augarten, lives by the square. He has saved so many people from death – now he must prescribe a drug to cause death./ I come back to the square – Doctor, can I have a prescription for poison, please./ Augarten takes out a pen, a notebook, jots something down in Latin, signs,

⁴⁰ T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1938-1974 (Kurka Wodna. Partytura)*, t. 1, *op.cit.*, p. 426.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 428

⁴² Cf. T. Kantor, *Dalej już nic.... Teksty z lat 1985-1990 (Przewodnik po spektaklu “Niech szczerą artyści”)*, t. 3, p. 29.

⁴³ T. Kantor, *ibidem*, p. 101.

⁴⁴ Celel Perechodnik (1916-1944?) the son of a Jewish landlord from Otwock. In February 1941, already closed in the ghetto, together with his family, he joined the Jewish police force. As a police officer, he took part in the closing of the Otwock ghetto. Then he hid away somewhere in Warsaw. He died in unclear circumstances during the Warsaw Uprising. Cf. C. Perechodnik, *Czy ja jestem mordercą?*, oprac. P. Szapiro, Warsaw 1993, p. 49.

puts a date: August 19, 1942 and adds a common formula: for Perechodnik. I take the sheet through the bars and walk away without saying a word⁴⁵.

The story described by Perechodnik is one of well-known stories from diaries, memories, tales and accounts of those who survived the Holocaust. But doctor Augarten writing his last prescription with his pen, doing his duty, and a chemist demanding “a prescription for poison” set this story in the zone of tragedy-absurdity, a nightmare, and it is not a transposition.

A suggestively sketched picture of a square where Otwock Jews were driven in Kantor’s theater of realness seems to be marked by the universal experience of the Holocaust, nothingness, empty places, that abyss where we forget the past, which Kantor wanted to rescue.

On the stage of his theater, the artist calls the spirits of those who were the core of his life (family, friends, masters, Polish and Jewish citizens of Wielopole, Tarnow, Cracow...) from “the black hole” of the beyond⁴⁶. Determining his approach towards that nothingness and futility, he analyses his own life, his memories, fears, emotions and passions. The tradition and culture of Polish Hasidism⁴⁷ must have been close to his heart, since he was raised within the sphere of spectacular rites of Jewish, Polish and Austrian Galicia at the beginning of the twentieth century. At the square/stage, among the scared “characters” of *The Water Hen*, there appear two Hasidim, despaired – “they throw up their arms as if they were mad,” then “to make matters worse, a fat tzaddik appears”⁴⁸. The Hasidim carry the Board of the Last Resort, which will not rescue them. Wrapped in a black cover, unwieldy, aimless, it is just an inconvenient burden, which they do not want and cannot leave behind. The tzaddik carries a huge trumpet, also in a black cover, and he performs his dance of “life and death.”

A Tzaddik comes in slowly,/ performing some kind of a ritual dance/ Bed clothes,/ a huge sophisticated trumpet,/ overwhelming, almost liturgical sounds./ The blend of loftiness with comedy. Hasidim wobble/ in fanatic wailing./ A board in a black cover above everything/ The Tzaddik keeps on performing his dance⁴⁹.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 50.

⁴⁶ Students of the dead class emerge from nothingness and disappear in it. “It was not a CLASSROOM-REAL PLACE. It was black nothingness, in front of which all the audience members stopped,” writes Kantor. Cf. T. Kantor, *Teatr śmierci. Teksty z lat 1975-1984*, t. 2, *op.cit.*, p. 404.

⁴⁷ Jewish religious movement on messianic grounds, started in the middle of the eighteenth century in Podolia and Ukraine.

⁴⁸ T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1938-1974 (Kurka Wodna. Partytura)*, t. 1, *op.cit.*, p. 437.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 437.

In the last performance of *Today Is My Birthday* (1990/1991, January 1991, premiered in Toulouse), a spirit of Jonasz Stern led by “creative magic” emerges on the stage. Jonasz (personalized by Zbigniew Gostomski) enters the performance space through picture frames, ragged, with the Star of David on the left arm. Hunched, filled with uncertainty and fear, the homeless figure of “the last” rescued Jew stands in front of the audience. *Self-portrait – I have something to tell you* (1988) – that is Kantor’s painted vision of the artist: lonely, naked, abandoned by everyone, trying to tell his story which is not listened to. In the performance of *Today Is My Birthday*, Kantor tries to speak in Jonasz Stern’s voice once again: the painter’s voice, recorded on a tape, comes out of a loudspeaker and tells the story of his survival. On June 1, 1943, gun bullets missed him, and he managed to escape from a mass grave under the cover of the night⁵⁰.

In that last performance of Kantor the “spirit” of Jonasz Stern once again drags himself from beneath the pile of corpses and once again – reluctantly, slowly – gets into a wooden box/coffin placed in the middle of the stage. And so does – with a kind of determination – the “spirit” of Maria Jarema (1908-1958)⁵¹.

In the set of Kantor’s *Autonomous Text* (1938-1974), there is a description of – possibly – a nightmare, titled *A Wheelchair with a Sick Person*. The text seems to be connected to the author’s feelings towards Stern’s war experience, which Kantor knew about:

A Wheelchair with a Sick Person, 1988 (?)

A wheelchair with a sick person was slipping down faster and faster. Suddenly/it fell into a hole or a hollow in the ground./ “It must be the end,” thought the sick person, as he got surrounded by darkness./ However, when he realized he was alive, he started thinking how to get out of the hole./ He knew he had to get out and call for help./ A wheelchair got stuck upside down in the mud./ Aghast at the collapse, he could hardly see./ Groping around he could feel moist soil./ Rising on hands and using them, he started pulling his body up. He was smeared with mud./ Eventually, he managed to put his head at the edge of the hole./ And then he saw a few people crying./ They were standing tight in one place and crying./ Tears were flowing down their cheeks. They were pressing white handkerchiefs to red eyes, cheeks and noses⁵².

⁵⁰ Jonasz Stern’s account of his escape from a train going from Lviv to the extermination camp in Belzec and survival from a mass execution is stored in the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw at number 301/4689.

⁵¹ Maria Jarema (1908-1958) – a Polish female painter, sculpturer and stage designer, co-founder of the artistic society ‘Grupa Krakowska’ [The Cracow Group]. K. Miklaszewski, *Tadeusz Kantor. Między śmietnikiem a wiecznością*, Warsaw 2007, p. 20: “Maria Jaremanka (Jarema) was not only Kantor’s Muse, but also his most radical Teacher”.

⁵² T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1938–1974 (XI Teksty autonomiczne)*, t. 1, *op.cit.*, p. 619.

To my mind, this description included the experience of death and miraculous survival of Jonasz Stern, his account of how he managed to get out from beneath a pile of corpses in a mass grave and, at the same time, Kantor's idea of his own death and burial. Kantor fantasized about his death, death on the stage, in front of audience-mourners bewailing his death: "I'd like to have spectacular death. It could help me to endure that moment"⁵³.

In 1990, Kantor wrote a text titled *Café Europe. Further on, nothing...*⁵⁴, in which he once again refers to exhibitions of his paintings (*The exhibition at the gateway*, 1957; *The Popular Exhibition*, 1963; *The exhibition at the post office*, 1964; *The exhibition of identical pictures with an umbrella*, 1970; *Everything is hanging by a Thread* exhibition, 1972; *Barcelona Cathedrals*, 1988; *Further on, nothing...* exhibition, 1989) and to his performance characters. The text assumes the form of recorded memories, author's comments, a sketch about personal achievements or reflections on those areas of his work in which his former attitude has been broken, unsettled – paradoxically – in order to aim at something new, unknown. Each of the aforementioned exhibitions was accompanied by manifestos and comments, and like all of Kantor's performances these were accompanied by scores.

And now the exhibition (*Café Europe*), writes Kantor. /Well.../ *accrochage/ vernissage/* The only hope in the audience. Let's hope the audience from my Cricot theater will come/ and say: He hasn't changed at all!/ The same!/ the same eyes/ and the same scarf...⁵⁵

A tiny, limited space of Kantor's Cracow studio at the Small Market Square, where he lived for the last years of his life – *The Poor Room of Imagination* – the place, where he came back, where his passions, cravings and desires crossed. Characters of his biography entered confidently or crept apprehensively into *that room* through the open door of his memory and imagination:

... There came boys and girls/ from my School Class./ The Dead Class./
... The Trumpet of Jericho/ with a Ghetto anthem./ It was carried by The
Old Rabbi from Wielopole/ with little Shmul in *Where Are the Snows of
Yesteryear?*/ who drummed on the old/ metal bucket/ to be equal to two
Cardinals dancing Argentinian tango/ and to draw greater attention.⁵⁶

Recollections are treated as a device to penetrate the core of "TIME PAST, where everything that was real in life, bereft of their practical function and practical effectiveness in this UNREAL time was subject to artistic PURGE!"⁵⁷.

⁵³ K. Pleśniarowicz, *Teatr śmierci Tadeusza Kantora*, Chotomów 1990, p. 45.

⁵⁴ T. Kantor, *Café Europe*, Spicchi dell'Est, Rome 1990.

⁵⁵ T. Kantor, *Dalej już nic.... Teksty z lat 1985-1990 (Dalej już nic! Café Europe)*, t. 3, *op.cit.*, pp. 198-199.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 199.

⁵⁷ T. Kantor, (*Powrót. Pamięć. La Memoire*), *ibidem*, p. 144.

In the performance of *Silent Night* from 1990, that act of using recollections assumed a new meaning. Michal Kobiałka remarks that in that performance Kantor in some measure redefines the notion of memory, myth and history. “Kantor gives us to understand,” writes Kobiałka, “that memory brings back what is unexpressable through narration and artistic reproduction; that it *renounces the consolation offered by correct forms, rejects the style enabling common experience of nostalgia for the unobtainable* (J.-F. Lyotard⁵⁸)”⁵⁹. In the performance of *Silent Night*, the narration of a myth, a few recollections of childhood, remains of objects (“a bed, a stool, a table, a window, the doors,/ then those which are more ‘complex’ – a cross, gallows,/ and finally the tools of war”⁶⁰) and current political affairs unite into one – Christmas Eve night, the night of history, the night of the world (“that dreadful night”). The artist presents us with pictures from the history which does not exist on book pages, dictated by official commemorations of eulogists for “the only correct” ideologies – the artist talks about the end of the world.

Nearing the end of his days, in August 1990, he wrote: “There has not been/ an age in the history of human kind which “fits” this image:/ the end of human kind,/ and the end of life on the Earth – our planet – so perfectly as the 20th century... Since the beginning of my artistic life /this picture /has always lived/ inside me. All the pictures of my imagination, of all my life, have originated *from it*”⁶¹.

Being closely affiliated with the artistic practice of twentieth-century avantgarde, and fully aware of what happened during the Second World War, Tadeusz Kantor, through his artistic work, makes himself and us responsible for the memory of the Holocaust. He does not strive to bear testimony to extermination, nor does he bother to witness, since he realizes that a testimony conceals the disability to witness. “It is impossible,” writes Giorgio Agamben, “to bear testimony to the Holocaust from the inside of death, as there is no voice that can express the deadly silence, *nor from the outside*, since the *outsider*, by the very meaning of this word, does not participate in the event”⁶². Kantor behaves more like an archive worker that guards the memory of accumulating events and recollections, those leftovers of human life, abandoned and poor, and who finds the only place for them – the stage, theater, theatrical space. Here, in the center of the stage, he puts the chimney of a burnt House. “It was a chimney from one of my paintings,” he wrote. “The painting was

⁵⁸ J.-F. Lyotard, *Postmodernizm dla dzieci*, transl. J. Migasiński, Warsaw 1998, p. 26.

⁵⁹ M. Kobiałka, *O teatrze pamięci ocalalej z niebytu*, in: *Tadeusz Kantor. Interior imagi-nacji*, ed. J. Suchan, M. Świca, Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, Warsaw–Cracow 2005, p. 152.

⁶⁰ T. Kantor, (*Cicha noc*), t. 3, *op.cit.*, p. 173.

⁶¹ T. Kantor, (*Cicha noc*), t. 3, *ibidem*, p. 176.

⁶² G. Agamben, *Co zostanie z Auschwitz?*, transl. S. Królak, Warsaw 2008, p. 35.

titled *My Home*,/ after fire, after a disaster”⁶³. In Kantor’s theories and work, memory is alternative to history – existing beyond ideologies and political imperatives. The space of images is the core and the basic idea (Kantor’s memory⁶⁴) of his performances – from *The Dead Class*, *Wielopole*, *Wielopole* through the variety of *Let the Artists Die*, *I Shall Never Return* and *Silent Night* to the last, unfinished, *Today Is My Birthday*...

Memory – *Imprinted traces*: in July 1990, the artist writes down his observations on the phenomenon of memory, which persistently returns to “certain events,/ people, occurrences” “as if it was attracted by some secret power,/ which is inside it.” They bring with them “silence/ and the taste of eternity,/ death, the abyss of memory/ desperate cries of the past⁶⁵”.

Today Is My Birthday, the last performance by Tadeusz Kantor, whose title may have been taken From a Jewish song *Tsu Dayn Geburtstog/ Today Is Your Birthday*:

*Today is your birthday
And we all have come
All your friends and family
All your dear old chums*⁶⁶.

Everybody came: mother, father, aunts and uncles, friends: Maria Jarema, Jonasz Stern Vsevolod Meyerhold – “The Great Martyr,” Rev. Jozef Smietana, THE WATER CARRIER from *Wielopole*, the Infanta from Velázquez’s painting, Doctor Klein...

Kantor “arranges” his past – it happens in a stage-room (*The Poor Room of Imagination again*) with a bed, a table, chairs and paintings (“of course”), doors (“important”), an oven with a chimney... He left his notes made in August (Thursday) 1989 – he mentions images that beset him: “execution, wars,/ genocide,/ war victims,/ whores, brothel, masters,/ ministers, generals,/ policemen, spies...”⁶⁷.

In the variety *Let the Artists Die*, there appears an old doctor, dressed in a black suit, with a stethoscope around his neck. He is confused with disorder, with restless, futile bustle. His grey hair blows as he rushes into the room of a dying Artist, tries to assist a twin dying of tuberculosis and, meanwhile, to comfort his brother (Lesław and Waław Janicki), says something to himself, probably in Yiddish. Suddenly, THE WATER CARRIER from *Wielopole* enters the stage of *The Poor Room of Imagination* (“barefooted, ragged, with

⁶³ T. Kantor (*Cicha noc*), t. 3, *ibidem*, p. 178.

⁶⁴ Cf. M. Kobińska, *op.cit.*, p. 145.

⁶⁵ T. Kantor, (*Cicha noc*), t. 3, *op.cit.*, pp. 180-181.

⁶⁶ *Jid. Tsu dayn geburtstog / Tsu dayn yontev haynt / Hobn zikh farzamlit / Dayne gute fraynt...*

⁶⁷ T. Kantor, *Dziś są moje urodziny. Wielka dygresja teoretyczna*, t. 3, *op.cit.*, pp. 231-243.

water buckets, rabid prophet dances to rhythmical and plaintive Jewish song⁶⁸). In the last performance (*Today Is My Birthday*) a Jewish doctor, Doctor Klein (played by Mira Rychlicka), appears as well. Seduced by the sounds of a song, he dances “having forgotten about his duty.” “A grey-haired old man in a white coat, with a stethoscope, dancing lively like a Hasid,” writes Leszek Kolankiewicz, “and he also had something mystical in him – Kantor even named him Jehova, but he probably meant the evil Gnostic Demiurge, the one that rather failed to create the world. Kantor searched for proper lines for him in Torah, in Genesis...”⁶⁹. Doctor Klein tries – feverish and dedicated, yet unsuccessful – to help, to auscultate his numerous patients, who surround him, teem around him like reprobates around Dante’s and Vergilius’ boats floating on infernal waters. “At one moment he cries: *Tous égaux*’ – like death that makes everyone equal”⁷⁰.

*

Tadeusz Kantor’s Theater of Memory rooted in his biography, which – re-considered and dwelled on – was to help him understand his life, was the theater of ultimate things, which treated notions with extreme seriousness. A performance of *Today Is My Birthday*, unfinished, broken in the rehearsal stage by the artist’s death on December 8, 1990, creates the world of thoughts and memories capable of bringing back the dead. And again – consciously or not – Kantor seems to be close to the East European Judaic philosophy: he describes the microworld, creating, at the same time, the images of the world perceived as the entire realness, and not as our created world, where we exist. Like in the Kabbalah Books, we find unending oscillation between unity and eternity, and in Kantor’s work, we may recognize references to individual actions taking place in the lowest zones of realness (“realness of the lowest rank/” of our created world⁷¹), introducing – according to Kabbalah – the dimension of human responsibility to our destination.

Kantor on/off stage throughout the performance “calls back” his dearest dead; I would compare that last performance to the specific Jewish service,

⁶⁸ T. Kantor, (*Dziś są moje urodziny. Notatki do spektaklu*), t. 3, *op.cit.*, p. 281.

⁶⁹ L. Kolankiewicz, *Siedem szklanych paciorków. Ostatnia taśma Kantora*, in: *Wielki mały wóz*, Gdańsk 2001, p. 229.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, s. 230.

⁷¹ Cf. Rabbi Jechiel Bar-Lew, *Pieśń duszy. Wprowadzenie do żydowskiego mistycyzmu*, Cracow 2006.

during which departed relatives are remembered. It is called Yizkor. It is not the mourning prayer (Kaddish), but the prayer to remember.⁷²

Now then: here – on the stage:/ the end of the world,/ after a disaster,/ a heap of dead bodies/ (there are many of them) and a heap of broken Objects, /remnants.

(...)

While from the dim recess, as if from the abyss of hell – there started to emerge people who had died a long time ago,/ and memories of events, which, as in a dream,/ had no explanation,/ no beginning, no end,/ no cause or effect. /They would emerge and would return persistently...⁷³

*

The meaning of music, singing, significant figures and objects (e.g. *The wardrobe – Interior of Imagination* for the play *In a little Manor House* by Witkacy, 1961), certain paintings and sketches (e.g. *Orpheus' Death* from 1942/44, *I have something to tell you* from 1988), and the significant presence of his person, on the one hand places Kantor's achievements in the field of research into the role of performativity in current discussions about his art, while on the other it allows us to categorize him as a master of performative art, and obviously memory as a part of his life and art.

Transl. Małgorzata Leśniak

⁷² The tradition of Yizkor prayer (Hebrew *Yizkor* – “Recall,” “Remember”) is connected with the verse of the Book of Devarim (Book of Deuteronomy): *Forgive, o Lord... May God remember the soul of my father, my teacher, and I will donate charity for his sake.*

⁷³ T. Kantor, *Cicha noc*, t. 3, *op.cit.*, p. 181.



Photo 1. Tadeusz Kantor, *Wielopole, Wielopole* (*Little Rabbi played by Maria Stangret*), [premiere Florence June 23, 1980, phot. Antonio Sferlazzo]; photo from collection of Biblioteca Spadoni, Florence 2010



Photo 2. Tadeusz Kantor, *Wielopole, Wielopole* (*Little Rabbi played by Maria Stangret*), [premiere Florence June 23, 1980, phot. Antonio Sferlazzo]; photo from collection of Biblioteca Spadoni, Florence 2010



Photo 3. Tadeusz Kantor, *Wielopole, Wielopole* (*Little Rabbi* played by Maria Stangret), [premiere Florence June 23, 1980, phot. Antonio Sferlazzo]; photo from collection of Biblioteca Spadoni 2010



Photo 4. Tadeusz Kantor, *Today Is My Birthday* (*Jonasz Stern* played by Zbigniew Gostomski), [premiere Toulouse 10 January 1991, phot. Caroline Rose] © Caroline Rose

**TADEUSZ KANTOR: SZTUKA PERFORMANSU I PAMIĘĆ HOLOCAUSTU
(streszczenie)**

Kantor wykorzystywał w swych działaniach artystycznych (malarstwo, teatr, happening, zapisy partytur) materiały archiwalne, fotografie, pozostałości historyczne i pamięciowe. Pozostając w ścisłym związku z malarstwem i teatrem, wykorzystując efekty muzyczne/dźwiękowe, sięgając do źródeł literackich, dokumentów, zasłyszanych opowieści, wreszcie do własnych snów i pamięci, tworzył „sytuacje performatywne”. Zatem z punktu widzenia koncepcji performatywu można twórczość Kantora interpretować poprzez interdyscyplinarną perspektywę badań rozmaitych zjawisk życia społecznego i kulturalnego: historii, pamięci, literatury, sztuki, doświadczeń przeszłości. W tym artykule interesują mnie okoliczności, z jakich jego dzieło powstało.

Szczególnie ważne są – z tak przyjętej perspektywy – pokazy i recepcja prac Kantora w Norymberdze w 1996 roku i – wraz z pracami Josepha Beuysa – w Jerozolimie (wystawa *Beuys|Kantor. Remembering*) w 2012 roku. Fakt miejsca wystawy (Norymberga, Jerozolima) spowodował odczytanie idei realizacji Kantora jako silnie związanych z pamięcią Holocaustu. Pamięć Zagłady była ustawicznie obecna w jego obrazach i sztukach teatralnych, w których kwestionował granice tego, co teatralne, malarskie i nierozzerwalne z historią i pamięcią. Problem performatywności w dokonaniach Kantora dotyczy także zagadnienia możliwości granic performatywności, której źródło artysta ten upatrywał przede wszystkim właśnie w pamięci. Traumatyczny charakter pamięci „czasu wojny i panów świata” – rozumiał to Kantor – zmusza artystę do rewizji wypracowanych w przeszłości konwencji przedstawiania. Nowa poetyka często równała się chęci przekraczania granic wyznaczonych pojęciami takimi jak: mimesis, iluzja, realność, performance. Artysta tworzący po Holocaustcie musi swą sztuką upamiętniać ludzi i wydarzenia, których był świadkiem. Motywy odnoszące się do tradycji żydowskiej w Polsce i do pamięci Holocaustu uobecnione są w twórczości Kantora poprzez sugestywne obrazy, przedmioty, postaci i znaki uobecnione w „Teatrze Cricot 2”. Znaczenie muzyki, śpiewu, przedmiotów, niektórych obrazów i szkiców sytuują dokonania Kantora w polu badań nad rolą performatyki we współczesnych rozważaniach nad jego sztuką – z jednej strony, z drugiej – pozwalają o nim samym mówić jako o twórcy performatywnym. Kantor swą sztuką wychodzi poza melancholijną koncepcją traumy i prowokuje jednostkę do podjęcia rytuałów żałoby jako swego rodzaju społecznego performansu.

Słowa kluczowe: Holocaust, Żydzi, pamięć, teatr, performans, muzyka, śpiew, literatura, malarstwo, przedmiot, tradycja, historia, opowieść, melancholia, ironia.

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**THE PROMISES OF UNISM, ZONISM, CONTEXTUALISM,
AND (DIA)CRITICAL ART**
SOME ASPECTS OF PERFORMATIVITY IN POLISH ART
(1923-2008)

Abstract: The theoretical basis of this study is J.L. Austin's concept of performativity, which has enjoyed a great career in postmodernism, especially in deconstructionism. The author's purpose is not to deconstruct Polish classical modernism (Unism, Zonism) for the sake of deconstruction itself, but to show from a historical point of view the extraordinary rise of the idea of performativity in 20th century Polish art, which will illuminate the genesis of the post-vanguard stage of artistic development (Contextualism), but also the source of another difference emerging in the postmodern discourse: the so-called Critical Art, or perhaps (Dia) Critical Art. Because – as Paul de Man writes – the performativity of language generates history. The consequence of uttering problematic performatives is that artists become aware of language or of locution: from the uttering of modern performatives or perhaps of the implicit, aporetic performatives (promises) of the avant-garde, when Władysław Strzemiński named some works *Unist* paintings or sculptures, and Leon Chwistek created the promise of *Anti-Unism*, to the Contextualist relativisation of the illocutionary power of speech (logos), and to the postmodern deconstruction of Contextualism. Jan Świdziński's Con-Textualism performed a conscious shift from the descriptive to the performative utterance. (Dia)Critical Art delays the rhetic act in its perlocutionary actions (subversive provocations, scandals, traps, and cunning jokes or asteism). Many artists question the use of language *in good faith*, comprehending their pseudo-promises as medicine for the violence of the illocutionary power of utterance.

Keywords: performativity (performatives), speech acts (locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts), promise, allegories of reading (unreadability), asteism.

The theoretical basis of this long-lasting enquiry (and the presented recapitulation) into the main doctrines (or intrigues) in Polish vanguard and post-vanguard art is John Langshaw Austin's concept of performativity,¹ which has enjoyed a great career in postmodernism, especially in deconstructionism. In his book *Allegories of Reading* (1979), Paul de Man observed a process in

¹ See: J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1962.

which a grammatically unambiguous question – “what’s the difference?” – in fact asks, in its literal meaning, about a concept (the difference), the existence of which is in turn denied by the figurative meaning.² This is an instance of aporia – does or doesn’t a question *ask*, and if it does not, what is it, if not a question? The fact that sentences which look grammatically just like statements, but they do not actually state, that grammatically identical expressions are heterogeneous, and they acquire diverse meaning in different contexts, substantiates the existence of a figurative (or performative) language dimension. Such tension between grammar and rhetoric gives birth to a theoretical query: is rhetoric going to absorb grammar, or are we going to interpret rhetorical devices and figures as a deviation from the rules of grammar? To put the problem in other words: which is the primary and determining function of language – the referential or the performative one? If we were to accept the latter opinion, the above-quoted rhetorical question would be an instance and a model of understanding of a linguistic behaviour, which generates aporias (or *allegories* of writing and reading). The idea of a performative utterance was to be (or to be included as a part of) the performance of an action.³ The amplification of the performative function of language can be observed in Austin’s thought. The uttering of some or all sentences is (or is part of) *doing* something, or – as John Searle wrote about Austin’s theory – “some utterances were not sayings, but doings of some other kind.”⁴ The radicalization of the concept of performativity in postmodern thought would show the elementary, irremovable conflict in language, or the various ways of making a self-resistant statement: “The error is not within the reader; language itself dissociates the cognition from the act. Die Sprache verspricht (sich); to the extent that is necessarily misleading, language just as necessarily conveys the promise of its own truth. This is also why textual allegories on this level of rhetorical complexity generate history.”⁵ Therefore, I am aware that if I use the expression “the *theoretical basis* of this text,” I also promise a theory of self-resistant performativity. However, my purpose is not to deconstruct Polish classical modernism (Unism, Zonism) for the sake of deconstruction itself, but to show from a historical point of view the extraordinary rise of the idea of performativity in 20th century Polish art, which will illuminate the genesis of the post-vanguard stage of artistic development (Contextualism), but also the

² P. de Man, *Allegories of Reading. Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1979 (*Semiotics and Rhetoric*, pp. 3-19), p. 9.

³ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (2nd edn.), ed. J.O. Urmson and M. Sbisà, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1975, p. 60.

⁴ J.R. Searle, *Speech Acts. An Essay in Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge University Press, London 1969, p. 68.

⁵ P. de Man, *Allegories of Reading, op.cit.*, p. 277.

source of another difference emerging in the postmodern discourse: the so-called Critical Art, or perhaps (Dia)Critical Art. Because – as de Man writes – the performativity of language generates history.

THE DIACRITICS OF UNISM⁶

The performativity (and the self-resistant *ingenium* or wit) of language is the main object and at once the condition of aporetic reading, which strikes “the principle of charity”⁷, emergent at the time when the dominant critical model endorsed the “perfect unity of meaning” (a tropism of our mind or – historically – the impulse of post-Platonic henology), determined by the following three conditions:

1. freedom from semantic defects: a text need not be construed as containing portions which are devoid of meaning;
2. consistency: a text need not be interpreted as containing contradictory elements;
3. coherence: the meanings of particular passages of a text may be integrated into a unified comprehensive meaning.

The expression *diacritics of language* (where *diacritics* is understood neither as a word or a concept in the conventional sense) compels one to attempt a fresh reading of Strzemiński’s doctrine (1923-1928/31) – an aporetic reading, i.e. one that also strives to account for debatable matters. Specifically, one must undertake a reading of Unism itself which – as a particular construct of the logic of sensual experience, based on the belief in the possibility of overcoming the contradictions inherent in this experience and the force that formalizes itself through it – seems to have nothing in common with diacritics. This is the basic promise of Strzemiński’s Unism. According to a widely acknowledged opinion, Unism constitutes the cornerstone of Polish Modernism. It is not in any way unusual, therefore, that at a moment of weakness of fundamentalist thinking, a critical dialogue with this tradition was proposed. There is no doubt, after all, that the doctrine of Unism does not fulfill the above-mentioned requirements of transparency, consistency and coherence. Rather, Strzemiński’s views betray textual duality and irreconcilability. This being so evident, I am therefore reluctant to employ the tactics of reducing

⁶ K. Piotrowski, “Diakrytyka unizmu”, in: *Władysław Strzemiński 1893-1952. Materiały z Sesji*, Biblioteka Muzeum Sztuki, ed. J. Janik, Łódź 1994, pp. 139-151; “The Diacritics of Unism”, in: *Władysław Strzemiński 1898-1952. Materials of the Conference*, ed. J. Janik, The Muzeum Sztuki Library, Łódź 1995, pp. 138-149.

⁷ S. Carlshamre, *Language and Time. An Attempt to Arrest the Thought Jacques Derrida*, Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, Göteborg 1986, p. 57.

Unism to a cognitive difficulty (or performative aporia). My purpose is to furnish not so much an intellectual interpretation as a sensual-dynamic (textual) one, which will illuminate the genesis of Strzemiński's post-Unistic stage of artistic development and the source of yet another difference emerging in the avant-garde discourse.

Consequently, it becomes difficult to notice that the Unist doctrine defies metaphor, while pretending to be unequivocal. The very presence of two distinct discourses – the rhetorical (performative) and the logical (or perhaps descriptive or *constative*, i.e. not entirely true or false, according to Austin's terminology⁸) – should provoke a doubt whether metaphor as a rhetorical device of substitution, displacement and shift of senses does not spawn discontinuity in Strzemiński's system (and by 'discontinuity' I mean the development of conflicting, and thus mutually exclusive, presuppositions, assumptions or conclusions). What I aim to demonstrate here is that, contrary to widespread beliefs, the structure of Unism is not fixed because it is a product of displacement, an inadvertent effect of which is the equivocal character of this concept. Displacement denotes a complex process of comparison and differentiation.⁹ In rhetoric it is the process which allows to compare one thing with another, or distinguish (identify) them, due to congruence or analogy. The Unist doctrine is produced by displacement, as built upon the *nature vs art* metaphor.

As one of the many Modernist doctrines, Unism assumed that essentialist questions made sense. In the case of Strzemiński, this constant attempt to achieve systemic completeness and conceptual exhaustion of art's essence stemmed from his conviction that the laws of gender, universal to nature, should also govern art. The analogy between an *organism* and an *art form*, the shift from one category of reality into another, the structuring of art according to the patterns of nature, may, after all, turn out to be nothing more than a *defective attribution* or *semantic impertinence*. Strzemiński's own statements

⁸ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things...*, *op. cit.* 1975, p. 3. "But of course, as Austin now stresses, to say that the performative is thus contrasted with the constative does not mean that the performative has nothing at all to do with any question of truth or falsity; on the contrary, we noted right at the beginning that to issue, for example, the utterance 'I promise' is at least to 'imply' that I do in fact fully intend to perform and believe I can, and the performance is vitiated (in this case, abused) if that is not 'true'" (*Geoffrey James Warnock*, J.L. Austin, Routledge, London – New York 1989, p.112). Austin wrote: "Because we suggested that the performative is not altogether so obviously distinct from the constative – the former happy or unhappy, the latter true or false – we were considering how to define the performative more clearly. (...) When we originally contrasted the performative with the constative utterance we said that (1) the performative should be doing something as opposed to just saying something; and (2) the performative is happy or unhappy as opposed to true or false." (J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 67, 133).

⁹ *Displacement. Derrida and After*, ed. M. Krupnick, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1983.

seem to confirm this skepticism, because what we are dealing with here is not the usual similarity (which is, in everyday practice, restricted to within a particular kind or genus but rather, in contradistinction to the act of comparison, an act of assertion, which is metaphorising that implies an intuitive perception of similarity and difference. According to Paul Ricoeur, in the process of metaphorising, similarity must be understood as a tension (between sameness and difference) emerging in the act of assertion activated by a semantic innovation – it is a paradoxical perception of similarity in dissimilarity.¹⁰ Seeing the analogy between nature and art (*art as creation of unity of organic forms which parallel nature in their organic constitution*¹¹), Strzemiński is aware of the difference between them (*The laws of art can never be reconciled with the laws of nature*¹²). Let us then assert that the discourse of Unism was based on a typical metaphorisation – i.e. finding similarity in difference. It is important to acknowledge this constitutive and performative role of metaphor in the structure of Unism.

The extent to which this figure of descriptive or constative *placement* of art, set against the background of the issue of *topos* (place), is problematic, becomes apparent when we realize the consequences of another precarious displacement in Unism – namely the fact that the generative laws of the visual arts (specifically painting and sculpture) are supposed to be positioned within the genus of *place* or *ground*, initially understood *per analogiam* – later, however, interpreted unequivocally. That, because Strzemiński definitively eliminated the analogy in the *genus* of visual art, which, according to the general principle of Unism, should allow us to distinguish the *inherent givens* of painting and sculpture, or the coexistence of their generic differences. The *genus* in question is space, whose attributes, according to Kopro and Strzemiński, are continuity (indivisibility), infinity and lack of motion or any forces operating. It is easy to observe that Strzemiński sought the generic differentiation in the three-dimensional model of space, identifying it with the *place* of the sculpture, while he was reducing the *ground* of painting to two dimensions. This does not alter the fact that *places* thus defined are integral aspects of the same space. Is this evidence sufficient to claim the disjunction of painting and sculpture, or does it rather suggest that the concept of painting has been assimilated by a broader concept of sculpture? Is it really the *inherent givens*

¹⁰ P. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, transl. R. Czerny with K. McLaughlin and J. Costello, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1986, p. 6.

¹¹ “Katalog Wystawy Nowej Sztuki, Wilno”, [in:] Władysław Strzemiński, *Pisma*, Wrocław 1975, ed. Z. Baranowicz, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, pp. 10-14, p. 10.

¹² *BLOK* 1924 (2); W. Strzemiński, “O nowej sztuce”, in: *Idem, Pisma, op.cit.*, pp. 17-18, p. 17.

of painting whose presence is being confirmed here, or rather a performative (convention) shaped by history?

The purpose of painting is realized in the simultaneity of the optical-spatial phenomenon, which is achieved by way of isolating the canvas from the surrounding space, while the purpose of sculpture is realized through the integration of the solid object with the space that surrounds it, or through organizing this space. If sculptural design is founded on the law of continuity and indivisibility of space, what is the basis for the design of painting, which, after all, strives to breach the continuity, thus evading this law? What kind of law is it, then, that can be repealed – and what *inherent givens* are these that are illegitimate? The dilemma of such pseudo-descriptive statements results from the metaphor which operates here: we are seeing, paradoxically, two things in one. It is from this phenomenon that metaphor as a semantic innovation derives its ability to accumulate meanings through disrespect for semantic boundaries. In the case of Unism this accumulation has lost its original meaning. Unism is a radical rejection of the reality underlying it. All these considerations point to the difference between the afunctional (in painting) and the functional (in sculpture) concepts of unity, which cannot be integrated under the assumption of an unequivocal space view. This is because what we are dealing with here is a *category mistake* as a de-constructive stage between description and performative, conflicting space re-description. This displacement process over which Strzemiński did not exercise sufficient control – successive comparisons or identifying and differentiating, dissociating and identifying anew – induces a tension in the structure of Unism.

The performative aspect of Unism is aligned with the issue of the *sociological foundation of Modernism* in the 1930s. Strzemiński's idea of Unism's social credibility is based on a metaphor (a Unistic painting, whose parts are all of equal importance and interdependent, is analogous to socialist society). The figurative, performative moment arises from the impossibility of arriving at a static Unist transparency as a model of society which challenges the notion of individuality, because a *Unistic painting* and a *pro-Unistic society* are irreconcilable and far from semantic integration. This integration is precluded by the fact that a Unistic painting cannot be reduced to a sign as a reproducible (non-individual) object. The paradox of this metaphor arises from the fact that a Unistic painting, the dimensions and composition of which are determined by intuition (are individually motivated), is supposed to model a society the organization of which is superindividual in character. It is conceivable to assume some objective (normative) relations between the dimensions of a painting as a quadrangle (i. e. its quadrature or *golden section*); however, even this can only lessen but not resolve the difficulty, since there will always remain the problem of determining the initial data – the performative moment of an individual decision. This is the *promise* mentioned by de Man, passed on

in language as its own truth in the difference between grammar and rhetoric. The Unistic social project could not perform the referential function which it offered, only the performative one, expressing Strzemiński's unproductivist (as condemned by Mieczysław Szczuka) behaviour and his willingness to partake in the ideological debates of the 1930s avant-garde.

The post-Unistic stage of Strzemiński's artistic development resulted from having acknowledged the aporia in Unism and was an attempt to resolve it. Unistic discourse tried to convince us about the unambiguous generic transparency of both nature and art, refuting the primacy of metaphor in experiencing them. "But this metonymic clause – observes De Man – has as its subject a voice, whose relationship to this clause is again metaphorical. The narrator who tells us about the impossibility of metaphor is himself, or itself, a metaphor, the metaphor of grammatical syntagm whose meaning is a denial of metaphor stated, by antiphrasis, as its priority".¹³ We have seen how in the Unistic, contradictory play of meaning the internal /external metaphor is established and undone at the same time. That is why this post-Unistic voice is weaker, and why it betrays the symptoms of a disturbance in the Unistic discourse – as if this voice were aware of its being a metaphor. Considering this process of displacement positively, via the borrowing of the nature/art metaphor and its subsequent modifications, Strzemiński realized (under the influence of Leon Chwistek's criticism, no doubt) that the Unistic nature of painting as art is merely a *productive fiction*.¹⁴ According to Austin's isolation of the performative, these *Unistic* utterances do not describe or report or constate anything at all, are not true or false as a constative placement of art, but the *Unistic* uttering of the performative sentence – as a displacement of art space – is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as heterogeneous parts of art – *Unistic* images or sculptures.

THE PROBLEM OF VOICE IN ZONISM¹⁵

The thought of the aforementioned Leon Chwistek – philosopher, logician, art theorist, and avant-gardist – revealed, particularly in the crisis decade of the 1930s, a critical moment in the modernist tradition which he represented as the

¹³ P. de Man, *Allegories of Reading*, *op.cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁴ "Dyskusja L. Chwistek – W. Strzemiński", *Forma* 1935 (3), in: W. Strzemiński, *Pisma*, *op.cit.*, pp. 222-233, p. 230.

¹⁵ K. Piotrowski, "Antyunizm Leona Chwistka – o defensywnej fazie awangardy lat trzydziestych", *Artium Quaestiones* 2004 (XV), pp. 139-179.

founder of formism (1917-22)¹⁶, and then aptly criticized. From the current point of view, one may be fascinated with Chwistek's attack on the leading strategies of modernism, which was an effort to unify different spheres of life. An extreme case of the above as regards art theory was Strzemiński's mid-1920s Unism, which he also propagated in the 1930s as a model of social organization, pointing to similar social trends abroad. The Anti-Unist critique by Chwistek, who endorsed ontological and aesthetic pluralism, opposed the modernist tendency toward unification since the early 1920s. His position in art history is quite unique, as his conception, against the grain of tradition, eliminated the term *essence of art* from the aesthetic debate.¹⁷ Chwistek was one of the precursors of anti-essentialism, which later became characteristic of many Anglo-American aestheticians of the nominalist persuasion. He rejected the *logic of the genre* and *verbal metaphysics*, which in his times, mainly due to the influence of Husserl's phenomenology, predominated in aesthetics and in the general theory of art (e.g. Emil Utitz, Roman Ingarden).¹⁸ As a *critical rationalist*, he opposed the *Wesensschau* method, as well as all the intuitionist approaches in philosophy and science, which he proposed to replace with a constructionist method inspired by modern logic¹⁹. Chwistek rejected metaphysics in all its varieties, from the so-called theory of pure form, developed by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, to the unacknowledged assumptions inherent in everyday speech, because he considered metaphysical folly, including the effort to express art in ideas, the main cause of the modernist agonism and social evil (such as the Nazi theory of race). As an antidote, he propagated a philosophy of *healthy reason*, which was different from the self-contradictory and vulgar Christian or fascist bigotry, often instigating performative violence in social life as the so-called *common sense*. Contrary to common beliefs, Chwistek claimed that there is no unified reality, as such a thing would be self-contradictory. As a proponent of the theory of plural reality, which was relativistic, hypothetical-deductive, and based on axioms, throughout both interwar decades he insisted that, according to the principle of noncontradiction, various types of reality should be constructed and distinguished one from another according to specific criteria, contrary to henological metaphysics and common prejudice. For instance, individuals must not be naively replaced with our ideas of them, since this may lead to social evil (e. g. burning witches at

¹⁶ L. Chwistek, "Moja walka o nową formę w sztuce", *Wiadomości Literackie* 1935 (51-52), p. 5.

¹⁷ *Idem*, "Nowa poezja polska (I. Uwagi metodologiczne)", *Nowa Sztuka* 1922 (February), pp. 11-13; "Zagadnienie metody w estetyce", in: *Idem, Zagadnienia kultury duchowej w Polsce*, Księgarnia Gebethnera i Wolffa, Warszawa 1933, p. 234.

¹⁸ L. Chwistek, "Tragedia werbalnej metafizyki", *Kwartalnik Filozoficzny* 1932 (X), pp. 46-76.

¹⁹ *Idem*, "Zastosowanie metody konstrukcyjnej do teorii poznania", *Przegląd Filozoficzny* 1923 (3-4), pp. 175-187.

the stake). That point was particularly important in the era of growing anti-Semitism and various totalitarian, pseudo-scientific illusions. Distinguishing between the criteria of reality and avoiding ominous semantic substitutions was, in Chwistek's opinion, the main foundation and economy of common sense, and, by the same token, the ultimate instance of a just social order based upon the principle of consistency.

However, deconstruction of Chwistek's texts and biography – unfortunately, his philosophy of healthy reason did not save him, a leftist intellectual, from a naive belief in the good intentions of Soviet communists after the invasion of Poland in 1939 – demonstrates that he did not always practice what he preached. The best evidence of his fault is his artistic doctrine of *Zonism* (Pol. *strefizm*)²⁰, which seems to be continuously oscillating between *healthy reason* and *quiet folly*. In the 1930s Chwistek discovered the latter to be the main source of artistic creation. As it turned out, his radical program from the 1920s, when he endorsed the theory of plural reality and its plural formalization (stylization) in art, gradually turned more and more difficult to put into practice. What proved most troublesome was the inevitable problem of meta-narration and the question of the status of voice, which simultaneously argues for keeping many separate realities apart, to make the concept of reality non-contradictory, and allows them to mix (sic!), which brings into being new realities, implying a creative – or perhaps performative – moment, but also pointing to the danger of contradiction. Chwistek conceives his Zonism as a kind of meta-system encompassing various formalizations (stylizations) of reality in art. By the same token, it could not eliminate contradictions among different systems of reality, the formal properties of which were supposed to be integrated by the key concept of the *zone*. In Chwistek's doctrine, this concept is related to the construction of any kind of order. In the first plane, zones help us gain some orientation in the *matter* of the still indefinite reality. They derive from the primary schema²¹ which operate in the reality of the imagination, and the very principle of ordering is undoubtedly the basis for the primary ideas of the self-contradictory everyday speech (common sense), which must be criticized and constructed by healthy reason, introducing fundamental hypothetical-deductive concepts of the theory of knowledge.

²⁰ *Idem*, "Teatr przyszłości. 1. Krytyka metody genetycznej; 2. Problematyka formy", *Zwrotnica* 1922 (1-2); "Wielość rzeczywistości w sztuce", *Przegląd Współczesny* 1924 (24); "Moja walka o nową formę...", *op.cit.*; "Dyskusja L. Chwistek – W. Strzemiński", *op.cit.*; "Zagadnienie wiedzy w malarstwie", *Przegląd Współczesny* 1936 (176), pp. 29-42; "Elementy streficzne sztuki wyobraźniowej", *Sprawozdania Tow. naukowego we Lwowie*, vol. XVIII, pp. 165-166.

²¹ L. Chwistek, "Moja walka o nową formę...", *op.cit.*, "Dyskusja L. Chwistek"..., *op.cit.*; "Instynkt stłumiony", *Wiadomości Literackie* 1936 (39), p. 8; "Elementy twórcze sztuki dziecka", *Wiadomości Literackie* 1936 (42), p. 8.

This is how we reach the paradox of the irreducible oscillations between healthy reason and quiet folly, in which the recommended legitimacy of the constructionist method of healthy reason (which reconstructs common sense), the basis of Chwistek's theory of plural reality²², is cancelled by the performative automatism of a zonal ordering of matter. Assuming, according to the practice of deconstruction, the problematic status of metalanguage, one may inquire into the location of the voice when it speaks about various types of reality (or perhaps only of its zones?), such as (1) things and persons, (2) physical objects, (3) impressions, and (4) imaginings whose axiomatic versions as systems of propositions (the so-called propositional functions) are contradictory, since such is, after all, the rationale of the theory of plural reality. Following deconstruction, one must inquire about the status of the voice – is it logical or rhetorical? Does it produce constative or performative statements? A deconstruction of Chwistek's theory indicates that even though he attempted to separate healthy reason (which he located in the naturalistic reality of persons and things) from quiet folly by creating zones in the reality of the imagination, the results of his effort in this respect remained rather problematic. One might say that Zonism, as an instrument of visual analysis (grouping together similar forms and colors in a space limited in such a way that any two points in it can be connected without reaching beyond its limits), supported by the healthy reason method of construction is negated by Zonism as a substitute of metaphysics, i.e. an example of metasystemic unification, in which the central concept is precisely that of the zone. The zone itself is an expression of operating inherent schema and a manifestation of an unconscious creative instinct, i.e. a quiet folly which operates in the reality of the imagination and which healthy reason tries to submit to the banalized and unified naturalistic reality. The latter became more and more important in Chwistek's thought. At first, he believed that there was no single reality, but many of them, yet already in the 1930s he tended to claim that the naturalistic reality (just like healthy reason) is in a sense particularly privileged and keeps returning to us in everyday life. At that moment, he replaced his ontological pluralism with polyschematism, reformulating his theory of the plural reality with an epistemological (i.e. no longer ontological) bias, in keeping with the claim that reality cannot be formalized.²³ This did not mean, however, that reality became irrational (contradictory), but only that the process of formalization cannot be finished. By the same token, Chwistek might have supposed that perhaps there is some indefinite single reality, although it always manifests itself as a number of different schemas. This issue will never

²² *Idem*, "Trzy odczyty odnoszące się do pojęcia istnienia", *Przegląd Filozoficzny* 1917 (2-4), pp. 122-151; *Wielość rzeczywistości*, Zakład Graficzny „Wisłoka”, Kraków – Jasło 1921.

²³ L. Chwistek, *Granice nauki. Zarys metodologii nauk ścisłych*, Książnica – Atlas, Lwów – Warszawa 1935, pp. 211-232.

be resolved, revealing a defensive moment in the avant-garde thought of Chwistek, who in the 1930s made his program of the pluralization and formalization of reality less radical.

What is particularly significant in this aporetic reading of Chwistek's thought today is his awareness of the mutual subversion of healthy reason and quiet folly. He wrote: "One must, however, remember that all this is a clear negation of the essence of art. Art is relentlessly coming to grips with reality. Art consists of an illusory creating of what actually cannot be created. Art operates in that particular domain of reality which has been systematically destroyed or constrained by the healthy reason. This has nothing to do with individual ideas, but with the primary, common approach to reality, characteristic of everyone before he or she is trained how to struggle for survival or position in society".²⁴ Thus one may realize that the voice, on behalf of healthy reason, postulates the elimination of such metaphysical terms as *uniform* reality and the *essence of art* as counterproductive and contradictory, contrary to the experience of the diverse and changeable reality of art, yet on the other hand the same voice accuses healthy reason of systematically destroying and restraining art, which is a clear negation of its essence. What, then, is this voice speaking for – healthy reason or the quiet folly? Is it common sense itself which, distinguishing the theoretical order from the artistic one, accuses itself of those repressive measures, or is it quiet folly which, under the cloak of healthy reason, develops a commonsensical argument to secure its vested interests? We cannot continue reading Chwistek's discourse, since in the course of deconstruction (or schizoid analysis) we have reached the aporia of the voice, which is unable to choose either healthy reason or quiet folly. Rational argument and rhetorical persuasion intertwine here in an aporetic whole which cannot be unraveled, for arguments must not be considered regardless of the imagination which lets them be articulated. Read literally, the voice argues that the essence of art is the lack of any essence or dodging any theoretical grasp in holistic (essentialist) terms, since according to Chwistek, the experience of art consists in the pleasure derived from opposing one's own creation to someone else's, and this becomes a substitute of such a theoretical approach.

In spite of this ambivalence and overdetermination in Chwistek's text, the reader realizes that what dominates in it is a critique of the basic strategy of modernism in the 1910s and 1920s, when the avant-garde favored a program of analytical examination and purification of the essence of particular artistic genres, which resulted in the extreme formalism and Unism of Strzemiński. Chwistek wrote: "The need for unification is a certain state of mind that appears under favorable conditions which, however, are relatively rare and by

²⁴ *Idem*, "Sukces sztuki wyobraźniowej", *Czas* 1937 (86), p. 8.

no means superior to others. The requirement of immediately solving all problems and removing all ambiguities is out of place in any kind of research²⁵. Chwistek's Anti-Unist model of art, opposing the effort of *Kunstwissenschaft* to reduce it to its essence, to something simple – as Ingarden would say, to the simple *quale* – maintained as unabridged the contradiction between sense and nonsense; between the experienced but ineffable, diverse, and individualized artistic creation and the continuously constructed, schematic, and theoretical unity of art; between induction and deduction; between quiet folly as an unconscious and automatic creative instinct and common sense or healthy reason which wants to exercise control over it. All these differences are particularly important for us today. With his Anti-Unism, Chwistek attacked the main principle of the modernist economy – the tendency towards unification and all the related discontents of the 1930s. This promise of Zonism (especially Anti-Unism) turned out an unhappy performative, while he publicly accepted Stalinism after September 1939.²⁶ The subsequent section deals with the other promise – the liberation from Stalinist totalitarianism through participation in modern relativism.

TOWARD A PERFORMATIVE REVOLUTION (CONTEXTUALISM AS CON-TEXTUALISM)²⁷

Jan Świdziński – in his youth a propagator of socialist realism (1949-55) – has been since the mid-seventies one of the main representatives of the post-conceptual movement, of the kind whose purpose was to overcome the hegemony of American conceptualism which could be seen/disposed of critically, counter-culturally, socially or anthropologically – in the work of such artists as Joseph Kosuth in his *Anthropologized Art* (1974) period, as well as Hervé Fisher, Fred Forest, and Jean-Paul Thenot from the Collectif d'Art Sociologique. The doctrine of Świdziński was published in February 1976 on the occasion of a show by Polish artists at the St. Petri Gallery, run by Jean Sellem in Lund, Sweden, under the title *Art as Contextual Art*.²⁸ That, considered in confrontation with Kosuth's tautological model of art, enables us

²⁵ L. Chwistek, *Sens i rzeczywistość*, Wiedeń 1916, p. 56 (the typescript in possession of the Dawidowicz family).

²⁶ L. Chwistek, "Głos uczonego", *Czerwony Sztandar* 1940 (24 III) (153).

²⁷ K. Piotrowski, "Sztuka jako sztuka kontekstualna. Jan Świdziński o koegzystencji absolutyzmu i relatywizmu kulturowego", *Exit* 1996 (2), pp. 1220-1231.

²⁸ J. Świdziński, *Art as Contextual Art*, Sellem Galerie St. Petri-Archive of Experimental Art, Lund 1976; *Sztuka jako sztuka kontekstualna. Art as Contextual Art*, Galeria Remont, Warszawa 1977.

to appreciate Świdziński's contribution to the overcoming of conceptualism – the hegemony of the art model conceived in *Art after Philosophy* (1969).

When Świdziński appeared with his programme, he criticized first of all the concepts of the earlier Kosuth, whereas the later Kosuth looked to him more like a partner and an ally. He found, in my view, a gentle way of withdrawing from the extreme logic-semiotic interpretation of artifacts. In 1975 he compared the artifacts not to analytical sentences as did the earlier Kosuth (that is to sentences formed by means of extensional functors whose logical value depends upon the veracity or extension of the compounded sentences) but to sentences comprising intensional functors (their veracity depends upon the contents replacing the variables). In Świdziński's view the notion of intensionality, so disconcerting to logicians, explained more successfully the character of artistic activity than the tautological formula which does not increase our knowledge of reality while pretending to be true under any circumstances. The intensionality of artistic statements, that is to say the presence in them of functors (e.g. *I do not know, I do know, I believe, I suppose, I must* etc.) studied in terms of epistemological or deontological logic, indicates that they are restricted by pragmatic moments of experience. Świdziński was seeking a verifiable conception of meaning in art in order to fill the void of the arbitrary linguistic behaviour of conceptualists. Kosuth's tautology was – in Świdziński's opinion – an extremist consequence of the modernistic model of art which eventually proved to be relativistic. Świdziński criticized that model for its utopian character, arguing: "My language or the media I am using describe my world, but there is another world being described by my language as well. Art as a relativistic world of its time is an utopia. We are subjected to dependency and there is no escape from it".²⁹ That is why Świdziński referred to the operational theory of meaning, formulated in 1927 by Bridgman. The operationalists, relying on a descriptive method of defining a term by simply stating its properties, which could lead to sheer verbosity, asked for a description of the operations or activities owing to which we claim that the property is given to the object, be it in physics or social sciences and also – as Świdziński demanded – in the theory of art. Grounding himself in operationalism, Świdziński tried to overcome the verbosity of conceptualism with the famous sentence of Judd – incidentally, his nominative definition is an important performative motive in modern art – quoted by Kosuth. Mere naming is not enough because art as an *empty sign* assumes or loses meaning – artistic truth or acceptance – only in the sphere of a concrete social practice since it is a function of how reality is seen in a given society. The term *empty sign* does not mean *nothing* or *something new*. A correlative of

²⁹ J. Świdziński, *Quotations on Contextual Art*, ed. M. Gibbs, Het Apollohuis Gallery, Holand, Eindhoven 1988, pp. 18-19.

each subjective act is not so much an objective thing or product but another subjective act which determines its objective limitation. We cannot separate the objective act from the results of an action shaping the objective dependencies of that particular act. We cannot maintain a stiff opposition between the object as a pure, passive, contemplative cognitive relation making it possible to distinguish the subjective from the objective. We should acknowledge the dialectical or hermeneutical, if not textual interpretation of that opposition (all these different contexts – together with the performative revolution – can be found in Świdziński's writings within the space of a dozen or so years). Thus, the artistic practice is no longer identified here with a concrete medium, becoming instead a pragmatism of art, an attempt to define which operations should be performed at the given moment in order to receive social acceptance (it is an important aspect studied in Austin's theory of speech-acts). We can thus say that we see only our private values, in which we believe, while we only pragmatically assume the existence of universal, socially acceptable values. This opposition determines the structure of our intensional statement to be realized in our minds. That is why Świdziński has indicated that art acts in the area of epistemological logic while analyzing concrete beliefs and opinions that are current in a local context. Because the practice of Art as Contextual Art would reveal anomalies in a given society, that is the desynchronization of its structure. In that case, society – realizing that it regulates its practice with canons that in fact regulate nothing – is obliged to work out new canons for itself. Thus, Contextual Art was a social act of *deconstruction* (sic – term used by Świdziński in 1977 in the Polish version of the manifesto), destruction of the old and construction of new meaning. However, let us remember that *novelty* here signifies *difference*. Contextual Art, unlike the tautological formula of the currently existing polysemic art in a relativistic time, operates a concrete time of social practice, which excludes the accumulation and current existence of various meanings of art (similarly as in in non-monotonic logics now³⁰). That is why Contextualism had to be, paradoxically, a criticism and simultaneously an attempt to accept cultural relativism as its alibi. Contextualism was therefore first of all a simulation (anomaly) of the relativistic model of art. While overcoming Kosuth's tautology, that is a relativistic model of utopian freedom ignoring limitations imposed by the social context, Świdziński indicated that *Contextual Art* is opposed to a multification of meanings and thereby to relativity. The contextualist's practice looked like that of an ethnologist-therapist who travels from place to place and helps the locals to become aware of their context and

³⁰ See: K. Piotrowski, "Jan Świdziński w poszukiwaniu logiki bez cierni / Jan Świdziński in Search of Logic without Thorns", in: *Global Communication Festival*, ed. Ł. Guzek and B. Łukasiewicz, Mazowieckie Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej „Elektrownia” w Radomiu, Radom 2009, pp. 20-25.

to expose it in the correct conviction that they are entitled to be different and that this difference should be respected. We must not make our context absolute because, in accordance with the logic of incomplete realities propagated by Contextualism, a context can always be found which describes our own context.

However, following this relativistic logic of Contextualism we may ask: what is then the context of Contextualism which aspired to assume hegemony and dominate the Art World, but in doing so damaged and loosened its own option of cultural relativity standing for a respect of cultural differences? Thus, Contextualism reduces itself to the status of an *artistic ideology* and reveals the failure of the myth or contextual promise of cultural relativity, which it reduces to an excuse for its own artistic practice. Contrary to the supposition of cultural relativism that contexts are and may remain different, Contextualism's practice and rhetoric does suggest that they do not remain unconflicted with each other. Furthermore, what results from this confrontation of contexts is by no means a realization of one's own or of another's context, no feeling what one really is, but damaging and loosening of various excuses (alibis) in social practice. Contextualism, as a meta-artistic strategy, presupposed and promised that it was possible to define the context and thus to understand the strategy of the Art World, both in a Polish provincial town and in New York. Unfortunately, while celebrating the right to be different it fell victim to the very same right, because it was able to loosen and weaken the strength of Art World only for a moment. This apparent defeat suffered by Contextualism only confirms its own diagnosis, namely that we constantly have to face a confrontation. The latter will never be pacified by an enlightened cultural relativity combined with a liberal recognition of the difference, and an abstention of freedom, relativity, difference and dissimilarity is just mere verbalism, because we can have only such relativity and such multiplication of meaning, such polysemy of art as we can afford at a given moment, as we are prepared to differ with others. Because the truth of art is, in Świdziński's opinion, a function of the area within which the working of that art may be verified, albeit the ultimate verification never actually occurs. The incomplete realities constructed by people must function in some finite universe whose time is not relativistic. Writing about the *area's greatness* Świdziński anticipated the thesis about the *carnality* or performativity of our language. Indeed, we cannot rid ourselves of linguistic carnality. We are unable to exclude from the figurative (spatial and temporal) language a limitation, or perhaps a performative limitation of reason by imagination which is responsible for the production of anomalies (a *promise*, according to Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida) in language. Because the fundamental promise or rationality of Contextualism consisted in the constant reconstruction of proxemic relations by examination of changing contexts, changing discourses

and types of rationality in the attempts at self-determination, for which we have no strength and patience. Thus, each act of criticism (decision) is more of a performative act of the imagination or of corporal impulsiveness than a result of a rational overcoming of the contextuality of our language of its rhetorical blindness. This is the prospect shown by Świdziński's book *Art, Society and Self-consciousness* (1979) in which he was attempting to define the structure of intensionality in the global context with which he was dealing³¹. This is his main written work – something of an introduction to the book *Freedom and Limitation – The Anatomy of Postmodernism* (1987)³².

Thus, Świdziński's definition of the global context or rather structure of the intensionality in which various logics coexist and regulate our image of the world presupposes that the fundamental promise of Contextualism is problematic because the particular context cannot be ultimately transparent, as the principle of pleasure active in the diacritical language is not transparent to human reason. The universum of the preferred logic of the game is neither full like that of the fundamental logic of norms and the antagonistic logic of freedom, which supersedes normative logic, nor is it empty like epistemological logic, which brings about an armistice in the constant struggle between the abovementioned logics. It presupposes a method for reducing the cognitive dissonance, which is to make our convictions relative, when we are not strong enough to give up the pleasure generated by the logic of freedom against the logic of norms. In the logic of the game we cannot assume that a decision taken in some situation will be equally right in another situation. The notion of truth is not very helpful here because profit and only profit is the principle in the logic of the game. Therefore, we are participating in different ways in the logos that has in the last decades questioned itself by an amplification its diacritical function: "The alternatives," says Świdziński, "may be accepted. The opponent's view can be such an alternative. But if this attitude is assumed as one for theoretically possible frontiers (for which the intellectuals are heading) then we are confronted with a paradox. By approving all alternatives we are inclined to accept (as an alternative) also a view excluding ourselves together with our point of view"³³.

In my book about Świdziński I have demonstrated that this crypto-alternative for the main promise of Contextualism was his secret collaboration with the communist state security service in Poland (1953-59) which first induced him to perform a relativisation of this embarrassing episode and of his own responsibility, and afterwards to conduct a contextual reduction of the

³¹ J. Świdziński, *Art, Society and Self-consciousness*, Alberta College of Art Gallery, Calgary – Canada 1979.

³² *Idem, Freedom and Limitation – the Anatomy of Postmodernism*, ed. B. Dyson, Syntax Publishing Calgary, Canada 1985.

³³ J. Świdziński, *Quotations...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 55-56.

hidden context of the artist's life. My hypothesis is that Contextualism was for him a *refugium* functioning similarly to the aporetic concept of *unreadability* in Paul de Man's deconstruction (the problem of *unhappy consciousness* in relationship with his collaboration with the German Nazis in Belgium). In both cases we can observe a performative act of apheresis (in a paralinguistic and quasi-phonetic sense). That is the process of a growing weakness in the contextualists' voice or the disappearance of Contextualism, which evolved in the direction of late Świdziński's Con-Textualism – a loss of contextual transparency.

POSTMODERN DECREATION AND (DIA)CRITICAL ART

Since 1989 in Poland, after this textual, performative revolution, art has dealt not so much with the observation of the initial, positive conditions of its sense, but rather with the kind of aberration related to the performative production of this sense. Now art or (Dia)Critical Art is not stagnating, searching for *innate dates* or *primary structures* any more, but there is a growing sense of lack of representation. Let us repeat after Wolfgang Iser that, contrary to the aesthetic utopia of modernism, it develops the dialectic of aesthetics and anaesthetics which, however, is not ordered through a metaphysical-anaesthetic perspective, but produces the "culture of a blind blot".³⁴ That is so because it is believed that any construction of purposes, substitution, repression or representation is an aberration, a metaphoric correlate of the absolute blindness of language, which precedes any figuration or meaning. Let us ask a question: what is the status of such a statement? If it is logical, then the ancient liar paradox appears; attempts to eliminate it were undertaken in the modernist era by differentiating language from metalanguage, when everyday language of common sense was criticised for its internal inconsistency as it enables us to speak about speaking about faulty speaking. Language is internally conflicted because it admits the reception of performative utterances, including expressions such as *all* at the very moment of saying it. Yet the growing sense of unreality or transreality, which we have in mind, is not the modernist progression of hyperreflection, consisting in automatic multiplying of metalanguages by the logical subject. It is easy to find out, taking the phenomenology of this hyperreflection into account, that after some time this logical voice becomes fiction which we do not have to treat seriously if, after

³⁴ W. Iser, *Aesthetisches Denken*, Philipp Reclam jun., Stuttgart 1990. See: K. Piotrowski, "Wprowadzenie; Anestetyczna perspektywa rozumu (w ujęciu Wolfganga Isera)", in: *Promieniowanie myślokształtów – od estetyki do anestetyki*, ed. K. Piotrowski, *Seminaria Orońskie*, Vol. III, Centrum Rzeźby Polskiej w Orońsku, Orońsko 1998, pp. 11-20, 24-42.

a couple of steps of self-reflection, the subject stammers and forgets what he was talking about at the beginning. Instead of progressively accumulating knowledge, an opposite movement appears, in which we are interested – the postmodernist erosion of narration. The groaning and fading of the logical voice is caused by the fact that, in its economy of self-knowledge, it cannot reject the limitations dictated by the imagination. The imagination, in turn, is not able to satisfy the voice's perverse appetite for current infinity because the eye can move from image to image and from word to word only horizontally, looking for some meaning in the cumulative, vertical act of comprehending. With time, imagination is satiated and reveals its time-and-space inefficiency. Unable to hold the manifold sensuality, it confuses the latter and is forced to forget in order to absorb anew. This inefficiency of the imagination, which feels heavy with its disobedience like sleepy eyelids, determines the condition of language. Language, because of its ability to talk about itself, does not acquire self-knowledge. It rather acts against itself. Perhaps, however, in stating the absolute blindness of language, the conflict in language is not so violent as it is not an act of self-cognition but a performative artefact, according to Jacques Derrida.

In relation to constructivists, concretists or minimalists, Sławomir Marzec's discourse³⁵ is abnormal, in that he admits that it is not his wish to reject *the metaphysics of reduction* but rather to complete it in a fairly perfidious way. He accepts the above mentioned belief that every presentation is limited by the imagination, and every act of seeing is connected with its detriment at the same time. Already the modernists had foreseen that the philosophy of reduction was a merely *productive fiction*, which was why their ideology of seeing broke down. This anaesthetic (extra-sensual) aspect was summed up by Wolfgang Iser as follows: "The psychology of a character has taught us that every experience is vested in not only inexperience, but also that certain elimination, certain selectivity is constitutive for the possibility of experience. Meanwhile, neurophysiological studies have rendered this relationship more understandable; in general, cognitive systems may operate actively in the environment because they are self-referentially (*selbstreferentiell*) closed. Thus we can see not because we are not blind, but we can see because we are blind to majority; in other words, in order to make something visible in the same act something else must be made invisible. There is no aisthesis without anaesthesia – not even once in the simplest experience".³⁶ Marzec's art, which merely provokes certain visual situations, suggests such blindness first. What dominates here is either simple plastered walls made from brick, fragmentary,

³⁵ See: K. Piotrowski, "Dekreacja / Decreation", in: *Sławomir Marzec, Obrazy i nie obrazy / Images and Non-Images*, Galeria Kronika CS Bytom – Galeria Grodzka BWA Lublin, Bytom – Lublin 1997.

³⁶ W. Iser, *Aesthetisches Denken*, Philipp Reclam jun., Stuttgart 1993, p. 31.

lacking continuation or composed into themselves as self-sufficient entities, or dark, greyish paintings resulting from mixing all colours, whose initial form is always a square and its fragments rendered absent or dislocated. The artist said in 1995: "Look at these forms – it cannot be said that they are equally real". It is a form merely resembling a square whose bottom right missing fragment, cut off on the curve, seems to appear at the top left edge. Further on, on the left, a fragment of a circle outlined with a crayon on the wall seems to allude to this lack or, along with the mentioned repetition of the lack, creates a presumed circle into which the initial, potential square could be inscribed. There are more similar situations merely based on suppositions. Thus, what we face is not a form, but only form programming. The imagination synthesizes automatically, without asking whether there is any foundation for this. It blindly believes that the external fragments are a repetition of the missing ones, though there is no possibility of accurate measuring. Finding out in the language the primacy of the programmed, imagination-torturing matrix automatically makes us look for its completion and repetition, which Marzec calls a *pre-figuration* (aesthetic, symbolic satisfaction). His visual situations suggest that it is difficult to speak about any figuration whose material or phenomenal correlate is unambiguous and simple. Phenomenality would never be revealed, were it not for the equal strength of the categories of substance and relation. The material equal strength of these categories means that it is difficult to consider them in the cause-and-effect or impulse-and-relation scheme. There is no materialist narratology here together with its chronological order, causality and establishment, but there is pulsation of changing viewpoints and emotional intensity. The action of these categories does not seem necessary but rather optional, as if they were two different people, two different performative acts and not a coherent, *a priori* mechanism of the whole representation. The economy of senses is not that of the whole, and the economy of spirit is not that of a fragment. Neither the whole nor a fragment occur in their pure form. There is no dominating trend (although it is not the economy of the game that matters here but its transparency). Seeing does not provide a ground for the differentiation of the material and phenomenal correlate. Neither the primacy of the ideal measurement can be fulfilled in the material background of the imagination, nor does the background itself occur in its pure concreteness and randomness, free from the activity of any competing phenomena. The language expressing the will of self-cognition is misled, failing to consider its overdetermination, that impossibility of transforming its material character (writing), phenomenal cognition through any ideology. This is a situation of anaesthetic apathy, which, however, Marzec refuses to accept, although he applies such programming of the form which does not enable the phenomenality to crystallize. Thus, he is not concerned about the aesthetic situation of creating (releasing a phenomenon). He wrote in 1996: "A decreasing situation

is a possibly maximum reducing visibility to pure apriority and such problematization of perceiving, sensing, which does not lead to constituting a reality 'of higher rank' but which makes it impossible. Therefore this is the activity striving for self-reduction, for contemplativeness itself. What matters is not the sense as an affect of symbolization of the reality but openness to the sense due to rendering this reality 'transparent' (...). I truly believe that only such 'unreality' allows art to 'remember about the undetermined human fate'. Because emptiness, senselessness, impossibility are not a limitation to our existence but a challenge, probably a major one. Stifling them with our personality, sensitivity, intelligence may be interesting and pleasant, yet in consequence it is only illusory" (from a letter to me, 1997). A decreationist does not want to have a lot in common with modernist decomposition (e.g. sense-creating destruction of grammar) or deconstruction. Any leveling of representation is, according to Marzec, an undoubtedly positive phenomenon as long as it can open a perspective whose limit is sense. Decreation of representation reverses the process of disenchanting reality, or, as Marzec states, including the sense in the sense-creating process of the imagination (decomposition) which is blind (deconstruction). It cannot be stated that decreation is a conjunction of decomposition and deconstruction. We cannot be satisfied with the profane decomposition or the blindness of deconstruction if we can sense all the time that a sacred energy of performativity exists in the marginal and still unstructuralised sphere which is not the object of our symbolic acts. The situation of decreation loosens the sense-creating mechanism of the imagination, not so much in order to produce some meaning or a blind blot but rather to turn the imagination into a less closed, self-referential system.

On many occasions, language reveals some extraordinary efficiency in giving names and insulting, thanks to its arbitrariness. It fixes relationships between words or loosens them when they are too uneasy. When we forget its conventionality and replace it by total naturality, we fall inevitably into ideology. The work of Robert Ruma and its reception seem to be a well thought-out whole, but it is not a whole however.³⁷ The theatricality envisioned in 1993, when he was arranging his atmospheric and aesthetically refined installations – with the use of an enormous pool, and a figure of the mother of god almost floating above the water, or a goldfish and an accompanying harpist – seems to achieve the desired effect, but only in a space set aside by society for this purpose. In this context, the artist has the right to create aesthetic reality, and his statements seem to have a binding force as a performative act. Their problematic nature reveals itself, however, when the artist

³⁷ See: K. Piotrowski, "Sztuka somatycznego społeczeństwa / Art in a Somatic Society", *Magazyn Sztuki* 1995 (2), pp.16-39.

persistently uses props (e.g. the figure of Christ immersed in aquaria) creating a framework in his sacred performance statements. Reference here is to the act of sacrifice or consecration made by the priest when changing a fragment of material into a cult or mystic body. The similarity between the props of the artist and those of the priest is purely external – iconic, and not substantial. The intention of the artist's performative statement may be extremely particular and unclear, but its form – imitating the frame of the priest's performative statements – also seems to imitate its fundamental character, suggesting the moment of sanctification, and therefore profanation. Reality created on the basis of the sacrament of priesthood cannot be established by any secular power – whether it is the law, or artistic conventions, whose existence is frivolous and short-lived. This difference in performative statements creates tension during the reception of Rumas' work, leading to conflict. The mob which destroyed Rumas' *The Municipal Manoeuvres. Hot-water bottles X 8* in 1994 in Gdańsk was not thinking soberly, but acted under the influence of religious fanaticism, forgetting that in destroying the artist's work and recovering the religious cult objects *profaned* by him, they were questioning by their very attitude the foundations of their faith. Religious fanaticism, as an anomaly of religious discourse, forgets about the performative rights that faith establishes. The blind mob, seeing familiar objects lying on the street, incorporated itself into the role of the priest to such an extent (like in the theatre, when we subconsciously feel our way into the action and imitate the actors) that it unlawfully sanctified the devotional articles bought by Rumas, creating an apparent alibi for its aggression against his work of art, which was only a quasi-sacred and *implicit* performative. "They were not proper persons and had not the 'capacity' to perform it".³⁸ Thus, for sanctifying figures, it is essential that here only a priest acts. His acts must be spoken *seriously* and so as to be taken *seriously*. It must not be a joke or a work of art. "Speaking generally," Austin writes, "it is always necessary that the 'circumstances' in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, 'appropriate', and it is very commonly necessary that either the speaker himself or other persons should 'also' perform certain 'other' actions, whether 'physical' or 'mental' actions or even acts of uttering further words."³⁹ And thus, a fanatical attitude towards a mystic body, which idolatrously reduces it to an easily imitated and profaned material covering, changes itself into quasi-blasphemy. Rumas gave a choice study of the touristic, consumptive religiousness of our hot-headed iconophiles as one of the figures in our native pop-culture. His provocation demonstrated that the body is possessed by the systems of power

³⁸ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things...*, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

in the same way as the cattle so prized by traders, while the symbols of ideology are as interchangeable as moulds in a sandpit.

Some Polish artists understand and exploit this tension between the illocutionary power of religion and the irreligious parody of this capacity as a pseudo-performative ritual, which is a deceptive, surprising and scandalous act of so-called Critical Art. In 2000, Hubert Czerepok intercepted the power proper for holy mass in the intention of the success of his exhibition at the Gallery BWA (the Office of Artistic Exhibitions) in Zielona Góra. Then he filmed this mass and exhibited the film in the Gallery. Obviously, it provoked the intervention of the Catholic Church. If Czerepok sinned against this rule of *decorum*, the Church – after this scandal, that is the cynical trap – had to at least verbally annul this gift of prayer, which is an inward and spiritual act. It excludes this unconventional, fictitious and unserious or *infelicitous* act of Czerepok as a blasphemy – his *unhappy* and curious *Mass*, which is not a misunderstanding because he generated or consciously provoked a *false* promise of a serious experience of real mass. His *Mass* as a perlocutionary utterance must be classed as a misfire because such use of ritual procedure is not accepted by the Catholic Church in Poland. “Language,” wrote Austin, “in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly – used not seriously, but in ways ‘parasitic’ upon its normal use – ways which fall under the doctrine of the ‘etiolations’ of language. All this we are excluding from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances”⁴⁰.

I do not claim that the described Critical Art is unserious, but that the artistic seriousness and the performative power of art depends on a critical function and a new redescription of the existing status quo, as in the work of Przemysław Kwiek. In 1998, he sent a request for a financial grant-in-aid (e. g. a two-year scholarship) to two large corporations – Coca Cola and Pedigree Pal. In these letters Kwiek promised that he would give up producing paintings with the inscriptions: *Coca Cola must be a bad drink since they have to advertise it so much in order to be drunk*, and: *Doesn't to Pedigree Pal add the meat from the dead dogs? And cats' too*. The public relations experts did not respond to this blackmail and Kwiek realized his threat, which would have been realized also in case of a positive answer. “In no case,” wrote Austin, “do we say that the utterance was false but rather that the utterance – or rather the act, e. g. the promise – was void, or given in bad faith, or not implemented, or the like. In the particular case the promising, as with many other performatives, it is appropriate that the person uttering the promise should have a certain intention, viz. here to keep his word: and perhaps of all concomitants this looks the most suitable to be that which ‘I promise’ does describe or

⁴⁰ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things...*, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

record. Do we not actually, when such intention is absent, speak of a 'false' promise? Yet to speak is 'not' to say that the utterance 'I promise that ...' is false, in the sense that though he states that he does, he doesn't, or that though he describes he misdescribes – misreports. For he 'does' promise: the promise here is not even 'void', though it is given 'in bad faith'. His utterance is perhaps misleading, probably deceitful and doubtless wrong, but it is not a lie or a misstatement. At most we might make out a case for saying that it implies or insinuates a falsehood or a misstatement (to the effect that he does intend to do something): but that is a very different matter."⁴¹ Kwiek's artistic proposal is not a banal criminal act of money extortion because his threat is a pseudo-promise, the artistic status of which is an alibi for his subtle joke or – as this cunning intrigue may well be described – an example of asteism.⁴² The promise with an artistic intention is neither true nor false in a special sense because it is a void performative as a provocation *in bad faith* which has to be realized and exhibited without moral and legal limitations.

The performativity of art depends on a radical introduction of fictionality into reality, which can cause a spectacular transformation of the latter. For instance, Rafał Bujnowski painted a self-portrait, then he photographed this picture and passed on the small photos with his visa application to the US embassy in Warsaw. When the artist received the visa, he attended a pilot-training course that featured a flight over Manhattan. This parabasis of the Polish artist, that is his *Visa Portrait* (2004), ridiculed the utopia of ubiquitous control. Bujnowski found a gap in the conventionalized procedure established by the performativity of administration which acts automatically, like in an everyday ritual. Now the act of art is first of all a perlocutionary one, that is contemporary art has to produce a surprising effect as a counterintuitive act against the most conventionalized domain of illocutionary speech.

This is obvious when we study Krzysztof Zarębski's pseudo-statements. In his work a critical moment appears – in *Clown in a Bathtub* (2008)⁴³, when as a performer he cannot stand the arranged perversion and in his authoritative, angry voice he tells his naked daughter Kasia to get out of the tub: "Get dressed! Now!" Yet, ethical statements and other performative actions (e.g. orders, commands, etc.) must be appropriate. Therefore, this illocutionary speech act can be understood by the sophisticated public only as a tragicomic moment of *menippea* – a constructive or deconstructive, carnival element of

⁴¹ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 10-11.

⁴² See: K. Piotrowski, "Estetyka jako asteiologia", *Sztuka i Filozofia* 2010 (36), pp. 30-37; "Acutum ingenium – asteiologiczny motyw w estetyce i sztuce", *Estetyka i Krytyka* 2012 (1), pp. 151-168.

⁴³ K. Piotrowski, *Krzysztof Zarębski. Erotematy słabnącego Erosa. Przyczynek do dziejów sztuki performace w Polsce i Stanach Zjednoczonych po 1968 roku*, Mazowieckie Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej „Elektrownia” w Radomiu, Radom 2009, pp. 279-284.

satyriasis, used by Zarębski as a perlocutionary utterance for enhancing the orgasm in a performer's work, eventually only as a *phonetic act* and a *pathic act* without reference to a *rhetic act* (*phone*, *pheme* and *rheme* are terms used by Austin⁴⁴). His command is not a manifestation of healthy fatherly concern, resulting from a sense of ethical responsibility. According to Austin, we can say: "Some perlocutionary acts are always the producing of a sequel, namely those where there is no illocutionary formula".⁴⁵ After all, this incomplete, orgiastic locution ends in offering his naked daughter to public view in Ray Kelly's basement in New York.

THE PROMISE OF A CONCLUSION

Today, traps of this type are arranged consciously because a huge educational work has been realized in art during the 20th century. The consequence of uttering problematic performatives is that artists become aware of language or of locution: from the uttering of modern performatives or perhaps of the implicit, aporetic performatives (promises) of the avant-garde, when Strzeмиński named some works *Unist* paintings or sculptures, and Chwistek created the promise of *Anti-Unism*, to the *Contextualist* relativisation of the illocutionary power of speech (logos), and to the postmodern deconstruction of Contextualism. Świdziński's Con-Textualism performed a conscious shift from the descriptive to the performative utterance. Dia)Critical Art delays the rhetic act in its perlocutionary actions (subversive provocations, scandals, traps, and cunning jokes or asteism). Many artists question the use of language *in good faith*, comprehending their pseudo-promises as medicine for the violence of the illocutionary power of utterance. Therefore, the uncompleted promises and the self-resistant performatives of (Dia)Critical Art are not the acts performed *in* saying something or *of* saying something, but parasitic, quasi-perlocutionary acts *by* saying something, in order to increase the thaumatic etiolations of language.

⁴⁴ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things...*, *op.cit.*, p. 95.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, *op.cit.*, p. 118.



Photo 1. Sławomir Marzec, *The Paintings and Not-Paintings Cycle*, No. CXVIII, 1995, oil on canvas, 150 x 150 cm, Photo: S. Marzec



Photo 2. Przemysław Kwiek depicts in public space an oil painting 100 x 140 cm: *Doesn't to Pedigree Pale add the meat from the dead dogs? And cats' too – The Avant-Garde Depicts Lilacs as Charts Cycle* (dissimulation of Van Gogh), depicting as the *Documented Action* (term of Przemysław Kwiek, headword from 1988), Dąbrowa – Łomianki, 1999, Photo: Pr. Kwiek



Photo 3. Rafal Bujnowski, *Visa Portrait*, 2004, oil on canvas, 35 x 35 cm,
Courtesy of the Artist and Raster Gallery



Photo 4. Rafal Bujnowski, *Visa Portrait*, 2004,
Courtesy of the Artist and Raster Gallery



Photo 5. Rafał Bujnowski, *Visa Portrait – Lesson 2*, New York, 2004, Courtesy of the Artist and Raster Gallery



Photo 6. Krzysztof Zarębski, *Clown in a Bathtub* (with Kasia Zarębska), Ray Kelly Cellar, New York, 2008, Photo: Zosia Zaleska-Bobrowski

**OBIETNICE UNIZMU, STREFIZMU, KONTEKSTUALIZMU I SZTUKI
(DIA)KRYTYCZNEJ****NIEKTÓRE ASPEKTY PERFORMATYWNOŚCI W SZTUCE POLSKIEJ (1923–2008)
(streszczenie)**

Teoretyczną podstawą tych badań jest koncepcja performatywności Johna Langshawa Austina, która zrobiła wielką karierę w postmodernizmie, a szczególnie w dekonstrukcjonizmie. Celem autora nie jest dekonstrukcja polskiego klasycznego modernizmu (unizm, strefizm) dla samej dekonstrukcji, lecz ukazanie z historycznego punktu widzenia nadzwyczajnego rozkwitu idei performatywności w sztuce polskiej XX wieku, co naświetli genezę postawangardowej fazy artystycznego rozwoju (kontekstualizm), a ponadto ukaże źródło kolejnej różnicy w postmodernistycznym dyskursie (tak zwanej sztuki krytycznej czy – możemy też powiedzieć – sztuki (dia)krytycznej). Ponieważ – jak pisał Paul de Man – performatywność języka generuje historię. W rezultacie wypowiedzania problematycznych performatywów artyści stali się świadomi języka czy lokucji: począwszy od wypowiedzania modernistycznych performatywów czy – lepiej powiedzieć – implikowanych, aporetycznych performatywów (obietnic) awangardy, kiedy to Władysław Strzemiński określił niektóre dzieła jako *unistyczne* malarstwo czy rzeźba, a Leon Chwistek stworzył obietnicę *antyunizmu*, do kontekstualnej relatywizacji illokucyjnej mocy mowy (logosu) i postmodernistycznej dekonstrukcji kontekstualizmu. Kon-tekstualizm Jana Świdzińskiego dokonał świadomego przesunięcia od deskryptywnej do performatywnej wypowiedzi. Sztuka (dia)krytyczna porzuca akt retyczny w swych perlokucyjnych aktach (subwersyjnych prowokacjach, skandalach, pułapkach i chytrych dowcipach czy asteizmie). Wielu artystów kwestionuje użycie języka w *dobrej wierze*, rozumiejąc swe pseudo-obietnice jako lekarstwo na przemoc illokucyjnej mocy wypowiedzi.

Słowa kluczowe: performatywność (performatywny), akty mowy (lokucyjne, illokucyjne, i perlokucyjne akty), obietnica, alegoria czytania (odczytania), asteizm.

PERFORMATIVE LIFE:
CONNECTIONS AND FEATURES

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ART AND THE POSTMODERN AESTHETICIZATION OF THE WORLD

Abstract: The 1980s will be remembered as a great change in the functioning of art. The term *postmodernism* consolidated this feeling even more. However, no one knew what this new functioning was to be all about. At first, the issue of freedom was raised, the freedom that paralyzed artists; if everything is permitted, if all manners of artistic expression are acceptable, then how to differentiate between the important and the unimportant? Later, it was pointed out that art is subordinated to a business way of thinking; here the term *art industry*, coined by Jeffrey Deitch, seems to be extremely accurate.

The 1980s show that everything can be art or can be seen as art, even sports. But that does not mean that the difference between the popular and elitist understanding of art has disappeared. It took a different form; it can be treated now as the difference between the aestheticization of different spheres of reality and the institutionalization of artistic practice. Elitist art should be sensitive to the processes of aestheticization, should make us sensitive to what we do not see, since to see one thing means not seeing something else. "There is no seeing without a blind spot." Artists' activity should make us sensitive to what the processes of aestheticization conceal or try to conceal, what they want us not to see.

Keywords: art industry, aestheticization, popular art, elitist art, blind spot aesthetics, communal artwork, sports as art.

CAN ONE IDENTIFY POSTMODERN ART WITH ART INDUSTRY?

Jeffrey Deitch claims that the 1980s will be remembered as a time of great change in the functioning of art. The 1980s will not pass into history thanks to Anselm Kiefer's and Julian Schnabel's paintings, or Jeff Koons's and Haim Steinbach's sculptures, but thanks to the record high prices for modern art at auctions in London and New York. It is enough to remember the auction at Sotheby's, where van Gogh's *Iris* was sold for \$53.9m (1987), and an even more famous auction at Christie's, when another painting by van Gogh, *Portrait of Doctor Gachet*, was sold for \$82.5m (1989)¹. Equally memorable is

¹ See: P. Watson, *From Manet to Manhattan. The Rise of the Modern Art Market*, London 1992.

Sotheby's auction in Moscow in 1988, at which a painting by a hardly known Russian artist, Grisha Bruskin, was sold for \$416,000, and two other paintings of his were sold for almost \$200,000. Is it possible then that the 1980s will not be remembered as a time of neo-expressionism or neo-conceptualism, but as a time of radical change in the place and role of art in culture? A time in which the art world transformed itself into an art industry?

In the 1980s art began to be treated as an investment. Information on the prices of artworks began to appear on the front pages of newspapers, and investments in art began to be compared with investments in shares, bonds, gold, diamonds and other financial assets. Art became part of the modern, post-industrial economy, a cultural capital. It was to attract investors and tourists, create new workplaces and contribute to the economic development of cities and regions. In cities aspiring to the status of global ones, museums of modern art and artistic quarters in the old, devastated, postindustrial districts began to be established. Art started to play an ever greater role in forming the image of cities and large corporations which used art for the promotion and advertisement of their brands. Art became the highest, post-material consumer item, a dynamic sector of the postindustrial economy (*creative industry*), and, thanks to the media, it penetrated into the main current of classless consumer culture. According to Deitch, "[c]onsumer culture absorbed the world of art to such an extent that an artist had no way out – whether he liked it or not, he became a part of this phenomenon."²

The fact that the 1980s witnessed an essential change in the functioning of art was obvious to everybody, also to the artists – the term *postmodernism* consolidated this feeling even more. However, no one knew what this new functioning was to be all about. At first, the issue of freedom was raised, the freedom that paralyzed artists; if everything is permitted, if all ways of artistic expression are acceptable, then how to differentiate the important from the unimportant? How are we to establish the criteria for art evaluation? The post-modern principle *anything goes* was to make it impossible to evaluate and assess art, and the fear of falling into the modernist criteria of art evaluation demanded the avoidance of evaluative judgments – instead of recognizing something as better or worse, we began to consider it as *other*. "Otherness" became the key concept, and postmodernism began to be treated as an introduction to the unavoidable presence of the other (other people, other cultures, other lifestyles), which should not be dominated or subordinated, but accepted with all its otherness. Later, it was pointed out that art is subordinated to a business way of thinking; here the term *art industry*, coined by Jeffrey Deitch, seems to be extremely accurate³.

² J. Deitch, "Art Industry", *Flash Art* (Polish edition), 1992, No. 3, p. 78.

³ Ales Debeljak highlights three characteristics of the postmodern institution of art: 1) the renunciation of subjectivity and individuality of works (infinite technical reproducibility of art

However, what does it mean that art became an art industry in the 1980s? First of all, this means a change in thinking about art, the appearance of a new discourse which started to renounce the old modernist reflection on art. When Jeffrey Deitch was writing his article on the art industry, he was an art adviser to Citibank and thus had a convenient vantage point from which to observe the increasingly close relations between art and business, and to witness the birth of a new discourse on art.

WHAT ELSE CAN BE VIEWED AS ART?

Art has always accompanied man. There are no known cultures in which we could not find objects or activities proper to what we might today call art. Therefore, we can say that art is ascribed to man, and in some inseparable way is connected with the human condition. However, inasmuch as art is eternal, the forms which it assumes are subject to changes depending on time and place. This was what Karel Teige had in mind when he wrote that the early 20th century avant-garde abolished old *forms* of art. Russian constructivists and Italian futurists showed two ways of transgressing the existing art forms. Teige claims that constructivism abolished the old art forms for the sake of projecting a new world, while futurism did so for the sake of play, surprise and marvel: “The human need for poetry, spiritual play, the need for impressions evoked by colours, shapes, sounds, words or fragrances is probably unchanging, but it does not mean at all that we would always need easel painting, symphonic music or novels.”⁴

In his considerations over what is perceived as art in different cultures, Denis Dutton, an aesthetician from New Zealand, listed seven features. The first distinguishing feature of art is *expertise* or *virtuosity* – a master command of some skills, which require talent, long-lasting exercise and knowledge. Art is here the opposite of routine, correct rule-compliant actions, while an artist is the opposite of a craftsman. The second distinguishing feature is *non-utilitarian pleasure* – art objects and performances are viewed as a source of pleasure rather than as tools with which to achieve some practical goals, and also the products of such performances which bring pleasure, even if they happen also to perform practical functions. Art is a promise of pleasure and happiness (*promesse de bonheur*). The third feature is *style* – art objects and

works), 2) the acceptance of commodity fetishism (total integration into commercial circuits), 3) political resignation (art does not represent an alternative reality). A. Debeljak, *Reluctant Modernity*, Boston – Oxford 1998, p. 173.

⁴ K. Teige, “Konstruktyvismus a likvidace umeni” (1925), in: *Programy ceske architektury*, eds. J. Pechar, P. Urlich, Praha, 1981, p. 169.

performances are made in a recognizable style, and have their own style. Style may be a characteristic of a particular culture, region or time, but it can also be completely individual. The fourth feature is *imitation* – art only imitates things that really exist or are imagined, which distinguishes it from the practical, everyday, serious reality, in which we are submerged. Art is a break, a breathing space from everyday life. The fifth feature of art is “*special*” *focus* – it arouses intense emotions and a sense of community. The sixth distinguishing factor is *imaginative experience* – it takes us from the practical, earthly world to the imagined, invented and untrue world. Finally, the seventh distinguishing feature of art, according to Dutton, is *criticism* – i.e. the existence of a more or less specialized and extensive language (discourse) allowing us to evaluate activities and objects as excellent, mediocre or unsuccessful⁵.

The features which Dutton identified are so broadly defined that they include not only the phenomena which are considered art in a given culture, but also many para-artistic or simply non-artistic phenomena. Admiration for the masterly command of some skills extends into almost all human activities, starting from cooking to public speaking, from cleaning a house to driving a car. As in the case of style, the presence or absence of which can be observed in all kinds of human behavior, starting from the way one moves and walks, dresses and speaks to the way of eating, listening, dancing or smoking a cigarette. Gertrude Stein asked: “Have you any way of walking? Have you any way of sitting? Have you any way of singing? Have you any way of sleeping?”

A common understanding does not allow us to separate art from non-art, since art is considered here as a gradable feature, i.e. it is attributable to different phenomena to a varying degree. Depending on its intensity, a certain feature or set of features can be interpreted in artistic terms, in categories of art. Not every preparation of a meal is an artistic act, but the preparation of a meal that requires exceptional skills and knowledge, provides pleasure which goes far beyond the simple appeasement of hunger, focuses attention on its shape, color, smell and thus impacts one’s imagination, and has style can certainly be recognized as art – the art of cookery. Obviously, this can be viewed as a symptom of the aestheticization of everyday life rather than art, but such an approach that emphasizes the reception process leaves out of the equation the creative aspect and the generation of a phenomenon that becomes an object of aesthetic pleasure. It is interesting that in the European tradition it is easier for us to agree to the aestheticization of certain phenomena of everyday life than to consider them as manifestations of art.

⁵ D. Dutton, “Aesthetic Universals”, in: *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, eds. B. Gaut, D. McIver Lopes, London – New York, 2001, pp. 210-212.

SPORT AS ART

In his consideration of contemporary sports events, Wolfgang Iser had no doubt that nowadays sport is subject to aestheticization; however, he hesitated to consider sport as art. According to Iser, “[m]ost people would agree with the idea that contemporary sport is highly aesthetic, but few – if any – would say that sport is art. But when I started arguing against sport’s potential art status I found myself – to my surprise – in an ongoing conflict. For every argument which came to my mind, I found a better counter-argument. Step by step the conventional arguments turned out to be unconvincing and insufficient. Instead I got more and more convinced that sport can, for very good reasons, be viewed as art.”⁶

Sport, like art, is a symbolic activity, distinctly separated from everyday life and governed by its own rules – is it not, from the practical point of view, ridiculous to drive a Formula 1 racecar repeatedly around a race track, or to run several laps around a track? In sport, as in the performing arts, we have to deal with a spectacle which is a purpose unto itself. Sport can make someone famous or rich, just like film, theatre or music can, but the purpose of the sport spectacle is the spectacle itself or – to put it differently – in sport, a victory can be won only as a result of a sporting accomplishment. It is difficult to accuse sports of a lack of creativity. Each sports discipline has its own strictly defined rules, but it is not those that create the spectacle; it is enough to compare two football matches to discover this. The rules are the same, but the spectacles created by football players are often impossible to compare, which is why we speak of artists in football or even football geniuses. It is also easy to reject the argument that sport does not express any ideas, emotions or emotional states, i.e. that it is unexpressive. One would have to be exceptionally insensitive to fail to see dramaturgy in sport, to fail to notice human dramas expressed in the intensified, condensed form of a tale about human ambitions, wishes, victories and defeats, about the eternal fabric of human destiny.

Although sport does not have a precise scenario, theorists of the happening were ready to offer an analogy with basketball matches; in both a sport spectacle and a happening we are faced with a very schematically outlined scenario. Sport is a celebration of chance. The result of a sporting contest is not known, predetermined in advance – the winner can be someone who was not the favorite, unforeseen circumstances may occur, someone may be disqualified, someone else may get injured, etc. Yet, has not art made use of chance for some time, at least since Dada? Does it not use structures that are open, rather than pre-designed?

⁶ W. Iser, “Sport – Viewed Aesthetically, and Even as Art?”, in: *XIV International Congress of Aesthetics, Aesthetics as Philosophy*, ed. A. Erjavec, Ljubljana, 1999, p. 213.

As can be seen from this overview, all the attributes which were to distinguish art from sport – the symbolic status, self-purposefulness, creativity, a significant message, a precisely designed form – can be challenged, since either art itself has questioned them or we can easily find them also in sporting events. What conclusions can be drawn from this? Welsch arrives at the following: “Whereas sport – for obvious reasons – is popular, art is – for equally good reasons – elitist. Many artists are aware of this and suffer from not having the support of the crowd (...). Contemporary sport – in contrast to modern art – matches the *sensus communis*. It is art for everyone; it is probably *the* popular art of today. It is certainly the most social art form. The huge increase of public interest in sport is an indication of this⁷. Does this mean that sport will replace art, or perhaps it has already done so? Welsch is far from such conclusions. The fact that nowadays sport can be treated as a manifestation of popular art, does not necessarily mean that art should become similar to sport or that it follow the direction indicated by sport. On the contrary, it can mean that art should not compete with the contemporary processes of aestheticization, manifested, among others, by postmodern sport, or sport-as-popular-art. Perhaps the time has already come for art to emphasize more strongly the difference between itself and the aestheticization of everyday life.

Wolfgang Welsch speaks about sport as popular art, the one which offers commonly understood experiences and emotions, but he also speaks about sport as “the most social art form”, which effectively satisfies the *sensus communis* of today⁸. In turn, Julian Young, referring to the Heideggerian fourfold (*das Geviert*), describes certain sport events as “communal artworks”, i.e. works perceived and experienced not by an individual recipient, but by a collective, communal one⁹.

Heidegger says that man dwells poetically on this Earth¹⁰, and that man lives in the fourfold – on the Earth, under the Heaven, among mortals and gods. Art reminds us of this truth of human existence, of man’s place in the world, his being-at-home. For Heidegger, art is always a reminder of what is most important for man, namely that only dwelling poetically on Earth can one provide one’s life with a truly human dimension, recover one’s home and stop being homeless. Thus, when Heidegger asks, after Hölderlin: “What is art for

⁷ *Ibidem*, 234.

⁸ Welsch uses the Kantian understanding of *sensus communis*, i.e. not as common sense, but as public spirit (*Gemeinsinn*), which is supported by emotion, but commonly important, i.e. felt by all. See: I. Kant, *Krytyka władzy sądzienia* (translated by A. Landman), Warszawa, 1964, p. 119-120.

⁹ J. Young, “Artwork and Sportwork: Heideggerian Reflections”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 1999, no. 2.

¹⁰ Heidegger refers here to Hölderlin’s poem: “Voll Verdienst, doch dichterisch wohnt / der Mensch auf dieser Erde”.

in a destitute time?”, he means not only our time, our contemporaneity, but each time that man has lost the truth of his being-in-the-world, this truth of which art can remind him, more or less metaphorically, since art speaks by means of the visible about the invisible, about mystery, the sacred, the world of the immortals. In our times, art also reminds us of it, but this is art created by individuals and addressed to individuals, it is the art of Hölderlin, Rilke, Cezanne, Van Gogh. Meanwhile, we do not have art that would be experienced by a community, modeled after the Greek drama, where the truth about the world and our being-in-the-world is experienced collectively by a community. As it is known, Heidegger was rather skeptical about Wagner’s idea that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* would renew the tradition of the communal artwork, a collective and communal artistic experience – looking at the Beyreuth Festival, it is hard not to admit that Heidegger was right. Julian Young asks whether in our times certain sports events can be seen in terms of such collectively experienced artworks, and, referring to his own culture, he quotes the example of a rugby match or, to be more exact, the annual rugby match between New Zealand and Australia.

At the stadium, we can see representatives of all social classes, from the prime minister and members of the government, through prominent figures of public life, to ordinary citizens. The social hierarchy remains visible, but all viewers form a unity during the match, manifesting in many different ways and by means of different props this unity in the face of the shared Other – the team and fans of the neighboring Australia. The spectators unite not only with one another, but mostly with their own team, which represents the community gathered at the stadium. The structure and function of the spectators, who are not only viewers but also participants of the spectacle, reveal the existence of the community and its character just like the team which represents the community. The playing field becomes the arena for the clash, in the course of which some truth about the community will be expressed. However, before the clash of the mortals – i.e. the competitors – begins, both parties will turn to their gods, asking them for support, and they will prepare various incantations and talismans which are supposed to gain the gods’ favor. However, the gods are capricious and unpredictable in their decisions, and when turning to them for some uncertain support, we are aware of our mortality, dependence and limitations, as well as the ineffectiveness of our attempts to subordinate being to ourselves. This way, the game unites mortals with gods, the Earth with the Heaven – rain, wind and other weather conditions influence and disturb the course of the game, thus showing us that we must always adjust our strategies and our modus operandi to the circumstances, that we must necessarily bring them into harmony with the Heaven and the Earth. To sum up, “(...) a great sport spectacle is the happening of truth, uniting of our quadrangle which restores our place in it – our being at home – and again refers us to these

simple and essential decisions which make of us and of our community being to which we belong. Certainly, theatre and sport are two different things but as far as the way Heidegger defines an artwork as a combination of a quadrangle, great sport and great theatre may be considered as artworks.”¹¹

AN ELITIST AND POPULAR UNDERSTANDING OF ART

The difference between the popular and elitist understanding of art can thus be treated as a difference between the aestheticization of different spheres of reality and institutionalized artistic practice. Aestheticization implies that we can look at everything as at an artwork, everything can provide us with an intensive aesthetic experience – because, to a great extent, it is a question of our attitude towards different manifestations of social life. Institutionalized artistic practice means, on the other hand, that all the developed cultures – and our culture is undoubtedly one of these – have created a complex set of institutions serving art, and these institutions have achieved a monopoly on using the name “art”, sometimes with such adjectives as “high”, “pure”, or “proper”. The most important question is the language developed by art institutions, the language of criticism about which Denis Dutton writes – an extended discourse, allowing us to describe certain products and activities as artworks, and to evaluate whether they are a success or failure. Both Welsch and Young refer to the language developed by art institutions, the language of artistic criticism, when they try to convince us that a sport event may be an artwork.

Therefore, we can understand aestheticization as an extension of the language developed by art institutions into those areas which have not so far been described and evaluated using this language. But is it only the issue of the language? Wolfgang Welsch denies this. It is not only the issue of describing a sports event in artistic terms, but of the change of a sport event into an artwork experienced by a community. The media play an increasingly big role in this change of a sports event into a spectacle; it is they who decide what sports events will be shown, not only on TV but also in the stadiums, and how – i.e. with what attitude – we shall watch them. The media have the capacity of transforming each event into a media event, i.e. an event that can be reproduced an infinite number of times and shown as if prepared especially for the media. Welsch sees the mediatization of sports as one of the essential features of the postmodern sport event – postmodern sports wants to be a spectacle and does everything it can to be transformed into it; moreover, the

¹¹ J. Young, *Artwork and Sportwork*, p. 274.

present deaestheticization of art and the aestheticization of life facilitate this process, since it is popular culture, of which sports is a part, that has taken care of the everyday satisfaction of the masses' aesthetic needs. Therefore, we should distinguish aestheticization in the general sense from postmodern aestheticization.

In the most general sense, aestheticization means imbuing selected phenomena of social life with aesthetic meaning. Something that was not previously perceived in aesthetic categories is now beginning to be seen and evaluated in such a way. Thus, aesthetic criteria push out and replace other criteria. Aestheticization understood in such a way is something well known – the aspiration towards the aestheticization of the human world. This aspiration was present in the programmes of the Arts and Crafts Movement, Secession (*Jugendstil*), as well as in the programmes of Russian constructivism and Italian futurism, and also in *art deco* and Bauhaus. Even earlier, Hegel, aware of the commonness of this aspiration, wrote that “art is like a fleeting game in the service of pleasure and entertainment, it can be used to decorate our rooms, to provide the external side of life with a pleasant, alluring form and to distinguish various objects by beautifying them.”¹² Hence, what is new in today's culture and what astonishes us is not an aspiration towards aestheticization, or beautification of the world, but the delivery of this aspiration – a utopia of the aesthetic world, realized before our eyes, which provokes the question: Where was the mistake – in the aspiration towards aestheticization or perhaps in the delivery of this aspiration?

What is wrong with the fact that the world of today is becoming beautiful? What is wrong with the fact that our houses, streets, shopping malls, restaurants, bars, pubs, the goods which we buy and the politicians for whom we vote become more beautiful, that our world begins to be populated by *pretty people*? What is wrong with nice, clean trains? What is wrong with kind staff in shops and hotels, and on trains? What is wrong with beautiful stadiums, which change into our cities' representative buildings? What is wrong with all this? Why are we not delighted by those changes? Why do they raise doubts?

It is equally difficult to criticize aestheticization as to criticize consumption; in both cases a danger appears of the elite usurping the right to decide what is proper or improper aestheticization (consumption). Agnes Heller calls this situation “a dictatorship over the needs of people.”¹³ The protest against today's aestheticization, generally a weak one, and in Eastern Europe even weaker and colored with hypocrisy, is maintained in the name of beauty and truth. According to critics, today's aestheticization has distorted, vulgarized

¹² G.W.F. Hegel, *Wykłady o estetyce*, transl. by A. Landman, Warszawa 1964, vol. 1, p. 13.

¹³ A. Heller, *Dictatorship Over Needs*, Oxford 1983. An example of such a dictatorship over needs was Marxism, which in a way explains the reluctance of East European intellectuals to criticize aestheticization and consumption.

and banalized the notion of beauty, and that is why instead of becoming embellished, the world changes into a kitschy simulation of beauty. Leaving out of consideration the fact that this evaluation is subjective and excessively generalized, one should note that today's aestheticization is not imposed from above. It is not the state which creates a total artwork, but the market. Shopping malls can be aestheticized in different ways, and if they become aestheticized similarly, this means that such are the expectations of those who visit those temples of consumption, and that such aestheticization suits them. We must accept the choices of the majority, because it is to the majority to whom all these attractions are addressed; at best, we can look for other places and do our shopping somewhere else. Wolfgang Iser, however, uses still another argument, claiming that excessive aestheticization leads to anesthesia, i.e. anaesthetizing us to real beauty. "When everything is beautiful, nothing is beautiful."¹⁴ This is a formula often used by Baudrillard. Does beauty, however, really need the contrast of ugliness? Cannot we recognize beauty (different forms of beauty) without confronting it with ugliness? And is it so difficult in today's world to find this contrast? After all, we know run-down and devastated areas of cities, we meet poor people and beggars in railway and subway stations, and in the aestheticized spaces we easily recognize people who do not fit that aesthetic decorum. Even if we do not find ugliness contrasted with beauty in our own close environment, we can see it on our television screens – every day the media show us people living in worse, less lucky and less aestheticized parts of the world.

The second type of criticism accuses aestheticization of making our world artificial, untrue and inauthentic, and consequently leads to substituting emotions and experiences, subordinating reality to marketing strategies and promotion, serving mainly the development of the market and the growth of consumption. Iser calls this "an epistemological aestheticization," and considers it as much more important than the aestheticization of everyday life. Nevertheless, here the views of the German aesthetician are no longer so unequivocal. Epistemological aestheticization had its theoretical foundations in Kant's philosophical system, and its full form is represented by Nietzsche's philosophy¹⁵. In the 20th century such an attitude was accepted by all main philosophical systems, from hermeneutics to analytical (or post-analytical) philosophy – this approach assumes that the image of the world is not given to us, but that it is created by us, since we create images or schemes by means of

¹⁴ W. Iser, "Procesy estetyzacji – zjawiska, rozróżnienia, perspektywy", transl. by K. Guzalska, in: *Estetyka poza estetyką*, Kraków 2005, p. 70.

¹⁵ Nietzsche claimed that our theories of reality were always built on "running water" and "unstable foundations", which is why they did not have any other grounds than our imagination. See: F. Nietzsche, "O prawdzie i kłamstwie w sensie pozamoralnym" (1873), in: F. Nietzsche, *Pisma pozostałe 1862-1875*, transl. by B. Baran, Kraków, 1993, s. 191.

which we perceive the world. This active, creative participation in producing images of the world is described by Welsch as the “aesthetic turn”, the consequence of which is the acceptance of plural, multitudinous images of the world and its life forms. We should reconcile ourselves to the multitude of these images and the forms to which they correspond, just as modern art reconciled itself to pluralism: nobody expects a cubist painting to be evaluated according to the criteria of surrealism, or pop art to be evaluated according to the criteria of abstract expressionism, or that the criteria of suprematism will be applied to the paintings of Joan Miró, or else the criteria of neoplasticism to the works of René Magritte. Our thinking about the world should become more flexible, more sensitive to differences and adjusted to the variety of forms of life today, in short – more aesthetic¹⁶.

THE BLIND SPOT OF AESTHETICS

Thus, postmodern aestheticization means two things: the aesthetic formation of reality and the aesthetic understanding of reality. The former is focused on beauty, while the latter – on truth. The former leads to the hyperaestheticization of everyday reality, while the latter to making reality less real, depriving it of stable, strong foundations. The consequence of both is the change of reality into a spectacle created by the media. However, we are more interested in the attitude of art to aestheticization than in aestheticization itself. Aestheticization does not blur the difference between art and reality; quite to the contrary, it makes this difference more acute. Wolfgang Iser favors aesthetic criticism of aestheticization. Apparently, this sounds paradoxical. In a world where everything undergoes aestheticization, including the truth criterion, it is a genuine paradox to demand from aesthetics to suppress the postmodern machinery of aestheticization, whose driving powers are the market, the media and fashion. However, Iser does not mean to stop the processes of aestheticization – this, after all, seems impossible. Instead, he wants us to be sensitive to the processes of aestheticization, and that is why he introduces blind spot aesthetics. Art should sensitize us to what we do not see, since to see one thing means not seeing something else: “There is no seeing without a blind spot”¹⁷

¹⁶ “Epistemological aesthetisation is a heritage of modernity”, Iser writes, developing his earlier ideas from the text “Die Geburt der postmodernen Philosophie aus dem Geist der modernen Kunst,” published in *Aesthetisches Denken*, Stuttgart 1990. See: W. Iser, “Estetyczne podstawy myśli współczesnej” in: *Estetyka poza estetyką, op.cit.*, p. 103. Iser calls aesthetics “the first philosophy,” which replaced in this aspect the old philosophy of being (antiquity), philosophy of consciousness (in the modern age) and philosophy of language (20th century). *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ W. Iser, “Procesy estetyzacji – zjawiska, rozróżnienia, perspektywy”, transl. by K. Guzalaska, in: *Estetyka poza estetyką, op.cit.*, p. 71.

Artists' activity should make us sensitive to what the processes of aestheticization conceal or try to conceal, i.e. what they want us not to see.

To offer an example: if football matches are communal artworks, then we can ask: what do those works conceal? Let us refer to two 'football' works by Maurizio Cattelan, who is well known in Poland. The first one is a black granite slab engraved with a list of all the matches lost by the English national football team; it was exhibited by Cattelan at the D'Offay Gallery in London (1999). The second is a more extensive work titled *Stadium* (1991). The former work speaks about pride, and reminds the English about all of their defeats, engraved in granite and preserved forever. These were the matches lost to Scotland, Ireland as well as Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Belgium, Switzerland and other countries. There is also a defeat in a game against Poland, 0:2. Hence, we have here a list of all the countries which managed to humiliate the proud Albion at least once. Cattelan strengthened this message, leaving out the dates when the particular matches took place and keeping only the names of the countries and the scores of the defeats. The artist said that he was prepared for a variety of reactions from the English public, and Nancy Spector, who interviewed him, considered the work to be a shot in the very heart of English culture, taken by a fan of the opposing team¹⁸. In his other work, Cattelan formed a football team consisting of black immigrants from Africa, which he called *A.C. Furniture Sud*. He dressed them in black sportswear, and on the shirts, in lieu of the sponsor's name, he had the word "*Rauss*" (German for "go away") printed, and made them play a table football game during the art fair in Bologna. Francesco Bonami wrote that Cattelan's work did not explore any social problems, but merely combined two phenomena – the Italians' passion for football and their aversion to immigrants from Black Africa, who in the 1980s came in large numbers to Italy, and that it transferred those two phenomena from the area of popular culture to the area of high culture (art fair), thus submitting it to reflection¹⁹. Referring to Welsch, it can be said that the idea was not only to show the invisible, but to submit the invisible to reflection, i.e. move it from the affective level to the reflective one.

In a different way, Cattelan reproached Poles with a blind spot in his work entitled *La Nona Ora* (1999). The image of the Polish pope, lying on the floor and crushed by a huge stone (a meteorite), was in such stark contrast to the widespread iconography of John Paul II that many Poles found the sculpture impossible to accept. An opposite reaction was enjoyed by the pope's portrait composed of Brazilian soldiers, photographed and placed on a billboard by

¹⁸ "Nancy Spector in Conversation with Maurizio Cattelan", in: *Maurizio Cattelan*, London 2005, p. 12.

¹⁹ F. Bonami, "Static on the Line: The Impossible Work of Maurizio Cattelan", in: *Maurizio Cattelan, op.cit.*, p. 54.

Piotr Uklański. The latter became a site of spontaneous meetings and prayers after the pope's death (2005).

Jeffrey Deitch agrees with Welsch that the processes of aestheticization cannot and should not be stopped. However, he thinks that the art world should not ignore those processes, but join them since this offers a chance to enlarge the importance of art in today's world. For a long time, aestheticization has not been performed by amateurs, nor has it been spontaneous; it is professionally organized and managed, and artists participate in it whether they want to or not. They do so when they exhibit at large art festivals (The Venice Biennale, Documenta in Kassel, Biennale in Berlin, Moscow, Liverpool, Manifesta, etc.), when they take part in art fairs or in art projects organized by museums. All these undertakings are more and more expensive, and require more and more financial support²⁰. Deitch based his belief that artists can effectively join the aestheticization processes on the observation of modern art, and precisely on the observation of the work of Christo, with whom he had an opportunity to work. Let us compare Christo's *5,600 Cubicmeter Package* – a tower filled with air and erected in a park in Kassel during Documenta IV in 1968 – with Marcel Duchamp's *50 cc of Paris Air* (1919). Christo's work is a spectacular construction, erected in an open space, attracting everybody's attention, while Duchamp's work is a modest souvenir from Paris, of no material value, brought for a friend and collector, Walter Arensberg. Let us compare another work by Christo, *Wrapped Monument to Vittorio Emanuele* in Milan (1970), with Man Ray's *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse* (1920). The mysterious, unreal object of Christo's stands in the centre of the city, while Man Ray's work entertained only the artist's friends. And finally, *Wrapped Reichstag* (1995), which for several weeks changed the vicinity of this building in Berlin into a spontaneous folk festival. This last work could be perceived from a purely visual standpoint – one would admire the play of colors which changed during the day; the shape, resembling that of an iceberg, a waterfall, a great mushroom, a sailing ship; however, it could also be analyzed and interpreted on the level of social and political meanings – namely, the Reichstag as a symbol of German democracy, the burning of the Reichstag as the beginning of the Nazi dictatorship, the Reichstag as the headquarters of the authorities of the Third Reich, etc. This is similar to another one of Christo's big projects, namely *The Gates* (2005), which for sixteen days changed Central Park in New York.

Christo shows that art can successfully join the processes of aestheticization. However, this does not mean that the difference between art and aestheticization disappears. It still exists because it is the art world, or – more

²⁰ The first Documenta in Kassel in 1955 cost DM 364,000; the second in 1959 as much as DM 1 million, the fourth in 1968 – DM 2 million, the sixth in 1977 – DM 4.5 million, the eighth in 1987 – DM 10 million, and the ninth in 1992 – DM 19 million.

precisely – the institutions which constitute it, develop the language, and the discourse that we use when speaking about art. Jeffrey Deitch would like this discourse to approximate the real functioning of art institutions, and would like to decrease the tension between artistic discourse and art institutions, as if he did not realize that it is just this tension – as Jindrich Chalupecky convinces us – that is the driving force of the art world²¹.

Postmodernist aesthetisation is a consequence of the conviction developed by the neo-avantgarde, namely that everything can be art, starting from a sports event, and ending with a T-shirt with the inscription “Expiring for love is beautiful but stupid”²²; from a shopping mall or pub to a demonstration of anti-globalists. Everything can be artistically stylized and provide interesting, stimulating emotions and experiences. Here the concept of experience (*Erlebnis*) seems to be the key one. Postmodern culture – or, to use Guy Debord’s phrase, the culture of the spectacle – is supposed to stimulate emotions. If we expect from art something more than intense emotions and experiences, then aestheticization will appear to be merely an introduction to art, as is the T-shirt with Jenny Holzer’s truism. Not only is the art of today dissimilar from aestheticization, but it leads exactly in the opposite direction; if aestheticization incites and stimulates our emotions, then art, even if it uses elements of aestheticization, leads towards a reflective experience (*Erfahrung*).

A football match may be a communal artwork, may offer its spectators strong emotions and feelings; however, we can easily find in it all the elements which Denis Dutton mentions – virtuosity, disinterestedness, style, a spectacle drawing our attention and stimulating our imagination. We can decide that a good football match is a spectacle more interesting than many typical productions of popular culture, films, TV series, sitcoms, quiz shows and talk shows. However, this does not change the fact that a football match – and sports in general – is situated within the area of popular culture, which categorization it does not even try to oppose; that is precisely what distinguishes it from art, which employs blind-spot aesthetics, since it does not want to be absorbed by the modern society of the spectacle.

²¹ J. Chalupecky, “Art and Transcendence”, *Flash Art*, 1979, June-July.

²² <http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/contemporary/Jenny-Holzer.html>.

**SZTUKA I POSTMODERNISTYCZNA ESTETYZACJA ŚWIATA
(streszczenie)**

Lata osiemdziesiąte ubiegłego stulecia przejdą do historii jako wielka zmiana w funkcjonowaniu sztuki. Termin „postmodernizm” jeszcze to poczucie wzmacniał, ale nikt nie wiedział jak ta zmiana będzie wyglądać. Początkowo mówiono o paraliżującej artystów wolności – jeśli wszystko wolno, jeśli wszystko jest dopuszczalne, to jak odróżnić to, co w sztuce ważne od tego co nieważne? Później zaczęto mówić o podporządkowaniu sztuki myśleniu businessowemu i tu wprowadzony przez Jeffrey’a Deitcha termin „przemysł artystyczny” wydawał się niezwykle trafny.

Lata osiemdziesiąte pokazały, że wszystko może być sztuką, nawet widowisko sportowe, ale nie oznacza to, że zniknęła różnica między elitarnym i popularnym rozumieniem sztuki. Przyjęła ona jedynie nową postać: instytucjonalizacji i estetyzacji. Sztuka elitarna powinna być wyczulona na procesy estetyzacji, ponieważ chcąc tego lub nie i tak w nich jakoś uczestniczy. Jednak głównym zadaniem sztuk elitarnych jest wskazywanie tego, co pomijają tworzone przez media obrazy, a więc estetyka ślepej plamki, która głosi, że każde widzenie coś ukrywa.

Słowa kluczowe: estetyzacja, estetyka ślepej plamki, komunalne dzieło sztuki, performatywność, przemysł artystyczny, sztuka popularna, sztuka elitarna, widowisko sportowe jako dzieło sztuki.

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PERFORMATIVE SPACES IN CONTEMPORARY POLISH ART

Abstract: Positing the division of space into geometric and performative, and pointing to the three strategies of its intensification proposed by Erika Fischer-Lichte in reference to the theater, the author of the article attempts to find their counterparts in visual arts. The article focuses on some Polish examples of public art, environment and installation.

The first strategy of intensification distinguished by Fischer-Lichte concerned the use of empty or nearly empty stage space, whose arrangement could change, allowing for different patterns of movement of the actors or the spectators. The article discusses whether it is possible to determine the relationship of a work of art with an empty gallery space through its active management. The objects used by artists are meant to intensify the sense of lack, emptiness and absence, to stimulate imagination and sensitivity, or to refer to spiritual values. Effects of this type are discussed on the example of the works of Jan Berdyszak and Mirosław Bałka.

According to the second strategy of the performative approach to space in theater, happening and performance art, the chosen place of action allows or rejects certain modes of behavior. Thus, there is no freedom of assigning meaning. This kind of situation occurs in the case of Wojciech Fangor's environment and of *Skladaki* by Maciej Szańkowski. The artists create a new space with their works, at the same time determining, through its characteristics, the situation of their reception, a specific energy that varies depending on the number of recipients, their age and other factors.

The third strategy of the intensification of performativity defined by Fisher-Lichte is the use of pre-existing and reclaimed spaces, whose features are modified in the course of the action. In the case of theater, these are performances arranged in town squares, in industrial interiors, in rural areas, on beaches, etc. In the visual arts, an analogous procedure was used in Mikołaj Smoczyński's installation *Labirynt*, realized at the Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw and even more explicitly in Joanna Rajkowska's *Dotleniacz*.

The works by Polish artists described here do not posit the concept of a work as an artifact meant for timeless and universal contemplation. They take into account what is current, unstable, fleeting, dependent on the will and decision of not only the artist but also the spectator. They demonstrate the ability to assign a performative sense to space without having to refer to the actors' actions, as in the case of theater performances.

Keywords: performativity, space, Erika Fischer-Lichte, installation, environment, public art.

Over the past twenty years, the concept of performativity has been expanded and employed in various fields of art. Initially, it was associated with theater

and paratheatrical actions. These issues have also been addressed in connection with action art and performance art. Currently, this perspective is also applied to the problems inherent in visual arts. Erika Fischer-Lichte writes that

questioning the boundaries of art, proclaimed and observed by artists, critics, theorists and philosophers since the early 1960s, can be described as a performative turn, regardless of whether this refers to visual arts, music, literature or theater. All arts began to exhibit a tendency to realize themselves through actions (performances). Instead of creating traditional works, artists began to prepare events whose active participants were not only themselves, but also the recipients, the spectators. Consequently, the conditions of the creation and reception of art changed significantly. The central point of this process was no longer an autonomous work of art independent of its creator and recipient that could be the focus of the creative activity of the artist (the subject) and an object of perception and interpretation of the recipient. It was replaced by an event that is created, developed and completed by multiple subjects – the artist and the listener/spectator¹.

The *event*, described by the German author and other theorists dealing with the issue of performativity, is a broad term. This category includes not only ephemeral facts, occurring in a relatively quick succession over a period of time. It is suggested that certain creations taking the form of an object can also be treated as events.

One of the main categories in traditional aesthetics was that of a *work of art*. Fischer-Lichte writes:

A work of art is created as an “object”, although its status of an object is usually not discussed; this work comes into contact with the recipient as an artifact which remains the same regardless of the presence of a recipient, or it is subject to change over time: the colors become darker, the newspaper clippings pasted onto the canvas turn yellow, etc. An artifact in the form of a sculpture, a statue, or a musical score is available to different recipients at different times, and in the case of texts and musical scores in different places as well².

These examples show that the concept of a work of art as an artifact was shaped primarily on the basis of such genres as painting or sculpture. However, it also included literature and partially music (recorded in the form of a musical score and then performed) due to the presence of a lasting material basis shaped by the artist. The genres that may seem foreign to the concept of creativity understood as the production of artifacts are theater and ballet. However, they have been also incorporated into the general category of works

¹ E. Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des performativen*, transl. mine after the Polish version: *Estetyka performatywności*, transl. M. Borowski, M. Sugiera, Kraków 2008, pp. 29-30.

² *Ibidem*, p. 260.

of art. Their singular “object” status consisted in the repetition of performances. The performance developed during rehearsals was repeated – made available to the audience in an unchanged form numerous times. Fischer-Lichte points out that a theatrical or ballet performance, is not much different in this respect from a painting or sculpture: in both cases the receiver could “continually return to the same work of art, exploring its new features and capabilities, combine its separate elements into a meaningful whole or refer them to external structures, creating new meanings.”³ A theater-goer or a ballet fan learned the works by watching them repeatedly. It was assumed that each time the perception of a performance concerned the same work. Its multiple viewings allowed for the capturing of features that had previously gone unnoticed, or the consideration of semantic references that earlier had not been taken into account. The “dialogue with the chosen artifact” took a similar course in all artistic genres⁴.

In theater, the situation began to change in the late 19th and the early 20th century. Peter Behrens and Georg Fuchs postulated that theater should “return” to being a festival. Thus, they suggested a departure from the concept of a theatrical work developed in the European tradition. Fischer-Lichte writes:

Instead of an artifact, they offered fleeting, one-off and unique events. They relativized – or even eradicated – the distinction between creator and recipient, which was fundamental for the earlier aesthetics of the work of art, its production and reception, whose parameters and categories consequently became invalid for a theatrical performance⁵.

Thus, there was a shift in the understanding of the performative nature of theater. The actions carried out during the performance were no longer reduced to the role of the work’s components. What mattered was their directly expressive character. This tendency found its extreme radicalization in happenings and performances. Their authors postulated a departure from the work of art as an artifact which can be treated as a commodity. In order to prevent the commercialization of art, it was proposed to create only transient events that cannot be bought, locked away or hidden. Thus, an objective understanding of art was rejected. Instead, emphasis was placed on transience, uniqueness and inability to replicate. These features, broadly and in a wide variety of forms, influenced different branches of contemporary art. This trend was reflected especially in those areas that are temporary and performative, since in their case it was easiest to eliminate such attributes as made them similar to artifacts. However, similar efforts were also made in the areas of artistic activity which involved the production of objects. This type of the

³ *Ibidem.*

⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁵ *Ibidem.*

performativisation of visual arts manifested itself in different ways during the second half of the 20th century. Since I cannot discuss this issue further here, I am going to focus on only one aspect of this phenomenon – the performativisation of space.

This issue is partially discussed by Fischer-Lichte in the context of theater space. She introduces the distinction between geometric and performative space. Geometric space is that in which the performance is taking place. It exists both before, during and after the performance. As Fischer-Lichte notes: “one can sketch its diagram, [it] has a certain height, width, length and volume, it is fixed and stable, and the listed parameters remain unchanged for a long time.”⁶ Performative space, on the other hand, allows one “to plan in a specific way the relationship between the actors and the spectators, to determine the rules of their movement and its perception when a certain order and structure is imposed on them.”⁷ The use of these possibilities, the compliance with them, their modification or disregard all have a significant impact. Performative space is therefore unstable. It changes and thus dictates various conditions of perception and interpretation. “It is each use that constitutes performative space and produces a specific spatiality”⁸.

I believe that the distinction between geometric and performative space cannot be transferred directly to the study of visual arts. However, it provides the basis for an attempt to find its counterparts. It is most easily found in installation art or similar phenomena, on which I will focus in this article. However, a more extensive discussion is also possible, including the issues of the performativisation of space in sculpture and painting. In such a case, the distinction between the two varieties of theatrical space, as introduced by Fischer-Lichte, proves insufficient. The situation calls for a broader approach to the concept of performativity in basic, philosophical terms, referring to language⁹.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 174.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 176.

⁹ The notion of the “preformative” first appeared in 1955 in reference to the theory of speech acts in the field of the philosophy of language. Its author, John L. Austin, indicated that linguistic expressions not only describe a certain state of affairs or ascertain something (constative utterances), but they also have causative power (performative utterances). He associated performativity with the belief that language, in addition to describing and representing reality, can cause changes. He associated the performative expressions with a possibility to perform specific activities through them, doing certain things. For instance, Austin quoted the causative power of marital vows, naming people and objects, making various promises, bets, curses, etc. The scholar pointed out, however, that performatives can be both accurate and “successful” as well as infelicitous and futile if spoken as quotes or outside of everyday life, such as those uttered by actors in theater. Then they lose their causative power. Jacques Derrida critiqued Austin’s theory and extended the notion of the performative, indicating the performative power of not only speech but also of writing. The

In this article, the starting point, when considering the performativisation of space in contemporary Polish installation art, is Fischer-Lichte's examination of the three strategies of intensifying the performativity of space in theater. I would like to note, however, that I do not treat installation art as derivative or secondary to the theater space. On the contrary, in my opinion, it originated from the mindset typical for painting and sculpture. Moreover, I find the twentieth-century avant-garde concepts to be of particular significance.

The first strategy described by Fischer-Lichte involves using empty or nearly empty space, the arrangement of which could change, allowing for different movement patterns of actors or spectators¹⁰. It occurs both in happenings and performances, sometimes also in theater, and entails an opportunity for changing places during the action. The emptiness of the space in which actions take place allows for the free management of the area. Performers and recipients are moving in search for new places of action and points of view from which they can be observed. The performativity of space is particularly strong in this case, as the initial situation neither favors nor excludes individual options. This also applies to the meanings given to various fragments of the space.

In Poland, in the field of visual arts, the problem of the object – empty space relationship and the associated complexity of reception was addressed by Jan Berdyszak. In 1965 (when his *Obraz strukturalny III – z otworem* [Structural Painting III – with Hole] was created, in which a hole was cut out in a rectangular stretcher), the artist changed the way of thinking about image and space. A few years later, commenting on his own work, the artist wrote: “It was not just a change of an isolated image into an unisolated image. Something important for attention and expectation was happening. Provocation and the provoked were noticed and distinguished. The provocation consisted in the open form of the painting with a different image – the wall. From that moment on, my provocations were intended not on the wall, but AGAINST it.”¹¹ Thus, Berdyszak challenged the traditional way of thinking and mental habits accepted by the recipients of painting. The wall was no longer treated as a background for the painting on it. Also challenged was the traditional understanding of a work of art conceived as a compact, homogeneous, indivisible and comprehensive form, which remains unaffected by the surrounding space and can exist unchanged, regardless of the environment¹².

author pointed out that all performatives are infelicitous, as speech about theater does not constitute “the determined modification of a general citationality – or rather, a general iterability”.

¹⁰ E. Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik...*, *op.cit.*, p. 178.

¹¹ J. Berdyszak, *O obrazie*, Muzeum Warmii i Mazur, Olsztyn 1999, p. 39.

¹² Some art historians distinguish between the closed composition (typical of Classicism) and the open one (characteristic of the Baroque). However, this openness is relative and refers to the organization of the elements on a plane. H. Wölfflin addressed this issue saying: “Each work of art

Initially, the artist cut small holes in the paintings. They give the impression of fragments “stolen” from the painting rather than fully-fledged elements of the work. It was only in 1967 that the wall emerging from the painted surface became a proper part of the work. Works from this period include *Kola podwójne* [Dual Wheels]. The artist had used the same title on some of his works earlier, between 1962 and 1964; this time, however, the circular form appeared in the negative. Berdyszak juxtaposed two parts of a rectangular, similarly painted canvas, in which semi-circular holes were cut in such a way that the empty circular space between them gave an impression of a whole. Initially, these paintings were hanged with the holes inside, with the cutouts forming an outline of a circle, and drew attention to the wall between them. Later, the artist began to hang them in an opposite way. The negative form opened up to the external space of the paintings. Looking at these works, each recipient was subconsciously searching for the outline of the other, in fact non-existent, half of the circle on a blank wall of the gallery. As a result, the painting stretched to the sides, integrating its own space with the one existing around it. This impression was intensified by the double outline of the frame which emphasized the geometric format of the painting even more.

The “opening” of a painting to the wall space resulted in the emergence of new and interesting issues. In order to signal and resolve them, the artist created visual-conceptual models. Some were created only in his *Sketchbook*, while others were realized as independent works. They were always accompanied by a theoretical commentary relating to the undertaken problem. In his comments, the artist alluded to the concept of a feedback loop between the painted parts of the work and the real space of the gallery.

The artist’s subsequent actions focused on creating a proper setting that would emphasize the empty space. His purpose was to create a painting that would harmonize with it. In 1972, the artist wrote in his *Sketchbook*: “I am thinking of pursuing such structures in which the primary value would be the space itself and it would carry new values that so far have been assigned only to objects, surroundings, events, actions and concepts.”¹³ In a later text, he added: “Marking empty places is not only an important **possibility of the awareness of the empty**, but it also puts man in the role of a **user of only his own mental imagination** – therefore, it opens the possibility of finding the

must be a closed whole, and the lack of clear boundaries is considered a defect. But the interpretation of this request was so different in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that given the relaxed form of the Baroque art, the Classicist cohesion can be associated with the closed form of art” (*Podstawowe pojęcia historii sztuki. Problemy rozwoju stylu w sztuce nowożytnej* [Basic concepts of art history. Problems of style development in modern art], Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków 1962, p. 47). The issue of openness of painting in Berdyszak’s image is approached differently. It involves such a design of the painting that it opens to the real space surrounding it.

¹³ J. Berdyszak, *Szkicownik*, nr 56, 1972, quoted after: B. Kowalska, *Jan Berdyszak*, Kraków 1979, p. 68.

individual values of a man.”¹⁴ Thus, the empty space, indicated by Berdyszak, became a place for the recipient’s actions. The artist predicted that they will have an imaginary character. Therefore, the entire space was always subject to change. Empty spaces indicated by the artist became the area of free creativity. Within the lightly marked framework of its geometry, individual actions of imagination were to take place. At the same time, depending on the placement of the painting, this space can be felt in a different way. A painting placed directly on the wall acts differently to one that is at a certain distance from it. The changes in the structure and color of the background wall are also important. The wall can be smooth or textured, white or colored, which changes the nature of the relationship between it and what is placed on it. An empty space can “materialize” or disappear. As Berdyszak wrote, “an empty place is a potential area where different values can appear.”¹⁵ Through visual elements, the artist is attempting to draw attention to certain inspiring possibilities such as the wall, showing darkness, etc. It is up to the recipient how he reads and uses them.

The problem of the active organization of empty space is also an important aspect of Mirosław Bałka’s works. Unlike the artists involved in happenings and performance art, suggestions in this regard come from objects and are not caused by the body/bodies of people performing actions. Objects used by Bałka are intended to foster the sense of deficiency, emptiness, absence. The installation *Good God*¹⁶ realized in 1990 in the Dziekanka Gallery in Warsaw was very important from this point of view. In this work, the artist abandoned depicting reality for the first time. He used real, simple items: a damaged shelf sprinkled with ash, a coarse board with nails in it, a wooden bunk with a heating pad set to the temperature of a human body, etc. Items selected by Bałka, however, did not encourage one to carefully analyze their appearance or functions. A recipient moving between these objects observed whatever the artist proposed on the one hand, while on the other he co-created the whole, completing the missing, empty space with the imagery of what might be in them. Describing Bałka’s work, Maria Morzuch pointed out that it is reminiscent of a monastic confinement cell “for reading or prayer or quiet methodical work of a scribe describing an initial letter in a medieval library.”¹⁷ Joanna Kiliszek viewed the sterile white gallery space juxtaposed with the roughness of old,

¹⁴ J. Berdyszak, “Puste. Pustka jako sens kreacji indywidualnych”, in: J. Berdyszak, E. Oliniewicz, *?Teatr, Teatr ?*, Wrocław 1996, p. 86.

¹⁵ J. Berdyszak, *O obrazie*, Muzeum Warmii i Mazur, Olsztyn 1999, p. 39.

¹⁶ The installation of the same name but in a slightly revised version was also presented in 1990 at the XLIV Venice Biennale, as part of the exhibition *Aperto*.

¹⁷ M. Morzuch, “Alchemia ciała albo niewzruszona klepsydra”, in: *Mirosław Bałka. Die Rampe*, exhibition catalogue, Van Abbemuseum, Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, Eindhoven – Łódź 1994, p. 32.

decaying planks as Bałka's marking a new area of art, "in which the artist, through the simplest objects, is trying to understand what is it in simplicity that achieves the highest degree of sophistication."¹⁸ Through the involvement of the recipient's imagination, all objects put on display by Bałka complement each other in many ways, often creating a holistic vision. It was more than just ample room for interpretation. Through his work, the artist demanded the recipient's activity, but without imposing any version of it as the only true and valid one. He seemed to regard the audience's decisions about the work, often contradictory, as complementary. One could repeat after Austin that the categories of truth and falsehood lost their meaning in the performative perspective proposed by Bałka.

This problem was even more evident in the installation *How It Is?* realized in 2009 in the Turbine Hall in London's Tate Modern gallery. Every year, as part of *The Uniliver Series*, the invited artist faced the challenge of arranging the enormous space of a former power station. For Bałka, it was the first opportunity to undertake a project on such a large scale. Describing this work, Karol Sienkiewicz stressed: "The artist used an element of surprise, operating with concepts of the full and the empty, the safe and the threatening."¹⁹ Behind the so-called bridge dividing the space of the Turbine Hall, Bałka built a giant steel container, 13 meters high, 10 meters wide and 30 meters long. The structure was not put directly on the floor but it was placed on two-meter supports. A ramp led inside. The installation blended very well with the existing space, creating an impression of being its integral part. Bałka's object was designed to be viewed and experienced from different perspectives. Coming from the entrance to the museum, you could approach it and feel its enormity just above your head. Choosing to walk on the ramp, you entered a dark space, which on the one hand attracted and tempted and on the other caused unease. Sienkiewicz wrote: "Slowly sinking into the black, you feel other people close by, you hear their footsteps, their breathing, their muffled whispers. After a short while, your eyes adapt to the darkness and you recognize their silhouettes. You come to a wall covered with a velvet-like material. You turn away and in an unreal frame you are watching black figures of other people moving hesitantly towards you or towards the bright rectangle. And that is it? So it is just black emptiness? Only that or so much more."²⁰

Bałka borrowed the title of the installation, *How It Is*, from a 1964 short-story by Samuel Beckett, in which the main character makes his way through endless mud, remembering his own life. As Katarzyna Urbańska noted,

¹⁸ J. Kiliszek, "Mroślaw Bałka at Dziekanka Gallery, Warsaw", *Flash Art* 1990, May/June, p. 171.

¹⁹ K. Sienkiewicz, "Miroślaw Bałka w Tate Modern", *Dwutygodnik.com* 2012, nr 76, <http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/562-miroslaw-balka-w-tate-modern.html>.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

Bałka's project echoes the struggle of a man confronting the resisting matter and space.²¹ However, according to Sienkiewicz, this work "does not only evoke exalted emotions. Its interior is neither a purgatory nor a confessional", the author writes. "The formlessness of darkness suspends the existing rules, as if during Carnival. In the dark, as if under a mask, everyone is all equal and naked in a way [...] The purpose of the artist is not to build specific connotations, but rather gauge what reactions are elicited in recipients by stimuli abstracted from the reality."²²

Bałka's works are often interpreted in the spirit of the trauma associated with the Holocaust. However, in the case of *How It Is?*, as well as other works by Bałka, such associations seem to be too far-fetched a simplification, blurring the performative nature of his realization. The artist himself, when asked about the references of his London project to the Holocaust, said: "This work will primarily be confronted with people who come here. Each of them brings something with them, some spiritual values, imagination or sensitivity."²³ This confrontation is an important element of the work, it decides how it is remembered and received. As Sienkiewicz rightly points out, Bałka's projects "are never autotelic objects, cut off from their surroundings, created to be admired and worshipped. They are realized through tension that arises in contact with a living human being."²⁴ Thus, they are fulfilled through performance which is the imaginative and physical behavior of recipients.

The second strategy of performative approach to space in theater, happenings and performance art involves a situation when the chosen place of action allows certain possibilities of receptive behavior and excludes other ones. In such a case, therefore, there is no full freedom of action and giving meaning. Specific spatial arrangements "open up new and unexploited opportunities for establishing relationships between the actors and the spectators."²⁵ They share the same space and its arrangement is meant to evoke specific experiences in the spectators. Therefore, they were to be placed within a selected area (in the center or at the edges, allowing them to see the whole action or giving them a limited field of view, near the actors or at a distance from them, etc.). The meaning of the space established by the author was to involve creating a place where "circulates energy which can interact in a specific way."²⁶

A question therefore arises whether such a performative character of space can be achieved without the involvement of actors? In visual arts, the approach described by Fischer-Lichte is most evident in the case of environment art,

²¹ K. Urbańska, "Bałka w turbinach", *Sztuka.pl* 2010, nr 1-3, p. 53.

²² K. Sienkiewicz, "Miroslaw Bałka w Tate Modern", *op.cit.*

²³ Quoted after K. Urbańska, "Bałka w turbinach", *op.cit.*, p. 53.

²⁴ K. Sienkiewicz, "Miroslaw Bałka w Tate Modern", *op.cit.*

²⁵ E. Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik...*, *op.cit.*, p. 178-179.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 185.

understood as a desire to create space, to give it new features, as opposed to installation art, which requires the artist, at least partially, to accept the preexisting situation, striving not so much to transform it, as to supplement or complement it.²⁷ The discussed works by Bałka and Berdyszak opened the possibility of a wide variety of spectators' behavior, enabling them to create their own spaces in the proposed area. It is not the case with Wojciech Fangor and Maciej Szańkowski.

As regards the first artist, I would like to refer to the famous environment *Studium przestrzeni* [A Study of Space], which was realized in 1958 at the *Salon nowej kultury* [Salon of the New Culture] in Warsaw together with Stanisław Zamecznik. It consisted of twenty paintings of various sizes painted by Fangor. Most were arranged on easels, with only four hung in a conventional way on the wall. Their irregular placement inside the gallery, combined with the variation in the height on which they were placed, forced a non-traditional reception. The point was not to present the painting to the viewer but to surround him with paintings, to include him in the new space. Individual canvases did not affect viewers with their own values. The essence of the realization was the spatial relationship occurring between them. The artist stressed: "The paintings are anonymous parts of the group which begins to be fulfilled in real space [...] by introducing visual elements in the spatial arrangement and by allowing the recipient to participate in this arrangement a link is created of which the recipient is part."²⁸

The whole exhibition was arranged in a crude and somewhat rough way. Paintings were placed against one another at right angles. They were to affect the viewers not so much with their colors as with fields of tension that were caused by the differences in their spaciousness and the angle of light. In most paintings white and black were the dominant colors. Only in several works were there chromatic colors: yellow, red, blue and green. The dominating shapes were circular, elliptical, semi-circular, as well as broad streaks painted horizontally, vertically or diagonally. All elements in the paintings were somewhat fluid, melting or pulsating. Quivering shapes painted on the canvas gave the impression of going beyond the flat surface. Through a purely painterly illusion the artist achieved an illusion of concave, convex or even solid character of painted elements²⁹. These false spatial suggestions were

²⁷ Such a distinction was suggested by G. Sztabiński in his text "Między rzeźbą a instalacją" [Between sculpture and installation], *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 1998, No. 4, p. 150. See also other articles by this author: "Sens sztuki instalacji" [The meaning of installation art], *Format*, 1998, No. 28/29 and "Sztuka instalacji a environment. W poszukiwaniu teorii" [Installations art and environment. In search of theory], *Rzeźba Polska* 1998, vol. VII.

²⁸ W. Fangor, quoted after B. Kowalska, *Wojciech Fangor. Malarz przestrzeni*, Warszawa 2001, p. 65.

²⁹ B. Kowalska, analyzing the realization after many years, wrote: "Only a handful of people inside the environment saw the restless pulse of color and indistinct forms, illusory sensations of

intensified by the arrangement of the canvases in the real space of the gallery. The situation created in the geometric space of the gallery broke the recipients' habitual patterns of behavior in such places. The recipients were forced to adopt a new way to determine the perception of art. Fangor said: "painting that I find interesting cannot be separated from the space that surrounds it, from things that surround that space, from the person who is involved in this relationship. A painting about which I am thinking should be dependent, hungry. It may exist as part of a group. Only in the life of this group can art be manifested"³⁰. Fangor's environment assumed the existence of a certain energy that circulates in the performative space and elicits a specific way of reception.

Another interesting example of the performative use of space arranged with geometric shapes is the environment by Maciej Szańkowski entitled *Obszar* [The Area]. The artist realized the work in 1981 at the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, then in 1983 at the Studio Gallery in Warsaw, as well as at the exhibition *Język geometrii* [The Language of Geometry] in 1984 in Warsaw's Zachęta Gallery³¹. In all these projects, he used white or black frames and large strips placed in such a way that they formed a disturbing, dynamic arrangement reminiscent of a labyrinth. In a catalog accompanying the exhibition at the Studio Gallery, the artist commented on his work: "The installation which I have entitled *Obszar* [The Area] is made each time using a «model» consisting of a series of recurring frames and lines of varying angles through which I can shape the area of the selected space. Years ago, continuing my *Składaki* [Fix-ups] and placing them side by side, I was surprised to notice the relationships between them and the environment, which gave me the idea of «transcribing» a sculpture into a number of mobile objects to locate them creatively in the space"³².

For each exhibition, Szańkowski used the same elements, arranging them differently. However, the specific arrangement was partly dependent on the place in which the works were exhibited. Therefore, these environments varied in character. In the high-ceilinged, gothic interior of the Museum of Architecture, elements of his *Obszar* were simplified; they seemed delicate and fragile in comparison with the massive pillars and soaring windows. In the sterile white room at the Studio Gallery, relatively small and low-ceilinged, *Składaki* became monumental. It seemed that they formed a labyrinth of sorts. This

movement, the curving and breaking of the space. These optical vibrations, confusing to the senses, were intensified when one stayed in the gallery for a longer time and followed the artist's instructions not to watch the exhibition in a stationary position", "Iluzyjna przestrzeń pozytywna – odkrycie Wojciecha Fangora" [Positive illusory space – Wojciech Fangor's discovery], *Format* 2003, No. 43, p. 30.

³⁰ B. Majewska, "Rozmowa z Wojciechem Fangorem", *Przegląd Kulturalny* 1957, No. 1, p. 6.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

³² M. Szańkowski, commentary in the exhibition catalogue *Maciej Szańkowski – Obszar*, Galeria Centrum Sztuki *Studio*, Warszawa 1983, unnumbered pages.

effect was intensified by shadows cast by the frames on the walls and the floor³³. Therefore, these environments were not completely independent from the setting in which they were created. It was only the introduction of elements into the space that determined the nature of the exhibition for its duration. It was also up to the recipients to what an extent they focus on Szańkowski's realization or whether they consider the interior features as a component of the exhibition.

In the cases described above, Szańkowski created different spaces using the same objects. In his *Obszar*, the artist showed how variable, unstable and relative what we know is in relation to what we see. All the elements were the same size; however, when arranged in a certain way, they began to compete. Some seemed to be taller and more slender, others more stocky. As soon as the problem of the relationship of *Składaki* with the surrounding space was considered, one started to doubt whether these were really the same objects. On the one hand, the artist each time created a new space with his work, while on the other the objects also underwent changes in the perception of the spectators. In each of the described environments, the space was re-established anew, and the situation of reception was also created differently because of specific energy, different each time, depending on the number of recipients, their age and many other factors.

3. The third strategy of the intensification of performativity distinguished by Fischer-Lichte is the "use of existing spaces which previously have been differently employed and whose specific potentials were examined and tested."³⁴ It involves an attempt to convert interconnecting real and imaginary spaces into an "inter-space"³⁵, where numerous transformations occur.³⁶ Such an approach to the place of action occurred very often in happenings, which usually took place not in galleries but in city squares, factories, garages, rural areas, beaches, etc.³⁷ Performers chose similar places for their activities. As regards theater, its reformers from the avant-garde period located performances in the spaces thematically related to the staged drama (e.g. in a pine forest, in a collegiate church, in a city square). In today's theater too, performances are staged in different parts of the city and in buildings in which the playwright set the events.

In the case of visual arts, such an approach is best seen in installations and public art. Artists use existing spaces, taking into account their physical characteristics, as well as their social and cultural importance, in order to

³³ B. Kowalska, *Maciej Szańkowski*, Warszawa 1996, p. 37.

³⁴ E. Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 178-179.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 185.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 193.

³⁷ See: "Zniesienie granic miejsca i czasu", in: T. Pawłowski, *Happening*, Warszawa 1988, pp. 88-97.

create a work that not only refers to the preexisting environment but also constructs new contexts.

Particularly interesting from this point of view are certain installations by Mikołaj Smoczyński. The issue of space and the changes that it undergoes was very important in this artist's work. In 1993, Smoczyński prepared an exhibition at the Center for Contemporary Art in Warsaw at which he presented several installations arranged so that they comprised one single whole. These included: *Labirynt* [The Labyrinth] and *The Passage*. Based on the original arrangement of spacious, bright, interconnected rooms located in one of the corners of the Ujazdowski Castle, the artist created a new space by removing its original characteristic features. Smoczyński wanted to prevent previous experiences of the place from affecting its present reception.³⁸ Describing Smoczyński's exposition at the CCA, Dorota Jarecka noted: that "Entering Mikołaj Smoczyński's exhibition at the Ujazdowski Castle is like walking into a cave. First, there is a dark corridor – some items are looming on the walls, but it is impossible to recognize them with eyes unaccustomed to darkness. The spectator can turn to the side, finding himself in a dark room padded with gray chipboard-like building material, the so-called 'suprema'. He may also walk ahead. Then, he will go through a series of three – this time light – empty rooms where the construction of walls or floors was disturbed. Mikołaj Smoczyński operates very delicately, although on a large scale. Using methods only he knows, he removes the top layer of plaster walls [...], transfers it to the adjacent wall and fixes it there. Thus, two walls which were supposed to be orthogonal are brought closer together."³⁹ Each element of the exhibition related to others, while contributing new qualities at the same time. The afore-mentioned *Labirynt* (on the right side of the entrance) was a dark, narrow tunnel in the shape of a triangle, whose interior was lined with *suprema* tiles. This material, developed during the war, is now used mainly for insulation. Smoczyński used this quality to sound-proof the maze and isolate its individual parts from others. What also fascinated the artist in the *suprema* was its severity, which, as he pointed out: "protects, but forces one to be careful; evokes feelings of depression and anxiety similar to those we experience when we are – against our will – under the care of someone overbearing."⁴⁰ The darkness in the *Labirynt* meant that the recipient was not able to focus on visual stimuli and focused on feeling and exploring space. The path that he had to follow, as Smoczyński wrote – "was not only the subject, but also something real; one had to find it and walk its distance."⁴¹ Discussing

³⁸ M. Smoczyński, "Labirynt", in: *Mikołaj Smoczyński Retrospektywnie*, ed. M. Lachowski, Lublin 2011, p. 146.

³⁹ D. Jarecka, "Bolesne wejście pod skórę", *Gazeta Wyborcza* 1993 [dated 05.02], No. 30, p. 3.

⁴⁰ M. Smoczyński, "Obraz", in: *Mikołaj Smoczyński. Retrospektywnie, op.cit.*, p. 146.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

the work, Marcin Lachowski emphasized: “*Labirynt* assumed the transformation of the functionality of architecture by a journey into another dimension of experience.”⁴² Traversing the corridor triggered a variety of emotions in the audience. Everyone received the surrounding architecture differently. Some spectators focused on this part of the exhibition, trying to analyze the space and feelings accompanying the journey, while others went through the labyrinth to get to the lighter, more open rooms with stripped plaster. Anna Maria Potocka also indicated the processual character of this realization. The author focused not so much on the journey, as on the destination, saying: “At the end, there is a nearly circular spot, spacious, higher and lighter. Once past the dark corners, the place seems ideal. For a moment, I forget where I came from and which way I went, and I feel that I could stay here forever.”⁴³

An important part of the 1993 exhibition was the installation *The Passage*, in which Smoczyński also used existing architecture. Once again, the arrangement of the same title but in a slightly modified form was presented by the artist at a group exhibition at the Center for Contemporary Art at Zamek Ujazdowski in Warsaw in 1997.⁴⁴ Although the 1993 and 1997 projects were each time placed in different rooms of the Centre for Contemporary Art, the idea which inspired the artist was similar. *The Passage* was a dark, long, almost empty corridor (in the 1993 realization) or a system of rooms/corridors (in 1997), where the only light came in through the doorways. In these installations, the artist used the existing architecture, “setting in front of the spectator – Marcin Lachowski wrote – a trail to travel, determined primarily by concrete, physical contact with the ground and the environment.”⁴⁵

The 1993 work was realized in only one of the rooms of the Center. In 1997, the artist adopted a number of rooms, creating in some of them a structure of sorts made of eternit-covered timber.⁴⁶ This material, which is a mixture of cement and asbestos, was once used for roofing. It is a cheap, gray, very raw and rough tile. In *The Passage*, it was used in the form of square plates. Used inside, it made it an unfamiliar and unwelcoming place. The artist painted the walls adapted from the existing architecture of the Ujazdowski Castle entirely gray, giving them a raw and unfinished character, which was intensified by the stratification of plaster.

⁴² M. Lachowski, “Mikołaja Smoczyńskiego sięganie kresu”, in: *Mikołaj Smoczyński. Retrospektywnie*, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

⁴³ A.M. Potocka, “Współistnienie z wnętrzem (o wystawie w Zamku Ujazdowskim)”, in: *Mikołaj Smoczyński*, exhibition catalogue, Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Zamek Ujazdowski, Warszawa 1995, p. 41.

⁴⁴ It was a group exhibition with Jerzy Nowosielski and Leon Tarasewicz.

⁴⁵ M. Lachowski, “Mikołaja Smoczyńskiego sięganie kresu”, *op.cit.*, p. 26.

⁴⁶ See: A. Benat, „Mistycyzm i heroizm”, *Życie* 1997, No. 79, p. 8.

In his review of the exhibition, Monika Małkowska wrote that Smoczyński “used the specific character of the architecture of the Ujazdowski Castle. However, his actions create a different atmosphere. Here, in one of the rooms, completely covered with gray paint, including the floor and ceiling, plaster is peeling off the front wall. Under the curling edges patches of white are showing, [...] but Smoczyński’s work does not evoke a sense of a neglected and decrepit place. The form sticking out of the wall is not accidental: it forms a regular circle, and the white protruding from underneath gives an impression of shining.”⁴⁷ However, it is not the objects on the walls and its structures that were important for the artist. What he found the most important was the spectator’s journey, his movement within this strange, partly historical and partly artificially created construction. Smoczyński, commenting on his 1997 work, wrote: “Two thresholds marking the zone marked also the length of the road that one had to walk in order to be outside once again. *The Passage* was simply what the word means: a path which one indeed had to pass through.”⁴⁸

Smoczyński’s work is a reference to the most elementary interpretation of what the Road is. It can be understood, as the artist pointed out, “as the distance that someone travels or needs to pass; as a journey or an excursion, which involves passing a distance; and finally as a search.”⁴⁹ What was particularly important for Smoczyński was the sense of the experience of the people who were inside his installation and passed through it. The artist wrote: “In isolated spaces, especially in those that are intended to exist as separate, some feel uncertainty and even fear and look for a way out, while others, on the contrary, find such places to be areas conducive to reflection and independent personal experience. Reactions of those who are on the road can be unpredictable but always real.”⁵⁰ *The Passage* forces the recipient to make a choice. Moreover, the feelings that arise in contact with it are unpredictable. Some may seek a relationship of the architecture with the current state of the interior and the superstructures. Others focus on traversing the corridors and observing their surroundings. Others, still, may wonder about the emptiness inside. The installation can provoke reflection or anxiety, resentment, a need to escape and flee to a lighter, more open and friendlier space.

Piotr Majewski noted that Smoczyński usually started the work on his installations with a very detailed “analysis of the spatial conditions of the location and realization of the installation. He considered the space to be unique, tracking its characteristics, history and potential that could influence

⁴⁷ M. Małkowska, “Trzech twórców rozmawia o życiu”, *Rzeczpospolita* 1997 [dated 05.05], No. 805-06, p. 29.

⁴⁸ M. Smoczyński, “The Passage”, in: *Mikołaj Smoczyński. Retrospektywnie, op.cit.*, p. 156.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

the interpretation of objects appearing in it.”⁵¹ It was very important for Smoczyński to consider various aspects of the place. A good example of this type of installation is also the work *Akcja Bezpośrednia* [Direct Action] in Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw in 1996. The artist focused on the primary functions of the space in which he was to be working. In the Zachęta’s Little Salon, who was once a vestibule – a large, high, clear and open space for receiving visitors – the artist used chip and concrete boards and planks of wood to built an object that Jarecka described as “reminiscent a little of an Egyptian pyramid and a little of a Polish barn.”⁵² The structure filled almost the entire interior, leaving only small paths by the walls that allowed to walk around the object from the outside. The installation completely changed the space of the Small Salon from large and open to claustrophobic and closed, with very narrow corridors. This effect was amplified by the limited amount of light which, because of the size of the structure, came into the room only on the left side, making the corridor on the right not only narrow but also dark. The recipient who wanted to get inside the object had to walk around it first. The entrance was high and narrow. The installation interior was intensely illuminated by the artist with a reflector which blinded the incoming recipient, intensifying the sense of anxiety and uncertainty about the surrounding space.⁵³ Commenting on his work, Smoczyński emphasized: “*Akcja Bezpośrednia* juxtaposes one space with another. Our experience in such an organized interior is a composite of various observations and often dissimilar or even contradictory experiences. In this sense, it resembles – on a miniature scale – what we experience watching a city, especially an old one, where a multiplicity of functions and layers upon layers of elements added over time creates a whole that is not always uniform but is all the more inspiring because of it.”⁵⁴

Very interesting from the perspective of the kind of performativity of space in visual arts discussed above was the work by Joanna Rajkowska *Dotleniacz* [Oxygenator], presented from July until September 2007 at Grzybowski Square in Warsaw.⁵⁵ Kaja Pawelek, curator of the project, wrote: “Grzybowski Square is a place suspended between different temporal orders, architecture layers,

⁵¹ P. Majewski, “Metafizyka «Obrazów urzeczywistnionych». Niektóre aspekty wczesnej twórczości Mikołaja Smoczyńskiego”, in: *Mikołaj Smoczyński. Retrospektywnie, op.cit.*, p. 49.

⁵² D. Jarecka, “Obudzone sny”, *Gazeta Wyborcza* 1996 [dated 15.04], No. 89, p. 11.

⁵³ See: D. Jarecka, “Obudzone sny”, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

⁵⁴ M. Smoczyński, „Obraz”, in: *Mikołaj Smoczyński. Retrospektywnie, op.cit.*, p. 154.

⁵⁵ At the request of local residents, after a long debate with the authorities in Warsaw and numerous efforts to restore it, the work was realized again with some changes in 2008, yet not as *Dotleniacz*, contrary to the arrangement with the artist, but as a “water feature”. Therefore, when giving the dates of the work’s operation, Rajkowska shortens it to 2007. Discussions concerning the reconstruction of “*Dotleniacz*” can be found in the book *Rajkowska. Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej* [Rajkowska. Political Critique Guide, ed. Zespół Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa 2010, p. 71-104.

social groups. There is a synagogue nearby, as well as the All Saints church, corporate offices and small hardware stores. The road to the square, leading along Próźna street, is like entering another world, another time – as if the ghetto was still here. Thousands of people live in drab apartment blocks – once the symbol of modern, post-war Warsaw. Among them, new symbolic architecture was built – office buildings and financial centers of the capitalist city; lavish apartment buildings are being erected nearby. These layers are superimposed on the same physical space, but there is no connection between them. Residents pass by every day but they do not communicate – there is no shared social space. The identity of this place is fragmented, there is no single narrative. The atomized present is based on these different, incompatible layers; it is fragile, there are gaps in it, places that need to be filled; an afterimage of the past suddenly appears in a flash. The past is a sensitive subject, usually treated as history, an obligation, a form of thinking about the past.”⁵⁶

Taking into account the specificity of the place and trying to make the site more welcoming for residents, Rajkowska ordered a pond to be dug in the middle of it, covering an area of 140 m² and one meter deep, which she then adorned with water lilies and planted shrubs and grass. The water tank was equipped with a special device ozonizing the air and producing fog. This way oxygen bubbles were raised from the bottom of the pond, refreshing the air and making staying there more pleasant. Around the pond, she placed seats for the spectators designed using the *K.myki* [S.tones] project (colored oval seats made of polyester resin) by Michał Kwasięborski, made by the *Bęc! Zmiana* Foundation and the Office of Architecture of the Warsaw City Hall, as well as large mattresses with colorful patterns on which one could lie down or sleep⁵⁷. Rajkowska’s project was preceded by archaeological research on Grzybowski Square, conducted in April 2007⁵⁸. Describing the artist’s work, Pawełek pointed out that: “The installation of the pond was an intervention firmly rooted in the specific context, a disturbance in the existing order. In return, she did not suggest one particular perspective, but rather a suspension of everyday patterns, a creation of a potential space nearby that was still very much here and now open to interaction and communication.”⁵⁹ Rajkowska’s work, considered in the perspective of performativity, was on the one hand an example of a pre-existing space, while on the other – a different use thereof. It did not describe a situation but it established it the same way as the linguistic expressions, such as marriage vows or baptizing a ship.

Rajkowska’s work was meant to supplement the square with a common space where people could come and be together. The artist only made the

⁵⁶ K. Pawełek, <http://www.rajkowska.com/pl/projektyp/62>.

⁵⁷ J. Rajkowska, “Dotleniacz”, in: *Rajkowska. Przewodnik, op.cit.*, p. 91.

⁵⁸ K. Pawełek, <http://www.rajkowska.com/pl/projektyp/62>.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

initiating gesture, but its interpretation and development occurred outside her control. "I wanted to create a place with its own gravity, its own energy – Rajkowska wrote – which is not directly related to any of the afore-mentioned stories."⁶⁰ In *Dotleniacz*, as Magdalena Pustoła pointed out, Rajkowska recalled the existing tensions, but at the same time she showed that there is no need to confront them⁶¹. The place began to function as a common area, an area of reconciliation, where people of all ages met. The pre-existing situation was combined with new contexts. Rajkowska wrote: "During the day, there was an atmosphere of Ciechocinek, a spa⁶², graduation towers. People sat huddled on the benches, the stone-seats, on the grass. [...] At dusk, those who wanted to relax in a couple of different ways came. They would bring beer, kiss among the flowers, sleep and more than that. [...] I could not find other words to describe their state: they just WERE there."⁶³ The artist also noted that in a city park one generally has to have an excuse to stay there: a dog to walk, a friend, a book to read on a bench. *Dotleniacz* reorganized the space and provoked people to spend time there without any excuse. It changed the official nature of urban space, which became a kind of area that can be used in any other way and that takes into account the pre-existing state, adding to it new values.

The strategies described above show that there are different varieties of spatiality. It can be pre-existing, but it can also be created and then it becomes a kind of event.⁶⁴ This possibility is not reserved exclusively for theater, action art or performance. Performative space is also an important element of the work of artists involved in other types of activity. Such activities do not involve the concept of the work of art as an artifact meant for universal and timeless contemplation which is only renewed by subsequent recipients. They take into account the current, the unstable, the fleeting, dependent on the will and decision of not only the artist, but also the viewer. Thus, the problems of the variability of perception play an important role here. It turns out that it is possible to provide a space with a performative sense without having to refer to the actors. This may also occur if appropriately used items appear between the decisions of the author and the reactions of the recipients.

Translated by Katarzyna Gucio

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⁶⁰ J. Rajkowska, „Dotleniacz...”, in: *Rajkowska. Przewodnik, op.cit.*, p. 79.

⁶¹ M. Pustoła, „Joanna Rajkowska”, in: *Nowe zjawiska w sztuce, op.cit.*, p. 390.

⁶² Understood as a health resort.

⁶³ J. Rajkowska, „Dotleniacz...”, in: *Rajkowska. Przewodnik, op.cit.*, 92-93.

⁶⁴ E. Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik, op.cit.*, p. 185.

**PRZESTRZENIE PERFORMATYWNE W POLSKIEJ SZTUCE WSPÓŁCZESNEJ
(streszczenie)**

Autorka artykułu, przyjmując podział na przestrzeń geometryczną i performatywną oraz trzy strategie jej intensyfikowania zaproponowane przez Erikę Fischer-Lichte w odniesieniu do teatru, stara się znaleźć ich odpowiedniki w działaniach plastycznych. Koncentruje się na polskich przykładach sztuki publicznej, *environment* i instalacji.

Pierwsza strategia intensyfikowania przestrzeni wyróżniona przez Fischer-Lichte dotyczyła użycia pustej lub prawie pustej przestrzeni scenicznej, której aranżacja mogłaby się zmieniać dopuszczając różne modele ruchu aktorów lub widzów. W artykule omówiony zostaje problem możliwości określenia relacji pracy plastycznej do pustej przestrzeni galeryjnej po-przez jej aktywne zagospodarowanie. Wykorzystywane przez artystów przedmioty mają na celu intensyfikowanie poczucia braku, pustki, nieobecności albo pobudzać wyobraźnię, wrażliwość, odnosić się do wartości duchowych. Dokonania tego typu omówione zostały na przykładzie prac Jana Berdyszaka i Mirosława Bałki.

Druga strategia performatywnego podejścia do przestrzeni w teatrze, happeningu i sztuce performance polega na tym, że wybrane miejsce akcji niektóre możliwości zachowań dopuszcza lub odrzuca. Nie występuje więc w tym przypadku swoboda nadawania sensu. Podobna sytuacja pojawia się w przypadku *environment* Wojciecha Fangora i *Składaków* Macieja Szańkowskiego. Artyści przy użyciu swoich prac kreują nową przestrzeń, wyznaczając jednocześnie poprzez jej charakterystykę sytuację odbioru, specyficzną energię zmieniającą się w zależności od liczby odbiorców, ich wieku oraz innych czynników.

Trzecia strategia intensyfikowania performatywności przestrzeni wyróżniona przez Fischer-Lichte polega na wykorzystywaniu wcześniej istniejących i użytkowanych przestrzeni, których możliwości w czasie akcji ulegają modyfikacji. W przypadku teatru są to spektakle aranżowane na placach miejskich, we wnętrzach fabrycznych, na terenach wiejskich, plażach itp. W sztukach plastycznych analogiczny zabieg wystąpił w przypadku instalacji *Labirynt* Mikołaja Smoczyńskiego zrealizowanej w Zamku Ujazdowskim w Warszawie oraz jeszcze dobitniej w *Dotleńniaczu* Joanny Rajkowskiej.

Opisane w pracy działania polskich artystów nie zakładają koncepcji dzieła jako artefaktu przeznaczonego do ponadczasowej i uniwersalnej kontemplacji. Uwzględniają to, co aktualne, niestałe, ulotne, zależne od woli i decyzji nie tylko artyści, ale i widza. Ukazują też możliwość nadawania performatywnego sensu przestrzeni bez konieczności odnoszenia się do działań aktorów, co ma miejsce w przypadku spektakli teatralnych.

Słowa kluczowe: performatywność, przestrzeń, Erika Fischer-Lichte, instalacja, *environment*, *public art*.

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BUILDINGS THAT ACT – ARCHITECTURE AND PERFORMANCE

Abstract: The discourse on contemporary architecture has been recently enriched by introducing definitions which apparently have little in common with the buildings' characteristics. More and more authors write about performative architecture, where the building is not a scene for a show, but becomes its proper actor. The form no longer follows function, but results from an interaction of external and internal factors. The performance of modern architecture has its origins in virtual environment and cannot exist without digital tools. Many symptoms suggest that this will be one of the leading directions in architecture's development in the predictable future.

Keywords: performance, performative architecture, new media, interactive architecture, digital design.

Architecture is frozen music, said Goethe¹, pointing out the mathematical dependences on harmony which are the basis of both arts. However, music is a dynamic composition changing in real time, whereas architecture seems to be passive and static. But these traditionally attributed characteristics are slowly fading away now. Two centuries after Goethe, Jean Nouvel, a French architect, updated a statement of the German Romantic poet and said that architecture lives like a movie – in the space of time and movement².

Contemporary architecture is moving further and further away from the definitions well known for ages. Three Vitruvian categories: utility – *utilitas*, durability – *firmitas*, and beauty – *venustas* are perceived as corrupted, and instead new concepts are being introduced into modern architectural discourse. Apparently, these have little in common with the attributes of architecture. More and more authors write about performative architecture, where the building is not a scene for a show anymore, but becomes its outright actor.

¹ B. Szmidt, *Lad przestrzeni*, Warszawa 1981, p. 392.

² B. Makowska, "Poszukiwanie tożsamości architektonicznej w dobie globalizacji przez sposób kształtowania elewacji – miejsce dialogu formy i jej kontekstu", *Teka Komisji Architektury, Urbanistyki i Studiów Krajobrazowych OL PAN*, 33-42, p. 41.

Buildings are no longer perceived as objects, but become organisms that act in an urban environment. Their form does not depend on the shape and material anymore, as they are a sheer contradiction to Vitruvius' *firmitas*, understood not only as durability, but also as unchangeability and stability.

How should one perceive performativeness in the context of architecture then? Looking for a definition of performative architecture, Branko Kolarevic wrote that it is impossible to create a coherent description, because performance in design may have various characteristics due to its varying nature – from spatial, through sociological and cultural, to purely technical. Its role in contemporary architecture is constantly increasing, but at the same time it has different meanings for different people³. The common basis is the active participation of digital technologies both in the design and in the construction process. In this case, the starting point of further considerations is an expanded definition of performative expression. According to it, one can talk of performance in relation not only to human activities, but also to “non-human” entities. In her analysis of the evolution of perception of performative expression in post-humanism, Ewa Domańska emphasizes that this does not mean the attribution of human behavior to artifacts, but rather seeing them as a consequence of various interrelated processes⁴. The shape of reality and all the changes taking place within it are a result of the common interference of external factors.

FROM IDEA TO REALISATION

The foundations of contemporary architecture come straight from the ideology of modernism, which perceived a building as an object, a composition of elements whose form was determined by its function. This narrow determinism appeared to impose serious limitations on the whole movement, especially when faced with constant rapid changes in the world. Designers in the 1960s responded to those limitations by attempting to develop flexible architecture which was supposed to adjust itself to the dynamics of the environment. Their realizations were the natural consequence of the changes that took place in the world of art. The turn of the 1950s and 1960s saw the emergence of interactive

³ B. Kolarevic, A. Malkawi, *Performative architecture. Beyond instrumentality*, Spon Press 2005, p. 3.

⁴ E. Domańska, “«Zwrot performatywny»” we współczesnej humanistyce, *Teksty Drugie*, nr 5, 2007, pp. 57-58.

art, and the gradual replacement of the concept of a work of art as an artifact by the concept of work of art as performance⁵.

In 1960 Japanese architects formulated the definition of metabolism in architecture – a trend which was based on an almost biological renewal and change. Machine-like aesthetics harmonized with the idea of a building that could easily adapt to the changing expectations of its users. The design process emerged from parametric design and analysis of environmental circumstances, which had to lead to an optimal scheme of form and function. However, the representatives of metabolism and structuralism in architecture were not the first to think of changing the role of buildings in spatial performance. It was the Russian Constructivists who can be seen as their predecessors. In 1919 Vladimir Tatlin designed the Monument to the Third International as a spiral construction made of steel, whose shape was to constitute a visible symbol of dialectic development. Inside he also placed simple blocks rotating at their own speeds⁶. The Soviet architects were probably the first to imagine the common use of dynamically changing images, light and sound to create an interaction between a building and its surroundings. Basing on their achievements, in the 1960s the architects gathered in the British architectural group Archigram revitalized the idea of the machine-building. They found an abundant source of inspiration in modern technologies and created designs of continuously changeable objects filled with high technology. The particular elements of these structures were supposed to move and change, which guaranteed varying aesthetic and functional parameters of the buildings.

Although the utopian ideas of Archigram date back to the 1960s, they meet almost all of the criteria defined by Lew Manovich as the distinctive features of the aesthetics of the information society functioning thanks to the “new media”⁷. The only major difference is the lack of digital representation due to the lack of proper design tools. Limited means were the most important and completely impassable borderline for the freedom of architectural design in the 1960s and 1970s⁸. It was only with the development of digital technologies in the end of the 20th century that architects gained access to an almost unlimited spectrum of possibilities.

⁵ R.W. Kluszczyński, *Sztuka interaktywna. Od dzieła-instrumentu do interaktywnego spektaklu*, Warszawa 2010, p. 65.

⁶ P. Trzeciak, *Przygody architektury XX wieku*, Warszawa 1974, pp. 125-126.

⁷ L. Manovich, *Język nowych mediów*, Warszawa 2006, p. 13.

⁸ B. Kolarevic, A. Malkawi, *Performative architecture...*, *op.cit.*, p. 138.

PERFORMANCE IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

There is a conviction that the notion of performative architecture refers only to the design based on the use of digital technologies⁹, but this seems to be a kind of simplification when juxtaposed with the theories of Kolarevic and others. Nevertheless, it has to be emphasized that the appearance of new interactive digital technologies have not only helped performative architecture to develop, but have also transformed its theoretical basis, as well as its methods of communication and the shaping of forms. R.W. Kluszczyński claims that the new media go beyond the traditional boundaries of art¹⁰. In the field of architecture, similarly, they have created a new relation between the objects which are “built, not built, and not-to-be-built”¹¹.

It should be noted that materialization of the designers' attempts does not have to be the necessary final stage of the whole process. Formal experiments carried out by Greg Lynn or Marcos Novak are the finest examples of architecture which exists only in virtual reality. In 1997-1998 Novak created *Paracube*, a functionless object that materializes only through computer visualization and disappears when it is over¹². The author rejected functionality, one of the most important characteristics of conventional architecture, and introduced the fourth dimension – time. *Paracube* is a deconstruction of a cube based on a steel bar construction covered with a smooth “skin”. Its form is continuously deformed by the changeable parameters set by the designer. The whole action is supervised by the author, although the procedures themselves do not apply to the final form (as it is in traditional architecture) but to the process of creation¹³. The designer is no longer focused on shaping and modifying the space, but on changing and creating the relations among its particular elements.

Greg Lynn, fascinated by the opportunities that new technologies offered to architects, carries out research on architectural form transforming in time in digital environment. This American designer, theoretician and philosopher, originally fascinated by buildings which “move, literally”, soon focused on designing in the dynamically changeable space¹⁴. Lynn's precursory activities were mostly determined by digital animations, which he used to create concepts of architectural forms. Thanks to that technique it was possible to easily manipulate them in real time and keep complete control over every

⁹ K. Januszkiewicz, “Architektura performatywna w Kolonii”, *Archivolta*, nr 2(54)/2012, p. 34.

¹⁰ R. W. Kluszczyński, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

¹¹ R. Achramowicz, “Pudło wirtualne”, *Architektura-Murator*, nr 09/2003, p. 102.

¹² J. Słyk, *Źródła architektury informacyjnej*, Warszawa 2012, p. 131.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ P. Buck, “O animacji w projektowaniu architektury. Eksperymenty Grega Lynna”, *Archivolta*, nr 2(54)/2012, p. 56.

stage of the process¹⁵. The method of dynamic shaping of form makes designing itself a performative activity. In his book *Animate Form*, published in 1999, Lynn wrote that architecture is one of the last disciplines that can accept permanence due to its durability¹⁶. In these circumstances it is necessary to define animation itself. The author does not explain it as a movement or location change, but a specific evolution of form, a shaping force that is closely related to animalism, animism, growth, activity and vitality¹⁷.

Soft, rounded shapes of Lynn's digitally created objects seem to be somehow environment-friendly. Meandered, curvy blobs are very remote from the Platonic pre-forms and the Cartesian space, now replaced by forms which are an effect of interaction between the object and external forces¹⁸, and which present a totally new approach towards shaping the space. Lynn puts them in contradiction to the deconstructivist attempts to solve geometrical conflicts in architecture. The philosophy of deconstructivism describes the world in terms of differences and claims that architectural form should reveal those conflicts. On the contrary, media surface of performative buildings is a means of dialogue with the environment, pacifying conflicts and contradictions.

Most of Lynn's concepts and ideas have not been realized and will probably never be realized. Korean Presbyterian Church in New York is an interesting exception. The dynamic and at the same time flexible form of the building was created in 1995-1999 thanks to the design methods fully based on animation technique. At that time, also the competition project for the Manhattan Port Authority Gateway Terminal was created. Lynn analyzed the movement of potential users, its directions and hypothetical intensity. On this basis he created a system of forces, and designed the spatial structure connecting platforms with other elements of the infrastructure and the surrounding urban tissue. According to the assumptions of the initial design, the structure was to be covered with membranes which had a double function of roofing and multimedia screens displaying messages for passengers at the same time¹⁹. Thus, the performance concerned not only the process of architectural creation but also the continuously changing message it was sending.

Lynn's virtual architecture portrays the dynamics of the world around us. It is not a simple development of a mechanical building that can move in real time due to advanced technologies. In this case, *performance* should be understood in a broader context. *Embryological House*, designed in 1997, was an

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

¹⁶ G. Lynn, "Probable Geometries. The Architecture of Writing in Bodies", *Any Magazine*, nr 0, p. 9.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ B. Kolarevic, *Designing and Manufacturing Architecture in the Digital Age*, in: *Architecture in the Digital Age: Designing and Manufacturing*, B. Kolarevic (ed.), Spon Press, 2003, p. 118.

¹⁹ P. Buck, *op.cit.*, p. 61.

attempt towards realization of a prefabricated and totally personalized house. Its form was supposed to undergo digitally controlled mutations according to the changing needs of the inhabitants. Its organic shape was another *blob* variation and was designed with the use of two thousands unique panels which, when assembled, were supposed to produce the effect of a coherent unity²⁰. The dynamic development of its form would be controlled in virtual reality by the architect, who could bring in new variables. In fact, moving a single element would modify the structure of the whole building, which offers an almost unlimited number of different formal combinations. According to Greg Lynn, it is worth mentioning that thanks to modern technologies the production of several dozen or even several hundred different digitally designed building elements is equally expensive to the production of one type of element repeated many times.

Greg Lynn developed the concept of organic, digitally designed architecture in the prototype of *Blob Wall* – a wall made of repeatable, soft, organically shaped parts. He redefined, jointly with the Panelite company, one of the basic structural elements in traditional architecture, like a brick or a stone block. He proposed lightweight, synthetic, colorful blobs instead. They are repeatable and modular, and joint together can be used in construction of almost every structure. Each time, the wall, the dome or the vault (or any other shape) is made of “blocks” generated individually within the system²¹. Lynn treats the *Blob Wall* as another opportunity to spread the idea of architecture designed in digital environment that is able to interact with external conditions. According to him, the evolution of the prototype can lead to a situation where the blobs or their derivatives are used in construction of objects on a much bigger scale²².

INTERACTIVITY, AUTOACTIVITY AND REACTIVITY IN ARCHITECTURE

The issue of interactivity of performative architecture and the relations between a building and its users has already been mentioned in Greg Lynn's concepts. Although he perceived performance as an ability to adapt, in further considerations architectural performance which is much closer to a traditional show cannot be omitted.

In view of different kinds of architecture's activities in relation to its users and its surroundings, three main types of active buildings should be

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ N. Spiller, *Digital architecture now. A global survey of emerging talent*, Thames & Hudson 2008, p. 144.

²² www.metropolismag.com [27.08.2012].

distinguished: interactive, autoactive and reactive. All of them in their specific ways express performativity in architecture. The diversification confirms Branko Kolarevic's theory, which takes the multi-faceted phenomenon at face value. The majority of analyses and conclusions limit buildings' activity to only one aspect – its façade²³. Nowadays, in the era of digital design, the digitally shaped external surface of the object does not exist only as a result of its internal scheme, but is rather a completely independent "skin". Following Januskiewicz and trying to find phenomenological comparisons, it should be said that its function is broader than being an element necessary for shaping "the body" of the building. It is also a sensory organ. "Skin" in architecture and arts outreaches the role of the cover, the camouflage or the adornment known from nature. It is a surface exposed to the action of external stimuli²⁴. At the same time, in the contemporary world filled with permanently changing messages, a building's skin is frequently a place for displaying messages or a space for artistic manifestations²⁵. It relates to the traditional expression of the material as well as to the new media, whose dynamic transmission can be an integral part of the building.

The key attributes of digital media are co-operation and participation. In the case of interactive architecture, the users' perception of and identification with its transmission and its content increases when people are engaged in a multimedia program²⁶. A building's interactive skin is subjected to the users' operations. It belongs to the public space rather than to the closed object itself. Its surface becomes an interface mediating between the interior and the surroundings of the building by means of gentle and soft infiltration²⁷.

The T-Mobile headquarters built in 2004 in Bonn (design: professor Peter Schmitz, Cologne) seems to be one of the best examples of architectural performance in a public space. The main building in the whole complex has a double function. It is a kind of a gate leading to the company headquarters and a forum for events taking place in a public space. In the beginning, the client searched for a spatial and technical solution that would enable displaying T-Mobile logo in an attractive and innovative way. The final outcome of Schmitz's and ag4's work (the company which was directly responsible for the construction of the media façade) surpassed all expectations. For the first time in history, a transparent media façade was built. The elevation consists of a system of horizontal panels permanently integrated with a LED lights installation. Together they make an external screen of 300 m², which is set in

²³ ag4 Mediatecture Company, *ag4 Media Facades*, daab 2006.

²⁴ K. Januskiewicz, *O projektowaniu architektury w dobie narzędzi cyfrowych. Stan aktualny i perspektywy rozwoju*, Wrocław 2010, p. 66.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 122.

²⁶ ag4 Mediatecture Company, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

²⁷ K. Januskiewicz, *O projektowaniu architektury...*, *op.cit.*, p. 111.

front of the building's glass curtain wall²⁸. Open spaces between particular panels provide uninterrupted view from the inside. At the same time, the façade acts like an enormous space displaying information and adverts, or turns the piazza in front of the building into a digital playground. The cameras record any move on the square and immediately transmit the animated picture to the screen. The fact that passers-by have the possibility of influencing the display's content seems to be one of the most interesting characteristics of the whole installation. During the lunch break, T-Mobile workers can relax playing digital tennis on it with special electronic rackets. There is also a possibility of displaying private images and photos sent via mobile phones or the Internet. However, the main part of performance of the T-Mobile headquarters' media façade are self-generating real time presentations. Their content is continuously updated and their form is adjusted to the architectural forms of the building.

Cooperation of the building's users in the process of shaping its aesthetics and semantics can have different forms. Nowadays, in most cases, it is still limited to rather small installations in interiors or experimental prototypes. During the 2002 Venice Biennale, Mark Goulthorpe and dECOi Architects presented for the first time their work – *Hyposurface*. It is a wall consisting of a mosaic of small metallic elements moved by a system of small pistons hidden behind their surface. The whole installation puts together a multimedia presentation, lights, images, sound and movement. Particular parts of the mosaic move in a programmed way and can imitate a living organism or a natural phenomena (like waves, for example), or can be manipulated by the users. The surface moves and waves under the influence of their voice, move or touch. It responds to every external action in an extraordinary way²⁹. Originally, *Hyposurface* was designed as a decoration which was supposed to be presented during the restoration of the Birmingham Hippodrome. The designers decided that the wall should not only be a surface to display works of art, but should become an interactive medium on its own. Following this presumption, Goulthorpe and dECOi Architects created a concept of spatial animation that reacts to different external stimuli, such as sound of the passers-by's steps or the audience's applause³⁰.

Hyposurface in Birmingham has never been installed on its destination, becoming a subject of research instead of living architecture. Still, one can find simpler and less demanding interactive objects in public spaces. In Sandnes, Norway, one of the underground pedestrian passages was enriched by Snohetta designers who put there an installation called *Watercolors*. It is made of three flat rectangular LED screens. They remain totally dark and light

²⁸ ag4 Mediatecture Company, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

²⁹ N. Spiller, *op.cit.*, p. 131.

³⁰ J. Burry, L. Burry, *The New Mathematics of Architecture*, Thames & Hudson 2010, p. 227.

up only when reacting to the movement of passers-by. The installation creates a negative image of the normal scheme where the shadow of a man is dark whereas everything that surrounds him/her is enlightened. In *Watercolors*, people's silhouettes generate "light shadows" on the screens' surfaces. Each, even the slightest move is recorded by the sensors and is turned into a dynamic system of light pixels.

Interaction between architecture and its user is also the interest of the designer Dario Buzzini. He created a wallpaper with a system of light points under a plain neutral cover, which allows to project text and simple images. The wall covered with a fabric becomes a low resolution screen with the diodes filling the grid on the whole surface. The user can turn them on and off creating a unique pattern. Buzzini's wallpaper becomes not only a fully personalized finishing material, but also a dynamically changeable interior design that communicates with its inhabitants. The installation in Bloomberg headquarters in Tokyo designed by Klein Dytham ICE has a similar role. In 2004 Dytham cooperated with Toshio Iwai, one of top digital interface designers, and created a screen integrated with the architecture of the building's interior. In front of the screen there is a system of sensors which detect movement. When a person approaches the screen, the device starts an interactive performance. In a simple and intuitive way everyone can easily take part in a digitally generated performance and leave a trace on the screen, a short-lived effect of the users' activity.

Kas Oosterhuis analyzed architecture's capability to perform and aim at creating an environment which reacts many times within short intervals so that the changes remain almost unnoticeable³¹. Carrying out research at the Technical University in Delft, he created a prototype of a living space called Muscle Body (design: Oosterhuis Lenard and Hyperbody). It is a lightweight membrane supported by external framework with 72 pneumatic actuators. Inside, the designers installed sensors recording activity of people inside the room and immediately transmitting the data to the computer which controls the pressure in the actuators. Thus, the shape and the size of the space is continuously changing in real time in reaction to the users' natural behavior³². Muscle Body was exhibited for the first time in 2003 in the Pompidou Center. One year later, Hyperbody created its modified version – Muscle Re-Configured³³. Aluminum panels instead of Lycra membrane were used and the steering system was developed. The designers' idea was to create reciprocal bonds between inhabitants and the room, because both the users and the digitally controlled space had to "learn" each other's behavior and develop

³¹ J. Stryk, *op.cit.*, p. 136.

³² N. Spiller, *op.cit.*, p. 243.

³³ *Ibidem*.

a relationship³⁴. Both Muscle Body and Muscle Re-Configured were produced in cooperation with Festo company, which also made the Interactive Wall. It was made of vertical panels, 1.2 meters wide and 3.6 meters high, responding to move, light and sound. Their reaction to the external stimuli could assume various forms – the Interactive Wall could lean towards the approaching person or move away. Moreover, it could respond with visual effects thanks to the LED system on its surface, or with sounds. The project emerged as another response to the needs of interactive architecture meeting conditions of the digital age – architecture which is “emotive, responsive and interactive.”³⁵

Contrary to interactive architecture, autoactive programming does not assume the users’ participation, although its transmission is directed at them. An autoactive message is designed in such a way that it perfectly meets the needs and expectations of an individual receiver. In the case of media façades, it can consist of classic presentations or videos, animated texts or pictures. They are repeated over a certain period because of limited time designed for the whole presentation. Thus, to avoid the impression of monotony, certain parts are changeable. It is also possible to integrate autoactive programming and convert it to an interactive or reactive performance³⁶.

Architectural autoactivity can be expressed by different means, from simple light installations to advanced multimedia projections. The Allianz Arena in Munich, designed in 2005 by Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, can be perceived as an example of the first group. The concrete structure of a typical sport stadium has façades covered with ETFE-foil air panels that create a unified external skin of the building. Each panel can be independently lit with white, red or blue light. The color scheme depends on the colors of the currently playing teams³⁷. At the LTU Arena in Düsseldorf (architect: JSK Architekten, 2003), the media façade works in a similar way. The elevation faces the nearby Rhine and one of major highways. It was designed as an enormous LED screen of almost 6000 m²³⁸. The displayed information is permanently updated and much more complex in form than that at the Allianz Arena. On the Düsseldorf stadium façade informative and advertising images, as well as short animated movies are presented. At the same time, thanks to semi-transparency of the external cover, one can see what is happening inside the building all the time. Therefore, there is an interference of different signals and messages, which is a phenomenon characteristic for the modern world.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 245.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 246.

³⁶ ag4 Mediatecture Company, *op.cit.*, p. 70.

³⁷ R. Findeis, “Stadion Allianz Arena w Monachium”, *Architektura-Murator* nr 1/2006, pp. 90-91.

³⁸ ag4 Mediatecture Company, *op.cit.*, p. 80.

The façade performance is connected with the performance of the interior naturally created by its users.

Purposeful exposition of the building's internal life and revealing mechanisms of its functioning was a popular formal solution in the era of fully glass façades. In the end of 80s Nicolas Grimshaw's studio built The Financial Times Printworks in London Docklands. The totally transparent, fully glazed, frameless curtain wall exposed the "living heart" of this industrial building – huge printing presses. The façade became a 96 meters long screen displaying quite an unusual show. In 2000 Grimshaw presented a competition design of an adaptation of the Battersea power station in London for the needs of a modern art museum. The architect desired to design a form related to the character of the artifacts exhibited inside. He created architecture which can adapt itself to the changing needs by transforming both its form and function. The whole concept was based on the use of a new type of glass which, depending on particular expectations, could become completely transparent or translucent. In the first state, the glass walls would enable an undisturbed view of the mechanisms of the museum. The second state would enable using those surfaces as screens for multimedia presentations³⁹.

Internal architectural performance does not necessary have to be a literal opening of the building for the spectators. In 2005 in the building of the Kauhof Gallery in Alexanderplatz in Berlin there was an installation unveiling its internal "life" not by introducing a transparent façade, but by a video projection which showed what was happening inside. The cameras were installed by the main escalators used by the gallery's guests to move up and down. The recorded footage was displayed in real time on a large screen set in front of the rectangular window in the front façade⁴⁰. This natural and completely uncontrolled performance was taken from the closed interior to the public space, which became an unusual autoactive presentation of happenings.

Finally, reactive architecture reacts to the outside impulses and stimuli, and changes the form of its elements accordingly⁴¹. Contrary to interactive objects, reactive programming does not require the participation of users in performative actions. The response to the environmental circumstances can take various forms, from dynamic changes of the shape and the displayed message, to completely static architecture whose performance is a result of digital design techniques. The building becomes an answer to the context of the surrounding. It gently penetrates the existing urban tissue and eases spatial conflicts.

Indeed, contemporary technologies still do not enable mass production of fully interactive buildings that smoothly adjust their forms to the environment

³⁹ B. Kolarevic, A. Malkawi, *Performative architecture...*, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

⁴⁰ ag4 Mediatecture Company, *op.cit.*, p. 74.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 108.

and to the users' needs. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the number of buildings capable of partial adaptation to environmental conditions is growing. The Aurora Place in Sydney, completed in 2000, is an example of a certain kind of performativity in architecture. Renzo Piano's skyscraper, over 200 meters high, should be perceived as interactive architecture because both the façades and the interiors of particular apartments can be modified depending on weather conditions and the inhabitants' individual caprices. The shape of the building is a result of generative design based on dynamic simulation of environmental circumstances, which nowadays more and more often becomes one of the most important design tools. They were also used in another of Piano's projects, the Weltstadthaus shopping mall in Cologne. The building is another example of architecture that adjusts to its environment, mostly thanks to the façades covered with a smooth "skin" made of glass. The wooden construction of the double curved surface perfectly cooperates with other parts of the structure, and responds to their dynamics and to changing environmental conditions, which seems to be the key factor in the case of space that is a borderline of interior and exterior⁴². Weltstadthaus's performance can be defined as an engineering criterion and can determine the structure's effort to reach the aims predicted by the designer⁴³.

Another space for the development of performative architecture is harmonious co-existence of new architecture in the already existing environment. The biomorphic form of the modern extension of Graz Kunsthaus designed by Perer Cook and Colin Fournier "hovers" over the roofs of old buildings and clearly differs from them. The rounded shape of the *blob* is covered with shiny glass panels. It is not only a visible landmark in the city space, but it also creates a dynamically changing announcement. Under the external glass layer which covers the façades, there are 930 standard fluorescent lamps. Together, they create a relatively low resolution monochrome screen which presents simple displays, such as pictograms or animations related to current activities of the museum⁴⁴. Low resolution of the images does not disturb the reception. What is more, it unifies the projection, art and architecture, and makes the whole message homogenous⁴⁵.

The form of media performance becomes an integral element of the building and is adequate to its shape and specificity. Helmut Jahn designed a congress centre in Zurich with the main façade consisting of a fully glazed curtain wall which functions as a huge screen. The slightly rounded shape of the building may remind of a sail which, indeed, is closely related to the

⁴² K. Januszkiewicz, *Architektura per formatywna...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 37-43.

⁴³ K. Januszkiewicz, *O projektowaniu architektury...*, *op.cit.*, p. 196.

⁴⁴ J. i T. Edler, "Na granicy możliwości – Kunsthaus w Grazu", *Architektura-Murator* 2006, nr 4, pp. 90-92.

⁴⁵ J. Słyk, *op.cit.*, pp. 189-190.

content of its media display. A big virtual sail fluttering in the wind is the background for information about current events or advertisements. This apparently conventional performance is combined with a unique way of generating the animation. On the façade there are sensors that measure present wind strength and its direction. Then, special computer programs convert the collected data so the digital sail on the screen moves in real time as if it was reacting to the real wind.⁴⁶ The whole performance is unique and unpredictable. Architecture, new media and nature act together creating a show which is not controlled exclusively by a man but mainly depends on uncontrolled weather phenomena.

PERFORMANCE AND COINCIDENCE

The broad spectrum of the described projects as well as the variety of presented definitions of performative architecture shows that it should be perceived as an architectural trend *in statu nascendi*. The forthcoming years will certainly bring further development of digital technologies and buildings based on them. Jakub Szczęsny from the CENTRALA Design Group predicts that architectural objects will be more and more flexible and ephemeral. That will enable introducing new functions following changes in the economic situation, or replacing non-structural elements of buildings according to current aesthetic and technologic trends.⁴⁷ The possibility of periodical programming changes within multi-functional buildings and building complexes can open the spectrum of completely new possibilities of using the space. By increasing a building's capability of metamorphosis the architects define its growing ability to adapt to changing environmental circumstances. Thus, quite paradoxically, increasing the elasticity and evanescence of architecture increases its durability (*firmitas*).

All performative actions within architecture rely on the use of digital technologies. They are the result of precisely programmed processes and analysis of external circumstances. Is it possible to omit them and replace them with coincidence as the main force shaping architectural form? Let the short reflection on the role of coincidence in architectural design be a kind of a resume for the foregoing considerations on mutual relations between architecture and performance.

⁴⁶ ag4 Mediatecture Company, *op.cit.*, p. 120.

⁴⁷ J. Szczęsny, "Pojęcie czasu a projektowanie i programowanie obiektów architektonicznych. Seria skojarzeń", in: *Coś, które nadchodzi. Architektura XXI wieku*, B. Świątkowska (ed.), Warszawa 2011, pp. 121-124.

Jakub Szczęsny made an interesting experiment in the Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej CSW in Warsaw as part of the exhibition *Architektura działania/ Performing Architecture*. In the Ujazdowski Castle's courtyard there was an installation composed of a cut concrete cloth. Its top edges were tied and hung up, whereas the slack, bottom edge had ropes attached to it. The other ends of the ropes were held by the participants of the performance, and the aim of the experiment was to create a structure of maximal size. Each participant could pull the rope for an elbow length in each turn, and the order of turns was determined by rolling the dice. Thus, only accident decided about the strength and directions of stretching the cloth. When the time assigned for the experiment ended, the concrete cloth had the form of an irregular tent. Then it was watered to make the whole structure firm. The outcome of the performance was a light-weight pavilion whose form was determined by both coincidence and participations of accidental people.

The solution proposed by Szczęsny's installation cannot be directly implemented in the building industry. However, it is another, a little bit fickle, example that shows how many possibilities become available to designers by introducing the idea of performance to architecture and perceiving performance as an architectural category. Unlike any other contemporary design phenomenon, performance makes it possible to find a common space between a building's durability and changeability of our times.

BUDYNKI, KTÓRE DZIAŁAJĄ – ARCHITEKTURA I PERFORMANCE (streszczenie)

Do dyskursu architektury nowoczesnej wprowadzane są pojęcia pozornie nieprzystające do immanentnych cech budownictwa. Coraz częściej podnoszony jest temat architektury performatywnej, która nie stanowi już sceny dla spektaklu w przestrzeni, ale staje się jego pełnoprawnym aktorem. Forma nie jest wypadkową funkcji, lecz wynikiem interakcji czynników zewnętrznych i wewnętrznych. Performance architektury nowoczesnej rozpoczyna się w środowisku wirtualnym i nie mógłby zaistnieć bez narzędzi cyfrowych. Wiele wskazuje na to, że w najbliższej przyszłości będzie to jedno z wiodących kierunków poszukiwań.

Słowa kluczowe: performance, architektura performatywna, nowe media, architektura interaktywna, projektowanie cyfrowe.

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VISUAL EVENT AS THE EFFECT OF A NETWORK PERFORMATIVE ASPECTS OF INTERNET-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION IN NET ART

Abstract: The starting point of the article is the assumption that the performative turn directs our attention to the expressive dimension of social activity and to events which have the character of a process. If we transfer this assumption to the field of visual culture, then the object of our inquiry will no longer be images, but rather their perception by the participants of visual events or the processes leading to those events. The performative aspects may be noticed in the definition of the “visual event” formulated by Nicholas Mirzoeff, who suggests the introduction of this term to replace “image”. In accordance with this concept, the visual event constitutes the main aspect of reception – the process of seeing in which the user or the consumer seeks information, meaning or pleasure in an encounter with visual technology: from an oil painting to television and the Internet.

The main thesis of the article is that the visual event is the product of a network, which in turn conditions the actions of the users communicating with one another. The performative aspects of Internet-mediated communication are revealed when Internet users employ speech acts. Simultaneously with this process of “doing things with words”, the interlocutors communicating with one another create a “community” which resembles *communitas* (the term used by Victor Turner). We can view the *communitas* as a network community in which the Internet users interact with one another not only with the help of verbal messages, but also with other forms of online communication (images derived from web-cameras, flash animations, photoblogs).

The presented issues find their reflection in the artwork *Listening Post* (2003) by Mark Hansen and Ben Rubin, the “visualisation” of Internet-mediated communication of the users employing speech acts in chat rooms. The online verbal communication used in this work takes on the dimensions of a performance which is the source of its visual aspect, and the speech acts employed by the Internet users function as the “citations” within the “iterability model” in the sense suggested by Jacques Derrida. The artwork *Bodies©INCorporated* (1993) by Victoria Vesna is another example of the performative aspects of Internet-mediated communication, which is described in the context of Judith Butler’s theory of performativity. These examples present the ways of using performative aspects of Internet-mediated communication in net art

Keywords: performativity, visual event, Internet-mediated communication, net art, *communitas*.

INTRODUCTION

The performative turn is one of a number of turns which structured Cultural Studies in the second half of the 20th century. Unlike the linguistic turn, which took as its starting point the metaphor of “the culture as text,”¹ the performative turn was based on the theories that substantially changed the approach to the same problems. The fundamental difference between the linguistic and the performative turn was that the latter “directs our attention to the expressive dimension of (social) action” and of the events which have the character of a staged enactment (performance) or of a process.² I will describe the performative aspects of the selected works of net art based on Internet-mediated interpersonal communication from this perspective.

THE PERFORMATIVE TURN WITHIN VISUAL CULTURE

The performative turn is related here to pictures and visual processes which find themselves at the centre of attention also on account of the pictorial turn. The aim of my inquiry is to attempt to consider the performative turn in the context of visual culture and to work out some text-independent methods of

¹ The metaphor of “the culture as text” puts emphasis on treating culture as a symbolic form generating meaning on the principles analogous to those of the linguistic systems. This sort of conviction is characteristic of the linguistic turn, which took place mainly in the poststructuralist philosophy of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Jean-François Lyotard (see: M. Gołębiowska 2003, *Między wątpliwością a pewnością. O związkach języka i racjonalności w filozofii poststrukturalizmu*, Universitas, Kraków, pp. 30-41). The critical movement acquired its special position, however, owing to the reflection of Richard Rorty, who characterised the history of philosophy as a series of “turns” and made it the last stage in its development (see: R.M. Rorty, 1967, “Metaphysical Difficulties of Linguistic Philosophy”, in: R.M. Rorty (ed.), *Linguistic Turn*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago; R.M. Rorty 1979, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton University Press, Princeton; cf. W.J.T. Mitchell, 1994, *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, p. 11). The linguistic turn substantially changed the understanding of language, which “becomes thus an active factor in the formation of reality, and not a passive reflection of thoughts and things” (L. Rasiński, 2009, “Reguły i ‘gry’ świata społecznego – Wittgenstein, de Saussure i zwrot lingwistyczny w filozofii społecznej”, in: L. Rasiński (ed.), *Język, dyskurs, społeczeństwo. Zwrot lingwistyczny w filozofii społecznej*, PWN, Warszawa, p. 9), and moreover plays a crucial role in the processes of social communication. Numerous concepts of “the culture as text” have been developing based on the notion of performativity, which was gradually losing its importance in the philosophy of language while gaining significance in cultural theory. In the latter field, the understanding of culture as a complex sign structure with a determinate meaning which it is possible to describe through the process of “reading” (expounding its meaning or deconstructing it) dominated until the late 1980s.

² D. Bachmann-Medick, 2012, *Cultural Turns. Nowe kierunki w naukach o kulturze*, transl. K. Krzemieniowa, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa, p. 119.

the interpretation of pictures. The topic of performativity has been raised within visual culture in a number of ways. Above all, linguistic performatives and speech acts have been compared to visual signs. It has also been pointed out that pictures have no meta-signs. That is why it is difficult to command, inquire, or state with their help, or to consider speech acts as analogous to pictures. Pictorial acts do exist, however. Pictures cannot directly indicate that they are stating, promising or vowing something, but they can perform these acts in indirect ways. It is not possible to identify an element of a picture that would be promising something, but it is possible to see the picture as a whole as a promise. Compared with words, pictures have a greater variety of meanings, and that is why interpretation is of much importance when dealing with them.³ One may therefore ask: are there any performative pictures?

Mindy Fenske believes that performativity is above all about the processes in which meaning is constructed, rather than about the discursive products of representation. In this sense performativity helps us to understand the mechanism of the production of meaning. We can therefore treat pictures as performative when they exhibit some features of a live performance or perform a communicative function. Other meanings of performativity can also be related to the creative process. The origin of the word *performative*, however, is linguistic, and it relates to the procedures of citation.⁴ It is in this aspect that this article will relate the performative paradigm to the analysis of visuality on the basis of net-art. Visual structures and pictures may be cited similarly to sentences or texts, and that is why they may be seen as performative, that is iterable. However, as Tomasz Załuski aptly notes, “Iterability is not limited to what has traditionally been labelled as ‘writing.’ Its broader description appears in places where Derrida attempts to show that it is not only characteristic of other types of signs and their respective ways of communication, but also describes the structure of the whole experience of reality.”⁵ I use iterability in this sense as an interpretive tool applied to selected visual works of net art. The source of their visuality are textual structures which have prompted the use of this method. This does not mean, however, that the pictures in these works are to be treated as text or that their structure is a kind of writing.⁶

³ Cf. W. Nöth, 2011, ‘Visual Semiotics: Key Features and an Application to Picture Ads’, in: E. Margolis, L. Pauwels (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Visual Research Methods*, SAGE, London, pp. 309–310.

⁴ M. Fenske, 2007, *Tattoos in American Visual Culture*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, p. 20.

⁵ T. Załuski, 2012, *Modernizm artystyczny i powtórzenie. Próba reinterpretacji*, Universitas, Kraków, p. 63.

⁶ Załuski goes on to state that “Owing to ... the fact that the notion of iterability was introduced in the context of reflection on writing, endowing it with a broader meaning entails a strategic generalization of the reinterpreted notion of writing and agreeing that the whole of reality has the structure of a peculiar ‘writing,’ a ‘graphematic’ structure.” *Ibidem*, pp. 63–64. Within this

The performative turn within visual culture has led to the interest in the forms of behaviour based on playing social roles with the use of various means of visual expression. Seeking the meanings of performance and performativity useful for visual culture, Mindy Fenske mentions the sociologists who, influenced by the theories of Erving Goffman, analyse everyday life in terms of a theatrical performance.⁷ This point of view may be helpful in interpreting the problems of the visuality that is part of everyday life and that includes nonverbal interpersonal communication (which may become the source of visuality in webcams). However, Goffman's theory is also useful in the context of the Internet-mediated interpersonal communication. The research in the area of visual culture tackles the problem of the reception of pictures transmitted in the process of online communication, which may be considered on the basis of Goffman's theory.

FROM "THE CULTURE AS TEXT" TO "THE CULTURE AS PERFORMANCE"

In order to understand the specificity of the transition from text communication to performative treatment of text one must introduce a number of ideas whose source lies in the process described by Erika Fischer-Lichte in the following manner: "A change in the research prospects occurred in the nineties. Now performative features of culture hitherto unnoticed have found themselves at the centre of attention. This made it possible to approach in an innovative (practical) way the already existing, or considered as potentially possible, realities, at the same time endowing artistic action and events with a peculiar character, not-acknowledged by the traditional model of culture seen as text. The career of another metaphor started then – that of 'the culture as performance'. It was also necessary to redefine performativity, so that it would begin to include physical action as well."⁸

The indicated transition from "the culture as text" to "the culture as performance" also affected the area of visual culture. However, it has not had the character of a radical change. Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska thinks that Erica Fischer-Lichte's diagnosis seems accurate, but only in part, since "[...] the performative approach in the research practice of humanist scholars has been

perspective, the interpretation of visual works on the basis of Derrida's notion of iterability assumes that an image is a text, and that the work of art has the structure of writing. In my interpretation I assume otherwise.

⁷ M. Fenske, 2007, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

⁸ E. Fischer-Lichte, 2008, *Estetyka performatywności*, transl. M. Borowski, M. Sugiera, Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków, p. 36.

developing most effectively not only on the intersection of both its sources [John Austin's philosophy of language and late twentieth-century art and aesthetics], but also at the crossing point of the textual paradigm (or, more precisely, the orientations which brought it to life) with these sources. Due to this double crossing of inspirations, one should speak of 'a performativist limit' to the textualist claims of universality or 'performativist supplement' to textuality."⁹ In this sense the subject of our interest is a study of "visuality," which supplements "textuality" from a performative point of view.

THE PICTORIAL TURN AND THE PERFORMATIVE PARADIGM AS FACTORS SHAPING INTERNET-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

The term *performative* was introduced by John L. Austin, who first used the adjective *performatory* in his earlier works, before he decided on employing the other term. Both adjectives derive from the verb *perform*.¹⁰ Austin's ideas¹¹ have many times been discussed in the context of the performative paradigm in Cultural Studies.¹² There have also been attempts to use them in the area of visual culture. In effect, new developments in Visual Semiotics, the Rhetoric of the Image and Picture Theory took place, initiated by another methodo-

⁹ A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, 2005, 'Performatywizm i problematyka tożsamości. Próba teoretycznego umiejscowienia koncepcji Judith Butler', in: J. Kmita, B. Kotowa, J. Sójka (eds.), *Nauka – humanistyka – człowiek. Prace dedykowane Profesor Krystynie Zamiarze w czterdziestolecie pracy naukowej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, Poznań, p. 258.

¹⁰ J. Austin, 1962, *How To Do Things With Words*, Oxford University Press, New York – Oxford.

¹¹ Austin's ideas were expanded by his disciple, John R. Searle, who, back in the 1990s, took the "speech act" to be the basic unit of communication. Searle included speech acts within the category of social behaviour referring to events as well as predicting them, stating, questioning, ordering or promising. He also believed that speech acts are to be seen not as formal linguistic structures but as organized systems which are not based on acting according to rules that have been agreed on, but rather function as outright games based on precisely formulated rules, such as football or chess (see: R. Schechner, 2006, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, Routledge, London – New York, p. 125). According to Searle: "The unit of linguistic communication is not, as has generally been supposed, the symbol, word or sentence, or even the token of the symbol, word or sentence, but rather the production or issuance of the symbol or word or sentence in the performance of the speech act. To take the token as a message is to take it as a produced or issued token. More precisely, the production or issuance of a sentence token under certain conditions is a speech act, and speech acts [...] are the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication" (J.R. Searle 1969, *Speech Acts. An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, p. 16).

¹² Cf. A. Zeidler-Janiszewska A., 2007, 'Perspektywy performatywizmu', "Teksty Drugie", nr 5 (107), pp. 34-47; A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, 2008, 'Perspektywy performatywizmu', in: R.W. Kluszczyński, A. Zeidler-Janiszewska (eds.), *Perspektywy badań nad kulturą*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź, pp. 87-100.

logical turn known as the pictorial turn. In terms of its origin, the pictorial turn was a mirror reflection of the linguistic turn. As a consequence, this point of view led to treating pictures as texts. A similar situation took place in the case of the performative turn, which, transferred onto the area of visual culture, also led to some theoreticians comparing linguistic structures (speech acts) with pictures, searching for analogies and trying to isolate pictorial acts. This conviction, however, proved false each time since, as W. J. Thomas Mitchell claims, "What makes for the sense of a pictorial turn, then, is not that we have some powerful account of visual representation that is dictating the terms of cultural theory, but that pictures form a point of peculiar friction and discomfort across a broad range of intellectual inquiry. The picture now has a status somewhere between what Thomas Kuhn called a 'paradigm' and an 'anomaly,' emerging as a central topic of discussion in the human sciences in the way that language did: that is, as a kind of model or figure for other things (including figuration itself), and as an unsolved problem, perhaps even the object of its own 'science,' what Erwin Panofsky called an 'iconology.'"¹³

The pictorial turn may be defined as a change of methodological direction from the linguistic to the visual paradigm. The outcome of this situation is that it becomes just as valid to use pictures in social communication as it is to communicate textually. Consequently, "textual encoding" is being replaced by "visual encoding." Another symptom of the pictorial turn is that visual communication has been assuming the position of an independent semiotic system, and that the picture now performs a role analogous to that of language, which was understood to be the foundation for all ways of communication within the linguistic turn.

The pictorial turn may also be compared with the performative paradigm, which draws attention to the visual aspects of social behaviour and makes "visual events" happening as a result of the influence of pictures on the recipients of mass media the object of its inquiry. Zeidler-Janiszewska has aptly captured the nature of this transformation, claiming that "the moment of transformation of the participants of a performance into a special community resembling *communitas* as understood by Victor Turner, emphasized by some authors more firmly than by others, is important for the intersection of the sources shaping today's 'performativist paradigm'; it is connected not only with 'doing things with words,' but also with acting through other forms of 'semiotic expression and communication.'"¹⁴

What this observation indicates is that the performative paradigm has been developing by supplementing "doing things with words" (speech acts) with other means of "semiotic expression" ranked among nonverbal communica-

¹³ W.J.T. Mitchell, 1994, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁴ A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, 2005, *op.cit.*, p. 261.

tion. This tendency emphasizes the role of visual forms of social behaviour noticed in Erving Goffman's concept as described in the book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. The author of the concept understands "performance" as the process of "playing" a social role and uses the term "performance" "to refer to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers."¹⁵

Goffman's definition touches a very significant feature of the performance: the relation between the "actor" and the audience. Theoreticians of cultural performance have strongly underlined the role of the audience or community in which performance is happening, while psychologists, to the contrary, are prone to emphasize the role of the performance actor. Goffman describes social interactions with the language of the theatre, noticing in them numerous instances of successive performances. Performers – participants in a social interaction – create a stage effect with the help of visual impressions perceived by others. It is worth noticing that the term which Goffman used denotes not only a performance, enactment, role-playing, theatrical show, circus act, concert or holding a ceremony, but also the performance of everyday activities, such as a surgery, associated with a particular social role. According to Goffman, the behaviour of the participants of social interactions is an information game of a kind, full of masking and mutual subterfuges, and subordinated to the rules governing the exertion and perception of visual impressions. Goffman's concept of performance contributed to the formation of belief that interpersonal communication is currently being shaped by visual, that is nonverbal, social behaviour.¹⁶ As Jacek Isański aptly notes, "The key assumptions of Goffman's dramatic theory pertain to the connection between the stage (where the interactions, or rather 'performances' take place), the decorations (helping actors present themselves on stage in a desired way), and the backstage (where the actors prepare for engaging in these interactions). The interactions, constituting a series of performances, involve using a façade, appropriate to the given situation, which, like in architecture, is characterised by a particular attention to detail and performs the most important role in the interaction, imposing a particular impression on the addressees and helping the actor sustain the impression during the interaction."¹⁷

¹⁵ E. Goffman, 1990, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, p. 22.

¹⁶ See: M. Carlson, 2004, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge, London – New York, second edition, pp. 34-35.

¹⁷ J. Isański, 2007, 'Wizualne tło dramaturgicznej koncepcji Ervinga Goffmana', in: M. Krajewski, (ed.), *Wizualność miasta. Wytwarzanie miejskiej ikonosfery*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, Poznań, p. 123.

The façade is the visual background for social interactions which take place within Internet-mediated communication by means of presentation of non-verbal behaviour through the use of webcams in chat rooms and digital photographs uploaded to the Internet. The increasing share of these elements in Internet-mediated communication is the evidence that such communication does not have to proceed textually. Quite the contrary, most Internet users are fond of visual means of communication, even if their use often entails losing one's anonymity.

PERFORMATIVE ASPECTS OF INTERNET-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

The performativity of Internet-mediated communication manifests itself in several ways. Firstly, the Internet, like virtual reality, is a domain of simulation, where “differences between media and live events, originals and digital or biological clones, performing onstage and ordinary life are collapsing.”¹⁸ In this sense performativity makes social, political, economic, personal and artistic events, happening in a public space, acquire evident characteristics of a performance. The described situation also pertains to Internet communication in which interlocutors perform social roles by using speech acts and “doing things with words.”

The other aspect of the performativity of Internet communication points to the nature of social relations which are formed among Internet users. It emerges in the process of Internet-mediated interpersonal communication, which is above all about Internet users using speech acts. Simultaneously, during this process of “doing things with words”, the communicating interlocutors form a community resembling *communitas*. The term, introduced by Turner, relates to Martin Buber, who claims that “community, growing community (which is all we have known so far) is the being no longer side by side but *with* one another of a multitude of persons. And this multitude, though it also moves towards one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the other, a flowing from *I* to *Thou*. Community is where community happens.”¹⁹

According to Turner, Buber touches upon the spontaneous and direct specificity of *communitas*, which constitutes the opposite of the institutional, abstract social structure²⁰. *Communitas* (the Latin term denoting a community,

¹⁸ R. Schechner, 2006, *op.cit.*, p. 123.

¹⁹ M. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, transl. R. Gregor-Smith, Routledge, London – New York, p. 37.

²⁰ V. Turner, 2008, ‘Liminality and Communitas’, in: *Idem, The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Aldine Transaction Press, New Brunswick, pp. 126-127.

a collective, reveals its common genealogy with the term *communicare* – “to communicate”) can thus be related to a network community, formed during Internet-mediated communication, as well as to all the symptoms of its functioning, wherein Internet users act on one another not only with words, but also with other forms of visual communication (webcamera pictures, flash animations and photoblogs).

Nonverbal behaviour of Internet users transmitted over webcams can also become a source of performativity, because it is hard to distinguish a situation depicted objectively by webcams from a subjective vision which often derives from the manipulation of a digital picture, which “was created to provide a testimony to reality more faithful than photography or film, to capture the world in vistas that would give the impression of a direct access to reality, or even participation in this reality (Flusser’s ‘gesture of video’). The phenomenon of electronic and digital imaging and the tools that accompany it consist in the fact that in its aspirations to corroborate reality the tool that was supposed to capture the world interferes with it, testifies to its own being-in-the-world, thus being to a certain degree self-referential. This can be understood also as coexistence of the observer, the one that registers the view, as well as their look together with the tool used for registering, with the observable world.”²¹ It is therefore impossible to differentiate an objective situation shown on webcams from a subjective vision resulting from manipulation of digital pictures.

VISUAL EVENTS AS THE EFFECT OF A NETWORK AND PERFORMATIVE CITATION

Goffman’s theory emphasizes the role of the recipient in the process of the functioning of the performance. This aspect is particularly visible in the approach presented by the theoreticians of Visual Culture Studies. Nicholas Mirzoeff suggests replacing the notion of an “image” with that of a “visual event” which is generated with the help of visual media technologies in the process of social communication. If we transfer the assumptions of the performative turn to the area of visual culture then the subject of our inquiry will not be images, but rather the ability of those who participate in visual events to see them, or the process which leads to their creation. The visual event also constitutes a focal aspect of the process of seeing or reception in which a contemporary recipient or consumer analyses impressions originating from various visual objects in a public space: art works exhibited in galleries,

²¹ M. Gołębiowska, 2003, *Demontaż atrakcji. O estetyce audiowizualności*, Wydawnictwo “słowo/obraz terytoria”, Gdańsk, pp. 201-202.

pictures watched at the cinema, on television, video or on the Internet. This definition reveals that images may come into existence in social interactions established in a both private and public space during the reception of art works, film or television, as well as in the process of visual events which take place during live multimedia performances and during online interpersonal communication.

The above way of image creation in the act of communication is evident in the phenomenon of convergence, which, according to Henry Jenkins, consists in “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want.”²² Convergence takes place in the minds of the recipients, but it also happens in their social interactions with others while communicating on the Internet. Describing these phenomena, both Jenkins and Mirzoeff refer to the events of 9/11. As a case of convergence, Jenkins provides the example of a digital collage by Dino Ignacio showing *Sesame Street*'s Bert and Osama bin Laden together in a single photo. Mirzoeff uses the 9/11 images to show that convergence takes place within the minds of the spectators, with a flux of disaster movie scenes entering the domain of real events.

A visual event is closely connected with the performative paradigm. Although Mirzoeff does not point directly at connotations of this sort, he understands the notion in terms of a visual impression received in the process of social communication mediated by visual media, which allows one to think that he includes within its scope both textual and visual forms of action. In his essay *The Subject of Visual Culture* Mirzoeff underlines that “The constituent element of visual culture's practice is the visual event. The event is the effect of a network in which subjects operate and which in turn conditions their freedom of action.”²³

In this context, the Internet may be seen to foreground in a particularly strong way the “eventhood” of the practices of communication based not only on verbal transmissions, but also on the interaction with webcam pictures. Mirzoeff presents the 9/11 terrorist attack as an apogee of contemporary visual events, and he comments on it as follows: “After the events of September 11 (...) it is now terrorism that is cinema. The visual drama of the events in New York played out as if cinematically directed. The largest possible target was hit with the most explosive force possible to produce the maximum effect on the viewer. At a symbolic level, the disaster was the result of the impact of the two

²² H. Jenkins, 2006, *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press, New York – London, p. 2.

²³ N. Mirzoeff, 2002, ‘The Subject of Visual Culture’, in: N. Mirzoeff (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader*, Routledge, London – New York, p. 6.

dominant symbols of modernity's triumph over the limitations of body and space – the airplane and the skyscraper. The scenario made sense to the viewer precisely because we had all seen it before [in cinema – note K.C.]. (...) Many of the eyewitness accounts used the metaphor of cinema to try and verbalize the enormity of what had happened.”²⁴

This example makes one aware of the fact that real reality is now beginning to resemble fictitious events which we have seen at the cinema. The definition of the visual event also leads to the conclusion that pictures generated with the help of media technologies can come into existence in the process of social interactions established in a public space during the reception of films or television as well as multimedia shows or Internet-mediated social communication. The practices belonging to the last of these categories have a particularly performative character, because messages created within them are ephemeral, undergo constant changes and, above all, do not exist before triggering the interaction. Mirzoeff believes that the future of the Internet consists in creating new forms of visibility which are based on textual forms of communication, yet exhibit a tendency to picture them in the form of iconic representations, such as flash animations on web sites.²⁵ An important aspect of the visual event is the problematic of seeing, which emerges from how pictures generated with the help of visual media affect their recipients. Mirzoeff stresses the fact that the nature of this phenomenon is the interaction between the visual sign and the technology which enables it to function with the active attitude of the spectator. Visual communication created on the Internet is based on this principle. The seeing and reception of visual media takes place during interactions in which recipients use speech acts, which may be observed in the case of Internet-mediated communication. The performative character of the visual event may be seen in that it is a “citation.” Mirzoeff compares the visual event to the “visual drama” which took place during the attack on the World Trade Center. What is more, in its visual structure, this attack was a “citation” of scenes originating from disaster movies. In this sense, as Jacques Derrida claims, the message, which was here referred to as a visual event, “must be repeatable – iterable – in the absolute absence of the addressee or of the empirically determinable set of addressees.”²⁶ Derrida's conclusion finds its reflection in the social reception of media images presenting the 9/11 attack. Many of the recipients of these messages were convinced that they were watching images from a disaster movie and not a broadcast of real events.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

²⁵ N. Mirzoeff, 1999, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, Routledge, London – New York, p. 108.

²⁶ J. Derrida, 1982, *Margins of Philosophy*, transl. A. Bass, The University of Chicago Press and The Harvester Press, Chicago – Hassocks, p. 315.

It is worth pointing out that Jean Baudrillard in his book *The Spirit of Terrorism* claims that “Whereas we were dealing before with an uninterrupted profusion of banal images and a seamless flow of sham events, the terrorist act in New York has resuscitated both images and events. (...) The role of images is highly ambiguous. For, at the same time as they exalt the event, they also take it hostage. They serve to multiply it to infinity and, at the same time, they are a diversion and a neutralization (...). The image consumes the event, in the sense that it absorbs it and offers it for consumption. Admittedly, it gives it unprecedented impact, but impact as image-event.”²⁷ Baudrillard’s conclusion seems to confirm the fictitious dimension of the attack on the World Trade Center. The French sociologist claims that the collapse of the towers is not enough to make it a real event. The fiction does not precede reality, does not anticipate it, but rather adds to it, creating a single unified whole. It is no wonder then that Baudrillard stated that “Reality and fiction are inextricable, and the fascination with the attack is primarily a fascination with the image.”²⁸ In this sense the images of the 9/11 attack shown in the media were “fictitious” and “real” simultaneously, without the possibility of separating the two.

LISTENING POST: VISUALISING THE “CITATIONS” OF “ACTOR-NETWORKS”

The performative aspects of Internet-mediated communication are noticeable in a work of net art that has inspired a lot of controversy since the moment of its creation – Mark Hansen’s and Ben Rubin’s *Listening Post* (2003). As Ryszard W. Kluszczyński observes, in discussions about it referring to other works that present the model of “the Strategy of System. “It came as a noticeable fact that despite their dynamic processing, digital properties, and immersing in interactive environment of the Internet, they do not create a possibility of real interaction for their users. They are characterized by eventfulness which does not find many ways out where the viewers are, but takes place rather in their inner, technological, digital world.”²⁹ Within this model of “the Strategy of System,” the texts spoken in chat rooms and appearing on LCD screens are, on the one hand, “citations” of the utterances of Internet users,

²⁷ J. Baudrillard, 2003, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers*, transl. Ch. Turner [New Edition], Verso, London and New York, p. 27.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 28–29.

²⁹ R.W. Kluszczyński, ‘Strategies of Interactive Art’, *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 2010, vol. 2, p. 19.

and, on the other, function as performative utterances conforming to the pattern of iterability and being identifiable as “citations.”³⁰

Listening Post presents in a suggestive way the “visualisation” of the process of communication of Internet users who use performative social behaviour (in this case limited to textual communication) when chatting online. The visualisation is based on a performative invocation of “citations” from online chats with the help of seven algorithms which select the texts. Among these algorithms, the first, third and fifth are visual. However, the impression of pictures forming is also felt when the spectator is at a greater distance from the LCD screens and cannot read the citations. *Listening Post* does not allow for a full participation, giving a choice of alternatives only: image or text, the whole or just a fragment.³¹

The situation described above is justified by the reasons for which *Listening Post* was created. Hansen and Rubin were invited to produce a work that could be called “the representation of the Internet; they wanted to answer the question of what a hundred thousand people chatting on the Internet would sound and look like. To depict this process, the authors used the word “crowd,” suggestive of occupying a certain space.”³² The work operates in the following way: a computer monitors chat rooms and with a one-hour delay displays “citations” originating from chat-room conversations on small LCD screens. During these conversations the visual sphere of the process of Internet-mediated communication comes into existence, which reveals its performative character as well as the fact that it is the effect of making an impression on the recipients of digital pictures generated during the reception of this art-work by the spectators in the space of the gallery.

The utterances which appear in *Listening Post* are performative on the linguistic level, but they can also form the basis for its visual aspect. For this reason it is not just the textual dimension of the work but its visuality as well that is performative. The situation is well described by Mirzoeff’s apt remark: “Where it seemed at first that the Net had simply adapted the traditional spaces of representation for its own use, it is now creating new models of visual experience.”³³ *Listening Post* makes the Internet cease to be an exclusively textual means of communication and begin to function as a visual medium.

At the same time it is worth pointing out that the performative character of *Listening Post* manifests itself on two levels. On the one hand, what appears on the screens are sentences and speech acts which perform the role of

³⁰ J. Derrida, 1982, *op.cit.*, p. 326.

³¹ R. Raley, 2009, ‘List(en)ing Post’, in: F.J. Ricardo (ed.), *Literary Art in Digital Performance. Case Studies in New Media Art and Criticism*, Continuum Press, New York – London, pp. 24-25.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 23.

³³ N. Mirzoeff, 1999, *op.cit.*, p. 112.

a repetitive “citation.” Derrida claims that meaning arises out of repetition, from former usage, as in the cases of our own signature. That is why we need to use a “citation” if we want to create meaning.³⁴ Transferring this observation onto the area of visual culture it is worth noting that pictures too can construct meaning through repetition and citation. A similar process takes place in the case of *Listening Post*, in which the source of visuality is to be found in the linguistic “citations” of chat-room conversations used in a repetitive manner. On the visual level of the analysed work, the appearing “citations” form pictures. What appears on the small, oblong screens is single words, sentence fragments or full sentences taken from the Internet (chat-rooms, discussion groups, etc.). They are replaced in short intervals and read as soon as they appear by a synthesized voice. The situation changes after a moment, however: the computer scans through the data very quickly, and the spectator attempting to embrace in a single view the whole of the work presented in the gallery cannot read the semantic value of the words, whose variety and mutual patterning create a unique visual effect.

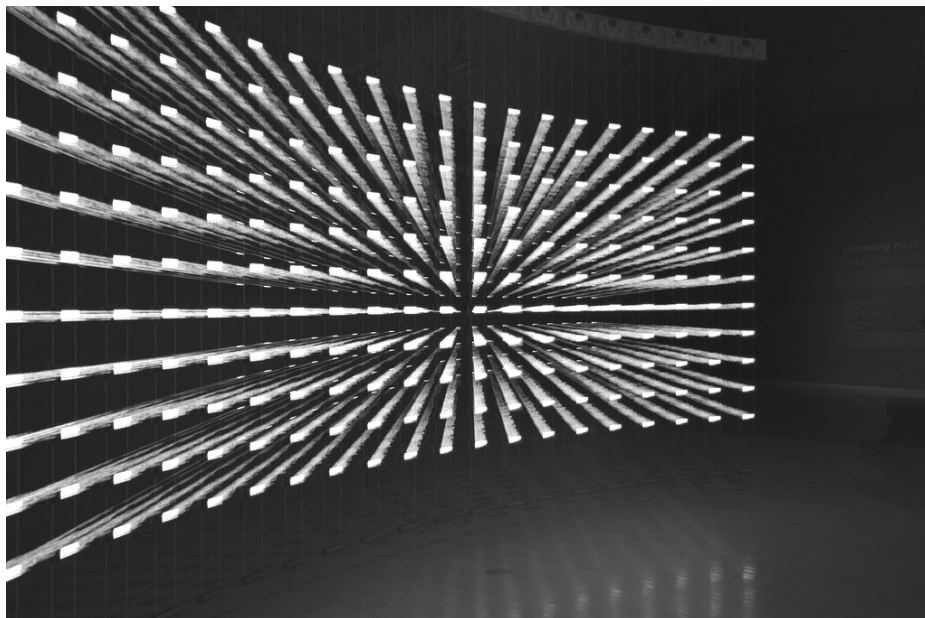
One more thing has to be noted: the performative act operates on the principle of convention. In this situation meaning is built not only through repetition but also through experiencing social roles. On the basis of the texts appearing on the LCD screens we realize what social roles the chat-room users perform. Linguistic performatives appearing in *Listening Post* are drawn into the “machinery of iterability,” which becomes the source of visuality.

Listening Post reveals two aspects of Internet-mediated communication. On the one hand, it is obviously based only on the written text, and, on the other hand, this text is to a large extent visualised, already on the level of the chat-room communication itself (with emoticons, for example), and later, as the mentioned work reveals. Text can thus serve to create pictures, or even films. This quality is evident in the discussed work in a particularly strong way. As the computer selects new texts with increasing speed, some disappear from the screens, while others remain lit, creating patterns that refer, in a symbolic way, to iconic representations of animals or flowers. Reading these “images” sometimes requires a lot of imagination, but it directs our attention to quite an important aspect of the visualization of Internet text, which conveys the specificity of pictures generated in *Listening Post*. They may consist of text fragments, yet their role is not semantic but “iconic.” Moreover, this iconicity is performative: created in the process of performative transformation of speech acts. The method described here is widely used on the Internet, for instance in ASCII-Art – the art of creating drawings and film with the help of font characters.

³⁴ J. Derrida, 1982, *op. cit.*, p. 326.



Listening Post (2004) by Mark Hansen and Ben Rubin



The final issue that I would like to raise in connection with *Listening Post* is the notion of community which is formed during the work's reception between individual spectators present in the gallery space and the people whose utterances are cited during the work's presentation. On the one hand, it is worth noting that the intention of the work's authors was to create a sense of "being" among the people chatting. The community created by Internet users participating in *Listening Post* resembles *communitas*. This is so because it only exists for the duration of the conversation, happens in the present and is spontaneous. Such qualities of *communitas* can also be found in Turner's description.³⁵ However, the artists who created *Listening Post* used a different dimension of collectivity. As Rita Raley put it, "To understand the community in and constituted by *Listening Post* we need to think in terms of the crowd in order to convey the sense of presentation, monitoring, surveillance. The crowd is that which one surveys, represents, assesses – yet it is also that which invites transport, the 'transcending of the limits of one's own person'. Our connections and affinities with it may be fleeting and temporary, but no less powerful and productive for being such."³⁶

The community mentioned above is formed as a result of performative citations of the Internet texts. The community is thus formed as a result of "doing things with words." However, trying to find the most adequate terms to convey the way the community functions, it is useful to refer to the "Actor-Network Theory" (ANT) by Bruno Latour.³⁷ His idea is based on the assumption that both the subjective interlocutors and the agentive computers participate in the act of communication and that the connections form a peculiar network. For the network to survive, it must be ceaselessly performed. The "actor" and the "network" become one. Similarly, in *Listening Post* there arises the impression of being in a "network" of connections between the chat-room users. It is, on the one hand, those who take part in these conversations and, on the other, the spectators watching the work in the gallery who are the "actors."

BODIES© INCORPORATED: "TEXTUAL" IDENTITY UNDER COPYRIGHT

Nicholas Mirzoeff considers the visual representations on the Bodies© INCorporated (1993) website, designed by Victoria Vesna and available at <http://www.bodiesinc.ucla.edu/>, in the context of the problematic of identity

³⁵ V. Turner, 2008, *op.cit.*, p. 113.

³⁶ R. Raley, 2009, *op.cit.*, p. 32.

³⁷ B. Latour, 2005, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York.

shaping in Internet-mediated communication. On the website the user can create visual representations of his or her own body, which become tele-present. As a result of his or her choices, the “body” acquires a certain psychological identity, sex, sexual orientation, age (0-999 years) as well as an “image” which we can see on one of the pages on the website known as the “Showplace!!!”³⁸

Choosing sex for the body, we act according to the performative paradigm, which, according to Judith Butler, inscribes these beings into a fixed model of identity.³⁹ If we give the bodies a particular sex and sexual orientation, it is not because they are essentially “male” or “female” but because we refer to the opposition of gender, a particular socio-cultural order and the conventions of the social role which we wish to bestow on the bodies. In *Bodies that Matter* Butler describes the first medical interpellation, “the initiatory performative, ‘It’s a girl!’ [which] anticipates the eventual arrival of the sanction, ‘I pronounce you man and wife.’”⁴⁰ The pronouncement does not relate a fact but in a performative manner brings into existence a creature with a fixed sex identity. The “bodies” brought to “life” on the Bodies© INCorporated website acquire their identity on a similar principle. Moreover, their identity is from the very beginning subject to the power which the users have over their bodies. This power has its limits, however, for a being given “life” cannot be deprived of it. Victoria Vesna describes how in the early version of the website it was not possible to take the “life” of the body away. After pressure from the users of the bodies such an option became available, although it is difficult to implement⁴¹.

The example of Bodies© INCorporated points to the fact that Internet-mediated communication integrates aspects of identity with visual bodily representations. However, as Vesna claims, “The title Bodies© INCorporated is a play on words. ‘Bodies’ is accompanied by a copyright symbol and ‘INCorporated’ draws on the Latin root ‘corpus’, while alluding to a corporation – bodies are incorporated into the Internet and their information is copyrighted.”⁴²

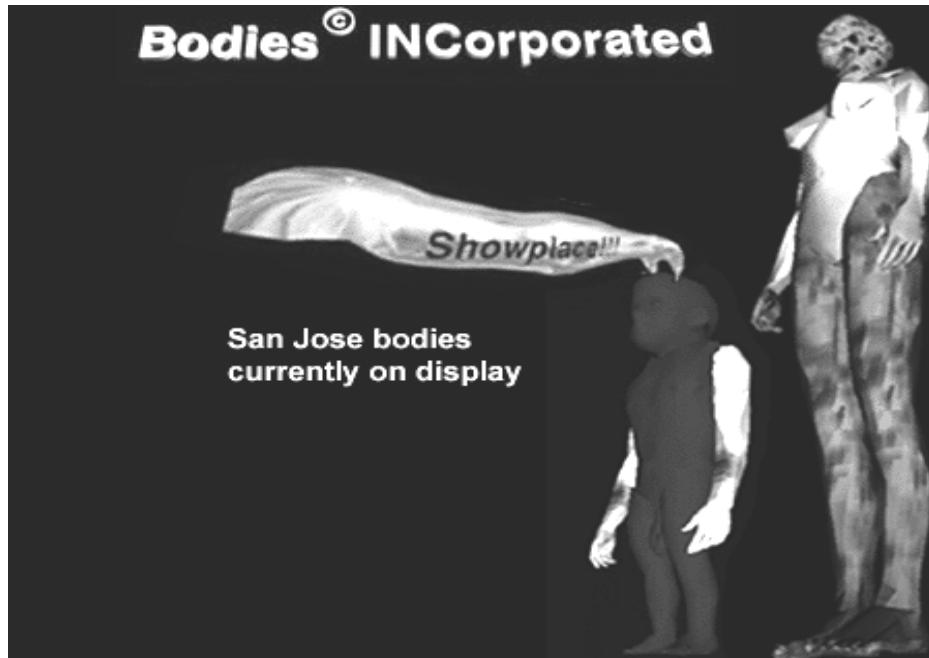
³⁸ N. Mirzoeff, 1999, *op.cit.*, pp. 112-114.

³⁹ J. Loxley, 2007, *Performativity. The New Critical Idiom*, Routledge, London – New York, pp. 117-120.

⁴⁰ J. Butler, 1993, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”*, Routledge, London – New York, p. 232.

⁴¹ V. Vesna, 2007, ‘Seeing the World in a Grain of Sand: The Database Aesthetics of Everything’, in: V. Vesna (ed.), *Database Aesthetics. Art in the Age of Information Overflow*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis – London, p. 14.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 12.





On the Bodies© INCorporated website the bodies are treated as “texts” under copyright. They can thus be “read” but they can also be “cited” and incorporated into other bodies. In *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*⁴³ Judith Butler refers to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s notion of embodiment derived from the book *Phenomenology of Perception*, which is of special importance also for the philosophical movement within visual studies. Butler constructs identity on its bodily basis, referring to the chapter entitled “The Body in its Sexual Being” and quoting the statement that the body “is a historical idea and not a natural species.”⁴⁴

The identity of the bodies on the website is thus shaped through “performative acts.” In this sense the process of embodying identity, mentioned by

⁴³ J. Butler, 1988, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, No. 4, pp. 519-531.

⁴⁴ M. Merleau-Ponty, 2005, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. C. Smith, Routledge, London – New York, p. 198.

Butler, resembles “enacting a script.” The performative identity is also constructed in the context of Austin’s linguistic theories and Derrida’s notion of iterability.⁴⁵ Similarly, the bodies on the Bodies© INCorporated website and their identity are shaped textually, which is seen in the textual descriptions which tell us what they are called, how old they are or what their sex and sexual orientation is. Perhaps this situation results from the fact that the bodies exist on the Internet, which is based on hypertext, but these performative “texts” are simultaneously pictures.

CONCLUSION

The domination of visual media confirms the proliferation of visuality and reveals the reasons which led to it, making some theoreticians proclaim that “Contemporary culture is becoming to a greater and greater degree the culture of image, or (...) the culture of visibility.”⁴⁶ At present performative social behaviour dominates the processes of communication achieved through visual media, especially the Internet. These processes, together with the visual elements of image simulation which render the modern practice of communication performative, highlight the visual processes, procedures of seeing and picture reception. This is achieved by affecting the spectators, who are more and more flooded by pictures generated by means of media communication technologies. The reception of pictures has replaced their creation. Nowadays pictures are generated on their own, and come to life like viruses on the Internet. The performativity of images is connected with seeing them as living entities. Mindy Fenske talks about it openly: “Images (...) are living things. The particular form of life is not, however, analogous to an acting individual agent or subject. Instated, the images’ life is more similar to the potential for life imagined in, for example, religious icons or, seen another way, the reproducibility of a biological virus. In the first case, images live because of human tendency to attribute life. There is propensity (both historical and cultural) to approach images ‘asif’ they have immanent power and life.”⁴⁷

The issue mentioned here has been voiced most strongly by Mitchell, who firmly states in *What do Pictures Want?* that “A picture is less like a statement or speech act, then, than like a speaker capable of an infinite number of

⁴⁵ S. Salih, 2002, *Judith Butler. Routledge Critical Thinkers*, Routledge, London – New York, p. 86.

⁴⁶ E. Wilk, 1998, ‘Preface’, in: E. Wilk (ed.), *Methodology – Culture – Audiovisuality*, Instytut Kultury and Wydawnictwo Naukowe “Śląsk”, Warszawa – Katowice, p. 7.

⁴⁷ M. Fensky, 2007, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

utterances.”⁴⁸ This remark illustrates the performative transference of the image from the position of a text to that of a visual subject or agent.

**ZDARZENIE WIZUALNE JAKO EFEKT SIECI
PERFORMATYWNE ASPEKTY KOMUNIKOWANIA ZAPOŚREDNICZONEGO
PRZEZ INTERNET W NET ARCIE
(streszczenie)**

Punktem wyjścia jest założenie, że zwrot performatywny, kieruje naszą uwagę na ekspresyjny wymiar działania społecznego i zdarzenia, które mają charakter procesu. Jeśli przeniesiemy to założenie na obszar kultury wizualnej to przedmiotem naszych dociekań nie będą obrazy, ale zdolność ich widzenia przez uczestnika zdarzeń wizualnych albo proces, który prowadzi do ich powstania. Performatywne aspekty można więc zauważyć w definicji „zdarzenia wizualnego”, sformułowanej przez Nicholasa Mirzoeffa, który proponuje wprowadzenie tego określenia w miejsce pojęcia „obrazu”. W myśl tej koncepcji zdarzenie wizualne stanowi centralny aspekt odbioru – procesu widzenia, w którym użytkownik lub konsument poszukuje informacji, znaczenia albo przyjemności w mediach wizualnych: od obrazów olejnych do telewizji i Internetu.

Główną tezę eseju jest przekonanie, że zdarzenie wizualne jest efektem sieci, która warunkuje działanie komunikujących się między sobą użytkowników. Performatywne aspekty komunikowania zapośredniczonego przez Internet ujawniają się gdy internauci posługują się aktami mowy. Jednocześnie podczas tego procesu „działania słowami” interlokutorzy komunikujący się między sobą tworzą wspólnotę przypominającą *communitas* – termin używany przez Victora Turnera. *Communitas* możemy odnieść do wspólnoty sieciowej, a także do wszelkich przejawów jej funkcjonowania, w których internauci oddziałują na siebie nie tylko za pomocą komunikatów werbalnych, ale także innymi formami internetowej komunikacji wizualnej (obrazy pochodzące z web-kamer, flashowych animacji i fotoblogów).

Opisane problemy znajdują swoje odbicie w pracy sieciowej *Listening Post* (2003) Marka Hansena i Bena Rubina, która ukazuje „wizualizację” zapośredniczonego procesu komunikowania internautów posługujących się aktami mowy w pokojach czatowych. Wykorzystane w tej pracy internetowe komunikowanie werbalne przyjmuje wymiar performance’u, który jest źródłem powstania jej sfery wizualnej, a używane przez internautów akty mowy funkcjonują jako „cytaty” zgodne z „iterowalnym modelem” w rozumieniu zaproponowanym przez Jacquesa Derridę. Innym przykładem performatywnych aspektów komunikowania zapośredniczonego przez Internet jest praca internetowa *Bodies© INCorporated* (2001) Victorii Vesny, która została omówiona w kontekście teorii performatywności Judith Butler. Wymienione przykłady ukazują sposoby wykorzystania performatywnych aspektów komunikowania zapośredniczonego przez Internet w sztuce.

Słowa kluczowe: performatywność, zdarzenie wizualne, komunikacja zapośredniczona przez Internet, net art, *communitas*.

⁴⁸ W.J.T. Mitchell, 2005, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago – London, p. 140.

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LET'S MAKE STAGE DESIGN, OR PERFORMATIVE ASPECTS OF ART

Abstract: The article explores performative aspects of stage design on the basis of Jon McKenzie's findings in his *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (2001). I suggest that theatre design is a self-sustaining discipline, clearly distinguishable from the set designs produced by painters or other fine artists. I will take as an example *The White Cube*, Poland's exhibit at the 2011 Prague Quadrennial, to show the differences in the meaning of the concept of set design as used by theorists and practitioners.

Keywords: performative, performance, set design, Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design (PQ).

The central motif of the Polish exposition at the 2011 Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space (henceforward PQ for short) was an installation entitled *The White Cube*. The curators of the project were Ewa Machnio and Agata Skwarczyńska, both stage designers working in theater. The whole project, which also included architecture, was called *Liberated Energy*. The energy, as we could read in the catalog, was to be that of the spectators, as the presented projects demanded their participation. The inside walls of a rather small stall in the main exhibition space of the PQ were covered with white paint. During the two weeks of the exhibition, the viewers were encouraged to use small spatulas to scrape off the top layer. Underneath was a panoramic photo of the Meeting Hall of the Polish Parliament. In addition, on the floor, there were TV monitors showing the debates on eight works of art: Tadeusz Różewicz's *Kartoteka* [*The Card Index*] directed by Michał Zadara, stage design by Robert Rumas (Teatr Współczesny in Wrocław, 2006); Stanisława Przybyszewska's *Sprawa Dantona* [*The Danton Case*] directed by Paweł Łysak, stage design by Paweł Wodziński (Teatr Polski im. Hieronima Konieczki in Bydgoszcz, 2008); *Supernova. Rekonstrukcja* [*Supernova. Reconstruction*] directed by Marcin Wierchowski, stage design by Matylda Kotlińska (Teatr Łażnia Nowa, Kraków 2009); *Wirus w spektaklu. Sędzia Główny*

w *Magnetyzmie serca* [*Virus in a Spectacle. 'Sędzia Główny' in 'The Magnetism of the Heart'*] directed by Grzegorz Jarzyna and the performance artists from the group *Sędzia Główny* (TR Warszawa); *Pozdrowienia z Alei Jerozolimskich* [*Greetings from Jerozolimskie Avenue*] by Joanna Rajkowska (CCA Ujazdowski Castle 2002); *Dotleniacz* [*Oxygenator*] by Rajkowska, curator Kaja Pawełek (CCA Ujazdowski Castle 2007); *Podróż do Azji* [*Take a Walk on the Asian Side*] by Joanna Warsza, Anna Gajewska and Ngo Van Toung (2006); and *Wspólna sprawa* [*Common Task*] by Paweł Althamer and neighbors (2009). The spectators at the PQ, however, did not see any of these projects, and could only listen to the commentaries made by non-professional recipients and oriented towards the personal interpretation of the works. The commentators included: a 59-year-old radiologist from Nowa Huta, who was impressed by the *Supernova* performance; a 34-year-old accountant from Bydgoszcz, enthusiast of *Sprawa Dantona*; a 29-year-old playwright from Warsaw, who discussed the joint project of the *Sędzia Główny* Group and the TR Warszawa; a 34-year-old chemist from Wrocław, who was outraged by *Kartoteka*; a 31-year-old cultural manager from Warsaw, who found *Podróż do Azji* excellent; a 78-year-old retired lawyer, who loved to sit by the *Dotleniacz*; a 69-year-old photographer from Bródno, who was a member of the expedition to Brussels as part of Althamer's social action.

The project of Machnio and Skwarczyńska certainly legitimized the spectators of the individual works although, at the same time, it completely ignored the spectator at the PQ. Commenting on the project, Paweł Dobrzycki¹, Polish stage designer pointed out that in order to learn more about the presented performances and stage designs, the spectator of the Prague exhibition had to read the catalog, as the video message was actually unclear and caused information pollution. The architectural part of the exhibition was focused only on the works functioning in urban spaces (the presented designs included the works by Rajkowska and Althamer). A golden suit, the outfit featured in *Wspólna sprawa*, was submitted in the PQ Experimental Costume competition. The participants of the expedition to Brussels were also invited to attend. Sixty of them walked through the streets of Prague's Old Town in their "precious" costumes, even distributing the suits among the fascinated Czechs.

The Polish performance did not meet with approval, although Sodiya Lother, CEO of the event, proudly wore Althamer's costume for one day. The curators mixed different genres, throwing together theater performances and works by the artists creating in the public space. However, those kinds of performance are not the same and they are accompanied by different kind of set design. It is worth stressing that stage design was actually the central theme of the Prague event, and that the PQ jury awarded the prize to an exposition

¹ Cf. P. Dobrzycki, „Skoro jednak jest”, *Teatr*, no. 11/2011, pp. 66-69.

which showcased the theatrical aspects of such design. This raises the question of why the artists' performances failed to generate an autopoietic feedback loop, as defined by Erika Fischer-Lichte, especially that in other circumstances, that is without the theatrical associations, it managed to do so, as shown by the remarkable success of Althamer's action. What is stage design in the modern sense of the term? Is it performative in itself, or is it just an instrument used for creation? How is the stage design of an artistic performance different than that in theater?

Providing answers to the above questions is possible if we go back a little over a hundred years to see the changes in the concept of a theatrical spectacle, and to consider the notion of performance. It seems that stage design is now an all-encompassing field based not only on the knowledge of art, but also of technology and the social sciences. Thus, the work of an artist-stage designer creating on the border of fine arts is a little different than that of a person who builds space in order to create a theatrical production. The failure of the Polish exhibition at the PQ showed that associating theater activities with fine arts leads to a message that is incomprehensible to the recipient. It is, therefore, necessary to isolate in the definition of stage design the element that can determine its function. It depends on the chosen artistic context. Performativity, encompassing many areas of the humanities and thus employing various methodologies, provides a chance to capture this element.

1.

Those who came to the Municipal Theatre in Kraków (now Juliusz Słowacki Theatre) on 28 February 1903 to the world premiere of Wyspiański's *Wyzwolenie* [*Liberation*], probably had not even suspected that they would be witnessing the beginning of a new era, the era of performance. This may seem a bit exaggerated, as it is commonly assumed that it was not until the second half of the 20th century that this type of art started to develop. Still, according to Marvin Carlson's definition of the term², theater is essentially performative. In this view, performance is a feature, not a separate genre, that other arts learned from Melpomene. Carlson (op. cit.) gathered all available information on the development of the concept of performance in both historical and contemporary perspective, which allowed him to draw conclusions about the essence of its function. It seems that in the history of Polish theater, the beginning of the 20th century is marked by Wyspiański's work. Literary historians often point out that his theater was oriented towards an interaction with the spectators or even their active involvement in the dramatic action. For

² M. Carlson, *Performance: a critical introduction*, Routledge, New York 1996.

this purpose, Wyspiański not only used the characters that openly addressed the audience, but also, through the arrangement of the stage space, drew the spectators out of their habitual patterns of reception. His artistic activity can be thus described as performative. From the historical point of view, he had already initiated the changes in theatrical production on 16 March 1901, with the premiere of his *Wesele* [*The Wedding*]. However, it was *Wyzwolenie* that showed the full potential of the reforms introduced by Wyspiański.

In his *Performance or Else*³, Jon McKenzie argues that performance has no single clear definition. He even says that “performance will be to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries what discipline was to the eighteenth and nineteenth, that is, an *onto-historical* formation of power and knowledge.”⁴ As he himself admits, he follows Michel Foucault’s school of thought, for whom the era of discipline gave way to the era of performance. McKenzie, however, develops this line of thought introducing a systematization and dividing performance into three groups: organizational, technical and cultural. McKenzie believes that at every stage of our social activities we operate according to the principles of performativity. In professional life, we contribute to the growth of a given production, however defined.

This refers not only to corporate work but to any work that is subject to pressure to improve efficiency. For McKenzie, a classic example of organizational and technical performance is the story of the Challenger space shuttle, launched into space on 28 January 1986. In the 73rd second of the mission, marked as STS-51-L, it disintegrated. McKenzie discusses in detail all the preparations that had been made before the launch and the actions undertaken after the tragedy. He analyzes the event from the point of view of the following theories: post-colonial (the crew was recruited from among the representatives of different nations living in the U.S., not everyone was an astronaut); feminist (emphasis was placed on the preparation of a female history teacher who was to teach a biology lesson in space; she would later become a victim of a series of jokes that circulated after the tragedy); cultural anthropology (the launch was an element of a consistent U.S. Cold War strategy). He thus shows different possible contexts of the reception of the crash, which for him became an example of a global performance. It should be noted that the book was published before 11 September 2001. The terrorist attack, the destruction of the World Trade Center towers in New York, and especially the live broadcast of the entire event in almost all television stations around the world was a much more spectacular example of a global performance than the Challenger crash.⁵

³ J. McKenzie, *Perform or Else: from Discipline to Performance*, Routledge, London 2001.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

⁵ This dependence was also noted by Tomasz Kubikowski, Polish theater scholar and translator of McKenzie’s book (cf. T. Kubikowski, “Amerykańska eksplozja”, *Didaskalia* 2001,

McKenzie finishes his argument with the conclusion that we are living in the time of a ubiquitous paradigm, which is the parent structure. Other parallel methodologies are subordinate to it, including queer theory, gender theory, postcolonialism, feminism, psychoanalysis, deconstructionism, and even semiotics. They are tools used to describe performances.

The conclusion of the argument is a little risky. The author coins a new term: *perfumance*⁶. He shows how to use the available knowledge to create a narrative of interpretation around the work. His example is a series of novels by Arthur Conan Doyle dedicated to Professor Challenger. McKenzie includes this character in a discourse with all the associations known to him. It allows him to relate the fictional character to the real figure of professor William Rutherford, who was the head of the Department of Physiology at the University of Edinburgh at the time when Conan Doyle was studying there. His lectures incited a lot of interest among the students. He carried out research on live animals, which provoked a negative response from the rest of the scientific community. He left the university in disgrace after a series of homosexual scandals. One can also relate the character to the history of the legendary HMS Challenger. It set off on a scientific mission around the world in 1872. It was the first ship in history converted from a military vessel into a large science lab. John Murray, a demonic and controversial figure, conducted research on the ship. The chain of associations finishes with the figure of Jane Challenger, the protagonist of *O Fim de Terceiro Mundo (At the End of the Third World)*, a novel by the Brazilian writer Marcio Souza, published in 1990. All those references begin a new narrative around Conan Doyle's novel and, essentially, may be more or less related to the fate of the Challenger space shuttle.

As McKenzie describes it, *perfumance* is "the citational mist of any and all performances", an "incessant dis(embodying)-(mis)naming" of performances. It is "passing through the liminautics of Performance Studies, Performance Management, and Techno-Performance", the "becoming-mutational of normative forces" and the "becoming-normative of mutant forces". It is "the odor of things and words, the sweat of bodies, the perfume of discourse ... the ruse of a general theory".⁷

Perfumance as proposed by McKenzie sanctions the trend existing in the humanities for a long time to study the work in its context, for which thus far the methodology of cultural anthropology has been employed. What is surprising about McKenzie's theory is his determination to seek the connections between culture and the technical sphere. His argument is fascinating, but also

no. 46). Richard Schechner went a step further, looking at Jihad and terrorism as performances (cf. R. Schechner, *Performance Studies – An Introduction*, Routledge, New York 2002).

⁶ McKenzie, 2001, p. 203.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

irritating. It may be presumed that he treats humanities as an area where any association can be applied. The use of the word *perfume* to create his neologism is characteristic for McKenzie, whose theses are based on the example of olfactory sensations and whose analysis may resemble a solution of a charade with a wide-ranging field of research. This impression, however, is deceptive. The multiplicity of references employed by the author is partially caused by the use of the English language, to which Kubikowski draws attention. The English term *performance* can be translated into about twenty Polish equivalents, meaning among other things “performance”, “spectacle”, “success”, “accomplishment”, “toil”, “achievement”, “results”, “swiftness of action”, “function”, “completion”, “celebration”, “radio play”, “behavior”, “deed”, “proficiency”, “fulfillment” and “adherence”. Thus, the term *performance* is more often used in everyday life in the English-speaking world. In Polish, the term is used mainly in relation to art, although the notion, treated as a loan-word, is present in corporate language to denote efficiency. This does not change the fact that Polish scholars are familiar with performativity and associate it mainly with the field of cultural studies. Each research methodology in the humanities that appeared at the end of the 20th century was regarded as another tool for the analysis of a work of art, although these were never linked together. Meanwhile, McKenzie shows that this can be done, and even different methodologies build a multi-dimensional aspect of reception. Richard Schechner writes that performativity has no end,⁸ and the book *Performance or Else* confirms it.

McKenzie’s views are not suspended in a void; they have provoked a wide-ranging discussion. In 2002, the American organization AHTE (Association for Theater in Higher Education) even devoted an entire session to this issue. Carlson points out that McKenzie shows how performance dominates the modern intellectual world, at the same time moving away from its origins – theater. One might ask what is understood as performance in contemporary theater research. Mirosław Kocur⁹ applies the concept to the analysis of the activities of the monks in medieval England. He shows that referring to historical phenomena as performance is not an error. In his book he claims that modern theater was born in fourteenth-century monasteries. One may even conclude that performance works like a periscope: popping above the surface of available knowledge and allowing one to see more from a different point of view. How can we then understand performance in the research on stage design?

⁸ R. Schechner, 2002, p. 15.

⁹ Cf. M. Kocur, *Drugie narodziny teatru. Performanse mnichów anglosaskich [The Second Birth of the Theater. Performances of Anglo-Saxon Monks]*, Wrocław 2010.

2.

Attempting to establish one feature which can be attributed to all sorts of performance, McKenzie uses Martin Heidegger's notion of *Herausfordern*, understood as a challenge, a penchant for action, or a provocation, and translated into English as *challenge*. McKenzie writes that "the world is challenged to perform – or else..."¹⁰. Wyspiański understood his task in the same way. His oeuvre can be read in the context of a series of challenges he faced in different areas of his artistic activity. Firstly, he performed his creative acts regularly despite his rapidly developing syphilis, a disease that was fatal at that time. The entire oeuvre of this versatile artist was provocative, like a gauntlet thrown down for future generations of artists and interpreters. In fact, Polish art of the twentieth century can be seen as a debate with Wyspiański. The most significant area for such confrontation is undoubtedly theater, where the best ones took up his challenge: Jerzy Grotowski, Tadeusz Kantor, Józef Szajna, Jerzy Grzegorzewski, Andrzej Wajda, or Konrad Swinarski. Numerous directors can be listed here, since Wyspiański's most famous play, *Wesele*, has been constantly present on Polish stages for over a hundred years and every year some theater takes up the challenge. It is interesting that there is a photograph of Wyspiański from 1893 in which he is standing alongside Lucjan Rydel and Karol Maszkowski, with Henryk Opieński and Stanisław Estreicher sitting on a bench. There is a glove lying in front of them, as if thrown carelessly on the carpet. The photograph was taken at a studio, and as such it has all the characteristics of an artificial pose. The people in it were friends, young men at the threshold of life. It seems that it was Wyspiański who took off his glove and threw it down for future generations.

The already mentioned *Wyzwolenie* is a play which was intended to be a continuation and, to some extent, a dialogue with Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*). Literary analysis shows that Wyspiański's Konrad owes the most not to his Romantic namesake, but to Kordian, the title character of Juliusz Słowacki's play¹¹. The strategy of Wyspiański can certainly be described as a postmodern intertextual game. In order to "transport" the character of Gustaw-Konrad into Polish reality of 1902 he uses, in addition to the basic instrument of language, stage design, understanding its purpose somewhat differently than his contemporary decorators. It was meant to be a passive background for literature, although it could not compete with it. Stage design developed by Wyspiański closely follows the word of the play,

¹⁰ McKenzie, p. 201.

¹¹ Cf. M. Prussak, *Przestrzenie „Wyzwolenia”* [*The Spaces of Wyzwolenie*], in: *idem, Wyspiański w labiryncie teatru* [*Wyspiański in the Labyrinth of the Theater*], Instytut Badań Literackich, PAN, Warszawa 2005, pp. 81-99.

sometimes becoming an unspoken supplement for the author's intent. Such a close link between word and image became somewhat cumbersome for later artists who took up Wyspiański's work.

After the curtain went up in the first act of *Wyzwolenie*, the audience saw a bare stage. The director entered from the left side of backstage, called the crew and ordered them to arrange the decorations. His text gave exact directions about the visual elements of the performance. An empty stage became a trademark of the theatrical avant-garde in the second half of the twentieth century, and Peter Brook¹² devoted an entire treatise to it, even though he does not make a single mention about Wyspiański. Nevertheless, Wyspiański did discover its unusual strength which allows one to open a production with the illusion of theater and makes it a game with the spectator's imagination. Things that appeared on the Kraków stage became theatrical signs in front of the audience, thus the playwright unwittingly contributed to demonstrating the semiotic potential of stage design. He decided to emphasize the metatextual character of the production through the costume of the main character, played by Andrzej Mielewski. On 31 October 1901, that is barely two years earlier, the actor had played Gustaw-Konrad in the world premiere of Mickiewicz's play (*nota bene*, staged by Wyspiański). He had been dressed in a white shirt, black trousers and a cape. The costume of Konrad – the protagonist of *Wyzwolenie* – reproduced that outfit. Wyspiański used the actor and the costume deliberately in order to construct a strong and meaningful connection between his piece and the Romantic work of Mickiewicz.

Nobody expected the aesthetics proposed by Wyspiański to succeed. This issue was even recorded in the mid-year report on the state of the Kraków theatre.¹³ The audience, however, was seduced by the magic of the theater he created, which also resulted in a financial success of Teatr Miejski in Kraków. At the same time, the criticism accompanying the premiere emphasized that it was a new genre, although the term performance was not used at the time¹⁴.

¹² Cf. P. Brook, *Pusta przestrzeń*, transl. Małgorzata Semil, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1977. Original edition *The Empty Space*, 1968.

¹³ Cf. *Sprawozdanie półroczne o stanie teatru krakowskiego za czas od stycznia do końca czerwca 1903 roku* [*Mid-Year Report on the State of the Kraków Theater between January and June 1903*], in: *Sprawozdania Komisji Teatralnej w Krakowie 1893-1911* [*Reports of the Theater Committee in Kraków*], written by K. Estreicher and J. Flach, ed. D. Paskuta-Włodek, Instytut Sztuki PAN, Warszawa 1992.

¹⁴ Feliks Koneczny, a conservative critic, wrote in March 1903: "*Wyzwolenie* is not at all a play, nor is it a dramatic poem or even a drama fantasy; this piece hasn't the slightest connection with drama or with theater. [...] *Wyzwolenie* is a personal lyrics, a poem about oneself, a testimony, a public confession, disguised in the form of confessing others, [...] in the entire Polish literature, it is the most subjective work." Cited after: *idem, Teatr krakowski. Sprawozdania 1896-1905* [*Krakow Theater. Reports 1896-1905*], ed. Kazimierz Gajda, Kraków 1994, pp. 287-290.

Even Wyspiański himself never suspected that the stage tricks he invented would enter the canon of artistic actions of the twentieth century. The power of disillusionment in theater began an extraordinary expansion of theater stage design outside the theater building. Along with the new media that emerged in the twentieth century, decorations accompanying artists lost their illustrative character; complementing the intentions of directors and other artists more and more, stage design began to contribute to the interpretation of the work. Cinema developed stage design as an art discipline as it became almost as important in the construction of the film frame as the actor. It must also be mentioned that the achievements of the artistic avant-garde in the twentieth century fundamentally changed the approach to the prop and its role.

In the previous century, another area of stage design emerged, one that must be included even in a cursory analysis of this art. It could be said that stage design is virtually ubiquitous in various forms of social life and art. It has become an instrument in creating information and entertainment TV programs; it also serves as a background building the image of candidates running for an office in election campaigns; in combination with costume, it is an integral part of shaping the image of modern celebrities. These are the most obvious areas in which stage design is employed. By employing scientific knowledge it becomes deprived of the aspect of freedom of an artistic creation and is brought closer to the area of dominance of psychology, sociology or social sciences. While it seems that stage design has functioned particularly in the political context since time immemorial, providing a backdrop for Greek parades in honor of Dionysus or triumphal entries of Roman emperors, building the image of feudal rulers as well as other world governance systems, from democracy to totalitarianism of all types, paradoxically, in many areas of its presence it was imperceptible in critical or scientific terms.

3.

British stage designer Pamela Howard¹⁵ asked her colleagues a prosaic question: What is stage design in 2009? She received fifty responses that could comprise a modern definition of the term. The respondents were practitioners, not theater theorists or historians. The provided one-sentence statements relate to subjective experiences describing the function of a stage designer and his/her place in the creation of performance. Artists often use metaphors to emphasize their professional status or even add unique magic or poetic character to their work. The very figure of a stage designer is intriguing, as he/she is seen as a secret agent operating, or even scheming, with the fabric of

¹⁵ Cf. P. Howard, *What is scenography?*, second ed., Routledge, London 2009.

stage design, namely space, light and music (Lilija Blumenfeld, Estonia), with the end result serving to highlight the poetry enchanted in an actor's gesture (Lidia Kosovski, Brazil), since it is a boundless space of illustration of the metaphorical world of performance (Paweł Dobrzycki, Poland). There were also some practical associations that treat stage design as a polyphony of different theatrical elements of undetermined order (Heiner Goebbels, Germany), a multi-purpose container filled with fiction and action (Monica Raya Mejia, Mexico), a salvage of social space which, however, cannot be identified with junkyard (Tomáš Žižka, Czech Republic), a lorry cargo which becomes a source of ideas (Henk van der Geest, Netherlands), a safety belt that reveals and seals the latent energy of space (Fiona Sze-Lorrain France/Singapore). Stage design is used to transform drama into a system of visual signs (Ioanna Manoledáki, Greece), and it is the ability to tell a story through stage images (Richard Hudson, USA), but it also gives life to things that create a rich narrative sketched with small elements (Edwin Erminy, Venezuela).

The cited sentences are only a part of Howard's survey, but they show the polyphony of meanings around the notion. There is a strong tendency to perceive a stage designer in romantic terms with sublime undertones, as a secret agent figure that is somewhat of a hybrid character because, on the one hand, it resembles the nineteenth-century Sherlock Holmes, but, on the other, it is evocative of the espionage nature of Mata Hari. What, in my opinion, theatrologists find most surprising is the choice of associations used by practitioners. Things to which stage design has been compared serve utilitarian functions first, such as a container or lorry; second, they are the wastes of civilization, like salvage; and third, they are meant to ensure safety. At the same time, stage design itself is meant to give life to objects that build the narrative of the performance. It can, therefore, be concluded that a thing as an abstract of sorts becomes the most important construction element of stage design.

It is interesting to juxtapose the survey with Patrice Pavis's extensive definition. In his canonical work, *Dictionary of the Theatre*, he writes that stage design is "knowledge, skill and art of composing theater stage and space, as well as – metonymically – the stage decoration itself as a result of the stage designer's work."¹⁶ Pavis, a theater theoretician, further in his argument shows the differences in the approach to the visual setting of a spectacle in the twentieth century art in comparison to the earlier concept of the roles and functions of stage design. For the most part of its history, its role was decorative, while in the last century it also gained the quality of an active creative element of the spectacle. Currently, a stage designer is "becoming

¹⁶ Entry "Stage design", in: P. Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theater*, transl., ed. and commentary S. Świontek, Wrocław 1998, pp. 454-455.

aware of his autonomy and his unique contribution to the production.”¹⁷ Aesthetic trends of the turn of the millennium show that stage design is used to destroy the space of the box stage, extending towards the spectator and reducing the boundary of illusion that once helped to build the distance between the actor/stage character and the recipient; it opens the space, surrounding the audience on all sides or having the audience follow the actor and moving action to different places, thus challenging the traditional reception of a performance, which entailed a fixed place of the spectator and decoration, and where mobility meant only the change of stationary elements on the stage. Nowadays, stage design is adapted for the staging and, through the use of lightweight materials and multimedia features of new technology, stage design becomes a “prop” in the service of the actors.

4.

Pavis’s definition refers the understanding of the concept of stage design both to its historical aspect and to its place in the aesthetics of theatrical production at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This is undoubtedly common ground for both teatrologists and practitioners. Everyone agrees that the function of stage design is secondary to the function of the production (that is performance). Pavis draws attention to something that poses a difficulty to researchers. Stage design has its own autonomy as a form of art. It occupies the area between painting, sculpture, photography, new media, and the actor, director, etc. Thus, as such, it is subject to separate aesthetics which cannot be identified with the theories we use to describe and name the phenomena occurring in visual arts in general. Given the number of its specializations in terms of cultural performances, a feature distinguishing them from one another should be specified. It is the artists themselves who can help solve this problem.

Erika Fischer-Lichte opens her book *Aesthetics of Performativity* with the analysis of *Lips of Thomas*, a 1975 performance by Marina Abramović. It consisted of several stages, all portraying aggression towards her own body. The naked artist first consumed large quantities of wine and honey, then cut a five-pointed star on her stomach, and finished her drastic action by lying on a block of ice. She was heated from the top so that the cut wound would continue bleeding. The performance was interrupted by the audience. Fischer-Lichte concludes that the interpretation of performance must rely on the contact with the audience. The stronger the contact is the better, as then autopoietic feedback loop can be created. In the 1990s, Ambramović stated

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 455.

that she hated the theater because it entailed pretense. She separated her own art from the tradition of theatricalization as advocated by Carlson. She, however, used real stage and theater when she wanted to employ expressive gestures, which was also a form of a personal ritual. Along with Charles Atlas, she realized the play *Biography* (1992-1993). The artist was standing on an empty stage. This time, her costume covered her completely: she was wearing an elegant black suit and stilettos. The outfit was a sign of change in relation to her previous actions, in which she mostly played with nudity. The recited text was accompanied by Maria Callas singing. Callas was used deliberately as her biography became an icon of the difficulties that female artists of the twentieth century had to overcome. Abramović spoke like a mechanical doll. The story concerned her personal and artistic life. Her monologue was a farewell to the values she and her lover of many years held in high regard. The performance served as a transition between Abramović who formed a remarkable artistic and personal duo with Ulay, and Abramović as an independent woman and artist. Theatre was the transition phase as argued by the authors already mentioned her¹⁸.

Abramović introduced an important distinction between artistic and theatrical performances. The thing that separates them is the illusion of theater. It refers to the feeling that what we see on stage is only a performance. At the same time, it assumes a constant game based on the opposites of illusion and disillusionment. Metaphorically speaking, it creates a bridge connecting the real world with the reality of the stage space, interpreted depending on the convention of the given production. An ordinary table can be just a table in the theater, but it can also become an emblematic depiction of a mountain on which Beijing opera characters climb laboriously. It was the lack of understanding of the uniqueness and separate nature of theatrical stage design that was the reason of failure of the Polish exhibition at the PQ in 2011.

5.

Ever since its first edition in 1967, the Prague Quadrennial was dedicated to the world stage design and theater architecture. It was not individual artists that were invited to participate in the international exhibition, but countries. In small spaces, national curators showed their countries' achievements in the field of theater and visual arts over the four years from the previous event. The jury recruits mostly from theater practitioners (stage designers, directors,

¹⁸ Both Schechner and McKenzie point out that the category of liminality derived from Arnold van Gennep and sanctioned by Victor Turner on the basis of contemporary theater studies talks about theater as a liminal phenomenon.

costume designers, lighting directors) and theorists of theater. Their task is to reward the most interesting exhibition, one that presents a new aspect of stage design. The main award is the Golden Triga, but a Gold Medal is also awarded. Poland has been rewarded twice: in 1967 Andrzej Majewski was awarded the Gold Medal for costume design, and in 1971 the Gold Medal went to Jerzy Gurawski, Leokadia Serafinowicz, Józef Szajna, and Zofia Wierchowicz.

The 12th PQ edition was held in 2011. It was attended by 61 countries, a record number in more than forty years of the event's history. Its Commissioner General was Boris Kudlička, a Slovak stage designer who has worked in Poland since 1995. Initially, he was an assistant to Andrzej Kreutz Majewski, but later he became famous as the author of magical landscapes for operas directed primarily by Mariusz Trelinski, but also Marek Weiss-Grześniński and Maciej Prus, for the Grand Theatre National Opera in Warsaw, the Poznań Opera, the National Theatre in Prague as well as for the U.S., Israel and Germany. In 2007, at the 11th PQ, he won the Golden Trig as the representative of Slovakia. In addition, he is known as the co-author of the Polish pavilion at EXPO 2010 in Shanghai, for which he was awarded the silver medal.

As a stage designer, Kudlička is not afraid of challenges and experiments with new media. He often builds monochromatic worlds using flat spots of intense color. He introduces rear projections. They become such a dominant element that the actor is merely a "prop", contrary to the definition by Pavis. He uses laser light, with which he rhythmicalizes the area of the performance. He uses large squares or rectangles on stage to create an architectural space enhanced with neon inscriptions or mirrors. Therefore, it came as no surprise that the Slovak artist, specifying the title of the PQ, made the link with performative arts. The jury included: Carlson as a theorist of performance; Monika Pormale from Lithuania, a stage and costume designer; Felice Ross from Israel, a lighting director; Viliam Docolomansky from the Czech Republic, a director; Carmen Romero from Chile, the director of the festival in San Diego; Brett Bailey from South Africa, a director, scriptwriter, stage designer, and costume designer; and Kevin Purcell from Australia, a conductor and composer. The Golden Triga 2011 was awarded to Brazil.

The curator of the winning exhibition was Antonio Grassi. He used a seemingly risky ploy. He prepared a classic stage design exhibition collecting mock-ups, theatrical costumes and video materials which could evoke associations with an ostensibly cluttered theater storeroom. The uniqueness consisted in the treatment of the spectator, who was caught in a real trap in the Brazilian pavilion. The exhibition occupied two rooms. It was not easy to get there because one had to cross a small bridge first. The footbridge separated the noise of the vast, diverse PQ exposition from the world of Latin American

culture. The interior sparkled with vibrant colors (juicy orange, bright red, pink, yellow, green, blue), one could hear singing, walls were heavy with theatrical items: props, costumes, mock-ups. Everything was arranged in display cases or suspended on the walls, some clothes made from candy wrappers were displayed on mannequins with the dignity of great costume designers. The whole exhibition was buzzing with the life of a Brazilian street, and had the flavor of repertory theaters, puppet shows or folk entertainment. In the verdict, the jury stressed the importance of richness of national identity that was emphasized by theatrical activities. Carlson explains that performativity is an inherent feature of the theater and other arts borrow it to emphasize their own actions or to expand the field of their activity. At the same time, looking from a historical point of view, he sees its essential signs in circus performances or medieval fools' jests. He points to all the activities that used to be called paratheater. Their characteristic feature is the focus on live contact with the audience, and the fact that the relationship with the audience affects the shape of the performance. Carlson defines performance as a form that strongly affects social relationships. Grassi demonstrated the power of theater in the street which holds together the identity of the favela inhabitants, the poor district, and in the area of religious cult and traditional bourgeois theater. Thus, he showed the ludic nature of theater and its accompanying stage design, in which the PQ spectator could revel.

6.

Poland was the polar opposite of the Brazilian exposition. The idea of *The White Cube* was meant to refer to the original exhibition space which has a hidden potential. In Prague, it was blurred because the pavilion generated performance over the existing artistic performance. The multi-subject semantic design was incomprehensible. The audience was not interested in the artists and their works. Also, they did not want to scrape off the hidden picture, because most PQ participants were unfamiliar with the Polish socio-political context. On the last day of the Prague event, the organizers quickly wiped the white walls.

The action of Machnio and Skwarczyńska can be seen as a scientific laboratory experiment. Here, the theme of the world exhibition was used to assert the need to isolate stage design and understand its specificity. The project demonstrated that it is different in a theater performance and in a work located in a public space. Both are performative, both take up the challenge, as McKenzie has it, and both affect the viewer as Fischer-Lichte sees it. But the decoration used each time is different and requires its own separate conceptual apparatus, needed both for its description as well as reception. Mixing only

causes chaos. Therefore, *Wspólna sprawa* by Althamer existing independently was a great success in Brussels and other cities, where it was shown as a social action. However, in Prague, in the context of the Experimental Costume, its idea failed even if its colorful character was seductive.

What should be the distinguishing factor is the illusion, loved even by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz. He believed that illusion stimulates imagination because it challenges the viewer to decipher the world of stage and, at the same time, it serves the purpose of fun. The performative structure of theatrical stage design is the idea of showing the world the way it potentially could be, and not the way it is. It is also meant to surprise with its perverse nature in relation to the everyday reality surrounding the recipient. The situation is slightly different when an artist creates installations in the city. Performativity of stage design of an art installation consists in the deformation of the ambient space, giving it a new quality that lasts for the duration of the exposition. The viewer plays a somewhat subservient role; he/she may be its performer, as in the case of Althamer's action, or a passive admirer, as is in Rajkowska's works. The distinction should not be overlooked, as the action by the curators of the Polish pavilion at PQ has shown.

Translated by Katarzyna Gucio

ZRÓBMY SOBIE SCENOGRAFIĘ, CZYLI PERFORMATYWNE ASPEKTY SZTUKI (streszczenie)

Artykuł omawia performatywne aspekty scenografii, bazując na rozumieniu pojęcia performansu wprowadzonego przez Jona Mc Kenziego. Autorka starała się udowodnić, że nie można stosować tych samych kategorii do scenografii widowisk teatralnych co do działalności artystów kreujących wydarzenia w obrębie szeroko pojętych sztuk plastycznych. Przykładem takiego niezrozumienia stała się Polska Ekspozycja na Praskim Quadrennial Scenografii w 2011. Dla pokreślenia wszelkich różnic w rozumieniu pojęcia istniejących w obrębie różnych sfer sztuki autorka analizuje definicje wprowadzone przez teoretyków i te używane przez praktyków.

Słowa kluczowe: performatyka, performance, scenografia, Praskie Quadrennial Scenografii, PQ.

Jacek Zydorowicz

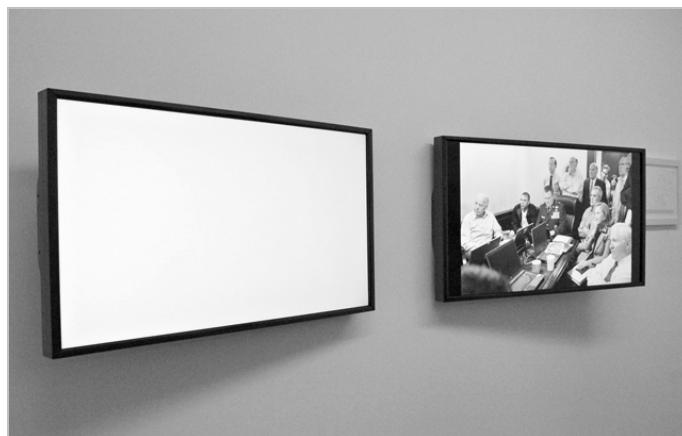
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

INVISIBLE AND IN-VISIBLE PERFORMATIVE IMAGES OF TERROR

Abstract: Contemporary visual art seems to proclaim that a picture always has the final say. Therefore, it is worth analyzing the regime of picture production and distribution, especially those images which gain the status of an icon. However, the specificity of our times and the media forces us to deal with tragedy-based icons, which are produced by international terrorism on the one hand [the collapse of the Twin Towers in 2001], and the international antiterrorist coalition on the other [Barack Obama and his coworkers watching operation *Geronimo*; photos from Abu Ghraib]. By paraphrasing the Austinian *Speech acts*, the aforementioned icons may be classified as performative pictures, and as such they are often analyzed by curators' projects as well as by individual artists.

Keywords: art, terrorism, performativity, visual culture, image, media.

Two LCD screens on the wall: on one of them there is pure dazzling whiteness, on the other one a memorable scene which depicts US President Barack Obama on a chair in the corner of the Situation Room, next to him Vice President Joe Biden and Brigadier General Marshall B. Webb. On the right, Hillary Clinton covers her mouth with her hand. Beside her sits former CIA Director and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, and Deputy National Security Adviser Denis McDonough, rather in the background Audrey Tomason (Director For Counterterrorism), John O. Brennan (Deputy National Security Advisor for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism), James R. Clapper (Director of National Intelligence) and several other prominent people. On the table there are open laptops, documents and photo prints that have been blurred [by the White House]. The viewer knows that everyone's eyes are focused on the screen, which is outside the frame, broadcasting Operation Geronimo, i.e. the elimination of Osama bin Laden.



A. Jaar, *May 1* (2012),
photo by JZ

The aforementioned installation, entitled *May 1* (2012), opened the exhibition during the 7th Berlin Biennale, and accidentally became direct inspiration for the title of this article. The two screens made by a Chilean, Alfredo Jaar, present the areas of “the invisible” and “the in-visible”. The artist did not make any changes to Pete Souza’s photograph known from the media (and delivered by the White House). He contrasted it with the immaculately blank screen showing whiteness. In doing so, he emphasized the unspoken intentions of Obama’s PROs (public relations officials): no bloody scenes will be shown. In accordance with the *pars pro toto* principle, viewers all over the world must be satisfied with the perfectly studied (in terms of light and composition) photograph depicting the reliable witnesses to this event¹. However, visual culture does not like such sophisticated rhetorics. Moreover, visual culture loathes the emptiness that such rhetorics create and fills it immediately. The space of “the invisible” was instantly filled by a lousy photomontage consisting of the lower part of the living Bin Laden’s face, combined with the deformed eyes and forehead of an anonymous corpse. Before anyone managed to unmask the forgery, the Arabic media had shown the picture of a martyr.

However, this was followed by far more interesting aftermaths in the sphere of “the in-visible”, that is Souza’s photo. Although a motionless photograph was taken, the “performance” in it continues. The first interference was of a religious origin and consisted in retouching the two women present in the Situation Room, i.e. Hilary Clinton and A. Tomason. *Di Tzeitung*, a Brooklyn-based Hasidic newspaper, explains: “In accord with our religious

¹ Numerous commentaries mention the inevitable association with the carefully arranged photograph of the dead Ernesto Che Guevarra (this iconic shot was taken by Freddy Alborta in 1967).

beliefs, we do not publish photos of women, which in no way relegates them to a lower status. Publishing a newspaper is a big responsibility, and our policies are guided by a Rabbinical Board. Because of laws of modesty, we are not allowed to publish pictures of women, and we regret if this gives an impression of disparaging to women, which is certainly never our intention. We apologize if this was seen as offensive.”² This immediately resulted in responses in the form of pictures in which all the men had been photoshopped out or in which Hilary Clinton was replaced by Jesus, with a view to provoking the orthodox circles.

While Souza’s photograph was spreading in the media, the Internet was teeming with other memes which obviously mocked the pathos of the photograph. The first to appear were comic bubbles. Then Photoshop specialists dressed all the present officials in Batman-like costumes. The laptop screens were made to show solitaire or violent scenes from computer games. Other memes presented the Situation Room crammed with pop culture icons such as Elvis Presley or a Muppet from *Sesame Street*, or else a table filled with fast food and Coca-Cola. Still another meme showed those present in the Situation Room wearing funny headgear, and a figure of Osama Bin Laden himself standing next to Tomason.

Alex Eylar went one step further and reconstructed the scene by means of Lego blocks (though in his version H. Clinton is not covering her mouth in terror).



Source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/picturesoftheday/8525707/Pictures-of-the-day-20-May-2011.html>

² Quot. after: http://articles.nydailynews.com/2011-05-09/local/29547078_1_state-hillary-clinton-image-photo accessed 12.09.2012.

The above examples demonstrate the effects in the visual sphere and the world view which can be produced by a single antiterrorist photo. However, far more effective are the pictures produced by terrorism itself and subsequently shown in the media. It is quite obvious that terrorist attacks focus on a show of sorts; thus, as Richard Schechner postulates, they should be included in the area of *performance studies*³. What immediate benefit does such research bring? More can be noticed when analyzing terrorist attacks from a perspective other than the state, official or military one. What is observable is not so much specific techniques as certain community rituals. What is more, one sees their dynamics, changeability, and susceptibility to intercultural hybridizations. One cannot use the same criteria to evaluate a media performance of the collapsing Twin Towers [11 Sep. 2001] and the occupation of the theater in Dubrovka by the Chechen Black Widows [23 Oct. 2002]. More importantly, Performance studies not only see the victims of terror, but also the target addressee of those shows, that is the viewer. According to John Bell,

Using the tools of performance studies to analyze how calculated violence is employed in media-saturated society is not an insult to the memories of those who died, but an essential means of understanding the undeniably symbolic level at which global conflict is now being played out. It is clear that such vivid terms as “Axis of Evil,” “Homeland Security,” and “Weapons of Mass Destruction” have been put into play with full cognizance of their semiotic value, and we will only understand the actual implications of these concepts and the actions connected to them – performatives all – if we are able to comprehend them on an equally sophisticated level of analysis. The concept of performance, and our studies of performance, can help us understand and respond to these new exigencies. From the temporary public shrines that sprouted up all over Manhattan immediately after 9/11; (...) to the public protests, marches, and rallies all over the world that have followed 9/11 in almost weekly regularity; to the conscious manipulation of the threat of terror by the United States government both at home and abroad in highly professional propaganda campaigns; and finally to the onset of a global war without end on the part of our “world’s largest army,” the idea of performance offers concepts, means of analysis, and methods of action which can help us figure out where we are and what we ought to do – certainly better than concepts of “art” or “drama” and “theatre,” which seem to be, consciously or unconsciously, now scrupulously estranged from the things of import that happen around us⁴.

³ R. Schechner, “Performatyka. Wstęp.” *Performanse globalne i międzykulturowe*, Wrocław 2006, p. 299 ff.

⁴ J. Bell, “Performance Studies in an Age of Terror”, *TDR: The Drama Review* 47.2, 2003, online version: <http://www.csun.edu/~vcspc00g/301/psinanageofterrorTDR.pdf> accessed 12.09.2012.

Hence, there is a need for flexibility in the field and for an interdisciplinary opening to the achievements of cultural and visual studies. The media are becoming an obvious ally of terrorists whenever in their tabloid rhetoric they focus on a visual dramatization of terrorist acts rather than on their analysis. Thus, we can see that Western cultural weapons [the TV, the Internet] are handled much more effectively by Jihad fighters than by the PROs of the American army.

Bush's and Obama's speeches, which are broadcast worldwide, make a weaker impression on the audience than the execution of the Taliban's hostage which was posted on the Internet. What is relevant here is the viewers' attitude and their different reactions to pull culture and push culture. After 9/11 came an unfortunate moment when G. W. Bush and R. Giuliani spoilt the Americans' sense of participation and involvement in the solemn performance by stating that they would go shopping like they always did (they meant to show their moral victory). In doing so, they partly wasted the cathartic potential of the 9/11 drama, perhaps feeling that the scenario was not theirs. Bush definitely preferred to realize his political theater⁵.

Five days after the attack on WTC, composer Karlheinz Stockhausen got into trouble when he said that this was "the greatest work of art there has ever been" ["das größte Kunstwerk, das es je gegeben hat"]⁶. However, several years later, analyses which used such artistic metaphors were no longer considered shocking. Jeffrey Alexander frankly treats the 9/11 attacks as performance and enumerates its elements:

Script: Bin-Laden and his lieutenants actually wrote out detailed plans for the September 11th attack, including preparations and training, directions of movement and time, entrances and exits.

Actors: To prepare for the performance, Bin Laden assembled, with painstaking effort, a cast of less than 20 actors, supported by a big background crew. They were superbly trained and carried out difficult parts. Rehearsals took place in *Al Qaeda* training camps.

Means of symbolic production: This is perhaps Bin Laden's most creative and significant innovation in terms of the cultural pragmatic requirements for performance. The large passenger airplanes were not only cruelly effective in the instrumental sense but powerfully expressive weapons in the dramaturgical sense, and they were cheap and relatively easy to obtain. The Twin Towers against which these new weapons were aimed performed as equally evocative symbols. The metonymic juxtaposition of planes and towers created a global stage for the performance of political murder, capturing the world's media attention.

⁵ Cf. S. Brady, *Performance, Politics, and the War on Terror: 'Whatever it Takes'*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire 2012.

⁶ J. Bell, *Performance Studies in an Age of Terror*, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

Social Power: It has often been said that Bin-Laden did not have access to significant social power, which is what defines warfare of an asymmetrical kind. But he did, in fact, have considerable physical and financial leverage. He controlled spaces, influence, and governmental power, first in Sudan and then later in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This access to social power was critical in allowing the terrorist performance to be launched, providing not only arenas for rehearsal but financial and ideological networks, allowing theologically and pragmatically legitimate promises of salvation to be made to martyrs and families.

Mise-en-Scene: Bin-Laden and his staff's directorial effectiveness could not be faulted. They thought through thoroughly the technical requisites of putting the elements of performance 'into the scene.'

Audience: Even with all these elements in place, Bin Laden's performance on September 11th was not assured success. There remained the audience to contend with, the final performative component whose relative independence cannot be denied. In considering the audience, we confront an issue that is critical to considering the performance of power in complex, socially and culturally fragmented societies.⁷

The effects of the terrorist attack go beyond the pure number of victims and the performance itself. Terrorism, by definition, aims at bringing about specific effects and changes. In order to analyze it, one can use paraphrased speech acts as understood by L. Austin⁸: Performative utterances (or performatives) are defined in the speech act theory as sentences which do not only passively describe a given reality, but change the (social) reality that they describe. Terrorist acts have a performative advantage over speech acts in that they find their continuation and strengthening in media images. However, not all pictures can obtain such performative power. They must obtain iconic status, i.e. be widely recognizable and provoke powerful emotions, have a significant influence not only on the world views, but also on human behavior. Since there is no simple recipe for this, it is worthwhile to analyze several examples.

In terrorist visual tactics, we can observe a growing care for the act of destruction to be not so much bloody and resulting in a huge number of victims, as simply photogenic. It should be suitable as a media icon and, as such, replicate itself in the collective imagination. An example of an act which was supposed to be spectacular and shocking was an attempt on the life of the controversial film maker, Theo van Gogh: an Islamic fanatic fired 8 shots at

⁷ J. Alexander, *Power and Performance: The War on Terror between the Sacred and the Profane*, European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre For Advanced Studies, Florence 2007, pp. 2-3.

⁸ J.L. Austin, "Wypowiedzi performatywne." *Mówienie i poznawanie*, WN PWN Warszawa 1993; see also: J.L. Austin, "Jak działać słowami", *ibidem*.

him in broad daylight, cut his throat with a machete and nailed his several-page message to the world to the victim's chest with his knife. Strikingly, an accidental witness's first 'civic' impulse was to use his phone in order to photograph the corpse on the pavement – in spite of this, the photo never became a media icon. From the strategic point of view, it is more beneficial for terrorists to refer to the well-trying sublimity, a combination of fear and fascination, and choose symbolically marked and photogenic targets. Together with reporters, terrorists have produced so many violent pictures that these have in turn crossed the threshold of the viewers' sensitivity and, as such, they do not stand a chance of being broadcast.

Such pictures from the sphere of "the invisible" were compiled by a Swiss artist, Thomas Hirschhorn, and placed on an enormous canvas entitled *The Incommensurable Banner*, (2007). This work was the highlight of the Berlin exhibition *The Uncanny Familiar: Images of Terror*⁹. With fetishist-like persistence, Hirschhorn extracted from the Internet dozens of frightening photographs of dead bodies, mostly those of civilians. They were all terribly deformed as a result of explosions and other terrorist acts. In an obscene manner, he showed what had been excluded from media broadcasts, and in doing so, he inquired into the policy behind this exclusion. As Hirschhorn points out: "We know from our endless 24-hour news channels that every day 10 people die here or there. We want to know but we don't want to see. Because when we see we are more involved. This is the power of visual arts. This is why I am a visual artist and this is why I insist this should be seen."¹⁰ It is worth noticing that the pictures of the injured bodies are printed on canvas, and above them there is a title made with spray. The banner's style is characteristic of street riots caused by Israeli raids in the Gaza Strip, when protesting Palestinians show drastic pictures of victims, accompanied by slogans written in English.

Hirschhorn's work was accompanied by a series of archival press photographs which had been used years before as illustrations for articles on attacks.

⁹ *The Uncanny Familiar: Images of Terror*, (C/O Berlin, 2011). This exhibition was organized to commemorate the tenth anniversary of September 11, 2001, and is curated by Felix Hoffmann for C/O Berlin. It features approximately 200 works from *Der Spiegel's* photographic archives and around 30 artists, including Thomas Hoepker, Dennis Adams, Michal Kosakowski, Coco Kühn, Fiorenza Menini, Thomas Galler, Thomas Ruff, Simon Menner, Peter Piller, Christoph Draeger, Thomas Hirschhorn, G.R.A.M., Walid Raad, Gael Peltier, Naeem Mohaiemen, Michael Schirner, Sarah Charlesworth, Mikael Mikael, Robert Boyd, Johan Grimonprez, Luuk Wilmering, Pascale Couvert, Natalie Czech, Reymond Depardon, Michael Schäfer, Marc Volk and Malte Wandel. The world premiere of *The Incommensurable Banner* took place at the Brighton Photo Biennial, Fabrica 2008.

¹⁰ Quot after: A. Bambury, "Thomas Hirschhorn – The Incommensurable At Brighton's Fabrica," <http://www.culture24.org.uk/art/photography%20%26%20film/art61501> accessed 12.09.2012.

In his work *My Neck Is Thinner Than a Hair* (2004), a Lebanese, Walid Raad (The Atlas Group), displayed the obverse, as well as described and stamped the reverse of photos from 1980s Beirut. For a change, there are no corpses here, but car wrecks. In another room, one could see press photographs dating back to the first generation of the Baader-Meinhof Gang – these were also dominated by cars which had been abandoned or raked by terrorists. This inspired a French artist, Gaël Peltier, to produce a series of photographs entitled *Mesure conservatoire* (2001). The black-and-white pictures presented a BMW 5 Series with a puncture of the back wheel and chips of glass on the seats. This time it was not stylized as a press photo but as rather police documentation, with shots from different angles. The choice of the make was not accidental – it is not a secret that BMW was the most frequently used car in Red Army Faction operations, and the three-letter abbreviation was interpreted to mean ‘Baader Mainhof Wagen’. Today it may seem strange that, in a pretty tortuous *pars pro toto* logic, mass media coverages of terrorist attacks during the “German Autumn” were accompanied by photos of cars, not people. However, the authorities at the time would do anything so as not to popularize the images of the RAF members themselves¹¹. However, this principle concerned only native terrorists. This tendentiousness would be confirmed by Raymond Depardon’s photographs of the memorable action of the group called Black September during the 1972 Olympics in Munich. The author did not focus on car wrecks or helicopters; one of his most popular works was a photo of a masked terrorist standing on the balcony of the Israeli sportsmen’s hotel.

As we can see, today’s war against terror is being waged in the symbolic space. W.J.T Mitchell talks about the ‘War of Images’, yet he explains the phenomenon as follows: “To call this a war of or on images is in no way to deny its reality or to minimize the real physical suffering it entails. It is, rather, to take a realistic view of terrorism as a form of psychological warfare, specifically a use of images, and especially images of destruction, to traumatize the collective nervous system via mass media and turn the imagination against itself. It is also to take a realistic view of the ‘war on terror’ as quite literally, a war against an emotion (...). It is thus a war on a projected spectre or phantasm, a war against elusive, invisible, unlocatable enemy, a war that continually misses its target, striking out blindly with conventional means and waging massive destruction on innocent people in the process. The aim of terrorism is, in fact, precisely to provoke this overreaction, to lure the “immune system” of social body (...) into responses which will have the effect

¹¹ The unintended effect was that an arrest warrant in the form of a Western-like poster immediately became a desired gadget, embellishing walls in student dormitories. Notably, the reprint is still on sale in online shops.

on increasing the power of terrorists, in effect ‘cloning terror’ in the process of trying to destroy it”¹².



CO Berlin, photo by JZ

However, pictures with performative power work both ways, and the states of affairs that they trigger often get out of control. One can evoke numerous examples, e.g. a recent attack on the American ambassador Christopher J. Stevens in Benghazi. Bloody riots in Libya and other Islamic countries were triggered by a film (available on YouTube) *Innocence of Muslims*. Firstly the media claimed that it had been made by an American Jew, Sam Bacile. The Investigation proved that it was a false identity of an Egyptian Coptic Christian named Nakoula Basseley Nakoula¹³.

¹² W.J.T Mitchell, “Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to Abu Ghraib”, *Brumaria 12: Art and Terrorism*, Madrid 2009, p. 281.

¹³ See: <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2012/09/nakoula-basseley-nakoula-aliases-innocence-muslims.html>; <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepfeatures/2012/09/201291518925528211.html>.

Anyway, it is difficult to be in favour of artistic freedom, as the film is embarrassingly lousy, featuring amateur actors, whose acting is based on Bollywood standards, and desert scenes from the Muhammad's life are shot in blue box. The content is a low standard provocation aimed at Islam followers - not only is the prophet shown (against the ban), he is shown as a bastard, impostor, promiscuous womanizer, pedophile and homosexual. However, the film turned out to be a time bomb because the problem occurred when it was posted on YT with the translation into Arabic.

It turns out that even the most recent history of conflicts between iconoclasts and iconophiles did not teach us anything. Let us recall: on 30 September 2005 the Danish journal *Jyllands-Posten* used twelve caricatures of the prophet as an illustration accompanying the article entitled "Muhammeds ansigt" ("The Face of Muhammad"). This was supposed to be a commentary on the problems of the Danish writer and journalist, Kåre Bluitgen, who ineffectively tried to find an illustrator for a children's book devoted to the Koran and Muhammad's life. The illustrators, anxious, refused; one of them invoked the case of the aforementioned Dutch director, Theo van Gogh. The journal's editorial team managed to convince several graphic designers, and, as a result, the publication of caricatures triggered an avalanche of hostile reactions. Some of the cartoons clearly equated Islamists with terrorists – for example, in a photo reprinted by *Rzeczpospolita* [4.02.2006] the prophet is exhorting suicide bombers to stop, because there are no more virgins for them in heaven. The source of anxiety does not reside in preserving a harmful stereotype, but obviously in breaking the taboo of portraying Muhammad. The editorial staff and the illustrators were flooded by threatening calls informing about planted bombs. The media resonance was so strong that soon demonstrations took place not only in Copenhagen but also in front of Danish embassies all over the world. In London the protesters wore imitations of explosives, and carried banners saying, "Europe, your September 11 shall come".

The protests assumed an anti-European character, especially after Italian minister Roberto Calderoli appeared in a T-shirt with the caricatures printed on it. In Arabic countries, clashes with the forces of law and order resulted in fatalities. In Arabic-speaking media and mosques there were calls for a widespread boycott of Danish goods and demands were made for an apology on the part of the editorial team. Even the Chechen authorities threatened to reject Danish humanitarian aid. The apology was issued on the 30th of January 2006, which did not tone down the conflict; on the contrary, it caused an outrage among the Western media, which, in an unfortunate gesture of solidarity and in defense of the freedom of speech, decided to reprint the caricatures. It is not hard to guess that multiplied pictures intensified the anti-European sentiment on the part of the Islamists. By contrast, "the Western world" tried to use the conflicts and discussions to its own advantage. Dilemmas arose: what do we

treasure more, freedom of speech or religious tolerance¹⁴? This is the paradox of the present time: we have the media, but there is no room for mediation.

The religious aspect of recent conflicts cannot be reduced to a scramble in the sphere of the media. When both sides stick to their fundamentalism, neither the conventional political and military apparatus, nor routine propaganda will suffice. What is necessary is to play on people's emotions through an appropriate symbolic dramatization of events. Austin Cline states the following: "By calling acts of religious terrorism 'symbolic,' I mean that they are intended to illustrate or refer to something beyond their immediate target: a grander conquest, for instance, or a struggle more awesome than meets the eye. (...) Such explosive scenarios are not **tactics** directed toward an immediate, earthly, or strategic goal, but as **dramatic events** intended to impress for their symbolic significance. (...) The very adjectives used to describe acts of religious terrorism – symbolic, dramatic, theatrical – suggest that we look at them not as tactics but as **performance violence**. In speaking of terrorism as 'performance violence,' I am not suggesting that such acts are undertaken lightly or capriciously. Rather, like religious ritual or street theater, they are dramas designed to have an impact on the several audiences that they affect. Those who witness the violence – even at a distance, via the news media – are therefore a part of what occurs. (...) Terrorist acts, then, can be both **performance events**, in that they make a symbolic statement, and **performative acts**, insofar as they try to change things"¹⁵.

What strategies and tactics can present-day art adopt in this situation? Witnessing, cloning or responding to terror? Or perhaps reflecting (on) terrorism – i.e. rethinking and mirroring the images delivered by the media? Or else creating counter-images? Renewing the old debate about representation and representability of violence in the media? One could say that all of the aforementioned tactics are widespread in the world of art. If some pictures of conflict areas have not gained a performative power, have not become media icons or have been obscured by information noise, art is able to bring them out, slow them down or re-emphasize them. Let us recall the events which took place during the Arab Spring, and the role that mobile phones played, as well as the role of photographs which were taken and exchanged by means of mobile phones at the time. Social networks and websites such as YouTube were teeming with blurred, running shots taken during the riots in Cairo's Tahrir Square. At times, due to the lack of better material, fragments of these photographs were broadcast by global medial such as BBC or CNN; however,

¹⁴ Cf. J. Zydorowicz, "Eurojihad i kultura wizualna", *Przegląd Religioznawczy*, 2009, no. 1, p.147 ff.

¹⁵ A. Cline, "Religious Terrorism as Symbol, Ritual & Performance Violence. Is Religious Violence a Type of Religious Ritual in a Cosmic Drama?", <http://atheism.about.com/od/religiousviolencecauses/a/RitualViolence.htm> accessed 12.09.2012 [emphasis mine].

none of them became icons. Yet German artist Monika Huber decided to give these films, circulating within the “citizen media” circuit, a different dimension by putting them in a gallery context during the exhibition entitled *Bild Gegen Bild*¹⁶. The technique adopted in the work *Einsdreissig* was quite unique in the sense that the artist photographed her TV transmitting the news, printed fragments of it, and covered the printouts with black and white paint. She then photographed the effect of her work and presented it to the public in the form of photographs. She comments on her work as follows: “Painting becomes a constant balance between affirmation and negation. The work is based on rules that render this ongoing process of change visible. Painting is a steady stream of making things both visible and invisible”¹⁷.

The aforementioned A. Jaar pointed to the area of the invisible with reference to the corpse of Osama Bin Laden. Presumably the decision of the White House to control these pictures stems from the fear of the victimization and heroization of the Al-Qaeda leader. With reference to the former ‘hunting trophies,’ the American mass media adopted a different visual policy. In the mission of proving the truth, the media transmitted Saddam Hussein’s dental examination (2006), the circumstances of his execution, photographs of his two killed sons’ faces (2003), and subsequently the capture, lynching and public exposure of Muammar al-Gaddafi’s corpse (2011). Naturally, such events were reflected in contemporary historical painting. On the basis of press photographs, Israeli artist Gal Weinstein adopted an impressionistic style in his portraits of the dead, crippled sons of Saddam Hussein (*Uday and Qusay*, 2004). Wilhelm Sasnal painted Gaddafi’s corpse (*Gaddafi*, 2011) in an iconographic pose known from the *Lamentation of Christ* (ca. 1480) by Andrea Mantegna. The irony was that the people queuing to see the dictator’s body did not intend to cry, but to take a triumphant perverse commemorative photo with a mobile phone.

Steve Mumford’s work can also be classified as historical painting. For a change, his pictures are not quotations from the media. Mumford made 6 trips to Iraq between 2003 and 2008, which inspired him to prepare a series of photorealistic oil paintings depicting scenes from the life of both the coalition soldiers and the Jihadists. Although the adopted iconographic convention resembles Romantic painting, it is difficult to see the attempts at evoking cheap emotions or at provocation. Each side of the conflict might well consider these paintings to be historical and sublime documents.

¹⁶ The exhibition *Bild Gegen Bild/Image Counter Image*, curators: Ulrich Wilmes, Patrizia Dander, Leon Krempel, Julienne Lorz, Haus der Kunst, Munich 2012.

¹⁷ Quot. after: U. Wilmes, “Monika Huber”, catalogue: *Bild Gegen Bild/Image Counter Image*, ed. by: Patrizia Dander, Julienne Lorz; Haus der Kunst, Köln 2012, p.118; Pictures of Monika Huber: <http://www.monikahuber.com>.



Steve Mumford, *The Great Good Friends, (Suicide Bomber)*, 2010



Dispute, 2009



Dying Soldier, 2009

Source: <http://www.postmastersart.com>

Another artist who comments on the reality of conflicts without sponging off the media is a Palestinian, Ahlam Shibli. Her series of photographs entitled *Trackers* (2005) may (unfortunately) potentially gain a performative dimension through tragic feedback. The artist portrayed Bedouins who willingly joined the Israeli army. For the Palestinians, this is betrayal deserving of revenge; however, the artist is far from such simplifications: „*Trackers* researches the price a minority is forced to pay to the majority, maybe to be accepted, maybe to change its identity, maybe to survive or maybe all of this and more”¹⁸.

Josh Azzarella went against the grain as regards historical paintings which dominated the beginning of the 20th century. In a series of works from 2008 he presented infamous scenes from Abu Ghraib, from which he carefully photoshopped out the victims of the tortures. After the scandal concerning the behavior of the American guards, the motif of the Wired Hooded Man on the Box was preserved in the collective memory. The artists deliberately chose other, less iconic photos in order to obtain the blurred memory effect which occurs after several years: ‘it rings a bell, but I guess something’s not right, or maybe it’s just my impression? ...whatever...’. Variations on the torture scenes from Abu Ghraib had appeared before on the walls of art galleries or in the works of a Colombian, Fernando Botero (a series of paintings entitled *Abu Ghraib*, 2004) or a Californian, Guy Colwell (*Abuse*, 2004).

Can art manufacture strong performative pictures nowadays? Obviously, it is not easy, and hence art is much more eager to rework ready media icons by means of the same mechanism which applies to Internet memes. The difference is that on the one hand, memes strengthen the original picture through multiplication, and on the other hand, they dilute and trivialize it. It is true that art often sponges off media icons; however, it aims at their analysis, not trivialization. Consequently, it reaches a different audience. On the other hand, as far as the audience is concerned, its scale or scope is not comparable to that of memes. Thus, it is better for art to penetrate the areas of the *in-visible* than become entirely *invisible*.

L. Minora claims: “Effective fine art addressing terror must possess two key objectives: to explore the issue as more than just a spectacle and to provoke questions about the enemy and the possession of power. Society charges artists with digesting atrocity in a relatable way – questioning by thorough and rigorous thought and creativity so viewers can grapple with issues in a new context through a silent conversation with the work. (...) In a world where terror is pervasive but terrorists are impossible to locate or even identify definitively, fine art has the unique ability to disperse and neutralize blame and present a fresh realm for questioning outside of media and history.

¹⁸ Quot after: J. Lorz, “Ahlam Shibli”, catalogue: *Bild Gegen Bild/Image Counter Image*, *op.cit.*, p. 158.

Artists are facing the atrocities of the world like everyone else – escapism isn't as much as a priority as translation and transport of emotion. (...) Fine art surrounding the issue of terrorism gives way to questions not only about the human narrative, but about what it means to be human”¹⁹.

**NIEWIDZIALNE I WEWNĄTRZ WIDZIALNEGO
PERFORMATYWNE OBRAZY TERRORU
(streszczenie)**

Współczesna kultura wizualna zdaje się głosić, że obraz ma zawsze ostatnie słowo. Warto się zatem przyglądać reżimom produkcji i dystrybucji obrazów, zwłaszcza tych obrazów, które zyskują status ikoniczny. Specyfika czasów i mediów sprawia jednak, że najczęściej do czynienia mamy z ikonami o tragicznym wymiarze, które produkowane są z jednej strony przez międzynarodowy terroryzm [jak upadek wież WTC w 2001], z drugiej – przez międzynarodową koalicję antyterrorystyczną [Barack Obama i jego współpracownicy oglądający operację Geronimo; fotografie z Abu Ghraib]. Parafrazując nieco Austinowskie *Akty mowy* można dokonać ich metaforycznego przełożenia fundując dla rzeczonych ikon kategorię performatywnych obrazów. Jako takie stają się one bowiem bardzo często obiektem artystycznych analiz w ramach kuratorskich projektów i indywidualnych przedsięwzięć artystów.

Słowa kluczowe: sztuka, terroryzm, performatywność, kultura wizualna, obraz, media.

¹⁹ L. Minora, “Fine Art and Terror: Art Knows No Enemies”, <http://www.thegarret.org/?p=495> accessed 12.09.2012.

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THE AESTHETIC OF PERFORMANCE AS EXEMPLIFIED BY PERFORMATIVE PATRIOTISM

Abstract: The article presents three examples of different performances: the first example is the so-called “Smolensk mourning” i.e. the funerals, demonstrations, and processions following the Smolensk plane crash; the second case is the European Football Cup in 2012 (Euro 2012); and the last example is the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity. All the above contain elements of ritual and spectacle, they refer to tradition or they establish one, and aim at a specific change. They are all linked by their reference to identity, patriotic feelings, and internal solidarity within a community. Yet, interestingly, it is their aesthetic aspect that has had a huge influence on their success (their effectiveness as spectacle); accordingly, they are described from an aesthetic point of view, which emphasizes their colorfulness, regularity, and dynamism.

Keywords: aesthetic of performance, social rituals, spectacle, patriotism.

Today, the notion of performance is so broad and wide-ranging, and used so commonly, that it is more and more difficult to use it accurately. The emergence of performance studies, as a discipline on the border of anthropology, ethnology, theater studies, and philosophy, by blurring the boundaries of the disciplines, has opened the term *performance* to many interpretations and further complicated its definition. Simultaneously, there are visible differences in the analysis and description of performance, which stem from the educational background of the researchers. It is not difficult to recognize whether the particular phenomenon is being depicted by a theater specialist, an anthropologist, an art historian, or a philosopher of language. It is not my ambition here to specify or to definitely close this term; instead I want to propose an analysis of particular examples of performative phenomena from an aesthetic point of view. Moreover, I have chosen the examples that do not belong to performing arts, but rather to the sphere of social activities, in order to show that aesthetic reflection does not pertain only to art but also enables us to comprehend and explain other human activities. I believe that until now the research on

performances, regardless of the obvious aesthetic of those phenomena, marginalized that issue.

Certainly, it cannot be said that the aesthetic of performance – as a group of features typical for certain human actions – was not described. On the contrary, the aesthetic of performativity was formulated – as a method of research on performance. Erika Fischer-Lichte, the author of the *Aesthetic of Performativity*¹ focuses only on artistic (mainly theatrical) performances, and focuses mainly on what is novel and specific in the “performative turn”. While cultural anthropologists expose social performances as something common across cultures, they do not pay particular attention to their aesthetic, considering it as obvious, yet of minor importance. My goal is to point out (on the basis of specific examples) those aesthetic elements which are common and traditional in culture, and, at the same time, extremely significant. The phrase *performative turn* does not refer to a new phenomenon, but to a new trend in research. Performance is not anything new, but rather something permanent in culture, in Polish culture particularly, and the aims of performance are invariable. Yet the awareness of its usefulness in achieving goals is increasing.

The examples I have chosen are contemporary, one could even say current: the first one is the so-called “Smolensk mourning” i.e. the funerals, demonstrations, and processions following the Smolensk plane crash; the second one is the European Football Cup in 2012 (Euro 2012); and the last one is the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity². All the above contain elements of ritual and spectacle, they refer to tradition or they establish one, and they aim at a specific change. They are all linked by their reference to identity, patriotic feelings (even though differently understood), and the internal solidarity of a community. Yet, interestingly (in this context), it is their aesthetic aspect that has had a huge influence on their success (their effectiveness as spectacle) as,

¹ *Ästhetik des Performativen* (Frankfurt: Rowolt, 2004). Fisher-Lichte writes that the performative turn in all arts is impossible to describe within the current, traditional, aesthetic theories – even though, in some respects, those theories could be still applied. It is impossible, however, to use them to analyze theoretically the decisive moment of that turn, i.e., the shift from an artwork and the associated relation between subject and object; and the materiality/significance of an event. In order to depict, research, and explain this shift accurately, new aesthetic needs to be created – a performative one.

² While writing this article I found an interview with Dariusz Kosiński, who mentions, as an alternative to romantic or patriotic performances in Poland, the Euro 2012 and the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity. Apparently, I am not very original in my ideas; still, it supports my intuition in my choices. Cp. http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,7830886,Euro_2012_zamiast_Wawelu_.html.

according to Bruce Kapferer, “The efficacy of much ritual is founded on aesthetics”³.

“THE SMOLENSK MOURNING” – THE AESTHETIC OF POLITICAL PERFORMANCE

The plane crash in Smolensk on 10 April 2010 resulted in a series of socio-political performances, such as funeral processions lighting up candles, keeping religious vigils, monthly commemorations in the form of demonstrations or processions – events that resembled critical social actions and theater performances. Though they all referred to the same tragedy, they were all different in character, dynamic, and aesthetic. Their aim was not to retrieve facts, rarely to evoke emotions, but rather to “perform” i.e. act in order to transform reality. It is difficult to use one term referring to them, even separately they escape categorization to specific genres.

The first actions, connected with the burials of the victims (displaying the coffins at the airport, funeral processions, national mourning), even though they were official, very solemn ceremonies, organized by national authorities, turned into a ritual through the intensity of feelings, the lack of distance of the people involved in them, and the frequently manifested religiousness⁴. Lighting up memorial candles (and arranging them in the form of a cross) or throwing flowers were meaningful gestures, performed spontaneously by the majority of the participants, chosen from the well-known, traditional repertoire of socially accepted acts. They were not original or novel; rather, they evidenced the permanence of those symbolic gestures in social consciousness. Certainly, it was reduced symbolism, compared with the sarmatic tradition of *pompa funebris*, i.e. a Baroque funeral ceremony of lofty, dramatic form – accompanied by proper stage design (*castrum doloris*), musical accompaniment, and mass liturgy⁵; or even compared to a more recent tradition of solemn funeral processions and the funerals of prominent people – Adam Mickiewicz, Stanisław Wyspiański, Józef Piłsudski⁶. Still, the “Smolensk

³ Bruce Kapferer, *Sorcery and Beautiful. A Discourse on the Aesthetic of Ritual*, in: *Aesthetics in Performance. Formations of Symbolic Construction and Experience*, ed. by A. Hobart, B. Kapferer, Berghahn Books, 2007. p. 129.

⁴ Victor Turner defined ritual as ‘prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over the technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings and powers’ quoted after: M. Delfem, <http://deflem.blogspot.com/1991/08/ritual-anti-structure-and-religion29.html>.

⁵ Compare: J. Chrościcki, *Pompa funebris. Z dziejów kultury staropolskiej*, PWN, 1974.

⁶ Probably the closest example could be the mourning after Pope John Paul II died, when people massively lit the mourning candles in the streets, organized marches etc... That group ritual sparked apprehension of some atheists and intellectuals, even though any attempt of

mourning” was not a typical funeral ritual, a public “last farewell” restoring the shattered balance, but it was a ritual of affliction, which means, according to Victor Turner, “a direct response to a tragedy that is perceived as a symptom of a hidden conflict”⁷. It triggered a series of consecutive events of performative character, which highlighted deep social divisions. On the one hand, a huge number of people brought to light their disappointment with the political situation and the manner of the country’s modernization (including the resentment towards the changing world views⁸ and lifestyles). Those people expressed their disappointment through national symbols and religious gestures – group prayers, chants, holding vigils at the cross erected in front of the Presidential Palace in Warsaw. That group quickly mythologized the late president and the crash itself into a “burnt-offering”. On the other hand, this triggered a reaction in a large part of society deeply worried by that sudden outbreak of mythologization and ritualization, and the rhetoric of exclusion from the national community of those who did not participate in those rituals⁹. The apprehension of the ritual is also connected to its non-reflective character¹⁰, a new tribalism, and a transformation of an individual into a persona

critique or public criticism were hushed up and exhibitions were being closed due to ‘insulting religious feelings’. The campaign of wearing T-shirts with black crows, sitting on TV antennas with the inscription ‘I didn’t cry after the Pope’, could serve here as a good example. The description of such artistic actions with the examples of censorship of exhibitions is being presented by I. Kowalczyk, in her article: ‘Sztuka, przemoc i demokracja’, <http://www.obieg.pl/artmix/1742>.

⁷ V. Turner, *Od rytuału do teatru. Powaga zabawy*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Wolumen, 2005, p. 184.

⁸ Dariusz Kosiński makes a point: ‘[...] part of Polish people may want to escape from the social model, promoted after political transformations of the 90s, i.e. the one that emphasizes making money, in order to lead affluent and peaceful life. A counter culture may emerge, aimed at middle-class policies of the Civic Platform, against that discreet charm of bourgeoisie, which will not last long, without spirituality’, http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,9656825,Nie_chca_byc_burzuazja.html?as=2&startsz=x#ixzz24M3ApQM1.

⁹ Ewa Szumowska, a director, wrote: ‘[...] mourning shown on TV, reports from Polish streets have nothing to do with death domestication. It is a mass hysteria, a community act which Poles craved for just like air. We are probably the only nation in Europe that is capable of such thing, just in the name of self-exultation, experiencing something big, and patriotism. It is horrible, still, seductive, especially for those that are willing to participate, wave, throw flowers, take pictures of the passing coffins, fight for the place in a line at Krakowskie Przedmieście. For me it is just horrible. It brings terrible consequences, reality distortion, and nationalistic rise. I am terrified by such mourning. <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/Opinie/Szumowska-Boje-sie-takiej-zaloby/menu-id-1.html>.

¹⁰ ‘Rite frees from the necessity of making choice. It is about moral choices, as well as choosing the forms of action etc... Thus, it guarantees a particular economy of effort, eliminating the stage of making choice. 2. Rite is a justification for a particular action, based on a mythical rule of precedence. ‘This is how we do it’ is a simple justification with no space for doubt. 3. Rite ensures community feeling with those who respect it, and most often, take part in it. 4. Finally, rite makes the world – including relatively new or difficult situations – susceptible

– “social personality”¹¹. The patriotic-religious performances were counteracted by some happenings of a carnivalistic and iconoclastic character, reversing the ritual order. The profound analysis of that conflict, the performances accompanying them, and their symbolic or mythic structure or functions, with their political inspiration, should be left to anthropologists and sociologists.

Let us highlight their aesthetic aspects and consequently their performativity. The plane crash that took place in a foggy, wooded, secluded place, without an explosion, left an image of numerous disorderly scattered pieces of the wreckage. It was not a “beautiful catastrophe”, like the September 11 attacks on the WTC (World Trade Center)¹², which Baudrillard called a spectacle and Karlheinz Stockhausen described as the biggest work of art. Maybe this was one of the reasons why the funeral ritual, with its rhythm, order, elegance, and colorfulness (sic!) became so attractive to the crowds, as well as TV viewers following the “live” broadcasts. The scene of the crash, regardless of the attempt of making it noble (a stone commemorative plaque, cemetery candles, and flowers), due to its inaccessibility was not easy to be aestheticized or publicized, thus the easily accessible places: airport, city streets, the square in front of the Presidential Palace, and the Wawel castle became the main stage. Certainly, the selection of those places over other ones has a political and historical significance. Undoubtedly, politics and aesthetic are inextricably linked, and according to Cristin Sartwell, “an ideology is an aesthetic system, and this is what moves or fails to move people, attracts their loyalty or repugnance, moves them to action or to apathy”¹³

“Mourning should not make an impression, mourning just happens” – as E. Szumowska wrote, treating it as a form of an individual state of mind. Meanwhile, a rite is an official, national ceremony, with its structure and its visual symbols of aesthetic character. And it is the aesthetic, not only the meaning that attracts many spectators. We could even attempt to distinguish several aesthetics in the “Smolensk mourning”¹⁴. The first one to emerge was the classic aesthetic of order – managing chaos through public ceremony, with military discipline, planned order of the farewells, the geometric precision in

to human influence’. J. Niżnik, *Symbole a adaptacja kulturowa*, Warszawa 1985, quoted after: K. Chusarska-Nowak, *Rytuły polityczne w demokracji masowej*, Wyd. Nauk. WSNHiD, Poznań 2009, s. 154, footnote 37.

¹¹ Compare: V. Turner, *op.cit.*, pp. 193-194.

¹² J. Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for Twin Towers*, Verso 2002.

¹³ C. Sartwell, *Political Aesthetics*, Ithaca, NY, USA: Cornell University Press, 2010, available at: <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/unilodz/Doc?id=10457656&ppg=11>.

¹⁴ Dariusz Kosiński lists 5 stages of a ‘Smolensk theater’, from the point of view of a drama art: mourning act, presidential elections, crucifix conflict, striving to remember (monthly anniversaries at Krakowskie Przedmieście), and finally, the first anniversary of the crash. http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,9656825,Nie_chca_byc_burzuazja.html?as=1&startsz=x#ixzz24LxEEq5r.

the arrangement of people and objects, and the glitter of the black polish on the funeral cars. That solemnity was stabilizing emotions¹⁵, and its function was to visualize the state's reliability.

Apart from the official ceremonies, a ritual very quickly emerged. A ritual romantic in its aesthetic spontaneously developed among the spectators who were turned into participants. It was the time of the nocturnal processions with candles, the laments and gestures of grief, the roaming from place to place, the exaltation and the growing tension released in an uncontrollable outburst of emotions under the crucifix erected at the Krakowskie Przedmieście (in August, i.e. four months after the crash!). This aesthetic appeared in contrasts – emerging particularly during the night, accompanied by candle light, in symbolic gestures (including prostration on the ground in the pose of Jesus on the cross), in children's sidewalk drawings¹⁶, chants, and litanies. Dariusz Kosiński has called it “a rebellious community of a spiritual nation – Polish Holy Fools”¹⁷ – thus, it is an aesthetic of obsession, trance and inspiration, just like the manic poetry that facilitated the emergence of the myth of fate, sacrifice, and treason. This never-ending ritual, whose successive stages were marked by the marches on the first and the second anniversary of the crash, but also the marches on the Independence Day) did not bring catharsis, rather it played the function of a performance: consolidating the social divisions and the vision of politics as a “struggle for the soul”¹⁸.

The third aesthetic emerged from a disagreement concerning the restoration of a ritual, which could annex the democratic public sphere. A concern of every totalizing event, meant to capture an individual's uniqueness, is being expressed not only in passive resistance, but also in performative action. No wonder the religious-national celebrations were accompanied by counter-manifestations that spread starting with a small demonstration held in Cracow

¹⁵ Even on the linguistic level. The notion of ‘grief-stricken/deeply sorrow’ counterbalances the emotions of ‘dissolving in tears/sinking in grief’.

¹⁶ It happened also after the World Trade Center attacks, when streets and fences were full of pictures, drawings, even stuffed animals. Most of them were collected and stored and were waiting for the commemorative center to be built. E.V. Haskins and J.P. DeRose write in an interesting way about the problem of musealization of that spontaneous creativity in: ‘Memory, Visibility and Public Space. Reflections on Commemoration(s) of 9/11’, *Space & Culture*, vol. 6, no. 4, November 2003, pp. 377-393.

¹⁷ http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,9656825,Nie_chca_byc_burzuazja.html?as=2&startsz=x#ixzz24M3ApQM1.

¹⁸ Jarosław Kaczyński, in his speech during the second anniversary of the crash, the following words appeared: ‘[...] We are meeting here today, just like last year, and we will be meeting here until [...]’. It is the most significant linguistic performative of that event. It also started the election campaign. ‘Smolensk Theater’ did not turn into a national protest, as its aim was to divide again what was state (and civil) from what was national. Compare: D. Kosiński, *Teatra polskie. Historie*, PWN, Instytut Teatralny, 2010, pp. 401-408.

(after the announcement that the presidential couple would be buried at the Wawel Castle), up to the condensed events at Krakowskie Przedmieście¹⁹. By using irony, playfulness, and sneering, they have become part of a mocking tradition, whose traces can be found in Polish culture (Gombrowicz, Witkacy, the Orange Alternative). That aesthetics is mainly about carnivalization – reversing meanings, blasphemous and iconoclastic gestures (creating a cross out of Lech beer cans), parody (dressing up as Pope), laughter (for example, a banner with the inscription: “Where there’s the cross, there’s a party”). It counterbalances the seriousness with a sense of humor; pompous gestures with foolery and ludic dance; it emphasizes youth, ingenuity, and individuality, of communal character. It is not visually attractive, it does not have its own symbolism, nor does it refer directly to any tradition, thus it is dynamic and unpredictable. However, it can manifest itself by corporal aggression and acquire characteristic bacchanalian features.

Apart from that group, directly involved in the performance of “the opponents of the cross”, many onlookers (including celebrities) appeared at Krakowskie Przedmieście, to watch an attractive show, to comment on it, and to use it as an attractive background for photos. What was a ceremony, a ritual, a play for its participants, was also a show, something to watch, for others. John J. MacAloon pointed out that performances require dynamics, audience excitement, evoke emotions (not necessarily positive ones: they can be negatively evaluated for bad taste or moral ambiguity), they could evoke skepticism, and reflexivity (opposition to ritual)²⁰.

The media helped transform the events into a spectacle, from ritual to carnival. Framing, close-ups, distance, and appropriate montage were creating visual symbols and metaphors²¹. However, the repertoire of the images was narrow: the close-ups of grieving faces, memorial candles, flags, photo portraits of the victims, flowers, the colours of the flag, and the crowd (whose scale was evident only from a distance), bird’s-eye shots of the crowds. Musical background and emotional statements by participants consolidated the whole by repetition²². TV broadcasts (but also press coverage) were transmitting only the image of the ritual, not the ritual itself, and that image

¹⁹ A detailed account of the August 9/10, 2010 night can be found at http://warszawa.gazeta.pl/warszawa/1,34889,8232837,Akcja_Krzyz_w_oparach_absurdu_Relacja_na_zywo.html.

²⁰ J.J. MacAloon, *Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies*, in: *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*, ed. John J. MacAloon (Philadelphia: ISHI, 1984).

²¹ For example, the sea of cemetery candles, just like Mickiewicz’s ‘lava’, the faces of young girl scouts, just like during Warsaw Uprising in 1944, but also stacks of burnt-out candles.

²² The soundtrack from a movie ‘Różyczka’ by Michał Lorenc was the musical background used in all of the ‘Smolensk news’ on TVP1. The musical theme was so fixed in viewers’ minds that a special documentary, for the TVP1 news, was produced on that subject.

was the basis for recognizing the aesthetic character of all of the reported performances. Still, we need to remember that the participants' perception of those events was different than that of the TV viewers, as they were completing their experience with the image produced by the media. Note that the participants' point of view was usually limited, and they were constantly surrounded by the crowd of other participants. Their perception was a physical experience – street noises and the clutter of the glass being cleared off, the tone of the conversations, the smell of the lit candles, cramped crowd, reduced visibility, tip-toeing, elbowing your way through the crowd, and exhaustion. The ritual requires from its participant a physical activity, an immersion, while watching the ritual on TV is itself a ritual of being a “couch potato”.

NATIONAL FOOTBALL FEST – PERFORMATIVE ROOTING FOR OUR TEAM

Taking into consideration different sporting events from the perspective of performance is not an original idea. The FIFA World Cup (Football) and the Olympics were analyzed as rituals on numerous occasions²³. I will limit myself only to the aesthetic of only one of such events, though one that has a very special place in Polish hearts, i.e. The Euro Cup 2012. The same aesthetic of a national character, just like the one that I have described in the context of the “Smolensk mourning”, emerged during Euro 2012. This aesthetic lacked political context (though it had a commercial one) and due to this fact it spread among an even bigger number of participants. The PRESS-SERVICE Media Monitoring company estimated that “between 20 May and 10 June 2012, and also, between 6 June and 10 June, the dominant phrases in the press, on the Internet, and the radio, in the public media, were: *the white-reds* – 16.5 thousand occurrences; *flag* – 11.5 thousand occurrences and *an eagle* – 5.6 thousand publications. The places beyond the top three – the fourth and fifth place – were taken by the following phrases: *a patriot* (5.2 thousand) and *an anthem* (4.5 thousands).”²⁴ No research was done on the number of the national flags being displayed in the windows and the cars in Poland; still, 72 thousand people took part in the campaign “For the national anthem”, organized by Warka Brewery. The campaign sought to record the national anthem as sung by volunteers throughout the country. All of those preparations, as well as the reaction during matches, were supposed to cheer up the

²³ Compare: A. Jawłowski, *Święty ład. Rytuał i mit mundialu*, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2007.

²⁴ <http://www.press-service.com.pl/pl/firma/pressroom/informacje-prasowe/art237,bijemy-patriotyczne-eurorekordy.html>.

players of the national team, to encourage them to take action and contribute to the winnings. Rooting for your team has a performative character here – it is an action and practice aimed at transformation, carrying many meanings, and characterized by its own aesthetic²⁵.

The aesthetic of rooting for the national team takes the form similar to other national demonstrations; yet, it has its own privileges. The white-red colors are not restricted to flags; they can appear on T-shirts, hats, scarves, and jewelry. The football fans and the manufacturers are extremely creative in preparing their gadgets, which can be funny, even silly, still they are not perceived as mocking or ironical. The originality of the national colors in that blends into a unified whole that reflects the size of the community. Just as football is a team game, based on the cooperation of individualities, the same applies to rooting for our team, which is a communal action (and in the case of team fans, even a tribal one²⁶), which was easily noticed at stadiums and fan zones, during the symbolic moments of the game (such as the national anthem) when everybody would raise their white-red scarves or flags, creating a sea of color.

In search for the symbols to cheer on the team, Polish tradition, though not the romantic one (mostly glorifying victims, or the losers) but rather the tradition of nobility or gentry, was used as a resource. Thus, the TV commercials often used the image of Polish Winged Hussars, as a reference to our historical military success in the battle of Vienna, and the invincible Polish cavalry. The Hussars' wings, in common awareness, were supposed to serve as a deterrent – to scare the horses of the opponents. Similarly, the colorful setting of the match (as well as facial make-up), according to Albert Jawłowski, an anthropologist, is the equivalent of using masks to intimidate an enemy, and is a special form of competition between the fans of the particular teams. It serves the purpose of self-affirmation²⁷.

The football fans' activities also include group chanting and singing the national anthem, which provided moments of ultimate elation during the

²⁵ We could quote here the following explanation by Bruce Kapferer and Angela Kobart: 'We define performance as similar to what is routinely described in the social sciences as action and practice. It is fundamentally symbolic in that it embodies orientation to existence that are meaningful, that is, they are human constructions even if they are not immediately available to the ferlecyive human consciousness of those participants who bring about a performance. This is what conventionally distinguishes action of practice from behavior, which has no necessary meaningful content. (...) performance is also more than action and practice in that participants in performance are thoroughly conscious of their action or practice as a performance to be witnessed or participated in as such', Introduction, in: *Aaesthetics in Performance. Formations of Symbolic Construction and Experience*, Berghahn Books, 2007, p. 11.

²⁶ About tribalism in rooting for a team compare: T. Sahaj, *Fani futbolowi. Historyczno-społeczne studium zjawiska kibicowania*, AWF Poznań, 2007, p. 144.

²⁷ A. Jawłowski, *op.cit.*, p. 218.

matches of the Polish national team²⁸. The experience of unity reaches its climax, becomes a ritual confirmation of belonging to the national community, and the reduction of one's own identity to that of the nation²⁹.

Participation in a match is a multi-sensory experience for the football fan. Apart from the blaze of colors, he is subjected to strong artificial light, the flashes of the cameras, dynamic movement (jumping, the Mexican wave, clapping in rhythm), the chants of other people, the commentator's voice, the noise of trumpets, but also the silence in the moments of intense tension. Here, the stadium plays a particular role. Even though its image and shape does not change, its architecture becomes more sophisticated and complex. On the outside it can look like a wicker basket or a lump of amber, whereas on the inside, it is supposed to impress us with its vastness³⁰. All of the above contribute to the fact that not only the team members start to play as if in a trance, but also the participants of that ritual, pulled out from reality, excited by the evolving game, transgress their normal state of mind. They are ready to do things they would normally not do³¹. Adult people jump, exchange hugs, dance, and cry. Not only during the matches, but also when celebrating on the streets, they suspend their individual social roles.

Certainly, apart from those thousands of football fans who were able to participate live in a rooting performance, millions of people watched the sports spectacle on TV, which additionally aestheticized that show. The close-ups of attractive girls, the camera picking up people with characteristic make-up, a bird's-eye view shot of the stadium – those are the techniques of achieving visual attractiveness.

Apart from great fun and material benefits, Euro 2012 was supposed to change the image of Poland. A good rooting performance was to present to the world Polish hospitality, sense of humor, tolerance, and modernity. The fans, as well as the organizers, were aware of this – it became a national priority. That mission was accomplished. And the fact that many fans gave rein to their imagination in thinking that their cheer may turn the history of Polish football, should be explained by the effect of the ritual ecstasy.

²⁸ Wojciech Lipoński wrote: '[...] you can laugh at worthless epigrams shouted from the auditorium, however, it is impossible not to see that those activities are performed by a huge number of people with a dignity and faith in their effectiveness, taking/assuming forms of a total ritual', W. Lipoński, 'Coloseum świata', *Kultura*, nr 50, 1973, p. 5, quoted after: T. Sahaj, *op.cit.*, p. 45.

²⁹ A. Jawłowski, *op.cit.*, p. 219.

³⁰ The volunteers working during the matches of the Polish national team at the National Stadium in Warsaw were observing, with a noticeable delight, the initial reactions of the spectators while their entering the tribunes. Their eyes and mouths wide open, accompanied by the shouts of applause (including taboo words) were almost a standard there.

³¹ A. Jawłowski, p. 220.

**THE GREAT ORCHESTRA OF CHRISTMAS CHARITY
– AN INVENTED TRADITION**

The Finale of the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity (Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy) is probably the biggest performance played out in Poland every year for the last twenty years. This occasion that consists of numerous local events could be called “an invented tradition”. This notion, coined by E. Hobsbawm, describes a tradition that “included both traditions actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period – a matter of a few years perhaps – and establishing themselves with great rapidity”³². WOŚP is often called a Polish marvel with no counterpart in the world; still, it draws on a few traditions, merges them, and modernizes them. In fact, it is a foundation that works in the field of health protection by saving patients’ (especially young patients’) lives and supporting their treatment. Additionally, the foundation promotes health and medical prevention³³. The funds they use for their activities come from public collection. Thus, it employs the traditional form of a Christmas collection. This tradition of a money collection (usually for the poor) has been a popular form of charity in Poland, though it was not well perceived by the Communist state, as it undermined its reputation by exposing economic and social inequalities, and referred to Christian virtues.

The contemporary WOŚP collection is based on different principles – mainly those of the civil society, in which non-profit organizations (the so-called “third sector”) act for the benefit of all. Dieter Gosewinkel noticed that the actions in this sphere are based on a minimal consensus of norms that includes tolerance, fairness and freedom from violence³⁴. WOŚP refers to such values and its motto is “love, friendship, and rock and roll”. The founder and the leader of WOŚP – Jerzy Owskiak – has a rock music background (he used to be a music journalist). It is no wonder he promotes youthful spontaneity and common solidarity. The tradition of charity concerts derives from musical circles. The most famous of such concerts, Live Aid, simultaneously held in the US, Britain, and Australia in 1983, was meant to fight hunger in Ethiopia³⁵. However, Jerzy Owskiak refers more to the hippie ideals, the quintessence of which was the Woodstock concert in 1969, and he organizes a giant summer festival Przystanek Woodstock every year as a form of appreciation for the

³² E. Hobsbawm, *Introduction: Inventing Traditions*, in: *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger, N.Y., 1983.

³³ <http://wosp.org.pl/fundacja/>.

³⁴ <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/transnational-movements-and-organisations/civil-society/dieter-gosewinkel-civil-society>.

³⁵ <http://www.live-aid-dvd.com>.

volunteer's work³⁶. The WOŚP collection takes place throughout Poland every year at the beginning of January. It involves nearly 120 thousand volunteers (mainly young people) and is accompanied by multiple local concerts and cultural events. At 8 p.m. the Orchestra sends of a "beam to heaven" (usually fireworks)³⁷. It is impossible to describe each of the events of the finale. They are unique, not structured or regulated by the organizers of the whole campaign. Nevertheless, one may distinguish some overall features of the campaign.

The source of its aesthetic is the musical background of WOŚP. This contrasts with the previously mentioned two examples. As Bruce Baugh writes, the three material elements of rock music are the "performance of tones, loudness, and rhythm"³⁸ all of which are present in the campaign. One has to note, however, the role of the media – TV and radio – and the fact that the individual aesthetic experience of the participants is of minor importance. Millions of people participate in this event just by putting money into the collection cans, or by placing the heart-shaped sticker in an easily noticeable place. A smaller number of people become the audience of the concerts. Certainly, the experiences of 120 thousand of the volunteers differ drastically, yet, usually they have little to do with participating in a big show. It is the TV and radio broadcast that reveal the scale of that phenomenon and puts an aesthetic frame on it. Moreover, it is the aesthetic that lies behind the success (effectiveness) of that performance – in order to achieve a certain goal you have to perform! The most important performer is the leader himself – Jerzy Owsiak. Spontaneity, authenticity, engagement, and freedom – originating from the ideas of rock music – are revealed in the way he dresses, speaks, and moves. His yellow shirt and red pants are supposed to express non-conformity and youthful carelessness, even though they have by now turned into a kind of uniform, a dress code³⁹. A unique manner of speaking: quick, with a bit of stammer, in loud, and by the end of the Finale even hoarse, voice, are other

³⁶ http://wosp.org.pl/przystanek_woodstock/o_przystanku.

³⁷ 'In one moment, in the entirety of Poland, we ask people to send to sky – Good Angels, the light in the form of a lit match, candle, flare or fireworks. We believe that in that particular moment we can make ourselves very visible', *ibidem*.

³⁸ B. Baugh, 'Prolegomena to any Aesthetic of Rock Music', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 51:1, Winter 1993, p. 23.

³⁹ Michał Podgórski analyzes one of the WOŚP billboards, revealing its oppressiveness, which is expressed in the outfits: 'we can see a group of people, wearing specific clothes that are linked to a certain lifestyle, with youth subcultures (...) However, the billboard does not show people who are most likely to be seen on the streets – people wearing loose sweatshirts, pants, sports outfits (perceived as dangerous) or people that just look common. At the connotation level this image may mean that only one group has been distinguished by Jerzy Owsiak. The rest is excluded, classified as unnecessary or worse. We can only see the world of Jerzy Owsiak and the people he perceives as 'his people' – good and valuable. M. Podgórski, *O opresyjności wobec WOŚP. Opresyjność WOŚP*, <http://www.ikonosfera.umk.pl/index.php?id=89>.

essential elements of his performance. It is worth mentioning Simon Frith here, who said that the art of performance, such as the show of a pop music artist “uses the voice as the most taken-for-granted indication of the person, the guarantor of the coherent subject; (...) the star voice (and indeed star body) acts as a mark of both subjectivity and objectivity, freedom and constraint, control and lack of control”⁴⁰. Not only the tone of voice, but also the language used by the WOŚP creator – adapting youth slang, full of neologisms, shifts, and simplifications, has become his hallmark. Many of his sayings became catch phrases. One must also mention his expressive gestures, “funny faces” and fidgeting, to complete the media image of Owsiak as a “twisted, funny freak”. This rock’n’roll aesthetic has become the convention of WOŚP. The live broadcasts from the Finale are very dynamic, the camera is constantly moving, the giant TV studio is packed with guests, it is loud, colorful, and you can usually hear rock music in the background. There is no time for longer discussions; everyone speaks fast, emotionally, emulating the speech style of the host. The live coverage from different cities follows the same mode. Everything seems to be creating the illusion of pure spontaneity, though everyone knows that the actions of foundation are deeply professional and carefully planned. Every TV report from the Finale has its own narrative structure – reports from the studio are interrupted by the local coverage, and the narration is focused not so much on the events, but on the numbers indicating the amount of the money collected and on whether WOŚP will break its previous record.

WOŚP seems to be a modern, invented tradition, as its founder says that the Finale is supposed to be a feast. A smart, secular event, with a very Christian message: helping your neighbor brings so much fun. And it really does. Those 120 thousand volunteers have learned that and they remember it for the rest of their lives. Grim charity work has always been very suspicious to me⁴¹. It is indeed a combination of a noble cause and entertainment, a traditional collection with a media show. One serves the other – without the show there would not be so much money and the idea of helping supports rock music and its aesthetics by elevating its value. That unique performance serves not only the aim of collecting the money for the children hospital’s equipment; its goal is also to change the society. Young people are supposed to remember their volunteering till the end of their lives⁴², people are supposed to feel better, and

⁴⁰ S. Frith, *Performing Rites: on the value of popular music*, Harvard University Press, p. 210.

⁴¹ The text by G. Sroczyński, ‘Wkurzam, choć wkurzać nie chcę’, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 14-15, 2012.

⁴² The youth’s intentions are not always as positive as the organizers would wish – for example, they earn better marks or credits in junior high school, yet it happens that they steal

most importantly, the relationships between the social groups are supposed to change. The common cause is to connect the young and the older people, the rich and the poor, the anarchists, pacifists, celebrities, and the ordinary people. WOŚP is supposed to change the Polish people and the country that is still undergoing rapid modernization. The invented traditions are an answer to the new situation, i.e. the fragmentation and hybridization of culture, that is why ... they usually occur during the periods of sudden social transformations, wiping off or just weakening social patterns and rules, which were the basis of the "old" traditions.⁴³

PERFORMATIVE PATRIOTISM

To sum up, I would like to quote the thesis of a teatrologist, a Polish researcher of performances, Dariusz Kosiński, which he presented in his book, published in 2010 (just before the Smolensk plane crash and Euro 2012): "Polish culture, and even more broadly – Polish identity – has the character of a tremendously dramatic spectacle, which is evidenced by the way in which historical events exist for the Poles, by our political practice or the dominant religious forms... the vital dramatic and performance-like lifestyle that has ensured the survival and preservation of the most important values of the community. At the same time, I believe we are facing fundamental shifts in the values and the ways in which they are realized. Thus, it seems to be essential to reflect on them, and theatrical perspective should not be forgotten in those reflections"⁴⁴ Aesthetic reflection should not be omitted in the description of those performances, as their scale and effectiveness outstrips what can be achieved by performing arts. The aesthetic appeal of the patriotic rituals, demonstrations of national unity, and civil actions is much larger than that of the classic artistic performances. The neo-avant-garde roots of the artists have resulted in the preference of authenticity and the live presence of the performer over his aesthetic image. Exclusiveness, intellectualism, and privacy are the features that have disabled the performer from approaching a wide audience and becoming an important constructor of social reality. Meanwhile, the necessity of participation in public dramas and rituals was so huge that it brought about, within the past two years, the active engagement of thousands of Poles and millions more following their media interpretation. It seems that

small amounts from the collection cans. Compare: <http://www.wykop.pl/link/580191/o-prowizji-dla-wolontariusza-wosp-miejcie-oczy-otwarte/>.

⁴³ W.J. Burszta, *Kultura miejska w Polsce z perspektywy interdyscyplinarnych badań jakościowych*, NCK, 2010, p. 25.

⁴⁴ D. Kosiński, *Teatra...*, p. 21.

beside the criticism of those “tribal” behaviours, there should be a place for their positive analysis of how to perform to be effective.

Translated by Kamila Berry

**ESTETYKA PERFORMANSU – NA PRZYKŁADZIE PERFORMATYWNEGO
PATRIOTYZMU
(streszczenie)**

Artykuł prezentuje trzy przykłady odmiennych performansów: tzw. „żałoby smoleńskiej”, Mistrzostw Europy w Piłce Nożnej (Euro 2012) oraz Finału Wielkiej Orkiestry Świątecznej Pomocy. Wszystkie one zawierają elementy rytuału i spektaklu, odwołują się do tradycji albo ustanawiają nową, a ich celem jest konkretna zmiana. Wszystkie też łączy odniesienie do uczuć patriotycznych bądź wspólnoty obywatelskiej. Co interesujące, ogromny wpływ na ich powodzenie (efektywność rozumianą jako performatywność) ma ich aspekt estetyczny, dlatego są opisane z punktu widzenia estetyki tradycyjnej, z podkreśleniem barwności, rytmiczności, porządku i dynamizmu.

Słowa kluczowe: estetyka performansu, rytuał społeczny, spektakl, patriotyzm.

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CITING GENDER THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DRESS AND GENDER IDENTITY

Abstract: The idea of the performative nature of gender identity formulated by Judith Butler has been used in this article to analyze the practices relating to dress. In the first part I am referring to the history of fashion and the gender codes it establishes. Dress often accentuates, highlights, or even constructs gender asymmetry, which is then sanctioned by moral, religious or legal principles. Assigning trousers to men and dresses to women defined the different ways in which they function in life: the freedom or restriction of movement. Gender-marked garments have enforced the behavior consistent with the ones recognized as natural for women or men. In the 20th century, the boundaries between the genders became blurred. The third sex – the object of artistic experiments by Duchamp and Claude Cahun – has become the most fashionable form of subjectivity, both in fashion and in life. The second part of the text is a discussion of selected dress-sculptures, in which artists use existing gender codes to form narratives about sexual ambivalence, gender identity as a masquerade or an entity of a processual nature.

Keywords: gender performativity, identity, fashion, dress-sculpture.

The phrase used in the title of my article has been taken from the concept of Judith Butler. In her book *Gender Trouble*, the American feminist philosopher presented a critique of gender and sexual identities which are generally considered to be normal and natural. According to Butler, sexual difference is constructed on the basis of citing or repeating gender norms in our daily lives. She challenges the belief that cultural gender attributes are an expression of innate traits of masculinity or femininity. She thinks that they are not expressive but performative. They are constructed by acts which, as it was thought, are only meant to express them. Therefore, there is no gender identity prior to them. It consists of continuous social performances, in which qualities characteristic of a particular gender are repeated. Commenting on the views of Butler, Richard Schechner wrote: „Each individual from an early age learns to perform gender-specific vocal inflections, facial displays, gestures, walks, and

erotic behaviour as well as how to select, modify, and use scents, body shapes and adornments, clothing, and all other gender markings of a given society”¹. Thus, occurs a citation of those ingredients which allow a person to identify as male or female. Such citation is not conscious reaching for the established formulae. Joanna Miezielińska, who wrote about Butler’s views in her book *(De)konstrukcje kobiecości* [(De)constructions of femininity], writes: “A prerequisite for performative practices seems to hide cited conventions that allow the act itself. Norms cited in gestures, behaviors and words of an individual must remain hidden so that the act itself, the embodiment of these norms, could be fulfilled. Only in this way can the ideal of gender be fulfilled”². This makes it difficult and sometimes impossible for a critical approach to be applied to the issue of gender identity.

An interesting and perhaps controversial idea of the performative nature of gender identity is the starting point for me in the analysis of practices relating to dress. Everyday activities carried out in front of a mirror (such as putting on make-up by women, shaving the face by men) in the context of Butler’s theory appear to serve not only the purposes of personal hygiene or aesthetic beautification, but constitute a ritual of summoning gender. A similar act of summoning gender norms is the use of “gender-appropriate” colors and patterns in clothing. It is generally accepted that it is not proper for men to wear pink. Pink is the color reserved for little girls just like blue is for boys. Repeating these conventions makes us believe that this is normal.

Clothing and body adornment play an important role in demonstrating and communicating our gender identity.

In this paper, I am using the metaphor of fashion as a game of communication. I am analyzing the relationship between dress and identity. Identity is treated as a mask which can be dismissed as an element of a masquerade. It is now accepted, however, that behind a rejected mask no face is hiding, but another mask. In this sense, there is certain kinship between fashion and contemporary flexible identity. In contrast to the old concepts which implied that the dress hides the truth of the body, it is assumed that the body is not natural, innocent, true. The body is the product of a culture materialized in language. We can only access biological sex through language, and it always means a cultural interpretation.

In my paper, I am referring to fine arts and design arts. It consists of two parts. The first one, entitled *Conventions, citations, reversal of gender signs*, relates to the history of dress (courtly fashion in Europe) and contemporary activities of designers. I present an overview of such issues of fashion which refer to the related codes of gender. I investigate whether clothes have gender.

¹ R. Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, New York 2002, pp.130-131.

² J. Miezielińska, *(De)konstrukcje kobiecości*, Gdańsk 2004, pp.193-194 .

I discuss how it happened that certain types of clothing were assigned only to women, and some to men only. The second part, *Gender Equivalents*, is an attempt to address citing gender in the context of art. Still, the subject of my interest is clothing, or more precisely a costume – a type of body package that plays a key role in artistic activities such as performances, visual objects, or ballet.

Conventions, which I would like to be questioned, relate to the issues of gender. Citing gender norms, we are never precise, never entirely faithful. This opens up the possibility of shifting some meanings, of an intervention in the symbolic order. Butler, like many postmodern thinkers, believes that “there exists no such thing as a subject or identity as a stable category, but they are rather the result of repeated gestures, words, behaviors.”³

Butler did not examine the relationship of dress with the formation of gender; however, she was aware of its role. Although fashion historians often refer to her theories, they are usually quite superficial. I have not found any deep analysis of the history of dress made for the issue I am describing. I have never come across any broader analysis of works of art based on dress as a medium telling about gender.

CONVENTIONS, CITATIONS, REVERSAL OF GENDER SIGNS

„The internal” is a surface signification⁴

One reason for covering the body is the sense of shame, a desire to conceal one's sex. However, covering the body does not mean eliminating gender differences. Dress often emphasizes, highlights or even constructs gender asymmetry. In the history of dress, one can find examples of legal regulations or moral imperatives concerning conventions ascribed to men's and women's clothes. There are also attempts to break those habits.

According to Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat, “all modern outfits were born from gradual transformations of tunic-shirt-dress.”⁵ Simplifying the issue, it can be said that from ancient times through the Middle Ages, regardless of gender, everyone wore dresses, or rather tunics. “„The late Middle Ages, introduced a final, clear differentiation between male and female clothing”⁶. Men's clothing has been shortened exposing calves were covered with tight-

³ J. Miezielińska, p. 199.

⁴ J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*, New York 1999, p. 141.

⁵ M. Toussaint-Samat, *Histoire technique et morale du vêtement*, (citation translated based on the Polish version: *Historia stroju*, przeł. K. Szeżyńska-Mačkowiak, Warszawa 2002, p. 330).

⁶ <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/models-and-stereotypes/anglophilia/gabriele-mentges-european-fashion-1450-1950>.

fitting leggings. It became necessary to sew a triangular wedge between leggings to cover the genitals. Over time, these so-called cod-pieces became padded, as did doublets (jackets). That part of the male body was not so much covered, as it was accentuated.

Men treated the cod-piece as a pocket, carrying coins, jewelry or letters inside. They were the largest in the 1530s. No Renaissance texts survived that would explain this peculiar fashion, which for people of that time was apparently natural, normal. Today, however, it is perceived as comical or obscene. Dress historians usually associate it with an expression of power and spirit of those times, which is building an image of a strong masculine individuality. The cod-piece initially served a practical function, but it began to grow over time. It was decorated with jewels and embroidery. Patricia Simons presents an argument that the decoration of the cod-piece was meant to divert homoerotic attention from male buttocks. In any case, this garment was to accentuate active masculine attitude. Often, however, the cod-piece was empty or stuffed with straw⁷. Describing the garment with many comic touches, Francois Rabelais stated that it is „stuffed only with wind, to great prejudice of the female sex”⁸. This sign of masculinity contains an inherent contradiction: the cod-piece hides and reveals, accentuates masculinity and unmask it. The “permanent erection” is artificial, a symbol of masculinity is just fake. We can therefore conclude that efforts to build gender identity through clothing is a masquerade. There is nothing behind the mask. Judith Butler writes: „there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very *expressions* that are said to be its results”⁹.

The female difference is built in dress in opposition to the male figure. Short dress could not be accepted for women. On one of the synods, the clergy declared: “Condemned be woman who sheds feminine apparel to put on men’s clothes.”¹⁰ Criminal law echoed the church regulations, threatening a woman who would wear trousers with three years in prison. It is worth mentioning that one of the seventy allegations made against Joan of Arc was that she wore men’s clothes. Long dress and adorning oneself were assigned to the fair sex, and a departure from this convention was met with criticism of moralists. St. Bernard exhorted soldiers: “Are trinkets an armor of a knight or a trimming of a woman? You are wearing your hair (...) like women (...). You are putting on

⁷ Based on P. Simons, *The Sex of Men in Premodern Europe: A Cultural History*, New York 2011, p. 99.

⁸ <http://books.google.pl/books?id=iWMweVon54C&printsec=frontcover&dq=gargantua+and+pantagruel&hl=pl&sa=X&ei=X5uKT46VBcv04QT197zICQ&ved=0CDUQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=gargantua%20and%20pantagruel&f=false>.

⁹ J. Butler, p. 25.

¹⁰ M. Toussaint-Samat, p. 351.

long and wide robes. And dressed like that you fighting over the most futile things.”¹¹

This shows clearly that in the Middle Ages a long dress was assigned to women, while trousers gained male gender. The non-verbal language of fashion constructed opposing images. Although no one is born with a predisposition to wear certain clothes, the dress code has specified for centuries what is appropriate to wear for a woman and how masculinity is expressed.

Dress historians believe, however, that for centuries outfit has primarily emphasized class differences rather than gender ones. In the eighteenth century, “a pink silk suit, gold and silver embroidery, and jewelery were regarded as perfectly masculine (...) fashion was not only a woman’s affair”¹². Men drowned in lace, wore silk stockings, high heels, powdered wigs and it did not make them effeminate in the eyes of peers. On the contrary, all these accessories accentuated their status, power, dominant position. This demonstrates the relativity of standards for qualifying something as male or female. Lace, stockings, cosmetics are “male” in the eighteenth century, just to lose the male character one hundred years later, to change gender completely. This allows us to recognize that “the taken-for-granted world of sexual categorization as a constructed one, indeed, as one that might well be constructed differently”¹³.

In the nineteenth century, clear differences in male and female clothes were marked. The industrial revolution and emerging bourgeois society designated distinct roles for both genders. Men performing active functions in offices, factories, “gave up their right to all the brighter, gayer, more elaborate, and more varied forms of ornamentation, leasing these entirely to the use of women, and thereby making their own tailoring the most austere and ascetic of the arts”¹⁴. Simple, drab outfits were meant to express male activity, professional position, physical fitness and work ethos. During this time, a canon of basic men’s clothing began to develop. Practical frock-coat in subdued colors reflected the style of a new type of man and became the prototype of today's suit jacket. “Men rejected any link with the world of court aristocracy, but women did no such thing.”¹⁵ Gertrud Lehnert writes: “fashion became the domain, duty even, of women, and from then on women’s

¹¹ F. Boucher, *Historie du costume en occident des origines à nos jours* (citation translated from the Polish version: *Historia mody. Dzieje ubiorów od czasów prehistorycznych do końca XX wieku*, transl. P. Wrzosek, Warszawa 2003, p. 135).

¹² Y. Kawamura, *Fashion-ology: An introduction to Fashion Studies*, New York 2005, p. 10.

¹³ J. Butler, p. 110.

¹⁴ J. C. Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes*, London 1971, p. 111.

¹⁵ R. König, *Macht Und Reiz der Mode: Verständnissvolle Betrachtungen eines Soziologen* (citation translated from the Polish version: *Potęga i urok mody*, transl. J. Szymańska, Warszawa 1979, p. 212).

conspicuous consumption became almost inseparable from the economic success of their husbands”¹⁶.

Femininity was at that time commonly associated with qualities such as tenderness, inability of any real effort. “The fashion of the time constructed, signaled and reproduced these values.”¹⁷

Corsets that ensured the desired wasp waist limited mobility of the fair sex, made it difficult to breathe, causing a number of ailments. Crinoline, fashionable at that time, had similar effect of restricting freedom. It provided a safe distance for the woman and made her an object to be admired from afar.

Nineteenth-century men’s clothing is characterized by practicality, while women’s apparel in a sense makes the wearer a beautiful cripple. She has no freedom to breathe, any sudden movements are impossible. Helen Roberts described the Victorian ladies’ fashion for narrow sleeves, as follows: “it was impossible to virtually raise the arm to shoulder height or make an aggressive or threatening gesture.”¹⁸ These words show how dress and fashion construct gender identity. All those panniers, supports, scaffolding of a woman’s costume raise the idea of the instability of an image intricately built by the great tailors.

In the history, there were figures who broke conventions risking social disapproval. The most popular of them, George Sand, challenged the general custom with her dress and general lifestyle. A male pseudonym, a cigar, then a pipe and especially trousers can be regarded as eccentricity or political gestures. Trousers allowed the French writer activity inaccessible to other women of her class. From the Middle Ages until the twentieth century, women who wanted to be seen ladies would cover their legs with countless petticoats and hoop dresses. There is a very telling anecdote about the Queen of Spain, who received very intricately made silk stockings from the elders of stocking-makers guild. The marshal of the court sent them back with a note: “A Spanish queen has no legs”¹⁹.

In the nineteenth century, clothes served to perpetuate traditional, conservative gender models. Describing femininity and masculinity, John Berger stated: “men act and women appear”²⁰. He diagnosed a situation in which man is associated with activity and woman with passivity. Fashion served to reproduce these models. The man began to be defined as a spectator and voyeur, femininity was reduced to a spectacle. In the twentieth century, traditional models of identity were challenged, and then positions assigned to men and women were reversed. The first sign of masculinization of women’s

¹⁶ G. Lehnert, *A history of fashion in the XXth century*, Köln 2001, p. 12.

¹⁷ M. Barnard, *Fashion as Communications*, New York 2002, p. 121.

¹⁸ H. Roberts, *The Exquisite Slave: The Role of Clothes in the Making of the Victorian Woman*, „Signs”, 1977, no. 2, p. 557.

¹⁹ G. Lehnert, p. 8.

²⁰ J. Berger, *Ways of seeing*, London 1972, p. 47.

apparel was reformed dress, the promoter of which was Ohio Amelia Bloomer, a suffragette living in. Puffy trousers worn with knee-length skirts were named bloomers after her. This style, however, was not approved, it was condemned and mocked.

Victorian culture linked men's trousers with authority. Women's skirt was an exclusively female garment. Only in the twentieth century skirts began to shorten and trousers were no longer a distinctive part of male attire. Several factors contributed to that. During World War One, women had to take over responsibility for the family, replace the men who went to the front in factories and offices. New tasks required appropriate clothing. At the beginning of the war, great tailors closed their shops, "and women themselves – more or less consciously – gave fashion a direction. They freed themselves from many of the burdensome fantasies that were imposed on them as rules of fashion."²¹ They rejected corsets, shortened skirts, exposing part of their legs for the first time in modern history. After the war, attempts were made to return to the old image of femininity, but in the 1920s, the promoted type of female beauty was a tomboy with short hair, lacking clear gender attributes. There was no shortage of critics of this fashion, for "many men saw the *new women* as professional and sexual competitor."²² In Berlin clubs and restaurants, frequented by the emerging gay subculture of the time, there were women deliberately wearing men's clothes. However, this cross-dressing²³ concerned a small social group. Coco Chanel tried unsuccessfully to promote trousers for ladies.

The first cause of the twentieth-century changes in fashion stemmed from political and economic issues that affected women's self-awareness. Women gained confidence, changed their attitude to their own sexuality and physicality. They began to play sports – the second factor of change in their way of dress. Another decisive turn in the perception of femininity and masculinity was the Hollywood cinema which in the 1930s featured many masculine heroines. One of the ideals of femininity was Marlene Dietrich, who made tuxedo and top hat her trademark.

Women's trousers appeared among working women and women of the upper classes, but they were worn in the countryside or in resorts. However, initially they were not accepted in city streets. There, the standards were strict

²¹ A. Dziekońska-Kozłowska, *Moda kobieca XX wieku*, Warszawa 1964, p. 145.

²² G. Lehnert, p. 21.

²³ Cross-dressing – the practice of wearing clothes of the opposite sex. It has found expression in literature (eg. in Shakespeare's plays), in performance art. Cross-dressing is often considered as a synonym for transvestitism. The difference between these concepts in the Polish language does not actually exist. However, transvestitism has psychological background, it involves a tendency to identify with the opposite sex, which is not always present in cases of cross-dressing.

and conservative. After World War Two, in the 1950s, the fashion for emphasizing the differences in dress between the sexes returned. However, in the following decade, when the youth became a strong consumer group, the old values were rejected and the external gender differences between became blurred. A woman-child exposed her legs wearing a mini-skirt; a man could have long hair and wear tight clothes. Jeans became a universal dress of both genders. Today, women of all ages use this garment, and Jean Paul Gaultier promoted skirts for men in the 1980s. At the end of his show in 2011, Andrej Pejic appeared on stage in a wedding dress. This can be regarded as a clear signal that the ideal of subjectivity promoted now is neither male nor female, but a third gender. Cross-dressing initiated by artists (Marcel Duchamp and Claude Cahun) is currently sweeping the world of pop culture. The blurring of boundaries between sexes in fashion is, however, deceptive, as there are still moralists claiming that some things are and some are not normal. The work of a Japanese designer Yohji Yamamoto is characterized by sexual ambivalence. He uses female models in men's fashion shows. Rei Kawakubo also rejects sexualization of the female body through dress on principle.

A very strong trend in the current fashion is the blurring of boundaries between sexes. Destabilization of the image of femininity and masculinity in dress has its roots in cultural transformations. It is about women's professional activity, successive waves of feminism, re-evaluation of norms thus far regarded as fixed. An important element in stimulating fashion is the modern philosophy focusing attention on the transformation of human subjectivity. In postmodern society a particularly appreciated feature of identity is flexibility, capability of continuous reconstruction, constant change in the narrative of oneself. Consumer culture, including fashion, uses this sentiment, suggesting that it can offer appropriate props for the masquerade participants. A woman as recipient of fashion is confronted with different concepts of female identity. Models promoted by the media extend from the idea of a public or even vulgar sexuality, to hiding and marginalization of issues relating to sex. Some models are conservative, others are trying to expand the definition of acceptable sexuality and sexual orientations. Such differentiated images associated with the proposed styles of dress may be a sign of ongoing struggles with the definition of femininity²⁴.

²⁴ Based on D. Crane, *Fashion and its social agendas: class, gender, and identity in clothing*, Chicago 2000, p. 18.

GENDER EQUIVALENTS DRESS IN VISUAL ARTS

Describing the process of gender identity formation, Judith Butler draws attention to the areas of prohibited identification. She believes that people who are beyond the unambiguous gender classification pose a challenge to the existing norms of femininity and masculinity. “The presence of unusual entities, unspoken, unusual bodies is a constant threat to the assumed stability of the subject embodying cultural norms; their sudden appearance may damage or break the boundaries keeping the subject within the socially assumed shape. Therefore, subjectivity or identity is exposed to a continuing risk of being overthrown; it is always unstable and dependent on instruments and practices of exclusion”²⁵. However, not all cultures took such a radically reluctant attitude towards transgenderism. For example, gender diversity was socially accepted among North America natives. *Winkte*, meaning “a two-spirit person” is a cultural role placing such an individual over the gender division, allowing them to access both cultural spheres: male and female. In the South Asian countries men who do not identify with their gender are called *Hijri*. They belong to a particular caste and are identified with androgynous deities of Hinduism.

In Western culture, these generally unacceptable aspects of subjectivity have often been a field for artistic activity. In 1922, Marcel Duchamp created his female alter-ego. Posing for Man Ray’s photos in women’s clothes as Rose Sélavy, he transgressed gender. As the artist himself explained: “It was not to change my identity, but to have two identities”²⁶. Around the same time, Claude Cahun began her adventure with photography and building identity. Claude, the name which the artist took, does not explicitly denote gender. In her self-portraits, she poses in male or female clothes, in masks, costumes placing her on the borderline between genders.

For Duchamp, the transformation into a woman was a single incident aimed at the acquisition of the two genders. For Cahun, experiments with disguises and gender masquerades represent a constant strategy of artistic activities. “[She] uses the medium of photography to explore gender as performance”²⁷. Thus, she challenged the notion of immutable identity, drawing attention to its fluidity, instability. The artist’s intention was not to access the other gender. For her, the boundaries of identity are not obvious, unambiguous. In the photograph from 1927 *I’m in training. Do not Kiss Me*, she photographed herself in a leotard with a barbell, her mouth painted in the shape of a heart and her hair styled in funny curls. The author of the photo appears to be

²⁵ J. Miezielińska, p. 202.

²⁶ Cited after C. Tomkins, *Duchamp. A Biography*, New York 1998, p. 231.

²⁷ A. Mahon, *Eroticism & Art*, New York 2005, p. 132.

training her own gender, neither male nor female, because the signs of both binary opposites are mixed and challenge each other. According to Butler, such identities which do not conform to the norms of cultural transparency are subversive in nature. "Their persistence and proliferation, however, provide critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory aims of that domain of intelligibility and, hence, to open up within the very terms of that matrix of intelligibility rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder"²⁸.

Gender ambivalence is a constant area of penetration for authors' fantasy. The Irish artist Dorothy Cross realized several works that seem to relate in an interesting way to the subject I am investigating. *Bust* is a kind of a tight-fitting top, a garment like a "second skin" made from cow leather and udder to fit a mannequin. Presenting an object of male desire in such a caricature bestial manner, Cross seems to question the social constructs of gender. These constructs are based – according to Butler – on reproducing gender-charged opposites. They guarantee the functioning of obligatory heterosexuality. Widely accepted sexuality based on attraction of opposites took a perverse form in Dorothy Cross's work. Male and female attributes are merged. Freud saw the cow's udder as sexual ambivalence, claiming "the udder of a cow has aptly played the part of an image intermediate between a nipple and a penis"²⁹. In the south of Ireland, where the artist comes from, the soft *th* is not pronounced. Therefore, in such a play on words: *udder* – *other*, cow udder can be read as "Other". This allows us to see *Bust* as a depiction of a freak, a sexual hybrid. Cross's work brings us to the topic of crossing the boundaries of gender and sexual diversity in the works of gay artists.

American artist Charlers LeDray learned to sew as a child. He gained fame as an author of installations which he makes out of miniature hand-sewn clothes. His arrangements, resembling a doll houses, feature delicate clothes – portraits of male identity, sometimes in the macho version. The scale of these works, however, ridicules stereotypical ideas of masculinity. In his work *Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines*, 1993 LeDray shows four types of American men's military uniforms. These are carefully tailored and, of course, very small. The juxtaposition of codes of male heroism and strength with handicraft considered to be feminine minimizes the feelings that we experience with men in uniforms. Uniforms of masculinity seem fragile and vulnerable.

In contrast to the fairytale aura of LeDray's work, performances by Valie Export, artist associated with the Vienna actionist movement, are radical, rooted in the reality of confrontation between feminism and patriarchy. At the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, Export completed a number of actions which became important to the feminist movement. I would like to point to works in

²⁸ J. Butler, p. 17.

²⁹ S. Freud, *Dora – An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, New York 1997, p. 45.

which the costume was an important element of the action script. In 1968, she realized the performance *Action, Trousers: Genital Panic*. Export entered a Munich cinema dressed in crotchless trousers. She presented her exposed genitals at the eye-level of the audience. Photographs from the following year referring to that action show the artist in the described trousers, wearing a leather jacket, with spiky hair. She is holding a machine gun – a misappropriated symbol of phallic aggression. The purpose of this provocative appearance, gestures and behavior was an attempt to break the clichés of a women's image in cinema. Therefore, it was no coincidence that the place of action was a cinema theater. In the tradition of cinema, and arts in general, a woman acts as a passive object serving the pleasure of a male voyeur. *Genital Panic* places the woman-artist in an active or even offensive position.

The series of actions *Tap and Touch Cinema*, which Valie Export performed in the years 1968-1971 in the streets of many cities in Europe was similar in character. In these performances, the costume-package in which she performed was important. On her chest, she placed a box with a curtain. Passers-by were encouraged to put their hands into the box and touch the bare breast of the artist. This way, Export wanted to break the limitations of art favoring the sense of sight. Male viewers confronted with the looking – therefore active – woman-artist did not experience any embarrassment, as evidenced by preserved documentary footage. Therefore, contemporary feminists find Export's actions controversial.

The works presented thus far concern pursuits related to going beyond sexual limitations, beyond binary thinking about gender. In all these cases, the basis of those efforts and experiments is the dress. It is used in the form of independent objects-sculptures or as a cover, an artist's costume. Other objects and photographs in which the artist used clothing as a means of creative expression, refer to gender stereotypes. Reaching for materials and accessories associated with femininity may, however, also be a critical statement about gender codes, it may challenge what we consider to be normal for the gender.

Annette Messager debuted at the same time as Export, when the art scene was dominated by men. The strategy of the French artist, however, was quite different. She is known for her use of typically feminine materials and techniques, such as embroidery, sewing or handicraft. In her series *Story of Dresses*, she placed clothing in hermetically sealed glass cases reminiscent of a coffin (as if they were holy relics). Drawings or photos were attached to the clothes, evoking memories or associations. Black and white photographs of parts of human body caused that the dresses were read as surrogates of a female body. Paradoxically, the clothes suggesting the body at the same time indicated his absence. Messager's works are like a memory map consisting of crumbling elements, or an image of identity which is not uniform, which is a collection of items associated with a particular gender.

Susie MacMurray and Shadi Ghadirian also refer to the feminine sphere in their artistic activities. However, it is not about feminine craft techniques, but about elements associated with a household. The Brit, Susie MacMurray, is looking for materials that would reflect the contradictions and paradoxes of human existence. For one of the dresses she used one thousand four hundred latex kitchen gloves. The color and shape of the dress may resemble a wedding gown, while rubber gloves are associated with domestic chores or gynecological examination. In the gynecological and kitchen context, marriage loses its romantic aura, it reminds about women's duties and obligations.

An Iranian artist of the young generation, Shadi Ghadirian, shows the problems of women of the East. In this tradition, female gender is determined by the same objects that are considered feminine in Western civilization. In a series of photographs *Like everyday*, the photographer used kitchen objects, with which replaced the faces of portrayed women. Covered with floral chadors, the models are completely devoid of individuality, reduced to housewives.

In the formation of female identity appearance is an important factor. As Simone de Beauvoir wrote: "No one differentiates between the woman herself and her appearance."³⁰ Therefore, for centuries women have submitted to the changing canons of beauty. In our culture today it is believed that a beautiful body must be slim. Thus, women use diets, surgery, drastic physical exercise to achieve the desired look. Extreme activities in this area can lead to a condition called anorexia. It is an aversion to eating, a psychosomatic disorder, which most often results in death. Art, as we know, refers to the canons of beauty. For this reason, some contemporary artists speak critically about the universal fashion to be slim. Interesting to me are those activities that are associated with dress-sculptures. I would like to mention here the work created by Maureen Connor in 1990 titled *Thinner Than You*. It is an ascetically simple form – a net dress suspended on a steel stand. The dress is very narrow, almost fitting the pole on which it is placed. It is also transparent, thus showing an empty interior. The artist suggests in this way the emptiness of the inner life of people focused on their own appearance. She not only criticizes contemporary standards of beauty, but also addresses the issue of separation of the body from the spirit. Identity, according to Maureen, is something questionable. Femininity is an empty veil.

Translated by Katarzyna Gucio

³⁰ S. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (translated based on the Polish version: *Druga pleć*, transl. G. Mycielska, Kraków 1972, t. II, p. 565).

**CYTOWANIE PŁCI
RELACJE MIĘDZY UBIOREM A IDENTYFIKACJĄ PŁCIOWĄ
(streszczenie)**

Idea performatywnego charakteru tożsamości płciowej sformułowana przez Judith Butler wykorzystana została w tym artykule do analizy praktyk związanych z ubiorem. W pierwszej części odwołuję się do historii mody i ustanawianych przez nią kodów płciowych. Ubiór często podkreśla, uwypukla czy nawet konstruuje asymetrię płci, która następnie sankcjonowana jest przez nakazy moralne, religijne lub prawne. Przypisanie spodni mężczyznom a sukienek kobietom określało odmienne sposoby ich funkcjonowania w życiu: swobodę lub ograniczenie ruchu. Naznaczone płcią części ubioru wymuszały zachowania zgodne z uznawanymi za naturalne dla kobiet lub mężczyzn. W wieku XX nastąpiło zatarcie granic między płciami. Trzecia płeć – obiekt eksperymentów artystycznych Duchampa i Claude Cahun – stał się obecnie najmodniejszą formą podmiotowości zarówno w modzie jak w życiu. Druga część tekstu to omówienie wybranych prac typu *dress-sculptures*, w których artyści wykorzystują istniejące kody płciowe tworząc opowieści na temat ambiwalencji seksualnej, tożsamości jako maskarady lub tworu o charakterze procesualnym.

Słowa kluczowe: performatywność płci, tożsamość, moda, dress-sculpture.

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SATIRE IN VIEW OF THE SPEECH ACT THEORY

Abstract: The recent live broadcast of *Poranny WF*, a Polish morning radio show hosted by Jakub Wojewódzki and Michał Figurski, in which they had a discussion about the Ukrainian women working as housekeepers, has given rise to an international scandal. In the hail of comments I found none investigating the issue in view of the Speech Act Theory. Is the theory able to shed some light on the issue of hate speech in satire? I shall compare Wojewódzki and Figurski's show with one of the most interesting satirical accomplishments of recent years, the animated sitcom *South Park* created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone. Do sixteen seasons of a show full of hate speech cause less harm than one broadcast about the Ukrainian housekeepers? Judith Butler's interpretation of Althusser's notion of "interpellation" shall help me solve this puzzle. Furthermore, I shall argue that Wojewódzki and Figurski are guilty only of a "scandal of infelicity".

Keywords: hate speech, speech acts, interpellation, infelicity, satire, scandal.

The issue I would like to address in the present article is hate speech in satirical broadcasts. The broadcasts of my choosing are perceived as containing instances of such speech. Before I begin any theoretical inquiry, let us consider some fragments of those programs (I encourage the reader to get acquainted with the original broadcasts rather than transcripts). In the recent broadcast of the Polish morning radio show *Poranny WF* the hosts Michał Figurski and Jakub Wojewódzki had the following discussion about Ukrainian housekeepers, which cost them their jobs and put an end to the show¹:

Figurski: *What the Ukrainians did yesterday is simply a disgrace. Because if we drew with Greece, they should have at least lost to Sweden*².

¹ The transcript based on: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yq5SdiBux7Q>> [20th August 2012].

² The hosts are referring to the football matches taking place during the 2012 UEFA European Football Championship, co-hosted by Poland and Ukraine. On the previous day the Ukrainian team won a group match against the Swedish team.

Wojewódzki: *Not to mention they had this player who was like 86 and had been resurrected for the game.*

F.: *That's right.*

W.: *And to think Jesus is on our side.*

F.: *Exactly. We are a Marian nation, I beg your pardon, and the tourists like to visit us more than them.*

W.: *Not to mention that the German Pope has a soft spot for us.*

F.: *And all our dogs have survived the invasion of the Euro 2012 guests.*

W.: *You know what I did yesterday after the game with Ukraine?*

F.: *Yup?*

W.: *I acted like a true Pole.*

F.: *You kicked a dog?*

W.: *No, I kicked out my Ukrainian housekeeper.*

F.: [laughs] *That's a great idea. I haven't thought of that... You know what, just to spite mine, I won't pay her today.*

W.: *You know what, I will hire mine back, take back the money and fire her back again.*

F.: *You know what, if mine was just a bit prettier, I would rape her as well.*

W.: *I don't even know what mine looks like, she's on her knees all the time* [laughs].

F.: [laughs]

Below is a scene from the television show *South Park* created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, which has enjoyed great popularity both in the USA and in Poland during its sixteen seasons on air. In the episode entitled *The F Word*, the 8-year-old Eric Cartman addresses a group of Harley drivers in the following manner³:

Cartman: *Hey, assholes! You guys know that everyone thinks you're total fags, right?*

Harley driver: *What did you say?*

C.: *You know, when people like you drive down the streets with your unnecessarily loud motorcycles, thinking you're all cool, everyone is actually laughing at you and calling you pathetic faggots. You do realise that, right?*

H.d.: *Hey man, we roll how we roll, and if people are annoyed or intimidated by it, that's too bad for them.*

C.: *No, nobody's intimidated, actually. ...Just wanted to let you know you're fucking fags”.*

What is the difference between hate speech in satire and its examples in everyday life? The fate of *Poranny WF* may suggest that it hurts the same way. The show has given rise to an international scandal – the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs submitted an official complaint, the media quoted letters from Ukrainian women indignant with the hosts, and the incident was widely

³ The transcript based on: <<http://www.southparkstudios.com/full-episodes/s13e12-the-f-word>> [20th August 2012].

commented on by journalists. On the other hand, the unabated popularity of *South Park* shows that satire has the ability to transform hate speech somehow so that it becomes acceptable. How does this transformation work? Were not Cartman's words offensive to homosexuals?

Curiously enough, the authors of *Poranny WF* have quite a different attitude towards labelling themselves as "satirists" from the one shared by Parker and Stone. Wojewódzki, interviewed by Jacek Żakowski for *Polityka*⁴, described himself as a satirist in defence against the charges of xenophobia. He was even willing to label himself as a "lousy satirist" in order to valorize his actions and defend the show. Parker and Stone, on the contrary, do not care about labels at all. In one of his interviews Stone said: "The only thing that ever concerned us was whether or not it made people laugh. ... Only after three years of doing the show did people start calling us satirical, and we had to look up what that meant"⁵. As we can see, the question that needs to be answered in the first place is "what is satire?" Is there a definition that would help us consider both *Poranny WF* and *South Park* in light of the satirical tradition?

In *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* we find that satire is "a genre defined primarily, but not exclusively, in terms of its inner form. In it, the author attacks some object, using as his means wit or humour that is either fantastic or absurd. Denunciation itself is not satire, nor, of course, is grotesque humour, but the genre allows for a considerable preponderance of either one or the other. What distinguishes satire from comedy is its lack of tolerance for folly or human imperfection. Its attempt to juxtapose the actual with the ideal lifts it above mere invective. From this need to project a double vision of the world satire derives most of its formal characteristic. Irony... is its chief device, but... it is irony of a militant kind"⁶. This definition furnishes us with some valuable ideas. Firstly, we need to distinguish satire from parody. Satire aims at people's shortcomings whereas parody feeds on texts. It is a difference worth remembering, for, as Linda Hutcheon observes, these two notions are commonly confused⁷. Of course, *South Park* is both a satire and a parody. In the present article I shall consider solely the satirical aspects of the show. Secondly, not only can satire not do without a certain exaggeration but also it fights against the said shortcomings by means of irony. We find

⁴ J. Żakowski, *Żakowski rozmawia z Wojewódzkim*. "Ja jednak myślę", *Polityka*, 3 July 2012, <<http://www.polityka.pl/kraj/rozmowyzakowskiego/1528561,1,zakowski-rozmawia-z-wojewodzki.read>> [20th August 2012].

⁵ M. McFarland, *Social satire keeps 'South Park' fans coming back for a gasp, and a laugh*, *SeattlePi*, 1 October 2006, <<http://www.seattlepi.com/ae/tv/article/On-TV-Social-satire-keeps-South-Park-fans-1216014.php>> [20th August 2012].

⁶ B. Lee, *Satire* in: *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*, ed. P. Childs and R. Fowler, New York 2006, p. 211.

⁷ See: L. Hutcheon, *Ironia, satyra, parodia – o ironii w ujęciu pragmatycznym*, in: *Ironia*, ed. by Michał Głowiński, Gdańsk 2002.

a suggestion here that irony is not restricted solely to a commentary, but that it can actually *do* something. Thirdly, satirical works are additionally distinguished by their “inner form”. This point requires further elucidation. The notion of “inner form” has its roots in Wilhelm von Humboldt’s theory of language but it is not used here in the meaning established by him. Werner Leopold points out that this notion “has been used by almost every author in a different sense, and with some it changes its meaning like a chameleon”⁸. The author of the dictionary entry is most probably referring to the fact that works recognized as satirical do not share any formal resemblance. Let us consider the traditional division contrasting Horatian and Juvenalian satire. It is not based on “external” distinctive features, as both satirists wrote in hexameter. The division represents a difference in each author’s attitude to human follies and vices – Horace is lenient while Juvenal is often virulent⁹. Alexander Pope’s *Epistles* and *Moral Essays*¹⁰ and Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*¹¹ are examples of Horatian and Juvenalian satire respectively. In addition, we identify Menippean satire, though it “is amongst the most elusive genres to define”¹². Voltaire’s *Candide* is considered to be a representative of this type¹³. Is family resemblance all we can find in these examples? To make matters worse, the etymology of the term “satire” is an object of debate¹⁴. Ancient Romans referred to the works of Horace, Juvenal and Menippus as “satura”, which also meant “a bowl of various fruits”, to illustrate the diversity of satirical topics. In the Renaissance it was believed that satires originated from Greek satyr plays, whereas Mikhail Bakhtin traced their tradition back to the festival of Saturnalia. Dustin Griffin notes that “most satiric theory, at least since the Renaissance, is polemical, ranging itself against previous practice or claim and attempting to displace it”¹⁵. Faced with such problems some scholars argue that satire is “somewhat existentialist in nature (i.e., in practice, one may argue that its existence precedes its essence)”¹⁶.

In his famous *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye made a remark which I would like to propose as a hypothesis elucidating the problem of the “inner

⁸ W. Leopold, *Inner Form*, <<http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/409593?uid=3738840&uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&sid=21101027413723>> [20th August 2012].

⁹ *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, ed. by J.A. Cuddon (revised by C.E. Preston), London 1999, pp. 780-784.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 387.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 440.

¹² W. Scott Blanchard, *Scholar's Bedlam: Menippean Satire in the Renaissance*, Lewisburg 1995, p. 11.

¹³ *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, p. 504.

¹⁴ R. Quintero, *Introduction: Understanding Satire*, in: *A Companion to Satire*, ed. *Idem*, Singapore 2007, p. 6.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

form” of satirical works. I am convinced that it shall gain legitimacy in view of my analyses. Frye argues that literature is not a collection of unrelated pieces but rather should be viewed “not only as complicating itself in time, but as spread out in conceptual space from some kind of center”¹⁷. He suggests the existence of archetypes, whose mutual dialectics is the source of all literature and which may be the basis for non-literary works as well¹⁸. We can gain knowledge about these archetypes from studying myths or the Bible¹⁹. Frye remarks that the confrontation between satire and human vices has an archetypal predecessor in the clash between David and Goliath – the latter standing for whatever is criticized²⁰. Since I shall confine myself to adopting this remark as a hypothesis, I shall not discuss Frye’s concept in further detail. The suggestion of an “inner form” characteristic of satirical works is not contrary to the idea of their “existential nature”. Although there are some universal vices like excess in eating or drinking, humanity constantly develops new ones – like “the contemporary forms of” racism²¹. If the object of satire is social reality then it is subject to change.

Let us examine our Goliath more closely. Hate speech is a “speech disparaging a racial, sexual, or ethnic group or a member of such a group”²². I shall consider the issue of hate speech from the perspective of speech act theory and the theoretical positions inspired by it. As we know, Austin distinguished utterances that merely describe something from those that perform some kind of action. He called the latter group “performative utterances” or simply “performatives”²³. The words “I pronounce you man and wife” uttered by a priest during the sacrament of marriage are such a performative. What follows from this example is that the accomplishment of an action is dependent upon “the total situation in which the utterance is issued”²⁴ – in this case the proper ritual performed by the proper person. We can thus see that a given utterance can have a different “force”²⁵, ranging from success to failure. Austin made an

¹⁷ N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Princeton 1990, p. 17.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 310.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 14, 133-136.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 228, 236.

²¹ Some suggest the existence of “proto-racism” in antiquity. In my opinion such views prove exactly the opposite, namely the difference between contemporary and ancient racism. First of all, the prefix “proto” suggests evolution. Second of all, the essential outcome of finding similarity (not identity!) is emphasizing the difference. Finally, implying the existence of “proto-racism” is based on a false premise that contemporary racism is the same kind of issue everywhere. On “proto-racism” see: B.H. Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, Princeton 2004.

²² Hate speech, “Collins English Dictionary” <<http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/hate-speech?showCookiePolicy=true>> [23rd August 2012]

²³ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, Oxford 1962, pp. 6-7.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 33, 72-78.

additional distinction between illocutionary acts that perform a given action *in* saying something and perlocutionary acts that perform actions *by* saying something. In the first instance the effect is identical with the uttered words (as was the case with the priest's words), whereas in the second instance it is different (as in the case of persuading or promising)²⁶. Moreover, these characteristics can be ascribed to the very same utterance, thus the difference between illocution and perlocution appears rather vague. I shall return to this subject shortly.

As Judith Butler observes, when we say that we were harmed by language “we claim that language acts, and acts against us”²⁷. In what way is language harmful? Butler suggests a resemblance between hate speech, which gives a harmful name, and acquiring a name in relatively neutral social situations (such as baptism). In order to elicit this similarity she investigates Luis Althusser's notion of “interpellation”. Althusser's goal was to explain the nature of the reproduction of the relations of production²⁸. He suggested that what is being reproduced is the submission to the ruling ideology. Inspired by Marxism and Pascal's defensive dialectics (“Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe”²⁹), Althusser argued that ideologies not only have a material existence dependent upon the existence of subjects but also exist precisely in their actions. As “ideology has no history”³⁰, the structure of each one is the same. Christian ideology addresses an individual in the following manner: “I address myself to you, a human individual called Peter (every individual is called by his name, in the passive sense, it is never he who provides his own name), in order to tell you that God exists and that you are answerable to Him. It adds: God addresses himself to you through my voice (Scripture having collected the Word of God, Tradition having transmitted it, Papal Infallibility fixing it for ever on ‘nice’ points). It says: this is who you are: you are Peter! This is your origin, you were created by God for all eternity, although you were born in the 1920th year of Our Lord! This is your place in the world! This is what you must do! By these means, if you observe the ‘law of love’ you will be saved, you, Peter, and will become part of the Glorious Body of Christ! Etc...”³¹. This leads Althusser to a conclusion that every ideology brings subjects into existence by an act he calls “interpellation”. However, interpellation can be performed only by some already existing subject. What follows is that the newly created subjects have

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 94-119.

²⁷ J. Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, New York 1997, p. 11.

²⁸ L. Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, “Marxist Internet Archive” <<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>> [22nd August 2012].

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

the ability to maintain by their actions the existence of some former subject. All kinds of “name giving” seem to fall under this model. A person receiving a Ph.D is being interpellated by a certain ideology and shall be expected to maintain this ideology. The same applies to marriage or promotion or the succession of a name. Therefore Judith Butler argues that interpellation is an illocutive act³².

As I said before, the “force” of performatives is based on what Austin called “the total situation in which the utterance is issued”. Both Butler and Jacques Derrida agree that this force comes from the fact of “citation”^{33 34}. When I say “I’m sorry” I perform a certain action. If one accepts apologies, s/he does so trusting that I act “how people usually act” when they do somebody wrong. In a way I am citing every successful apology (so much the worse if I am citing my own failures). We can thus see that the force of a speech act is conventional, i.e. based on former usages. This puts in question the distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, since an illocutionary speech act may legitimise its future usages. In that sense every illocutionary act is always a perlocutionary one.

Let us read some excerpts from the letters sent to *Gazeta Wyborcza* after the broadcast of *Poranny WF*³⁵:

Letter from L.

You, misters, are popular, rich, drive expensive cars, wear expensive labels. You can afford anything you want, but you lack good manners. If you insult someone who cleans your home, it is a bit like you're insulting yourself. You don't give them alms, you pay them salary for a well done job. When I heard about what you've done I felt like crying. Such a great injustice. We don't deserve those words, although our girls do work on their knees. That's what our employers want us to do. «A decent house should not be cleaned with a mop or vacuum cleaner», I heard from a Polish woman, the first I worked for in 2005 when I came to your country. The house was three storeys high. My knees are so damaged that I will never wear a dress again. I had to tie her shoelaces. She was 56 years old, drove a car, wasn't disabled. The whole of Poland knew her. «Ukrainians are stupid», she would say, «they cannot do anything right». I left because she didn't want to pay me. She threw my things outside, treated me like a dog [...]

³² J. Butler, *op.cit.*, pp. 24-28.

³³ J. Derrida, *Sygnatura, zdarzenie, kontekst*, transl. by Bogdan Banasiak, in: *Idem, Pismo filozofii*, Kraków 1992.

³⁴ J. Butler, *op.cit.*, pp. 21-29.

³⁵ *Gazeta Wyborcza* 30.06.2012, p. 19. On the same page we find quotations from the discussed show.

Letter from Tania

I was hurt by your words «kick my Ukrainian out». It's like you equated the job of housekeeping with our nationality. The girl I work for called me and asked if I could come and clean her brother's apartment that week as well, because «his Ukrainian» had left. I asked her if she meant that «his housekeeper» had left. She said: «yes, yes, I just said his Ukrainian is gone». [...] I came to Poland with my mother. Our first employer was very hospitable. He helped us and gave us advice, without any subtext or feeling pity for poor Ukrainian women. We worked for him six years, until someone reported him for employing us illegally. I guess Polish housekeepers did it. They were angry because we worked harder than they did. They would say we were a different race. [...] After your chat I was a wreck for a whole day. It came back to me, uncertainty, fear. It was a blow below the belt [...]"

Letter from Tatiana

I would never agree to work for you at any price! I wouldn't sell my honour even for a million. And my son-in-law was so furious that he called me from Germany. «What a boorish behaviour», he said. He read your gibberish on the Internet. The hell with the one about kicking out. If you stopped there, there would be no fuss. But, mister Figurski, jokes about rape? You can joke like that with your wife if she lets you do so. One should never boost one's self-confidence at the expense of others. Fate is wicked. Now you are superstars, but what will be the case tomorrow? Maybe you will have to clean people's houses. Only, can you do that? [...]"

The letters from L. and Tania show us that hate speech, as well as other interpellations, is an illocutive act. According to them the epithet “my Ukrainian” cited previous harmful usages – it equated the job of housekeeping with Ukrainian nationality. Butler claims that every name has its “historicity”³⁶ whose denotation and force come from the “sedimentation of its usages”³⁷. Saying “my Ukrainian” places the subject in a subordinate position – on her knees. There is a cruel logic to it; in the eyes of the hate speaker these women will keep proving them right with their work – cleaning. How can satire counteract hate speech? If repetition reinforces a performative maybe it can also weaken it³⁸? The “historicity” of the term “queer” shows that it can happen. Judith Butler calls this process “resignification”³⁹. How is it possible to cite hate speech in a way that is not harmful? In other words, how to make interpellation infelicitous?

Austin drafts something he calls “the doctrine of the Infelicities”⁴⁰ which is a catalogue of “the things that can be and go wrong on the occasion of such

³⁶ J. Butler, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 19-20.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 13-14. See also: *Idem*, *Bodies That Matter*, New York 1993.

⁴⁰ J. Austin, *op.cit.*, pp. 12-52.

utterances”⁴¹ as, for example, making a promise, placing a bet or entering marriage. He argues that infelicity is a disease to which all conventional actions are exposed. Therefore, as we have seen, it concerns all speech acts. He introduces the distinction between misfires and abuses. In case of the former a usual procedure was not performed correctly, for example, one does not get divorced by shouting “I am divorcing you!” during an argument. I shall focus on the latter. A paradigmatic example of an abuse is a promise made without intent to perform it. As we all know, too many empty promises can undermine one’s credibility. They actually do something, but rather different from what is promised to be done. Normally a promise reinforces its future usages but if it cites more abuses than proper uses it weakens its performative force (or, more precisely, its force as a promise). To sum up, on the level of perlocution an abuse has an altogether different effect than a promise. The same applies on the level of illocution, as a promise may, for example, make an addressee happy, whereas an abuse may do just the opposite.

Let us go back to the abusive language of Wojewódzki and Figurski. The first words in which Figurski expressed his dissatisfaction with the result give us a hint that they mock people embittered by someone else’s success. The mention of “a player who’s like 86” additionally suggests that from the very beginning we might expect some exaggeration. We know that two additional features of satire are militant irony and the archetypal clash between David and Goliath. Let us notice that the part of dialogue concerning Ukrainian housekeepers consists mainly in articulating a certain kind of promises, namely threats. Wojewódzki announces that he will fire “his Ukrainian” and take away her salary whereas Figurski’s words can be considered as a threat of rape, if not towards his present employee then perhaps some future, more attractive one. What is lost in transcription is the spontaneous laughter accompanying each threat. As Linda Hutcheon observes, the theoreticians of irony agree upon one fact – if a piece is to be regarded as ironic the act of its interpretation must reach beyond the given text. In the case of considering a speech act as ironic it involves “situational analysis”⁴². Given only the text, one may consider Wojewódzki and Figurski’s words to be full of hate. However, we ought not to separate speech from the speaking body, especially in the case of a radio broadcast. Inspired by Lacan, Shoshana Felman points out that in an act of speech the metaphysical dichotomy between mind and body is abolished⁴³. At the same time, “the act cannot know what it is doing”⁴⁴ which means that one does not have conscious control over the speech apparatus. Therefore spontaneous laughter was a sabotage against a harmful speech act.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

⁴² L. Hutcheon, *op.cit.*, p. 167.

⁴³ S. Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, Stanford 2003, p. 65.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

Wojewódzki and Figurski stood against Goliath, that is interpellations taking their strength from countless harmful repetitions, armed only with a ridiculous weapon, namely infelicity. Yet they have failed. What went wrong?

The letters from the Ukrainian women sent to *Gazeta Wyborcza* suggest that they might not have heard the broadcast. In her letter, L. writes that she heard *about* what Wojewódzki and Figurski had done, whereas Tatiana might have been informed by her son-in-law. I have every reason to believe that the same applies to the majority of the offended. Their knowledge of the scandal comes from every source but the broadcast. Radio *Eska Rock* which aired the show has less than five percent market share⁴⁵. Two most frequently visited videos on YouTube featuring fragments of the broadcast have 110 thousand and 39 thousand views respectively (as for 25th August 2012). This is not many, considering the fact that the population of Poland is nearly 40 million. Two most popular videos of Kamil Durczok ranting on a dirty table accumulated 2 million and 500 thousand views respectively. People know of the infamous discussion mainly from websites and the press, where it was frequently, though always fragmentarily, quoted. It is hard to estimate how many people visited those websites. There is, however, openly available data on the sales rates of Poland's most popular newspapers. In June 2012, the month when the scandal broke out, the three most popular ones sold jointly 760 thousand copies a day⁴⁶. It is ironic to see how the criticism of Wojewódzki and Figurski uses the same means that are the object of critique. Publicizing the scandal resulted in the repetition of harmful speech in various media. Yet no one accuses, for example, the editors of *Gazeta Wyborcza* of hate speech. People silently assume that it is possible to cite hate speech in a way that is not harmful and yet refuse to grant such power to satirical works. I believe that transcribing Wojewódzki and Figurski's words by the media has not only put them out of the satirical context, but also made their words hate speech. In fact, the authors of *Poranny WF* were the only ones attempting an act of resignification.

Taking Wojewódzki and Figurski's words out of context resulted in yet another difficulty. People began to see their words in the light of other contexts. The letters describe them as "superstars" who "can afford anything" and are "popular, rich, drive expensive cars, wear expensive labels". It was hard to imagine for the public that they could actually need to criticise anything. Instead of fighting with Goliath they became Goliath themselves as a result of interpellation. This is precisely what this vulgar pamphlet published

⁴⁵On the official site of *Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji* I found data only from 2009: <http://www.krrit.gov.pl/Data/Files/_public/Portals/0/kontrola/program/model_sluchania_radia_09.pdf> [28th August 2012].

⁴⁶Based on: *Związek Kontroli Dystrybucji Prasy*, www.zkdp.pl, <<https://www.teleskop.org.pl/zkdp/index.jsp?p=publicData>> [25th August 2012].

in *Przekrój* is about: "not only is it that we don't have to bear with your dirty jokes made of shit and cum, we can also tell you openly that we don't give a single fuck. You suck, get the fuck out. Seriously, we don't get what else you want. You are well off and can easily never work again"⁴⁷.

I have stated earlier that Wojewódzki and Figurski's threats were infelicitous acts due to laughter. There is a passage in *How to Do Things With Words* when Austin describes making empty promises as outrageous⁴⁸. It is hardly surprising, as one of the goals of his lectures was to refine indisputably successful performatives. Shoshana Felman, on the contrary, argues that it is precisely the scandalous usages that are the most illuminating. Just as Nietzsche, she considers man to be "the promising animal"⁴⁹. An animal was what Wojewódzki and Figurski satirized. I believe that the only scandal they are guilty of is the scandal of infelicity⁵⁰.

Parker and Stone disclose the issues related to resignification in the episode *The F Word*. Let us begin by a summary of the episode. The protagonists of the show, a group of 8-year old boys named Kyle, Stan, Cartman and Kenny, are annoyed by the noise made by motorcycles owned by local Harley drivers. When Cartman's request fails they decide to spray "faggots get out" all over the town, which results in accusations of homophobia. The boys explain themselves: "just because a person is gay, it doesn't mean he's a fag" and insist that they use the word "fag" solely with reference to loud Harley drivers. At the same time the debate reveals that everyone in town is annoyed by the noisy motorcyclists to such an extent that with the support of the gay community and even the local priest, who hold banners "gays against fags" and "God hates fags", the mayor signs a decree officially changing the reference of the word. Meanwhile the Harley drivers try to discover why everyone is calling them "faggots"⁵¹. They search the dictionary and learn that the term has been in use since the late sixteenth century and until the twentieth century it changed its meaning several times. It was a contemptuous epithet for a woman but also meant "a bundle of sticks"; thus a "faggot gatherer" was someone whose occupation was to gather firewood. In the nineteenth century the term meant "any awkward bundle" and was used as an insult to the elderly. At the beginning of the twentieth century it appeared in American English as a pejorative term against homosexuals. The Harley drivers are confused: "The

⁴⁷I. Witkowska, M. Karaś, 'Taka, kurwa, konwencja', *Przekrój* 01.07.2012, <<http://www.przekroj.pl/artukul/906094.html>> [24th August 2012].

⁴⁸J. Austin, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

⁴⁹S. Felman, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

⁵⁰The whole of Felman's book can be viewed as a consideration of the scandal of infelicity.

⁵¹This etymological reconstruction is based on the dialogues from the episode. I found similar information in: *Online Etymology Dictionary*, www.etymonline.com, <<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=faggot>> and *Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com, <<http://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/67623>> [30th August 2012].

term just keeps changing its meaning! What's it got to do with us?". In the meantime the decree signed in South Park is widely commented on in the entire USA. The experts maintain that "«fag» is still defined in the dictionary as a pejorative term against homosexuals. You are still causing harm to gay people everywhere, whether you mean it differently or not!". Faced with this situation, the boys decide to invite the editors of the dictionary and persuade them to change the definition. During the editors' visit, the Harley drivers attack the town in revenge for calling them "fags". The incident persuades the editors and from now on the dictionary defines "faggot" as "¹ An extremely annoying, inconsiderate person most commonly associated with Harley riders.² A loud and obnoxious person who owns or frequently rides a Harley".

In what sense is this episode satirical and what does it actually criticise? The object of ridicule is the very process of resignification. I have mentioned earlier that citation can either reinforce a performative or sabotage its force. Parker and Stone bring to light another factor essential in resignification – the authority of sources. Althusser argued that ideology exists only in the actions of subjects. Butler pointed out that harmful names have a history which determines their current usage. However, what this history does not contain entirely is the very usages. The authority of a text can be more powerful than the authority of acting subjects. This authority comes from the supposed objectivity of texts such as lexicons, penal codes, maybe even newspapers. Yet it is precisely this objectivity that can cause harm. Of course, one may argue that people are the authors of texts. But then again, Parker and Stone show that the definition of a particular term found in texts is always delayed compared to the ways in which the term is actually used by people. In a way, the texts are annals. They, as it were, constantly fall behind and thus restrain resignification. *South Park* shares some similarities with Lawrence Sterne's novel *Tristram Shandy*, where "the satire may be directed mainly at the process of writing and reading and the illusions writers and readers are involved in"⁵², the difference being that Parker and Stone expose not semantic but performative illusions.

However, the strength of *South Park* comes not only from the perspicacity of its authors. In the episode *The F Word* the word "faggot" is used (if I counted correctly) 82 times, which is quite daring. During an interview with Stone a journalist remarked that "since it's a cartoon, you can say things that live action actors can't", which made Stone reply "that's always been true, and that's true not only of us but cartoons in general"⁵³. How could we define this peculiar quality of cartoons? I have argued earlier that a text such as a lexicon can cause harm. How is it that a text such as a cartoon is not considered

⁵² Z. Pavlowskis-Petit, *Irony and Satire*, in: *A Companion to Satire*, p. 518.

⁵³ M. McFarland, *op.cit.*

harmful? A lexicon seems transparent, as it is merely a collection of quotes, i.e. past usages of language. Yet this transparency is a mere illusion. Due to a certain delay it can act against the common usages of language – during a dispute we may sometimes hear “that the dictionary says...”⁵⁴. *South Park* seems transparent as well, though in a different way. The only ones to blame are Parker and Stone – people often ask “did they go too far?”⁵⁵. This way Kyle, Stan, Cartman and Kenny are cleared of charges, yet at the same time their adventures remain a separate issue (whereas Wojewódzki and Figurski were the issue). The boys do not make acts of interpellation nor can be subjected to them. It seems that we have a gigantic advantage over them as they are merely cartoon characters. At the same time, however, it strikes us that “we have learned something today”⁵⁶.

William W. Young III observes that “the critics of *South Park* make claims that are strikingly similar to those that have been leveled against Western philosophy since its beginnings. It mocks religious beliefs, leads younger folks to question accepted authority and values, and corrupts our children and culture”⁵⁷. It is an easily recognisable allusion to Socrates. After all, as Linda Hutcheon points out, the Greek word *eironeia* suggests both a semantic inversion and “a valuing pragmatics”⁵⁸. Robert Arp adds that “*South Park*, just like philosophy, is misunderstood”⁵⁹. I believe that the above characteristics describe all insightful satire. However, its philosophical heritage is not limited to Socrates, who, after all, is considered an ironist not a satirist (though he was compared to a satyr). The thinkers who combined an ironic attitude with a satirical eye were Nietzsche and Kierkegaard⁶⁰. The latter often used parables as a means of philosophical inquiry. Maybe it is time to admit that in the postmodernist “melting-pot” philosophy reaches far beyond books.

*Translated by
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⁵⁴I found some interesting insights into the role of dictionaries in public debates in the following article: D. Baron, *But the dictionary says*, “Oxford University Press blog”, 27.06.2011, <<http://blog.oup.com/2011/06/dictionary-courtroom/>> [30th August 2012].

⁵⁵C. Elsworth, *South Park episode angers viewers with scenes of Hollywood titans raping Indiana Jones*, “The Telegraph”, 11.10.2008 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/3179812/South-Park-episode-angers-viewers-with-scenes-of-Hollywood-titans-raping-Indiana-Jones.html>> [26th August 2012].

⁵⁶An expression commonly used by one of the characters from *South Park*.

⁵⁷W.W. Young III, *A Lot of Hot Air, or the Corruption of Youth*, in: *South Park and Philosophy*, edited by Robert Arp, Blackwell Publishing 2007, p. 5.

⁵⁸L. Hutcheon, *op.cit.*, p. 169.

⁵⁹Robert Arp, *Sucking Balls and Fucking Off: An Introduction to The Bothersome «South Park and Philosophy»*, in: *South Park and Philosophy*, p. 2.

⁶⁰Z. Pavlovskis-Petit, *op.cit.*, p. 520.

**SATYRA W PERSPEKTYWIE TEORII AKTÓW MOWY
(streszczenie)**

Ostatnia audycja *Porannego WF-u*, radiowego programu Jakuba Wojewódzkiego i Michała Figurskiego, podczas której wymieniali uwagi na temat Ukrainek trudniących się pomocą domową, wywołała skandal o skali międzynarodowej. W lawinie komentarzy zabrakło takiego, który rozpatrywałby sytuację w perspektywie teorii aktów mowy. Czy teoria ta może rzucić nowe światło na zagadnienie mowy nienawiści używanej w satyrze? Porównam audycję Wojewódzkiego i Figurskiego z jednym z najciekawszych dokonań satyrycznych ostatnich lat, animowanym serialem *South Park* autorstwa Trey'a Parkera i Matta Stone'a. Czy szesnaście sezonów serialu pełnego mowy nienawiści boli mniej, niż jedna audycja o „Ukrainkach”? Pomocne w rozwiązaniu tej zagadki będzie odwołanie do Althusserowskiego pojęcia interpelacji w interpretacji Judith Butler. Ponadto przekonywał będę, że Wojewódzki i Figurski winni są jedynie skandalicznemu niepowodzeniu.

Słowa kluczowe: mowa nienawiści, akty mowy, interpelacja, niefortunność, satyra, skandal.

NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTORS

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