

Tarlan Rasulov
Azerbaijan State University of Culture and Arts
(Azerbaijan)

trasulov@yahoo.com

**“LIVELIER THAN ALIVE”: PERFORMATIVE
GESTURE AND INTERACTIVE THEATRE.
PERFORMANCE AS ANTI-THEATRE**

Abstract. In the article the author examines the concept of performance, which has become very popular recently, in the context of interactive theatre. The analysis from this point of view, together with the consideration of new theatrical concepts of theatrical theorists, the experience of experiments of theatrical practitioners from the end of the 20th century to the present day, allows us to give a more precise definition of the concept of “live theatre”.

Key words: interactive theatre, orthodox theatre, performative, live theatre, Erica Fischer-Lichte.

Introduction. In the context of expanding the boundaries of traditional theatre space, the so-called “art of action”, including performance, happening, actionism, etc., occupies a special place. Combining elements of various arts, it allows artists to express their thoughts and emotions through movement, through space, use of unusual props or even participation of the audience in the process of performance. This article will discuss the problems of defining the concept of “performance” and its similarities and differences from traditional and interactive theatre.

The interpretation of the main material. Performance is commonly understood as a “live” presentation of an artistic work related to the performing arts. The first person to use the word performance as a defining term in relation to his work was John Cage, who used this term in the poster of his work “4’33””. Performance is an interdisciplinary form of contemporary art that expresses a concept through an action performed by a

performer (or several), with minimal or no invention of expressive means, the presence of formal or personal experimentation and the inclusion of the audience in the space of the artwork. Unlike traditional (“orthodox”) [9] theatre, performance does not seek to create a finished dramaturgical structure or a continuous plot. Rather, it is a momentary manifestation of an artistic idea or concept. Performance has no script, actor, director and is not improvisation. Performance has a structure, namely a starting point “given” and a presumed “goal” whose existence it explores.

Unlike the traditional artistic work or act, which is creative in relation to the object it creates outside itself, and the theatrical gesture, which is creative in relation to what it imitates or represents, the performative gesture is creative only in relation to itself. In this sense, it does not produce, repeat, or refer to any other aesthetic, artistic, or social phenomenon, but is rooted in the pure physical presence of artist and audience united here and now in the space of performance – a space where the world of art and the world of life merge and blend.

Thus, when studying performance from the very beginning we are faced with the problem of identifying the object itself, or the category of objects of study. The expressive means used by performers are so disparate and multifaceted that any attempt at systematization seems doomed to failure. The renowned performance studies scholar Roselee Goldberg [4] argues that performance resists categorization within a particular typology of artistic creation precisely because it is based on the idea that creative means are potentially limitless. Performance seeks to escape the confines of any definition, playing with the boundaries between disciplines and genres, visual art and theatre, performance and ritual. While any definition of performance may not be exhaustive and fully describe the phenomenon, it is possible to highlight its identity, which is that performance always seeks to place the physical presence of the artist and their audience as the aesthetic focus, deliberately abandoning any other instrument of artistic mediation between author and audience.

Erika Fischer-Lichte [4, p.158] writes in this regard that performance art replaces “artefacts with fleeting, unique and unrepeatable processes”; it resists the temptation to “create artworks like artefacts and commodities and replaces them with the creation of ephemeral events”.

Broadly speaking, performance is an action or series of actions. However, as David Davies [3, p.4] rightly points out, not all actions are performance

art. Writing this article or reading it, for example, is a kind of action but does not qualify as performance. Therein lie the two criteria of performance art: all actions can qualify as performance when they are deliberately intended to be perceived as performance and are intended to be shown or presented to an audience.

Let us focus on the first criterion. To say that performances are actions that have a purpose is to say that they are intentional events, implicitly or explicitly directed towards a certain result. In this sense they differ from involuntary actions or simple automatic bodily movements and reflexes. But performance is also and above all an action that has to be shown, presented to someone, it is intended for an audience. Performance implies the complementarity of two functions – to show and to watch.

Performance art is shaped by dramaturgy and stage direction. The audience's perception of time and space is strongly influenced by the context of the story. On stage, the actor performing a role gives his body and mind to the character. The character's image is conceived and formed during the rehearsal process, after which it materializes on stage. Unlike an actor, a performer or performance artist does not hide behind the image of the character, instead they present themselves and their unique experience. One of the most fascinating features of performance art is that, unlike theatre, what happens on stage is not fiction, quite the contrary: the performer gives the audience the most "true" part of themselves; they do not fit into a role, but rather strip away the ones that everyday life sometimes imposes.

A play in the theatre also by definition requires an audience, but not all plays are equally aimed at the audience. Plays in traditional "orthodox" theatre focus on the play, not on the audience in the auditorium. The reaction of the audience in this case is one of the secondary factors influencing the result. Whereas the actions of performers are determined by the presence (and often the reaction) of the audience. The specific "live" mediality ("liveliness") of performance consists in an interactive (sometimes even conflictual) meeting between performers and spectators. From this encounter emerges a mechanism that Fischer-Lichte [5] calls the "feedback loop": an always open process of co-creation of an event through the efforts of performers and audience, an aspect that performance shares with interactive theatre. It is no coincidence that the connection between these two art forms is very close: in many cases, it is possible to distinguish a performance of interactive

theatre from performance art (and vice versa) only by the place in which it is presented to the public.

Unlike theatre, performance does not aim to simulate reality, neither in the context, nor in the role of the performer – the performer, nor, above all, in the action. Theatrical gesture is always tied to “as if”, to disguise, whereas performative gesture, on the contrary, is “real”, it is a gesture that takes place in the space and time of life, here and now. In the words of iconic Serbian performative artist Marina Abramović: “What is important to me is that in performance art everything is real,” Abramović said at one of her lectures. – The energy is real, the pain is real, the knives are real, the blood is real. It’s not theatre: you become the theatre and the props. And it allows you to look deep inside yourself and undergo a real transformation [14].

The actions performed in performances and the materials used in them, the effects that result from them, do not pretend to be what they are. They are in fact “brutally” real – they are true. Their meaning is contained, in other words, in an authenticity that does not deceive, does not pretend but instead simply manifests itself on stage.

Performance art is essentially “anti-theatre” in which a refusal of the traditionally postulated “faith in the circumstances on offer” operates. In performance art there is no clear distinction between the realm of the real and the realm of the artistic, and thus life, according to Joseph Beuys, a postmodern artist who made a huge contribution to performance art, is the performer’s greatest artistic tool and society is his greatest work of art [11].

The performative gesture, in essence, is an “augmented reality”. It is a real gesture that does not imitate, represent or intend to express anything outside itself. It has no communicative or narrative function in the usual sense of the word and does not refer to any text, meaning or code. The experience of performative gesture, however, is also not reducible to the ordinary experience of everyday life. By offering the audience performance into life in its pure immanence, performance actually ascribes a brighter, clearer reality to it, thus it is “augmented”. The performative gesture realizes a kind of ‘virtual reality’ that is similar to life in everything, but with a degree of greater intensity and power. This power comes from the physical and/or mental presence of spectators and artists together in a common spaces and themes. Marina Abramović’s performance “In

the Presence of the Artist”, which lasted seven hundred and thirty-six hours and thirty minutes, is a prime example. Virtually motionless and speechless, Abramović sat in the centre of one of the halls of New York’s MoMA, opposite her stood a table and a chair on which anyone could sit and look into the artist’s eyes. Later the table disappeared, and with it the barrier between the artist and the viewer finally disappeared. This can be considered “augmented reality” because Abramović does not play any character outside herself here: the relationship that arises between her and the viewer is a genuine connection between the subjects. The emotional intimacy here is incomparable – in intensity and quality – to the feelings that unite audience and actors in traditional theatre. Faced with the “power” of this encounter, the value of live art becomes clear; it is a living gesture, bodily and spiritual at the same time. It is poetic in the literal sense. Interactive theatre and performance art strives for precisely this magnitude of impact on the audience [13].

Performance demonstrates the process of creating an artistic image rather than the result of the artist’s creativity. Another difference between performance and spectacle is the possibility of repetition and organization of events that do not depend on the will of the performer or on reality, while in performance a unique reality is demonstrated. The importance of the “here and now” moment is relevant for both performance and spectacle. When creating a performance, the author, first of all, defines a model of behaviour, without learning the “role” in advance, it is important for him to “live” the situation.

As far as the audience is concerned, the goals of a theatre performance and performance art are significantly different. Theatre aims to provoke reflection in the audience, while performance art seeks to distance itself. The paradoxical nature of performance, according to Richard Schechner, lies in the fact that, despite the fact that the performative act – itself short-lived – focused on the “here and now” its consequences, nevertheless, and the effect it has on participants and spectators can last indefinitely, because each new address will be an entry into a dialogue with the performance. The peculiarity of Schechner’s concept lies in the fact that the researcher points to the fact that performance affects and changes tradition [13].

The constructivist nature of the performative act suggests that a performance is never entirely new, but always consists of a familiar set of actions that can be incorporated as part of other performances. Clones or

copies of the same performance can claim originality each time, thanks to the difference in the context of reproduction. Thus, a performance is always presented to us as a single performance of an action, presented each time in motion. All performances depend on the interactivity of actions, which by definition cannot be static.

It turns out that, according to Schechner, there are no spontaneous behaviours, because even the most unexpected ones are constructed from already known, practiced actions. All actions are composed of already known elements, insofar as their particular configuration (i.e. a series of specific episodes) can possess exclusivity [12].

Schechner offers another alternative view of performance. It consists in considering any action and deed as performance, despite the fact that they do not conform to existing conventions. This approach can be called the principle of performativity, which allows any interaction to be investigated as a performance. In this case, the action itself is not a performance, but is only analyzed from this perspective. Performance creates a specific zone of tension in which even ordinary actions are perceived as ritualized. This zone has a pronounced centre, the performer himself, whose spontaneous actions are read as artistic, and a random peripheral event can be destructive in this situation.

The performers' experiences are included in the work, their physical and mental state is co-experienced by those present. The similarity of performance and ritual is also related to the problem of interpretation – it is secondary or insignificant, there is only an unambiguous effective result. But at the same time, the interpretation of performance always gravitates towards the multilayered purpose of the performance. The external side is often an ironic game, where the main character openly declares his freedom, credo, and attitudes. The peculiarities of performance are its reality, situationally and concreteness. First of all, it is manifested in the fact that the performer interacts with real and concrete objects – with the objects they took as props, and with nothing else. The a priori presence of meaning is central to the theatrical genre; meaning is embodied in all sorts of stage means by any means, and on the other hand, meaning is actively sought by the audience.

Jerzy Grotowski said that “ritual is a performance, a finished action, an act, and a degenerated ritual is a performance”. By ritual in this case Grotowski meant “a moment of provoked tension”. In his work “The Performer”

Grotowski argues that the performer is first and foremost a man of action, a way of life [14].

To summarize the above, we can say that performance is a “magic” arising between the spectator and the performer. And the former is no less active in this process than the latter. After all, the question about the meaning of it is not a question that the performer asks, but one that is answered. And this requires a certain quality of acute attention to what is happening around us, a certain courage to give meaning to the events around us, to look at this as-it-happens chaos of coincidences as a synchronicity that has created a bizarre path for the performer at this very second; the ability to see this path and the determination to follow it. Thus, in performance, unlike “orthodox” theatre, the emphasis is shifted from the performer to the spectator. This brings performance closer to the practices of interactive theatre.

Performance reveals what was originally present in natural communication between people: non-professionalism, concreteness and reality, subjectivity, spontaneity and immediacy of perception, associativity and projectivity, open interpretation and polysemantism.

Conclusion. The value of performance is in the possibility of what can be called “stopping the world”. Performance presents the viewer with an opportunity to reflect on themselves, on their thoughts in relation to the performance, on their condition, on their life. There are no good and bad performers, no professionals and amateurs, there is the spectator, prepared and unprepared to stop and meet himself. The performative gesture draws its power from the joint presence of artists and spectators here and now in the realized event and generates an “augmented reality” that blurs the boundaries between truth and fiction. In performance art, life becomes art and art becomes life.

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Tərflən Rəsulov (*Azərbaycan*)

“CANLIDAN DA CANLI”: PERFORMATİV JEST VƏ İTERAKTİV TEATR. PERFORMANS ANTİTEATR KİMİ

Məqalədə müəllif son zamanlar daha geniş vüsət performans anlayışına interaktiv teatr kontekstindən yanaşmışdır. Bu baxımdan edilən analiz zamanı XX əsrin ortalarından başlayaraq indiyə qədər müxtəlif teatr nəzəriyyəçilərinin yeni teatr konsepsiyaları, teatr praktikalərinin keçirdikləri eksperimentlərin tamam başqa rəkursdan nəzərdən keçirilməsi ilə “canlı teatr” anlayışına daha dəqiq definisiyası verilir.

Açar sözlər: interaktiv teatr, ortodoksal teatr, performativlik, canlı teatr, Erika Fişer-Lixte.

Тарлан Расулов (Азербайджан)

**«ЖИВЕЕ ЖИВОГО»: ПЕРФОРМАТИВНЫЙ ЖЕСТ И
ИНТЕРАКТИВНЫЙ ТЕАТР. ПЕРФОРМАНС КАК АНТИТЕАТР**

В статье автор рассматривает понятие перформанса, ставшее очень популярным за последнее время, в контексте интерактивного театра. Проведённый анализ с этой точки зрения вместе с рассмотрением новых театральных концепций театральных теоретиков, опыт экспериментов театральных практиков начиная с конца 20-го века до наших дней, позволяет дать более точное определение понятию «живой театр».

Ключевые слова: интерактивный театр, ортодоксальный театр, перформативный, живой театр, Эрика Фишер-Лихте.