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# Scientific Principles of Studying Performance Art as a Contemporary Cultural Phenomenon

## Наукові принципи дослідження перформансу як сучасного культурного явища

**Abstract.** The article focuses on the scientific principles used in the historical studies of performance art and being the basis for theoretical understanding and obtaining objective knowledge regarding the investigation of the nature of this unusual phenomenon. Artistic, social, political forms of performance and their interconnections within the structure of contemporary culture are analyzed. The essence and versatility of the performance art and the full possibilities of its research and application are determined.

**Keywords:** current art, art of action, performance art, social art, live art, media art, public art.

**Problem statement.** Performance has a strong potential for realization in cultural sphere via the rapid formation of non-verbal content, simultaneity and sensual perception of creative images. However, the problem of its study is the lack of demarcation line with life, complexity of recognition, inability to predict, changing application field, and a wide range of scientific research methods. Therefore, an attempt was made to analyze the phenomenon in the scope of its scientific principles.

Despite the researchers' attention to the various directions of performance (Z. Alforova, A. Vujanović, Yu. Hrinenko, R. Goldberg, Ye. Morozova, V. Romaniuk, K. Stanislavska, R. Shchekner, M. Shuvakovych, Ya. Shumska and others), performance art still is a poorly researched area.

**Objectives** of the study are theoretical comprehension and substantiation of the concept of "performance" as an artistic phenomenon, investigation of historical origins, identification and substantiation of performance features, analysis of the current development state.

**Presentation of the main research material.** Scientific principles in the article are considered to be the main elements and basis for cognitive process in the art of performance in terms of general forms, possibilities of cognitive means and mechanisms that determine logical sequence of studying the contemporary art phenomena. In this context, it is a clear set that determines the researcher's attitude to the facts, sources, methods of study and makes it possible to draw scientific conclusions. In this case, it is still possible to talk about scientific principles of the existing collection

of performance knowledge as the result of a previous synthetic phenomenon study.

The word "principle" itself, as it is mentioned in the encyclopedic literature, is translated from Latin as "beginning", "basis" and is characterized by universality, reflection of essential provisions, imperative nature, and general cogency and is an expression of ideas, activities and beliefs. Defining the essence of performance art for comprehensive analysis induces application of different scientific principles. First of all, it is a principle of comprehensiveness and inclusiveness, which provides study of performance art in diverse aspects, influence on it and its own formal, indirect, decisive influence (on contemporary art in particular, and on culture in general), which makes it possible to analyze the phenomenon not in separate categories, but in interconnection with other social processes. The principle of validity is closely connected to the previous one, because the art forms of public actions require documentation and facts of an objective nature: eventfulness, public reaction and turn of events, etc. The principle of specificity includes analysis of performance impact through its components, taking into account the social conditions. The principle of complexity gives an opportunity to choose approaches in studying and understanding the influence of various sciences on performance and its characterization in terms of origin, development, purpose of existence and predicted functions. The principle of harmonization of theory and practice involves theoretical study of performance on the basis of available art critical works and practical experience, understanding it at the empirical

level, analysis and synthesis of these knowledge and skills and their generalization at the subjective and objective level.

Performance (from the Latin “perform”—“act”) became popular due to the changes in modern socio-cultural reality, when the recipient perceives the work without delving into verbal content, giving the priority to its visual and sensual part. The rapid perception of performance is remembered, it appeals to stable stereotypes and associations, creating a social, communicative and interpersonal situation with self-referential consequences that is to focus on its own action with a broad interpretation.

The principle of historicism requires complex analysis of interdependency of all historical facts in their interrelation, when the phenomenon of performance is considered in connection with the specific historical experience, in the light of the momentum of past and subsequent events. Historicism, raised to the level of scientific thinking, adjoins empathy, helps to understand and evaluate the motives of actors' actions. The principle of historicism makes it impossible to make a random subjective set of facts, that is why Rama Hoetzlein's (*Timeline of 20<sup>th</sup> C. Art and Media*, 2009–2010) or Bedri Baykam's (*Art History Map*, 2019) attempts to design the art history in a composite map where performance takes separate place seem to be proper and interesting. Although other artists-researchers and performers believe that performance has always existed because it is a non-verbal message in the space, aimed to effect and impress.

It is possible to trace back the archaic roots of performance because an action itself is irrational process that ignores semiotic codes of the culture. Besides, Freudian concept of personality says that it is the irrational element that has the most aesthetic and psychoanalytic significance. Performance finds the language where signifier is not detached from the signified, that is true and not separated from emotional states [6; 7; 8; 16].

A. Losiev points out that whole being during the ancient era, in particular for the ancient Greeks with their rituals, was regarded as a beautifully organized living body, the absolute, materialized cosmos. Arche (Greek “arche”—“the beginning of knowledge”), origin of the term “archaic”, is what was in the beginning and never ceases to exist. For ancient Greeks it was universe and themselves along with cosmos, music, nature and the whole pantheon of gods. Greeks perceived cosmos as resonating and the universe as superintended music, both being as corporeal as they are, since the body was a phenomenon of expressiveness for them [13, p. 61–62].

In performance study, important scientific methodological principles are the principle of alternative, social approach and objectivity, which require the researcher to be truthful, to take into account social interests of different social strata, forms of their cultural influence on the society, likelihood of the event and so on. For example, performance may include a real life situation. D. Alexander names elements that characterize such social performance: a multilayered system of collective representations—cultural codes; actors—performers; audience—casual viewers; means of symbolic reproduction—stage-prop for creating

atmosphere; mise-en-scene—action; public power—a system of public-willed relations between people about organization of common livelihood activities [1; 10, p. 71].

Special condition for successful performance is the level of harmonious combination, “smelting” elements of one's work. In true performance viewers identify themselves with the acting performer and “cultural scripts” that are cultural anticipated and seem plausible due to carefully organized, sincere and spectacular mise-en-scenes [10, p. 71]. But if the image is fictitious, basic elements are separated or at least one of them is lacking, then, according to D. Alexander, social action will not work and will be unconvincing [1].

A. Vujanović examines performance art in three categories: relative to institutional environment (the institution defines art of a theater, opera, dance, etc.), related to the social situation where the performance takes place (boundary of real and fictitious, as well as the moment when the boundary disappears) and related to broader social environment (the combination of “art” with “activism”, a phenomenon known as “artivism”) [4].

A. Vujanović emphasizes that art lost its monopoly on aesthetics due to massification and media activity. Nowadays, modern society focuses not on the material, but on the cultural and informational world. The researcher believes that any performance may now be called political, since independent companies engaged in performing arts seek to interfere with free creativity of the artists, intervene in the social environment, influence public space by using new images, representations, techniques of work with body and society. An example of performing art in politics could be the drag queen gesture when it is used by a Member of Parliament (“drag queen” is a non-gay or transgender man who dresses up like a woman). Here, aesthetic activity inherent in politics is clearly manifested. This, of course, does not mean that art is politics, but it does mean that art is part of it [4]. Yu. Lemeshko, analyzing the interdisciplinary connections between performance, media and politics, identifies this phenomenon as a problem of theatricalization of politics and perception of political events from the perspective of spectacularity and entertainment. Political reality is being constructed with the help of the media [11, p. 192].

A. Vujanović denominates the following models of politicality that today stand out in contemporary researches: political content; politicality of the performance medium and form; politicality of modes of work production.

In the “political content” model, art takes place in social events as a neutral observer; one can talk about social events without being directly involved in them. An example of this would be the performances of artists of different trends, who critically evaluate the relations between the countries of “first”, “second” world, etc.

The performance model of the “political medium and form” may not have direct political message and political content, but political potential is tracked in performance, especially when it comes into discussion with legitimate ways of creating or with usual ways of viewers' perception. Minimalist dance is an example that form (expression) is as

important as content; choreographers such as Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton represented on the stage a new non-dancing body, thus democratizing its meaning.

The model “politicality of conditions and ways of work” considers the regularity of cooperation principles, place of production in the context of economic conditions, ways of forming groups, etc. There are many independent groups engaged in performative avant-garde practices, but “the principles of their organization are incorporated by all traditional hierarchical elements of official theatrical institutions: principal, chief director, etc.” [4].

Scientific principles of performance research are naturally revealed by general scientific (historical, logical, classification), historical (chronological, synchronous, periodization, comparative-historical, retrospective, structural-systemic) and special (social studies, psychology and, probably, statistics, when it comes to performances involving social networks) methods.

In different eras the author’s position changes—he/she is an imitator, artisan, demiurge, designer, scriptor, trickster, which takes us beyond the limits of the corporal. By experimenting with themselves, the artists taught viewers the new ways of perceiving the world. For example, before the impressionists, the world was thought to be not dependent of our emotions and impressions. By letting air and light perspective in the work, as well as their own impressions, artists instantly made these inventions the achievement of humankind and the norm in art [2, p. 61–64].

Active futuristic movement originated in Italy, when F. Marinetti, determined to be a target for “inflammatory violence” initiated his performances. On February 20, 1909, along with the futurism manifesto, which was printed on the front page of the daily French newspaper *Le Figaro*, a prefix anti-appeared in art. New art proclaimed the triumph of anti-culture, anti-humanism and anti-aesthetism in a new age of mechanics, electricity and speed. It was about acceleration, a new era, new ways, different thinking and formation of appropriate concept of the universe. Classical art was considered a thing of the past; it was thought that old art should give way to the new one, which must serve the masses. In 1910, on Piazza San Marco, after the Sunday church service, futurists scattered 800,000 copies of the manifesto directly from the clock tower, drawing attention to themselves in the form of physical confrontation that is fight. This was considered the birth of the idea of an alternative space of action [6, p. 13].

F. Marinetti’s calls for “every day spitting on the altar of art”, denying all logical rules, deconstructing the past, rejecting fear and passivity in the manifesto. While promoting the idea of machines, cities, and masses, the futurists opposed the other elements: museums, peace, and moralism.

The aim of modernist circles was to “shake” the average man. Their performances were accompanied by attention and scandal. Their events, which often ended with booing, arrests and free advertising, began with the sale of twice as many tickets as there were seats in the hall, obscene inscriptions on posters, greasing seats with a glue, and were accompanied by insults to the public (for example, declaring

that “war is beautiful because it decorates the flowering fields by machine-gun fire orchids”) [3, p. 80]. The collection “War is the only hygiene of the world” (“Guerra sola igiene del mondo”, 1911–1915) contained a manifesto “The pleasure of being booed” (“La volutta d’esser fsschiati”), where F. Marinetti addresses the viewers with disrespect.

The reform of art was in that viewers ceased to be its passive consumers. At a certain moment, audience did not withstand the onset of provocation and was indignantly agitated, stirring the action itself, taking it from the limited rectangle of the stage into the room. Performance has proven to be the most reliable mean in annoying a “respectable” audience. It allowed being both “creators” of the new art form and “objects” of art at the same time. The lack of script and storyline and encouraging public to collaborate likened the futurists’ activities to variety shows. Artists used language and separate sounds, makeup on their faces, created special extravagant costumes and scenery, bringing eccentric innovative ideas into the action [7].

Performance at the turn of the century underwent major changes: after emerging in a closed subcultural environment, it is often reproduced in exhibition space—“reperformance”, as M. Abramovich calls it. Such a course of events contradicts the primary essence of performative practices, since anti-institutionality, uniqueness, authenticity have always been its main elements. The performance existed in a personalized way, only seeking a genuine experience of the present moment from the audience and artist and aimed at creating a specific experience. Characteristic feature of the 2000s was the extremely widespread use of performance elements by other arts to enhance the influence. This creates many hybrid genres and newest forms of art. M. Abramovich, A. Vujanović, R. Goldberg, V. Romaniuk, Ya. Shumska justly claim: “the third wave of performance art is now developing in the world” [12, p. 41; 15; 16, p. 86].

In contrast to the long-standing concept of linear expanding of the history of styles in art, with a system similar to the organism and tendency to evolve constantly, another one appeared, proposed by R. Krauss. To characterize the concept of “art”, she developed a model of collapsing, reproducible construction. Krauss refers to R. Bart’s metaphor about the Greek ship “Argo”, which, replacing the old parts with new ones, eventually turned into a brand new ship. With the same way, in her opinion, art, having changed dramatically, preserved its name and form [2, p. 61].

M. Witz in his work *The Role of Theory in Art* says that one can substantiate a clear definition only for the kind of art that is no longer expected in history and time and nothing new will happen. However, as art itself continues to exist, it can change beyond recognition and cannot be clearly defined. At the same time, it is possible to suggest exact definitions to the concepts of “performance of modernism”, “performance of postmodernism”, “performance of contemporary”, “Renaissance art”, etc. It is interesting, that M. Witz allows the existence of the phrase “it is a work of art” only if it is considered as praise to the author, an estimation of his work, but not definition [2, p. 61].

Performance falls under such category of statements: “it was not created”, “it is a contingency”, “it exists only in our imagination”, but, according to M. Witz, if art experts formulated the question in this way, then a shovel or a stone at the crossroads can be called an art. This shows that some attainments, skills and taste are required from the viewer, not just from the artist. Contemporary art can be a product of environment, culture, which, however, does not mean that you can do it without the artist. On the contrary, the artist has to teach the community to “see” the art, and the real creative act is just observing, interpreting and understanding what is happening [2, p. 61–65].

In performance art, epatage and the power of action help to attract attention of the audience. The affirmation of corporal in postmodernism resulted in development of appropriate strategies for artist’s and viewer’s behavior. “As a result, a new viewer has emerged, which, on the one hand, prefers spectacle (fr. ‘Spetaculaire’—‘sensation’, ‘impression’), and on the other, becomes the object of the artist’s manipulation” [2, p. 87]. However, the “new viewers” proved that they do not have any restrictions and therefore are willing to be involved in the field of corporeal provocations and spontaneous artistic actions, which made possible interesting interactive forms of pictorial corporal practices; for instance, during flash mob the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It was expected that in the third millennium technogenic civilization would approach the point of bifurcation, which would provide a new qualitative state of higher or chaosogenic lower principle. It may seem that avant-garde art has departed from everything that classical art was focused on. However, the person and the attributes of the human personality—immateriality, morality, taste, culture—remain one of the main problems of avant-garde creativity in general and performance in particular. Moreover, the avant-garde expanded, enriched, and deepened the human understanding of art through performance [14, p. 25].

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In effort to draw the public attention to the problem, artists extensively use irony, epatage, exaggerations, metaphors or association, illuminate social phenomena in their own works, and provoke the viewer through indirect or direct actions or thoughts on social issues, including interactive moment. In addition, public art, which includes performance, focuses on the unprepared viewer and involves communication with the city space and its dwellers. Democracy of performance manifests itself in the choice of a theme that can relate to any aspect of life. All performances are combined by an outward orientation on a person and any performance is intended to awaken the viewer’s consciousness. Performance, as a rule, avoids “politicization”—it is art of hint that encourages to have one’s own personal opinion [9; 17, p. 157–158].

In the world practice of the performances, there are ecoseries that change established stereotypes about the inviolability of nature and its suspension from the process of creativity. For example, in the *Thank You Project* trees, in collaboration with the British artist Tim Knowles, paint their own works. The involvement of natural phenomena in the act of art is also used by the artist in *Tree Drawings*, workshops for adults and children. In children’s groups, a new generation mentality is combined with a therapeutic effect—overcoming the threshold of fear of drawing in collaboration with “colleagues from nature” [18].

**Conclusions.** Thus, many scientific principles provide an opportunity to reveal the nature, essence, functionality of the phenomenon of performance, so significant in contemporary art. The restorative art of performance is very interesting to study, because it allows to see new angles of knowledge about society. The performance of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is also used for targeted therapeutic work with children, as art is sincere, and presenting something in the form of art works better than explanation.

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**Шклярєнко Ж.**

**Наукові принципи дослідження перформансу як сучасного культурного явища**

**Анотація.** Розглянуто окремі наукові принципи, що застосовуються в історичному дослідженні мистецтва перформансу і є основою теоретичного осмислення та отримання об'єктивних знань для вивчення природи незвичайного явища. Проаналізовано мистецькі, соціальні, політичні форми перформансу та їхній взаємозв'язок у структурі сучасної культури. З'ясовано сутність і різносторонність явища, потенціал його дослідження та застосування.

**Ключові слова:** актуальне мистецтво, мистецтво дії, перформанс, соціальне мистецтво, live art, media art, public art.

**Шклярєнко Ж.**

**Научные принципы исследования перформанса как современного культурного явления**

**Аннотация.** Рассматриваются отдельные научные принципы, которые используются в историческом исследовании искусства перформанса и являются основой теоретического осмысления и получения объективных знаний, касающихся изучения природы необычного явления. Анализируются художественные, социальные, политические формы перформанса и их взаимосвязь в структуре современной культуры. Определена суть и разносторонность явления и широкие возможности его исследования и применения.

**Ключевые слова:** актуальное искусство, искусство действия, перформанс, социальное искусство, live art, media art, public art.