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## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VISUAL PERFORMANCE AND THEATRE. THE QUESTION OF GENRE IDENTITY

The question of the difference between theatre and performance art in the context of visual art is only rarely directly stated, but it is all the more controversial. In the world of visual art and theatre, there are different opinions not only about the differences between the two genres, but also about what performance is. I am well aware of what a complex and insufficiently explored space I am entering here, but still I believe that my effort is a contribution to a discussion that needs to be opened. The present study focuses primarily on comparing the position of the performer and the actor while also taking into account the different histories and institutional backgrounds of the two art forms. It also constitutes an attempt at pointing out a certain vacuum that exists in the field of defining performance art.

It is of course impossible fully to describe such a fundamental and extensive topic within the space available in a single study. Therefore, I will try to capture the most important points of departure through a thematic ordering that I consider essential, deliberately leaving aside e.g. the connections with literature (slam poetry, etc.) or group delegated performance (i.e. performance performed by someone other than its author,

delegated to someone else): in my opinion, such a genre finds itself at the almost perfect interface between performance art and theatre. Nor is it possible at this point exhaustively to take into account all theoretical perspectives on both performance and theatre and to confront them.<sup>1</sup> my view is therefore selective, but its selectivity is purposeful. In this study I draw on visual art theory and primarily deal with performance in its context, from which my interpretive code is also derived: that is to say, I do not interpret performance through theatrical perspectives, but through the code of visual art. As a result, for example, I do not emphasise the position of the spectator, which is crucial for theatre but not for performance (as I will outline below). I depart from the assumption that performance (in the sense of performance art) is part of the visual arts, and my aim is not to establish clearly defined boundaries for the art form, but to propose a distinguishing principle that can be applied as a scale.

I have come to my conclusions through the study of primary and secondary literature, and interviews with artists from both disciplines, as well as theatre theorists and critics who were willing to give me their time.<sup>2</sup> In addition, my conclusions

are influenced by my position as an active artist, which has also given me the opportunity for direct comparison with the international scene. I consider this 'double position' an advantage; as much as it is possible to write about performance art from a purely theoretical point of view, it is an artistic field that is based on live action. For the purposes of this study, I have also sought out direct experience from the side of the theatre: I attended rehearsals of a production with performance elements, briefly tried out the role of an actress in an experimental theatre project, and took part in dialogic acting classes for beginners and advanced students.

Over the past few years, theoretical-critical reflections on the field have, with a few exceptions, been written by the performers themselves or 'ideologically' tuned according to whether the writer is in favour of a given kind of expression or not; however, they touch very little on what performance could or should be and what its disciplinary specifics might be. On the other hand, there is a significant amount of teatrological reflection dealing with performativity and sometimes also with (visual or artistic) performance itself, and two main tendencies can be identified therein. The first tendency of these teatrological considerations is to include artworks that do not belong in performance art, which is a consequence of the vague external definition (there is a certain functional – albeit unspoken – prior understanding shared within the art scene), the second is to subordinate the reflection on performance to purely theatrical principles (i.e. to interpret performance as theatre). Performance art has thus rather unhappily put itself on the defensive against everything theatrical. To open up the topic of performance theory, to ask what is typical of visual performance or performance art and how it differs from theatre, is therefore, in my opinion, necessary in many aspects.

Performance art is historically tied to a conceptual art base, while simultaneously expanding towards other art forms, with which it freely intermingled. In the sixties, performance art was seen as an intermediate genre, with

intersections among different artistic disciplines and their common denominator to be found in live action in the here and now. The term performance art thus served as an umbrella term for various live art performances. However, given that nowadays this kind of artistic expression is no longer marginal (on the contrary), with the associated significant diversification, this concept is no longer sustainable, and therefore, in accordance with Claire Bishop, the term visual performance is used, which despite some reservations seems the most accurate. In her definition, visual performance is made up of visual artists who are not trained actors, musicians, dancers, etc.<sup>3</sup> In the text, I continue to use the term performance art to refer to performance art up to about the nineties, that is, to denote the period before its significant expansion. When I write about performance art without attribution, I always mean performance art in a visual context, that is, visual performance.

As difficult as it is to define theatre as an art form, there is a fairly clear general (audience-oriented) understanding of what 'traditional,' 'typical,' or simply conventional theatre looks like. Despite the oversimplification, conventional theatre can be identified with drama.<sup>4</sup> (Beyond that, of course, there are a number of theatrical genres and practices that break out of this stereotypical notion. These are equally taken into account in this study: everything I will argue about theatre below can be applied to puppet theatre, ballet or opera, as well as to 'alternative' theatre that lies closest to visual performance.) In the case of visual performance, however, there is no such simplistic (all-)general awareness. Even art historians have so far settled for such claims as the 'indefinable nature'<sup>5</sup> of performance art, which is supposedly where its strength lies<sup>6</sup> performance art mentor RoseLee Goldberg argues that, "by its very nature performance defies precise or easy definition beyond the simple declaration that it is live art by artists. Any strict definition would immediately negate the possibility of performance itself."<sup>7</sup>

In my opinion, this may have been true during times when performance was a marginal

genre and very few artists were involved in it. Since the beginning of the new millennium or so, we have witnessed the increasing expansion and mass popularisation of visual performance, with the associated institutionalisation and commercialisation. Marina Abramović is referred to by Lady Gaga, for example, and Donatien Grau speaks of the phenomenon of 'pop performance' in this context.<sup>8</sup> The position of visual performance is therefore changing dramatically compared to the past, but so far there have only been publications documenting the history of performance art and very few theoretical texts, which has resulted in a plenty of confusion about what performance and visual performance actually is. This also implies difficulties in its evaluation. As long as it is far from clear what features are typical of an art form or genre, there are very limited options available for writing about and evaluating performance.

This study deals with visual performance and theatre as genres that, although significantly different, share some essential features. The aim of the study is to find a broadly applicable differentiating feature and to use it to describe visual performance so that it can be easily distinguished from other art forms and, on the basis of this feature, performance is easier to write about, whether in the context of art theory, history or art criticism.

In the Czech environment (and the same is true, my research suggests, for more or less all environments where English is not the native language), the term performance is used quite widely and often vaguely or inaccurately. The word *performance* in the English language means any act, action, endeavour or performance, in both artistic and non-artistic contexts.<sup>9</sup> Even in the Czech environment, we speak of the performance of a car or a manager in the sense of their effectiveness (although so far only in the field of advertising and management); in the broad sense of the word, a performance is also, for example, a lecture at a university or a demonstration. In addition to this, it is important to take into account that the word performance has a different meaning

in speech act theory and philosophy,<sup>10</sup> and yet another meaning in the context of art (whether visual art, music or theatre). This study focuses exclusively on the artistic environment. There, the term performance refers to various kinds of artistic activity that have live performance in common, whether it might be an author's live reading (which, for the purposes of this essay, can be called a 'literary performance'), a concert (by the same token, a 'musical performance'), theatre ('theatrical performance'), and performance in the context of the visual arts, i.e. visual performance. Music and theatre are always performative (action-based), while literature and visual arts are not, although they can become performative (action-based) under certain circumstances. The process of creating a poem or a painting, for example, the recitation of a text or an installation that invites direct interaction can be described as performative, but a text on paper or a finished painting is not a performance in itself (without the contribution of the human element). Visual performance has a specific position within the visual arts, and in the case of literature it is slam poetry.

In the Czech theatre circle, performance is mostly referred to as non-traditional theatre, 'alternative' or authorial theatre.<sup>11</sup> The word performance is a signal to the viewer to expect 'something different' than what can be – imperfectly – called a traditional theatre form or traditional theatre. However, to speak of alternative theatre (however many detractors this name might have) as performative is terminologically unfortunate, because, as shown above, all theatre is performative (theatre as a kind of performance cannot be 'non-performative'). What all kinds of performances (artistic and non-artistic) have in common is that they are live actions in space and time and are (therefore) performative.

How does theatre relate to other performative art forms? The direction of the theatre scholars' reflections on the nature of theatricality is derived from the affiliation of theatre to the performing arts. As an example, here is the formulation of theatricality by Peter

Pavlovsky in his book *Basic Concepts of Theatre*: “To theatricalise an event means to interpret it scenically, to create a situation using a stage and actors. The symptom of theatricalisation is the visual element of the scene and the creation of situations of speech.”<sup>12</sup> Although a classical music concert, for example, also has a stage, we would be hard-pressed to describe the players as actors or look for the spoken word. What about an author’s live reading? There is a scene, also a speech, but there is no actor, the author reads the text ‘in their own way,’ unprofessionally. If the author of the text is also an actor, their reading will have theatrical qualities or features (it will be theatrical). An actor differs from a mere agent (a person acting or doing) in their ability, their skill to act. Theatre can exist even if the stage is reduced or completely abolished, even if the creation of situations of speech is absent. But not without the actor (even if hidden behind the scenes). It seems, then, that key could be the actor and acting. Acting is essentially the creation (by actor and spectator, differentiated and accepted) of a fiction or illusion, in which the actor is playing ‘someone’ or ‘something.’ This creation of an illusion seems to be a possible leitmotif through which other differences could be seen, but which would not be sufficient in themselves to distinguish it from other art forms.

The following text will focus on the specific differences between visual performance and theatre, from the ideological to the practical and institutional, in order to verify the extent to which the creation of illusion applies. The intention is to highlight the differences between the two art forms and through them to articulate a hypothesis characterising visual performance. The latter would enable visual performance to be evaluated and would be useful for theorists, critics or art historians as well as for organisers of cultural events and artists themselves.

## **Performing Arts (rehearsal and repetition) and Visual Performance (de-skilling)**

Although it is not obvious at first glance, not all types of artistic performances belong to the performing arts. The performing arts, characterised by their emphasis on professionalism and repetitiveness,<sup>13</sup> include theatre, dance, opera and concerts, but not readings and visual performances. This is because these artistic expressions lack the professional craftsmanship that is typical of the performing arts (that is, professional training in singing, dancing, acting, etc.). Visual performance artists have even historically built on the accentuated (and deliberate) de-skilling (lack of skill) in the performing arts<sup>14</sup> this de-skilling is also linked to the democratisation of the arts.

Albeit a historical distinction, it still has some validity today, but it cannot be followed unquestioningly. It would mean that someone who is able to dance at a professional level, for example, cannot create visual performance; with the shift of visual performance from the margins to large institutions, this assumption has been challenged. However, it is still the case that visual performance should not present such a level of skill; in the case of delegated dance performance,<sup>15</sup> for example, de-skilling is artificially required of dancers.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, this does not mean that visual performance is bad theatre or dance performance – each genre has different goals and starting points.

Instead of the procedures typical of the performing arts, visual performance is based on different principles of creation (more on which in a moment), so it cannot be evaluated according to the same key as the performing arts. Historically, performance art is linked to the desire of the avant-garde movement of the sixties to eliminate art as product:<sup>17</sup> performance art is ephemeral, immaterial. While in the West it was a reaction to the commodification of art through the growing art market, in the East performance art was an

immaterial reaction to the limited freedom and possibilities of artistic expression. Performance art was defined at the time oppositionally as an immaterial, ephemeral and essentially unrepeatable act, whether critical of the system and contemporary morality, exempt from meditation, and playful. Performance art was meant to be close to everyday life, an unrepeatable one-off act distinct from repetitive theatrical, musical or dance performances.

Unlike in the performing arts (that is, theatre, among others), the visual performer does not rehearse their action in advance according to a given script. Specific approaches vary, but generally speaking, the visual performer has only a rough plan or intention for the event and experiences similar uncertainty as, for example, in everyday life before an important meeting. Many things can be decided on the spot by details that cannot be accounted for in advance (I aim to cut a rope: how long will it take me with my knife? Will it even work?). During the performance, there is a lot of room for 'fragmentary authenticity,' that is, the kind of fleeting authenticity arising in moments of surprise when something unexpected happens. In the case of performance, it is usually an ideologically pre-prepared action, not a staged or rehearsed plot that is meant to be repeated. The degree of readiness is variable for each performance. Individual details may be prepared, for example whether the performer is carried away by the branch he aims to sit on during the action, or the overall message is prepared and the individual details remain up to chance. Readiness ranges from almost no preparation to precise preparation. From the above, I conclude that the more prepared an artistic event is in the details and overall feel, the more it approaches performing arts. Applied to visual performance and theatre: the more prepared a performance is in its details and overall appearance, the closer it is to theatre.

The basic difference is the different type of education of actors and visual performers: the type of training fundamentally influences the artist's means of expression and their further direction. Actors learn to work with the voice (stage speech,

singing), the body (movement skills, dancing), and the text (interpretation of the text, creation of their own script and characters), that is to say, they shape their acting expression and study the history and theory of theatre. Visual performers are trained in drawing, video art, sound art, and the history and theory of visual arts. In the case of performers, formal training is not crucial; de-skilling is still a desirable discipline. A certain de-skilling is also typical for the poetics of amateur theatre or friendship bands (amateur, hobby level). However, with performance it is also a specific feature at the professional level. The situation is very different even after graduation: an actor tries (or is able) to get a job in the theatre. A visual performer cannot get any such comparable 'engagement.' Modes of creating and living are also different. Ideally, an actor spends most of his time rehearsing theatre pieces and acting in their reprises. A visual performer can potentially be employed as a teacher, and they think through their performances over time and realises them occasionally, usually on a one-off basis, again outside the rhythm of rehearsals, retakes, or the theatrical season of their fellow actors (whether functioning at the professional or amateur level). It is clear from the above outline that visual performers and actors come from different practical and institutional contexts that fundamentally shape her creative expression.

### Theatre, Acting and Illusionism

As already outlined in the previous section, based on the author's research, actors and acting are considered a basic premise of theatre. Of course, theatre has many other levels, but without the actor (whether acting on stage or hidden in the background) it could not be realised. Therefore, the following will focus on the differences between the actor and the visual performer, who is as indispensable to the realisation of performance (at least in a basic sense) as the actor is to the theatre. So who is this actor and how do they differ from the performer? Discussing the various levels of acting, Michael Kirby argues that the essence of



acting is in pretending, simulation, impersonation,<sup>18</sup> and that acting is present in even the smallest and simplest action that involves pretending.<sup>19</sup> What does this imply? By way of explanation, use will be made of the example of physical pain in theatre and performance, whereby specifically conceived body work – pain, liminal situations, etc. – is referred to as body art. However, there is no equation between visual performance and body art, body art is only one possible position of visual performance and vice versa. Extreme physical engagement is not a prerequisite for visual performance, but in the following paragraph it will serve as a suitable vehicle for my thoughts.

When a visual performer stabs themselves in the hand, it is a real fact and experience; when an actor stabs themselves, there is a shared expectation that it is ‘make-believe.’ There are two completely different constellations. Watching a strong physical real experience up close is mentally challenging; we get close to the real person, the real situation. The pain is real, and though planned, the visual performer only suspects how he will react to it, each time risking an uncertain outcome. For the onlooker, there is both the temptation and the fear to approach the performer voyeuristically, forgotten memories are made present, the time of performance can seem painfully endless; for the spectator it can also be a humanly liminal experience. Watching an actor, by contrast, is ‘safe’ because the actor moves within the convention of the ‘make-believe.’ The theatregoer “(...) sees the suffering of others and feels the pleasure of knowing that it is someone else who is suffering, and also that it is not true.”<sup>20</sup> The theatre spectator assumes that the pain seen in the theatre is an illusion and treats it accordingly. (The visual performer may be mentally prepared for the act in advance and most likely has set certain internal boundaries, but this does not guarantee that the action will actually unfold as expected, i.e. there is (due to the absence of rehearsal and repetition) indeed some real risk.)

The environments and objects that surround the actors in the theatre are also often illusory. The

stage is a place where one can be transported to another space and time, to another continent, to another century. The audience understands and accepts as a convention that what is on stage is fiction. Jan Císař, in his text on puppet theatre, describes the workings of theatrical fiction succinctly: “The greaser cannot sell, he must only pretend to sell. For him, the marketplace cannot be a space that is absolutely real; it must be a space in which he can perform – that is, a space for fiction, for transformed reality.”<sup>21</sup> In the same way, the objects that are used in the theatre can represent something quite different from what they really are. A table can become a cave, ordinary clothes can become a magical dress, etc.

Different conventions apply to visual performance: the space in which the performer moves is always the same place we see in front of us. There is one reality here and now, both spatial, temporal and action-oriented. Also, objects are in most cases used non-illusionally. (If they are used illusively, then this is a sign of theatricality.) In the case of performance, it is questionable whether to use the term ‘prop,’ which is closely associated with the theatrical environment. I lean more towards the neutral term ‘thing’ or ‘object,’ since prop implies illusiveness and theatricality.

However, the common feature of both genres is the use of specific clothing and accessories. In theatre, the term costume is used and, as with the word prop, I think that when talking about visual performance, a neutral term is more appropriate. However, the terms prop and costume are justified when dealing with a theatrical use of objects, whether in or out of the theatre. That is, the performer may use the garment in a theatrical or non-theatrical way. The non-theatrical use of clothing consists in the performer’s wearing of certain, even distinctive, clothes and remaining themselves (the distinctive clothes may be part of their personal style and worn on a regular, everyday basis), whereas in the theatrical use they ‘become someone else’ through their clothes and accessories.

Visual performance is usually only performed once. While theoretically repeatable,

this is not the primary intention of its creators.<sup>22</sup> There is usually a specific reason for reperformance, whether it is to re-enact an event by a well-known artist or to repeat one's own performance after many years. In contrast, a theatrical production is created to be repeated and its success is quantifiable by the number of repetitions. Even if a theatrical performance is performed only once, it is the result of many rehearsals and other preparations, unlike a performance. On the other hand, if the same performance is performed repeatedly, in my opinion it becomes (albeit unintentionally) theatrical.

Related to rehearsal and repetition is the question of improvisation. Catherine Wood argues that "there is a quality of unpredictability in the unfolding and outcome [in performance], and this distinguishes it from theatre, which is assumed to be the results of scripted repetition via rehearsal."<sup>23</sup> However, her claim cannot be applied to theatrical improvisation. So is improvisation the same as visual performance? Yes and no. In fact, a distinction must be made between improvisation in the general and in the theatrical sense. If the question is asked whether visual performance is improvisation, the answer is yes, but it is not theatrical improvisation. With improvisation<sup>24</sup> it is true that the more often one gets into improvised situations, the better one is able to handle them, in everyday life as well as in art. Thus, although it is without preparation, it is an act shaped by previous experience of improvisation; the more such experience one has, the better one is at improvising. In a theatrical context, actors learn to improvise and hone their ability as much as possible within the context of the theatrical routine. Such improvisation on stage is, after all, a discipline in its own right. Improvisation in the context of visual performance is more akin to everyday life, in the sense that the performer's action fulfils a certain idea or concept and does not rely on illusion or use the techniques inherent in theatre and theatrical improvisation. Theatrical improvisation:

(...) can be briefly and broadly characterised as a mode of acting characterised by a

varying degree of effort to limit the *a priori*, predetermined project, programme, and idea of the role: to reduce the scope of the predetermined text of the dramatic person, but equally to limit the *a priori* idea of the actor's character and their actions. (...) Acting based on improvisation always counts on the possibility of change, of the evolution of the conception and realisation of the role, it is open to chance, to immediate situational inspiration – from communication with partners, with the audience and with the atmosphere of the performance.<sup>25</sup>

Although the project, dramatic text, role and script are limited, they do not disappear. It's still about portraying a character, creating fictional stories and plots. Certainly theatrical improvisation can, at some points, become intertwined with visual performance provided theatrical consensus is greatly suppressed. During a visual performance, the actor does not represent a role, and so there is no need to limit the scope of the fixed text of the dramatic person or the character of the actor; the performer does not act or create illusory situations. In contrast, the visual performer acts and improvises in a way similar to everyday life.

Michael Kirby has identified five types of acting, ranging from 'non-acting' to 'complex acting.' Non-acting in his typology means that it is not about portraying roles. In the second level, called "symbolic acting," the audience recognises a character in the stage action even if the actor/performer acts as if they were not a character.<sup>26</sup> If we apply these categories to a visual performance, then in most cases it falls into non-acting, symbolic acting is the case, for example, with Jiří Surůvka, who takes on the identity of the 'Anti-Batman' during his performances, or with Darina Alster, who personifies one of the female archetypes or deities. For Kirby, the key to differentiating between the different types of acting is the degree of pretence that appears in the action.

In relation to performance art, Kirby mentions uncoded representation or symbolisation.<sup>27</sup> This uncoded representation takes the form of self-stylisation, which has become the norm in recent years thanks to social media. However, it was used by visual performers long before the mass spread of the internet. Users of social media (including fictional ones) can construct the reception of their own person (through photos, videos, and textual outputs) as they see fit. The same principle has been and is used by visual performers, but in an artistic context. For visual performers, it is not about pretending or creating illusory identities, but rather about consciously accentuating certain elements or possibilities (aspects) of the self, whether this relates to appearance and physicality, social identity or political self.

The term 'self-stylisation' is sometimes used in the theatrical context to refer to self-staging.<sup>28</sup> Self-staging implies the idea of a stage and 'performing for someone,' which is related to the fact that theatre is one of the performing arts, unlike visual performance. For theatre, the person of the spectator is very important, as well as the idea of something happening on stage especially for them.

In her work on acting, Marie Adamová has expressed the relationship between the performer's self-esteem and the actor's performance as follows:

With self-training, the potential viewer is never sure whether it is 'make-believe' or 'for real' (for example in art performances) ... What distinguishes the activity of the performer and self-stager from the actor and his creation is, in the case of the actor, not only the necessity of collaboration with other components of the dramatic work (especially the constitutive collaboration with the spectator component), but also the intention (conscious and unconscious feedback communication with the spectator).<sup>29</sup>

## Performance, Agency, and Individualism

As a means of expression, the visual performers can be seen to have a mode of doing that has much in common with the everyday. It is aptly described by Erika Ficher-Lichte:

When Marina Abramović crushed the glass in her hand and started bleeding, it meant that the glass was crushed and then bled. Her actions shaped the reality of the broken glass and the bleeding hand. In this respect, there was no difference between art and reality in the performance. All that was done and shown meant exactly what was done and shown, and thus created a corresponding reality.<sup>30</sup>

It is true that doing means exactly what has been done, but not only that. The performer's action is at the same time symbolic and becomes, whether intentionally or unintentionally, also a sign, a metaphor, or, in the words of Július Gajdoš, an image.<sup>31</sup>

Doing is not feigned or illusory, a jar is a jar, bleeding is bleeding. The fact that doing is at the same time not utilitarian, that is to say, it has no practical meaning, removes it from the everyday and moves it into the realm of art. An ordinary breakfast or other action is therefore at first sight no different from an artistic one. One could say that performance is in a sense the metaphorical equivalent of Duchamp's ready-mades. In this case, an act is art if it is marked as art and accepted as art by the art world. It can even be argued that visual performance is more about not/doing than doing, because doing is the end and not the means. Performance is focused on process, whether external or internal.

Doing is both symbol (or ritualistic, as will be shown later) and sign-based, although exactly what it symbolises we often do not know. The specific meanings are assigned by the viewer/



observer based on their preunderstanding and current internal setting. It can be said, then, that visual performance is an art form that requires the inwardly active collaboration of the observer in order to create meanings.<sup>32</sup> The performer's specific position, compared to acting, is also due to the fact that the performer freely jumps from the position of the subject to the position of the object, from the signified becoming the signifier and back again. In doing so, they also become a sign of something other than themselves, although they do not create an acting character (or a fictional figure of himself) by their actions.

What they create is the identity of the *hic et nunc* doer, and onto this identity are projected meanings largely dependent on the imaginative capacity of the viewer. Anything the visual performer does, anything they wear, any object they work with, etc., can be considered as a sign or symbol. This places great demands on the recipient; the codes that the visual performance uses (however conventionalised over time) require revision at every single action.

A tendency towards self-objectification can be identified in visual performance. The performer perceives and treats themselves and their body as a means or an art object, their personality and body are public and personal at the same time. They are a mediator and a carrier of meanings. It can be argued that they sometimes work with their body in a way similar to a painter with paint or a sculptor with matter; they explore it, manipulate it, paint it, cover/uncover it, freeze it, cut it, isolate it and treat it as if it were an object. Such behaviour involves distance and proximity, subjectivity and objecthood at the same time. The above, however, in my opinion, does not result in the death of the subject, as Féral claims,<sup>33</sup> but object and subject coexist.

When confronting doing with theatrical terminology, then doing is not dramatic. Departing from the simple definition of dramatic action as the action of a person acting on another person such that "each action is caused by a previous one and is usually done so in order to cause a subsequent action,"<sup>34</sup> it follows that causality

underlies dramatic action. Doing, on the other hand, is non-causal, sometimes directly beyond causation. Thus, however, a storyline develops, and a situation arises: it is static rather than dramatic, approximating a painting.

The performer reveals and isolates an aspect of their personality through action and assumes the identity of the performer in the here and now. It is similar to a spectator adopting the identity of a fan during a football match. However, the performer's action is not utilitarian, unlike that of a football fan. Theatre can be said to mimic human agency,<sup>35</sup> whereas visual performance is a form of human agency set in an artistic context.

## Spectator, Documentation, and Individualism

Without the spectator, the theatre would not be itself, they are paramount to its existence. The theatre thinks about the spectator, works with how the performance will affect the spectator, has the intention to move the spectator in a specific way, to evoke certain emotions, etc. Theatre needs an observer, it needs to be played for someone. Vít Neznal defines the relationship between theatre and the spectator as follows: "Other media (film, fine arts, music, literature, etc.) may lack their purpose without a spectator, but they are not conditioned by them in the sense of not being able to come into existence without them."<sup>36</sup>

The presence of the spectator is not decisive for the visual performance, although the visual performer is aware of their existence, they do not need the spectator's presence during the action. Martin Zet has even created a body of work called *Performances for Myself*,<sup>37</sup> i.e. performances that have taken place without spectators and now exist only in the form of photographic documentation. František Kowolowski was resolute on the issue: "The (visual) performer does not need a spectator."<sup>38</sup> The theatre is directly dependent on the spectator's presence at the time of the

performance,<sup>39</sup> which is also evidenced by the large number of theatrical texts dealing with the issue of the spectator and their perception. It can be said that, unlike visual performance, theatre seeks a predetermined emotional effect on the spectator; purposefully evoked and regulated emotions are part of the directorial and dramaturgical intention.

If the space allows it, the viewer follows a similar zoning during the visual performance as a visitor in the gallery. It is possible to walk freely around the performer, to stop and stay longer or to take a cursory look and move on, to look closely, from afar, to leave, to return.<sup>40</sup> There is a link to conceptual art, the emphasis is on the visual. One of the forms of performance is, for example, self-installation, i.e. placing one's own body and mind in a space, in (un)usual conditions and environment, as if it were an art object.

At the same time, the spectators (who are more like onlookers) can complete the visual performance by their behaviour and their reactions. In many ways it is not quite clear what is part of the performance and what is not, often it is not fixed when and how the action ends, what the 'rules' are, when the audience can participate and when not.<sup>41</sup> A visual performance does not usually have a clearly distinguished beginning (it can be loosely intertwined with everyday life) or end, nor does it have a fixed length. The culminating moment of an action can occur at any time, and there may be several or no climaxes. The viewer is therefore forced to search for meaning and internal relationships constantly. Visual performances are often not meant to be watched continuously, the viewer is expected to see only a part. Each visual performance is of course specific, what is important is that through this disturbance, life breaks into art and vice versa, whether through chance, personal relationships, or simply through an unexpected, unplanned progression; all of this generates a fragmented authenticity. Documentation and the subsequent artistic work with it therefore plays a key role. The different work with the documentation is a historically and functionally conditioned difference. The visual performance continues to work with

photo and video documentation artistically, the documentation actually re-creates<sup>42</sup> (or co-creates) the performance, the author has the possibility to present what he wants to be perceived and preserved, through the use of editing and other post-production means. At a basic level, the documentation is proof that the performance has actually taken place. Documentation is therefore not a secondary outcome of the artistic act, but constitutes the visual performance itself and determines its further reception.<sup>43</sup> It is exhibited in galleries in the same way as other art objects, whether tangible or intangible. This is, in my opinion, one of the very essential and tangible differences. Photographs taken during a theatre event can also be exhibited, usually as a (promo) presentation of the theatre or as part of the photographer's portfolio. But not as an autonomous work of art by the actor.<sup>44</sup> Documentation of visual performances, however, works in this way. It is not a mere by-product of the event; on the contrary, it forms an integral part of the visual performer's artistic work.

The question arises as to the relationship between the author of the documentation and the visual performer.<sup>45</sup> In my opinion, the visual performer is the author of the idea or concept and from the available documentation they choose such photographs (and such video footage) that best describe their concept. (The author of the photography or video is not the author of the visual performance, they only document it – unless the documentation is made by the author of the performance.)<sup>46</sup> The style of documentation can be influenced by the artist's choice of photographer: it is a matter of personal preference whether they prefer 'documentary,' slightly blurred photos or more stylisation. An important feature of visual performance, also mirrored in the question of documentation, is individualism. The visual performer represents several functions that in the theatre would be distributed among a group of collaborators (costume designer, playwright, dramaturg, director, set designer, actor), between whom there is an intense exchange of ideas and a broad relationality. Theatre is a collective,

collaborative work and the final form is always a compromise or consensus. In the case of visual performance, the most common (and also historically embedded) form is the single performer, which is practical because of the fragmented preparedness of the event. There are, of course, also author duos, whether permanent or temporary, and free performance collectives. Group performances are of two kinds: The first are visual performances in which a large number of artists perform simultaneously, but who operate in a similar mode to individual performers. They are still individual independent artists, who in this case work alongside each other, respond to each other, etc., without the dramaturgy one would find in theatre. Of course, the approaches of individual performance groups, as well as individual artists, are various, and there may be a pre-determined script, with such a performance approaching theatre. The second type is delegated group performance,<sup>47</sup> in which 'ordinary' people or artists fulfil the intention of another artist. In this form of performance, the specific approach is very important; the 'artist-author of the performance' can act either as a coordinator who only minimally directs what happens, or as a director who gives precise instructions on what the performers should do. Through the lens of this study, the currently popular delegated group performance is a borderline genre between visual performance and theatre.

### **Fragmentary Authenticity, the Everyday, and the Illusion of Authenticity**

The leitmotif of illusion and illusiveness is directly related to the theme of authenticity, in the sense of genuineness (one can also say non-pretence). In texts about visual performance and theatre from the perspective of visual art, theatre is often described as artificial and fake in contrast to real or true, authentic visual performance.<sup>48</sup> In my opinion, this received notion is inaccurate, because there is also authenticity within theatre,

namely the authenticity of acting, i.e. authenticity within a given fictional world. (As with theatrical improvisation, which is also a theatrical fictional world.) Just as with improvisation, then, it is possible to speak of two kinds of authenticity: the first relates to the 'everyday self' and the second to the 'fictional self.'

'Everyday' authenticity is a socially constructed ideal state,<sup>49</sup> which is not easy to achieve (for the sake of this essay, we will assume that it can be) and even harder to maintain. Authentically, one reacts to unexpected events such as surprise, sudden joy, shock, etc.<sup>50</sup> These states usually last only for a limited time, which is why I think of authenticity as fragmented, fragmentary, partial. And it is precisely such states of fragmentary authenticity that happen during a visual performance that caters to them by being prepared only to a certain extent in the details and in the whole, and moreover by not using acting. In this sense, then, authenticity, or more precisely authentic emotional response or authentic action, is something extra, something that may or may not appear. Authentic is what was not prepared for, what was not counted on and what more or less threw the performer off guard (for example, when the visual performance *The Artist is Present* (MoMA, 2010) was unexpectedly attended by Abramović's former artistic and life partner Ulay and the meeting years later was very emotional for both of them).<sup>51</sup>

Acting, on the other hand, creates the illusion of 'everyday' authenticity, and the more perfect the illusion, the better their acting skills, or rather the whole performance, is evaluated. Moments of fragmented 'everyday' authenticity can occur in the theatre, but they are much less frequent due to actor training, rehearsal, and repetition. In the case of theatrical improvisation, unexpected situations are a fictional format (the actor learns to create and respond to such situations according to a certain key), so it is also authenticity within a fictional world.

It can be said, then, that within acting it is possible (and desirable) to achieve authenticity

within a given fictional world, and that this authenticity is also an illusion of 'everyday authenticity.' The visual performer confronts us with a real (actual) action in which fragments of this 'everyday authenticity' appear. The visual performance is anchored in an action that is non-illusory and that usually has a symbolic, committed, ritual or spiritual overlap within the performance, in which the visual performer occupies the position of subject and object at the same time.

### Performance and Ritualism

Finally, the aspect of visual performance in which the rational and conscious side of the personality is suppressed will be discussed, namely ritual. Even though the study might be concluded at this point, it would be incomplete should this question be omitted. The element of ritual is present in every performance, whether non-artistic or artistic. The ritual horizon is therefore present in both theatre and visual performance. The following reflection will focus purely on visual performance, as this aspect tends to be accentuated (both positively and negatively) in theory and practice.

First, let me explain how ritual is conceived of here. The origin of ritual is connected to the field of magic and religion, but metaphorically<sup>52</sup> one can also describe as (profane) ritual the morning brushing of teeth.<sup>53</sup> In general, it is an act or set of acts whose psychic-sacral power increases with the number of repetitions. At the same time, it is an act which has in it a prefiguration of the same or similar acts of an earlier one, whether such acts were performed by the same or by a different person or group of persons at a different place and time. Richard Schechner argues that all performances are essentially a repetition of previous performances (the theory of restored behaviour).<sup>54</sup> Whatever it is, it is very likely that a similar action has already taken place at some point in the past, so all performances are considered to have a ritual aspect, whether this aspect is reflected or not. The aesthetic dimension of ritual is

secondary to its meaning, but it plays an important role in terms of effectiveness and fixation. Ritual is a way of communicating and shaping the external world; the performer experiences continuity and coherence with the environment while at the same time participating in the creation of this coherence through ritual. In an extended sense, in this way they participate in the shaping of their life, the world in which they live. Such ritualistic creation of the world, and thus self-creation, is the link between the world of magic and the world of art.

Ritual is a symbolic act, objects have the function of a sign, they are used metaphorically and analogically. As Pavlovsky notes,<sup>55</sup> the time of ritual is relative, it can slow down and speed up again in the course of a single action in relation to what is happening. Thomas Hylland Eriksen called a similar phenomenon of distorted time 'slow time.'<sup>56</sup> This is, according to him, 'calm, linear, cumulative, organic'<sup>57</sup> and is a space not only for relaxation but also for self-reflection and possible self-transcendence and transgression.<sup>58</sup> Visual performance can be thought of as a non-utilitarian, non-efficiency-oriented action that evokes in the audience a sense of this slowed-down, 'stretched' time. In the first phase, boredom, nervousness, or the need to pull out the mobile phone, will set in. For the viewer and the artist, there is a real opportunity to step outside the everyday self, which is what the inefficiency of action and the subjective slowing down of time serves to achieve.

According to anthropologists Caroline Humprey and James Lidlow, ritualism consists in a conscious change in the direction of action "from the utilitarian to the meaningless."<sup>59</sup> In visual performance, as in ritual, the achievement of a particular outcome recedes into the background; what matters is pure doing, pure activity. Hanna Hesemans, in her study *Why We Should Not Try to Understand Performance Art*, applies this understanding of ritual from Fritz Staal<sup>60</sup> to visual performance, the meaning of which, she argues, coincides with the meaning or non-sense of ritual, whose function is to transform the profane into the sacred. Visual performance in her conception

is not about meaning, but about the emotional effect it produces in us.<sup>61</sup> Unlike theatre, however, this effect is not 'calculated' and is hardly, if ever, repeatable.

As diverse as the manifestations of visual performance are, they can be perceived with a bit of exaggeration as an eclectic form of ritual, whether it is an accented ritualism or one more hidden in the civility of the performance. In this aspect, visual performance resembles theatre and dance. It depends on the intention of the artist and also on the internal setting of the spectator whether they can discern the ritual dimension in the performance.

## Conclusion

This study has pointed out the differences between visual performance and theatre, with the starting point consisting in the comparison between actor and visual performer. The author has found that defining the two genres is as difficult as finding the differences between them. Several theatre scholars have attempted to do so just marginally, but with only minimal knowledge of visual performance; the author is assuming the principle that would allow visual performance and theatre to be easily distinguished in practice.

Incorporating historical and institutional differences, the author concludes that the key difference that can be easily applied *in situ* is illusiveness. According to Michael Kirby's theory, pretence is a fundamental prerequisite for acting – and acting or playing is considered as a fundamental feature of theatre, something that distinguishes it from other artistic performances. Illusion is therefore typical of theatre, and different levels of illusion can be identified, each of which also functions as a scale. In my opinion, there is a direct proportionality here: that the more illusion, the more the performance approaches theatre.

An illusion can be: 1) an illusion of identity, that is, the artist pretends to be someone or something other (a person, an object, a natural

element, etc.) than what he or she really is, 2) an illusion of emotion (pretending to have feelings, emotions, emotional experience), 3) an illusion of an object, e.g. a piece of wood becomes a table or a princess, and 4) an illusion of the environment, where an outstretched blanket in an interior becomes a beach, etc. In the case of clothing and objects, it is important to distinguish whether the artist wears a costume and pretends to be someone else, or whether they retain their own identity despite the eccentric clothing (which may also be their everyday 'civilian clothes').

Illusiveness is fundamentally linked to rehearsal and repetition. Again, the more the action is prepared (whether in detail or in the overall feel), the more it approaches theatre. Every rehearsal, which is intended to fix the artistic form towards repetitiveness, refers to the performing arts, and therefore to theatre.

In addition to rehearsal and repetition, the performing arts are characterised by professionalism, whereas visual performance by de-skilling. The performing arts are built on the training of the artists in the field; for visual performance, the untrainedness of the artists in the performing arts is historically important and typical. Actors undergo specific training that gives them the ability to act, both vocally and in movement. Visual performers may have art or any other training, but it is not necessary for the realisation of a visual performance. For visual performance, any acting skills are even a hindrance, because the goal is not to act, but to *do*.

It can be said that visual performance is a form of human action in an artistic context, while theatre in general imitates human action (or animal, elemental, etc.). Like human action, performance is characterised by a so-called fragmentary authenticity, which occurs when a person acts without a prior script, outside of routine, and is confronted with unexpected circumstances or events. Fragmentary authenticity comes from a degree of non/preparedness of the action, again in direct proportion. Theatrical improvisation, unlike improvisation in everyday



life, is a theatrical form. In everyday life, fragmentary authenticity occurs to a much greater extent than in theatre, where it is eliminated through rehearsal and repetition. On the one hand, theatrical improvisation involves routine, rehearsal and repetition, so 'unexpected' events are more or less expected (they are part of the fictional world), but on the other hand, the truly unexpected can also occur – and much more so than in a perfectly rehearsed production.

Another difference between the two genres is the role and position of the viewer. Theatre could not exist without the spectator: the target audience is part of the directorial and dramaturgical plan and is thoroughly thought out in advance. In the case of visual performance, the spectator is not essentially necessary, as the visual performer works artistically with the documentation, which is an integral part of the visual performance and even co-creates it in a certain way. As an autonomous work of art, the visual performance can then be presented in a gallery environment through photo or video documentation selected by the artist.

The fact that visual performance is a non-illusory act with limited preparation makes it much more complicated to perform with multiple people. A performer usually works as an individual artist, whereas theatre is most often a collective consensus. The group-delegated performance, recently very popular, is a liminal unit between visual performance and theatre, where the degree to which the author/performer intervenes in the course of the action in a directorial way depends, among other things, on the degree to which the action is rehearsed. Visual performance is not meant to be watched continuously; the spectator is free to come and go. The complex work is communicated through documentation.

In the author's opinion, all performances, whether non-artistic or artistic, have a ritualistic aspect. Ritual, as well as visual performance, can be characterised as a non-utilitarian, even non-intentional action that has an inner meaning in the transformation of the performers and the spectators. Related to this is the phenomenon of

slow, distorted time, which allows for an immersion into the self and a stepping-out of the everyday. As diverse as the manifestations of visual performance might be, it is possible to perceive them, with slight exaggeration, as an eclectic form of ritual, whether the ritualism is accentuated or hidden in the civility of the performance.

It is quite difficult to distinguish visual performance from theatre because the differences described (in approach, preparation, training, etc.) are often not visible at first sight. As important as it is for a theoretical grasp of the issue to keep in mind all the aspects addressed in this study, in my opinion, it is sufficient to stick to illusiveness for a quick distinction. Indeed, the degree of illusiveness can be identified at a glance, just as one can distinguish acting (associated with trained vocal or bodily expression) from doing that approaches the mode of everyday life. Context also plays a role in the spectator's reception: while the theatre spectator assumes that what they see in the theatre is an illusion (for example, that the blood on stage is not real), the visual performance spectator expects that what they see is real.

In the light of what has been said, I propose to characterise and assess visual performance as an action in an artistic context, as a non-utilitarian and non-illusory action. At the same time, the institutional and historical context, especially the context of conceptual art, must be taken into account. Thus, it is possible to say that visual performance is a non-illusory and non-utilitarian (human) action realised in the context of conceptual art.

It is clear that both art forms come from different contexts, ideological, practical, historical, and institutional, and both have their own irreplaceable place in the art world. Theatre allows audiences to be transported into 'other worlds,' to be carried away by familiar and unfamiliar stories, by the refined vocal and physical expression of actors, and often by exquisite sets, lights or costumes. Theatre is a great colossus with a huge history and nuances of expression, from opera, ballet, puppetry, drama to less traditional

‘alternative’ theatre, which in some ways can be intertwined with visual performance. (Immersive theatre, for example, uses elements of visual performance and installation). Performance, which has long been a fringe genre, offers a more conceptual experience, it is more unpredictable and difficult to read. Whether it is contemplative, civil, extravagant or ritualistic, it applies to a greater extent the fragmented authenticity that is typical of everyday life.

What has been written about the differences between the two art forms in this study is not universally valid. I conceive of visual performance and theatre as open fields, not fixed definitions. It is possible to speak of visual performance elements in theatre and theatrical elements in visual performance: that is illusionism is proposed by way of application as a scale. Naturally, there are projects that oscillate somewhere on the edge (for example, the aforementioned group delegated performance), genre boundaries are always blurred, and this is what allows for further artistic development. On the other hand, the development is also supported by the effort to name the phenomena, to grasp them. It is the author’s belief that the present study will open a much needed discussion and, most importantly, stimulate further research.

within theatre studies and whose authors focus on questions of visual performance only generally. The author critically analyses the comparisons available and complements these by her own theoretical and empirical research. The author concludes that there are major differences between visual performance and theatre, brought together under the concept of illusiveness, whose application is proposed in the form of a graded scale. This concept is thoroughly explained and presented in specific contexts and expressions. The author also formulates a general characteristic of visual performance as a genre. The study opens up a new field of potential research and broadens the possibilities of writing about visual performance and evaluating the genre on the basis of what is unique to it.

## Visual Performance and Theatre

The study “Visual Performance and Theatre,” explores the visible signs that set the two artistic genres apart. The work’s motivation is to enrich our theoretical conception of visual performance and contribute to an interdisciplinary understanding and cooperation of theorists and practitioners alike. The author starts by pointing out that there is no reliable referential definition of either genre available – one that could work as a guideline for comparison – and pinpoints the general difficulties in the use of the word ‘performance.’ Then she summarises the partial conclusions brought by prominent studies; works whose domain lies

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Those interested in the full bibliography on which I have based my conclusions and which there is no space to publish here shall be referred to my dissertation: Jana Orlová, *Visual performance and theatre* (PhD diss, Prague: Academy of Fine Arts, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> In about five years, there were about thirty of them. I owe the overarching methodological support from the side of art theory and history mainly to the supervisor of my dissertation (this study is a summary of my discoveries therein) Pavlína Morganová and also to Tomáš Pospiszyl.

<sup>3</sup> Claire Bishop, “Black Box, White Cube, Gray Zone: Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 62, no. 2 (2018): 24.

<sup>4</sup> In the Czech context, ‘going to the theatre’ means going to watch drama, which is perceived as the most typical form of theatre. See e.g., Vít Neznal in his discussion of alternative theatre “Going from somewhere to somewhere,” <https://www.divadelnioviny.cz/jit-odnekud-nekam#comment-195779> (cited 30 July 2019). “Drama can be briefly characterised as theatre of a predominantly dramatic type, whose acting component is created solely by the psychosomatic tonality of the person and in which the acoustic components of the actor’s performance are clearly dominated by the spoken word.” Jaroslav Etlík, “Drama,” *Divadelní revue* 1 (2001): 61. The word drama is also used in a figurative sense: “[In] this sense, drama refers to a theatre company or building in which drama performances are predominantly (or predominantly dominate) performed.” *Ibidem*, 62.

<sup>5</sup> Amy Dempsey, *Art styles, schools and movements* (Prague: Slovart, 2002), 222.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>7</sup> RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> Donatien Grau, “Lady Gaga,” accessed March 1, 2021, <https://flash---art.com/article/lady-gaga/#>.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Schechner, one of the founders of performance studies (which originated in the 1970s in New York), defines performance as an open structure based on an event, action or activity. See Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies* (London: Routledge, 2002), 41. In performance studies, performance becomes a metaphor for the action structure of the world: the field of performance studies interprets phenomena across different disciplines through their action, performative dimension. (This is also the concept of the anthology *Terrains of Performance*, in which one can find, among others, a text on the performativity of politics or a text entitled *Performativity as a Tool for the Study of the Middle Ages*. See Alice Koubová, Eliška Kubartová, eds., *Terrains of performance* (Prague: AMU Publishing House, 2021).

<sup>10</sup> For the Czech context, see Alice Koubová, *Thinking from the second place: on the question of performative philosophy* (Prague: Academy of Fine Arts, 2020). On performative and performativity in analytical philosophy, see also Aleksandra Jovičević, Ana Vujanović, *Introduction to performative studies* (Bratislava: Theatre Institute, 2012), 75-88.

<sup>11</sup> On the issue of the concept of performance (art) and the use of the word performance in the Czech theatre environment, see Orlová, *Performance and Theatre*, 18-24. Czech theatre studies, as far as performance art is concerned, is based on German theatre studies, especially on the texts of Erika Fischer-Lichte, who follows the ideas of Max Herrmann. Fischer-Lichte refers to his concept of theatre studies focusing not on the literary text but on performance itself, which according to Herrmann is the basis of theatre. Erika Fischer-Lichte, Minou Arjomand, and Ramona Mosse, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies* (London & New York: Routledge, 2014), 12. Another source for the concept of performance art in Czech theatre studies is the work of Jana Pilátová, focusing on Jerzy Grotowski’s figure and ritualism in theatre. Pilátová uses the concept of performance in a somewhat simplistic and incomplete way, for example, she presents the term ‘performatives,’ used by Tomasz Kubikowski, as a field constitutive. Jana Pilátová, *Grotowski’s nest: on the threshold of theatre anthropology* (Prague: Institute of Art – Theatre Institute, 2009), 504. Orlová, *Performance and theatre*, 17-18.

<sup>12</sup> Petr Pavlovský, *Basic theatre concepts: Theatrical dictionary* (Prague: Libri, National Theatre, 2004), 431.

<sup>13</sup> See for example Baz Kershaw, Helen Nicholson, *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 12.

<sup>14</sup> Claire Bishop briefly mentions deskilling as a difference between visual performance and performing arts. See Bishop, “Black Box,” 24, or Claire Bishop, “Performance Art vs. Dance: Professionalism, De-Skilling, and Linguistic Virtuosity,” in Cosmin Costinas, and Ana Janevski, eds., *Is the Living Body the Last Thing Left Alive? The New Performance Turn, Its Histories and Its Institution* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 40.

<sup>15</sup> Claire Bishop, *Delegated Performance: Outsourcing Authenticity*, CUNY Academic Works 2012, accessed Mar. 31, 2021, [https://monoskop.org/images/f/f3/Bishop\\_Claire\\_2012\\_Delegated\\_Performance\\_Outsourcing\\_Authenticity.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/f/f3/Bishop_Claire_2012_Delegated_Performance_Outsourcing_Authenticity.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Bishop, “Performance Art vs. Dance,” 41.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: the Dematerialisation of the Art Object From 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

<sup>18</sup> Michael Kirby, “On Acting and Non-acting,” in Gregory Battcock, Robert Nickas, eds., *The Art of performance. A Critical Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984), 56. Accessed January 18, 2020, [https://monoskop.org/File:Battcock\\_Nickas\\_eds\\_The\\_Art\\_of\\_Performance\\_A\\_Critical\\_Anthology\\_1984.pdf](https://monoskop.org/File:Battcock_Nickas_eds_The_Art_of_Performance_A_Critical_Anthology_1984.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, 59.

- <sup>20</sup> Anne Ubersfeld, "The Pleasure of the Spectator," in *Performance: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies* Vol. 2., edited by Philip Auslander (London: Routledge, 2003), 245.
- <sup>21</sup> Jan Císař, *Theory of puppet acting* (Prague: SPN, 1985), 14.
- <sup>22</sup> The genre of group delegated performance, which is on the borderline between visual performance and theatre/dance, is often intended to be performed repeatedly. For example, the performance of Alexandra Pirici or Anne Imhof.
- <sup>23</sup> See <http://intermsofperformance.site/keywords/live/catherine-wood> (accessed January 17, 2020).
- <sup>24</sup> I define improvisation as "a manifestation, a performance, especially artistic, created without preparation, on the spur of the moment, a creation prepared hastily without proper means." See Jiří Kraus et al., *New academic dictionary of foreign words* (Prague: Academia, 2005), 341.
- <sup>25</sup> Jan Roubal, Josef Kovalčuk, and Jan Motal, eds., *Theatre as an unthrown ladder: texts on original, alternative and studio theatre* (Brno: Janáček Academy of Performing Arts, 2015), 73.
- <sup>26</sup> Battcock, Nicas, *The Art of performance*, 57-61.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>28</sup> For example, Miroslav Vojtěchovský, Jaroslav Vostrý, *Image and story: scenicity in visual and dramatic art* (Prague: KANT for AMU, 2008), 5-18.
- <sup>29</sup> Marie Adamová, *Terra histrionis: Exploring the art of acting* (MA thesis, Prague: AMU, 2016), 20. The so-called feedback loop means a two-way communication between actor and spectator.
- <sup>30</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Aesthetics of performativity* (Mníšek pod Brdy: Na konári, 2011), 245.
- <sup>31</sup> Július Gajdoš, *From staging to installation, from acting to performance* (Prague: KANT, 2010), 89.
- <sup>32</sup> The viewer completes the work in his or her mind, which is typical of conceptual art and has its equivalent in literary theory in the school of reception aesthetics that emerged in the sixties in West Germany, in parallel with the emergence of the performance art genre. According to the founder of reception aesthetics, Wolfgang Iser, the concept of the reader is in many ways identical to the position of the recipient of performance art. It is up to the reader to 'complete' the work, to 'determine' the meaning, while the meaning is always subjective, dependent on the reader's imagination and previous recipient experiences. The work does not have only one 'correct' and rigidly fixed meaning. Wolfgang Iser, *The Theory of Literature. Current Perspective* (Prague: AV ČR, 2004).
- <sup>33</sup> Josette Féral, "Performance and Theatricality: the Subject Demystified," in *Performance: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies* Vol. 2, edited by Philip Auslander (London: Routledge 2003), 209.
- <sup>34</sup> Jan Císař. *A man in a situation* (Prague: ISV, 2000) 30.
- <sup>35</sup> Hans Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic theatre* (Bratislava: the Theatre Institute, 2007), 40.
- <sup>36</sup> Vít Neznal, *What is theatre? The "media" tradition of Czech theatre theory in the context of the art-reality dichotomy* (PhD diss., Prague: DAMU, 2017) 50.
- <sup>37</sup> Martin Zet, *Performance for myself* (Brno: ESKORT Gallery, 2006).
- <sup>38</sup> František Kowolowski, "Elementarist performance art in contemporary social conditions," in *Action and reaction: performative aspects in contemporary art and art education*, edited by Vladimír Havlík (Olomouc: Palacký University, 2015) 163.
- <sup>39</sup> See: "(...) a theatrical act cannot come into being without an audience," and "a performance (art) does not need an audience to take place." Neznal, *What is theatre?*, 49, 69.
- <sup>40</sup> Immersive theatre takes a similar approach, exemplifying the use of elements of performance and art installation within theatre.
- <sup>41</sup> It is different in Carol Martin's Theatre of the Real. Here, the emphasis is on the spectator, who is confronted with an ethical dilemma from the position of a witness, but the theatrical framing and illusionism is maintained. See Suzanne Little, "The Witness Turn in the Performance of Violence, Trauma, and the Real," in Emer O'Toole, Andrea Pelegri Kristić, and Stuart Young, eds., *Ethical Exchanges in Translation, Adaptation and Dramaturgy* (Leiden – Boston: Brill – Rodopi, 2017), 43-62. Accessed January 17, 2020, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004346376\\_004](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004346376_004).
- <sup>42</sup> "The act of documenting an event as a performance is what constitutes it as such." Philip Auslander, *The Performativity of Performance Documentation* 5. Accessed June 10, 2022, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237818132\\_The\\_Performativity\\_of\\_Performance\\_Documentation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237818132_The_Performativity_of_Performance_Documentation).
- <sup>43</sup> Jana Písařiková deals in detail with the topic of performance documentation. *Archives and documentation of performance art: searching for a path between history and myth* (PhD diss., Brno: FaVUVUT 2016).
- <sup>44</sup> In the case of video documentation, comparisons can be made with the theatre's internal documentary recordings, television recordings of theatre performances and, last but not least, with streaming. In the case of recordings and streams, which are intended for the public, it is a specific film genre that rewrites the language of theatre into that of film. It is governed by its own specific laws and challenges (for example, not every production is technically or artistically suitable for such a treatment, care is taken not to shift the meaning, not to make the theatrical characterisation appear out of place on the screen, etc. See Pavla

Bergmannová, "Theatre Online! Possible Ways of Theatre to the Audience in the Age of Covid," in Monika Horsáková, Irena Kocí, eds., *Transformations of dramaturgy 5* (Opava: Silesian University in Opava, 2021), 24-31.

<sup>45</sup> On this topic, see for example Jan Krtička, Jan Prošek, and Hanna Buddeus, eds, *Documentation of art* (Ústí nad Labem: Faculty of Art and Design, Jan Evangelista Purkyně University, 2013); Jan Mlčoch, "What is an original in 20th century Czech photography? The answer: there is a lot of it, but..." in František Zachoval, ed., *Original? The art of imitating art* (Hradec Králové: Gallery of Modern Art, 2021), 215-221; Amelia Jones, "Presence in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," *Art Journal* vol. 56, no. 4 (1997) accessed May 12, 2020 or Hanna Buddeus, *Representation without reproduction? Photography and performance in Czech art of the 1970s* (Prague: UMPRUM, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> See Jana Orlová, "How (not) to exhibit performance art," accessed March 23, 2022, <https://artalk.cz/2022/03/23/jak-nevystavovat-performance-art/>.

<sup>47</sup> A solo performance may also be delegated. In this case, the action is performed by someone other than the author of the concept, and the author of the concept has asked the person to perform the action. Delegated can also be a reperformance (Marina Abramović, for example, likes to delegate her older performances).

<sup>48</sup> The myth-making discourse of authenticity across the history of performance (art) is explored in detail by Jessica Chalmers in a case study of the transformations of Marina Abramović's approaches. See Jessica Chalmers, "Marina Abramović and the Reperformance of Authenticity," accessed June 10, 2022, [https://www.academia.edu/4313053/On\\_Marina\\_Abramovic\\_and\\_the\\_Reperformance\\_of\\_Authenticity](https://www.academia.edu/4313053/On_Marina_Abramovic_and_the_Reperformance_of_Authenticity).

<sup>49</sup> Irene Eynat-Confino, "Performance Space and Designed Authenticity: From a Non Sequitur to a Real Make-Believe?" Accessed June 10, 2022, [https://www.academia.edu/24427386/Performance\\_Space\\_and\\_Designed\\_Authenticity\\_From\\_a\\_Non\\_Sequitur\\_to\\_a\\_Real\\_Make\\_Believe](https://www.academia.edu/24427386/Performance_Space_and_Designed_Authenticity_From_a_Non_Sequitur_to_a_Real_Make_Believe).

<sup>50</sup> That even the everyday is not entirely authentic is decoded by books such as Erving Goffman's ever-referenced *We All Play Theatre*. In them, the central question is how much acting is present in the everyday, how much we pretend (pretend to be better or simply different than we really are) in everyday life, or how much we wear social masks, implying the theme of socially constructed reality. The trouble is that it is not easy (if it is possible at all) to identify what is inherently our own and what we have taken over from society in the form of upbringing, social correctives, etc. This further problematises the question of the possibility of authenticity. It is also for this reason that I apply the term fragmentary authenticity in connection with reactions to unexpected events. Erving Goffman, *We all play theatre* (Prague: Studio Ypsilon Publishing House, 1999). Original edition: Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor, 1959).

<sup>51</sup> The footage from the documentary cameras is available for example here: <https://youtu.be/OSoTg0ljCp4>, accessed June 18, 2022.

<sup>52</sup> See George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Brno: Host, 2002).

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Hylland Eriksen gives the example of a modern ritual as a sport or a rock concert. In: Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Social and cultural anthropology: kinship, nationality, ritual* (Prague: Portál, 2008), 273.

<sup>54</sup> "Performances – of art, ritual, or everyday life – are 'renewed behaviors,' 'twice-behaved behaviors,' activities that people train and rehearse... But everyday life also involves years of training and practice, adjusting and performing one's life roles in relation to social and personal circumstances." Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 29.

<sup>55</sup> Pavlovský, *Basic concepts of theatre*, 242.

<sup>56</sup> In his book *The Tyranny of the Moment*, Thomas Hylland Eriksen analyses the accelerating pace of time, noting that although we are faster and potentially more efficient at work thanks to the internet and mobile phones, we have less and less time. In: Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *The tyranny of the moment: Fast and slow time in the information age* (Brno: Doplněk, 2005).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, 157.

<sup>58</sup> On the concept of transgression see Georges Bataille. *Erotism* (Prague: Herrmann a synové, 2001).

<sup>59</sup> Caroline Humprey, James Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual. A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 260.

<sup>60</sup> Fritz Staal, "The meaninglessness of ritual," *Numen* vol. 26, no. 1 (1979): 2-22.

<sup>61</sup> Hanna Hesemans, "Why we should not try to understand performance art" University College Maastricht, 2017, accessed November 13, 2019, [https://www.academia.edu/33662364/Why\\_we\\_should\\_not\\_try\\_to\\_understand\\_performance\\_art\\_-\\_About\\_the\\_ritualistic\\_aspects\\_of\\_performance\\_art\\_meaninglessness\\_and\\_rules](https://www.academia.edu/33662364/Why_we_should_not_try_to_understand_performance_art_-_About_the_ritualistic_aspects_of_performance_art_meaninglessness_and_rules).



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