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## PERFORMANCE AS A COMMUNICATIVE PROCESS

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The article deals with the examination of performance as a social event and a communicative process from the position of the constitutional meta-model of communication. Performance is viewed as a form of communication based on the horizontal relation of its participants because of the informational and symbolical exchange between the performers and audience and its transformative potential. Much attention is paid to the analysis of the transformative power of performance through the lens of notion of liminality. The author draws a conclusion about the communicative nature of performance and fruitfulness of application of the research results to the analysis of performance communicative dimensions.

**Key words:** performance, communication, transmission, ritual, participation, transformation, liminality, communitas.

The modern social reality is closely connected to the phenomenon of performance. Originally, this notion has established in the foreign liberal arts as a title of artistic genre, which appeared in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Due to the wide occurrence of performance in the cultural-artistic sphere, this phenomenon has been predominantly researched within art studies. However, the researches argue that the notion of performance runs far beyond the borders of artistic field covering the whole sociocultural space. In particular, E. Goffman, M. Carlson, B. Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, D. Conquergood, P. Phelan and J. C. Alexander analyze the manifestations of this phenomenon at varied levels of social interaction: from everyday situations to the representational events of political life. At the same time, none of these researchers have considered performance as a form of communication. However, performance is distinguished by an exceptional communicational potential, which is expressed in the exchange of thoughts and experience in the verbal and non-verbal forms in the process of the performance realization by its participants.

In the history of the scientific research of the phenomenon of performance it is possible to define three social-philosophical approaches. The first approach represented by S. Frith and E. Fischer-Lichte considers performance as a social event, which presupposes a presentation of the particular skills of the performer in front of the audience. Even though the authors argue that the interaction of actor and audience is constitutive for

performance, they do not define it as a communicational bound. The second approach represented by E. Goffman and R. Schechner in the social-philosophical consideration of performance illustrates the analyzed phenomenon as a regular everyday action, which always presupposes the realization of typical and standardized behavioral schemas by a performer with the aim to influence others. Therefore, within this approach, performance appears as a classical dramatic act – the reproduction of the particular social role. The third approach reflected in the works of J. C. Alexander is based on the interpretation of performance as a collective social action, which is always a social event characterized in terms of its success or failure, authenticity or artificialness. The effectiveness and authenticity of performance, within this approach, is defined by the fusion of its six elements: collective representations, actors, audience, the means of symbolic production, *mis-en-scene*, and social power.

However, none of the authors emphasizes the communicational essence of performance and considers it as an act of communication. Even though in the abovementioned social-philosophical conceptions the interpretation of performance is not limited to the artistic sphere but, on the contrary, is widened to the borders of public space, the authors still do not place the focus on communicational dimension of the analyzed phenomenon. Although S. Frith, E. Fischer-Lichte, E. Goffman, R. Schechner, and J. Alexander emphasize the significance of the pragmatic aspect of social performance, they do not move beyond the declaration of the pragmatic importance of this phenomenon to the analysis of the communicational processes, which are constitutive for the realization of performance or those, which are constituted by it. Therefore, the article's objective is to analyze performance as a process of communication.

J. Carey, an American communicational theorist, in his work "A cultural approach to communication"[4] defines two approaches to this phenomenon: transmission and ritual. Within the transmission view, the initial thesis is that language is a tool of description (of the reality, events, experience, etc.) that functions to transmit the information. In other words, communication is a process of sending and receiving messages, the transmission of information from the sender to receiver [1, p. 78]. Moreover, in the context of the transmission approach, communication is viewed as a "process of information processing, which enables to explain how all kinds of complex systems, living or nonliving, macro- or micro-, are able to function, and why the functional failures often occur" [1, p. 100]. Therefore, the core notions within this approach are "transmission", "sending", "translation", and "presentation of information".

According to the ritual conception, communication is "a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed" [4, p. 23]. That means that the representatives of the ritual approach perceive the phenomenon of macro-level – social order – through the lens of communicational interactions of macro-level. As distinct from the transmission approach, within the ritual view the core notions are "exchange", "participation", "association", "solidarity", and "mutual trust" [4, p. 18]. Even though this

approach does not deny the transmission aspect of communication, it does not reduce it to the transmission of messages about facts. In other words, the ritual approach defines the aim of communication as the maintenance of social stability over time. This happens due to the reflection of collective representations spread within a particular community in the communication. The process of communication, thus, is a space of construction of social meanings and, as a result, a social reality through the interaction of the participants of the communication basing on mutual meaning that is actualized and experienced by them again. According to Peters, the meanings, which arise in the process of communication, are public and social because they are always constituted; they are the results of the collective action, which unite power and truth, reason and emotions [6, p. 396].

Unlike the transmission approach, which considers the communication to be a process of transmission of already existent meanings and signs, the ritual approach conceptualizes communication as a process of “the construction, apprehension, and utilization of symbolic forms” [4, p. 25]. This process happens permanently and maintains a stability of collective representations. Moreover, it ensures the solidarization of the participant of the communication. That means that communication, from the position of the ritual approach, presupposes also a continuous process of maintenance and legitimation of social meanings in the public consciousness.

Even though the ritual approach to communication has advantages in comparison to the transmission conception, the latest should not be neglected. Both views can be complementary. In other words, in spite of the defined measures of the transmission approach, it can be applied to the analysis of social interactions. Furthermore, the ritual conception can be considered as a meta-model, which “creates a conceptual space, where different theoretical models of communication can coexist and interact” [1, p. 80].

This constitutive meta-model of communication can be the foundation to conceptualize a performance as a form of communication. Performance as a sum of reflexive symbolical actions is a communicational process, an utterance, which differs from the ordinary language by the character of signs, which are used to constitute an utterance. Every performance presupposes a participation of the performers and the audience, which, basing on the collective representations, become solidarized in the process of information exchange, self-representation, and the creation of meanings. From the position of constitutive model of communication, performance is a communicational process due to the character of the participants’ interaction – the performers and the audience. Performance as an impossible without an audience process is always a platform of dialogue for minimum of two perspectives. The first side is a position of performers. A performer is considered not as a perceptual human being but more as an ideal embodiment of sensual experience in a dramatic action. A performer directly experiences pain, joy, and other emotions depending on the actions, which he/she performs. An audience is an ideal recipient, who percepts and interprets the performer’s action, which appears as signs to them.

The performance is a platform of communication based on the horizontal relation of its participants. According to Turner, the performance appears as a “mutual confrontation of human beings stripped of status role characteristics” [7, p. 470-471]. In other words, in the performance, social determinants of its participants do not matter because the situation of performance itself transforms them into the equal communicators: the communication happens as an interaction of people as they are, who are willing to meet each other. Moreover, every participant of the performance influences its results via suggestions and directions of communication: there happens a “suggestion of a situation, when a person is able to choose a type and a way of communication by himself/herself due to the fact of his/her presence” having an aim to “seek for the common on equal terms” [9]. That means that performance is a source of narrative’s creation because even if a performer suggests his own script, it cannot be realized directly: the audience is active and self-sufficient; thus, its reaction cannot be defined in advance.

In addition to that, the performance as a symbolic action is not only a process of transmission of information or exchange of meanings but also a process of creation and transformation of reality through the communication. According to Conquergood, performance is a transgression, a “force which crashes and breaks through sedimented meanings and normative traditions and plunges us back into the vortices of political struggle” [5, p. 32]. That means that the performance is not only a platform of utterance, suggestion and deliberation about individual or collective interests and intentions, experience exchange etc. but also a space for discussions concerning the transformation of social and cultural norms, which underlie knowledge and power relations.

Proceeding from the accepted constitutive model of communication in the consideration of performance, the latest sets the horizontal relations among its participants – the performers and the audience. Such character of their interaction demonstrates the equal possibilities of both sides to create a performance. According to E. Fischer-Lichte, performance is “mediated by the actions of the actor directed at the constitution of the particular interaction with audience and at the same time – by the actions of the audience that enters the relationship suggested by the actor endeavoring to modify them or willing to replace him (the actor)” [2, p. 95]. Therefore, performance ensures the interaction of the actor and the audience and enables to “constitute the reality of the world” [2, p. 95]. That is why it is theoretically fruitful to separate three levels of communication within performance: 1 – the level of transmission of information; 2 – the level of exchange and creation of meanings; 3 – the level of transformation of social reality. At the first level, particular pieces of information are the units of exchange, whereas at the third level they are premises of the self-presentation by the participants of the performance.

According to E. Fischer-Lichte, “one of the most fundamental categories of the aesthetics of performativity is transformation” [3, p. 91]. That means that performance is always aimed at the particular change through the action – of the reality, social order, collective representations, and the participants of the performance themselves. The

communicative interaction of the latest ensures the possibility of such change. The performance often provokes its participants via the non-verbal communication to take part in the active interaction and thus, maintenance of communication. For instance, M. Abramović in her performance “Lips of Thomas” through the travesty of her body pleads the audience to get involved in the course of the performance: the audience had to make a decision whether to stay passive observers or to become active – to save the artist and apparently change the artistic script.

The experience of personal transformation was an objective of the performances of H. Nitsch. The participants of his performances attained an opportunity to “recreate the relation between a symbolic component of culture and a sense experience of every participant” [3, p. 98]. This led to the setting of a relationship between a performer and an audience and ensures its transformation because the violation of taboos in the performance preconditioned participants’ catharsis. H. Nitsch willing to reconsider the experience of the World War II creates limit situations connected with violence, which require from the participants of the performance to turn from the passive observation to active actions. In addition to that, the community of the participants does not make pressure on its members. On the contrary, the community creates such conditions so as every participant after this limit situation can go through self-transformation.

Due to the transformational potential of performance, one of its crucial characteristics as a form of communication is liminality. This term was firstly used by Belgian folklorist A. van Gennep to designation of the second stage of the rites of passage – rituals peculiar to all cultures, which are the indicators of transition of one sociocultural state or status to another one (from childhood to maturity, from illness to health, from winter to spring, etc.) [7, p. 466]. Liminality indicates the transitional and intermediate nature of these rituals, which make a social order integral. Performance is also a transitional state: it presupposes the intermediate stage of transformation of the performance’s participants between a state that precedes the performance and a new state, which appears in the process of the performance. Therefore, the performance always exists in the relation of “in between”, it exists at the boundary of the particular order next to the process of the revelation of things and ideas, demonstration of their structure with the aim of the transformation of this order and constitution of the new reality.

Performance as a liminal state occurs between different structures. That means that performance is a specific interlude, which is a transformative element between the existing order and future that occurs as a consequence of the performance as an event. V. Turner considers liminality as a fundamental feature of the puberty rites and other rituals of life transformations – birth, maturity, marriage, death – that signify the liminal essence of such happenings. According to the author, liminality presupposes a temporary separation of the individual from the usual social order, his/her endowment with the ambiguous social status, relief from the laws and rules, which consequently leads to the transformation of the current orders and statuses.

As V. Turner writes, liminality is a contingency of the social reality transformation because it is a source of origination of such cultural forms as philosophy, art, and mythology [8, p. 128]. These cultural forms, in their turn, generate the models of reclassification of reality and transform the relation of an individual to the whole society because they “incite men to action as well as to thought” [8, p. 129].

According to the author, liminal situation is intermediate: its participants are somewhere “betwixt and between” [8, p. 95]. Such undetermined status of the individual in the liminal state demonstrates its value as a space of examination and search, creation and representation of the alternative reality – a realization of renewed cultural models and meanings in the new context. That means that the actuality is pro-liminal and defined by the stable conditions that are changed to the alternative ones as a result of the liminal state, which transforms the primary situation and its participants. The alternative may be positive in case of the association of the product of imagination and creativity of the symbolic action by participants with real consistent historical and cultural structures, which link performance to reality and are necessary for its transformation. Performance as well happens simultaneously within and beyond the real time that enables the performers and audience to go through the different stages so as to transform the reality, themselves, and thus, a better their cognition.

Taking into consideration that liminality characterizes a space “between” in human experience, so as to experience a liminal state, it is necessary to literally or symbolically cross the line – to come to the concert hall or to step forth witnessing the participation in the performance or to become mature. This boarder is a beginning of the liminal space, which is characterized by the processes of establishment: liminality always presupposes progress, movement and transformation. Therefore, the actors of performance always live out the transformation as a result of their participation in it.

In addition to that, a liminal situation in performance changes a nature of social bonds in the community that takes part in it: the model of society as a structured, differentiated, and hierarchic system becomes replaced by the notion “*communitas*”. That means that it is possible to define two modes of human interaction and communication. According to V. Turner, the first is based on the notion of society as a structured hierarchic system whereas the second one, arising in the liminal states, expresses an unstructured nature of society, which is a “*communion of equal individuals*” [8, p. 96]. In other words, *communitas* appears in communities, where there is no unchanged structure [8, p. 126].

According to V. Turner, in the liminal situation a human being “in and out of time, and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties” (8; p. 96). In other words, liminal state is medial, where social differentiation and stratification is opposed to the unity in *communitas* – in a ritual communication. Such type of interaction within a *communitas* ensures the horizontal relations of its members. Therefore, *communitas* is a communication on equal terms. The author compares

communitas with M. Buber's definition of a community, which is always a unity of plurality based on the permanent dynamic process from the individual to "we", which exists through its fulfillment [8, p. 127]. That means that communitas appears, when a sum of people constitutes their relation through the communication, which involves all the participants in the experience of liminal situation.

Furthermore, the notion of liminality stresses an open character of performance. According to V. Turner, that means that liminality is featured by potentiality [7, p. 466]. Performance has unpredictable consequences, which are constituted in the process of performance. Therefore, liminality describes performance as a platform of experiment and play – the play of ideas, words, symbols, and metaphors. That means that even though performance may have a script, it can never be planned in advance entirely because its realization and success directly depend on the interaction of its participants. This peculiarity unites performance and communication, the results of which cannot be forecasted due to the impossibility to predict human reactions.

So as to create a performance, a performer uses his/her body. Performers embody meanings in physical movements – motion in space, mimics, speech, dance, etc. The body language in comparison to the ordinary language is dominant in the passive perception of others and thus, is a primary source of information about the interlocutor. The audience percepts body gestures of the performer and, looking to them, builds its behavioral model and interpretation of these movements: an observation of the non-verbal signals of politicians leads to the formation of public opinion about them, whereas an expressive performance of the musical composition inspires an audience, encouraging it to the mutual movement of the performers and listeners.

Therefore, performance is determined by a physical co-presence of the performers and audience. In other words, the co-presence and communication of two groups of people at the particular moment are the premises of the occurrence of the performance. During the time, when performers make gestures, the audience percepts and interprets them, constituting together with performers in the process of communication the meanings and responds to them: "the viewers laugh, express joy, yawn, moan, scuffle, shuffle, bend over with an intense expression face or lean back with relaxation, bate breath and freeze up; look from time to time at a watch, fall asleep and start snoring" [3, p. 67]. Such reactions of the audience bring forth the reactions of the performers, which are the components of the communicative process and constitute a "feedback loop" – "an self-referencing, autopoietic system, the development of which is unpredictable and uncontrolled" [3, p. 70].

The feedback loop is preconditioned by the physical co-presence of performers and audience during the performance. The aspects of such interaction were researched by R. Schechner with his "Performance Group" in 60-70-s of the XX th century. According to R. Schechner, the audience becomes an active participant of the performance in the moments, when performance is transformed from an artistic act to a social event, which equals performers and viewers in their right to take part in creation of meanings.

Therefore, the author considers a performance to be an embodiment of a democratic model of interaction, which presupposes a communication of its participants as equal parties to a relationship. [3, p. 72].

Such exchange of traditional roles of performers and observers increases an unforeseeableness rate of performance and testifies about its social essence due to the distribution of functions within its participants. For instance, in the performance of R. Schechner “Commune” (1970-1972), the performers actively involved the viewers in the participation turning them into actors. Even though the refusal from the participation led to the formal cut-off of the performance, it still turned the viewers into the actors because emphasizing their unwillingness to participate in performance, they therefore held an active position and became an object of regard of others.

To sum up, performance is always a social event and a form of communication that ensures personal transformation and a transformation of the external environment and social reality. Performance actualizes aspects, which can lead to the exchange of information, experience, creation of meanings, and constitution of a *communitas* – a communicational structure that appears in the process of performance as a liminal state and is characterized by the mutual activity and efforts to understand each other and influence a social order. This research may be efficient for the consideration of layers of communication (non-verbal and verbal) within performance in further research.

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## ПЕРФОРМАНС ЯК КОМУНІКАТИВНИЙ ПРОЦЕС

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Із середини ХХ століття перформанс досліджувався в зарубіжній гуманітарній науці з позицій мистецтвознавства як новий синтетичний мистецький жанр. Водночас поняття перформансу виходить далеко за межі мистецтва, охоплюючи весь соціокультурний простір. Мета даної статті – демонстрація виняткового комунікативного потенціалу перформансу з позицій конститутивної моделі комунікації. Остання є поєднанням ритуального та трансмісійного підходів до визначення комунікації, виокремлених Дж. Кері. З позицій конститутивної моделі комунікації, перформанс постає комунікативним процесом зважаючи на горизонтальний характер взаємодії дієвців-учасників. Автор виокремлює три рівні комунікації у межах перформансу: 1 –рівень трансляції інформації; 2 – рівень обміну та творення сенсів; 3 – рівень трансформації соціальної дійсності. Значна увага приділяється аналізу останнього рівня, який передбачає, що перформанс як комунікація трансформує соціальну дійсність і своїх творців – перформерів та аудиторію. Трансформаційний потенціал перформансу розглянуто крізь призму поняття лімінальності у розумінні В. Тернера. Перформанс як лімінальна подія тлумачиться як трансформуюча ланка між існуючим порядком і майбутнім, який виникає внаслідок власне події перформансу. Поняття лімінальності також вказує на відкритий характер перформансу. Значення ситуації лімінальності у перформансі оцінюється з огляду на зміну характеру соціального зв'язку спільноти, що бере у ньому участь: модель суспільства як структурованої, диференційованої та ієрархізованої системи змінюється поняттям “communitas”. Необхідною ж умовою участі у такій спільноті та розгортанні перформансу є людське тіло як медіум комунікації. Таким чином, перформанс як соціальний феномен та форма комунікації через горизонтальну взаємодію учасників та їхню фізичну співприсутність уможлиблює персональну та соціальну трансформацію.

**Ключові слова:** перформанс, комунікація, трансмісія, ритуал, участь, трансформація, лімінальність, communitas.