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« The question(s) of representation »

Performance, representation, event

Barbara Roland

Trained in arts and a graduate of the Université de Liège in cinema and audiovisual arts, Barbara Roland also holds a Ph. D. in performance arts (Université Libre de Bruxelles). As part of a practical and theoretical approach to performance art, she has focused on the study of the manifestations and expressions of three creative processes: performance, *mimêsis* and representation. During this research, she has considered practice as an experimental medium of a *performance-research*, defined as a place and means of investigation (of observation, action, participation, collaboration, intervention...) and of critical and theoretical problematisation. She is also a performer, a lecturer, and has also written for national and international journals such as *Scènes*, *L'art Même*, *Inter*, *M@gm@*, *Degrés*, *Research*, *Hybrid*...

Abstract

Since the late fifties, the history of performing arts has experienced aesthetic and paradigmatic changes, both in its foundations and its approaches. The emergence of performance, as the practice of a genre drawing on the avant-garde and performance art, but also as a paradigm of practices to study and theories falling within an anthropological and inter-cultural perspective, largely popularised by Schechner (Performance Studies), is at the root of a transition. It's characterised by a shift from an Aristotelian logic of binary or bipolar representation to a processual, interactional, event-driven logic of performance in an aesthetic and post-modern system different from representation and *mimêsis*, which it does not necessarily involve or exclude. It is an indicator of a disturbance in representation, of the

closure of its models and conventions, and a catalyst for the dialogue and conciliation between ever-evolving systems; where the destabilisation of the performance/representation opposition or analogy show fluctuating relations between the creative processes of events, to the advantage of dialogue between assimilation of practice and theory, while avoiding being stuck in the determination of their representations.

Keywords: art, avant-garde, closure, contemporary, aesthetics, event, genre, happening, mimêsis, paradigm, performance, performative, post-dramatic, representation, situation, theatre

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In the post-war period of the early 20th century, numerous demonstrations, like the Dadaist, Surrealist and Futurist movements have shown that things could no longer be represented like they used to be, that it was no longer possible to passively believe in the illusion of representations, bearer of false hopes, and that there was a need to show things differently, if not escape fiction altogether to act on reality. Since the late 1950s, the history of the arts representation has experienced a disruption of an aesthetic and paradigmatic order, in its foundations and modes of approach. In film, theatre and fine arts, the avant-gardes that have taken centre stage have marked a turning point in art history. From the most innovative cinematographic practices, such as the French Nouvelle Vague or Italian Neo-realism, to the rise of performing arts with the first *happenings*,¹ the second half of the 20th century became a sort of laboratory of human actions and reactions for postmodernist art.

The emergence and the expansion of performance marks the end of a certain theatrical genre, dramatic theatre, and subsequently of the very concept of theatre as it had been practised for several decades.² Performance questions and dismisses the dramatic principles and conventions of representation, as well as its assimilation to the model it replaces and on which it sometimes imposes itself, by extension. It does not do so only as the practice of a genre, the conception of which is inherited from the avant-garde and art performance that have upset our perspective on art, but also as a paradigm for the study of the practices and theories falling within an anthropological and intercultural view that Schechner has largely contributed to popularise (*Performance Studies*).³

¹ Allan Kaprow, "Assemblages, Environments & Happenings (1966)," in Mariellen R. Sanford (ed.), *Happenings and Other Acts*, London/New York, Routledge, 1995, p. 235-245.

² Josette Féral, *Théorie et pratique du théâtre*, Montpellier, L'Entretemps, 2011, p. 110.

³ Josette Féral, *Théorie et pratique du théâtre*, Montpellier, L'Entretemps, 2011, p. 111.

While performance is often assimilated to practices and theories of post-dramatic or performative theatre,⁴ developed by Hans-Thies Lehmann⁵ and Josette Féral⁶ among others, there has been an increasing European interest in performance over the past few years, in the search for an interaction between a new theatology and *Performance Studies*.⁷ More generally, performance establishes itself as a field of practices and theories in its own right (*Performance Studies, Performances Theories*), which takes on *theatre studies* developed in America and other Anglo-Saxon countries, and it sheds light on the evolution of the theatrical practice,⁸ expressed and comprehended in an innovative approach to performance/representation arts.

From a historical perspective, performance differs from representation in its functions and processes. Representation has often been translated into English as *performance – a theatrical performance*, for instance –, which carries the idea of an action performed in the very act of its presentation, and which implies both the stage (what went in the preparation of the show) and the room (with all of its potential receptiveness).⁹ Since the emergence of performance art, the translation of performance as representation, or at least their synonymy, becomes problematic. As clarified by Patrice Pavis, representation expresses an altogether different perspective on things than performance, the meaning and conceptions of which it betrays.¹⁰ Performance questions, influences and sometimes thwarts the principles of theatrical representation, its links with illusion and fiction,¹¹ by

⁴ “Performativity appears as a synonym for fluidity, instability, broadening horizons, situated somewhere between the identification and ambiguities of meanings. Therefore, it is multi-signifying and plural, and goes against the idea of One to reveal the Many. The recurring idea conveyed by this notion is the ambiguity in the multitude of meanings, instability, and shifting forms” (Josette Féral, “De la performance à la performativité,” *Communications*, no. 92, “Performance. Le corps exposé,” Christian Biet and Sylvie Roques [eds.], 2013, p. 12).

⁵ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Le Théâtre postdramatique*, Paris, L'Arche, 2002.

⁶ Josette Féral, *Théorie et Pratique du théâtre*, Montpellier, L'Entretiens, 2011p. 191, 199. Josette Féral more generally understands performance as a practice born in the fields of dancing and fine arts and in keeping with the surrealist and Dadaist movements, themselves inspired by conceptual art, minimal art, body art, happening, pop art, with a theatrical practice and theory that does not so much consist in identifying the oppositions and differences between theatre and performance as in marking their complementarity, by emphasising how theatre can learn from performance. Performance allows a renewed perspective on theatre, an analysis of its hidden underside.

⁷ Marco De Marinis, “Représentation, présence, performance: pour un dialogue entre nouvelle théâtrologie et ‘Performance Studies,’” in André Helbo (ed.), *Performance et savoirs*, Bruxelles, De Boeck, 2011; Guy Spielmann, “L’‘événement-spectacle’ pertinence du concept et de la théorie de la performance,” *Communications*, no. 92, “Performance. Le corps exposé,” Christian Biet and Sylvie Roques (eds.), 2013, p. 193-204.

⁸ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction (second edition 2006)*, New York, Routledge, 2002; Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics*, London, Routledge, 2008, p. 3-4. Erika Fischer-Lichte, like her predecessor Max Herrmann, considers performance as a natural extension of theatrical studies.

⁹ Patrice Pavis, *Dictionnaire du théâtre. Termes et concepts de l'analyse théâtrale*, Paris, Éditions sociales, 1980, p. 343.

¹⁰ Patrice Pavis, *La Mise en scène contemporaine*, Paris, Armand Colin, “U letters,” second édition, 2010, p. 45.

¹¹ Marco De Marinis, “Représentation, présence, performance: pour un dialogue entre nouvelle théâtrologie et ‘Performance Studies,’” in André Helbo (dir.), *Performance et savoirs*, Bruxelles, De Boeck, 2011, p. 53. On this precise topic, Marco De Marinis raises the question

placing the reality of the action before the spectators' eyes. It shows specificities that question the binary and bipolar model of dramatic representation, depending on performance and *mimêsis*, of which it reveals the disturbance, if not the closure, as early as the late 1950s.

Performance, the disturbance or closure of representation?

Born at the same time as happenings, typical of the collective avant-garde demonstrations – sometimes called events –, performance art, body art, and all of the subsequent practices, will largely contribute to the development of contemporary theories and practices of performance and post-dramatic theatre.

A happening is often seen as “new avant-garde theatre,”¹² looking for new languages to express itself – standing out from the classic theatrical genres, dancing, circus, painting – that would change the representation system in every respect, by adopting a critical and reflexive perspective on the latter. However, practitioners and theoreticians have not always agreed on its assimilation to the theatrical practice, which refers to codes, conventions, ways of being and doing that fall within the representable. Performance art positioned itself at odds with these concepts. Although in close relation with the practices of experimental theatre, such as the Living Theater or the Performance Group that have tried to question and go beyond the principles of dramatic representation during the same period, performance art has often distanced itself from theatre.

The principles of the theatrical model inevitably influenced by performance are most often accentuated, minimised or thwarted in the latter, by avoiding the use of theatrical conventions and resorting to real time or experienced time, i.e. a duration that depends on the events and actions with regards to the context and materials used.¹³ The performance time is that of a real action during which the limits between the stage and the room are abolished. Real-time activities are invented according to the context of creation, thus favouring the involvement of all the participants in an empowering experience that allows one to change one's perception of ordinary reality, fight against conditioning and act directly on a situation that breaks away from the frontal and one-directional model of the art of representation.

Although performance has been regarded as a new performative or post-dramatic theatrical form, sometimes associated with the theatrical avant-garde tradition, it breaks away from the functions of traditional theatre: from the interpretation of characters and a fictional world replaced by the real activity of subjects in action.¹⁴ It often stands out because of the non-dramatic nature of its

of whether it is really possible to go beyond representation-fiction, or whether the limit is simply pushed a bit further, without the frontier being ever really crossed.

¹²According to Michael Kirby, a *happening* can be described as “a purposefully composed form of theatre in which diverse allogical elements, including nonmatrixed performing, are organized in a compartmented structure” (Michaël Kirby, “Happenings: An Introduction,” in Mariellen R. Sandford, *Happenings and Other Acts*, London/New York, Routledge, 1995, p. 9).

¹³ Allan Kaprow, “Assemblages, Environments & Happenings (1966),” in Mariellen R. Sandford, *Happenings and Other Acts*, London, Routledge, 1994, p. 236-238.

¹⁴ Marvin Carlson, *Performance a Critical Introduction*, second edition, New York/London, Routledge, 2004, p. 105; Michael Kirby, “On Acting and Non-Acting,” *The Drama Review*, vol. 16, no. 1, March 1972 (reprinted as Chapter 1 of *A Formalist Theatre*, Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987, p. 3-20).

actions, its lack of a consistent diegetic world, the absence of fiction and dramatic homogeneity, the deletion of a frontal framework of representation and hierarchical structure; but also because of the absence of rehearsal.¹⁵ It marks a break from theatrical representation and therefore from denial, in other words from the “as if” of illusion, by forcing the reality of what constitutes the action onto the audience. Performance demonstrates that it is in the reality of the action, in the suspension of repetition and *mimêsis* that something can happen without representing itself.¹⁶ It establishes other ways of being, seeing and perceiving both things and the world, which escape repetition and break away from the dramatic theatre’s reproduction of usual and mimetic behaviours. From collective actions such as happenings or events, to individual actions or body art, performance art upsets the theatrical experience.

Performance aims to reduce the gap between art and reality, by showing the activity or activation of a real action of which it is the self-referential expression. In Kaprow’s perspective, art serves life and meets the concept of *lifelike art*,¹⁷ an “art like life” that he distinguishes from *artlike art*, in other words the professional art that differentiates between art and life.¹⁸ According to Kaprow, performance takes shape on the mode of an individual or collective conscious experience reflecting the artificial aspects of everyday life and the lifelike qualities of created art.¹⁹ In this sense, performance includes all of the conscious actions of human life situated between art and non art – a show, a phone call, a hike in the mountains, a research process, etc. It is established in/like the reality of what it is, at the crossroads between art and life.²⁰

Over time, performance has yet taken on completely different functions than the ones considered by Kaprow, namely by trying to bring down the walls between art and life in another way. It has opened up to multiple and divergent perspectives expressed in every kind of form and manner, depending on the context and expressive subjectivity. Numerous events – at once artistic, poetic, but also subversive and provocative – have revealed forms of free expression lying somewhere between art and life, and the reality of the everyday life marked by political, economic, social and moral pressures.

The new avant-garde has developed a series of events throughout the world, thanks to personalities and movements such as Joseph Beuys, Claes Oldenburg,

¹⁵ Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993, p. 173. Kaprow declares on this topic: “By the early sixties the more experimental Happenings and Fluxus events had eliminated not only actors, roles, plots, rehearsals, and repeats but also audience, the single staging area, and the customary time block of an hour or so”.

¹⁶ Catherine Perret, *Les Porteurs d'ombre. Mimêsis et modernité*, Paris, Belin, “L’extrême contemporain,” 2001, p. 298-299.

¹⁷ Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Berkeley [CA], University of California Press, 1993, p. 205-206.

¹⁸ Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Berkeley [CA], University of California Press, 1993, p. 201.

¹⁹ Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Berkeley [CA], University of California Press, 1993, p. 195.

²⁰ “The dimension of ostension, of self-referential presentation, of self-signifying materiality, in other words the reference to the self, before and rather than a reference to “someone else,” the production (of meaning, reality) rather than reproduction, constitute the performative aspects of performance” (Marco De Marinis, “Représentation, présence, performance: pour un dialogue entre nouvelle théâtrologie et ‘Performance Studies,’” in André Hello (ed.), *Performance et savoirs*, Bruxelles, De Boeck, 2011, p. 58).

Nam June Paik, Jodorowski and ephemeral Panic Movement, Tadeusz Kantor, Jean-Jacques Lebel, Jacques Charlier, but also Panamarenko and Hugo Heyrman in Belgium... They have questioned, and still do the social, cathartic, or even therapeutic functions of artistic creation and its modes of expression.

At a more individual level, performances by Chris Burden, Vito Acconci, Gina Pane, Ana Mendieta and Marina Abramovic constitute remarkable examples of a performance art that participates in the revolution of representation, whether in the private or public space. Action – with and on the body – becomes a driving force of the manifestation of free speech in an attempt to create an approach that is at once aesthetic, political, cultural and vital. Performance art empowers people, it gives them the power and freedom to be both a place and means of action, transgression, subversion of the authoritarian and hierarchical structures, deconstructing and questioning of the bourgeois and capitalist systems of representation.

Performance does not only try to erase the distinctions between everyday life and artistic creation, or between the spectators and actors of a show, by taking the right to give everyone the opportunity to present and represent oneself freely, outside any oppressive and repressive framework.²¹ It creates friction and tension between the elements of creation, the function of which is not only to integrate participants, but also to escape the institutional framework and blend in the natural and social environment in which the event takes place. By making way for spontaneity and improvised physical interactions, performance shows a will to thwart the frameworks and forms of the representation of behaviours and conventions, ultimately achieving a reversal on a much wider scale, that of an entire representational system.

Performance art tries to go “beyond” traditional representation, beyond *mimêsis*, which used to imply ways of doing and being that protected the order of fine arts. In this respect, it seems to be a response to the new theatre mentioned by Artaud, which puts an end to representation as attached to illusion, to imitation, now replaced by *the reconstitution of a closed space of original representation, the archi-manifestation of force or of life*.²² Happening, in keeping with a non-representational and non-narrative theatre, reverses the system of representation in favour of an explosion of physical forces, of the most extreme behaviours, in the fashion of Dionysiac celebrations, orgies and trances. Mimetic mediation gives way to the immediacy of individual and collective actions. A happening responds to this new theatre as a party closing representation in a space where the action embraces and crisscrosses the audience.²³ Its relational aesthetic announces a “participative” and cathartic art focusing on what it can achieve rather than what it can represent.

Performance establishes itself as a means to break down the barriers of representation, by emphasising the production of original situations that try to escape the prescribed models, to experiment from the inside with new forms of (inter)action in/on the real and with the subjects’ representations. It shows new relations to events, permanently positioned at the crossroads between art and life, experience and subjectivity. Performance invites one to rethink the model of representation, by engaging in the experimentation of situations of presence and

²¹ Jean-Jacques Lebel, *Le Happening (essai)*, Paris, Éditions Denoël, 1966.

²² Jacques Derrida, *L'Écriture et la Différence*, Paris, Seuil, 1967, p. 349.

²³ Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, Paris, Gallimard, “Folio essais,” 1964, p. 126, 148.

co-presence of an art in action. Since Artaud's theatre, the stage *no longer represents*, since it does not constitute a sensitive illustration of an already written text, thought of or lived outside the stage, which would only repeat it, as indicated by Derrida. It will no longer repeat a *present*, re-present a present time that would be elsewhere and before it. It will neither be a representation.²⁴ Performance forces itself into the present time of a self-referential and self-signifying dimension, as the real expression of an original presentation, from within, referring first and foremost to itself; it shows the inevitably (self-)reflexive and referential aspect of practices revealing a disturbance in representation, at least in dramatic representation, the closure of its models and conventions.

From a representational logic to an event-based logic

Performance is not limited to a genre, as noted by Marvin Carlson in his book entitled *Performance: A Critical Introduction*. It is a quite complex phenomenon with subtle meanings, as diverse as the fields of activity in which it operates, at the crossroads between all sorts of disciplines: anthropology, ethnography, sociology, psychology, linguistics, communication, literature, sport, ritual, art, politics, economics, technology, etc.²⁵ One of its specificities is that it establishes itself at the intersection of all kinds of disciplines as an inter- and cross-disciplinary notion that brings representation to centre stage, by opening up to a postmodernist and extensive configuration of its acceptations and functions.

The anthropological idea of performance – as an experience, a skill and a model, breaks down the barriers, so to speak, of the categorical and trite concepts of representation, as well as its limits within the disciplinary terms of its practices and theories. The practical and theoretical modes of its range of action lead us to consider a possible way to mediate, negotiate, conciliate between performance and representation and integrate them.

Performance expands the model of representation, of the fine arts and theatre mainly, to the study of all human conscious behaviours.²⁶ At a paradigmatic level, its theories focus on the analytical perspective, on the modal skills that allow one to consider every object, “reality, event or action” as a performance.²⁷ These theories rely on a common operator in anthropology which requires to look beyond the theatrical model – as a *performance/representation* – and to take another perspective on doing, but also to do differently. Among others, Goffman applied the theatrical model to life, in order to comprehend human behaviours. Life is regarded as a performance, the meaning of which exceeds the reference to the theatrical model, which is not always adapted to the contemporary human realities. Performance means that one has to make the arrangements required by action and observation, through experiences of various kinds, carried out in a certain time frame and inseparable from its conditions of production and reception.

²⁴ Jacques Derrida, *L'Écriture et la Différence*, Paris, Seuil, 1967, p. 348.

²⁵ Marvin Carlson, *Performance. A Critical Introduction*, New York/London, Routledge, second edition, 2004, p. 9-80.

²⁶ André Helbo, *Performance et savoirs*, with the collaboration of Catherine Bouko and Élodie Verlinden, Brussels, De Boeck, “Culture et communication,” 2011, p. 9.

²⁷ Irving Goffman, *La Mise en scène de la vie quotidienne*, Paris, Minuit, “Le sens commun,” Paris, 1973; Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies. An Introduction* (second edition 2006), New York, Routledge, 2002.

According to Richard Schechner, performances are actions that consist in being, doing, showing doing and explaining “showing doing”.²⁸ With these four operations, performance is liberated, so to speak, from a strict and regulatory function of representation, by means of the *mimêsis* of reality with fiction and of the activity of creation with the activity of reception. The evolution of these concepts since the emergence of the avant-garde movements demonstrates that performance (the execution of an action) does not necessarily aim to represent any longer. On the contrary, representation seems to have become a potential function of performance, which may or may not *represent* itself.²⁹

With performance, one enters an aesthetic arts mode that goes against the classical art mode, considered poetic and/or representative. We call it aesthetic because the identification of art is no longer based on the distinction between methods of representation, but on the distinction between ways of expressing sensitivity that are inherent to art products. The aesthetic art mode puts an end to the representational mode:

The aesthetic arts mode is first and foremost the ruin of the system of representation, in other words the ruin of a system in which the dignity of the subjects used to control the dignity of the representation genres (tragedy for the nobles, comedy for the working class; historical painting vs. genre painting, etc.). The representation system used to define, through genres, the situations and forms of expression that used to correspond to the social status of the subject. The aesthetic arts system disproves this correlation between subject and representation mode.³⁰

Performance is a driving force and an indicator of the evolution in the concepts of theatre and other forms of performance arts; from a representational logic of a representative arts system to an event-based logic of performance/representation in an aesthetic and postmodernist system, which shows its specificity in relation to *representation* and *mimesis*. It does not necessarily involve these two concepts and does not *necessarily* exclude them either³¹. Rather, it maintains subtle and ever-evolving relations with them.

In her book entitled *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, Erika Fischer-Lichte puts forward the concept of performative event, in order to describe the aesthetic of performance, three manifestations of which confirm its intrinsic nature: the mutual interaction between actors and spectators, which is the basis of the feedback loop’s autopoiesis, the destabilisation, or

²⁸ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies. An Introduction (second edition 2006)*, New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 28.

²⁹ Here we have to rid representation from its semantic attachment to dramatic theatre and staging of fictional worlds and characters. Representation is a largely polysemous concept and the function of creative production also results from a perceptive action: from the artist’s flaw on the one hand, who pictures or forms an idea of a thing or reality, in other words the figurative or abstract expression stemming from his imagination, and from the flaw of the outside opinion on the other hand, which isolates the observed event or object from its ordinary environment, so as to represent it. Therefore, we have to apprehend things with our mind and senses, in order to identify, know and recognize them. See Josette Féral, *Théorie et pratique du théâtre*, Montpellier, L’Entretiens, 2011, p. 85, 96, 99.

³⁰ Jacques Rancière, *Le Partage du sensible esthétique et politique*, Paris, La fabrique, 2000, p. 30, 31, 48, 49.

³¹ Richard Schechner, *Performance: expérimentation et théorie du théâtre aux USA*, Montreuil, Théâtrales, 2008, p. 8-9.

erasure of binary oppositions and situations of liminality.³² These three characteristics directly support Richard Schechner's studies on performance, both complemented and questioned by Fisher-Lichte's theories.

The contemporary event encourages new forms of experience that do not depend on a classical and dramatic theatrical logic relying on the implementation of a drama and/or script designed for a theatrical performance.³³ The open configuration of performance does not depend on a regulatory *mimêsis* aiming at the normative representation of a drama and a script, the relations and functions of which are questioned. It relies on the potentially independent development of a situation that defines itself as an event. In Richard Schechner's experimental theatre for instance, it is via experimental performances striving for interaction and participation that drama can be manipulated, adapted, that *mimêsis* can be thwarted³⁴ and that the script can change according to the evolution of the situation.

In *Performance Studies*, Richard Schechner indicates that the first performance is a situation, not a representation, event or genre: it is not "in" or "on" anything, unlike representation – a sculpture is formed from matter, paint is applied on a canvas, theatre is set on stage, writing takes form on paper and the image on screen. Performance is not applied onto something, it stands "in between,"³⁵ and this is what characterises its process, in comparison to *representation*. While every representation involves a performance as one of its functions, a situation resulting in the execution of an action, not every performance involves a representation – which establishes itself in or on a medium of material expression – or *mimêsis*. It is certainly at this level that the practice of performance art is distinguished, strictly speaking, from representation – as fiction –, which allows one to believe in a place elsewhere, evoked by the stage. Its self-referential function sends one back to the real action, to a situation considered as liminal by Erika Fisher-Lichte, that is to say transitional, which takes place in an act of presentation taking priority over the representative function of the event. Above all, it is a situation including activities of various type and nature,³⁶ the *mimêsis* and representation of which do not (only) refer to

³² Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, London, Routledge, 2008, p. 161-180.

³³ Richard Schechner, *Performance: expérimentation et théorie du théâtre aux USA*, Montreuil, Théâtrales, 2008, p. 27-72.

³⁴ Christian Biet and Hélène Kuntz, "Théâtre occidental – La dramaturgie," *Encyclopædia universalis*. [Online] <http://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/theatre-occidental-la-dramaturgie/> [accessed 28 June 2015]. The idea according which performance thwarts *mimêsis*, and thereby the bipolarity of representation, needs further explanation. Performance breaks away from *mimêsis* in the sense of mimetic regulation, the function of which is to achieve duplication on the mode of fiction. However, *mimêsis* includes a larger notion of its field of acceptations. Among the numerous theories on this issue, some of which are quoted in the introduction to this article, Christian Biet considers an idea of representation (as a make-believe of another reality) that does not involve the imitation of reality to mimic it exactly, but the provision of a *mimêsis*, in other words the establishment of a relationship, reflected and mediated by the artwork, with the world. This idea is interesting inasmuch as it can be regarded as the means of expression of a relation between the artwork and the world, which opens the space of representation, not only to fiction, but also to imagination and reality.

³⁵ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies. An Introduction* (second edition 2006), New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 30.

³⁶ Richard Schechner, *Performance: expérimentation et théorie du théâtre aux USA*, Montreuil, Théâtrales, 2008, p. 38.

the in-between of fiction, but the performative repercussion of which (on the perceptible and intelligible world) takes on social, political, identity, cathartic functions.

Where *mimêsis*, regarded as a break by Ricœur, opens the space of fiction,³⁷ the physical damage sometimes displayed in the most radical performances of Angelica Liddel, Ron Athey, Rocio Boliver, Ivo Dimchev, etc., literally opens representation to the real. They make the spectator aware of the reality of the performance, which demonstrates the illusion of fiction, the reflection of *mimêsis*, and the need to be and represent oneself in person. The performer does not play the game of dramatic representation but with the dramatic game of (re)presentations, from which he sometimes cuts himself off, at the cost of the most extreme actions. A break within the break imposes a sudden return to reality, shatters the – maybe deceitful – mirror, becoming the subject of the event.³⁸

One of the specificities of the performative event, at times considered as a new kind of “avant-garde theatre,” is that it is not related to any particular genre. It integrates manifestations of all kinds, which are not necessarily, if not only, based on the stage development of a fictional world. It opens new perspectives for the study and understanding of the practices that have unsettled, and still unsettle, the traditional logics of representation, even if it does not exclude them from its field of investigation. Theatrical or not, fictional or real, it involves a certain number of codes and conventions, depending on the situations in which it structures itself and evolves. Whatever its nature – a show, festival, ceremony, football match, parade, political meeting, etc. –, performance can evolve independently of the establishment of codes and rules. On this subject, Catherine Perret notes that the event seeks to make the measurement of time apparent, without mask, outside representation. It tries to generate the real time, that is to say the subjective time of the act, although it faces the immoderation of chance and the problem of provoking it without representing it³⁹; at least outside its limits. The performative event is able to question the principles of and the gap between spectators and actors, without involving a separation or distinction between the world of the stage and that of the audience. The event is singular in that it does not interfere in the relations to the stage, participants, action, and time. As noted by Catherine Bouk, every participant enjoys a freedom that theatre does not allow.⁴⁰ It is able to break loose from the vision-based dramatic model of theatre, in favour of a dynamic of integration, interaction, participation, sensation.

According to Guy Spielmann, the “show-event” hints at a new epistemic horizon, the communicative characteristic of which seems obvious and “the most convincing criterion of which lies in inter-subjectivity: a performative body and a

³⁷ Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit, t. 1. L'intrigue et le récit historique*, Paris, Seuil, 1983, p. 76.

³⁸ Barbara Roland, “Performance, sacrifice et don,” publication of the Aplaqa conference proceedings: *Représentations du sacrifice et du don*, Halifax, University Mount Saint-Vincent/University Saint-Mary/Université Dalhousie (under publication); Ead., “De la représentation du tragique au tragique des (re)présentations: l'expérience cathartique de la mise en scène de soi,” in Joël Beddows and Louise Frappier (eds.), *Histoire et mémoire au théâtre*, Laval, Presses de l'Université Laval (PUL), 2016.

³⁹ Catherine Perret, *Les Porteurs d'ombre. Mimêsis et modernité*, Paris, Belin, “L'extrême contemporain,” 2001, p. 298.

⁴⁰ Catherine Bouko, *Théâtre et réception: le spectateur postdramatique*, Bruxelles, P.I.E. Peter Lang/Dramaturgies, no. 26, 2010, p. 34.

‘spectative’ body treated as a joint event [...]”⁴¹ Inter-subjectivity constitutes the basis of new artistic practices, around such topics as “togetherness,” meeting one another, the collective production of meaning, the modalities and components of which evolve depending on the environment, conditions and means affecting the implementation of reality. This notion is similar to the one developed by Cyrille Brett, who considers the *time* of the event as the collective and inter-subjective phase during which the structuring of the representation takes place.⁴²

Sometimes, the event extends to installations, to natural and human environments restoring the opportunity for art to settle in a social, poetic or political context. Talking about “events,” Itzhak Goldberg says that they are often related to installations as a material, ephemeral or modified basis – or even a basis under development – putting the spectator in a new situation requiring his participation, with only one difference: the temporal dimension.⁴³ The links between installation and event are close ones indeed. Installations are often samples or integrated parts of performance that contain sound or visual elements. Events are also associated with environments, defined by extension as happenings without “actors.” Environments and events have this in common that they reduce the gap between art and life, as well as the distance between spectators and the work to such a point that they participate. The integration of installations and environments into events facilitates the creation of universes, atmospheres, visual or sound artistic landscapes – maybe interactive – involving the eventness of the perceptible and intelligible in real, artificial or virtual environments, where the subject takes action and in/through which the subject can be acted. Participants end up being guided or progressing by themselves along performative paths and living “sensational” experiences, on the mode of performance (execution of an action) and representation (reception, perception), (“*K, A society*,” by Chris Verdonck; *Bright et Embodiment/PureBig Future*, by Christian Bakalov...).

Many events include inter- and cross-disciplinary spectacular modalities, alternatives to action, participation, interaction and interactivity, in which performances and representations are not so much opposed as they question one another, unite, alternate, coordinate, adjoin each other, and interact at various levels of action and perception. An action of everyday life may be established or restored in the public space, as well, performance may be represented simultaneously or afterward on screen (*Bed Time Talking*, by Tania Alice...); an exhibition may be interspersed with performances (*The first contemporary dance event*, CAB; *Brouillon une exposition en mouvement*, by Boris Charmatz; *Museum Night fever*...); the representation of artists may become a performance in itself. Artworks may interact with choreography, theatrical production and the implementation of technical means (*I-on* and *X-on*, by Ivo Dimchev...); a

⁴¹ Guy Spielmann, “L’‘événement-spectacle’: pertinence du concept et de la théorie de la performance,” *Communications*, no. 92, “Performance. Le corps exposé,” Christian Biet and Sylvie Roques (eds.), 2013. In the perspective of the study of the concept’s relevance and performance studies and theories, Guy Spielmann claims that performance can be considered only in relation to another, consubstantial activity: spectation. Not every event is “spectacular.” With performance, one enters the field of the specular and expectation, of patience, sensation..., which sometimes refuses to become spectacular. See Josette Féral, *Théorie et pratique du théâtre*, Montpellier, L’Entretiens, 2011, p. 204.

⁴² Cyrille Bret, “Georges Brecht: ‘Vers une logique de la relation,’” *Inter: art actuel*, no. 101, 2008-2009.

⁴³ Itzhak Goldberg, “Installations-Happenings, liaisons dangereuses ?,” *Communications*, no. 92, “Performance. Le corps exposé,” 2013, p. 69.

cinematographic, digital, interactive apparatus may be integrated into an installation, a performance, a theatrical production (*Field Works-Hotel*, by Deepblue/Heine Avdal & Yukiko Shinozaki; *The Fault Lines*, by Meg Stuart, Philipp Gehmacher and Vladimir Miller; *Vision*, by Pierre Mégos; shows by d'Armel Roussel, Fabrice Murgia, Romeo Castellucci, Robert Lepage, Denis Marleau...).

The search for links between live performance and technical means of mediation immerses the performers and sometimes even the spectators in events, during which the performance/show opens up to interactivity, simulation, immersion (like the performances of Marcel.lí Antúnez Roca; *Me and my shadow*, by Joseph Hyde...).

In *Me and my shadow*, the interactive apparatus serves as a base for simultaneous 3D connections and interactions between participants from four European cities (Istanbul, London, Mons and Paris). The four performance-installations act as online tele-presence portals offering an immersion in a collaborative virtual environment. The participants are invited to communicate via the projection of their image on the screen - the virtual and material space being also accessible online via a website. In this kind of experimentation, which specifically focuses on the issue of communication and the non-verbal forms of language, the feedback loop that operates between the human actions and technical equipment – *Kinect* camera –, shows the shady projection of the real into the virtual space. It expresses the vagueness of a communication performed by bodies, the movements of which leave incomplete and altered marks of a representational problem of reality.

The live action and mediation means that facilitate the interactive immersion take the form of a technological mimicry of original situations. Mimetic projection appears to be the principle of immersive and interactive simulation, which goes beyond the strict functions of representation. In this sense, it is not so much opposed to representation⁴⁴ as it constitutes, beyond its splitting, its transcendence, realisation, or transformation; the extension of a real experience of long-distance virtual communication. It is indeed through the representation of subjects on screen that the immersion and the integration into the virtual take form in reality.

The metonymic nature of performance, as the execution of an action in the act of its presentation and as a representation, frees itself from a strictly theatrical and spectacular function, both as a situation and an event. The event-based system is behind the transition from an Aristotelian idea of binary or bipolar representation, the *mimêsis* and performance of which are the constitutive functions, to a processual, relational, interactional, interactive, immersive and performative notion of performance/representation. In this respect, the modalities of staging, doubling or (non-mimetic) restoration of a fictional or concrete reality, of its

⁴⁴ According to Baudrillard, simulation is the opposite of representation, it does not rely on the utopian principle of the equivalence of the sign to the real, but on the killing of every reference (Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulations*, Galilée, Paris, 1981, p. 16). Stéphane Vial, *L'Être et l'écran: comment le numérique change la perception*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France (PUF), 2013, p. 157-159. While simulation pertains to the real, at least in its virtual potential, and representation pertains to the illusion, make-believe, it is not necessarily based on the killing of every reference. Additionally, representation cannot be reduced to make-believe or illusion. Therefore, simulation is not so much opposed to representation as it reveals some of its hitherto unseen dimension, other levels of expression and realisation.

regulation or organisation through *mimêsis* (the presence of which it would aim to assert or not) are not the only important elements, since the mediation of real situations of presence and co-presence of the subjects, the interactions (performances) and performative representations (interpretations) of the event are equally significant.

Exhibit B by South-African artist Brett Bailey is a major example of a controversial situation of representation, because of its event-based relationships between art and history, art and memory. The event consists in the exposing of twelve living paintings imitating “human zoos” of the late nineteenth century, in order to denounce the atrocities of colonialism and to question the current policies on African immigration in Europe. The appropriateness of the performance to the historical representation is here problematic, because of the pejorative load of the reproduction phenomenon, and of its representations in terms of any exposed show. The accusations of racism and serious affronts to human dignity seen in the show question the functions of restoration of these behaviours,⁴⁵ as a historical reproduction, whose impact as an event seems to deprive the performance of any critical or reflexive function. The reason for this is that the functions of the event are here reduced to interpretations – maybe taken out of the context of performative experience –, to sensational effects, to the reification and exploitation of performers in the service of a racial manipulation of representation. The process of reproduction of history in a contemporary context undoubtedly raises questions, depending on the multi-disciplinary theories on this topic (psychoanalysis, sociology, philosophy, aesthetics...), on the technical nature (mimetic), or at least on an ethical dimension of such restoration... The questionable point here pertains to the performative mediation of the representations of otherness, of which it is the subject: while the performative objective of artistic representation is to denounce and raise awareness on reality – a reality that it reproduces –, the denunciation, as if subjected to the mimetic effect of the principle of inversion that is typical of the effect of representation, becomes the very object of the event-driven manifestations of the black community, of a disturbance in their representation.⁴⁶

In conclusion

Although performance no longer aims to *re-present*, one cannot deny that the contemporary art system necessarily involves the performance of representation and representation of performance, if not on the mode of its reception and (capitalist) reproduction in a system determining and determined by an institutional and representable order, at least in relation to a political, social and identity cause or situation, of which performance is the monstration. Representation brings performance to the forefront, and vice versa, and appears as

⁴⁵ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies. An Introduction* (second edition 2006), New York, Routledge, 2002, p.28. From the perspective of the *Performance Studies*, the performance is the restoration of a behaviour or a restored behaviour.

⁴⁶ According to Austin, the idea of event, in the sense of “incident,” is here an indicator of a performativity conveying eventness, which emphasises the disruption it induces in a continuous process, and which makes the present suddenly emerge – the representation of a community and of its suffering in relation to the burden of the past and its representation – on the enunciative stage in its broadest sense (linguistic, scenic, social). Josette Féral, “De la performance à la performativité,” *Communications*, no. 92, “Performance. Le corps exposé,” Christian Biet and Sylvie Roques (eds.), 2013, p. 209.

an instrument of action and methodological, ethical and aesthetic analysis of the creative functions and their influences in the field of arts, as well as an object of deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge. Performance and representation are not so much opposed as they participate in the breaking down of their barriers and in the development of their practical and theoretical notions, which have the potential to reduce the gap between art and life, between ignorance and knowledge, between “showing doing” and explaining “showing doingm” between the performances and representations that draw on and question each other.

The practices, criticisms and theories of performance, of post-dramatic and performative theatre, of event – in the study of their manifestations, influences and connections –, are likely to result in the evolution of the trite notions of the arts of representation. They show other, ever-changing and ever-evolving ways to *re-present*, which depend on adjustments, adaptations and transformations. They establish themselves as ways to reflect the functions, as well as the representational and event-driven potential of art, which opens up new perspectives according to flexible ways of being, seeing, doing, feeling, (inter)acting...

Therefore, one should continue to progress in the direction of the evolution of the notions of contemporary representation: where the destabilisation of the binary oppositions makes way for changing and plural relations between the creative processes behind the events. Contemporaneity in arts implies that one overcomes the sense of disturbance in representation and questions the possibility of opening up to new aesthetics and policies, allowing one to think in terms of the polysemy that is inherent to the performativity of events, rather than in the exclusive terms of analogy or opposition of performance and representation. One has to look for the conciliation of ever-evolving systems, to the advantage of dialogues between and assimilation of practices and theories, while avoiding getting stranded in the determination of their representations.

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