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## **PERFORMANCE: SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH COMMUNICATION (UKRAINIAN PERSPECTIVE)**

The article deals with the examination of the performance's transformative potential through the demonstration of social and communicative nature of this phenomenon. Performance is viewed as a social event and a means of communication from the perspective of the constitutional meta-model of communication of Robert Craig. Performance is considered as a reflexive, open, creative and self-presentational social event and liminal situation that presupposes three communicational dimensions – transmission of information, collective creation and social transformation. Much attention is paid to the consideration of the Ukrainian revolution of Dignity 2013-2014 and conceptualization of its particular aspects as social performances that led to the transformation of the Ukrainian social realm.

**Keywords:** performance, communication, transformation, liminality, Ukrainian revolution of Dignity.

The occurrence of the performance as a new genre of the modern art in the middle of the 20th century was a prominent event in the history of the modern culture that transformed not only a traditional conception of art work's form, conditions of its presentation and artist's status but also became an embodiment of a qualitatively new type of communication between the author and audience. Since 1950s, performance has turned into a progressive form of art practice that neglected the dichotomy of object and subject, performer and audience, and transformed the interrelations of the material and symbolical statuses of actions and objects as performance's components.

Due to the widespread occurrence of the performance in the artistic field, this phenomenon has been examined primarily from the position of art studies. Consequentially, it was long underestimated as a social phenomenon and a communicative process that can lead to social transformations. However, the researchers emphasize that performance's social nature and the necessity to consider it in the context of its various manifestations in a sociocultural space. Even though E. Goffman, M. Carlson, E. Fischer-Lichte, D. Conquergood, P. Phelan and J. C. Alexander approached to the examination of the performance from the positions of social philosophy and cultural studies admitting the necessity to widen the limits of a theoretical inquiry of performance as a social phenomenon, none of these researchers attempted to examine a communicative potential of the performance as a form of communicative interaction. However, performance as a form of social interaction is a communicative process based on the horizontal relations of its participants that exchange information, create meanings and even construct a social realm intervening social norms and institutions.

The aim of this article is to consider the performance as a form of communication that can be defined through the notions of reflexivity, openness, creativity and self-presentation. Moreover, through the conceptualization of the performance as a communicative process, its transformative potential will be analyzed from the position of the constitutive meta-model of communication. So as to demonstrate the performance as a source of social transformative power, it will be relevant to appeal to the recent Ukrainian experience of social change – the Revolution of Dignity that took place in 2013-2014 and led to the change of the political power in Ukraine and series of reforms and at the same time the decrease of the Russian influence and war with Russia.

The above-mentioned characteristics of reflexivity, openness, creativity and self-presentation are significant for the performance's conceptualization as a form of social communication. Reflexivity is perceived as an intention and criticalness of the performers and performance itself towards a social realm. According to Bauman, in the performance, a performer “takes up a particular reflexive position, or alignment, to his or her act of expression, the assumption of responsibility for a display of communicative

skill and efficacy”<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, reflexivity is also a feature of the performance itself: Turner conceptualizes it as a form of public reflexivity that is expressed in the “doing codes” – dramatic means of communication that cannot be reduced to the codes of speech<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, performance is an embodied reflection – on social reality, performance’s aims, performers’ actions and direct reaction of the audience. The reflexive potential of the performance transforms it into an effective tool of social research and adds a deliberative-analytical dimension to its expressive one.

Openness, as an essential feature of the performance, presupposes a space of communicative interaction that ensures neither a representation as the transmission of information nor a demonstration of social power but the exchange of ideas and meanings between the equal members of the civil society, who can be active participants of the event through self-expression. According to Jurgen Habermas, openness is a sphere of political communication<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, from this perspective, social performance is a platform of public discussion that provides open access to everyone, who has a will to make his/her voice heard.

Moreover, openness may also be understood as a specific relation of the performance to its script and the consequences of its realization. In particular, openness means performance’s non-identicalness to the script and unpredictable character of its consequences due to the essence of the free collective interaction. Indeed, performance cannot be absolutely controlled by anybody: it cannot be considered as a precise realization of the particular idea. That does not imply that performance is independent from the influence of its participants. On the contrary, in the process of performance, it is impossible to distinguish the creators and the audience because of the symmetrical relations between them as equal sides in the collective creative activity.

Openness preconditions the creativity of the performance’s participants: during the performance, they appear in situations that could not be predicted in advance. Moreover, creativity points at the transformative potential of the performance due to its ability to create reality and construct collective representations. According to Peter Snow, performances as creative processes are the means of culture creation: “they hold cultures up to scrutiny, they admonish them, reflect them, celebrate them, confirm them, transform them, and, most significantly, they create them”<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, the performance as a creative collective social action enables a cultural development that happens through the reflection and transformation of the existing cultural norms and samples. Paolo Virno considers the unity of these norms and at the same time the performance’s script as a General Intellect that in the mode of virtuosity and creativity is not an abstraction but a “cooperation, the acting in concern of human labor, the communicative competence of individuals”<sup>5</sup>.

Finally, self-presentation is a process of collective creation and self-expression in the performative action that is not similar to the representation of another person’s roles or ideas. Self-presentation, unlike representation as an indirect demonstration, and presentation as solely presence and immediate certainty, is a presence of a subject that is presented and its own agency, activity in creation, transformation or maintenance of the particular impression that the other participants of the performance possess. Thus, in the performance, the most significant role is devoted not to the presentation of the artifact or demonstration of a piece of art, but to the process of its realization that is aimed at the self-presentation of the performer and audience through the participation in the creation of symbols and meanings. The self-presentational character of the performance reveals its crucial features that are presence, directness, and authenticity.

So as to analyze a social performance as a form of communication it is necessary to consider theoretical foundations of such conceptualization through the definition of the notion of communication. In this context, it may be fruitful to refer to the conception of James Carey, an American communicational theorist, who in his work “A cultural approach to communication” defines two approaches to conceptualize communication: transmission and ritual<sup>6</sup>. The transmission approach is based on the idea that a language is

<sup>1</sup> Bauman, R. (2011). Commentary: foundations in performance. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 15 (5), 710-711.

<sup>2</sup> Turner, V. (1979). Frame, flow and reflection: ritual and drama as public liminality. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 6 (4), 465.

<sup>3</sup> Habermas, J. (1991). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Snow, P. (2010). Performing society. *Thesis Eleven*, 103 (1), 85.

<sup>5</sup> Virno, P. (2004). *A grammar of the multitude*. New York: Semiotext, 65.

<sup>6</sup> Carey, J. W. (2009). *A Cultural Approach to Communication*. In *Communication as culture: Essays on media and society*. New York: Routledge, 11-28.

a universal tool of description through which information about reality, human experience, and social events are transmitted. According to the transmission approach, communication is an “information processing and explains how all kinds of complex systems, whether living or nonliving, macro or micro, are able to function, and why they often malfunction”<sup>1</sup>. Thus, communication is a process of sending and receiving verbal messages. On the contrary, according to the ritual approach, communication is “a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed”<sup>2</sup>. A communicational process as a ritual is a platform of collective construction of social meanings and, consequently, a social reality. Unlike the transmission perspective, the crucial notions that identify the ritual approach are “exchange”, “participation”, “association”, “solidarity” and “mutual trust”<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the perspective of the communicational process’ definition as a ritual emphasizes the solidarization of the communication participants as the main feature of communicational interaction. In other words, communication, according to the representatives of the ritual approach, is a dynamic process of maintenance and legitimation of the social meanings in the collective identity of the community.

At the same time, these views can be complementary and may be united in the constitutive meta-model of communication, which “opens up a conceptual space in which diverse first-order models can interact”<sup>4</sup>. I perceive it to be meaningless to consider a question of the definition of communication as a problem of the binary choice between two opposite models because there are no foundations of the necessity of such a choice. Therefore, this constitutive meta-model of communication can be a foundation to conceptualize a performance as a form of communication because it suggests a broader view on communication than two approaches defined by Carey.

From this perspective, the performance as a complex of participatory reflexive, open, creative, and self-expressional actions is a communicational process. Firstly, it is an utterance that is distinct from the verbal utterance due to its syntax. Secondly, it is a communicational forum that is peculiar to the horizontal interrelatedness of its participants. Finally, it is a process of creation and transformation of reality through communication. According to Dwight 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”<sup>5</sup>. In other words, social performance is always challenging to the social order that preconditions it. Therefore, three levels of communication can be defined in performance: it is a platform of utterance, suggestion, and deliberation about an individual or collective interests and intentions, experience exchange, etc. and also a tool of the transformation of social and cultural norms, which underlie knowledge and power relations.

The transformative potential of the performance can be considered through the lens of the notion of liminality suggested by Arnold van Gennep and developed later by Victor Turner. Liminality is a peculiar characteristic of the particular group of rituals that points at their transitional and intermediate essence. These rituals are aimed at the integration of the social order. Being spread in all cultures, they are the bridges from one transitional social state or status to another one. The performance appears to be a transitional state too because it embodies a mediational stage in the development of a social system. Moreover, its participants go through the transformation so as to reach a new state that is constituted during or after the performance. Thus, the performance is characterized by the “in between” relation to the stages in a social realm and is aimed at the transformation of the existing order and construction of the new one. Using nonverbal and verbal symbols, which are created and shared due to its’ participants presence, the performance leads to the construction of the collective representations. They transform the public thought and influence a social reality. In addition to that, performance transforms the character of the communal social bonds that are its premises: it changes the model of a structured and hierarchic society to “communitas” that appears in the result of the liminal situation and is defined by Turner as a “communion of equal individuals”<sup>6</sup> – an unstructured social formation that is more open and flexible.

<sup>1</sup> Craig, R. T. (1999). Communication theory as a field. *Communication Theory*, 9 (2), 141.

<sup>2</sup> Carey, J. W. (2009). *A Cultural Approach to Communication*. In *Communication as culture: Essays on media and society*. New York: Routledge, 19.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Craig, R. T. (1999). Communication theory as a field. *Communication Theory*, 9 (2), 80.

<sup>5</sup> Conquergood, D. (1998). Beyond the text: Toward a performative cultural Politics. In Sh. J. Dailey (Ed.), *The Future of Performance Studies: Visions and Revisions*. National Communication Association, 32.

<sup>6</sup> Turner, V. (1991). *The ritual process: Structure and antistructure*. New York: Cornell University Press, 96.

Applying the concept of liminality and constitutive meta-approach to the performance as a form of communication that presupposes a transformative dimension, it may be fruitful to refer to the Ukrainian experience of the nearest past, that is Maidan – the Ukrainian revolution of Dignity that took place in 2013-2014. Its particular actions and happenings may be considered as instances of the performative reorganization of the Ukrainian social realm.

The Ukrainian revolution started from the students' protest against the decision of the Ukrainian ex-president, who refused to sign the association with the European Union<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, his policy throughout his presidential term was anti-Ukrainian in all its directions (the attacks on the Ukrainian language willing to legalize Russian as a second official language, political repressions of opposition, corruption and pillage of state resources). However, later on, these demonstrations were transformed into the mass protests of people who became the victims of violence from the side of the official power. The Revolution lasted for about three months. More than a hundred people were killed and more than a thousand people were injured. The whole society struggled for justice, human rights, and national dignity. Therefore, the revolution was named the Revolution of Dignity. During that time, there were many remarkable performances that influenced the victory of the revolution. Moreover, the phenomenon of Maidan itself seemed to embody the performative features like a complex communication and sum of reflexive activities realized by the performers and audience on the particular mis-en-scene who aimed to revive and construct collective representations and change the society.

Those who were on Maidan, were a self-organized social group. Without any doubt, public media were a significant means of the resources' mobilization. However, the main channel was the human one through networking and social media. Therefore, as a community, the participants of the protests, who at first sight were the audience, on an equality with the politicians initiated political performances. They were not aiming to be considered as artists or candidates for government jobs. They understood the liminal character of that period for the country and presented themselves so as to persuade the politicians and nation to change the direction of the Ukrainian development.

Being self-organized, as a complex community, the participants of the Maidan created a liminal situation in the Ukrainian social environment that was also the "bifurcation point"<sup>2</sup>. From the position of synergetics, "at this point, the old solution becoming unstable, new solutions emerge which may correspond to quite different behavior of matter"<sup>3</sup>. In other words, this point is a situation of unpredictability, which presupposes a necessity of choice among the equal possibilities and further development of the system that does not depend on the linear necessity – the causes that are thought to be crucial and inescapable before this liminal point. That means that the bifurcation point is a liminal situation characterized by its decisive role in the development of the process, system, etc. that equalizes and makes them open to different opposite possibilities: at this point, a system may transform into chaos as well as reach the higher level of organization. Performance as a liminal point is also a means of system check that through the communication leads to the unexpected consequences, which could not be defined in the script but are the result of the free collective interaction and creation.

On the 8th of December 2013, the Marching of Millions took place in Kyiv. It was a demonstration of Ukrainians' solidarity in a struggle for the democratic development and European values – the values of civilization that are the amenities for their subjects – freedom, equality and fraternity. Up to 1 million people were active participants of this collective discussion. However, not only were they talking. In particular, they sang the national anthem as a symbol of Ukrainian independence and unity. It may be considered to be a kind of social performance because it was a reflexive action, where people could express themselves together, without knowing whether they win or not. They made the music together and revived the national values. In other words, singing together resembled a ritual aimed at a solidarization of the audience and creation of new collective representation – a political nation – the unity based on common values regardless of ethnic background.

Singing together may be considered through the lens of the notion "musicking" suggested by Christopher Small. Musicking means that musical performance presupposes the involvement not only

<sup>1</sup> Kvit, S. (2014). The ideology of the Euromaidan. *Social, Health, and Communication Studies Journal Contemporary Ukraine: A Case of Euromaidan*, 1 (1), 28-29.

<sup>2</sup> Prigogine, I. (2011). Only an Illusion. In S. M. McMurrin (Ed.), *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (pp. 35-64). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 48.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

in the artistic process of creation but also in a situation of social interaction. According to the author, it is reasonable “to see a musical performance as an encounter between human beings that takes place through the medium of sounds organized in specific ways. Like all human encounters, it takes place in a physical and a social setting, and those, too, have to be taken into account when we ask what meanings are being generated by a performance”<sup>1</sup>. Thus, collective singing of the Ukrainian national anthem during the Marching of Millions was a social performance through music as a platform of mutual exchange of thoughts and emotions in the verbal and nonverbal forms that helped its participants to actualize their strivings and solidarize on the basis of collective values. In other words, singing together was a process of “making the music together”<sup>2</sup> that as “this sharing of the other’s flux of experiences in inner time, this living through a vivid present in common, constitutes what we called...the mutual turning-in relationship, the experience of “We,” which is at the foundation of all possible communication”<sup>3</sup>.

In addition to that, in the process of such political performative communication as a collective creative collaboration that took place during the Revolution of Dignity, the ways out of the political crisis, preconditioned by the actions of the ex-president Yanukovich and his government, were sought. In its turn, the consideration of the political opportunities lied through the construction of social realm there and at that time, the definition and evaluation of the events by its participants in the process of their realization, and the elaboration of the script of the necessary actions aiming to maximize the common good. According to John McAloon, performances are the “occasions in which as a culture or society we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others”<sup>4</sup>. That means that self-determination and self-presentation in the social performance happen in such a process of construction of the narrative, discussion of the strategies of the further collective actions that lead to the collective reorganization of the social reality.

On the day before the Marching of Millions, there was another remarkable performance too. A young musician from Lviv Markiy Matsekh brought his piano painted in the colors of the Ukrainian national flag and played a concert in front of the line of the military who executed commands from the non-legitimate government<sup>5</sup>. According to the musician, the piano was a social experiment: “I very much want such an object to become the symbol of the Maidan. It has to be visible during the day, and it has to be heard at night”<sup>6</sup>. One of the compositions he played was a song composed by John Lennon “Imagine” as a symbol of the Ukrainian people in hopes of living in peace in their own country. That musical performance underlined the motives and nature of the confrontation between the protesters and the representatives of the non-legitimate official power. The latter was ready to use the lethal weapons against people who struggled for justice and actually, they used it two months after that.

However, the protesters and their leaders hoped not to allow violence. In particular, during the Revolution, its civil department implemented an educating program for the participants of the revolution that was aimed at the demonstration of the effectiveness of the nonviolent resistance and organization of the peace-making patrols. During the Revolution of Dignity, a lot of civic organizations and communities occurred, such as “the Maidan SelfDefence, the Auto-Maidan (from “automotive,” mobile units of car owners that became the Maidan’s cavalry), “Ne Zlyi Maidan” (the phrase has a double meaning in Ukraine: “Don’t anger Maidan” and “Don’t betray Maidan”), Euromaidan SOS, Maidan Open University, the Hospital Guard, the “Maidan” All-Ukrainian Association, the Civic Council of Maidan, the Civic Committee for Investigating Human Rights Abuses in Ukraine, and the “MaidanPost” Media Guard”<sup>7</sup>. These organizations were the embodiment of self-organization and unity of people in understanding the common values.

Thus, Markiy Matsekh communicating social meanings in the music in front of the military forces demonstrated that Maidan was not a source of aggression and violence. On the contrary, this performance

<sup>1</sup> Small, Ch. (1998). *Musicking. The meanings of performing and listening*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Schuetz, A. (1951). Making music together: a study in social relationship. *Social Research*, 18 (1), 76-97.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander, J. C. (2011). *Performance and Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 20.

<sup>5</sup> Moussienko, N. (2016). *Art of Maidan*. Kyiv: Huss, 50.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Kvit, S. (2014). The ideology of the Euromaidan. *Social, Health, and Communication Studies Journal Contemporary Ukraine: A Case of Euromaidan*, 1 (1), 29-30.

became a symbol of nonviolent methods of political struggle. In addition to that, this performance was successful because it became extremely popular in the media through the distribution of the photo with a musician playing in front of the line of the military. Its impact on the global community and collective consciousness of the Ukrainians was evidence of the performance's transformative power. Through the music as a manager of social interaction, the participants of that performance derived their forces to struggle for their rights and gain the political power that was traditionally possible to achieve only on the institutional political stage. However, being socially unequal but feeling equal in the musical performance, its participants created a communicative forum so as to reconfigure a social hierarchy and create a space for the free expression of different estimations.

Another peculiar performance during the Ukrainian Revolution was the "Police in the Mirrors", when people came out to stand in front of the police with the mirrors as their shields with the lettering "God, is that me?" The performers did not talk or make any artistic expressions. On the contrary, they stood quietly and let the representatives of the military observe their reflections in the mirrors so as to provoke them to think about their sense of nationhood. It was a performative attempt to intervene in the institutional order asking the police to participate in the communication but not in the realization of the illegal commands. This collective performative action was an example of a social interaction initiative. Protesters communicated the message that both they and police were citizens of Ukraine and thus, possessed mutual goals and values – to live in the independent state and be free to choose a democratic and civilizational way of its development. Thus, they attempted to make the militaries be critical and not realize the illegal commands of the government. In other words, through the performance as a communicational act, its initiators tried to involve the wide range of participants so as to find a common background and support in the further sociopolitical struggle.

The Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity won in February 2014. It appeared to be a "national liberation struggle" whose crucial value was a "unity in diversity"<sup>1</sup>. The victory of this self-organizational collective expression of the will cannot be traced exclusively to the success of the above mentioned artistic and political performances that accompanied the confrontation of the nation and non-legitimate government. However, these performances had a powerful impact on the collective consciousness, identification of the majority of Ukrainians, and social order. In particular, these performances and the Revolution of Dignity itself led to the making of the civil society, occurrence, and union of the Ukrainian political nation, a complete reset of power and a range of diplomatic victories of the state. At the same time, the tasks of the Revolution are still relevant due to the Russian aggression in Ukraine.

To sum up, the events that took place on Maidan happened in a crucial period in the modern Ukrainian and I strongly believe the whole European history and were also peculiar as demonstrative examples of social change and nonviolent struggle for the national dignity. Through the communication, performances broke the undemocratic institutions and preconditioned further democratization and liberalization of the Ukrainian state. Therefore, it may be fruitful to consider performance as a social event and communication to be a powerful means of social non-violent transformation.

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