

Performance Art/Life Art/ Mediafication

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The effect of the immateriality of mass communication that is produced through the media is such that it has been possible for these media to establish themselves globally and not only become dominant as instruments of information and entertainment, but even to replace direct communication, which is reality, to the benefit of their own pseudo-reality. Today mediafication is the reality against which one must measure oneself; it is a transformative type of vital functioning to which we adapt ourselves as individuals.

The media define our desires and needs even if, viewed subjectively, we don't find them at all persuasive. The media have become the collective unconscious of the postwar period, to which we have adapted without noticing that it was they that have fashioned our inner images. As present as the media are, their effect seems almost nonexistent, and yet they ultimately continue to dominate our behavior. The unceasing flow, the definition of topicality, the never-ending process of mediafication is too strong not to drag us along with it.

Thus, a global consciousness is constituted via the media that we become conscious of only in retrospect. The fact that we don't even notice it initially and that it is already directing our behavior before we can even imagine other forms of mediafication impedes our access to mediafication. For this reason we must define alternatives to the media using their own concepts, but directing those concepts toward other aims.

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Performance is just such a concept, which has arisen, however, from the world of the media. There it signifies the appearance (*Auftritt*) of an actor, moderator, or entertainer, either on a stage or, later, in a studio, and finally in a film, a show, or at some specific site. Performance means an appearance and the achievement (*Leistung*) linked to it; an "enablement" (*Können*).

Over the course of time, however, the meaning was expanded in several ways: to performance in the sense of an accomplishment, to the idea of the distinguished "performance" of a product, or simply as a measure of business and profit. Thus the concept has taken on another dimension, which comes from assimilating the contradictions that link the subject to the object and, transforming them both, obliterates the contours of subject and object in an almost terrifying way. Performance can thus be characterized as the appearance of a subject or object that is able to attract our attention in that it is the completion of a performed accomplishment (*Leistung*) that both fascinates and captivates us.

Performance is an event that appears to us to be impossible, an event that is content to remain as such at the latest state of the art of technology within the parameters of mediafication. Through this self-referentiality, performances take on the status of pseudo-phenomena; they occur, and yet they can appear only through the media. Performance is the appearance (*Auftritt*) of the event.

The event as performance within the media occurs as if it were being performed by an invisible hand. This is partially due to the fact that, in the cinema, we experience time and space scrambled up, something that in television (as a "mixed media," a mixture of diverse media) has the effect of making it seem that everything is only fictional there as well. Thus, for example, the news from around the whole world is rendered bearable in that one perceives everything from a safe distance.

One can therefore say that performance happens somewhere, but is fed by the reality whose blood it sucks only to then render it unreal and leave it behind. This situation, typical of the mediafication process, leads us to the point at which an event that doesn't appear in the media hasn't taken place (although it has, of course, taken place) and that, without the presence of the media, this event is no longer perceived as an event. The mediafication process has gone so far as to elevate an event to the level of a pseudo-event, through which an event first is or was an event.

This perspective is correct insofar as it pertains to the usual situation. But once one has understood the mediafication process with its make-believe images, the event can be experienced directly once again as a phenomenon that we ourselves can manage or experience in such a way that we can transform fictive reality into an actual reality which we master. We are assisted in this by the poetic action-event and the creation of situations, both of which would be characterized today as performance art, and both of which developed historically alongside the mediafication process and its overwhelming success.

In the media we are always addressed in a manner that is "over our heads," and thus we are left speechless. But in performance art we are able to find our way back to our own speech, a speech with which we perform our actions and thoughts. If we remain directly with the performance of an event accompanied by a linguistic expression, we are speaking of what J.L. Austin calls a "performative utterance." He is more specific about this:

The uttering of words is, indeed, usually a, or even *the*, leading incident in the performance of the act (of betting or what not), the performance of which is also the object of the utterance, but it is far from being usually, even if it is ever, the *sole* thing necessary if the act is to be deemed to have been performed. Speaking generally, it is always necessary that the *circumstances* in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, *appropriate*, and it is very commonly necessary that the speaker himself or other persons should also *perform* certain *other* actions, whether "physical" or "mental" actions or even acts of uttering further words. (8)

Performative utterances are differentiated into explicit and implicit (or primary) utterances, and moreover as opposed to a constative (also descriptive) utterance, as the "differentiation between acting and speaking." Austin further characterizes "herewith" as "a useful criterion for whether an expression is performative." Language is indeed-already a specification (a further development) towards pure event. And yet within language a historical process of the linguistic act is also identifiable.

Now, one thing that seems at least a fair guess, even from the elaboration of the linguistic construction, as also from its nature in the explicit performative is this: that historically, from the point of view of the evolution of language, the explicit performative must be a later development than certain more primary utterances, many of which at least are

already implicit performances, which are included in most or many explicit performatives as parts of a whole. (71)

Certainly, a performative utterance is a specific one, one that includes the individual directly and is performed by him. The constative utterance is, by comparison, "general."

Consequently, a performative utterance vis-à-vis mediafication would be a self-performed event or an independent (remediary) mediafication. And precisely here is where the conflict is located: what does an event still mean within mediafication, since it can only be performed for its own sake *or* for mediafication? The event is bifurcated by mediafication into one actual and one pseudo-event (pseudo-happening, pseudo-phenomenon), a process that earlier could be performed through art but has now become commonplace in mediafication. This in turn is the reason for the total aestheticization of life: it is precisely mediafication that can be retained as such — in which case the flow of life passes us by — or it is formed independently or logically received, and then mediafication becomes a poetic situation.

This polarization and inevitable effacement of event and pseudo-event were already recognized in the initial phase of total mediafication by Erving Goffman and Marshall McLuhan. Joshua Meyerowitz has referred to these two positions as situationism and media theory (13 ff.).

It seems to me that we must here look at situationism¹ through mediafication then, precisely the reverse; in this way we will come to a remediary understanding of mediafication. The terminology in Goffman's comments is still extremely relevant, except that he uses them with reference to an everyday "theater" that seems to have been projected onto the street from the customary (= traditional) theater:

For the purpose of this report, interaction (that is, face-to-face interaction) may be roughly defined as the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another's actions when in one another's immediate physical presence. An interaction may be defined as all the interaction which occurs throughout any one occasion when a given set of individuals are in one another's continuous presence; the term "an encounter" would do as well. A "performance" may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants. Taking a particular participant and his performance as a basic point of reference, we may refer to those

who contribute the other performances as the audience, observers, or co-participants. The pre-established pattern of action which is unfolded during a performance and which may be presented or played through on other occasions may be called a "part" or "routine." These situational terms can easily be related to conventional structural ones. When an individual or performer plays the same part to the same audience on different occasions, a social relationship is likely to arise. Defining social role as the enactment of rights and duties attached to a given status, we can say that a social role will involve one or more parts and that each of these different parts may be presented by the performer on a series of occasions to the same kinds of audience or to an audience of the same persons. (*Presentation* 15-16)

Goffman's definition of performance is precisely that which is the opposite of the media; he understands it separately from the media as something that derives from the situation itself or that makes it possible:

The next issue concerning expression requires a more extended consideration.

Whatever an individual does and however he appears, he knowingly and unknowingly makes information available concerning the attributes that might be imputed to him and hence the categories in which he might be placed. That status symbolism in his "personal front" provides information about his group and aggregate affiliations; his treatment at the hands of others conveys a conception of him; the physical milieu itself conveys implications concerning the identity of those who are in it. Face-to-face situations, it may be added, are ones in which a great variety of sign vehicles become available, whether desired or not, and are, therefore, situations in which much information about oneself can easily become available. Face-to-face situations are, in fact, ideal projective fields that the participant cannot help but structure in a characterizing way, so that conclusions can be drawn about him, correct or incorrect, whether he wants it or not. (*Encounters* 102)

In a much later publication, however, Goffman recognized the power of mediafication and examined it vis-à-vis gender in advertising. Here he uses the concept of display (see *Gender Advertisements* 11 ff.).² What is important for seeing through the mediafication process are certain meanings of display: pomp, exhibition in stores and display windows, this further accentu-

ated by the "fascination spots" of the new, finely nuanced light provided by halogen lighting.

Displays are part of what we think of as "expressive behavior," and as such tend to be conveyed and received as if they were somehow natural, deriving, like temperature and pulse, from the way people are and needful, therefore, of no social or historical analysis. But, of course, ritualized expressions are as needful of historical understanding as is the Ford car. Given the expressive practices we employ, one may ask: Where do these displays come from?

If, in particular, there are behavioral styles — codings — that distinguish the way men and women participate in social situations, then the question should be put concerning the origins and sources of these styles. The materials and ingredients can come directly from the resources available in particular social settings, but that still leaves open the question of where the formulating of these ingredients, their *styling*, comes from. (*Gender 3*)

But Goffman still provides the traditional answer to this question in that he refers to biology and the parent/child relationship. Certainly this still holds true today to a certain extent, but it nonetheless seems to me that styling is prescribed by the media and by their characteristic qualities. McLuhan attempted to elaborate this fact very early on in his 1951 book, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*.

Of course, McLuhan was reacting in this book to the state of mediafication in the 1940s (and earlier); to advertising, comic strips, business methods. And yet even then he was able to recognize, for example, that "the switch-over from competitive display to personal affection is not easy for the girl. Her mannequin past is in the way." And neither is it easy for the man to respond to this "display of power," with, at best, "an impossible virility of assertion" (99).

McLuhan describes stylization through the media, the process of mediafication through the examples of newly developing behavioral patterns such as "Nose for News," "Know-How," "Plain Talk," "Market Research," "Eye Appeal," "The Voice of the Lab," "I'm Tough," "What It Takes to Stay In." These patterns, provided by the media, will determine our behavior from this point on, especially among young people, and only by learning to distance ourselves from them will we be able to find our way to ourselves.

The notion that we are pursuing here didn't interest Marshall McLuhan. He directed his comments toward the degree to which the media extend our bodies and thus allow the entire world to be dwarfed into a global village. One could therefore say that McLuhan picks up where Goffman leaves off. He attempts to understand mediafication (in *Understanding Media*) in that he characterizes the effect of the media as a cultural factor of the first order. For this reason, even trivial details could become a medium for him. Such details (for example, the stirrup), as he perceived them, contributed to great changes. The effect of this on his thought was a mythologizing of the media — the media became animistic. Only in this way is it possible to explain that he characterizes the electronic environment as extremely tactile, when, in effect, the tactility consists at best in touching keyboards, in pushing buttons and switches, on the other hand, it is certainly seeing that becomes the determining factor.

The extreme and pervasive tactility of the new electronic environment results from a mesh of pervasive energy that penetrates our nervous system incessantly. The sense of touch had been anesthetized in the mechanical age, but today television is only one of the tactile agents transforming popular awareness. Of course, color TV is very much more tactile than black and white TV. Tactility is the integral sense, the one that brings all the others into relation. This sense is greatly enhanced by the polarized and feedback pattern of our new electronic environment. This environment itself constitutes an inner trip, collectively, without benefit of drugs. (*War 76-77*)

This tactility would be justified, in my view, if it were interpreted as "being affected" or as "perplexity," as intellectual rather than physical contact. McLuhan would certainly not permit this point of view to be considered, since in a book that was published at almost the same time, he further exploits the physical metaphor and speaks of the massage that is administered to us by the media after he had previously declared them to be the message.

All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered. The medium is the message. Any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments.

All
media
are
extensions
of
some
human
faculty —
psychic
or
physical. (*Medium 26*)

Just how seriously we are to take these magical incantations cannot be determined with any great certainty, since in another book, designed quite dynamically in terms of graphics, we can read in black letters against a red chevron, "The medium is the mess age" (*Counter-Blast 23*). In other words, the same medium is chaos, of which he also says, it is involvement (26). In one powerful act, McLuhan turns everything upside down when he claims, "the new media are not bridges between man and nature: they are nature" (*Verbi-Voci-Visual*, intro. np).

And yet, the more frequently one bids farewell to McLuhan at the front door, the more unexpectedly he confronts one at the back door — through the enormous provocation that his formulations exert, through the unburdened quality of his comments and through the stimulus they provide.

If we remind ourselves once again of Goffman's interaction, what McLuhan calls involvement and situation would be the electronic environment. If both are read together, one arrives at a useful foundation for an encounter that can be called event and pseudo-event within the mediafication process. By bringing in additional thinkers from this period at the beginning of the electronic age, it will become clear to us that the media must also be thought and employed remedially (*re-mediär*) so that we learn to understand its effect.

We must further differentiate the situation and the media-specific element, and above all place them in the context of a new reality that is their result. Until the dominance of the media, reality was still relatively easy to describe, although historical changes cannot be overlooked. To a great extent, the field can be marked out with the terms realism, naturalism, and surrealism. What was meant by these was the world of work and social engagement (Marx) and the construction of the psychic apparatus (Freud). The force of circumstance (*Sachzwänge*), the exter-

nal world, and the inner needs and joys that accompanied them were the poles between which reality occurred.

With the dominance of the media as reality — and with the hyperrealism that results from this — one can now say, we now live in a mixture of outer and inner worlds, of public and private, of nature and culture that can no longer be clearly defined; indeed, the immaterial is more strongly emphasized than the material. The prototype is no longer reality, but a media-reality.

The real — the apparent prototype — must be transformed in the image of its reproductions, measured against its eventual reproductions. Daily events must obligingly follow along after their copies. There are already numerous events that only take place as they do so that they can be used as broadcasts; indeed, there are those that occur only because they are desired or needed as broadcasts. In such cases it is no longer possible to judge where reality stops and play begins. (Anders 190-91)

It is interesting that Günther Anders still views this problem of an altered reality as a difference between reality and play, whereas today it has become all too clear that play has become the bitter seriousness of another reality, of a total aestheticization that is a second nature and display that can again generate new forms of play. Here the “hyper” also refers to the hyperreality of Jean Baudrillard, for whom, however, play has also played itself out because the media are now simply simulation and nothing else.

Thus for Baudrillard, who was inspired by Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power* and fascinated by McLuhan, the “medium is the message.” The masses stifle communication and are as such the medium, and life is lost within its simulation. This is McLuhan's media theory, according to which we have now definitively become the appendages of the media; we are extensions of the media, their end points.

Whenever one feigns something, one speaks of simulating, and yet simulation can also mean calculating a virtual reality on the computer that then can be carried out, as is the case in architecture, for example. Today the simulation of many things is part of reality. And that fact brings simulation into the context of the pseudo-event.

One of the first theories of the pseudo-event was supplied by Daniel Boorstin. Under the heading “The Image,” he charted for us the temperature curve of celebrity in which the medium — filled with faces that are eternally the same — actually is the

message. And yet Boorstin doesn't view this as a handy formula; rather, he views it critically when he writes, "We are haunted, not by reality, but by those images we have put in place of reality" (6).

Boorstin shows clearly the trends of the new epoch: from heroism to fame, traveling to tourism, form to shadow, ideal to image, dream to illusion. These shifts are the basis for pseudo-events. As he also puts it, news is made, not gathered. This means that while events are intrinsically uninteresting, pseudo-events are appropriate to the delirium of the electronic media.

Pseudo-events spawn other pseudo-events in geometric progression. This is partly because every kind of pseudo-event (being planned) tends to become ritualized, with a protocol and a rigidity all its own. As each type of pseudo-event acquires this rigidity, pressures arise to produce other, derivative, forms of pseudo-event which are more fluid, more tantalizing, and more interestingly ambiguous. (33)

Once we have tasted the charm of pseudo-events, we are tempted to believe they are the only important events. Our progress poisons the sources of our experience. And the poison tastes so sweet that it spoils our appetite for plain fact. Our seeming ability to satisfy our exaggerated expectations makes us forget that they are exaggerated. (44)

Oh, wonderful pliability of human nature, in a society where anyone can become a celebrity! And where any celebrity (boxer "Sugar Ray" Robinson, singer Elvis Presley, lawyer Joseph L. Welch) may become a star! Once the star has been established as a celebrity, or the celebrity established as a star, he can "perform" in almost any kind of piece — a war movie, a musical spectacular, a murder mystery, or a gangster story — provided he is paid enough and he can preserve his "real" personality. The star celebrity is an undifferentiated entertainer. (161)

Boorstin defines the star as an undifferentiated entertainer. This also means that the role is no longer important, but rather who is playing it, who can in turn slip into any kind of role. This is the foundation for the undifferentiatedness, the condition of adaptation to the media. The moderator does nothing other than complete a broadcast in accordance with the standard of the media, of the masses, to give shape to the commonplace; the moderator is also supposed to entertain, and the entertainer moderate. What exactly is entertainment at this point? Is it actu-

ally entertainment, or just being entertained to death? Neil Postman put it this way: "Entertainment is the superideology of the entire television discourse" (110).

This notion of total entertainment was proposed by Guy Debord, only he called it "spectacle." "Everything that was ever directly lived has moved away into a representation" (n.p.) is the first thesis in his book of 221 theses, *Society of the Spectacle*. With these theses, this spokesman for the Situationist International launches a grandiose assault against (intellectual) exploitation by the spectacle. Debord also makes use of the pseudo-event to describe the basis of the spectacle, whereby he acknowledges the hegemony of the media.

The pseudo-events which rush by in spectacular dramatizations have not been lived by those informed of them; moreover they are lost in the inflation of their hurried replacement at every throb of the spectacular machinery. Furthermore, what is really lived has no relation to the official irreversible time of society and is in direct opposition to the pseudo-cyclical rhythm of the consumable by-product of this time. This individual experience of separate daily life remains without language, without concept, without critical access to its own past which has been recorded nowhere. It is not communicated. It is not understood and is forgotten to the profit of the false spectacular memory of the unmemorable. (Thesis 157)

Postman's entertainment industry, Hans Magnus Enzensberger's consciousness industry, and Debord's spectacle are all critical terms formulated for describing the effects of the mass media. They all derive from the theory of the culture industry put forward by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Horkheimer and Adorno have nothing positive to say in their critique of the mass media. Here the sociologist-philosophers of elitist culture resist the new media in their defense of traditional values, which of course they succeed brilliantly in doing. And yet they do not simultaneously notice that these new media do not only supersede the old, but must also be discussed within new configurations of problems and therefore require new, altered positions: "Amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work" (137); "The culture industry does not sublimate; it represses" (140); "The paradise offered by the culture industry is the same old drudgery" (142); "whatever the camera reproduces is beautiful" (148); "Advertis-

ing and the culture industry merge technically as well as economically" (163).

Armed with Marx and Freud, the argument is laid out in accordance with their findings, and yet none of the conceptual apparatus that are inherent to the mass media or that derive from them are either used or posited. Because of this, the analysis is incorrect to the same degree that it is correct — the vocabulary is too general. This fact can be excused by the fact that their book was written during a period in which it would not yet have been possible from a philosophical standpoint to arrive at a more sophisticated analysis of the media. And Horkheimer and Adorno *do* recognize the significance of the media, even if these are interpreted negatively.

Horkheimer and Adorno also already speak of a "pseudo"-element within the context of an individuality that can only unfold in accordance with the general norm. The result of this is that only pseudo-individuals can develop a taste for pseudo-events. Here, however, we again find ourselves in a circle of self-referentiality. Therefore we are describing the distance to the media that we all also sense in such a way that initially we consider ourselves ensnared and blinded. We are able to trace out their immaterial territory only slowly. And yet ultimately we are also able to cultivate another attitude towards them. James Monaco probably has something similar in mind when he speaks of performance as the most "non-medial" medium:

On the most basic level, performance is a medium, in the sense that it does convey information. It is, however, the most "non-medial" of media, since it changes the information conveyed least: is there any significant, measurable difference, for instance, between an acted embrace and a real embrace? (If there were, chances are human relations would be considerably simplified; but media allow us to lie.) (8)

This definition of performance is, of course, only correct if we designate it as performance art under the remedial, artistic point of view. Otherwise, performance is precisely the backbone or, as already mentioned, the blood that the media extracted and drained out of the actual, or "acted out" event.

Performance art is, in the broadest sense, the life-art (the art of living), and, viewed in this way, it is the foundation — or rather, the heart — of any artistic or poetic activity. For the human scene, the interplay of subjects, objects and space, the projection and projects are the central theme of art, that then leads to innumerable ramifications or connects concentrically with the scene.

Richard Schechner seems to have this in mind when he describes performance as follows:

Now, my corner of experience, my "specialty," is performance. Not just theatre, but performance as a wide variety of activities ranging from theatre and dance to sports, rituals, popular entertainment, therapies that use performance techniques, and ordinary daily encounters among people where participants seem to be playing out roles more than just "being themselves." I've even come to doubt that there is a core or single self that a person can "be." Everything in human behavior indicates that we perform our existence, especially our social existence. (14)

Certainly, Schechner is approaching the issue through theater, but the avant-garde theater of the 1960s was at the root of performance art as we understand it today. And an understanding of performance art is served by bearing in mind the fact that the body as such is disembodied through mediafication, negated as material. Performance art wants precisely to win back a language of the body and project it in the form of a remedial understanding, so that all powers are again concentrated on it. This, again, is actual experience.

Chantal Pontbriand speaks in this context of performance (art) as the fundamental characteristic of our time, and Rosalee Goldberg of the meaning of "live art." For Daniel Charles, these two ideas together constitute a decentering achieved through performance art, a decentering that can in the last analysis affect or indicate anyone whenever we find our way to the "immediate":

Hypothetically, it may also be that performance as the phenomenon we are attempting to define here, goes beyond the form we would attribute to it by habit, that of a performance in a given time and place, a closed time and space, in order to shatter what remains of traditional theatre — that place, that space, that time, that moment — and to substitute for them multiplicity, simultaneity, totality in space and time.

That could mean that we may consider the notion of performance as a fundamental characteristic of postmodernism. For this, we must take it as a premise that postmodernism corresponds to the calling into question of languages, of established codes, to the breaking down of divisions between disciplines, to the explosion of hierarchical structure between institution — producer — product — receiver. (Pontbriand 10)

[A]rtists did not merely use performance as a means to attract publicity to themselves. Performance has been considered as a way of bringing to life the many formal and conceptual ideas on which the making of art is based. Live gestures have constantly been used as a weapon against the conventions of established art. . . . For this reason its base has always been anarchic. By its very nature, performance defies precise or easy definition beyond the simple declaration that it is live art by artists. Any stricter definition would immediately negate the possibility of performance itself. For it draws freely on any number of disciplines and media — literature, poetry, theatre, music, dance, architecture and painting, as well as video, film, slides and narrative — for material, deploying them in any combination. (Goldberg 7-9)

Anyone can find himself again in this battle-cry “back to the immediate” in certain moments; thus the confusion and chaos that results from the sometimes excessively nonchalant use of the concept of performance. Nevertheless, and in spite of the admitted risks, performances provide an exemplary means for expressing the call for different artistic activities to confront one another; since the failure of Wagner’s attempt to unite the arts in the one *Gesamtkunstwerk* that great opera was supposed to be, performances have had a demystifying and critical function. As another performance artist, Robert Filliou, has put it, “There is no longer a center in art. Art is there where you live.” One would therefore have to differentiate between as many performance aesthetics as there are ways of life — i.e., to return to the language of Wittgenstein, “language games”. . . . The refusal to be subordinate to a highest-ranked game, to a “games of games,” characterizes Wittgenstein’s language games. As varied as they may be, performances have their decentering in common. (Charles 26)

What is clearly expressed in these reflections is the idea that art has found itself in the strange situation of becoming life whenever mediafication alleges to be life. But there is a further dilemma in this, namely, that life is not yet art, but rather condenses into art only in certain moments, in poetic situations, either as performance art or as a work of art that is realized as an object within a certain period for later reception depending on quality and attention.

Art thus remains something like a filter, for otherwise it could not be differentiated from the, ordinary mediafication and aestheticization of the mass media. Here it should be added that mass-media art is also possible. This media art can be elicited

whenever it employs remedial poetic arguments in lieu of the standards of insipid entertainment, intersubjective communication, competent realization, and a high degree of complexity that appears to be "simple." Only in this way is the pseudo-event able to yield to the thematization of topicality, of engagement, of perplexity and tranquility.

In this moment, the scene is brought to a point that is both mandatory (*verbindlich*) and connective (*verbindend*). Again, viewed in general, life is a series of scenes; life occurs in scenes. The change of scenes is the calming repetition of the usual events; it is changes in location, the change of scene, and the incessant advance of time . . . to the point of pestilence and catastrophe.

The body is inscribed in these elements; it leaves its trace in them and is circumscribed by them. Thus Jean-François Lyotard is able to speak of diagraphy as the main characteristic of the *mise-en-scène*. The body/self together with the other/others are the primary horizon of experience, the actors in the scene.

The important thing in this context is that *mise-en-scène* consists of a complex group of operations, each of which transcribes a message written in a given sign system (literary writing, musical notation) and turns it into a message capable of being inscribed on human bodies and transmitted by those other bodies: a kind of somatography. Even more important, and less dependent on the classic context, is the simple fact of transcription — that is, the fact of a change in the space of inscription — call it a diagraphy, which henceforth will be the main characteristic of *mise-en-scène*. (88)

What produces the proximity to performance in the designation "*mise-en-scène*" is that the scene does not exist without an event (act); they are co-determinate. But the "mise" can be understood in two ways. Either one is placed in the scene (the décor), or one places oneself in it. This is the difference between performance and performance art at the most basic level. In a spiral of complexification the media (mixed media) supervene to fascinate us, that is, make us dependent, as do the inter-media that help to liberate us.

Performance art is an inter-medium in the blurring of art/poetry and life and an artistic transformation (of whatever kind). What is of decisive importance is the necessity that, within the total isolation in society, the individual initiates an event. The individual is conscious of his uniqueness and, by branching out toward poetry — a less elevated claim may suffice — crosses the

bridge to the other that usually occurs only through the media. One's own body is the "ground zero" that dominates instead of objects in performance art.

What is at a given point the most powerful articulation functions as the ground zero of the orientation of a perception. Its power is grounded in the factors of form (*Gestalt*) and meaning. In order for the individual's own body to assume the role of a "ground zero," it must, no differently than is the case with things, dominate the usual perception on the basis of its form of a particular meaning that is conferred upon it. In our perception and indeed in our actions we usually merge with the things with which we are confronted. In such instances we are hardly aware of our own individual body in its transcendental, constitutive function. Likewise, it does not make itself noticeable vis-à-vis motivation in the competition for the domination of perception. We can relate the different pairs of spatial directions such as "above" and "below" and even "right" and "left," and spatial qualities such as "near" and "far" just as easily to any object that enters into our gaze as to our own bodies, and learn from them. In the contradiction between objective and subjective orientation, it is a matter of the constitution of perceptual objects as something that exists *an sich* and are objective and claim validity. (Holenstein 57)

If the individual emerges within the parameters of poetry, the inherent universalistic laws can also be discerned that facilitate global communication. In the moment of the orbital linkage of the planet earth, performance art provides an excellent opportunity for the individual to affirm his uniqueness and simultaneously establish his ability to communicate. Or, as Holenstein puts it:

There are universal inherent laws
in human life conditions (in things)
in the way in which human beings cognitively process their
life conditions (in ideas), and in the way,
they express their relationship to these
ideas (in signs). (128)

Performance art makes use of the sign "human being," and this human being in turn has ideas and makes use of objects or creates those objects that it needs. With one glance at innumerable tribal cultures all around the globe we can discern that life and art have always been linked; performance art was always inherent to them. Art was then increasingly put in the service of

whatever ideology, but retained at its core the universal qualities that survived.

Today, in the media age, performance art is, as a fleeting instance of bodily poetic presence, a guarantee for the perseverance (*Unverbrüchlichkeit*) of the re/presentation of human values in dialogue.

Performance art is the global body language of poetic freedom.

Notes

¹ Ed. note: This term does not have the same meaning here that it has in the Situationist International of Jon Erickson's essay.

² In the German translation this term appears as *Darstellung*, which means simply "presentation" — trans.

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