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**ENCHANTING  
THE WORLD ON  
THE BASIS OF  
EAST SIDE STORY  
BY IGOR GRUBIĆ.  
A LESSON OF  
PERFORMATIVE  
AESTHETICS**

The concepts of performance and performativity have been significantly present in the humanities for a long time. This considerable interest accompanied by the use of the concepts as key analytic categories for the overview of artistic and social phenomena have resulted in the 'performative turn'. It may be assumed as a reaction to the earlier 'linguistic turn', a suggestion to move away from the metaphor of the world understood as a book to be read towards the world as a performance to participate in<sup>1</sup>. Thus the 'performative turn' emerged at the time when the existing instruments for decoding meanings embedded in a piece of art proved insufficient. Since the 1960s there have appeared more and more artistic forms falling outside the method of exploring a work of art as, for instance, a certain structure of signs with a particular meaning, requiring the application of a proper "reading" of the language used by the artist. They were no longer independently existing artistic artifacts but rather something that developed as a result of actions performed by the artist as well as spectators, listeners and audience engaged in the said actions in various ways. As Erika Fischer-Lichte<sup>2</sup> explains, *instead of creating traditional works of art, artists increasingly produced events which involved not just themselves*. In her opinion, such transition from an artwork to an event requires a new aesthetics, and this can be the aesthetics of performativity.

Her proposal does not exclude but functions alongside the existing heuristic and semiotic aesthetics and may be attributed to the broad trend of theories that have emerged after the 'performative turn'. However, as so many of them have been developed until today

in the field of fine arts, literature and social science, one may feel lost and overwhelmed by the number and diversity of ideas aiming to explain the notion of performance. In fact, there is no single performativity paradigm; instead, we deal with an 'explosion of paradigms'. Therefore, Jon McKenzie answers the question *What is performance?* with another question: *Which performance?*<sup>3</sup>.

Undoubtedly, the key is the word derived from the English verb *to perform*<sup>4</sup>, which underlines the very acting/doing/being the agent, and clearly indicates that it is no longer about producing culture in language terms. Josette Feral points out that performative works 'occur' (*they happen*, as Richard Schechner, the father of performativity, would say)<sup>5</sup>. This proves that performance in its most basic meaning refers to what is created on an ongoing basis, in front of the audience, in particular time and space circumstances. Thus, on the basis of the symbolic interactionism theory by Erving Goffman, Fernando De Toro suggests calling performance a situation in which a performing artist, space and audience are present. *The basic and constitutive condition of this relationship is the assumption that there must be someone in the performance space who addresses the spectator. Please note that I am not talking about a spectacle, illusion, possible worlds or creation of possible worlds. This definition avoids any fragmentation of the concept, any exception to the rule. It recognizes the existence of a wide variety of performances, with the said variety encompassing a spectacle*<sup>6</sup>.

While analyzing contemporary performance theories it is impossible to overlook discrepancies among certain standpoints, stemming from different inspirations of, for instance, linguistic, anthropological or theatrical nature. What definitely links them is the existence of the necessary interactive aspect, depending on the 'here and now' presence of performers and participants/witnesses<sup>7</sup>. Erika Fischer-Lichte calls it an autopoietic feedback loop and situates it in the center of her theory, just as the performance category, which she derives

from the German *Aufführung* (in the context of 'introducing oneself to someone'). As she claims in her book *Estetyka performatywności, everything that happens in the performance may be generally described as re-enchantment of the world and transformation of all its participants*<sup>8</sup>. This enchantment is realized through combining life with art and constitutes the objective of the said aesthetics.

Hence, let us try to get enchanted. The opportunity for this may be the shocking work *East Side Story* of 2006 by a Croatian artist Igor Grubić<sup>9</sup>. Owing to realizations such as *Anioły z brudnymi twarzami* (2006), *366 rytuałów wyzwolenia* (2008) and the already mentioned *East Side Story*, Grubić has gained an international reputation as the artist engaged socially and politically, frequently acting in public space. I would like to apply description categories used by the German researcher to his installation, which, on the one hand, does not represent a performance in the narrowest meaning of this world, and on the other, constitutes a spectacle abounding in events and thus represents a performative work. The two-channel video installation is a performance that may be defined as indirect since it was realized, recorded and is now displayed. What I am interested in is the entire complexity of the presented situation. At first glance *East Side Story* can be located somewhere in between a performance and an artwork as an object, distinctive and independent of its recipients, resulting from the creative activity of the artist-subject. However, such an unobvious situation, being at the same on the threshold, or, in other words, in-between, may reveal the inspirational potential of performative aesthetics. Any attempt to apply the conceptual framework developed on the ground of considerations over performances to a particular artistic activity (practice) shall automatically become a lesson of Fischer-Lichte's theories. It is also one of the objectives of this text, since in this way we may confront the 'order of presence' she postulates (manifested in the event by the role reversion and

breaking the opposition spectator/performer and subject/object) with the traditional 'order of representation'.

Grubić presented his work in various locations, among others in Zagreb (2008), Istanbul (2009), Milan (2012) and Basel (2013). It is also available online (through Vimeo website)<sup>10</sup>, and now it can be watched in the Art Museum in Łódź as a part of the exhibition *Atlas nowoczesności. Kolekcja sztuki XX i XXI wieku*, displayed since 2014<sup>11</sup>. The title *East Side Story* refers to the well-known musical film *West Side Story* of 1961, considered to be one of the most famous musicals in the history of cinema<sup>12</sup>. It is a timeless story honored with ten Oscars, loosely inspired by Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and depicted within the reality of American suburbs of the fifties. Upper West Side has now become a prestigious district of the New York's Manhattan, yet in the middle of the previous century it was occupied by Latin American immigrants and numerous gangs ruling the streets. Their notoriety served as the canvas for the musical and the related film. The motif of two groups of strangers – in ethnical terms – fiercely struggling against one other is explicitly highlighted in the title of Igor Grubić's work. However, while in the original the motif is depicted by means of magnificent songs, breathtaking choreography, marvelous costumes and plausible acting interpretations, in Grubić's video installation instead of songs there are frightening sounds and even more horrifying scenes of physical and verbal violence, all being combined with a few performers' street dance.

Thus, the Croatian artist uses different methods to create his story, set in the eastern 'district'. In Grubić's film we can find both dance and visual art, political performance and reconstruction. He also juxtaposes silent choreography of the dancers' motions with the vocal violence of the crowd in the video footage. The scenes displayed on the left side of the installation were recorded by television cameras during the gay pride parades organized in 2001 in Belgrade

and in 2002 in Zagreb<sup>13</sup>. The parades were the first manifestations of this kind in the countries preoccupied with the euphoric building of a democratic society; both in Serbia, shortly after removing Slobodan Milošević from power, and in Croatia, when the until then governing nationalists had lost the elections. During those two parades their participants were attacked by the organized groups of neo-Nazis and football hooligans (fanatic football fans); within the confrontation we may also notice hostile crowds of observers-pedestrians and war veterans. The second projection depicts a group of dancers presenting their own interpretation of those events by means of gestures and motions. They perform exactly in the same places where the original material was recorded, dancing as individuals and as a group. The spectacle evokes a shocking impression caused by the scale of violence and aggression emanating from the screen as well as the striking contrast between these scenes and the apparently smooth dance movements in calm streets on an ordinary day.

*East Side Story* by Grubić seems to offer a considerable performative potential, yet, how does it correspond to the performativity aesthetics categories (or, to follow directly the German original, the aesthetics of what is performative)? Erika Fischer-Lichte expands her theory around the term 'performance' and reminds that the noun 'performance' and the adjective 'performative' derive from the verb *to perform*. It means that *performativity results in performances as it manifests and realizes itself in the performative nature of acts. (...) the performative turn in the arts is associated with the tendency for the artifacts to realize themselves in performances and as performances*<sup>14</sup>. Simultaneously, the German researcher points out the key 'parameter categories', which on the one hand induce eventfulness of the performance, and on the other determine its aesthetics. The said parameters comprise: feedback loop autopoiesis arising during the performance, emergence and destabilization (or even erasure) of opposites, and the

situation of liminality and the resulting transformations which the event participants are subject to<sup>15</sup>.

In simple words, *autopoiesis* is the capability of self-creation or self-production (from Greek *auto-*, self, and *poiesis*, creation or production), while *feedback* denotes the return information, from us to others or from others to us, directly referring to our actions and proceedings. In this context, as Fischer-Lichte claims, performances originate from the feedback loop, which in turn stems from the actions of their participants, both artists and spectators. She seems to acknowledge that given such a situation – and provided that all the conditions mentioned further are met – ‘we all are performers’. However, not everyone is aware of the fact that the actions of performers and spectators are subject to reciprocal back modifications. As the result of this process of interactions and mutual stimulations between performing artists and the audience, spectators may be defined as performers.

If we view the first projection of Grubić’s video installation in terms of a performance – being *an event consisting in a confrontation and interaction of two groups in a certain time and space in order to experience a particular situation of corporeal co-presence*<sup>16</sup> – the depicted interactions undoubtedly express this principle. As the marching demonstrators are attacked by their opponents, the initial observers, like the passers-by and policemen gathered for safety reasons, soon get involved in the actions. At first, the atmosphere of suspense prevails. The armed police cordons are getting ready for a possible clash; *Gay Pride Zagreb* demonstrators are standing aside, tense but apparently proud of their manifestation; loud music reverberates in the background. The camera skips to the crowd gathered around and then the music fades, predominated by booing and offensive gestures. The camera shows banners: ‘Our rights are human rights’ and ‘No for gay rights’. A neo-Nazis group are clapping rhythmically and

threatening the parade participants with shaking fists. Suddenly and unexpectedly, a slight push transforms into fierce fight. The moving camera records shocking scenes: a man entrapped by the attackers and being kicked in the head; a woman rushing after the police car, desperately crying for help; blood-strained policemen running away from the violent crowd; an old woman saluting with the gesture of Croatian nationalists and a young man returning the Hitler salute. Parade participants are trying to cope with the situation themselves, a group of photojournalists and camera operators are scurrying around them in a tear gas cloud, and the vicious crowd, full of elderly people, are shouting out insults and wish death to the marching ones<sup>17</sup>.

The second projection likewise fulfills prerequisites to be qualified as a performance, yet it employs the autopoietic feedback loop in a more complex way. We are presented with four dancers from Zagreb, each of them referring to the events of 2001 and 2002 in their own way. They show movements and gestures extracted from the film documentation of both parades and present them in choreographic sequences along the original march routes. As the author of *Estetyka performatywności* writes, *within performances the artists create specific situations with which they confront themselves and others, the spectators. (...) They do not create artifacts anymore but locate themselves and the others in the prearranged laboratory conditions*<sup>18</sup>. The said conditions had impact first on Grubić himself, as his original idea of the project<sup>19</sup> was completely different. During his field work he obtained materials from the Zagreb manifestation (recorded by the activists' studio Fade In, with which the artist cooperated in the years 2000–2007) and from Belgrade (from the independent B92 television). He planned to make a documentary consisting of a series of interviews with the representatives of both parties and give the parade participants and their opponents an opportunity to discuss their motivations. *But witnessing*



*the violent events made my plan pointless. The film footage was so much more meaningful and significant than any interview that I could have conducted. I mean, the footage is so depressing! (...) I must admit that I was totally shocked by what I witnessed. I had never seen such an aggressive cruelty before in my life – he said in the interview*<sup>20</sup>. Looking through the material he felt incredulity, shock, and even nausea at the thought that people could be so brutal and cruel towards one another only because someone was different. As a response to this situation, being a visual artist, he worked together with dancers and choreographers to depict, as he had initially intended, this physical sensation in the public space. However, the dancers' slow, recurring, isolated motions do not only imitate the corporeal protest but, first and foremost, communicate what they saw and experienced. First the artists appear on the screen individually; in their dance they transform gestures of both sides, sometimes with one single flow of movements. Their bodies express a whole array of emotions, ranging from confusion to anger. Sometimes they try to shield themselves and then attack all of a sudden; at some moment they wince at sharp sounds and verbal abuse, and at the next moment they start to chant rhythmically. Only at the end they perform together, and their motions conjure up the original clash; then, finally, they dance together, intertwining with one another. Their bodies' movements emphasize the horrifying encounter recorded by the media, thus allowing the audience to experience it in a visual manner.

The autopoietic feedback loop results in this respect from the reaction to the scenes displayed on the second screen. It does not fully correspond to the model situation outlined by Fischer-Lichte, as we deal with a specific interaction which is, moreover, delayed and postponed in time. The performers enter into a relation with the image displayed on the adjacent screen as well as with their memory, since some of them took part in the projected parades themselves.

Their performance, in turn, directly influences passers-by, rushing through the city and preoccupied with their own affairs. During the parade passers-by react to what they can see and thus their responses are very strong; watching silent figures performing a peculiar dance in the street makes the reactions less obvious and explicit. In most cases people only cast a glance at the dancer (or dancers) and continue walking.

The artist seems to assign some importance to what is happening outside the 'here and now' of the street performance realizations. Perhaps he expects the viewer's attention and their reaction to the complete, two-channel installation. The spectators may already know the context of the event, have different awareness at watching both projections; thus, the potential impact of *East Side Story* may be much greater. In this sense postulates of the performative aesthetics seem distorted; it is so because the event triggered by Igor Grubić is not directly an event that everyone participates in, regardless of the engagement degree and their role, so the 'production' and 'reception' occur in the same space and time<sup>21</sup>. This is not the case, although I believe this issue requires some deeper and more extensive considerations. I am thinking here of the intermediality effect, departing from the classic – and as such preferred by the German artist – understanding of a performance (a spectacle), whose condition is the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators within a particular spectacle as well as the reciprocal social interaction.

As regards the *East Side Story*, the said motif, defined by Fischer-Lichte as a medial (communicative) aspect of the performance, seems quite problematic. What I mean is the difference between the mediatized performance (hence intermedial) and the *live* performance. According to Fischer-Lichte, in the case of the first one, represented, for instance, by radio broadcasts or shows recorded with camcorders or cameras, production and reception proceed separately, and the

feedback loop has no power of creation<sup>22</sup>. The second type of performance, as, for example, theatrical or circus spectacles, rites, rituals or parades, is determined by the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators, and its creation rests upon the autopoietic feedback loop.

In my opinion the said assumption, underlying as such the concept of performative aesthetics, requires adjustment; what is more, it may be even challenged. I suggest extending the definition of what is performative; the initial reference point thereto should be the distinction specified by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: (...) *presence, liveness, agency, embodiment, and event are not so much the defining features of our objects of study as issues at the heart of our disciplinary subject. While some may address these issues in relation to plays performed on a stage, others may address them in relation to artifacts in a museum case*<sup>23</sup>. In such context, I am going to regard a directly given artifact as an event, with respect to which I am most interested in the type of relations it enters into with the ones who watch it.

At this point it is worth recalling a dispute between Peggy Phelan and Philip Auslander. Phelan argues that the present, 'here and now', is the only space for performance existence and hence it cannot be preserved, saved or documented. *Performance's being becomes itself through disappearance* – otherwise it loses its ontological integrity<sup>24</sup>. Auslander, in turn, advocates that the opposition between *live* and mediatized performances has become barely distinguishable. More and more live events are broadcast, and technologies used thereto create the impression of particular intimacy between viewers and transmitted events; after all, media coverage also exists exclusively within a relationship with those who watch it at a given moment<sup>25</sup>. To sum up, Phelan points out the event-like character of performance, whereas Auslander proves that *live* performance has assumed the form of a television broadcast.

In the Polish environment, Ewa Jeleń-Kubalewska formulates even more radical assumption and claims that *there exist no unregistered*

events. Thus, the ontology of these events as performances shall not be based on disappearance but on appearance<sup>26</sup>. She transfers this position directly into her analyses, where both static images (photographs) and moving images (television broadcasts) are considered to be performance, provided, however, that they establish a network of relations with the surroundings in which the user/spectator/interpreter is located. This being the case, the viewer's contact with the image may transform into an event (a performance), since each picture represents an unfinished event (in its liminal phase) that can be activated by the spectator's gaze.

As Ariella Azoulay argues, *'the act of prolonged observation by the observer as spectator has the power to turn a still photograph into a theatre stage on which what has been frozen in the photograph comes to life. (...) The spectator is called to take part, to move from the addressee's position to the sender's position to take responsibility for the sense of such photographs by sending them even further, (...) and, eventually, for transforming of what has been photographed into what has happened, into an event'*<sup>27</sup>.

Another postulate has been formulated by Adrien Heathfield. He suggests focusing on the performance's progression in time instead of its point-related, ephemeral presence in certain 'here and now'. In his view, subsequent repetitions do not constitute an opposition to the first performance; in fact, they complement and elaborate its 'life'<sup>28</sup>. This thesis is supported by Christopher Bedford who emphasizes performance's prolonged 'duration' resulting from its various repetitions, such as documentations, descriptions, analyses or re-enactments. Subsequent reproductions, as he implies, change the event's original meaning; nonetheless, it only shows that performance represents time-based art<sup>29</sup>.

This short review of concepts pertaining to the anti-repetitive ideology of performance art shows quite clearly that researchers have been attempting to transcend one single definition, as it seems

to petrify the usefulness of this term in the contemporary culture studies. Tomasz Załuski describes these attempts as the 'critical discourse on performance art'<sup>30</sup>. In my opinion, however, Erika Fischer-Lichte's proposal, though related to the concept by Phelan, proves more open and leaves some room for debate. As I have been trying to present, her autopoietic feedback loop can – given particular circumstances – undergo certain transformations which offer a slightly variant perspective while, simultaneously, preserving the baseline assumptions. Various levels of performers and spectators in *East Side Story* as well as their reciprocal interactions in a specific place and time result in consequence in a multi-level performance. Although its final form consisting in a two-channel video installation surpasses the magic 'here and now', it still, to some extent, meets the requirements set forth by performativity aesthetics.

The above arises from the fact that while defining performance Fischer-Lichte distinguishes its three other, often inseparably connected, aspects apart from mediality, i.e. materiality, aestheticism and semioticism. I am going to focus on the aspect of materiality since it seems to be of primary significance. It relates to the concept of reality, or, to be more precise, the corporeality of the performer and the spectator, as well as to the conditions in which the said corporeality is accomplished. *Since the performative turn in the 1960s, theatre action art and performance have employed a range of solutions to direct spectator's attention to the specifically generated performative materiality and, at the same time, to stress and enhance its various determinants and creation methods. It refers equally to performance's corporeality and to its spatial and tonal aspects*<sup>31</sup>. Still, Fischer-Lichte's basic assumption is the 'here and now' condition, thus she regards performance as a form of transient and fleeting nature, realizing itself in its present, impossible to be repeated yet possible to be documented. Corporeality serves in this case as a carrier of interactions

between performers' bodies and those of spectators, stimulated in its one or several aspects.

In this regard, the concept of embodiment is of key importance since corporeality in performances is produced, among others, by performative acts. Undoubtedly, it is the human body that is exceptionally present in Grubić's *East Side Story*, and constitutes the focus point of both projections. The first projection shocks with violence inflicted on bodies, rendering the footage distressing and hence uncomfortable to watch. It seems to prevail over the second projection, yet it is the choreography of the dancers re-interpreting the Zagreb and Belgrade parades that carries particular power and strength. By emphasizing their own individual corporeality, they initiate the embodiment process of those events' reality. Grubić thereby appears to correspond with the performativity aesthetics by creating a reaction where dancers' bodies serve the role of a filter for the images displayed on the second screen. As Erika Fischer-Lichte explains, *theatre and performance draw the spectator's attention to the special individual bodily being-in-the-world of actors, to specific performative acts by which they create their own bodies*<sup>32</sup>.

Thus, the material aspect of performance is realized, being expressed not only through corporeality but also through spatiality, temporality and tonality. Within the context of the work by the Croatian artist, it is the last dimension that is particularly important. Sounds and voices, distressing, provoking and irritating as they are, build the atmosphere of insecurity. They are predominantly shouts of the manifestation's marching adversaries. Lengthy projection passages are accompanied by harsh whistling; sometimes one can hear insults or rhythmic chants by Neo-Nazis and football hooligans. From time to time a single heartbreaking cry stands out from the commotion, and in the last scenes firearm shots can be heard. All these sounds exert a highly negative impact; they hem in, cannot be

escaped, secluded in any way, which, in consequence, induces a nearly physical pain. However, such pain should be present indeed – is also reflected in the principles specified by the performative aesthetics, for sound in a particular performance constitutes not only a carrier for meanings, but functions also as a real factor that influences human body in physical terms. Just as previously, this interactive loop again encompasses dancers whose motions and gestures harmoniously complement the sound mass described above.

Thus, projected images and sounds are capable of coming through the wall of indifference which is normally difficult even to move. They impose their presence and at the same time evoke emotions. It may be assumed that their tangibility results in intensive experiencing of the presence of Grubić's work and hence the performance's materiality and corporeality 'happen' therein. As Erika Fischer-Lichte explains, *the autopoietic feedback loop is triggered and fueled not only by actors' and spectators' noticeable, and therefore visible and audible, actions and reactions, but also by energies circulating between them*<sup>35</sup>.

The author of *Estetyka performatywności* emphasizes that performance always triggers a specific social process, i.e., what happens between performers and spectators or between spectators and spectators. The social dimension can easily change into the political one, *when the nature of relationship between participants is revealed and power relation is established. Once an individual or a group strives to impose a particular attitude, conduct or belief upon others, we deal with political relations*<sup>34</sup>. While watching the events depicted by Grubić there are no doubts in this respect. Twenty years after the breakup of Yugoslavia conflicting narratives about its past and present have been spread, and the newly established countries still have not determined their identities in a globalized world in which their collective past has already become meaningless. What is more, repercussions of wars fought in the 1990s have eventuated in a massive historical

void, wherein former Yugoslavia countries are still facing the necessity to ease social, economic and cultural consequences of the conflicts. It, therefore, comes as no surprise that at the construction stage of the new national identity there arise tensions between the emerging nationalisms, defending 'true' values, and the transformation towards neoliberal capitalism, presented as the only solution for post-communist maladies<sup>35</sup>. Together with religious frictions all these factors add up to a highly explosive mixture. In this context, gay pride parades have become the confrontation arena for the two orders. Perhaps given such background we may feel less surprised with the scale of aggression presented in Grubić's film, even if the attacking party is represented by ordinarily looking elderly people.

Moreover, as Fischer-Lichte further proves, people tend more often to behave like spectators of a show, preoccupied with watching the surrounding life. Thus, faced with acts of violence they do not feel obliged to intervene; at best they take out their phones and call the police. Artists, in turn, wish to reverse such a state of affairs in their projects. Their performances contain situations eliciting viewers' interventions and actions<sup>36</sup>. Artists, *assuming responsibility for spectators, make the latter aware that they also bear some responsibility and have to take decisions and act*<sup>37</sup>. After all, every performance rests upon the autopoietic feedback loop, which on principle involves continuous exchange between spectators and performers. Hence, through watching a spectacle carried out within the framework of the performative aesthetics, we may experience an exceptional situation of revealing ourselves in the perception act as actively watching and, at the same time, determined by what we are watching – in other words, as both subjects and objects.

The state when we are actually somewhere 'betwixt and between' is a liminal state, a threshold situation. According to the German theater researcher, *the liminal state of participants arises first and foremost from*



*undermining the art/reality opposition and other derivative opposites*<sup>38</sup>. The 'betwixt and between' state and the feeling of crisis it evokes may instigate transformation of the subject performing the perception act. It refers particularly to strong feelings and sensations, like compassion, fear, indignation or repulsion. These feelings provide in consequence an impulse to act or intervene and thus the subject may get torn from his/her everyday life. All in all, *East Side Story* by Igor Grubić definitely provides us with this type of strong sensations invoked by a perception act. It is enough at this point to reiterate his statement about physical shock and pain while watching parades archival footage as well as the change they brought about in him. The artist's intentions are also depicted in a catalogue dedicated to his presentation in Belgrade: *in a primitive community that brutally reacts to differences, a small group of creative people, resembling a resistance movement, will try to change people's consciousness through a dance ritual*<sup>39</sup>.

As a consequence, what happens within the performance may be called the re-enchantment of the world. *It is reflected in the bodily co-presence of artists and spectators, in the performative elicitation of the materiality of its components and emergence of meanings*<sup>40</sup>. The final effect is, therefore, the aesthetic experience, since it constitutes a threshold experience, eventually triggering transformation or being experienced as transformation itself. Such experience, as Erika Fischer-Lichte argues, lies within the focus of her performative aesthetics' interest. Even though it may have transitional character, it shall be better remembered due to the very fact of its occurrence.

Owing to his political and social engagement, Igor Grubić intended to create art that would urge the viewers to reflect on reality they live in. *East Side Story* reflects quite clearly this engagement's direction as well as the manner in which he uses public space as the preferred means of artistic practice. Hence, his installation becomes a story of the former Yugoslavia countries, torn apart between tradition and modernity,

neoliberalism and nationalism, the state of being open and isolated. The author has declared that the aim of his artistic project was to address the issue of sexual minority rights in the society exhibiting violent reactions to diversity and otherness. *I decided to have the dancers perform on the very spots of the events, in both cities. This was a way of suggesting the presence of a vivid, creative force very much alike a resistance movement that is trying to change an intolerant, conservative society into a better one*<sup>41</sup>.

The above constitutes the starting point of Grubić's artistic practice under which he intervenes in the public space, contesting the present condition of the society and stressing its major problems. In Croatia, as he has admitted, in fact, no culture of protesting had existed similar to the one of the West. Speaking freely or protesting in public was considered suspicious, and sooner or later it brought about accusations of being a public enemy. Today there are such political or economic protests, yet his statement is of different nature; it is supposed to initiate a dialogue or communication in a conscious, well-planned and creative way<sup>42</sup>.

Not without a reason has Igor Grubić used dance in *East Side Story*. As Olivier Marchart proves, dance as a form of art has been linked to politics for a long time, let us just mention the court of Louis XIV, New York's Workers Dance League or Anna Sokolov<sup>43</sup>. Moreover, dance represents an integral part of protests, as exemplified by Rhythms of Resistance performing during demonstrations of anti-capitalist movements, or Insurgent Rebel Clown Army protesting with the use of pantomime, dressed in military uniforms and with clown makeup on their faces; we should also bear in mind Emma Goldmann, a dancing feminist.

Marchart argues that we deal not so much with dance politics, but rather political dancing and he refers to the concept of political acting by Hannah Arendt. According to the philosopher, public space

comes into existence whenever people act together and disappears when they cease to do so<sup>44</sup>. The same applies to dancing. If someone dances in the dark and in private, they do not protest since no one can see them. In order to dance politically, you need to dance collectively. Thus, for public space to emerge through a protest, the following is required: strategy, collectivity, conflict, blockade of streams of circulation, and, last but not least, human body. The protest must 'step into' public space and take it over; it should also manifest by means of embodiment. The Austrian sociologist perceives *East Side Story* through the perspective of political dance, yet he regards it more like a reflection on protest conditions within a hostile environment. In this dance violence is sublimated into an art form and therefore it overtly refers to the famous musical film wherein street gangs' fights are portrayed by means of astounding choreography.

In his work Grubić creates a quasi 'resistance movement'. Importantly, he decided to carry out rehearsals on the same streets of Zagreb and Belgrade which had been the arena for original fights with Gay Pride demonstrators. He was developing *East Side Story's* choreography for two months at exactly the same spots, in the public sphere. To some degree, this might be regarded as performative intervention into public space. Nevertheless, it does not meet the above-mentioned requirements for creating public space in a political sense. Dancers did not block traffic flows, there was neither a collectivized conflict nor long-term protest strategy. Performers danced mostly individually and even when they united in their dance, the choreography featured dancing of a singular body, repeated several times. As a result, as Marchand points out, after the political aspects of actions have been subtracted, there remained only the embodiment. In other words, it was a bodily re-enactment of a political event from the past and not a political act in itself<sup>45</sup>. It is, however, worth reminding that *performance is always carried out for others, thus*

it is not about merely doing but about acting reinforced through the aspect of symbolic actions on show. Therefore, it does not have the nature of ordinary doing but performing, an action carried out for someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance<sup>46</sup>. And thus the enchantment of the world must be working.

- 1 E. Domańska, 'Zwrot performatywny' we współczesnej humanistyce, 'Teksty Drugie', 2007, no. 5, p. 52. Cf. R. Schechner, *Performatyka. Wstęp*, [T. Kubikowski, Trans], Wrocław 2006, pp. 16–17.
- 2 E. Fischer-Lichte, *Estetyka performatywności*, [translated by M. Borowski, M Sugiera], Cracow 2008, p. 29.
- 3 J. McKenzie, *Perfumuj albo... Od dyscypliny do performansu*, [translated by T. Kubikowski], Cracow 2011, p. 62. Cf. E. Jeleń-Kubalewska, *Cierpienie i śmierć jako współczesny performans medialny. Perspektywa performatyczna*, Poznań 2014, pp. 23–35.
- 4 As *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it, the English verb *to perform* was first used around the year 1170 by legal practitioners, and it denotes 'carry out', 'realize', 'fulfill'. There are many other meanings attributed to this verb: 1) do, pay, provide, keep one's promise (its causative power is emphasized in this case); 2) pay off, benefit; 3) cause, produce, form, have effect, treat; 4) present, act on stage/ in front of audience, sing, play an instrument/a role, dance; 5) misbehave, disturb, show aggression (in colloquial sense); 6) construct, build, create; 7) have sexual intercourse; 8) urinate, defecate (in figurative sense); 9) accomplish, fill, supplement, make up for sth, decorate – E. Jeleń-Kubalewska, *Cierpienie i śmierć jako...*, op. cit., p. 20.
- 5 *Thus they come closer to reality and emphasize it by its deconstruction, a play with codes and competencies of spectators* – M. De Marinis, *Performans i teatr. Od aktora do performer a i z powrotem?*, [http://www.grotowski.net/performer/performer-5/performans-i-teatr-od-aktora-do-performera-i-z-powrotem#footnoteref10\\_y11141j](http://www.grotowski.net/performer/performer-5/performans-i-teatr-od-aktora-do-performera-i-z-powrotem#footnoteref10_y11141j) [accessed on: 03.06.2018].
- 6 F. De Toro, *Performance: quelle performance?*, [in :] *Performance et savoirs*, d'A. Helbo [ed.], Bruxelles 2011, p. 75 ; as cited in: M. De Marinis, op. cit.
- 7 Cf. A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, *Perspektywy performatywizmu*, 'Teksty Drugie', 2007, no. 5, pp. 34–47.
- 8 E. Fischer-Lichte, op. cit., p. 289.
- 9 *East Side Story*, 2012, a two-channeled

- installation, 14:02 min., author – Igor Grubić; camera – Jasenko Rasol; editing – Zoran Minić; choreography – Irma Omerzo; dancers – Pravdan Devlahović, Darko Japelj, Zrinka Šimičić, Zrinka Užbinec; archive footage – Fade In from Zagreb; B92 from Belgrade, Stefan Orlandić Stojanovski; production – Kreativni Sindikat.
- 10** <https://vimeo.com/64892049> [accessed on: 27.09.2018].
- 11** <https://msl.org.pl/wydarzeniams/wystawy-biezace/atlas-nowoczesnosci,1390.html>. The work was purchased in 2013 and is a part of the Łódź museum collection.
- 12** *West Side Story* is an American-British musical film directed by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins, screenplay by Ernest Lehman, cinematography by Daniel L. Fapp, starring: Natalie Wood (Maria), Richard Beymer (Tony), Russ Tamblyn (Riff), Rita Moreno (Anita), George Chakiris (Bernardo), Simon Oakland (Schrank), Ned Glass (Doc), William Bramley (Krupke). The film of 1961 is an adaptation of the Broadway production of 1957, with music by Leonard Bernstein, screenplay by Arthur Laurents, inspired by Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) and with songs written by Stephen Sondheim. The spectacle and the film tell the story of tragic love between a Puerto Rican immigrant Maria (the sister of Bernardo, the leader of the Sharks, a Puerto Rican gang) and American Tony (the friend of Riff, the leader of Jets, a gang of white Americans). In 1962 the film won Oscars for the best picture, supporting actor, supporting actress, direction, cinematography, art direction, costume design, sound, editing and music; moreover, it won other prestigious awards, including Grammy and Golden Globe. *In the case of 'West Side Story' we may freely overuse the word ingenious as it matches everything: direction, acting, choreography and more. Despite being 55 years old, the musical songs have been sung even up today. Every next generation know*
- very well 'I feel pretty', 'America' or 'Maria'! Both the film and its Broadway original production are loosely based on 'Romeo and Juliet' by William Shakespeare* – <http://www.kinowtrampkach.pl/pl/film/west-side-story> [accessed on: 20.08.2018].
- 13** The first Gay Pride Parade was organized in Belgrade in 2001 and ended up with clashes with the police. In 2010 opponents of the parade attacked the protesters, throwing stones and flares in their direction. The riots resulted in setting fire to surrounding buildings and cars. In the years 2009, 2011, 2012 and 2013 authorities completely prohibited parades having received the police's official statement that they were unable to provide adequate safety to the participants thereof. What is interesting, as Igor Grubić said, a large part of the gays did not dare to take part in the first parade and it was attended mostly by activists from non-government human rights organizations. The attacking party was represented by war veterans, strongly identifying themselves with the nation, and football hooligans – *Art collection Telekom presents: Igor Grubić on the power of ritual*, <http://www.electronicbeats.net/art-collection-telekom-presents-igor-grubic-on-the-power-of-ritual> [accessed on: 16.09.2018]. More about the situation of LGTB groups in both countries: <https://cafebabel.com/pl/article/czy-gej-jest-w-chorwacji-ok-5ae007a6f723b35a145e2388/>, a different view in Serbia: <https://queer.pl/artykul/186931/zycie-i-smierc-parady-w-belgradzie> [accessed on: 17.09.2018].
- 14** E. Fischer-Lichte, op. cit., p. 41.
- 15** Ibid, pp. 261–262.
- 16** A. Duda, *Estetyka performatywności według Eriki Fischer-Lichte*, 'Dialog', 2007, no. 7/8, pp. 153–154.
- 17** Cf. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/grubic-east-side-story-113651> [accessed on: 15.09.2018].
- 18** E. Fischer-Lichte, op. cit., pp. 262–263.
- 19** The project was supposed to be a response to the invitation from the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade that he

- received once he had completed *Anioły o brudnych twarzach* (*Angels With Dirty Faces*).
- 20** Art collection Telekom presents..., op. cit. Cf. another interview with the artist: <https://www.jutarnji.hr/kultura/art/igor-grubic-moj-rad-o-pravima-homoseksualaca-otkupio-je-i-tate/2115168/> [accessed on: 17.09.2018].
- 21** E. Fischer-Lichte, op. cit., p. 22.
- 22** Ibid, p. 110. The researcher explains that performances being products of technical and electronic media admittedly create effects of presence, yet not presence itself. This is an impression of the present which does not involve the actual appearance of bodies and objects because they change merely in a display of lights and pixels. As she explains, *this impression might move the spectators to tears or scare and frighten them, making them hold their breath and start to sweat and raising their pulse. (...) The effects of presence and the impression of the present deliver promises of the present rather due to the fact that, in line with the logic of this process, they deprive the performer's actual corporeality of any materiality, disembody it and thus the present can be experienced exclusively as an aesthetic impression, in absolute isolation from the real, material corporeality* – Ibid, pp. 163–164. Cf. P. Pavis, *Współczesna inscenizacja*, [translated by P. Olkusz], Warsaw 2011, pp. 178–210.
- 23** As cited in: R. Schechner, *Performatyka: Wstęp*, [translated by T. Kubikowski], Wrocław 2006, p. 16.
- 24** P. Phelan, *Unmarked. The Politics of Performance*, London–New York 1995, p. 146. The said dispute was also analyzed by the already mentioned herein German researcher who supported the author of *The Politics of Performance* – E. Fischer-Lichte, op. cit., pp. 110–111.
- 25** P. Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, London–New York 1999, p. 54. Artur Duda stresses the new context created by digital revolution. *Ubiquity of digital cameras, camcorders as well as the television recording important and trivial everyday events transform most people into 'actors' and 'film directors', more and more aware of their role. Moreover, they allow to notice the spectacle-related aspect of culture products; to assert that the power of its continuity and expansion in time and space relies not only upon artifacts – the objects produced in the distant past – but also upon performances* – A. Duda, *Performans na żywo jako medium i obiekt mediatyzacji*, Toruń 2011, s. 17.
- 26** E. Jeleń-Kubalewska, *Cierpienie i śmierć jako współczesny performans medialny. Perspektywa performatyczna*, Poznań 2014, pp. 34–35. The statement is shared, among others, by Amelia Jones, who claims that such archival footage registering is indispensable for performative activity itself. *The body art event needs the photograph to confirm its having happened; the photograph needs the body art event as an ontological 'anchor' of its indexicality* – A. Jones, 'Presence' in *Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation*, 'Art Journal' 56, 1997, no. 4, p. 16; as cited in: T. Załuski, *Powtórzenie i krytyczny dyskurs o sztuce performance*, 'Sztuka i Dokumentacja', 2013, no. 9, p. 52.
- 27** A. Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, Nowy Jork 2008, p. 169. Cf. E. Jeleń-Kubalewska, op. cit., pp. 189–190. The researcher also admonishes to bear in mind the liminal status of photography, suspended 'betwixt and between'. We should therefore view photographs in a different way than semiotics does, and look around the photograph so that we are able to see that its meaning 'happens'.
- 28** A. Heathfield, *Then Again*, [in:] *Perform, Repeat, Record. Live Art in History*, A. Jones and A. Heathfield [eds.], Bristol–Chicago 2012, p. 28. All sorts of re-performances and re-enactments play a crucial role in this respect.
- 29** Ch. Bedford, *The Viral Ontology of Performance*, [in:] *Perform, Repeat, Record...*, op. cit., pp. 77–78.
- 30** T. Załuski, op. cit., p. 51.

- 31** E. Fischer-Lichte, op. cit., p. 122.
- 32** Ibid, p. 149.
- 33** Ibid, p. 95.
- 34** Ibid, p. 274.
- 35** <http://x-traonline.org/article/conversation-with-what-how-and-for-whom> [accessed on: 20.09.2018].
- 36** E. Fischer-Lichte, op. cit., p. 277.
- 37** Ibid, p. 275.
- 38** Ibid, p. 282.
- 39** O. Marchart, *Dancing Politics. Political Reflections on Choreography, Dance and Protest*, <https://www.diaphanes.net/titel/political-reflections-on-choreography-dance-and-protest-2126> [accessed on: 17.09.2018].
- 40** E. Fischer-Lichte, op. cit., p. 289.
- 41** <https://vimeo.com/64892049>. *East Side Story* should not be then perceived only as a piece of socially involved art, but also as a reflection on the place of the engaged art in the society. However, as Ewa Jeleń-Kubalewska points out, *liminality may become one of the attributes of performative processes, because one of the most characteristic features of performance is its focus on transformation of subjects participating in these processes, often resulting from the desire to resist the existing social norms* – E. Jeleń-Kubalewska, op. cit., p. 29.
- 42** *Art collection Telekom presents...*, op. cit.
- 43** O. Marchart, op. cit. [accessed on: 15.09.2018]. To be precisely understood, the sociologist adds that *East Side Story* is a fairly political (critical) work from the perspective of the field of art and not from the field of politics, as the later has different requirements.
- 44** H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago 1958, pp. 198–199.
- 45** O. Marchart, op. cit.
- 46** M. Carlson, *Performans*, [translated by E. Kubikowska], Warsaw 2007, p. 29.

Anna Dzierżyc-Horniak

*Enchanting the world on the basis of east side story by Igor Grubić. A lesson of performative aesthetics*

**In her *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics* Erika Fischer-Lichte argues that everything which happens in a performance can be described as a repeated enchanting of the world and transformation of all the participants of the event. The text is an attempt to consider the videoinstallation *East Side Story* by Igor Grubić exactly from this perspective. It discusses key concept categories utilized by the German theatre researcher, and at the same time undertakes an attempt to fit them into the installation of the Croatian artist. The analysis points out to the bodily co-presence of the actors and the viewers, the performative production of materiality of the performance and the way in which the performance becomes an event. Questions were asked about a performance *live* as opposed to a mediated performance.**

KEYWORDS:

**AESTHETICS OF PERFORMATIVENESS, PERFORMANCE, AUTOPOIETIC FEEDBACK LOOP**



Ministerstwo Nauki  
i Szkolnictwa Wyższego

Paid by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education according to the agreement no. 796/P-DUN/2018 signed on 4.04.2018 r.

The assignment name: Creation of the English version of the Scientific-artistic Journal "Dyskurs" publications; DUN financing – 30 000 PLN.