SUMMARY

CRITICAL PARADIGMS IN DIGITAL INTERACTIVE PERFORMANCE
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By its complexity, performance art remains one of the most expressive art forms. Ever since it was consecrated as the avant-avantgarde of European art, performance art developed as an intriguing, interdisciplinary artistic genre, shocking and capable of arousing emotions, to transmit engagement, presence, attracting audienecs in active involvement in the artistic act.

At first, artists resort to performance as a form of artistic expression when the classical art forms reached a critical point where they could no longer express what the artist felt it was critical and important to deliver. Today, the performing arts are characterized mainly by their ability of engaging the public in a militant gesture, a common characteristic of the performance genre .

The use of digital technologies as a means of expression brought a significant enrichment and a saturation of media communication, starting from the years 1960-1970, when the first experiments with video art began. With the introduction of communications technologies, ubiquitous worldwide, performances have become more sophisticated, more complex, bringing not only new means of audio-visual expression, but especially facilitating connection and remote communication. Through technology, time and space have acquired new dimensions and the human body – indispensable in live art – was provided with new means of expression which enable a variety of extensions of its parts and functions into new spaces, continuously redefined and performed.

Artistic experimentations where digital interactive technologies occupied a central role – particularly in the late 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s – have led to the development of some innovative, fascinating productions and artefacts, that amaze even today, in spite of the fact that these technologies have been widely

adopted in the mainstream. Interactive performances have the capacity to engage the public in an exploration of its own self and its relation to the world of digital technology and its effects on society.

The continuing develpment of digital technologies and the transition from web 2.0 towards a society dominated by artificial inteligence and virtual reality has major impacts on humanity an dis facing us – more than ever – with an unknown future. The new arts – visual, performance or audiovisual – born from the melting of traditional media into new technologies and new media, are dominate today either by a positivist deterministic discourse or, mainly, by an apocaliptic, substantivist one.

Generaly, performance is an interdisciplinary form of art that is difficult to define, if not even impossible, as some would argue. Even more difficult is the discussion about artistic performances that incorporate interactive digital technologies. Starting with the interest for this form of art, we chose to observe the artistic manifestations that can be defined as performance that incorporate digital interactive technologies. In order to find an approach to teaching this type of artistic discipline, we started to research the contexts where this type of art is developed and performed.

We consider that the analysis of the narative discourse sorounding certain forms of digital performances and the discussions about the esthetic, philosophical or technological aspects is significantly improved by the identification of the main critical paradigms that soround them.

The overall objective of the proposed research is to analyze – from an interdisciplinary perspective, in the European context – artistic expressions incorporating digital audiovisual technologies. We will focus on identifying critical paradigms necessary for the development of definitions and taxonomies of digital interactive performance sites, in order to propose a methodical teaching of this kind of art for students of arts majors.

Considering that the study is addressing an emerging artistic genre, little known in Romania and in continuous development – especially at the starting moment of this research, in 2011 – we felt that the research should first clarify to which domain the genre belongs to, the extent of its expanding and the relevance of the productions that are listed in this category as well as the would be definition that

circumscribes the type of artistic performances that integrate interactive digital technologies.

The research is structured in two parts. The first part comprises the step of identifying the relevance of the theme and the definition of the genre. We attempted a framing of the concepts within the larger areas from which the definition of performance in general is being derived, and more specifically, digital performance. We also made a delimitation of terms, especially considering the fact that a number of terms are untranslatable into Romanian or the translations that are circulated in different contexts are contradictory and have not been validated by an authoritative context .

Thus, in a first stage, in collaboration with the University of The Hague, we conducted a study that allowed us to monitor arts events that occurred in a certain period in several cities in several European countries. The main objective of the study was to identify the artistic events that subscribe identified definitions of the concepts of intermedia and multimedia. We planed to offer a taxonomy of those art events that are encompassing at different levels of complexity, both digital technologies and disciplines at the interface of several arts: visual arts (visual, video art, photography, sound design, light design , stage or stage design), performing arts (dance, acting, performance, technical director), music (interpretation, composition, electronic music, etc.). In addressing the research, we referred to theories of intermediality in the visual and performing arts, from the perspective of the artistic movement that generated the concept in the 1960s, and theories of performance art in the performing arts, limiting the research field to the type of performances that included, in one form or another, digital technologies.

The study, which is summarized in the first part, allowed us to validate the hypothesis that, within the art of the XXI century, digital technology is a central point of interest, both as a matter of ideas, content, and as a tool of artistic expression. Within the study, a series of short interviews with various European artists was carried out, interviews that allowed an understanding of how to approach art in terms of training, technology and openness to the financing of artistic creation in the European context. The interviews are included in the annexes for their relevance in the context of the present research but have not undergone a qualitative analysis, especially for reasons related to research methodology.

The second hypothesis we tried to clarify in this first part of the research concerns the institutional context which – according to the theory of context – has the opportunity to validate a work of art or performative artistic creation.

With the support of the Romanian Academy, through the " Romanian Culture and European cultural models: research, synchronization, durability", we were able to undertake the second part of the introductory study, at the library of the Venice Biennale. At this stage we tried to identify if this institution, recognized for its openness to innovation and artistic creativity, was showing a special and steady interest towards artistic creations that include digital technologies (especially in the context of performance art). The research of the documents of the Biennale was to refute this hypothesis but gave us access to a rich database of performing arts literature, subsequently enabling us to develop the methodology and the structure for the second stage of the research.

We continued the first part of the work with a section where we tried to define the terms and the concepts covered by this study. We approached the various meanings of the term "performance" and the derived concepts, starting from the definitions and meanings ascribed by theorists – many of them practitioners themselves, such as Goldberg, Schechner or Birringer – who founded the formal study of this field, performance studies. At the same time, we searched for the terms that have a correspondence in Romanian language, given that literature is poor and there is a persisting lack of agreement on the property of ternms and the appropriateness of loaning terms from English.

Beyond clarifying the terminology used in the context of this type of performance manifestations, agreed informally but not necessarily formally accepted by purists Romanian linguists, we felt the need to clarify the boundaries of the performance studies – approached as a subject which concerns the relationship between identity and performativity in the sense developed by Foulcault, Derrida and later, Judith Butler – and performance art, seen as the result of what makes performing practice.

Reviewing some of the stages of performance history and the context of building a performance practice allowed us to open the discussion about digital performance, the specific subject of this research.

The research methodology was determined primarily by the stated objective from the outset and especially the didactic interest of the researcher. This aspect was

important in the choice of the specific methodology because the topic of performance art – in general – and digital interactive performance – in particular – are extremely generous and lends itself to multiple approaches, ranging from historical and monographic approaches, critical studies centered on the work of authors, or studies designed as practice as research, as indeed are many in the literature consulted.

Thus, in the second part of the research, we chose to realize a research synthesis as defined by Cooper and Hedges in Research Synthesis as the Scientific Process (2009), which allowed us an identification of relevant theories, a classification and analysis of the main themes that the literature covers in this area, in an "attempt to integrate empirical research in order to create generalizations." (2009, p. 6) In the present case, taking into account the very wide range of events that define the context of performance, the breadth of field and the variety of disciplines involved in the analysis of their content, we sought to identify some critical paradigms that subscribe areas of common interest which are found in the themes tackled by the authors of reference in the field. This will allow the development of a taxonomy of the digital interactive performance and will enable a better understanding of the mechanisms that allow the construction of interdisciplinary contexts where it can be cultivated an innovative and creative mentality in this area. The relevant topics that have been chosen will be illustrated with some performances identified. For each paradigm we choose to present a performing artist or a company that is representative for the paradigms under discussion. The base for research is the very substantial literature that was accessed in the library of the Venice Biennale and the University of Utrecht and audiovisual documentary materials found in archives and websites of artists or the companies discussed.

The first paradigm subscribe the geneneral area of the social sciences that form the multi-disciplinary field constituted as performance studies. In describing the literature we focused on those authors who reference contributions to teaching performing arts, academics or practitioners, whose writings are the result of their investigation into their own performance practice. Among them were mentioned reference works made by Rosalee Goldberg, Steve Dixon, Marvin Carlson, Richard Schechner and Andre Helbo, authors who founded the performance studies as a subject open for specific approaches in philosophy, anthropology, linguistics and cultural studies. Among the many topics to be learned and addressed in this paradigm – which also includes in its entirety, performance studies – we chose to approach

some topics that relate to the philosophy of technology and the mechanisms that determine the individual response to technological developments. Post-humanism is a trend of thought and a philosophy that has great impact on art in the information society and form the basis of some coagulated and highly articulated performance interventions. The chapter describes the philosophical context, marked mainly by McLuhan's theory of technology as extension of the body and the technological developments in artificial intelligence that led to these openings. We believe that, at this time, the artist Stelarc is the most representative post-humanist performance artist, and we chose some of his works as best illustrations of the concepts discussed.

The second paradigm is approaching performance art in terms of digital culture, understood as a set of values, beliefs, artifacts, rituals and other general characteristics of a culture that develops as a consequence of developments in digital technology in recent decades and forming context of the current information society. In this context, the digital interactive performance is viewed from an intermedial perspective and a first classification of the types of performance is presented based on organic relationships that are created between performer, space technology and performance. However, the digital culture perspective provides the opportunity to discuss issues related to the convergence between digital technologies and the development of social media communication and the promise of new platforms for artistic expression, situated in areas liminal to the known domains, in what is considered to be intermedial performance art, as defined in this paper. Works by artists such as Merce Cunningham, Adrien M and Claire B, or those of the company Troika Ranch illustrates some of the topics discussed. Klaus Obermeier is the intermedia artist whose work of varying degrees of complexity is illustrative for the intermedial approach to performance art.

The third paradigm discussed is that of the performing arts, which brings together the theories and methodologies used in the analysis of performing arts, developed especially in theater studies. Among the topics discussed, the notion of body-physicality is central, whereas live art has always [at least] a human body at the interface, which relate to the public at the scene. Other topics that are specific for performance art have to do with notions of time and space: here-now, then-there. Once mediated and resolved through digital technologies, time and space become relative concepts. A past, registered moment, can become, by staging, now. Technology causes space to expand beyond the physical performing space, the public

can attend hundreds of kilometers away - or in the next room. Another topic addressed in this paradigm has to do with the act of reception and the study of the public. The audience – which, in the context of the digital performance is often no longer passive but becomes an active user – and its process of transformation into today's user, is an umbrella theme for research into the psychology of reception in the information age.

The exploration of the limits of corporeality, within the context of the new temporal or spatial dimensions facilitated by the new technologies, have created some explorative performing experiences in immersive, non- gravitational or telematics spaces, which in turn, opened up new directions in the contemporary performance practice. All these areas become subjects available for in-depth further research, especially taking into account that there is a rich literature that reflects these experiments, some dating from the early 90s when technology first began to be available. Certainly, one of the most generous issues, barely mentioned in this context, is linked to the new audiences and spectatorship since – with the introduction of digital technologies – these area witnessed some of the most profound changes .

The fourth paradigm identified in the study of digital performance and intermediation describes the concern for theories of performativity and what is called "aesthetic interactivity" identified in human computer interaction (HCI), known in Romanian as human-machine interaction (HMI). Leaving behind the mainly functionalist approach that characterized the early development of human interaction design and digital technology, the design theorists specializing in interfaces discuss the need of turning to theories of performativity and, in this context, define some specific genres of performance. The presentation of the company Blast Theory and Spoke Riders, the mixed reality performance ends the chapter that covers aspects of interaction between the individual and digital technology in the context of digital performance and intermediation.

The paradigms discussed are incorporating many more topics than those mentioned, but circumscribe frames suitable for opening new areas of discussion and offer methodological solutions for the analysis of the digital interactive performance.

We have completed our synthetic research about the digital interactive performance by opening the discussion about cultivating an educational context appropriate for training artists in this interdisciplinary artistic direction. We made a presentation of some pedagogical approaches in this area expanded via three

academic programs EU: the postgraduate program in Interactive Arts from the University IUAV of Venice, the Master in Media, Art and Performance Studies from the University of Utrecht and the approach to the study of performing arts in an intermedial context determined by digital technologies at the Theatre Academy of Maastricht. The experience of the three programs confirms that, in order to develop a program for the training of performing artists that is relevant in the new digital age, an inter and trans disciplinary approach it is required, something difficult – if not impossible – given the current national academic landscape.

In this respect, the approach proposed – in fact, already tested in the master's program Theatre, Film and Multimedia, of the Faculty of Theatre and Television – is limited to a course, rather theoretical, covering a component that belong to the field of performance studies. The course would cover a pedagogical perspective on the paradigms discussed in this paper, illustrated with works by contemporary artists relevant to that topic and would have as its first objective the understanding of the main aspects related to the development of digital interactive performance.

To the extent that we want to train practitioners capable to develop artistic productions relevant in the context of the new arts, we have to develop an innovative, inter-disciplinary framework, where the pedagogical approach would be replaced by a heutagogical one, in which practical and collaborative projects can be tackled. Such an approach is not formally possible in the current academic settings, but can be hosted by the university in interdisciplinary research centers and artistic production contexts.

Such a framework could benefit from the collaboration of intermedia artists such as Klaus Obermeier (a visiting professor for the past two years in the master program mentioned) and could become a unique community center for intermedial arts.

Since the 80s, when the first theories on performance were developed within the western academic context, the disciplines developed around performance studies covered the need for the analysis of narrative discourse from complex perspectives. Today there is a rich academic literature specialized in performance studies. Theoretical constructions have started from the practice of performance, many practitioners being able to theorize and discuss in detail both their artistic approaches and the contexts in which they occurred.

Until recently, in Romania there were no such concerns, performance arts being focused exclusively on theater. This does not mean that there was no practice of performance, often by artists from the visual arts. Although in recent years this issue has been addressed in various academic universities, efforts are just getting started and the absence of tradition in the theoretical academic discourse is being felt. We believe that the present paper represents an important contribution towards the establishment of a paradigmatic framework approach to the study of digital interactive performance in the national academic artistic context. The paper also prepares the context for future research efforts aimed at building an archive of performance practice in Romania. Such an archive would be an invaluable contribution to the development of education in the performance arts other than theater. At the intersection of visual arts, music, theater and cinema, interactive digital performance is an important chapter of such an approach.

Keywords:

Intermedial performance, interactive digital performance, performance studies, performance art, post humanism, post-human art, esthetics of human computer interaction, digital culture, transmedia, intermedia, multimedia, hypermedia, cyberspace

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