

Processing Der Prozess/Proces

Jana Horáková (Brno)

Current debates on media-performance relationship focus on the ability or inability of documentary materials (photographs, video, film, props, scores, scripts, reviews) to provide a true and authentic image of historical live performances. Another recent tendency in media-performance discourse is led by the belief to overcome the limits of mediated (second-hand) history via reenactments of historical performances.

Due to my background in theatre and new media, I would like to take part in these debates by investigating the possibilities and potential of linking live performance with new media. Our attempt is to discover alternative strategies of theatre/performance relations with media, in this case digital media, by means of placing the theatre/performance within contemporary art production developing strategies of a culture of usage. "In this new form of culture, which one might call a culture of use or culture of activity, the artwork functions as the temporary terminal of a *network of interconnected elements*, like a narrative that extends and reinterprets preceding narratives."[\[1\]](#)

The "network of interconnected elements" annuls the time-based and linear relations between artworks in favour of spatial relations and thus overcomes temporal chain relations between artworks (or rather evidence of them in form of documentary materials), which forms the basis of traditional art historiography. Strategies of postproduction, described e.g. by Nicolas Bourriaud, can be seen as a part of digital historiography, which overcomes the one-way, hierarchical construction of art history in favour of digital historiography, which refers "both to the prioritization of spatiality over temporality as a historical *modus operandi*." While written historiography deals with the document and its authorial presence, "digital historiography ultimately stands to override the ubiquitous and influential document model with its own information landscape"[\[2\]](#)

The investigation of live theatre/performance, by means of placing it into a relation with live forms of new media, results in diverse forms of output and mise-en-scenes. These new perspectives may lead us towards new, or renewed, and maybe unexpected claims about the ontological as well as historical status of both the theatre/performance and live media performance.

The investigation of the relationships between live theatre/performances and live new media productions will be conducted experimentally by media artists Gívan Belá and Michal Kindernay, starting February 22. 2010 (and continuing later on) as a part of their ongoing project THE LAST THEATRE SHOW EVER! /The First Theatre show never! The subject of the work is the theatre adaptation of Franz Kafka's *Proces/Der Prozess* by Dušan David Pařízek in Theatre Komédie (Divadlo Komédie) in Prague.[\[3\]](#)

Even though most of the current debates on the media and performance relationships regard performance art as an art field waiting for its integration into the official art history books, our project aims to protect live arts as radical and subversive media, resisting any effort to make them conform to official art history. This motivation is also reflected in the chosen subject. Kafka's unfinished novel *Der Prozess* (1925) is a unique articulation of a minority member experience, whose voice functions as a noise-art-of-society. Noise as the articulation of the outsider's experience of the Order (and by the Order) will serve as a thematically corresponding back/playground for an experiment with subversive and often radical formats of live action combined with live media processing.

While the documentary and realistic media for the representation of live performances are usually criticized for their mere fragmentary ability to record and represent the complexity of the live event, artists will use new media techniques to transfer the recording of live performances to the abstract realm of the computer. This enables them to process and perform the data taken from the live performance in a very complex, albeit non-representational way that refers to aspects of the theatre/performance, which goes beyond our retinal and aural experience.

By using sensors and processing, they will audiovisualize the forces that animate some of the visible actions and to which all actual plays and performances (and, according to Hans-Georg Gadamer, even all art) refer.

What can be thus dissociated from the representing activity of the players and consist in the pure appearance (*Erscheinung*) of what they are playing. As such, the play – even the unforeseen elements of improvisation – is in principle repeatable and hence permanent. It has the character of a work, of an *ergon* and not only of *energeia*. In this sense I call it a structure (*Gebilde*).

What as such can be dissociated from the representing activity of the players, is still linked to representation. This linkage does not mean dependence, in the sense that the play would acquire a definite meaning through the particular persons representing it, apart from the real creator, the author. Rather, as a relation to them all, the play has an absolute autonomy, and that is what is suggested by the concept of transformation.

What this implies for defying the nature of art, emerges when one takes the sense of transformation seriously. Transformation is not alteration, even an alteration that is especially far-reaching. Alteration always means that what is altered also remains the same, and is maintained. [\[4\]](#)

Digital media will not be used in a way to accentuate the opposition between mediated and live performance. The experiment will rather accentuate and try to make visible the hidden activity of an omnipresent play in an effort to stimulate new aesthetic experiences.

These artistic activities can also be seen as a part of digital historiography strategies, characterized by: "... the transition from atemporal chronological point to dialectic temporal flow. The mutability of digital information will challenge notions of definitive chronological reference points." [\[5\]](#)

Against 'Media vs. Live Performance'

Despite the presently increasing interest of artists and scholars in various forms of media-performance, the still quite dominant opinion considers live performances and mediatized or technologized forms of experience as two irreconcilable opposites. This opposition is strongly defended especially in the context of theatre/performance theory. Traditional theatre performances are often seen and protected as a kind of legacy and memory of the 'good old times' when people read books, believed in the power of words and spent evenings together around the fireplace ...

We can see the results of this approach and the reasons for its persistence in the effort of scholars to place theatre/performance outside contemporary mediatized culture's economy of reproduction, and in the generally accepted understanding of live performances as the counterbalance of the dominant characteristics of contemporary visual culture. This approach is seen e.g. when Patrice Pavis describes influences of media on theatre performance as "technological and aesthetic contamination"[\[6\]](#). His words could stand for the ideal of the 'pure form of theatre' as the core of the discipline. We can deduce that the unmediatized experience of the notorious 'here and now', fading away during a performance production (together with the live action of the actors' bodies) is generally accepted to be the main characteristic of the theatre/performance.

Peggy Phelan's definition of live performance reinforces this idea: "Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance".[\[7\]](#) She keeps the live vs. mediated performance relationship in a most radical opposition and defines live performance as "being [which] becomes itself through disappearance ..." [\[8\]](#)

Phelan's definition of live theatre/performance betrays the higher evaluation of live experience over the mediatized one. Its roots can be found in the revolutionary atmosphere of the second avant-garde movement with its emphasis on live art forms, where the gesture was not only aesthetic, but also political one. Live art forms of the 60s and 70s should be seen as a part of the politically charged counterculture movement. This is manifested in the effort to liberate the artistic creativity from economic relationships. The artwork should be liberated from the system based on a commodity circulating in the loop consisting of curators, gallery owners, artwork owners, by means of a rejection of any possibility to reproduce the work of art/ist.

Philip Auslander states that the opposition between live vs. mediatized forms has no support from the analyses of their ontology (see Phelan), but it has rather an ideological and historical character. To support this statement, he proposes the arguments referring to the "electronic ontology of media"[\[9\]](#) manifested in the performativity of electronic media as:

Disappearance, existence only in the present moment, is not, then, an ontological quality of live performance that distinguishes it from modes of technical reproduction are predicated on disappearance: the televisual image is produced by an ongoing process in which scan lines replace one another and is always as absent as it is present; the use of recordings causes them to degenerate. In a very literal, material sense, televisual and other technical reproductions, like live performances, become themselves through disappearance. [\[10\]](#)

He suggests understanding the opposition live vs. mediated performance as historical and contingent, rather than as ontologically differentiated. He proposes that: "historically, the live is an effect of mediating technologies. Prior to the advent of those technologies (e.g. sound recording and motion pictures), there was no such thing as 'live' performance, for that category has meaning only in relation to an opposing possibility."^[11] He ends his argumentation in favour of an arbitrary binary logic with reference to Baudrillard's statement that "live" can only be defined as "that which can be recorded."^[12] We can conclude that if the live performance is an event that can or even should be recorded, then new questions arise concerning the way, in which the recording (photography, video, text, or possibly something else) refers to, replaces, replays, mimics, simulates, or acts on, live events. However, our experiments will try to escape the realm of binary oppositions (such as live/recorded) and we will deal with more indefinite and uncertain relations between live and mediated experiences ...

Against Media of Liveness ^[13]

Generally speaking, the media able to deal with certain experiences of live theatre/performances of the past are documentaries (most often photographs and videos) and memories of participants, which together with authors' scripts can serve as scores for representations and reenactments. However, it is important to be aware of the limits of each medium.

Probably the most discussed media for documenting live performances are photographs. The ideologically attributed transparencies of these media have several problematic sides. One of them stems from the fact that it cuts away the dimension of one of the fundamental qualities of live arts - time/movement - and the related qualities like timing, the dynamics of the performance and also sound, voice, etc. The other problem with photography is its double mode of representation. The photograph is seen on the one hand as a 'pure' document, indexically referring to the original event. On the other hand, the photographer often tries to transform the whole event into a single picture (or series of pictures), which serves as a metaphor and abbreviation. In this sense, it is not referring to the specific moment of the event that is recorded by the camera, but rather serves as an autonomous symbol - representing the whole performance.^[14]

An example of the questionable quality of photography, as a direct medium for documenting an original live event, is the following picture of Chris Burden's action *Doorway to Heaven* (1973):

www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/finch/finch5-12-08_detail.asp?picnum=3

The photograph is added here with the title and the author's description of the action:

Doorway to Heaven

1973

Performance with 120-volt electrical current, two wires.

At 6 p.m. I stood in the doorway of my studio facing the Venice boardwalk. A few spectators watched as I pushed two live electric wires into my chest. The wires crossed and exploded, burning me but saving me from electrocution. - Chris Burden [\[15\]](#)

The photograph is a good example of the ambiguous relation between the action and its recording. On the one hand, it is an index - document referring to the very dangerous, death-defying action, in which the artist challenges a risky and violent potential of high voltage electricity. Although on the other hand, it is an autonomous image – a symbol or even an icon in the very literal sense of the word - functioning independently as an image.

The rather technical description of the event, which Burden presents in the script above, proves that also the artist's own depiction of the performance should not be taken as an adequate medium of live event representation. The script is only its blueprint, not its recording. It should be taken not as an additional record of what was done, but as a score ready to be performed in new contexts if someone else finds it to be a proper medium for his own creative expression (as for example Kafka's novels).

Shanken warns interpreters of this picture, that important parts of the situation are missing:

... the tension Burden and the spectators must have felt prior to the shocking instant, the sound of the explosion, the smell of the artist's smouldering flesh and the psychic disturbance caused in the eerie calm of the image and its suggestion of spiritual epiphany. [\[16\]](#)

His need to explain the situation in its complexity refers both to the fragmentary (documentary) and metaphorical (theatrical) quality of the photograph. He tries to overcome these limits of photographic representation by the explanation of other (mostly invisible) and thus unrepresentable circumstances and factors, which are missing in the image (like tension, sound, or the smell of burning skin).

The Liveness of the Trial and the weak statements of witnesses

Shanken's effort to complete the image of Burden's risky action shows the importance of the testimony of witnesses as a medium of representation. But in order to avoid short endings, we should state that also recording eyewitnesses' testimonies cannot be treated as a 'truth' about the event. The confrontation of assertions about any past event would show us how easily the perspectives and meanings can be ascribed to a situation and thus change it even radically.

Bay Kershaw starts a chapter dedicated to the relation between memory and performance with an explanation of his own experience of participating in a trial as a witness. He was asked to describe the conditions of the building where he lived and where the crime had happened:

I was called as a key witness to the trial at Manchester Crown Court. The mutilated body had been the plaintiff's, and he was lucky to be alive. [...]

This was the first time I'd been a witness in jury trial. [...]

The defence proceeded to construct a picture of 'the scene of crime' as appealing den of illicit drugs and kinky sex intolerable to normal society. [...]

I have a powerful memory of the big front door of Oxford Street opening into sickly smell of cheap sweets. The philanthropic landlord had his business on the ground floor. [...]

Above that was the heart of the place: two floors of single rooms for their creative oddballs of the dirty old town. [...] The place was alive with new ideas and bright imaginings. We made the buildings a Manchester hotspot, a place to be. [...]

But the damage had been done, and now memory floats free, unanchored from time. What were the real buildings? Were they a hope-filled haven of creativity and friendship? Were they a squalid, unhealthy and dangerous slum? Were they just a cheap shelter for unconventional people provided by a kindly sweet merchant? Were they a pit of illegal drugs, driving tenants into a twisted take on reality? Were they all these things at once? [...]

What use now, or ever, to travel through memory in search for the ground of value? [\[17\]](#)

As the example shows, even the victim himself can hesitate about which characteristics of the 'scene of crime' would be the right/true ones, and which factors should be taken into the picture to make his testimony true. As he experienced personally, even memory cannot be considered as a medium for transparent transfer of something from the past into the present. Memories function as filters and grids through which we can look as through a keyhole and only imagine or dream to be there and be part of the original experience ... Moreover, our memory as a medium of representation of the past events is maybe even the most uncertain medium, because we have no control over the factors which change filters of our knowingness ...

Kershaw expressed uncertainty of witnesses about their ability to reproduce the past event and even to verbalize their own experience of it. However, when we shift the perspective, we can see the law court where the trial takes part as a stage, on which the accused, victims, and witnesses perform their testimonies live. Philip Auslander took this perspective [\[18\]](#) and argued for the similarity of live performance and legal procedure. Due to the system's strong preference for live testimony, it is also covered in the law system as a proof of the past events. He showed with the support of many examples, that the live performance of memory retrieval, and the live confrontation of witnesses, accused, and victims in front of a jury is not only the praxis, on which the Anglo-Saxon judicial system is based, but proved that this practice functions also within the existing paradigm of the live performance (or vice versa?).

Der Prozess/Proces

The theatre/performance based on Kafka's novel *Der Prozess/Proces* superposes the dominant theme of Kafka's novel with the form of the live performance, which can be understood, according to Auslander's statement about relationships between situation of performance and trial, as an actualization of a trial, conceived as a pattern of live performances/events in general. So we can see the theatre/performance *Der Prozess/Proces* as an exemplary representative of live performances in an even wider sense than the notion of performance arts delimitates.

The director of the stage production, Dušan Pařízek, interprets the subject of Kafka's novel not as a fight between the individual and the totalitarian system (this interpretation was brought into Czech theatre context by Jan Grossman's famous stage production of Kafka's *The Trial* in 1966), but goes deep into the structures of the writing process and situation of the presentation/confrontation of the result of the writing/creative process to/with the reader/audience. Thus, he transformed the whole situation of the theatre performance into the trial: The actor (Josef K./Martin Finger) is the witness in his own trial, giving evidence about his own life to the theatre audience, summoned to a position as the jury, judging his performance of the guiltiness of his life.

"Only our concept of time leads us towards naming the last judgment like this, but it is martial law in fact." (Kafka, *The Trial*, quotation from the playbill)



Foto: Kamila Polivkova

The mise-en-scene of *Der Prozess/Proces* doesn't represent pure theatrical form; rather, it is an example of the theatre production in Pavis's words from the beginning of the article "contaminated" with media: There is a repeatedly used pre-recorded video and song *Stand by me* (by B. E. King, J. Libera, M. Stoller), which, playing from a cassette player placed on the stage, divides the stage production into montage of scenes. However, the main role among the media used in the stage production has a text, more accurately: the process of writing by hand as a process of giving self-examining testimony. This is the key to the stage interpretation of the novel.

We can say that the "postproduction" of Kafka's novel does not add another layer upon the original text, rather, the stage production goes the opposite way - into the material the novel is made of and reveals the process of writing, in other words, the artistic creation is performed.



Foto: Kamila Polivkova

The last reason to be mentioned for choosing the stage production *Der Prozess/Proces* as a central part of the experiment is the fact that the very stage production *Der Prozess/Proces* cannot be seen as an original work of art in a traditional sense of the word. The stage production itself is a result of the process of transformation of the novel (epic) into the form of drama and then into the 4D work of art – the stage production. We can say that the dramatization and stage production of Kafka's novel is a typical example of the presently widely spreading artistic strategies of postproduction within culture of usage.

Processing *Der Prozess/Proces*

The experiment explained afterwards will be the subject of investigation of the alternative possibilities of relationship between theatre/performance and (new) media.

We will add new media with their immateriality, programmability, and performativity (and associated qualities) to the scope of analogue media forms (which we have discussed above). This makes the relationship between performance and media more complicated, but also more challenging.

The experiment will examine this relationship via the live performance linking with the live digital media performance. The goal of the experiment is to search for new/other configurations of live performance and media.

The digital media will be used neither as a tool of representation nor as a tool of reproduction during the experiment. The live performance linking with the media via its transformation from one state to another should not contaminate the performance.

The project will deal with the liveness of live theatre/performances in the situation of its disappearing/transformation into memories of its participants and computer. We can say that the live performance's presence via its disappearing will be the subject of the media transformation and postproduction/performance as well.

If the analogue media world is typical for its fragmentation and inaccuracy, then the digital media world offers the maximum information to the interpreter, although in an incomprehensible language (like mathematics). So we can say that the complex and impenetrable information that digital recording provides, even enhances the main characteristic and quality of live theatre/performance via accentuation of its ontology of disappearance.

The transposition of live theatre/performance into live digital media performance during the execution of the experiment should even enhance the qualities of live performance - its eternally expiring, disappearing appearance into the hidden level of the omnipresent play ...

Then, the experiment as a whole can be seen as a performance of the universal ontology of disappearance ...

The experiment with transformation of the theatre/performance into the different new media languages and spaces can be likened to the way digital media are used for simulations of complex phenomenon. We can collect data about them, we can simulate them, but we can't represent/display them. All these means and media can help us only refer to them in different ways. So we decided to investigate the possibility escaping the hierarchical relationship of presence and representation and use the live performance-data as a source of material and imagination for making art.

The experiment should also be seen in a context of "post-document" digital historiography:

The post-document historiographic landscape is enframed by paradigms of information design and technologies of viewership, among them: interface, quantification of relevance and (subjective) informational hierarchies.

A typology of the landscape nodes might include nodes for retrieved adaptive information or interpretation, channeling, relevance differentiation and strategies for influencing, the traversal path such as gateways, forced impositions, spaces of participation and resources for reference ... [\[19\]](#)

This is the way in which artists will work with the live theatre/performance Der Prozess/Proces: Without any interventions into the performance as such, during the experiment they will use the live performance as an engine (source, matter, scenario, score...) for constitution of perhaps millions of other aesthetic experiences created with the use of yet unspecified media instruments (as a post-production and live performance/transformation as well). By using the new instruments of new media, they will make constellations for emergence of art-media-events belonging to the new/other aesthetic agendas ... The result of the experiment will be evaluated afterwards ...

The project we are going to introduce can thus be seen as a form of collaborative research, in which artistic and scientific approaches overlap and fuse.

Support of the project:

CIANT - within a residency programme.

With kind permission of Prague Chamber Theatre

Masaryk University - The project is part of the research activities done within Centre of Fundamental Research of AMU and MU (Masaryk University), supported by MŠMT, grant No: LC544.

Jana Horáková (Brno)

*1971. She completed her studies of Theory and History of Theatre at Charles University in Prague and Masaryk University in Brno (Mgr., Ph.D.). She works as a lecturer and guarantee of the Theory of interactive media studies (at Musicology dept., Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University). Her professional interests lay in point of intersection between art-science-technology with special attention to media-performance relationship and robotic art. She has published in Czech and foreign periodicals and publications. She has participated at Czech and international conference (She won the best paper award at EMCSR 2004 Vienna for her paper at history of science section). She has organized international symposia *Media-Performance* (2005, 2007). She (together with B. Buescher) is co-editor of Czech-German book *Imaginary Spaces* (2008). Soon will be published her first monograph *Robot as a Robot* (2010).

[1] Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Postproduction. Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*. New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002

[2] Terry, Brett: The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Historiography. In *Reframing Consciousness* (ed. Roy Ascott), Intellect Book, USA: 1999, pp. 145)

[3] The production opened the theatre season 2007/2008 in the Theatre Komedie. The Proces (Trial) was presented at the international theatre show PROJEKTION EUROPA at Deutsches Schauspielhaus, Hamburg, where Dušan D. Pařízek represented Czech Republic. The Proces (Trial) was rewarded with Alfred Radok award for the best stage production of the year 2007. Martin Finger (Josef K.) gained Alfred Radok award in male actor performance category. Divadelní noviny magazine priced the Proces the stage production of the year 2007. The Proces production got MAX price for the best production of text originally written in German in Czech Republic in the season 2006/2007 (awarded by Cultural foundation Allianz and Prague theatre festival of German language).

[4] Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Great Britain: Continuum Publishing Group. 1975/2004, p.110.

[5] Terry, Brett: The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Historiography. In *Reframing Consciousness* (ed. Roy Ascott), Intellect Book, USA: 1999, pp. 145)

[6] Pavis, Patrice. *Theatre and the Media: Specificity and Interference. Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*. Trans. Loren Kruger. London. New York, Routledge, 1992, 99-135, p. 134.

[7] Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London, New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 146.

[8] Item, p. 146.

[9] Auslander, Philip. *Ontology vs. History: Making Distinctions Between the Live and the Mediatized*. Conference paper: 3rd Annual Performance Studies Conference. Atlanta. 1997. on-line: <http://webcast.gatech.edu/papers/arch/Auslander.html> (rev. February-7-2010).

[10] Item.

[11] Item.

[12] Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulations*. Trans. P. Foss, P. Patton, P. Beitchman. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983, p.146. in Auslander, reference number 6.

[13] We understand liveness as the sense of living presence. It always involves action in the present, an awareness of now. (see <http://www.liveness.org/>) . While above quoted Auslander has a broader understanding of the term. See his book: *Liveness. Performance in Mediated Culture*. London and New York: Routledge. 1999.

[14] Philip Auslander differs between documentary and theatrical photographs in Auslander, Philip: *The Performativity of Performance Documentation*. Performance Art Journal, no. 84, 2006, p.1-10.

[15] The image and the text are published e.g. in *Art and Electronic Media*. ed. Shanken, E. 2009, p. 145.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Kershaw, Bay: *The Radical in Performance. Between Brecht and Baudrillard*. Great Britain: Routledge, 1999/2002, p. 157-159.

[18] Auslander, Philip. *Liveness. Performance in a Mediated Culture*. chapter: LEGALY LIVE. Law, performance, memory (pp.112). London and New York: Routledge. 1999.

[\[19\]](#) Terry, Brett: The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Historiography. In *Reframing Consciousness* (ed. Roy Ascott), Intellect Book, USA: 1999, pp. 145)