



RICERCA E PROGETTAZIONE PER LE ARTI PERFORMATIVE

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A. Fondamenti di Performance Studies

Che cosa è *performance*

Performance Studies. An Introduction

1. What is Performance Studies?
2. What is Performance?
3. Ritual
4. Play
5. Performativity
6. Performing
7. Performance Processes
8. Global and Intercultural Performance



Performance: definition 1968

Performance is an extremely difficult concept to define. From one point of view – clearly stated by Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) – performing is a mode of behavior that may characterize any activity. Thus performance is a “quality” that can occur in any situation rather than a fenced-off genre. Various kinds of psychotherapy develop both practical and theoretical consequences from this. Or, as John Cage has argued, simply framing an activity “as” performance – viewing it as such – makes it into a performance. Documentary film and the splicing in of documentary footage into “fiction” films transforms ordinary behavior into performances. So do shows like “Candid Camera”. [...]

[Schechner, *Approaches*, 2003³: 22n]



Performance: definition 1968

[...] a performance is an activity done by an individual or group in presence of and for another individual or group. [...] in trying to manage the relationship between a general theory and its possible applications to various art forms, I thought it best to center my definition [...] on certain acknowledged qualities of live theater, the most stable being the audience-performer interaction. Even where audiences do not exist as such – some happenings, ritual, and play – the function of audience persists: part of the performing group watches – is meant to watch – other parts of the performing group; or, as in some ritual, the implied audience is God, or some transcendent Other(s).

[Schechner, *Approaches*, 1988: 30n]



What is performance? (1)

In business, sport, and sex, “to perform” is to do something up to a standard – to succeed, to excel. In the arts, “to perform” is to put on a show, a play, a dance, a concert. In everyday life, “to perform” is to show off, to go to extremes, to underline an action for those who are watching. In the XXI century people as never before live by means of performance.



What is performance? (2)

Performances mark identities, bend time, reshape and adorn the body, tell stories. Performances – of art, ritual or ordinary life – are “restored behaviour”, “twice-behaved behaviour”, performed actions that people train for and rehearse.



What is performance? (3)

Performances are made from bits of restored behaviours, but every performance is different from every other. First, fixed bits of behaviour can be recombined in an endless variations. Second, no event can exactly copy another event [...] the specific occasion and context make each instance unique [...] Where do performance “takes place”? [...] as action, interaction and relation. [...] performance isn’t “in” anything, but “between”.



Eight kinds of performance

1. in everyday life – cooking, socializing, “just living”
2. in the arts
3. in sports and other popular entertainment
4. in business
5. in technology
6. in sex
7. in ritual – sacred and secular
8. in play



Is/As Performance

What is the difference between “is” performance and “as” performance? Certain events are performances and other events less so. There are limits to what “is” performance. But just about anything can be studied “as” performance. Something is a performance when historical context, convention, usage, and tradition says it is. [...] One cannot determine what “is” performance without referring to specific cultural circumstances. There is nothing inherent in an action in itself that makes it a performance or disqualifies it from being a performance.

