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## PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

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## PERFORMANCE CONCEPTUALISM: FROM SEMANTICS TO BODY LANGUAGE

### Abstract

The research focuses on the philosophy of performative actionism. It refers to the contemporary practices of installations, happenings, monstrations and flash mobs on different topics as to the concept of pure action. Performance is regarded as the relevant understanding technique to manifest the currently popular dynamism principle of arts and philosophical anthropology. The research aims to analyse the art experience of the subject's bodily actions to demonstrate their anthropological authenticity, social significance, legal value, epistemological activity, and political will. As a result, authors conclude that non-semantic silent performances reveal limited possibilities of modern human self-realisation despite having several rights, freedoms and technologies to improve their lives. Performance is viewed as a conceptual model of individual functioning in the polyontic reality. As an alternative to the linguistic one, self-representation through performance is a rather flawed but relevant means of showing the nature of the subject's existence in the contemporary social, legal, political and cultural environment.

*Keywords:* performativity, performance, agent, action art, body, corporeity, actionism, installation, gesture, presence.

### Introduction

The essential kind of human activity today is, indeed, communication. However, the reset of cultural paradigms proves that communication acquires a different character, changes applied technologies and acquires new relevant formats. Human needs simplification and naturalisation of human needs lead to the segmentation and localisation of human ways of expression, higher activity, the increase of their mobility and the people's loss of their anthropological integrity. The biological body is at least as important as the emotional or spiritual state. Semantic discourse is separated from the performative act.

The existence of a person in a multi-level meta-environment demands non-institutionalised

means of self-positioning and self-realisation. Reality undergoes hybridisation, transforming society. The very subject mutates, shifting from a profound transcendental person to a public but conspiratorial agent. The research interest in the possibilities of the agent's mind, psyche, and body and the alternative means of their activities has been increasing. These promote the development of new technologies and tools for human adaptation to the hybrid environment. Against that background, the methodological articulations become vital, with their performative acts and performance as efficient social and art practices of a person's self-realisation. Performance, lacking speech hermeneutics, acquires its value in the arena of global communication, being implemented in both live bodily forms (flash mobs,

socio-mobs, monstrations and installations) and via digital visual images (video resources on popular platforms, especially video streaming versus broadcasting).

The main goal of this study is to show that the creative action space makes it possible to realise the main conceptual ontological principle of our times – the disruption between physical and meaningful activities, actions and comments, acts and words, body and corporeity. A person cannot preserve their integrity in the stratified reality. Their verbal-symbolic essence is separated from the physical body since they present themselves and communicate autonomously and independently. Personal de-socialisation and fragmentation, along with the dominance of the virtual world, have led to the depletion in the repertoire and fragmentation of a number of human functions, particularly localisation of their speech and actions. Thus, performance is becoming an irreplaceable alternative form of self-realisation of the silent body. Meanwhile, language remains a person's way of existing as an agent of the information environment.

### Methodology

The rapid development of the modern world finds its theoretical interpretation in the ontological concepts of hyper-modernism, virtuality, transgressiveness, dynamism, corporeity, and performativity. That theoretical discourse is accompanied by a growing number of creative human practices of cognition, comprehension, integration, self-expression, communication and self-realisation. Any area of public or private human activity, including social, legal, political, economic or artistic, has its own conceptual, technological and methodological features in the meta-modernism landscape, possessing a particular cultural logic of late capitalism. An essential feature of meta-modernism as a currently relevant paradigm and a methodological model is the trend to eliminate the extravaganza of post-modernist speech games, which carried away

into its hyperspace of synthetic and illusory grammarology and discursiveness. Meta-modernist ontology sees real beings in the presence and dynamics of the bodies of the natural performance of life. Performance today plays the role of the leading ontological, epistemological, hermeneutic and anthropological category, one of the critical concepts of the post-non-classical philosophical and scientific methodology, as well as the leading progressive technique in art.

This thematic discourse unfolds within the framework of philosophical ontology, using the methods of phenomenological reflection, deconstruction, hermeneutic analysis and interpretation, correlations of social and virtual performances. The study is based on the theoretical principles of simulativeness, discursiveness, dynamism and performativity.

Meta-modernism has also changed the nature of subjectivity. Despite the metaphorical statement of his/her own “death”, the author in post-modernism possessed absolute and unlimited power over the symbolic reality of the text. Arbitrarily generating senses and meanings of things, they literally created myths about reality, not striving for its authenticity and increasingly drifting away from it. The subject existed as a multi-layered formation of intersecting texts, already read and interpreted, though still capable of generating more and more new meanings and reactions in new contexts of the communicative field.

Thus, the discursive being of the postmodernist subject was not at all limited to the prototype of a symbol or sign and was not checked with it. The world-text existed as a universe of author's myths, whereas the anthropic nature of the subject manifested itself exclusively in their communication and mutual recognition of the mutual value of oneself and another, equal to oneself. Today, the apology of the text has been replaced by the triumph of the somatics, and the dynamics of narration has been replaced by the dynamics of objects. Currently, observed priorities are those of body and corporeity, naturalness, sensual presence, actionism, potentiality, natural law

and real action, suffering and satisfaction, participation and life.

Post-postmodernism has marked itself with the search for the “lost reality”. According to it, “reality” should be understood as both the objective and subjective being of the person. New unique technological capabilities of interiorisation, visualisation, and increased physiological functionality of the subject’s brain and body have dramatically changed the idea of reality itself (Meliakova, 2020, pp. 119-122). Today, it is not a semiotic simulacrum that “comes to life” through subjective interpretation, but an independent *action* open to perception, sensation, understanding, and participation. Modern subjects position themselves not through their language but through their active or passive *presence*. Speech acts are replaced with physical acts of self-expression. The speech and action ratio has changed, too. Signs represent themselves not in the text but in the performance. The emerging meanings are no longer regarded stable [for a specific cultural context] in their meanings, but they are upgraded, reloaded, re-defined repeatedly through presence and participation.

Within meta-modernist content, the category of “performativity” / “performative” has lost its classic meaning, suggested by J. Austin (1999) – “the efficacy of utterances” – and has acquired a slightly different, almost literal meaning: the technique of bodily representation. In this capacity, this term has firmly established itself in the methodological discourse of modern humanitarian knowledge, having originated in post-non-classical art. Performance as a modern method of self-expression, presentation, positioning, participation, understanding, and integration clearly expresses the new dialectic of action and meaning. The interpretation of all dimensions of reality today requires the final refusal from the linguistic technique for the sake of body language technique and expressive performative techniques.

In the simulated human world, prioritisation changes: semantic symbols yield to actionism,

while verbal communication channels are frequently replaced with non-verbal ones. Linguistic symbols, carriers of stable meanings, filled the ideal being with more or less popularised myths. All horizons of a person’s public existence – political, legal, ethical, labour, market, educational and cultural – were the sphere of combined myths, the skilful operation of which demonstrated the very *deconstruction* – a universal postmodernist method of understanding, cognition, interpretation, communication, and self-expression, popular in semiotics, logical semantics, post-structuralism, hermeneutics, epistemology, phenomenology and anthropology at the turn of the millennium. Skilful deconstruction raised its master to the level of an autonomous and independent full-fledged subject, arbitrarily creating precedents of meanings in the gaps of mythologies at the crossroads of semantic vectors, thereby provoking conflicts of contexts and generating the author’s new meanings. It was deconstruction that guaranteed the identity of the subject. However, the space of discourse in which the author stayed made the identity dynamic and unstable, similarly to the discourse itself.

In fact, until recently, the discursive semantic field was the main meta-reality of communication and being, in general. Outside the discourse, the subject did not exist at all. Articulation practices therein contributed to creating new semantic connections and, consequently, an individual’s self-creation.

However, recently, the concepts of subjectivity, individuality, self-expression and existence have undergone significant changes. Within the modern context, individualisation has no direct connotations with the individual. The individual as a term for someone holistic, deep, spiritual, existential, personal, and associated with the group no longer exists. There is a unit isolated from the whole, a fragment, an activist, an actionist, an agent, devoid of integrity, involvement, solidarity, kinship, mutual recognition, and context. Anthropism has been developing to-

wards the *agent* involved in network interaction in objective reality.

The issue of the difference and relevance of the two categories – “presence” and “availability” – equally characterises the agent’s way of remaining debatable. While *availability* focuses on physicality and materiality, *presence* implies a spatial-bodily dimension, which includes both a virtual sensory corporeity and the biosocial body itself, in its role significance.

In neo-materialism, the physical body has become an object of increased research interest, along with the phenomenon of the crowd, gathering, genderism, performance, flash mob and various bodily practices. This is based on current trends in transhumanism, biopolitics and the genesis of somatic rights. The concept of the *body* was developed in the modern theory of *performative subjectivity*, substantiated in particular by the American philosopher J. Butler (2002; 2018), political philosopher J. Dean (2017) and sociologist G. Standing (2014). Their performative actionism is of political nature, and it is mainly revealed through the precarious activities as a legally vulnerable category of the population. The precarious body is a non-verbal way of their silent self-expression and compensation of the social deficiency. J. Dean also notes that the efficiency of a symbol as a communicative element in the communicative capitalism network falls. The *body* correlates with the *agent* of the performative/performance, that is, the act/action in which people-events participate and perform. In American “left” political theory, this concept is called “agent realism” (*agency* as the key notion) (Kovalenko, Meliakova, & Kalnytskyi, 2020, p. 97).

The choice of a performative paradigm in modern methodology is obvious and beyond doubt. Performative acts become a way of bodily communication, a manifestation of the individuality of agents, of creating a global dimension of the performative set, organising various kinds of situational, branch and consumer alliances. The performativity becomes a feature of mass culture

and *being* for a human in the contemporary world. The body gains significance in any human activity, starting with art and finishing with market relations. There have long been scientific discussions about the body as the main substantive, productive, biological, intellectual and communicative resource. Pragmatic ideas of corporeality have been shaped within the theory of commodification of the human body, the concept of self-entrepreneurship and self-exploitation (Gorz, 2010). For instance, Italian philosopher A. Musio (2018), critically assessing human *biolabour*, where the body acts as an entrepreneurial resource, calls it an effect of the phenomenological revolution, which blurred the border between the time for life and for a professional career (“the concept of robbed time”).

Performative acts involve each participant in the event and share responsibility for what is happening between them. As creators of an event, agents assign meaning to it, just as they assign the event itself. They incarnate themselves not in the language of symbols but in the language of the body, which is authentic self-expression, the revival of naturalness. The performative act actualises the corporeity, displacing the semiotic experience with the material-bodily one. The performative, which is of a potentially active nature, refers to the inherent principle of modern conceptual art: the intention is many times more important than execution. The purpose of such art is to convey the very idea, concept; it is a purely artistic gesture. As the famous American minimalist S. Levitt said in the 60s: “Conceptual art is designed to arouse the intellectual interest of viewers without affecting their souls” (The sculptural structures of Sol Levitt, 2009).

Within this methodological context, the categories “performative” – “performative act” – “performance” in the meaning of the provoked spontaneous self-developing action differ from each other only in their origin and applied accent, and, therefore, are equally appropriate as an ontological property of the public. While *perfor-*

*mance* originates in art, *performative* originates in structural linguistics. Yet, the main maxim of both categories lies in their indication of the unique situation of interaction as a *pure openness* of actions, meanings, the composition of participants, and their influence. The arbitrariness, variability, unintentionality, spontaneity and self-generation of the *performative/performance* guarantee the subject a more effective entry into communication than narrative, discourse, cento dialogue, or any semantic practices do.

### Results and Discussion

The true ontological meaning of the concepts “doer”, “agent”, and “author” is expressively presented in art today. The principle of contemporary art (as well as any other productive field of activity – education, business, social, civic, media, digital, etc.) is: the author is not someone who has done something with their own hands, for example, painted a picture, and now needs public recognition of the results of their work; in fact, the author is the one who said: “This is art, because I, an artist, affirm it”. As mentioned earlier in the analysis of performativity: the intention is many times more important than performance.

This principle of motivating an artist infinitely pushed the boundaries of 20<sup>th</sup>-century art. At the same time, both the subject (the author and the viewer) and the object (a thing and an art object) acquired new content in contemporary art. Conceptual objects are much more than just works: they manifest a new role for the artist, a new way of presenting work, and completely new content in the relationship between art and the viewer. They can be completely different in character and nature. The object of creativity, for example, can be a found thing, which the artist hardly touched (at least, did not violate its integrity), but only *designated* it as their work. It is believed that the first person to do it was the French artist, Marcel Duchamp, as evidenced by his ready-mades: a bicycle wheel screwed to a stool, a bot-

tle dryer, or an upside-down urinal placed on the podium and called the “Fountain” (Andreeva, 2021).

Moreover, in installation art, the contemporary author does not even bother to show imagination in naming the work. As a rule, installations receive an extremely literal name, directly and unambiguously naming the subject: for example, “Bicycle Wheel” (Marcel Duchamp), “Piano” (Gunther Uecker), “Fur Tea Service” (Meret Oppenheim) (Andreeva, 2021). The literal name of the work eliminates any possibility of a gap between the thing and its legend, as well as the explication of this very legend and its independent existence. In this case, through its name, the thing declares itself directly. Any performative object, in the role of which both a thing and a living agent can act, exists in isolation from the mythological horizon of names, titles and meanings; it fills the space of interaction with itself, with its actions and intentions; the acts launched by them are capable of, as it were, silently “breathing out” a new reality.

For instance, the Russian school philosopher H. Petrovsky (2018) considers the concept of artistic image, suggesting the rejection of its aestheticism and transcendence for the sake of an emphasis on pure representation and demonstration of the sign itself. This reading leads to a dynamic, active, physical image – the “imprint of bodily encounters”. Modern actionism as the action art makes the most of this technique of a dynamic sign, embodying not corporeity but the thing itself. Modern conceptual installations frequently contain living creatures in need of food, watering and productivity. This is called the “performance” of a work of art that “lives” and “breathes” (Johnson, 2020).

In this sense, Australian research is indicative. Based on the works of J. Deleuze, they theorise fashion as a means of modulating human subjectivity. Affecting bodies through the collision of matter, signs, practices and specific skills of coordination, fashion represents a special way of subjectifying bodies that exchange effects, mem-

ories, and sensations in spatial, temporal, material and emotional communication. A. Eckersley and S. Duff (2020) demonstrate this by the example of installations by Melbourne artist F. Abikar, reproducing the habits and memories of a dressed body. In turn, the Russian researcher Y. Kostinkova “reads” contemporary poetry in the interface of the urban landscape using the case study of artistic projects by the St. Petersburg group “Laboratory of Poetic Actionism”. In her opinion, modern literature is no longer limited to the printed page but chooses urban reality, virtual, digital and transmedia content, natural and retro-cultural landscapes, or political-situational actions as a performative art space, thus entering into a dialogue with cultural memory and the synchronous, or horizontal, the context of life (Kostincova, 2018). Ukrainian philosophers Andrey and Yaroslava Artemenko also take an active part in the global discourse on visual art practices. They analyse the cultural logic of meta-modernism by demonstrating the loft style in the context of general trends in visual practices of modern art space (Artemenko & Artemenko, 2020).

A contemporary author, an artist, is not a creator, but, primarily, a manager, moderator, organiser, regulator, and administrator, setting up a new semantic zone – a creative space for self-expression and self-development – a workshop open for cooperation. They do it because they *are entitled to do so*. For their creative activities, contemporary artists (as well as anyone else) do not need recognition from the public, institutions, or connoisseurs, since they are absolutely autonomous, independent and, at the same time, restless. The viability and value of their works are determined exclusively by their own efficiency, competitiveness, and demand in the market for goods and services. Consequently, outrageousness and commercial success justify any creative initiative of the author. The key task of any kind of creation is to be effective.

The liberal value of the *legal autonomy* of the individual, as well as the value of *the author's*

*will*, have become firmly established today not only in politics and art, but, to no less extent, in law, philosophy, ethics, entrepreneurship, education, economy, production, services, leisure and recreation, social and informational activity, and other areas of life. Self-determination and self-realisation of a person in the liberal-democratic world are based on the initial fundamental principle: *I have the right equal to another person's right*. This principle justifies any of the most daring intentions, initiatives and results. The fundamental and generative role of law in the active life of a person should be recognised.

However, the existence of *the right to act* presupposes, primarily, the choice of the *language of action* (in the sense of the way of self-expression and functioning). This “language” becomes an extremely naturalised semiotics – an authentic body language. In this case, the body is separated from symbolic speech, myth, and semantics and is an independent means of expression. Things, bodies, gestures, situations, events “speak” for themselves, devoid of any accompanying comments from the author or any mythological semantic context. This has happened not only since digital culture has made the digital way of verbal communication absolute, visualising the subject. Primarily, the dominance of *corporeity* (in the sense of pure consciousness, capable of feeling its own presence) triggered an intense search for the most lost part of *nature*, that is, the *body*.

The activity of a pure thing, direct body language, have become a natural behavioural reaction to the excessive virtualisation of reality, as well as to the dominance of simulative practices of self-expression. Actually, simulation as a priority way of existence has not disappeared; it has merely changed its subject: narrative and discourse – to corporeity and body. The oblivion of nature, or its deficit, due to the domination of digital reality (as J. Baudrillard (2004), S. Zhi-zhek (2016) and others have written), led to the “revival” of this very nature in all its inferiority, but self-sufficiency, especially since the individual chooses the method of “naturalisation”, as



they *have the right to do so*. A successful illustration to this is the avant-garde work of contemporary artists in the genre of happening, environment, assemblage, installation, action or performance, that is, *the art of action*, as well as amateur practices of self-expression and communication, prevalent in social media, video hosting and in the form of messages, life hacks, challenges, and public acts of a socio-legal and political nature in the form of flash mobs, smart mobs, socio-mobs, political mobs, demonstrations and monstrations.

As such, in all its genres, the currently popular action art has a common goal – to blur the boundaries between symbols and reality, to express the acuteness of life itself. In contrast to the Renaissance one, contemporary realism does not create exact copies of reality; it *recreates* reality via its expressive means, the main of which is the thing, the body, and often the body of the artist themselves. It goes without saying that art is a semiotic space – a horizon of signs and meanings. It is unthinkable without symbolism. Here, expressive means (word, sound, movement, or form), which are always limited in their number, perform the function of conveying the concept of the work as much as possible. Accordingly, compensation for incompleteness occurs at the expense of simulated, symbolically reproduced missing aspects.

However, the realism of art does not lie in the naturalism of the signified but in the naturalness and authenticity of the signifier. The reproductive material, object, technique, craftsmanship, location, environment and much more details selected for this can eliminate the sophistication, refinement, elitism of courtly or, on the contrary, avant-garde symbolism. Thus, the most progressive contemporary art is not just crude and accessible, it is primitive and daring, but it is vulgar impromptu. Absolutely everyone can become its connoisseur since they encounter it in real life, participate, and independently endow it with sense and meaning. In *the art of action*, everyone is equal in their rights: the author and the viewer.

It is increasingly resorting to body language, both living and virtual, because its essential property is interactivity. Digital culture further blurs the line between producers and consumers, leading to an open, democratic media environment.

The most voluminous and expressive categories that convey the concept of the art of action are *actionism*, or *action art*, as a creative art style that seeks to demonstrate not the result of the artist's work, but its process and *happening* (i.e. a case, an event, occurrence), which is a form of social and artistic self-expression, an act or action, characterised by a paradox and shocking character, designed for the improvisation of the participants. The artists themselves can take part in the happening, but they cannot control the course of events. Happening does not have a clear script; the audience can get involved in what is happening by having a glass of wine on the stage with the characters. This art's primary goal is to release absurdist energy since the flow of life is absurd, and its free and liberating flow should be maximally represented during this action (Elshevskaia, 2016).

Happening is a symbolic form consisting of momentary actions, fantasies inspired by life and based on archetypal symbolic associations. The same action will have different meanings and effects depending on its "reading" by the audience. In this regard, the Canadian playwright and theatre critic G. Botting is often cited, stating that the happenings rejected the plot and plot matrix for the sake of a full-fledged complex matrix of a random event, or a rhizome matrix as a vector of improvisation (Elshevskaia, 2016). Viewers' participation in the happening is its driving force. Therefore, happenings frequently aim at socio-political propaganda, mainly with an emphasis on protest (as in the works of J. Beuys and J.-J. Lebel), or simply shocking public morality. In any case, they are designed to "blow up" the stereotypes and myths of the language. Therefore, they must be "eloquently" mute.

The environment is a kind of happening, which is less active, not intrusive towards the

viewer. The participant can enter it entirely unconsciously. A “Wikipedia” example of the environment: life-sized white sculptural figures in New York by J. Segal, depicting gays and lesbians hugging each other. The sculptures are seated on the benches of the city alley; passers-by sit next to them, thus making an integral art space of living and plaster figures. This is a non-spectacular art that is so unnoticeable that the viewer enters its works without knowing it; this is symbolism, which is diffused in reality, ecstatic unpredictability. They are called a monument to the LGBT Liberation Movement, which, in turn, speaks of their eloquence and demonstrativeness, regardless of their delicate form (Dyachenko, 2009).

Nevertheless, the popularity of the very concept of *happening* has lowered, being replaced with the related terms of *action* and *performance*, where the artist acts on his or her own behalf (not in an incarnation), often putting their own body at risk. *An action* may be limited to the artist’s pure *gesture*, his/her declaration, explanation, proposal, offer, and a public statement (e.g., to regard all Amsterdam shoe shops as their works of art, which was once declared by the Dutch conceptual artist Stanley Brown). *Performance*, in turn, implies a specific planned artist’s *action*, where he or she participates physically or using their memory, biography, or less often – as a director who organises other bodies. *Performance* as avant-garde art is generally of “epataje” nature. Its extreme shocking samples are well-known, e.g. involving the author who tests his extreme physiological capabilities along with viewers’ feelings and emotions. These include the performances, reminding of sacred rituals accompanied with the cruel and ruthless slaughter of animals and desecration of their corpses, personal self-harming, masochism, vampirism and even public suicides (Elshevskaya, 2016). An essential aspect of actionism is in the fact that the happening and recording (e.g. video records) actions, being broadcast on the news, shared and viewed in social media, rumours, stay in popular

memory and create a variety of absolutely different senses.

Actionism is implemented not only in art but also in popular socio-cultural practices of communication and solidarity, e.g. in *flash mobs* and *smart mobs*. A *flash mob* is a mass event planned via digital communication when a large group of strange people do certain provisionally agreed activities in a public place, and then they walk away also spontaneously. The concept purpose is to be effective for passers-by, triggering their emotions of surprise and absurdity; to destroy conventional ways of behaviour, expected reactions, logic strings and social stereotypes by demonstrating a daring gesture of free will. The principle here is to be spontaneous, autonomous, depersonalised, anonymous, rejecting from the promotion (coverage in mass media and advertising), as well as non-profit.

A *smart mob* is a type of flash mob. The term was coined in 2002 by the American sociologist and critic G. Rheingold to name a new form of self-organisation of people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a result of “another social revolution” (Rheingold, 2006). Smart mobs consist of people able to act in agreement even without knowing each other. People in smart mobs cooperate in an absolutely innovative way owing to their mobile devices that serve as a means of communication and calculations.

Currently, many trendy types of performances are called popular or folk. For instance, political mobs (or *socio-mobs*) are mass events with a social, legal or political goal, expressing public discontent, protest, a critical view on the social and political activities of the governments or public activists. They are considered a simple, operative, legitimate and safe way of expressing a public opinion or drawing attention to certain problems than meetings and demonstrations. Examples may include the practice of burning a politician’s toy, silent destruction of advertising materials with the slogans of a certain party or populist newspapers, throwing small coins at the building of Parliament in response to the rise of public

transport fares, or famous flash mobs *Kiss-in* against homophobia and in favour of human rights, which were popular in the 1980s in the American LGBT movement, when the participants expressed their protest as kisses.

*Monstration* is a performative practice, conceptually similar to a socio-mob but having its specific features. Therefore, it is referred to the varieties of happening (a game action), but not a smart mob (scenario planned action). This is a mass art action organised as a demonstration, accompanied by absurdist slogans and banners, which declaratively lack any sense, in particular, political sense. Its potential participants preliminarily know only the date, venue and exact time, whereas the rest is their improvisation. The concept of these actions is to be unique, absurd, public, open to multiple interpretations, multi-layered and, what is most important, to be communicative. The objective of monstration participants is to silently interact with viewers, with each other, self-express, implement art imagination, position oneself and one's opinion on the environment.

For example, Novosibirsk (Russia) has traditionally held monstrations, gathering five and more thousand people, annually on 1<sup>st</sup> May since 2004. They are organised by the community of free artists and creative youths as a symbolic alternative and a paraphrase to the traditional May demonstrations that used to be held in the USSR. These monstrations show new relevant interests, hobbies and issues of the contemporary youths, their world outlook, humour and general knowledge that replaced the Soviet ideology. One of the initiators and organisers of the annual Russian monstrations is the artist and director Artyom Loskutov (2010), clarifies the origin of the very term *monstration* by the deliberate clipping of the Latin prefix *de-* in the word *demonstration*, which brought some negative connotation, denial, harm and destruction. The growth of the number of the same-name events in dozens of Russian cities today and their mass nature show the relevance, popularity, and demand for

this technique of social interaction. In this respect, the Siberian centre of contemporary art coordinators notes that as a form of public art, a monstration is within the space between art activities, social activities, and a political gesture (Loskutov, 2010).

A *gesture* is that very *myth* of Barthes' structuralism, not semantic but visual; a *myth-gesture*, which expresses, points, refers but not voices openly. A monstration is a shrewd travesty to *serious* political demonstrations. It does not just mark the line between civil liberties and the initiatives but pushes these boundaries, becoming a school of solidarity, collectivism, legal freedom and activity in the new performative form. Therewith, it is to be borne in mind that any mobs (flash, smart, socio mobs or monstrations) as a formally organised community features a high level of the conformism of its agents. They are usually susceptible to suggestion as a group, emotionally infected, and tending to mimic; they are convinced, relatively unanimous, reluctant to resist, powerful as a unit, anonymous, and having suppressed the feeling of personal responsibility. Still, participation in a flash mob is regarded in contemporary European psychology and education as a creative and quite effective way of human physical, cognitive, social and emotional development (Cuellar-Moreno, Antonio Cubas-Delgado & Caballero-Julia, 2018). A flash mob is characterised as a generally positive, adaptive and motivating practice, encouraging self-governance and self-confidence.

Nonetheless, it is worth returning to the action art where life and creativity are fused. Its most shocking and heroic form (at times, it is expressly political) is called *living art*. Its ruthless, painful and epatage manifestations include, inter alia, radical actionism: from a series of years-long actions by the Taiwan artist Tehching Hsieh (Krylova, 2011), who has been enduring many hardships, physiological and psychological limitations, to the experience of Russian artist Oleg Mavromatti (Radical Actionism in Action: A Showcase, 2010), where the final action (*Friend*

or *Foe*) implied his potential death online while broadcast by Bulgarian television (online voting could result in a lethal current discharge), as well as a *living art* notorious performance by the Pussy Riot band, who brazenly performed a protestant song for packing a video in the Orthodox Christ the Savior Cathedral (followed by two-year imprisonment).

Yet, the revealing nature of public performative practices most often raises criticism from the traditional semantic culture, public norms, standards and ruling structures, which again confirms the restrictions to actions in a typical liberal-democratic landscape. For example, O. Mavromati's radical conceptual art was heavily criticised by the Russian public and the Orthodox Church. That is noted by Russian philosopher D. Filipova (2020), and she concludes the synthesis of the Orthodox Church and the state patriotism within the culturally resonating religious tradition, which indicates that the Russian public space is sacralised.

The opposite side of art radicalism may refer to the creativity of *absolute absence*, with the absence of material and body, let alone the work itself. This is a cognitive energy practice of pure inducement to using imagination. In this regard, in New York, there is The Museum on Non-Visible Art (MONA), which shows its visitors *naked* walls or, at times, painting frames on them. Viewers are provided with an opportunity to imagine the works of art by themselves within the powers of their imagination. The maximum facilitation may be given in brief guidance or names of the *masterpieces* placed on the plates by artists. In that case, the artist appeals to the implied context of the viewer's subjective art background. Clearly, art is not in the perfection of forms but in the very *idea*, capable of influencing viewers' feelings. Furthermore, the means of communication chosen by the artist are not essential. The process of the symbol interpretation shifts here to the deeply internal, private space of the person's imagination.

This kind of sign removal shows the absolute

triumph of the pure *significatum*. The sign-independent *significatum* refuses from the primitive simulative explanation of Self-using artistic means, instead opting for remaining the original intact nature that has a chance to be subjectively interpreted. This is the production of phenomenological corporeity without digital technologies. Only consciousness may guarantee a free, unfastened and continuously developing living image of art. It is also to be noted that a viewer is rather independent, too, since he or she no longer depends on the artist as a result of their communication with art. The viewer here takes the main part because he or she stops being a connoisseur but becomes a creator. While pure classical actionism shifts the emphasis from the creativity effect to its process, the *non-visible* art shifts the focus from the effect and process to the very idea of creativity and the imaginative message. This true action art makes the viewer produce the works and their senses, which, undoubtedly, broadens the scope of freedom as well as the degree of activity and responsibility.

It may be suggested that this kind of exhibition of *non-visible* art also play the role of precious locations for creative cooperation and communication among individuals. These art zones serve as *workshops* for the fruitful interaction of co-thinkers; they implement the hype trend for *networking* (*co-working, creative incubators, hubs and anticafés*) as creative zones for the synergy of art, business, civil activities and personal interests. These are the locations to generate ideas and lobby human creative development. These social spaces are highly multifunctional, and they feature highly efficient group interaction; their participants are active and independent; they are accessible for sharing expertise and personal experiences; they are characterised by a bodily and live presence, democratic nature, and, what is essential, the equality of all participants. Currently, the popularity of these actions and events is soaring, as they serve as the valuable alternative to the network and social media communities based on texting, video hosting and

video blogging through web resources.

In any case, the key concept of the performative practices is the positive interaction and reconciliation via intimate self-expression. In this context, British and American researchers made an analogy between the public art dynamism and the sectarian rituals in Northern Ireland, based on their synthesis in the cathedral mega-installation presented in 2015 (Downey & Sherry, 2020). The event aimed at the interaction between the hostile communities in their esthetic modality. It was notable that the prolonged opposition and collision of the agents, defined by the authors as *traumatourgy*, eventually acted as the means to reach an inter-community sense of belonging.

However, alternative social networks (including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) and such file-sharing services as Like or Tik-Tok are still the priority form of solidarity in modern society. Therefore, the method of performance has been implemented there in various online actionism manifestations. One of the brightest examples of the virtual performative is a *message* (meaning an address, a note, a declaration or a signal). It is an explicit or implicit video address. Another popular kind of online flash mob is a *challenge* (an argument, a competition, a challenging task to be fulfilled), which is a genre of internet video blogging, or vlogging, where the agent demonstrates the so-called “viral task” or a life hack offering to reproduce it as close to the original as possible. The challenge is considered an effective tool of mass communication since it is built based on the dialogue between the author and the viewer, thus equaling their rights. Though the challenge genre is entertaining, it is still conceptually designed for the equal status and trust present in any game. According to analysts’ assessments, challenges encourage overcoming the barriers of cross-cultural communication, and they draw the attention of the wide international public; this is an innovative tool, penetrating different culture media and uniting people worldwide. Challenges establish social (though online) interaction, which a person might be afraid of in

real life.

Its common topic unites the participants of a challenge, and they perform their creative interpretation. A case study may be in the Middle East video game called *Middle East Gaming Challenge*, which is played by the children of the two hostile communities – Jewish and Arabic. Therewith, they are educated in different educational systems. Thus, organisers make an attempt to encourage their overcoming traditional prejudices of the Arabic and Jewish school students in Israel and to free children from the conventional stereotypes. Experts consider a game challenge in these conditions as the first positive experience gained with the peers of the other, hostile religious and ethnic environment (Novoselova & Kurbanova, 2017, p. 286). Naturally, the central concept of a challenge is rather simple: visualisation, brightness, extraordinariness, originality, passion, laconism of time and words, the emergence of the spirit of freedom and creativity. However, the name of the game is that the challenge is based on the *action*, that very action art, returning us to the paradigmatic significance of performance in contemporary culture and social practices.

Performative techniques of bodily presence find their innovative manifestation in the popular culture of memes. Owing to the popularisation of the Internet, memes (simulative units of cultural information, according to R. Dawkins (2016)) have entered a new favourable medium and generated a particular social phenomenon – internet memes, which are the references, hashtags, text metaphors, smileys, emoticons, pictures, syntactic symbols, speech patterns, video gestures, challenges, flash mobs etc. They are applied by the users in social media, blogosphere, forums, electronic mail and text messengers, i.e. in the online environment as symbolic units of special communication. Internet memes, as well as the mass media viruses that appeared afterwards, have become an integral part of modern popular culture.

In this respect, as early as 2012, Russian phi-

losopher Yu. Melamed wrote about the human regressive activity in the Facebook verbal structures. Addressing the followers with the slogan *Say "No" to SMILEY! ... Stop smiling!* Be for the Renaissance of meaning in the printed text! No more text profanity! Relearn to convey the fine details and emotions in words and not in brackets!" the moralist received "0 likes, 0 comments" (Melamed, 2012, p. 13). The proof of human existence should now be found in media, where life has actually moved. A *celebrity* has become fully autonomous towards the content. If you do not get likes, you do not exist (Melamed, 2012, p. 14).

Thus, as a rather widespread concept, a meme includes various patterns of the performative mass culture and action art considered above. A performative act is not inborn natural human activity, but it is a complex form of human behaviour gained as a result of social simulation and mimicking. At the same time, all ultramodern bodily communication practices are potentially memetic by nature, similarly to rituals, as the sources of genetic, cultural senses manifested in an advanced contemporary form (Alexander, Giesen, & Mast, 2006).

Significant transformations of the modern person's social and symbolic anthropic nature, including self-expression practices, are determined by the rapid virtualisation of all the areas of human activities. Contemporary anthropology regards a person in the diverse and uneven ways of his/her being (Latour, 2013). Virtualisation is understood as the process of replacing institutionalised practices with simulations. The field of simulation expands, inter alia, owing to the innovative technological resources, changing space and time, or at least their experience. In the 1990s, the French ethnologist and philosopher M. Auger (2017) analysed the anthropology of hypermodern and laid the foundations for a new philosophical concept of "Non-Places". M. Auger (2017) defines *non-places* broadly: as the facilities, ensuring the fast freight and passenger turnover (motorways, hubs, airports, and termi-

nals), means of transport, and large shopping malls and places of a long stay, sheltering refugees globally (pp. 20-21). An example of a non-place may be a famous lively crossroads of Shibuya in Tokyo, which during the rush hours is crossed by about two thousand people within two minutes. These are areas of comfort and alienation, transfer zones, emerging in our social life without any clear existential content (e.g. in the case of the conventional places, memorials, and heritage sites). They are ruled by the setting of *here and now*, and everything is subject to the importance of the current moment. They lack the place itself, its history or its personality. Non-places standardise people, turning them into anonymous passengers and service consumers.

Our identity cannot fill the non-places with at least rudiments of personification in any way. A standard *transit passenger* shows the minimum of his or her individuality, though seeking their privacy, leading to the total representation crisis (Bavilsky, 2018). Being freed from their conceptual determinants (faith, traditions, ideology, ethics, relations, patriotism and historicity) and entering no-places, an individual agent merely plays the role, being provisionally identified by the customer's plastic card, identification card, QR-code, bank account number, pass, identification document, driver's licence, biometric data, etc.

In non-places, people do not stay, and they are present there symbolically – using their simulation avatar. In non-places, their steps are highly active, determined, predictable and planned. Their behaviour, as in the role simulation, is expected and understandable. A person moves according to the rules established in that environment: signs and traffic lights, duties, restrictions, indicators, signals for drivers and pedestrians, for passengers, visitors, users, buyers, viewers, consumers, customers, subscribers, clients, etc. Non-places do not require self-expression from individuals in their existential meaning. They require their elementary activity, enabling them to follow the algorithm of the func-

tional zone and, being identified, move ahead. Their self-identification in these mazes and smart mobs does not involve emotional speech or indifferent citations. It is enough for them to be there bodily and silently and to understand the code of access to the system of non-places. Non-places direct giant performances of silent agents, implementing their unconditional rights to access, use and consumption. That is a true triumph of rational utilitarianism and consumer culture.

### Conclusion

In the view of the aforesaid, it is possible to make the following conclusion. Any performative practices – happenings, flash mobs, monstrosities and challenges – carry their socio-legal semantic load as the means of expressing the will by the subject of the contemporary sociopathic society. A vivid example of the performative expression of the civil position, social claims, a form of fighting for their rights is street picket lines in the environment of the capitalist realism. Body language always functions as a means of protesting. This is a silent “outcry” for help, repentance, attention deficit; it is an ultimatum, challenge, intention, as well as a desperate attempt to point to the obvious things, which is much more eloquent than the perfect means of semantic and audio-visual expression. The logical shift in technological modes, cultural epochs, and global political models irreversibly modify people, their habitat, and self-realisation opportunities. The latest prospect of the artificial intelligence era is in cyberpunk. The oblivion of democracy and refusal from economic liberalism may entail cyber rule and the deficit of somatics. In these conditions, the clear relevance is in the performative practices of the human bodily self-expression and the semiotics of a visual gesture. However, the expansion of actual individual rights is very relative. The shift from the linguistic-hermeneutic paradigm to the performative one has encouraged replacing the semantic discourse with body communication via a silent

performance, act, and action. Actionism is a new connotation of stable senses; the body language as a means of expression, impact and interaction, which is a logical effect of the existence in the digital content.

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