

## Conference Paper

# Education in the Context of the Performative Trends in Modern Culture

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### Abstract

The article describes the changes in event and activity management typical for the contemporary culture. These changes affect all cultural subsystems and forms and are described by a concept of the 'performative turn'. In this respect, the main focus of this research is the sphere of humanities education, where performative practices are becoming the relevant tools for mastering information and creating creatively oriented actors for the XXIst-century culture and society.

**Keywords:** performative cultural turn, event practices, art performance, humanities education, creative intellectual technologies

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## 1. Introduction

Radical transformations in Russian culture, brought about by the equally radical social transformations started in late XIXth–early XXth century, continued throughout the late XXth–early XXIst century and into the new millennium. These transformation condition sociocultural development of Russia. The changes in people, their activities, value systems and world views, occur in every historically defined type of culture. The last three decades of the XXth century were designated in cultural-historical typology 'a postmodern culture'. This is the type of culture that philosophers and cultural theorists describe as dominated by the performative trends in its sociocultural development.

Jean-Francois Lyotard noted: "Performativity is something that the postmodern world has to deal with – the world where postmodern artist or writer finds himself in a position of philosopher: whatever text he writes, whatever work he produces, they are not governed by any pre-defined rules" [3, p. 98].

V.V.Savchuk points at 1990s as a decade of the performative cultural turn and, citing E. Fischer-Lichte, notes: "media quality and interactivity become dominant. Therefore, the metaphor of 'culture as text' has lost its explanatory power, and the metaphor of 'culture as performance' has begun its ascent" [4, pp. 34–39].

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Postmodern worldview is based on the deconstruction and reversion of the traditional value systems belonging to the historical cultural types: their relevance is denied, and they are treated with irony and playfulness. This process occurs within all subsystems of non-material culture and, as in all previous cultures, it is vividly represented in art.

## 2. General Characteristics of Postmodern Culture

Let us list the major characteristics of postmodern culture identified by the turn of the century philosophy.

First, it is a notion that culture has become fragmentary and decentralized: hierarchical structures have been destroyed; low and high, elite and mass culture have equal bearing.

Second, the reality is simulated and replaced by an idea of reality as something imaginary. It is a culture where copies become self-sufficient, and an original loses its value.

Third, life in many areas becomes theatrical: whether political or high-brow, or ordinary and routine. This creates a sense of inauthentic existence, which had emerged in 1980s and facilitated the rethinking of the limits of individuality in a new society [2, p. 178].

Postmodernism makes relevant the search for cultural identity, highlighting individual life and its internal foundations. The end of the XXth century encouraged us to think about cultural decline, loss of value of the human existence and the acute problems facing the consumer society. A new religious turn was, in the end, quite postmodern: marked by an emergence of various religious movements and ritual practices previously relegated to the cultural periphery.

Finally, postmodern culture is characterized by uncertainty and the loss of temporal and spatial boundaries. Novelty no longer finds its expression in radically new forms (as in modernism), but borrows its ideas from all kinds of sources. Cultural texts are produced from the hypertext, referring themselves to earlier works. Historical process loses its teleology and coherence; cultures are seen as a mosaic; different eras are brought together and even become actualized within the contemporary culture.

Postmodern art, in turn, values not so much an artwork as a *result* of a creative process, but rather the process itself. The emphasis switches from the author, the verbal and the language of art to the audience, the gesture and the rituals.

“Both artists and analytics switched their focus to the artist’s activity: to the production, a fact/act... We are witnessing the process of radical transformation of art: from the art of an artwork to the performative art” [4, p. 38].

Thanks to the performative transformation, all kinds of cultural actions acquire artistic characteristics. This re-formatting of culture has brought serious consequences to art, which “becoming almost indivisibly intertwined with the performative gesture of a thinker, a politician, or a curator, has yet again appeared where it was not expected” [4, p. 39].

These new relations with the sociocultural world found its expressions in the so-called ‘art practices’, which today no longer inhabit the separate art space, but are rather introduced into the everyday cultural world.

The widespread popularity of art practices within the urban spaces of early XXIst-century cities, which cultural historians describe as a final stage of postmodern culture, fully realized an important postmodernist notion of theatricality of all spheres of life – theatricality which both conditions life and provides means for its sociocultural reproduction.

At the same time, theater as an art form, and as a highly important cultural instrument, has changed, coming closer to the performance and, therefore, considerably expanding its limits, discovering new forms and spheres of influence. Even though historically theater was born out of performance (the Dionysian mysteries), performative shift in the XXIst-century art created such forms as an immersive theater, inclusive theater, baby theater, verbatim. All these forms develop radically new possibilities to interact with the audience and to influence it. In particular, we want to focus on social theater as a modern form of theatrical performance used in education of different levels.

Let us now discuss the characteristics of the performance that determine its constructive potential in every sphere of contemporary culture.

Performance literally means ‘an execution’, ‘a completion of task’. Performance is focused on the idea that we liberate the creative personality and its energy through gesture. This creates a number of features, both similar and dissimilar to the theatrical art:

- performance does not depend on playwriting or literal text, which is required in traditional theater. There is some pre-determined sequence of actions, but changes are both possible and desirable;

- performance is necessarily a team activity, and an understanding interaction of its participants directly influence its effectiveness;
- artistic performance uses languages of different arts, assuming and producing an acting polylingualism;
- performance happens here and now; in this sense, each performance is unique;
- each performance produces a unique connection–collaboration between performing ‘actors’ and participating–performing ‘audience’;
- performance as an art of action presupposes a certain choice of action-behavior, facilitating the development of the creative competence.

Without extending this list further, let us note the centrally important role played in the performative practices by the involvement in collective action–interaction focusing on a subject that interests all the participants. This collective slant distinguishes performance from happening – the latter does not concern us here.

### 3. The Goal of Contemporary Education

The goal of contemporary education is to bring up individuals capable of creativity and constructive actions within the changing culture and society. Consequently, both content and tools of contemporary education are changing in this direction. We need to introduce performative practices, especially in humanities.

Humanitarian consciousness is necessarily value-oriented. It can be developed through subject-subject immersion into the value system and through its active reclamation. Here we are faced with a task of creating “a cognitive ability that participates in the object of cognition and emphasizes with it,” according to V.V.Savchuk [4, p. 10]. Therefore, modern methods of teaching humanities include not only lectures-presentations (which facilitate emotional and sensory response through visual tools), but also lectures-performances that encourage the audience to take action regarding the subject of the lecture. Obviously, such action is described and specified as a preliminary scenario.

M.Shuvakovich, contemporary art researcher, presented such a lecture-performance at a conference held in Ural Federal University in 2016. To explain the concept of performativity, M.Shuvakovich uses the works of Richard Schechner, who “used the term ‘performance’ to describe any human everyday action – that is, he defined performance as an everyday performance. He understood performative art as a new type of the anthropological theory and practice. His idea was of a performance as

a living action that happens throughout every moment of human life.” [5]. In his public lecture, called lecture-performance, Shuvakovich presents a graphic scheme of relationships between performance and performative arts. A lecturer – in this case M. Shuvakovich – is an author of the central idea of a performance, which he performs during the lecture, interactively involving the listeners.

Historical and cultural artefacts cannot be taught without art, which preserves past cultures and serves as its heritage. By developing educational methods that ‘animate’ this heritage, and by allowing students to participate, we can not only facilitate content learning, but also encourage the development of communicative skills, sophisticated perception, imagination, and an ability to feel confident in a concrete actionable situation. Here we see an importance of bodily and sensory expressiveness of a performance, which is highly relevant in contemporary culture.

## 4. Conclusions

Cultural event management and performance management are the indispensable markers of cultural development at the start of the third millennium. The introduction of performative practices in all cultural fields, including education, optimizes forms of cultural activity and facilitates concordance between contemporary culture and society.

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