

What is Performance Anyway?

The following is a look at performance, the generalised and ubiquitous category of performance, following the perspective of Schechner's "ethological thinking" in the aspect of one of the most basic and powerful determinants of our existence in this world: the natural selection.

While for long obscured and compromised by the "social darwinist" and reductionist simplifications, the contemporary influence of evolutionary theory reveals itself mostly through the "explanatory inversion". It is a valuable heritage of the debates on consciousness in 1990s. John Searle's insights and arguments, augmented by the biological hypotheses of Gerald Edelman, together form the base for the "non-materialist naturalism" in the view on consciousness.

For us, the most crucial in this view is the presumption about the lack of natural flow of information from the environment to the subject and the conclusion that "evolution works through selection, not instruction". Processes of "recognition" (as opposed to "cognition"), through which consciousness works to adapt its bearer to environment and achieve survival, appear as intrinsically performative. Ideas and categories used by the "neurophilosophers" of 1990th converge here with those of performance scholars. Moreover, while analysing performance processes, both major processes of "instruction" (categorisation, scripting) and "selection" (success or failure of performance) seem intertwined and confronted in particular performance event.

This can lead to the redefinition of "performance" as a meeting of the instruction and selection processes. This new definition seems compatible with already functioning; at the same time it roots performance in the deepest layers of life and shows its significance as a basic life's mood.

About the Author

Tomasz Kubikowski (born 1962), Author of books on performance theory: *Siedem bytów teatralnych* (The Seven Theatre Beings, 1994) and *Reguła Nibelunga* (The Principle of the Nibelung, 2004); numerous theatre reviews, essays, and reportages. Translator, also of Schechner's *The Future of Ritual* and *Performance Studies. An Introduction*. Deputy Artistic Director and Dramaturge of the Polish National Theatre in Warsaw. Professor (and the former vice-rector) at the Aleksander Zelwerowicz Theatre Academy in Warsaw; has also visited the Music Academy in Warsaw, University of Warsaw, Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw and University of Richmond, Virginia.