

Between Play and Performance

Play is the main form of a child's activity. Children enjoy the activity in which they can transform reality, for example objects, elements of nature (e.g. building from branches, sand or snow). According to Jerzy Cieřlikowski, a researcher of children's literature and folklore, "childhood is a great play"¹. Can joyful experiences in plays be translated into educational activities related to art? The answer to this question can be creative workshops, realized during the Vincent's Pocket, which often uses the natural tendency of their participants to play. But in the 17th edition of the Vincent's Pocket, **PLAY** becomes the leading topic. Therefore, it is worth posing some questions. How can young people, today often glued to screens and electronic gadgets be encouraged to act creatively in the natural surroundings? To what extent can adults control the space, duration and course of children's ludic activity? When it can be stated that the play is fulfilling or not? Does a play have always any rules? How can you propose creative departure from rules, or changing them during a play? What experiences, emotions, moods accompany the participants and the observers of a play? Can a play – excerpt from pleasure - be also a pretext for reflection on itself and our relationships?

Such plays, which emphasize the inventiveness of participants and their ability to transform the real world - are defined in psychology as creative activities. In this way, play becomes a field for a creative meeting of a child and an adult based on the principles close to art. When conventionality is especially important in a play as well as illusion and pretending - then we talk about illusory games, "make-believe" activities. This kind of plays gives the opportunity to try to be someone else but above all it develops the ability to participate in symbolic, contractual situations, to immerse in culturally created events. We can also point to dramatic plays where there is a storyline, action with a specific structure and appearing props. Plays in the role, the closest to a theatrical situation, allow performing realistic roles and imagined characters. But there are also symbolic games, detached from the actual situation and context, and their participants use objects, gestures or words as signs and symbols. In this area it is possible to contractual giving meanings to the everyday, unexpected and found things, but also to the sticks, places, trees, etc. It is possible to create an own world of signs and meanings.

¹ Jerzy Cieřlikowski , *Wielka zabawa. Folklor dziecięcy. Wyobraźnia dziecka. Wiersze dla dzieci* (Great play. Children's Folklore. Imagination of a child. Poems for children.), Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Wrocław 1985

It is interesting that some researchers find some links between play, game and ritual (Jerzy Cieřlikowski, Victor Turner) or between play and art / culture (Huizinga), and between play and performance (Richard Schechner). That is why a new science was born: performance studies which deal with the analysis of events. Often in everyday life and in culture, we deal with events in which people do something together in order to tell (to prove) what is important to them or simply to experience something together. This situation can be described as a cultural performance (plays, rituals, manifestations, parades, vernissages, etc.). Therefore, children's plays can be a starting point for understanding performative phenomena in culture (such as rituals or theater) and in art (artistic actions, happenings, performances, artistic walks). Children spontaneously use various props, objects, sounds, elements of nature and move in both the area the fictive imaginary reality and the real. In the same way, artists perform for example in happening and performance art.

Artistic performance is a specific type of art that appeared in the 1960s. It is very difficult to answer the question: what is performance? This art does not have specific means of expression, as it is in painting, sculpture or graphic art. It is easier to indicate the relationship of performance with the artistic and cultural revolutions of the 1960s. The artistic vanguard in the second half of the twentieth century recognized that in our rapidly changing times we needed new ways of expressing ourselves and our place in society. As a result, there appeared such proposals as body art, living sculpture, land art, conceptual art, action art, happening, or activities of the Fluxus group, and performance is the consequence of these artistic proposals. These new phenomena are linked by the decision to cross boundaries between different disciplines and fields, e.g. between art, music and philosophy (exemplified by John Cage's works). The departure from cultural patterns and traditional divisions in art for artistic disciplines led the artists to the idea of intermediality. Intermedia art means more than just a combination of different means of artistic expression. We may talk about intermedia in art when the artist chooses freely the means of expression, different depending on the problem, sometimes specific only to him/her. It is not the specific characteristics of the discipline that defines the artist's statement in this case, but the ability to name the problem and only then developing a way of presenting it. Often, it means not combining but transgressing many different forms and ways of acting in one expression, such as painting, drawing, film, and dance. Today, intermedia studies are slowly entering the university (intermedia studies appeared in the USA as early as 1968, in Poland in 2007). But in primary and middle schools, it is the teacher who decides whether the student makes a drawing or whether he/she works with the paint. Hence, the special importance of informal educational proposals carried out

outside the school, which give children and young people the opportunity to choose and experiment.

Except for the intermediality it means crossing the borders of the past artistic practices, in the field of visual arts, in the 1960s, there was a need for an artist's presence and performance not in the privacy of the studio, but in front of the audience (body art, happening, living sculpture, performance). This was a huge change in art, because new problems emerged that did not fall within the sphere of traditional art history and aesthetics or artistic education. Let us stop for a moment around the issue of stressing the action in the field of visual arts.

If we choose performance as a form of expression, it means that we do not only use signs, symbols, colors, but also take into account the new phenomenon which is the live presence of a performer in front of the audience. Therefore, it would be difficult to ignore the question of the role of the body in the process of cognition and experiencing the world, shaping the identity, and also in the creative process. This is a difficult issue, also in the context of education and the work with youth. In the meantime, the performance makes us reflect on how we can create creative situations in which we do not emphasize the division into souls and bodies, thinking and acting, but we treat them together. The definitions of "I" that we use most often in the reference to the sphere of consciousness, to what is "in the mind", to inner thoughts and experiences. While, both children's play and art performance show the importance of creativity in action, when at the same time the child / artist invents reality and does something in it, acts, actively transforms the real and accessible environment, while the others are participants and / or observers of these actions.

Usually the presence of a live artist is associated with the theater. It must be emphasized, however, that performance is not the theater, it is not only a specific form of artistic expression, but also a manifestation of a new (in relation to tradition) way of thinking about art and about our relations with others. The performer-artist him/herself creates a kind of instruction (what am I going to do?) /scenario (which is not a literary text) of his/her own event, he/she also leaves room for improvisation and unforeseen events. Performers do not need a special stage, performances of performing arts can take place in different physical spaces, but the condition is the presence of the audience (or camera, so-called camera action), and consciousness of action in the field or in the context of art. Creative activities can take place in any chosen space, even the ordinary one, e.g. in the shop, on the street, in the woods, etc., but then the performer has to take responsibility for this kind of interference. Often working in a Citadel park we do not pay attention to the surroundings, and sometimes we may have an impression that the participants in the workshop could actually implement the project

anywhere else. It is worthwhile to reflect on the meaning of the real space in creative activity. What kind of space fosters good relationships and play, and which one makes us feel uncomfortable? What does my space mean to me? The space can be empty, quiet, separated, and only by some action we can give it a special meaning. Then it becomes a tamed place, which can also say something about us.

Land art artists, in particular, unveiled the importance of activities outside the gallery, showing the possibility of creative use of a place and space. Traditionally, the artist works in solitude, in the studio, and shows others the finished work, bringing it to a gallery / museum. His/her presence as a psychophysical creature usually does not matter much, except for a nice event that is a vernissage. So the most important process of creating an artwork is hidden, making it appear as mysterious and inaccessible. Today many artists work in the open space, either in the city space or in close contact with nature. The material of these activities often becomes what we find in the environment: leaves, earth, water, etc. Sometimes this action is only related to other people, trying to establish relationships through minor gestures, such as hand giving or walking together, hiking . Let's ask the workshop participants about the importance of space in their lives and in the plays.

Intermediality, action, creation of events in the real space - these are the basic terms that are connected with performance art. As it seems, the distance from the children's play to performance in art is close, so we encourage the participants of the 17th Vincent's Pocket to prepare courageous performative proposals of workshops for children and young people. We therefore expect students' ideas to focus on projects where performance and experience are important not the effect of the final product.

Key words for a forum and workshops: play, performance, action, intermediality, creative activities, space, place.

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