

Artist and Public in Non-representational Arts: Collaborative Aspects

Mariselda TESSAROLO¹

Abstract: *Arts may be representational or discursive. Representational arts need the artist until the moment they are completed, and then take on a life of their own. Representational symbols constitute an articulated reality, untranslatable and indissoluble. Discursive arts depend on written or verbal language, but may also include musical notation. There are no right or wrong ways of reading, also because reading remains a personal experience. In the case of music, the empirical player is in some ways similar to the empirical reader, but he/she also has to consider the audience who is listening and the other musicians (empirical players) playing with him/her and interpreting the same musical scores. Modifications may take place because of the typification of social relations and undergo continuous transformation. In literature this is due to the instability of reader situations, while in music it concerns two actors: the musical performer and the concert audience.*

Key-words: *representational arts; discursive arts; interpretation; instability situations*

1. Introduction

In the first few pages of his *Sociology of Art*, Duvignaud² states that art is something that concerns us: it is an imaginary experience that is proposed to us by the artistic creation and that binds us, even though its understanding remains unexpressed. Art has the capability of recomposing the fragments of a divided humanity through participation and in a possible communion, where our freedom can find its place. The artist seemingly includes in their work an invisible community in which the social substance is crystallized, an authentic “mana” that makes the weft of our future existence. At the base of the artist’s work is society with its aspirations, imagination, dreams and fears. As Kant might say, art is rooted in existence precisely because it is a search for what is “beautiful”.³ There are notions that cause other notions to explode: Kant goes in search of aesthetic judgement and finds creative intentionality.

All man-made objects need an analytical approach and the musical phenomenon cannot be correctly defined or described without considering its triple mode of existence: as an arbitrarily isolated object, as a produced object and as a perceived object. These three modes of existence of music reunite in its symbolic system, but they are also a matching of distinct configurations. Music reunites different and specific disciplines such as classical music, extra-Western music, traditional, popular and so forth. All musicians look for a combinatorics of their own, because they have an intuition that only by studying the richness of the “impurity” present in their music will the result be a “musical fact” with musical practice at its base, and not a series of isolated works, purified in a certain way. Impurity implies a partial and provisional

¹ Affiliation (University of Padua (Italy). Scholar Senior), email address (mariselda.tessarolo@unipd.it).

² J. Duvignaud. 2003. *Sociologia dell’arte*. Bologna: il Mulino, pp. 10-11.

³ Duvignaud clarifies that he uses the term “beautiful” because he does not know what other word to employ in order to define this element, elusive yet recognized by users over the centuries with that name.

definition of music as “humanly organized sound”⁴. The notion of impurity as defined by Molino⁵ corresponds to the mode of musical production based on a combination, i.e. a blend, whose listening is plural. The same line of reasoning may also be found in Bauman⁶ and may be related to what he defines as “dream of purity”, referring to the idea of cleanliness in order to eliminate that which spoils the harmony of a picture, a work, but also a society. The two authors, though, do not think that this is the right idea either for art or society, because with a “perfect” state of things there is no longer a need to add or remove anything. This cannot be musical practice, or artistic practice, and it does not meet the needs of society.

In arts, signifier and signified overlap and give rise to the function of symbolic consumption, according to which every art signifies itself; author and user search for a meaning, or maybe even the meaning. The act of giving a title is the example of the author’s attitude of attributing meaning, while feeling emotions is the example of the user’s attribution of meaning. Music has its own content, represented by the fullness of thought that is untranslatable in language terms, as it simply expresses a musical thought. The human need to share with others is realized mainly through language, which is the most powerful vehicle for the construction of meaning since it explains and interprets every symbolic form created by man. Meaning, after all, remains one of the elements and extra-musical causes that always affect listening, and fruition in general, but also the nascent state (*statu nascenti*) of a composition, without however determining its content⁷.

2. Collaborative aspect in art

The collaborative aspect is present in all arts, even in those that are quintessentially presentational or autographic such as painting, sculpture and architecture. These arts are in the mind and hands of a single artist who develops cultural traits belonging to their time and difficult to enucleate. The peculiarity lies in the fact that the collaboration enacted by the user in fruition (namely in the pleasure experienced when admiring, watching and appreciating), may be defined as an understanding of the “mana” that the artist was able to convey from society to the work. The simple fruition, i.e. watching, admiring and appreciating works of art, initiates a participation in something that is shared with other users.⁸ It is a form of collaboration that takes on experience and shared pleasure. In such situations, there can be no “us against them” because the artist’s freedom must always take the other into consideration. This is what Bellini⁹ calls “polysemic urge”.

The expertise called *techne* (ability to do or make) by Aristotle is required from the artist, and it is both a craft ability and a social skill. It includes the ability to listen, grasping the point of agreement so as to avoid disagreement. According to Sennett, sensitivity towards the other is not an ethical attitude; rather, it stems from the practical activity of collaboration, that which keeps social groups alive. Shutting and withdrawing oneself is a method for reducing provocations. Another method is homologation of tastes and culture: if we were all alike, we would have a neutral vision of the world and this would make it possible to avoid difference,

⁴ J. Blacking. 1973. *How Musical is man?*. Washington: Washington Univ. Press, p. 27.

⁵ J. Molino. *Le signe musicien*. Arles: Act Sud/Ina, p. 186.

⁶ Z. Bauman. 2002. *Il disagio della postmodernità*. Milano: Bruno Mondadori, p. 3.

⁷ M. Tassarolo. *Extramusicatità del significato in musica*. In *Psychology of music and education*, ed. by M. Biasutti. Padova: Cleup. CDrom, p.1.

⁸ Collaborative exchanges occur in many forms. They may also become a value in themselves, as they translate into practice a socially shared abstract idea.

⁹ P. P. Bellini. 2019. *Comunicazione come ‘urgenza’ polisemica*. Metis, 2, p. 49.

with tamed social action. In performing arts, the discovery of others is often a shock. In chamber music, for example, this has to be learnt during rehearsal; therefore the art of listening becomes important, because simple homogeneity is not enough to make music together¹⁰. Classical music requires work on scores, yet following a score is not enough and it does not suffice for envisaging what the music will sound like. Many artists have expressed themselves on this point: between the pages of the score and the musical result, the musician's personality and performance intrude, along with the difference of the single musical instruments and, when they appear, so-called "enigmas" in the text itself. One such example may be found in the indications written by the composer on the score, such as *con espressione* or *allegro ma non troppo*. In order to translate these indications into sound, the musician needs to have an intuition of the composer's intention. Sometimes individual interpreters send out signals concerning how to play, and these signals are actually difficult to interpret for other musicians. The work often needs to be done together with other musicians, and reading the score does not serve much purpose; it is more beneficial to listen during rehearsals. In making music, there is a great difference between practising and rehearsing: one is a solitary experience, the other is collective. Common to both is the standard procedure of attending initially to a whole score, then focusing on particular testing passages. In rehearsing, individuals' musical habits are transformed into shared consciousness¹¹.

In playing together with other musicians, one learns much because there is much to be learned from others; besides, the listening clarifies what works and what does not, even though it is just a detail. Orchestra rehearsals have to be condensed into a huge collaborative effort over a relatively short time frame, also considering that professional rehearsals are, most often, a sort of conversation among strangers, since orchestras are not always formed of the same musicians. The need to communicate with strangers makes the search for points of agreement more difficult, when trying to maximize the time available. Such behaviours may be compared to rituals that provide an advantage because they facilitate expressive collaboration. In orchestra rehearsals, musicians need to interact and exchange for reciprocal benefit. In order to make art, they need to collaborate¹².

The meaning of a work is implemented in three moments: production of the text (by the composer), its performance (by the players) and articulation of the work's concretization (be it music, theatre¹³ or dance). In this last part, the user comes into play (the audience). The three moments should be seen as a set of sensory and cognitive activities of events that may be located in time in a given communicative context.¹⁴ Every music has its peculiarities. In jazz, for instance, improvisation takes musicians – although indirectly – to be the voice of a community. Spati observes that listeners with their expectations, which stem from the community aspect of music, implicitly anticipate the jazz musician's response; and the same happens to the musician who belongs to that community. The two ends of communication, player and listener,

¹⁰ R. Sennett. 2012. *Insieme*. Milano: Feltrinelli, p. 25.

¹¹ R. Sennett. 2012. *Insieme*. Milano: Feltrinelli, pp. 26-27.

¹² Communication among musicians mainly consists of raised eyebrows, non-vocal sounds, rapid looks and other non-verbal gestures. Rather than saying in words, musicians prefer to show: they play a passage and leave it to the other musicians to interpret what they are doing (it would be harder to express it in words, for example: I would do this a bit more expressively). R. Sennett. 2012. *Insieme*. Milano: Feltrinelli, p. 29.

¹³ The term "theatre" includes operatic theatre.

¹⁴ These three moments are investigated separately by different disciplines. Intitulations may also be considered an important interpretive medium to assess understanding and listening practices in the direction envisaged by the composer, with a view to helping the listeners grasp something that perhaps they would not consider.

understand each other because the signifying sign, i.e. the music that is played, evokes the same type of response in both¹⁵.

This is precisely what jazz enthusiasts expect and in jazz the bases – well known by the player – are always there and allow both parties to incorporate their own subjectivity. Among jazz players, in fact, two types of inter-musical syntony are valued: the first relates to a reciprocal understanding among players, while the second relates to a rhythmic pulse that can make the music come off.¹⁶ The second criterion that is relevant for jazz concerns originality. Along with exemplarity, this is a characteristic and an ability to do something new and unique, particularly in jazz. Good jazz musicians do not confine themselves to familiar landscapes, because one of the rules of jazz is to be creative. Jazz always has a personal marking, a distinctive way to use one's body, a "voice" coming out through one's fingertips or the blowing of the breath. Furthermore, in order to improvise, one needs to be able to listen and accept what is proposed by the person who expressed something in the previous turn¹⁷. The major risk for an improviser is not that of making mistakes (as a mistake can always be recontextualized), but that of not coming out as musically interesting. It is precisely thanks to this personal voice that originality is overturned and becomes exemplarity, thus configuring a reference model for other musicians and defining "how" a certain language should be spoken. The term "exemplarity" is accepted to indicate the strength of the example that, according to¹⁸, is the type of normativity that best meets the needs of contemporary pluralistic societies. Such type is based on the "reflecting judgement" formulated by Kant, explaining the exemplarity of the work of art whose validity is universally recognized on the basis of common sense (*sensus communis*). In reinterpreting the concept, Ferrara observes that it is not a sort of natural faculty common to all mankind, or one that depends on the social context. Rather, it consists of a sense of fulfilment, of assertion, perceivable by all those who participate in the aesthetic experience.

Improvisation is the action of generating music during a performance. Therefore it is a process that includes ideas, uncertainties and reprises, but also discoveries that are made along the way. The various paths tried out by the musicians, in fact, are not inconsistencies because they do not refer to the score. They are an integral part of the performance aesthetic: a musical save or an attempted revision become part of the music.¹⁹ The moments of problem-solving are in every respect part of the process of trying and making mistakes (groping). All such moments give improvised music its characteristic appeal related to improvisation and the aesthetic of imperfection (that disregards mistakes)²⁰. In jazz, Sparti observes, the aesthetic component is not connected only to the obligation towards the other musicians in the group. This occurs precisely because the musician who accompanies, such as the pianist, even if not ready to anticipate a soloist, will have to be ready to support them anyway, providing a base, an atmosphere, responding to what the soloist is doing "right now" (i.e. on the spot, immediately). In a group of jazz musicians, everything has to be shared and there needs to be mutual trust. Whatever one musician feels the urge to express will not be ignored. All are involved and related with each other, for better or worse.

¹⁵ D. Sparti. 2009. *Suoni inauditi. L'improvvisazione nel jazz e nella vita quotidiana*. Bologna: il Mulino, p. 176.

¹⁶ *To make the music come off, to strike a groove, to keep it up: jazz music would lack swing without this*. R. Sennett. Together. 2012. Milano: Feltrinelli, p. 194.

¹⁷ D. Sparti. 2009. *Suoni inauditi. L'improvvisazione nel jazz e nella vita quotidiana*. Bologna: il Mulino, p. 172.

¹⁸ A. Ferrara. 2008. *La forza dell'esempio*. Milano: Feltrinelli, pp. 11-12.

¹⁹ It is not possible for theatre or literature either, since theatre needs a text and actors, and literature needs at least one reader who knows the linguistic code in which the text is written.

²⁰ D. Sparti. 2009. *Suoni inauditi. L'improvvisazione nel jazz e nella vita quotidiana*. Bologna: il Mulino, p. 200.

3. Importance of recording techniques

Even jazz, with the recording, can become a finished work of art: we are able to listen to it in the same form every time, just as happens with all recorded music (but also with the recordings of dance and its various choreographies, or theatre), for the reading of poetry and literary works.²¹

The accomplished work such as it is intended in painting or sculpture – i.e. in presentational arts that “break free” from the artist when finished – is not possible for music, it hardly becomes a structure that may be separated from conditions of production or reception. It should be noted that musical recordings render music similar to a work of presentational art. However, there is a relevant difference: while Michelangelo’s David is unique and cannot be presented again by anybody else (otherwise it would simply be a copy), any piece by Beethoven, for instance his *Ode to Joy*, may be presented again as *Ode to Joy* by Beethoven at each performance: the recording only fixes a subjective interpretation in time, while the written work remains a piece by the composer who created the score. The same is true for a writer, poet²² or engraver.

As regards pop music, the Fifties bring about another significant change. It materializes in rock’n’roll, but started with rhythm’n’blues, which modifies the sound of spirituals, then coming to a reincarnation in the notes of funk. New aesthetic forms emerge with disc-jockeys, who have a crucial role both for the promotion of new records and the definition of new genres. In those years, a record was not only the report of a live event, but also something independent standing on its own, disconnected from the performance of the musical piece. Elvis Presley takes the stage when his fans already know his success thanks to the release of his records²³. In such cases, the recording is a work by “that” singer that stands alongside a live concert. In the Sixties, with magnetic tape, the production of records made of ideal events, instead of real events, began. After being a secondary and derived form, the record became a primary and original form. The vinyl support is a part of the subcultures of different communities becoming acculturated with that music. The dj has a creative activity, such as the assembling of a puzzle, that allows different pieces to be joined together and then form a smooth final unit, where dancing subjects are allowed uniformity of dance. Dj’s are “turntable musicians” who initially perform elaborate mixings and in this way create new music. It should be considered that house records are not recordings of performed music but ways to play music, created directly by the dj, which provide space for spontaneity, surprise and creativity²⁴.

A work is autographic if, and only if, the distinction between fake and original is relevant; that means if, and only if, the most exact duplication does not count as genuine. Painting is presentational (or autographic). Music is non-presentational (or allographic). The painter’s work is finished, painting is a one-stage art, while music is a two-stage art. However, not all autographic arts are one-stage. The writer and the poet, therefore literature and poetry, are complete arts even if they are not read out loud. Musical composers conclude their work when they finish writing the score. The score is not definitive, but it is an indispensable tool for performances: the score defines the work. The same occurs in engraving when the artist prepares the cliché. Notation and writing emancipate allographic arts. A sketch or painting is a

²¹ The recording of an artwork is different from cinema!

²² The artist sells his or her creation only as an object and, although hanging in our sitting room, it always remains a Picasso, a Modigliani etc.

²³ F. Marinozzi. 2004. *Dalla libertà alla musica*. Roma: Philos, p. 145.

²⁴ F. Marinozzi. 2004. *Dalla libertà alla musica*. Roma: Philos, pp. 83-84.

work of art in itself. The text of a poem or novel is a character of a notational pattern; texts are not scores but scripts, because the classes of congruence are not disjointed or differentiated, and a literary writing is a work in itself. So, an artwork has a different place in different arts. In painting, it is a single object; in engraving, it is a class of objects. In music, an artwork is the class of performances that are congruent with one character. In literature, the work is the character itself²⁵. In theatre, as in music, it is a class of performances (the text is or includes the score of the work). Communication is a prerequisite for all social relations and symbols are the communication tools. Works of art are messages that convey facts, thoughts, feelings, and their study belongs to the theory of communication. Art is dependent on society and helps to hold society together²⁶.

Social change includes the modification of cultural symbols and facilitates the birth of new languages. Within the scope of this transformation we find performative artistic forms, whose communicative and relational nature affects the social fabric precisely because it is potentially transformative. Beside theatre in all its varied versions, performative arts include all live performances. This passage may be understood as a fruitful “contamination”. The theory of performance was developed by Schechner. With this expression, he refers to every form of social action that is useful for giving form and, alongside artistic practices, he also includes popular culture, sports, play and virtual communities²⁷.

The dynamics of theatre performance therefore follow the social complexity that expresses cohesive forces, maintaining the stability of a certain status, as well as innovative forces, generating new values and new individual relations. One could state that since the 1960s, the theatre has been trying to express conditions that were particular, rather than universal, fragments of experiences re-elaborated in theatrical languages. Turner reflects on the function of theatre and on the fact that it is a producer of culture and it involves the viewer directly. Theatrical fiction plays a key role in shaping moments of excess as a change of contact and clash between actors and audience where routines may be taken for granted²⁸. Another author with a personal perspective on theatre is Duvignaud (1921-2007), who records the existence of two kinds of theatre, one relating to consumption and the other to creation. He observes that every natural and spontaneous reality becomes social and cultural in the theatricalization, i.e. in the representation of itself, in front of our eyes and in front of the eyes of others; performing, therefore, means creating being and accumulating a collective substance²⁹. According to Duvignaud, art is a utopian experiment on the future, an effort by society to aesthetically realize the movement of permanent revolution by which it is animated. Each age expresses its peculiar form of tragic and comic, and the theatre will always embody the conflict between social censorship and the freedoms of the future, sketching on the stage heretical individuals who fight against the established order.

Artaud (1896-1948) gives the actor a new function while reorganizing roles and positions between actors and audience. The actor’s script is no longer purely verbal, it is also movement, music and percussion, and even if his attempt fails, theatre is deeply changed³⁰. Artaud changes and transforms theatre practices and the forms of spectacularization by giving voice to the voiceless. Finally, a brief mention of Grotowski and Badiou. Grotowski (1933-

²⁵ N. Goodman. 1976. *I linguaggi dell’arte*. Milano: Il Saggiatore, p. 179.

²⁶ N. Goodman. 1976. *I linguaggi dell’arte*. Milano: Il Saggiatore, p. 216.

²⁷ I. Riccioni. 2020. *Teatro e società: il caso dello Stabile di Bolzano*. Roma: Carocci, p. 14.

²⁸ V. Turner. 1993. *Antropologia della performance*, Bologna: il Mulino, p. 79.

²⁹ J. Duvignaud. 1969. *Sociologia dell’arte*. Bologna: il Mulino, p. 17.

³⁰ A. Artaud. 1971, *Messages révolutionnaires*. Paris: Gallimard, p. 135.

1999) guides the exploration of theatre function in the collectivity: theatre distances itself from itself so as not to fall into spectacularization. The theatre is not convention but rather visionary space, rituality and trance. The human being is split and this is what is left after removing the superfluous aspects in theatre³¹. Lastly, Badiou (1937-) highlights an encounter of politics and theatre. He analyses “Theatre” and “theatre”, two possible forms of theatre with a different potential: the first enters into the lives of citizens upsetting their certainties, while the second is just leisure. The encounter of theatre and society, but also of most non-representational arts, has a great potential because it happens “live” and, for this reason, it strengthens the group’s sense of belonging and recognition and enhances a spirit of collaboration.

4. Conclusions

In contemporary art a special place is reserved for the theatre, setting itself as a privileged observation point. The theatre – not in its written text but in performance – is based on ritual process and participative dynamics. In fact, it materializes as an artistic presentation that carries in itself constant renewal, adjusting to multimedia, interactional and interactive performance.³² The communication paths of theatre performances, from the times of historical avant-gardes, were able to “irritate” art’s social system, in addition to middle-class sensitivity, by cognitively and emotionally shaking viewers who were summoned to become involved in art, just like in life³³. Nowadays every performance may be regarded as a product and may therefore be reproduced in video, rendered an object, likewise a painting or a statue and, alongside the author’s name, the theatre piece will also have the endorsement of the director who staged it.³⁴ Performative arts – therefore not-presentational – are always the fruit of joint activities by numerous people, and each art has its own frame, clarifying and defining its specific identity and distinguishing it from the others. Performative arts are often music, theatre, operatic theatre, dance and literature. These are non-presentational arts distinguished one from the other by relevant specificities. For music, both performed live and in recordings, musicians are necessary who, besides studying the score, understand how to perform that music together with other musicians³⁵. For a theatre piece, the same communicative procedure is necessary: learning the text (script) and collaborating with the other actors and the theatre director for the staging of the piece. Attention always focuses also on the public with its reactions. For literature, the peculiarity is that the public could be one reader, who generally performs a silent reading.³⁶ In solitary reading a reader does it all by him/herself and so much so that, when reading the text over again, the reader realizes that he/she filled the spaces that Iser calls “blanks”³⁷ and that take on further meanings³⁸.

We share Cassirer’s view when he states that an artistic process has a dialogic and dialectic character similar to the language process, where the viewer does not have a merely

³¹ I. Riccioni. 2020. *Teatro e società: il caso dello Stabile di Bolzano*. Roma: Carocci, p. 59.

³² Theatre originated from the orthodox form of Greek theatre and developed into the current forms of experience - body art, happening, even video performance and online performance.

³³ L. Gemini. 2020. *L’incertezza creativa*. Milano: FrancoAngeli, p. 17.

³⁴ In Italy the archives of the national public broadcasting service, RAI, contain a wealth of recorded theatre pieces, similarly to what happens in many other countries.

³⁵ C. Agrillo. 2007. *Suonare in pubblico*. Roma: Carocci, p. 73.

³⁶ In group readings where someone reads aloud for a number of listeners, the text being read has to be staged by the reader with his/her voice and body.

³⁷ W. Iser. 1987. *L’atto di lettura*. Bologna: il Mulino, p. 246.

³⁸ A. Lesenciuc. (2020. *The Theory of Concept-Holes*. Bucarest, Ed. Ideea Europeane,.

passive role³⁹.. Arts are important for society because they consist of a system of relations that are realized among people, among levels of expression and levels of knowledge, among techniques and forms, among works and modes of work. Artists create new symbologies and new modes in which, nonetheless, our imagination does not yet dwell, since form, embodying the human ability to feel, precedes symbolic interpretations. The reflection on art is the staging of the ways in which a conscious contemporaneity may be constructed. Every art renews itself through successive eliminations, with fragmentary transformations that in the future, little by little, will allow a system to be reconstructed; a system that, in its turn, will never be sufficient and complete. If we already knew that system, it would be incommunicable: what is expected from an artist is his involvement, his participation in an experience, and not only the creation of museum exhibits⁴⁰. Art is always the encounter between an author and one or more users. Only the presence of both parties allows art to construct a communicative system where a pre-understanding exists, a shared social world referring to reciprocal relations that establish themselves among subjects and that are expressed in regulation and social adjustment, but also in indeterminateness, in a continuous flow and transformation. There is a tension towards order and harmony, and these are conveyed in the constant transformation. Each society always considers a margin for manoeuvre and, within its cultural and social order, a tendency to partial indeterminateness, which has become extremely important nowadays. From time to time, art is a mode of understanding and a mode of action giving an imprint to the whole experience. It shapes itself as a material and symbolic activity limited to devising original objects, and through such objects it “displays” a historical and social reality expressing an individual sensitivity.

In every historical period, arts are characterized by a predominant style constituted by the cultural and artistic products that are recognized and accepted as “the normality” by listeners, readers, viewers and users of art. Alongside such styles, and generally in contrast with them, “modern” or new styles manifest themselves that are not yet accepted by the wider public. In many cases, the novelties provisionally indicated as “revolutionary” become rooted and predominant styles in a subsequent period. These revolutions, often regarded as anachronistic and destructive by both the mass of artists sticking to conformity and a particular public, are the product of efforts for construction that are representative of the new generations⁴¹ claiming the unquestionable right to express themselves in a different way from older generations. Authentic modernity should be intended as a capability of shifting the perspectives off-centre and assuming the others’ point of view. Besides being a foundation for rational thinking, such off-centring also extends to social relations.

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³⁹ E. Cassirer. 1972. *Saggio sull'uomo*. Roma: Armando, p. 289.

⁴⁰ J. Francastel. 1987. *Guardare il teatro*. Bologna: il Mulino, p. 232.

⁴¹ H. Weinstock. 1969. *Cos'è la musica*. Milano: Mondadori, p. 387.

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