

The Transcendental Deduction / Relation in Time.

An interview with Wladyslaw Kazmierczak about two performances.

Malgorzata Kazmierczak, 2011-04-18

An interview with Wladyslaw Kazmierczak about two performances: Wladyslaw Kazmierczak & Ewa Rybska, The transcendental deduction / relation in time at MAP Live Evening November 20th 2010, Source Café, Carlisle and The transcendental deduction / trust at OUI Performance #3, 12 March 2011, Space 109, York.

See <http://www.ouiperformance.org.uk/vn-02>

Malgorzata Kazmierczak: Both of your recent performances clearly refer to two famous performances of Abramovic and Ulay: "Relation in Time" from 1977 and "Rest Energy" from 1980. Why have you decided to use them?

Wladyslaw Kazmierczak: Studying books, reading the descriptions and looking at the video documentation of performance pieces of the iconic performance artists we see that many performances from that time were very simple. We wanted to explore two performances of Ulay & Abramovic: Relation in Time where the couple sat back to back with their long hair tied together in a continuous bun, linking the backs of their heads together and holding them fast to each other and Rest Energy where they demonstrated publicly their trust in each other: Abramovic held a bow, while Ulay notched an arrow in the string and aimed it at her heart. We wanted to find our own position as a duo of performers in the context of the most famous icon Ulay & Abramovic with a little help of Emmanuel Kant philosophy.

M.K.: You mentioned "iconic performance artists", who are they and why did they emerge in art history?

W.K.: Depending on how we date and define the beginnings of performance art, the circle of iconic figures becomes more and more reduced and closed. E. g. about Vito Acconci we know everything and constantly more and more, although he definitely ended his career as a performance artist more than 30 years ago.

The whole publishing and scholarly effort, books on performance art concentrate on the short period 1968 – 1972, which became such an important reference point, that it eliminates later achievements. Art historians, certainly involuntarily, distort the idea of performance art, its openness, liveliness and variety. For scholarly and methodological aims, they come up with interesting, yet only interpretations of

performance art, associating it excessively with other fields of knowledge or different trends in art. Historians select performers into those, about whom we know more and we can write about them quite safely and those, about whom historians do not know much and they are not willing to know their activity.

M.K.: So what's wrong with art historians concentrating on performance art "icons"?

W.K.: Nothing wrong at all, but the phenomenon of "iconism" in performance art is bad for contemporary performance art. Its consequences are disastrous for performance art history and for the research on contemporary performance. It is unfavorable for the performance art pioneers themselves, who became known as the originators of this genre, but their sporadic contemporary activity as performance artists is generally ignored. Art historians are not interested in current performances of iconic performers. It seems like a joke, but it is true. We don't have any knowledge about what the famous performance artists create if we do not witness their activities ourselves.

In the 80s and 90s we were observing a process of fixing the gulf between iconic performance artists who appeared in the 70s and their ahistorical, post-iconic contemporaries. In the 80s performance art was rejected and excluded from art. Everything that happened after 1980 did not have any effect upon defining the genre, its facts and the observation of the dynamics of its development by art critics. The artists who emerged much later in the 80s, are automatically ascribed to an unclear, ahistorical line of performance art. The post-iconic generation of performers stood in front of the dilemma – what kind of artistic tactics to accept while facing an indifference or accidental interest in performance art? To be helplessly stuck in a critical and cognitive non-existence, quit performance art or to construct an independent platform for expression that would be consciously deprived of evaluations and critical opinions? Over 30 years of practice in performance art showed, that the function of such an independent form excellently serves performance art. Outside of the art market, valuation and assessment. It is a pulsating, changeable and impermanent process. New places show up, created by young performance artists who believe in a sense of the existence of that art and know well known performance art centers.

M.K.: Zbigniew Warpechowski accuses you of plagiarism even though he hasn't seen any of your performances since 1984. When you created an event on facebook with an invitation to York, Ewa Partum asked immediately: how does your performance refer to the Abramovic & Ulay performance – is it a plagiarism, pastiche, joke...?

W.K.: Many artists are disturbed by the lightness of being, they treat art and life too seriously, while it's just a twinkling of an eye. Iconic performance art still remains a constant context, about which we should remind both artists and the audience. Using a quotation,

pointing at special cases of performances from the 70s turns out to be a very energetic method, revealing unknown aspects and specific features of iconic performances. The citation excellently guides us towards the verification of an idea, meaning, image and the message itself. A quotation can be irritating, embarrassing, or received as an attempt at plagiarism if we are prone to ascribe bad intentions to artists. Literality, however, and perfect copying is always pointless. It is always about revoking memory about live art and its precursors. But it's also about a cry to the performance art history: and what about us? Each of such gestures or citations is surrounded by irony, ambiguity, mockery, depreciation of icons, but also our admiration for them and our helplessness towards them.