



BODY IN PERFORMANCE ART

Ritesh Ranjan

Department Of Art History And Visual Arts, Panjab University, Chandigarh 160014.

ABSTRACT

This research paper is aimed to define and understand the role of body – the performer's body/ physical body/virtual body/ hybrid body in the context of its relation to the performance and its engagement with the audience/s in relation with time and space. Performance as a very recent development in the field of visual art/s is still defining/ developing its vocabulary and grammar as well as the artistic language; and negotiating with the different possible exploitations of human body as a tool and a medium of art practice/s at the same time. It is more or less accepted that Performance Art cannot do without the human form. The development of today performance art research has been motivated from the study of gesture, posture and, the sound of silence, and progressed into different areas of body investigation. This is the platform for a string of theoretical works in constant evolution and transformation. On the other hand, in many live performances, of which the essence is not what is said or shown, but how and what is communicated throughout the whole body as membrane of spirit, voice, sound, said or written words, and video images are adopted only as vehicles for a poetry pure expression. Therefore it is consequential that here the body is considered as an unknown landscape that invites one to explore its hidden manifestation, while emotions, feelings, movements, and sensation due by them, are the unstoppable flowing stream that traverses it, which is somewhere aim of this research entitled 'Body in Performance Art/Performative Act in Contemporary Indian Art'. In fact Action Art (Performance/Performative) is mainly a research to explore and lead the transformation. On the other hand, in many live performances, of which the essence is not what is said or shown, but how and what is communicated throughout the whole body as membrane of spirit, voice, sound, said or written words, and video images are adopted only as vehicles for a poetry pure expression. The research is primarily based on some of the recent performances in India, but it is not only restricted in/at the same.

KEYWORDS : Art, Contemporary Art, Indian Art, Performance, Performative, Body, Performer, Visual Art, Physical body, Virtual body, Hybrid body, Modern Art, spirit, voice, sound.

INTRODUCTION

In Performance Art/ Performative Act, it is necessary to consider a priority to performer as primary element, the act maker of the act itself with performer's performing body. However, whether the presence of the performer's body has to operate and act within the action itself, and in which measure it must be visible, perceptible, and tangible to be said 'Performance Art/ Performative Act', perhaps it is a subject to be precisely defined.

To analyze the idea of the body as essential element of any Performance/Performative action, and investigate the possibility of action and representation on the surface of the so-called 'visible body', it is important to understand about the word 'body' and how it works in given space, a specific time with the presence of spectator/audience, which could be also having various notions.

To be a performance/action artist means to improve the Self-knowledge by investigating 'What S/he want to do and what someone want to do of/about her/him. Is a performance artist must primarily recognize him/herself as a 'tool' of his/her own work? Should performance artists have to deal with investigation of the Human Body throughout its own reading, to focus on their own Body as peculiar/predominant means of communication? The Human Body and its own ways of expression as Real Body - Virtual Body - Hybrid Body, the Human Body and its own interactions with the others and within reality and the Human Body interacting with auxiliary tools/media (video/sound technology and devices) also.

Body is the primal source for celebration and expression in the visual arts. It has always played an important role in art making. Using artists body itself became a trend of art making in the 20th century. The result of the 20th century search of the artists for an exceptional new material was Body. The political and cultural upheavals of the 1960s saw the emergence of new artistic forms, made with new creative tools.

Most notably, created by consumer-grade video cameras and editing systems, crude by today's standards, permitted innovative 'alternative' practices. Very much in tune with the rebellious and revolutionary spirit of the times, the art created with these new tools was difficult to collect or exhibit in traditional spaces. It was more suited to seat-of-the pants, artist-run, rough and ready venues that

were sprouting up in urban centers. At the time 'performance art' as not yet a term, Artists those were using their bodies as a medium of their works were called as 'body artists'.

Performance art for the first time started somewhere around 1960, though there is no such agreement as to where, when and why Performance art might be fixed in the moment when on 8th July, 1910 the Italian futurist painters and poets threw almost 8lakh copies of their broadside, "Against Passet Venice", from the clock tower above Piazza San Marco onto the heads of the law abiding citizens.

Performance Art, in the form we know today was different at the beginning stage. Rather we can put these kinds of various works under an umbrella term called a pre-cursor group to performance art. Around the time of 1950s Gutai group's happenings, Dada performances, and even the process of Abstract expressionists, where not even work of art even the process of creation were largely dependent on Body, can come under this precursor group to performance/performative.

Performance art had appealed to Indian artists also. There are different experiments going on in the contemporary Performance art scenario in India. Carrying an experimental subject matter and media, many artists are using performance and performativity to find a new audience, as performance/performativity in art bursts the boundaries of traditional art forms and mixes elements of dance, theatre, visual art, music, literature and new media.

In India, over the last decade and a half, seems it has gained in popularity and has attracted committed practitioners. Even galleries in India are inviting internationally acclaimed artists to perform, for instance Vadehra Art Gallery has invited Yoko Ono to perform along with her two parallel exhibitions at Gallery premises and a series of public art projects all of which invites public participation. This performance piece 'To India with love' performed in January 2012, at Stein Auditorium, India Habitat Center, New Delhi was infact sold before it took place.

At the same time South-African born RoseLee Goldberg, who authored several books on performance art, invited to speak on Yoko Ono's this performance piece at Vadehra Art Gallery and also to

speak at India Art Fair as 'Performance Art: The Medium of the 21st Century'. Another perspective is why artist like Yoko Ono and writer/art historian like RoseLee Goldberg are coming to India to perform and to talk on performance art respectively. Is Performance Art scene is hopeful here?

Art Alive Gallery also conducted performance of Anita Dube in February 2012. Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi facilitated Sonia Khurana to conduct a workshop on performance art in December 2011 and later on she had invited to reconduct same piece at National School of Drama, New Delhi. Before this, Kiran Nadar Museum of Art facilitated few other performance artists to conduct workshops on the same, like of Samudra Kajal Saikia in November 2011 and earlier to Inder Salim Tikku. It was quite appreciable that a private museum is taking interest in performance art and facilitating workshops on the same. Are Galleries and Institutions moving towards performances or these are only few cases?

In another case Vivan Sundaram's show 'Gagawaka making strange', showcased at Lalit Kala Academy in December 2011 left a question in mind why a prolific artist like Sundaram has started to imbibe performance/performative into his art practices? There were sculptures, garments, effigies, art objects, and a fashion show with actual models with ramp walk along with an avant-garde kind of performances. Even the idea of Gagawaka ramp walk was also executed on the opening day of the India Art Fair, January 2012. Models wearing outfits made of recycled materials were seen walking through the halls, interacting with viewers. Perhaps Vivan doesn't want to keep himself untouched of the notion of his contemporary time or today artists want to create some new idiom for them throughout the performance/performative?

At India Art Fair- 2012, London based Lisson Art Gallery booth has been the center of attraction for all kind of visitors due to Marina Abramovic's video 'The Onion' and her works of 'Kitchen series', all were centered to her performative gesture.

While another noticeable thing in this context is, noted photographer artist, Dayanita Singh was autographing and numbering her latest book, 'House of Love' on the opening day. Interestingly she went around the Art Fair, pushing a cart from which she was directly selling the books to customers. Isn't she was performing around in her own way?

Apart from these few events/instances, over the past few years and across the various artistic disciplines, this interdisciplinary art form seems growing up that experiment with new forms, venues and themes. Organizers from all genres comes to see increasingly been including performance projects in their programmes and even devoting showcases to them. In India Khoj International artists Association and Sarai are two autonomous, registered societies those seem instantly committed to showcase and promote performance art and artists.

In 2012, Khoj has conducted an evening of live performances 'Khojlive12' showcasing thirteen works by artists like Amitesh Grover, Ammad Tahir, Diya Naidu, Hemant Sree Kumar, Inder Salim, Miss Doty & Madame Potty, Neha Choksi, Pushpamala N, Rashmi Kaleka, Rohini Devasher, Subodh Gupta and Vivan Sundaram. Few of among them are established names whereas some needs introduction; they are working across contemporary dance, sound, fashion and gaming. While a number of artists push the boundaries of their respective practices using choreography, design and languages of digital era, others actively seek interaction and audience participation, challenging the traditional relationship of audience as passive spectator.

From its first international workshop in 1997 to 'Khojlive08', a 6 days live art festival in 2008, and more recent international residencies devoted to performance and time-based practices, Khoj has consistently engaged with the genre of live art. Similarly Sarai is

providing alternative space to young practitioners for performance based work which regularly organizes performance art events. And Sandarbh, a non-profitable artist initiative founded by Chintan Upadhyay in 2003 to increase interaction between the rural and the urban situation with art and culture in the Vagad Region. Its aim is to explore new modes of art practices in the ever-changing cultural, historical, political, economic and environmental scenarios. Sandarbh organizes residency programmes, site-specific art projects and community-based interactions in complete contrast to the more traditional museums and gallery systems.

Sandarbh has seen providing a significant space to performance/performative practices along with promising young performance artists.

In this context of alternative art practices, as a part of Bar1 (Bangalore Artist Residency), Smitha Cariappa organized the Live Art 2011, Bangalore International Performance Festival in November 2011. It was part public performances, workshops and seminars, with experienced international artists, young artists and students.

These spaces are building an international reputation for outstanding alternative art incubation which plays a central role in the development of analytical, experimental, interdisciplinary and critical contemporary art practice in India. Are they constantly challenging the established thinking about art by giving space to performance based practices? And what are the leading reasons that they laid to promote/support to experimental art practices like of performance/performative?

Apart from these alternative spaces or sometimes along with them, many Indian Artists are experimenting with the Body and using it as a medium to push the boundaries of the self and to question the standard ways of sizing lived. There are different experiments going on in the contemporary Performance art scenario in India. Few of the artists involved with 'Indian Performance Art scene' are Rummana Hussain, Subodh Gupta, Anita Dube, Manmeet Devgun, Shantanu Lodh, Tejal Shah, Umesh Madanahalli, Pushpamala N, Jasmeen Patheja, Sonia Khurana, Nikhil Chopra, Murli Cheeroth, Inder Salim, Chintan Upadhyay etc. There are no doubts that they are working in terms of different dimensions of Performance art. All of them are working with strikingly different styles.

There are also the works where the artist has been using his/her body extensively but does not fall into the direct notion of performance art. The contradiction not to call their work, Performance art is varied. In most of the cases, there is the absence of the live audience. It is just used as a video footage and in most of the cases, they are even edited.

These kind of works are available in a huge number among them few names are Nalini Malani, Sunil Gupta, Ayesha Abraham, Subba Ghosh, Shilpa Gupta, Sonia Khurana, Pushpamala N, Anita Dube, Atul Bhalla, Ravi Agarwal, Manmeet Devgun, Vidya Kamat, Manish Kansara, Sushil Kumar, Manjunath Kamath and Mriganka (works as a collaborative with Sonal Jain called Desire machine).

Performance is an integral part of their works, the outcome is not pitched on the performance; performance remains an integral but unarticulated area in these artist's works. Perhaps, 'Bird' by Sonia Khurana was one performative act that invested the energies on the very act of performing/performance. So, talking about the performance in context of Indian contemporary art perhaps will not be completed including this performative stance along with performance art where artist directly communicate with viewers through his/her body. And this is what taken as 'Performative Act' here with Performance Art (Performance Art/Performative Act) as a topic of this research.

It is more or less accepted that Performance Art cannot do without the human form.

The development of today performance art research has been motivated from the study of gesture, posture and, the sound of silence, and progressed into different areas of body investigation. This is the platform for a string of theoretical works in constant evolution and transformation. On the other hand, in many live performances, of which the essence is not what is said or shown, but how and what is communicated throughout the whole body as membrane of spirit, voice, sound, said or written words, and video images are adopted only as vehicles for a poetry pure expression.

Therefore it is consequential that here the body is considered as an unknown landscape that invites one to explore its hidden manifestation, while emotions, feelings, movements, and sensation due by them, are the unstoppable flowing stream that traverses it, which is somewhere aim of this research entitled 'Body in Performance Art/Performative Act in Contemporary Indian Art'.

In fact Action Art (Performance/Performative) is mainly a research to explore and lead the vital capability of the body to interact with reality and become a true visual place in which and where meanings (social/individual/spiritual) are produced.

But the essence of this particular kind of work is not to produce new models or icons through some demonstrative uses or arid performances of the human body, but through the body offering new possibility to understand art as distinctive discipline that can lead us to a profound consideration about our destiny in our time, beyond the same boundaries of body representation, and even beyond also what is in-rooted in our collective imaginary, as it can strongly bring back to nature what our deceptive mind sees as hybrid, synthetic, troubled, diverse and different.

Conclusion:

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To understand performance as an art form/language it is always important to consider the relation of the performer's body/ physical body/virtual body/ hybrid body in the context of its relation to the performance and its engagement with the audience/s in relation with time and space.