

ON PERFORMANCE ART
AND HOW THE WORLD IS CHANGING
(PERFORMANCE VS. INTERVENTION)

ARTUR TAJBER

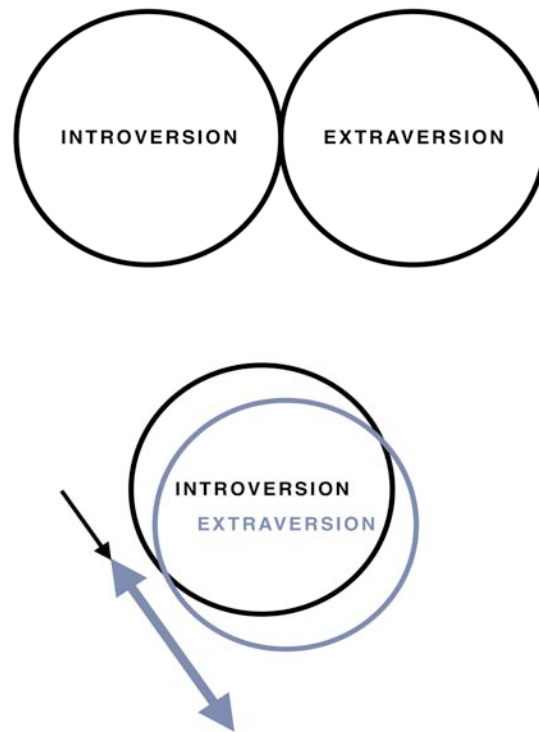


Artur Tajber, *WALK™MAN*
Image Courtesy of the Artist.

I write these words from my very own, personal position -- from my personal experience, from observations I've realized in my surroundings. I am writing from the position of an artist who has been active as an artist since the early seventies, who has been doing performance art since the mid-seventies, who has been organizing art events and been an academic teacher for almost thirty years. My intention is not to define a relationship between historical art categories or phenomena, but to give an account of the psychological and semantic background of my past and current artistic decisions.

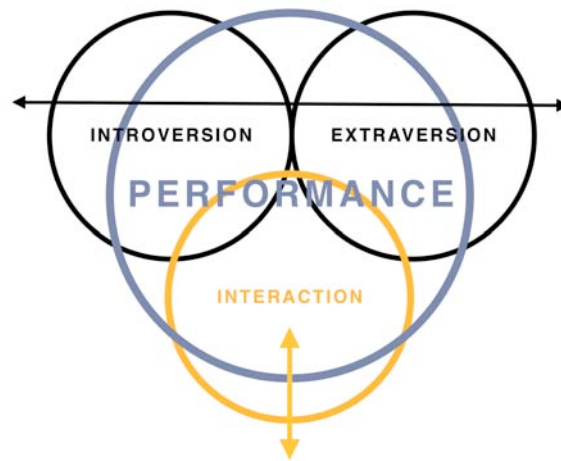
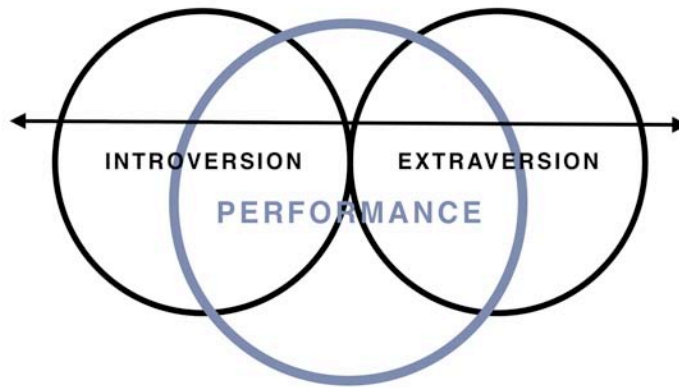
I am an introvert who acts under the very strong imperative of public presence and activity. To act in public I need a strong will and determination, and in doing it I spend a lot of energy. I started to perform as the result of several difficult decisions, and did it in order to go consciously against my previ-

ously shaped character. It is perhaps as a result of those facts that I have found myself deeply analysing my activities ever since.

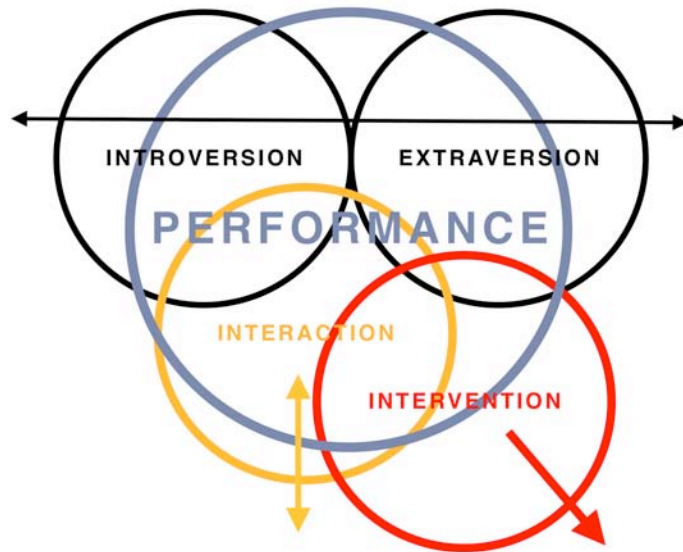


To act in public, for an introverted person, means to break with one's natural demeanor. To act in public is not a simple transformation from "introversion" to "extraversion," but an *extroverted* act exploding from the fortified inside. It is not an act of spontaneity but a partly calculated process of loosening boundaries and control in order to accumulate a "higher" energy. An "introvert origin" generates an "extravert resonance."

"Performance art" means to perform in the context of the artworld or to perform in relation to an artistic idea. That is, to understand performance art we must spend more time analysing *art* than performance itself. It is from the context of "art" that the internal process of "extravert resonance" becomes more important than any overt relationship with an audience. That said, however, audience interaction remains one of the most important characteristics of performance art. So what I am arguing for is a very particular and complex type of experience.

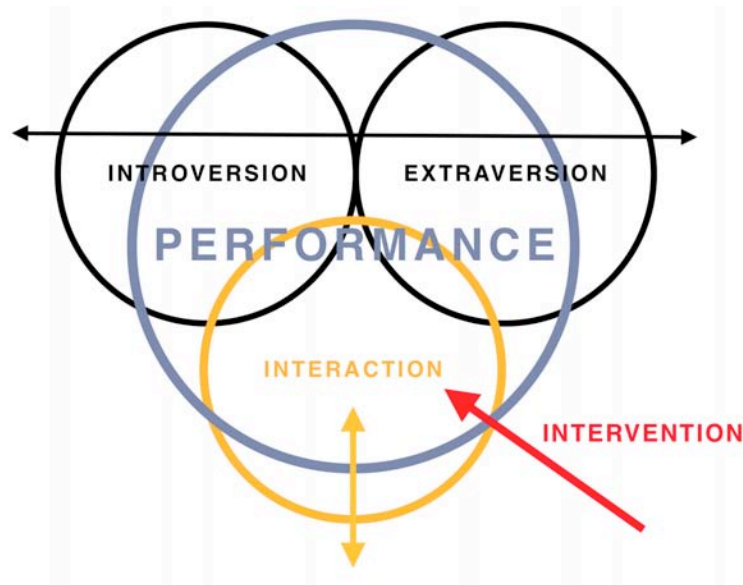


A particular performance act is a result of the extroversive resonance of an introverted personality, and this act is potentially “interactive” -- that is, it is directed, addressed to individuals or groups of people. It may be announced as a message, as art activity, as a public event, or not. For my own sake I divide my activities into two groups: those which I address directly to the audience (announced performances, mostly realized at gallery-like spaces or in the context of art festivals), and those which activate public spaces and the margins of social existence (these are often transparent, anonymous activities, realized in the background and without the umbrella of the art).



This second type of potentially interactive activities (or *interactivities*) is similar to the notion of intervention, but with an important difference. The difference lies in energy and intention – it is about dynamics, sharpness, aggression and target. The interactive operation I am trying to describe is subtle. It never operates by force and against other individuals directly; it is never used as propaganda or ideological dictate, and it is not presented as Truth. Instead it operates through persuasion. For many, the next step after the act of persuasion is intervention. However, from my point of view, it is when intervention starts that the creative aspect of the performance operation vanishes.

Intervention, as a general term, has many resonances – from military connotations to humanitarian ones. We use the term “art intervention” for many kinds of public and politically oriented artistic works. But intervention also means “to interrupt or to break continuity.” While I resist the accent of domination that accompanies the word in its military incarnation, I am open to some of its other connotations. To stand in resistance, to defend somebody, to protest – these are also interventions.



I know and I respect many interventionists' art activities – and I repeat: I am not writing about the personal strategies of other artists, but of myself. Personally, I prefer to use different terminology and less invasive methods than those I associate with the term intervention and self proclaimed interventionists.

Instead, for me, the most aesthetically and ethically exciting as well as the most risky thing is to provoke the *inadequate* intervention!

We/I start to speak of intervention when fast, urgent change is needed, immediately, without delay or ordinary, customary procedure. Intervention is needed when we believe in the necessity of immediate action and cannot wait, when we don't see any other solution. It is true that sometimes we haven't any other choice; we must wake up to save ourselves, to *repair* the world. But at the same time, I don't believe that intervention is the best way to *create* something. In the world, and as artists, we can choose to act against evil or to work for good. The former comes from ethical sensibility, and in some circumstances is obligatory, the latter is voluntary and needs an open, creative vision. The former is realized spontaneously and momentarily, while the latter demands a lot of time, energy, power and attention. Art is made between the two.