

GIACOMO FRONZI

Performance Philosophy as an Interdisciplinary Field: Perspectives and Limits

ABSTRACT

Il saggio esamina i vantaggi e i limiti della Performance Philosophy (PP) come campo interdisciplinare che tenta di connettere pratica performativa e riflessione filosofica. Partendo dall'assenza di un'adeguata elaborazione filosofica della performance – storicamente confinata agli studi teatrali, linguistici e antropologici – l'autore ricostruisce le principali proposte teoriche: dall'estetica del performativo di Erika Fischer-Lichte alla rete di ricerca fondata da Cull Ó Maoilearca e Lagaay nel 2012. Pur riconoscendone la fertilità, il saggio segnala alcuni limiti della PP: eccesso di apertura, mancanza di uno statuto metodologico chiaro, persistente centralità del teatro. Si propone infine l'esigenza di un'analisi filosofica preliminare della struttura della performance.

Performance Philosophy (PP) has established itself over the past fifteen years as an interdisciplinary field at the crossroads of performative practice and philosophical inquiry. The essay traces its theoretical genealogy – from Fischer-Lichte's aesthetics of the performative to the research network launched by Cull Ó Maoilearca and Lagaay in 2012 – against the backdrop of a longstanding philosophical deficit: performance has traditionally been theorised within theatre studies, linguistics, and anthropology, rarely on genuinely philosophical grounds. Productive as PP undoubtedly is, the essay raises a number of concerns: its constitutive openness risks methodological vagueness; a theatre-centred bias persists beneath its interdisciplinary ambitions. What remains missing, the author argues, is a rigorous philosophical account of performance as such.

30 giugno 2026, pp. 117-128

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.2036-5624/25713>

Section: Dossier [peer reviewed]



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Performance Philosophy as an Interdisciplinary Field: Perspectives and Limits

The Problem

So-called Performance Studies, as well as the many theoretical investigations into the performative that have emerged within theatre studies and in the history and criticism of the performing arts, have so far failed to find an adequate counterpart within philosophy. Broadening the perspective, one might also say that the problem concerns the usefulness and function of philosophical reflection in relation to dynamics and processes that directly and comprehensively involve the interaction between the bodily sphere, the affective dimension, and the cognitive dimension.

Despite the ongoing cross-fertilisation and dialogue between theatre, philosophical inquiry and artistic practice, what may still be lacking is a genuinely philosophical reading of performance – one that would give it a different profile, while also restoring and reassessing its significance within the framework of everyday life (rather than along the lines pursued by gender studies, feminist theory, sociology or anthropology).

In contrast to more familiar approaches (in theatre studies, the arts, linguistics, business or sport), the most widespread theoretical-philosophical perspective has tended to interpret performance as something reducible to the notion of effective output, particularly as demanded by late-capitalist societies (following the line of thought associated with Marcuse, among others). From this standpoint, the so-called “performance society” compels each of us to steadily raise our level of achievement in order to respond ever more efficiently to the demands of a system geared entirely towards cost reduction and the maximisation of benefits and profit.

Alongside this framework, and reflecting on the varying degrees of significance that the actions we perform each day hold for us (to take a simple example, opening a door cannot be placed on the same level as taking religious vows), I propose a new interpretation of performance: as a complex form of action marked by a high degree of meaningfulness and a powerful capacity for transformation. I have developed this theoretical proposal in a more systematic and structured way in a recent book^{*}; here,

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¹ See Giacomo Fronzi, *Performance. Un itinerario filosofico e storico-artistico*, Castelveccchi, Roma 2025.

however, I would like to focus on the theoretical approach known as “Performance Philosophy.”

As is well known, the adjective *performative* was introduced in the late 1950s by John L. Austin to define a specific type of utterance². Austin starts from the premise that, contrary to what philosophers had traditionally maintained – namely, that an utterance can only be either true or false – it is possible to identify a type of utterance that escapes these two options and that, rather than being true or false, entails a *doing* (and not merely a *saying*).

Austin’s examples have become canonical: the response “I do” at the altar during a wedding ceremony, the utterance “I name this ship Queen Elizabeth” while holding a bottle of champagne, or the statement “I bet a thousand lire that it will rain tomorrow”. In all these cases, *saying* coincides with *doing*: by saying “I do”, I am not simply reporting a marriage; I am committing myself, I am granting myself. These utterances are what Austin calls *performatives*. The term, he writes, is close to the jurists’ word *operative* (as in “I bequeath my house to my children”), but since that word has other uses, it is preferable to adopt another one.

In order to be effective and not “infelicitous”, performative utterances must meet certain conditions: the convention to which they refer must exist and be accepted; the circumstances in which the convention is invoked must be appropriate; the procedure must be executed completely and correctly; and there must be coherence between the speaker’s thoughts, emotions, sentiments, and actions. Austin’s theses – here reduced to their basic framework – were later widely debated and reinterpreted by figures such as Jacques Derrida, and reformulated in more specific terms within sociolinguistics and Gender Studies by authors such as Judith Butler³.

This line of inquiry, whose insights intersected with other disciplinary fields such as anthropology (Victor Turner), theatre studies (Richard Schechner), and sociology (Erving Goffman), provided the framework for the emergence of Performance Studies in the 1980s. These «are proposed as a conceptual lens for observing a world that Schechner argues should be understood less as a legible text and more as a performance to be engaged with»⁴. Schechner’s approach, as well as that of other Performance Studies scholars, has an ethical-political character, insofar as – recalling

² See John L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, Oxford University Press, London 1961 and John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words. The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University*, Oxford University Press, London 1955.

³ See Jacques Derrida, *Signature, événement, contexte*, Communication au Congrès international des Sociétés de philosophie de langue française, Montréal 1971; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York-London 1990 and Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, Routledge, New York-London 1997. For a feminist and queer reading of the performance, see Andrew Parker – Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (edited by), *Performance and Performativity*, Routledge, New York-London 1995; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Duke University Press, Durham 2003; Karen Barad, *Performatività della natura. Quanto e queer*, ETS, Pisa 2017.

⁴ Flora de Giovanni – Lucia Perrone Capano, *Il performativo: alcune questioni preliminari*, in «Testi e linguaggi. Rivista di studi letterari, linguistici e filologici dell’Università di Salerno», n. 9, 2015, pp. 13-20: p. 15.

Adorno's theses at a distance – a performance is always the result of social conditioning and of pre-existing and internalized models. According to Flora de Giovanni, «it is precisely the awareness of the influence exerted by pre-existing patterns on behavior that constitutes the common denominator of what many have defined as the performative turn in contemporary culture»⁵. The performative turn described by the author thus has what might be called a *culturological* and socio-political connotation, referring to the relationship between the performative dimension and culture (a topic on which I will not dwell here).

In connection with Performance Studies, Performance Studies International (PSI)⁶ was founded in 1997, emerging from the Annual Performance Studies Conference, first held in 1995. From that inaugural edition onward, PSI has essentially registered developments in Performance Studies – both theoretical and, so to speak, geographical – by virtue of the disciplinary and territorial expansion of this field. Over the years, PSI has convened not only in the United States, its birthplace, but also in Wales, New Zealand, Singapore, and Australia, broadening the spectrum of themes and domains involved: cultural studies, human geography, history, archaeology, anthropology, theatre studies, interculturalism, multilingualism, and even the highly topical debate on conservation, sustainability, and the climate crisis.

Nevertheless, despite PSI's increasing openness to diverse disciplinary fields, it still shows (once again) a strong grounding in theatre and the arts⁷. A glance at its board makes this clear: the president, Jazmin Llana, is Professor of Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies at De La Salle University, and the vice president, Serap Erincin, is a multimedia artist and Professor of Performance Studies and Inter/Cultural Studies at Arizona State University.

What has been said so far, albeit in very concise terms, underscores a fact: discussions of performance and the performative have traditionally been confined to the theatrical, linguistic, anthropological, or artistic domains. Even the fundamental work of Erika Fischer-Lichte, despite its notable openness (including philosophical references), is no exception, although its core theses certainly warrant renewed discussion⁸. Here I will limit myself to reconstructing the main issues proposed by Fischer-Lichte, deferring a

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ See *Performance Studies International*, online: <https://www.psi-web.org> (accessed 17/2/2026).

⁷ As recently as five years ago, Marco De Marinis reflected on the place and/or role of theatre within the context of Performance Studies, and on that of performance within the framework of the New Theatre Studies. See Marco De Marinis – Roberta Ferraresi (a cura di), *Pensare il teatro. Nuova teatrologia e performance studies*, La Casa Usher, Firenze 2017 and Marco De Marinis, *Performance Studies e Nuova Teatrologia: il dialogo continua*, in «Mantichora. Italian Journal of Performance Studies», n. 9, 2019, pp. 23-32. On the Italian reception of Performance Studies see Fabrizio Deriu, *La ricezione dei Performance Studies in Italia. Appunti di cronaca e riflessioni epistemologiche*, in Gerardo Guccini – Armando Petrini (a cura di), *Thinking the Theatre – New Teatrology and Performance Studies*, Atti del convegno internazionale di studi (Torino, 29-30 maggio 2015), AlmaDL University of Bologna Digital Library, Bologna 2018, pp. 193-208, online: https://amsacta.unibo.it/id/eprint/5781/1/Thinking_the_theatre_AdP_7_11iv2018.pdf (accessed 17/2/2026).

⁸ In this regard, I would refer the reader to my book *Performance. Un itinerario filosofico e storico-artistico*, cit.

critical re-reading to another occasion, since recalling their relevance here serves to support the thesis that a properly and explicitly philosophical formulation of the performative has not yet been adequately developed.

Erika Fischer-Lichte's Proposal

With regard to the main theorization of an “aesthetics of the performative”, as far as I have been able to ascertain, the first proposal is that of Dieter Mersch, who, in *Ereignis und Aura*⁹, develops a radical critique of traditional aesthetics understood as a philosophy of art grounded in the linguistic-textual paradigm. Against the assumption that the artwork can be assimilated to a text to be interpreted, Mersch claims the centrality of the event and aura, drawing on Benjamin and Lévinas in order to shift the axis of the aesthetic from hermeneutics to responsiveness, from intentionality to the dimension of happening. Art is no longer conceived as a stable object but as an act, a performance, the emergence of an experience that exceeds the subject's availability and imposes itself as an encounter with alterity. Although theoretically fertile, this approach remains confined to art theory and does not fully thematize the multidimensionality of the performative. It is in this sense that engagement with Erika Fischer-Lichte's aesthetics of the performative becomes necessary, explicitly situated within the field of *Theaterwissenschaft*.

Fischer-Lichte redefines aesthetics not in terms of beauty or judgment, but as the analysis of the materials, dispositifs, and forms through which an event-work produces perceptual, emotional, and cognitive effects. In this framework, aesthetic experience coincides with artistic experience in its phases of conception, production, and reception. However, this delimitation to the field of art – and more precisely to theatre and the performing arts after the “performative turn” – raises questions about the possibility of extending the performative paradigm beyond the theatrical perimeter.

The paradigmatic example of *Lips of Thomas* by Marina Abramović (Innsbruck, 24 October 1975) allows Fischer-Lichte to show how performance produces a liminal situation in which ethics and aesthetics intertwine inextricably. The artist's self-martyrdom is not reducible to a symbol or a mere provocation; it triggers an event co-produced by performer and spectators, who, by intervening to interrupt the action, retroactively modify the very structure of the work. Here the decisive trait of the performative turn emerges: the overcoming of the subject/object dichotomy and the dissolution of the conception of the artwork as a vehicle of predetermined meanings. The performative event cannot be understood according to the categories of semantic

⁹ Dieter Mersch, *Ereignis und Aura. Untersuchungen zu einer Ästhetik des Performativen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2002.

transmission; it must be experienced in its transformative dimension, as a happening that exceeds traditions and destabilizes conventions.

The theoretical core of the aesthetics of the performative is articulated around the notion of performance as an event grounded in the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators. Drawing on Max Herrmann, Fischer-Lichte insists on the autopoietic nature of performance: it emerges from a constantly transforming “feedback loop”, in which producers and recipients become co-producers of an unpredictable and not entirely controllable process. The materiality of the real body, conceived not as a mere support of signs but as a phenomenological presence, constitutes the gravitational center of this dynamic. This gives rise to an aesthetic experience as a co-experience of real bodies and real space, in which the distinction between an aesthetics of production and an aesthetics of reception loses its significance. Performative space, far from being a mere scenic container, is configured as a relational dispositif that opens possibilities without determining their outcome: garages, squares, abandoned factories, or traditional theatre halls become places in which spatiality is generated by the event itself.

Atmosphere – understood in a Böhmean sense as an intertwining of lights, sounds, smells, and presences – constitutes the first perceptual level through which the spectator is involved. However, this radical openness raises the problem of boundaries: if performative space is distinguished from non-performative space, it is precisely by virtue of a threshold that, though porous, cannot be annulled without dissolving the specificity of the experience. Analogously, the semantic dimension undergoes a profound reconfiguration. From the 1960s onward, performance is no longer structured as the translation of predefined meanings but as a field in which unforeseen associations emerge, where signifier and signified are articulated in a plural and non-normative manner. Perceptual multistability produces a continuous oscillation between the order of presence (the actor as a real body) and the order of representation (the character), generating meanings that cannot be stabilized. In this framework, effect and sense are co-produced within the autopoietic circuit. Problematic, however, is the assumption that understanding would be extraneous to the aesthetic process and possible only *a posteriori*: such an exclusion risks impoverishing the temporal complexity of experience by artificially separating perception and reflection.

The notion of the *event* constitutes the point of condensation of the entire theoretical architecture. With the performative turn, the artwork is supplanted by the event, and the aestheticity of performance is rooted in its emergent autopoiesis. This perspective implies a redefinition of the relationship between art and reality: performances do not oppose life nor symbolically represent it, but configure themselves as self-referential practices that are constitutive of reality. However, the affirmation of a fusion between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic comes into tension with the insistence on liminality. If performative experience is an experience of threshold, then it implies a distinction,

albeit fluid, between the ordinary flow of existence and the extraordinary dimension of performance.

It is precisely this exceptionality that makes transformation possible: through the enchantment that brings the ordinary to appear as extraordinary, the spectator is estranged from perceptual habits and led into a liminal state analogous to the rites of passage described by Van Gennep and Turner. The transformative power of the performance-event thus lies in its capacity to produce metamorphoses – transitory or permanent – through bodily, sensory, and spatial micro-events. The concepts of staging, aesthetic experience, and event constitute the three pillars of this theory.

Staging, understood as the planning of material conditions that allow the unforeseen to emerge, does not oppose the authenticity of the event but is its condition. *Aesthetic experience*, as an experience of threshold valid in itself, is distinguished from other transformative experiences only by the nature of the metamorphosis it solicits, although the distinction between artistic and non-artistic performances ultimately refers to the institutional framework of reference. The aesthetics of the performative thus focuses on “border-crossing”, on the constant traversal of the threshold between art and life. In this perspective, the restoration of enchantment to the world does not assume regressive or anti-Enlightenment traits but is configured as a critical project: a new Enlightenment that does not aim at domination, but at a transformed relation with oneself and with the world, founded on co-presence, reciprocity, and the awareness that life itself can be understood as a performative practice.

Performance Philosophy

It is striking to observe that analyses with a recognisably philosophical profile have been advanced not by philosophers, but by scholars of theatre theory. This is evident in the case of Fischer-Lichte and equally so in what has come to be known as Performance Philosophy.

For approximately fifteen years, an “experimental” line of research has developed under the name Performance Philosophy (PP). Founded in 2012 and initially animated by Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca and Alice Lagaay, PP is a research network committed to cultivating a collective practice of thought through a pluralist and interdisciplinary approach, encompassing both continental and analytic traditions, as well as Western and Eastern perspectives. Its underlying aim is to problematise the very concepts of “performance” and “philosophy”, exploring the contours and structure of their possible relations, and thus moving within a terrain of uncertain and ever-shifting boundaries.

PP itself, sharing the very nature of the concepts it seeks to examine, is subject to continuous reconfiguration and redefinition, being in constant evolution. This elastic

and dynamic character is linked not only to the variability of its objects of inquiry, but also to its constitutive inclination towards experimentation, sometimes even radical experimentation, as a mode of exercising thought.

While engaging with Performance Studies, PP also seeks to re-evaluate and revitalise them, asking more specifically how philosophy might restructure itself in contemporary conditions, what forms it might assume, and what tools it might adopt. With a performative posture, PP endeavours to identify possible responses to these questions in the concept of performance and in performative practices, as well as in their philosophical texture.

In order to grasp its potential and to identify possible critical issues – while also clarifying what PP actually is – we may turn to the introductions of the two volumes that, over the past decade, have documented this line of research, both edited by Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca and Alice Lagaay. As the editors recount, the project began in April 2010, when they organised a conference devoted to the relationship between performance and philosophy at the Freie Universität Berlin. At that institution, a debate had already been developing between 1998 and 2010 within the Collaborative Research Center “Performing Cultures”, from which – under Laura Cull’s initiative – the idea of the April conference emerged.

The decision to include the word “performance” in the expression Performance Philosophy reflects both the intention to foreground the principal reference point of this philosophical approach and the desire to emphasise its openness and fundamental indeterminacy – qualities deemed necessary to allow the various lines of inquiry potentially contained within this framework to develop freely.

However, to speak of PP «is not to disavow the differences between those fields that have been conventionally defined as ‘performance’ or ‘philosophy’»¹⁰. The task, then, is to bring into relation two domains which, according to the editors, have always maintained a certain proximity, dating back to classical Greece: poetry and philosophy (to which one might add rhetoric and oratory). According to Laura Cull in particular, PP constitutes an interdisciplinary field in its own right whose preliminary objective is to overcome the rigid distinction between performance and philosophy in favour of two alternative theoretical-practical configurations: performance as philosophy and philosophy as performance (a formulation that also titles the fifth and final section of *The Routledge Companion to Performance Philosophy*)¹¹.

¹⁰ Laura Cull – Alice Lagaay, *Introduction* to Id. (edited by), *Encounters in Performance Philosophy*, Palgrave, London 2014, pp. 3-12: p. 4. From my perspective, by contrast, the task is precisely to proceed in the opposite direction: to re-thematise the concept and practice of performance, granting it an extra-theatrical characterisation.

¹¹ Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca – Alice Lagaay (edited by), *The Routledge Companion to Performance Philosophy*, Routledge, London-New York 2020.

The contributions collected in *Encounters in Performance Philosophy*, to which the editors refer in their introduction, clearly aim to give concrete shape to this overarching programme – namely, to explore how the relationship between performance and philosophy may be articulated in their mutual constitution and influence. Drawing on Martin Puchner, for example, it is emphasised that theatre and philosophy have always been intertwined, both sharing the problem of “ground”. With Denis Guénoun, attention is directed to the stage as a privileged site of appearance, where the actor presents themselves in two modes: frontal and figural (in profile). These correspond to two functions: presence (the fact of being on stage, in its various modalities) and action (related to doing and praxis). Guénoun subsequently extends this reflection beyond the theatrical domain, developing in metaphysical terms the theme of the dramatisation of our lives and destinies.

The arguments advanced by Freddie Rokem and Esa Kirkkopelto likewise begin from a profound engagement with theatre. In the former case, within a framework described as a metaphysics of theatre, the relation between the One and the Many is analysed in terms of the interaction between text and performance, subject and role, appearance and reality, with reference to Plato, Shakespeare, and Socrates – the latter regarded by Rokem as an example of the philosopher-actor, by virtue of the intrinsic performativity of his philosophising.

Esa Kirkkopelto, by contrast, investigates acting in its transformative capacity, emphasising its potential to alter our everyday experience and arguing that it cannot be reduced to a mere complex of technical and stylistic choices. Acting (the act of performing) thus calls into question the broader issue of “how to act”; consequently, given these implications, actor training must be situated – beyond the confines of theatrical practice – within an ethical and political framework. Ultimately, Kirkkopelto «argues that acting both can and needs to liberate itself from its residual anthropocentrism and the myth of the “integrity and authority” of the subject, in order to seek a more relational philosophical basis»¹².

Within the volume edited by Cull and Lagaay, central issues for both philosophy and performance – such as those concerning the body and language – also find significant space. While Emmanuel Alloa examines the theme of the body (and more specifically the actor’s body) in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Arno Böhler introduces the expression “philosophy on stage” to describe a post-dramatic mode of doing philosophy, staging philosophical practice by granting it a corporeal, not merely discursive, dimension.

Broadly speaking, in the formulation emerging from the 2014 volume, the editors advance the hypothesis that PP should assume an autonomous profile that goes beyond

¹² Laura Cull – Alice Lagaay, *Introduction* to Id. (edited by), *Encounters in Performance Philosophy*, cit., p. 8.

the “mere” application of traditional philosophical theories to performance. Drawing upon inter- and multidisciplinary dialogue, PP conceives performance as a philosophical activity in its own right and philosophy as a form of performance.

Cull and Lagaay return to these theses in the introduction to the 2020 volume, *The Routledge Companion to Performance Philosophy*. Once again, PP is presented as an emerging – and by now emerged – interdisciplinary field, internationally recognised, even if constitutively and perpetually «emergent»¹³. Compared with earlier formulations, the idea of contamination between performance and philosophy is now grounded also in what is termed «dramaturgical sensitivity»¹⁴, presented as a distinctive feature of performance philosophy. The expression possesses undeniable force and can indeed be traced throughout both the history of philosophy – especially Western philosophy – and the history of performance.

Particular emphasis is placed on «dramaturgical sensitivity (with regard both to the generation of knowledge and to the potential of its communicability)»¹⁵, evidently understood as one of the mediating terms that bind philosophy and performance. The principal aim of this plural, polyphonic, open, and cooperative field is reaffirmed: to think performance as a form of philosophy and philosophy as a form of performance, conceiving them as two closely related – though nonetheless distinct – forms of thought and action. Much hinges on this point, not least in terms of interdisciplinary cooperation: the attempt to foster a shared and collective reflection emerging from diverse experiences placed in dialogue, giving rise to a hybrid and transdisciplinary configuration.

But how is PP defined in the 2020 volume? The editors write:

There are multiple overlapping usages of the term ‘performance philosophy’. That is, performance philosophy might refer to the field, to a method, practice or mode of thought (doing performance philosophy), or to an object (a book described as a work of performance philosophy). The term is used in the context of thinking towards a ‘performance philosophy’ rather than a philosophy of performance; researchers have begun to consider what it might mean for them to inhabit the role of the ‘performance philosopher’ alongside the potentially comparable positions of philosopher of performance and the philosophically minded performance maker, but also alongside the dramaturg, life-coach, pedagogue, sportsperson, ethnographer, activist and mystic¹⁶.

Capable of being translated in multiple ways, PP presents itself as a research practice intended to explore the knowledge and theoretical potential of any performative

¹³ Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca – Alice Lagaay, *Introduction* to Id. (edited by), *The Routledge Companion to Performance Philosophy*, cit., pp. 1-18: p. 4.

¹⁴ *Ivi*, p. 2.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ *Ivi*, p. 6.

practice, including philosophical and/or academic practice, while at the same time reconfiguring their defining features. Its objective is to reopen – and qualitatively expand – the concepts traditionally associated with “performance” and “philosophy”, attributing to the former a philosophical potential and to the latter an intrinsic performative character.

In this respect, PP draws attention to new possible modes of communicating philosophical theory and thought, a position encapsulated in the questions raised by Jon McKenzie: «How will we perform or do theory in the twenty-first century? What role might Performance Philosophy play? And must one do philosophy by the book? Can it – and theory – survive their incorporation by graphe, by plasticity, by transmediation? How might they live on?»¹⁷.

Here again the aforementioned *dramaturgical sensitivity* comes into play, translated into a willingness to experiment with new uses of the written word, setting aside its linear, academic, and conventional format – aptly summarised in the motto “No paper”, adopted in certain events organised by the international PP network¹⁸.

These, in broad outline, are the principal features of the interdisciplinary field gathered under the formula Performance Philosophy, with respect to which we may articulate some considerations, identifying both its limitations and its undeniable strengths.

According to Friedrich Schlegel, what is commonly called the philosophy of art usually lacks one of the two: either philosophy or art. Paraphrasing this observation, one might suggest that performance philosophy risks lacking either philosophy or performance (a risk of which the present author is well aware). We must ask whether this is always the case, or whether there is indeed an imbalance and a predominance of one dimension over the other. Achieving equilibrium between the two terms is undoubtedly difficult. The field of PP seeks to maintain such balance, though not without complication.

Can the research developed within PP genuinely be described as “philosophical”? Given the plurality of voices involved, the terms “philosophy” and “performance” are to be understood in a very broad sense, within a theoretical reflection that may be described as philosophical in character. At the same time, philosophical practice properly so called – as suggested by Cull and Lagaay – may seek to revitalise its own performative vocation by renewing its tools. Nonetheless, certain reservations remain regarding the hybrid nature of this approach, which resists straightforward

¹⁷ Jon McKenzie, *Ouisconsin Eidos, Wisconsin Idea, and the Closure of Ideation*, in Anna Street – Julien Alliot – Magnolia Pauker (edited by), *Inter Views in Performance Philosophy: Crossings and Conversations*, Palgrave, London 2017, pp. 79-95: p. 84.

¹⁸ See *Performance Philosophy*, online: <https://www.performancephilosophy.org> (accessed 17/2/2026).

classification within a single domain of inquiry – although perhaps its fertility lies precisely in this resistance.

Given the difficulty of determining what exactly is meant by philosophy and what by performance, PP may be articulated in three distinct ways: “philosophy of performance”, “performative philosophy”, or “philosophical performance”. While a volume such as this might be described in terms of a philosophy of performance (that is, a reflection that uses philosophy as a *tool* to analyse performance as an *object of research*), the other two options – which correspond more directly to PP – oscillate between theory and practice. The risk, as noted earlier, is that of an “excess of openness” that may result in the absence of a precise identity and in a certain methodological confusion regarding both means and ends. Above all, what seems lacking is an initial philosophical analysis of performance – of its structure, articulations, and defining characteristics. Perhaps, despite its undeniable fertility and at times exhilarating potential, this absence constitutes its principal weakness.

Another aspect to be noted is that, albeit to a lesser extent than in Performance Studies, the reference to “theatre” – whether in the critique of the anti-theatricality of Western philosophy or as a domain of reference – and to the dramaturgical dimension remains evident. That said, this presence becomes more attenuated in the 2020 volume and in the issues of the journal «Performance Philosophy»¹⁹, which is characterised by a remarkable breadth and diversity of themes, no longer confined to theatre studies.

Nevertheless, the often-repeated expression *dramaturgical sensitivity* clearly derives from the nature of theatre. It appears to indicate a predilection for an attitude that is not in itself philosophical, but whose scope might prove fruitful for a wide-ranging inquiry into reality, practices, and the world – into all that may be described (or reduced to) the “performative”: investigating reality with dramaturgical sensitivity.

Here, however, a possible objection arises in light of PP’s declared non-Eurocentric orientation: is not what is termed *dramaturgical sensitivity* itself profoundly Western? The forms we define as dramaturgical, even when referring to extra-European theatre, are so defined on the basis of Greek and European traditions, in which concepts such as “drama” and “dramaturgical” are central. The Aristotelian unities of time, place, and action shaped European theatre and culture for over two millennia, influencing even our modes of interpreting non-European theatrical experiences. If due attention is not paid to the cultural specificity of this vocabulary, one risks inadvertently reproducing Eurocentrism – even while rightly seeking to transcend it.

¹⁹ See «Performance Philosophy Journal», online: <https://www.performancephilosophy.org/journal> (accessed 17/2/2026).

Such an intention – to move beyond Eurocentrism – deserves to be realised, with the aim of «decolonize performance philosophy»²⁰, opening it to African, Chinese, Indian, Japanese, and Latin American thought.

One of PP's most significant merits lies precisely in its challenge to what is taken for granted and regarded as unchangeable: established ways of practising philosophy and established ways of understanding and enacting performance. It does so also by experimenting with new communicative modes, opening philosophical debate to new languages, formats, and signs.

In concentrating on philosophical performance, PP appears to investigate the philosophical gradient of performance (though which performance remains an open question), attributing to performance the capacity to articulate something philosophically. Understood instead as performative philosophy, PP seeks to recover philosophy's own performative vocation, tracing it back to the ancient performative roots of philosophical practice and to the philosophical roots of activities we would today describe as performative, such as oratory and theatre. In both cases, the perspective is inter- and transdisciplinary, faithful to an ethos of openness, self-renewal, and continuous reconfiguration, and oriented towards ethical and civic engagement.

PP thus invites us to consider alternative ways of doing philosophy, reflecting on how it may be positively transformed through its engagement with the performing arts and with performance in a broader sense. Its aim is reciprocal transformation grounded in intercultural dialogue, seeking to overcome gaps and inequalities that also affect the academic world. The point, therefore, is not merely to reinforce a humanistic conception of philosophy as an intellectual activity that promotes the emancipation of the marginalised on the basis of a presumed "commonality", but rather to consider how to «support an actual and ongoing *pluralization* of thinking and *equalization* of knowledges; how it will practise an ethics in thought built not on resemblance but difference, not quantitative expansion but qualitative mutation»²¹.

²⁰ Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca – Alice Lagaay, *Introduction* to Id. (edited by), *The Routledge Companion to Performance Philosophy*, cit., p. 12.

²¹ *Ivi*, p. 13.