

# Review of *Kapitoly z estetiky múzických umení*

Zuzana Slušná

Kopčáková, S. and Kušnírová, E. (2024) *Kapitoly z estetiky múzických umení*. Prešov: Vydavateľstvo Prešovskej univerzity. ISBN 978-80-555-3262-2



If a theorist contemplates art in the 21st century, they may encounter a situation reminiscent of artist Robert Irwin's humorous observation that contemporary theory has stretched the concept of art to such an extent that its original meaning has blurred. As the parameters for defining art continuously expand, theoretical reflection becomes increasingly specialized and fragmented. Art theory, as a discipline, requires navigating with insight and knowledge across a varied context. Given that current theories in aesthetics and the arts often fail to clarify, refine, or define key terms, there is an urgent need for texts that provide readers with a basic orientation through concise yet expertly informed content. In the performing arts realm, this need is addressed by the

undergraduate textbook *Chapters in the Aesthetics of the Performing Arts*, co-authored by Slávka Kopčáková and Eva Kušnírová, and published by the University of Prešov Press, which aims to provide an overview of key theories in the field.

Publications introducing readers to specific discursive areas of aesthetics are scarce in the Slovak book market, making the reviewed text a welcome addition. The authors of the textbook engage in this discourse from the outset by focusing on the field of *múzických umení* [musical arts],<sup>1</sup> as indicated in the title. While they explore areas involving live interactions between artists and audiences, they refrain from using the more contemporary term performing arts. Instead, the authors clarify the semantic distinctions between *múzické umenia* and performing arts. This clarification of terminological specificities and the precise use of basic terms are crucial aspects of the textbook's quality. The statement emphasizes the textbook's role as an essential resource, providing fundamental information for students and those wishing to update or expand their knowledge and understanding.

One positive aspect of this text is that it maintains a unified interpretative approach while extending beyond traditional art disciplines to underscore the interdisciplinary connections between fields such as aesthetics, philosophy of art, and art theory. Kopčáková and Kušnírová transcend the boundaries of conventional textbook introductions, emphasizing a broader artistic and theoretical context, and the text displays several characteristics of a monographic work. As both authors have previously published monographic works, including textbooks, the stylistic and morphological depth of this text is expected. In the present work, the authors effectively synthesize and organize key aesthetic-philosophical and art historical approaches pertinent to the performing arts. They consider the essential body of knowledge in the field of aesthetics of the performing arts and introduce foundational theories of performativity, referencing scholars like Wittgenstein, Austin, Goffman, and Eco. They focus on the development of performativity theory, tracing its implications from social sciences to the philosophy of art and subsequently to theoretical reflections on art itself. While the textbook is primarily aimed at students and teachers of aesthetics at Slovak universities, its interdisciplinary nature makes it relevant for a wider audience, including students of art and art science.

The authors skillfully elucidate the broader contextual background of the so-called performative turn by using examples from the fields of music and the performing arts, including figures like Cage, Kaprow, Kubkovič, Piaček, and Abramovič. These sections are relevant not only for their clarification and description of the artistic context but also for demonstrating why it was necessary to move toward the partitioning and specification of terms in theoretical reflection. Drawing on Central European aesthetics and art theory, the authors utilize key and established theoretical works while addressing the terminological specificities of terms such as performance, performativity,

<sup>1</sup> In the Slovak context, the use of the term *múzické umenie* (from the Latin and Greek word *muse*) is an old expression to refer to what is called in English *performing arts*.

happening, and event. The chapters are systematically and logically structured, providing an understanding of the social and philosophical contexts in which these theories were articulated.

The textbook comprises four well-structured chapters: *the Philosophy of Performativity and its Aesthetic Consequences*, *Performativity and Performance in Music*, *Performing Arts in Theatre and Aesthetics of the Performing Arts*. Slávka Kopčáková authored the first two chapters, while Eva Kušnírová wrote the third and fourth. The authors map key theoretical backgrounds and present the latest domestic and international approaches and works. The interpretation style is didactic, avoiding complicated academic language and unnecessary technical terms,

The first chapter, *The Philosophy of Performativity*, considers the position of the performing arts within the broader arts system. It systematically categorizes and conceptualizes the aesthetics of the performing arts, clarifying the key theoretical frameworks underlying current definitions. The chapter emphasizes the interactions and connections between *muzickými uměními* and performing arts, contextualizing their transformation within the art scene. The author broadens the discussion by incorporating interdisciplinary theoretical contexts and specifying key notions such as performance, performativity, happening, and event. Focusing on connections between experiment, performing art, and art-based research, the author identifies developmental shifts in the theoretical reflection on experimental music. The chapter maps out the philosophical-theoretical connections between significant 'turns' in 20th-century art history, such as the performative turn and the psychological turn, and refines the meanings of terms like experimental and avant-garde music.

The second chapter, *Performativity and performance in music*, defines key terms such as performance, action (event) and happening, focusing on the philosophical-aesthetic context in which these terms emerged within 20<sup>th</sup>-century theoretical reflection, with an emphasis on the contributions of Cage and the Fluxus movement. The author elucidates 'performativeness' not only as an art category but also as a principle emerging from experimental and postmodern music approaches. The chapter highlights the differences in theoretical approaches using examples like Marek Piaček's event model of music and Ladislav Kupkovič's initiatives. It also explores the distinctions between the terms event and happening within art disciplines, emphasizing key theoretical works from the domestic environment, including those by Kajanová, Martináková, and Piaček.

The third and fourth chapters, *Performing Arts in the Theatre* and *Aesthetics of Performing Art*, outline the theoretical frameworks for terms such as performativity, performance studies, and performance in contexts related to the performing arts. The author clarifies the terminological and conceptual distinctions between happening, event, performance, and action within the field of theatre. This exploration extends to the use of the concept of performance beyond the theater, providing insight into the cultural and social contexts in which this new model of art emerged. The chapter *Performing Arts in the Theatre*

maps the application of concepts and principles related to the 'performative turn' across various art forms, particularly music and visual arts. The chapter *Aesthetics of Performing Art* goes deeper into the origins and connections of performance as a process that enhances the interactions between objects, subjects, place, and time. The author pays particular attention to the interdisciplinary connections of aesthetic theories of performativity, focusing on four attributive properties: materiality, spatiality, corporeality, and sonority, while emphasizing the processual nature of the phenomena analyzed.

These chapters also provide a comprehensive examination of the theories of performativity by Fischer-Lichte and Schechner. The unifying theme of the presented theories, in addition to the performative turn, is the perception of art as a social act. Kušnířová further explores new concepts of viewer perception, emphasizing experiential aspects often linked to the active participation of involved actors.

In addition to its comprehensive content and focus, it is important to highlight that the authors of the reviewed text made a concerted effort to adhere to didactic principles suitable for university textbooks. Unlike many texts claiming to be university textbooks but lacking key parameters, this work maintains didactic principles, especially in clarifying key concepts and terms. The text is consistent and logically structured, facilitating an understanding of the relationships and connections between individual theories and concepts. Clarity and comprehensibility are further enhanced through graphical elements, such as the use of different typefaces and the marking of key concepts in bold or italics, which improve text clarity and help the reader navigate the textbook.

Each chapter is of adequate length, and the formal arrangement is appropriate. The authors employ tables as extratextual components, though the absence of a picture appendix is a drawback given the textbook's focus on the performing arts. Despite this, the chapters flow seamlessly from one to the next. The authors include common terms used in the Slovak environment for individual key concepts, thus expanding students' terminological knowledge. In conclusion, this textbook is well-founded and versatile, appealing not only to students of aesthetics but also to experts in artistic disciplines. It serves as an excellent foundation for further research, making it valuable for both students and scholars.

Zuzana Slušná  
Institute of Aesthetics and Art Culture  
Faculty of Arts, University of Presov, Slovakia  
[zuzana.slusna@unipo.sk](mailto:zuzana.slusna@unipo.sk)

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.12737238