

PERFORMANCE

Performance as a Pathway to Human Development

Performance is the continuous activity of producing how we are in the world. It is not merely expressive; it is generative. What matters most is the collective creation of supportive social environments in the moment, where people can exercise their capacity for ongoing emotional and developmental growth.

The internalization of predetermined social roles often obstructs development. Performance offers an activity-theoretical framework to confront a critical question: How do we promote human development amid social decay? It is the act of breaking free from fixed identities and roles, of stepping into possibility.

Traditional psychology has long taught that development is a private, internal process, one that unfolds in fixed stages and culminates in a stable identity. It suggests that mental health depends on a strong sense of self and that learning is contingent on how developed we already are. Activity theory challenges this view. It proposes that development is social, dynamic, and emergent through activity.

What is central, then, is the creation of new Zones of Proximal Development (ZPDs), new kinds of social environments that foster learning and growth through shared activity. For civilization to advance, we must cultivate new forms of life. We must create human development.

Psychologically oriented programs often impose pejorative value judgments. They label youth as “troubled,” “at risk,” or “a problem.” These programs tacitly enforce behavioral expectations, measuring success through indicators of what they deem good or bad, adaptive or maladaptive. Such expectations are undemocratic, coercive, and intrusive. They reinforce institutional arrangements that overdetermine social roles. In effect, they are anti-development.

Performance offers a radically different approach, one urgently needed in this historical moment of developmental crisis. In a society marked by social decay, random violence, and deepening poverty, performance becomes a tool for transformation. It supports the collective creation of new social environments that are radically democratic, where participants share responsibility for what they are doing together. It is a new kind of play—a continuous performance of life.

Inspired by children's play, performance is the activity of doing what you don't yet know how to do. In play, children perform ahead of their development.

Performance, too, is a developmental dialectic of being and becoming. It carries the improvisational spirit of play, maximized through the activity of creating, developing, and performing our lives.

Performance promotes development by disrupting identity, by breaking out of internalized social roles. Through performance, people can enact who they are not, and in doing so, reinitiate growth. If you can perform "you doing you," then you can also perform "you doing something else."

Performance is not acting. it is a creative imitation. It is the activity of not being you. It stretches the self beyond its boundaries, allowing you to be "you and not you" simultaneously.

Performance is demanding. People often resist the idea that they can change, that they can develop. But the truth is: development is always possible. At any point in life.