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THE PROPHET AS PERFORMER: AN ANALYSIS OF SYMBOLIC ACTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Abstract: The aim of this article is to investigate the potential relationships between the manifestations of Old Testament prophets and contemporary actionism, using the case study method, the hermeneutics of the artistic act and the performative criticism method. The starting hypothesis is that the actions performed by biblical prophets can be described as performative acts, through the use of their own bodies, language, gestures, objects with symbolic functions, a specific scenography of the prophetic act, and even the ritualistic aspect of the manifestation, all intended to convey a supernatural message. The research results may indicate that by assigning a precise purpose to the action, using a well-defined scenography, and integrating gestures and language with symbolic-ritual characteristics, a correlation can be established between the biblical prophet and the actionist artist. The prophet could be attributed the qualities of a performer, and his manifestation could be defined as a performative act.

Keywords: performative act, performance, prophet, artist, action, scenography, ritual

The phenomenon of performativity in art is relatively recent² when compared to classical techniques and media of expression. However, the motivation behind this type of artistic expression in contemporary times is well justified (by artists) and analyzed (by critics). It seems even more challenging to turn back in time to a context devoid of ties to actionism or performative expression, such as the prophetic period of the Old Testament, in order to observe whether the actions of certain prophets might exhibit characteristics of an action³/performative act.

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² “Performance art: An evolution of HAPPENING and FLUXUS during the 1970s. Performance artists were also inspired by avant-garde music and dance. Sometimes the artist performed (...), and sometimes he or she designed the performance. In 1969 the dancer-coreographer Trisha Brown (born 1936) had a man equipped with mountaineering gear descend a seven-story building in New York City. Two performance artists as Gilbert and George (Gilbert Proesch, born 1943, and George Passmore, born 1942) are Britishers who collaborate as „Living Sculpture.” In The Singing Sculpture (“Underneath the Arches”), performed in 1971, they painted themselves bronze and danced, with mechanical movements, on top of a table. Under the table a tape played a song about two tramps, beneath the arches of a bridge, fantasizing in their dreams. Part of their rationale is that they, as artists (trained at Saint Martin’s School of Art in London), could embody art and carry it out as they saw fit.” (Nancy Frazier, *The Penguin Concise Dictionary of Art History*, Penguin Reference, New York, 2000 pp. 511–512).

³ “Actionism,’ on the other hand, is a term that initially overlaps semantically with ‘performance.’ However, its origin is Germanic. Both Joseph Beuys and the Austrian Hermann Nitsch preferred the term ‘Aktion’ over ‘performance,’ specifically and subjectively justifying this choice.” (Mihaela-Florina Tănase, *Accionismul contemporan și conotațiile sale rituale, O abordare istorică și hermeneutică*, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană,

The hypothesis underlying this research is that, although the Old Testament prophets did not explicitly present themselves as artists, and in their actions, they were not intended to position themselves as subjects, their acts nevertheless transcend ordinary human behavior. They have an audience/spectators with whom they interact, convey a (supernatural) message, and make use of their bodies, language, gestures, postures, and objects with symbolic meaning. The action itself, through the symbolism and repetitiveness of the elements, as well as its sometimes ceremonial nature, can take on ritual connotations. Ultimately, the biblical text that records these actions appears to have the characteristics of a post-action script. By recording these details and applying the case study method to the actions of Old Testament prophets, as well as the hermeneutics of the artistic act, we will attempt to demonstrate the viability of the aforementioned hypothesis. In the same vein, we will also employ the method of performative criticism⁴, which can be applied to biblical studies.

Terminology

The terminology we aim to clarify belongs to both the field of art and that of religion, particularly the biblical domain. The correlation between the semantics of these terms could offer a new perspective on approaching prophetic actions, suggesting that, in terms of their organization and manifestation, they may also belong to the artistic sphere.

Moreover, art is a ‘form of human activity and social consciousness, characterized by the creation („establishment”) of expressive structures capable of communicating a specific human emotion in the presence of reality; this emotion has a complex nature, simultaneously encompassing sensoriality, affectivity, and intelligence,⁵ which are characteristic elements of the human spirit. A conjunction between art and spirituality is also noted by the historian of religions, Mircea Eliade, when he observes a tendency among primitive peoples, as well as various civilizations throughout time, to repeat the act of creation, manifested through the universality of spiritual-ritual actions and their consistent aspect over time⁶.

Since ‘the human capacity to generate aesthetic values is linked to the meaning of the Greek term *aisthetikos*, which means “to be sensitive” or “to know through the senses”⁷, and the prophet employs these elements when performing certain actions, we can place prophetic expression within the scope of the aforementioned term. Moreover, the prophet’s sensitivity is one of the characteristics that make him receptive to the divine calling, as ‘the prophet (Heb. *nabhi*, as they are called in the Old Testament, meaning heralds; “the one who announces” in the name of the Lord) – prophets were the heralds, messengers of Yahweh, “speakers on behalf of God” (Exodus 4:16)⁸.

Cluj-Napoca, 2024, p. 183). Also, “Actionism (from Latin *actio* – activity, action) emerged in the 1960s within the artistic environment of Western Europe. In search of new modes of self-realization, artists sought to transform static exhibitions into a kind of action in which they themselves could participate, while also engaging the viewer in a provocative, dynamic process – the action.” (<https://arhive.com/encyclopedia/4269~Actionism> accessed on 17.10.2024).

⁴ “Performance criticism is a critical methodology used to analyze the way in which repeatable and socially recognizable events (e.g., theater, parade, graduation, political inauguration) use specific techniques to powerfully express social values and themes. The application of the methodology to the prophetic literature of the Old Testament is based on the premise that select portions of the OT are literary variations of originally oral compositions presented or recited before live audiences. “Thus says the Lord” and “Hear the word of the Lord” are two common introductions found throughout the Hebrew prophets that, in many important ways, symbolize the whole of the prophetic enterprise. Both phrases imply the oral delivery of an identifiable, repeatable message to an audience. Both phrases announce a performance.” (Mark J. Boda, J. Gordon McConville (editors), *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, USA, 2012, p. 578).

⁵ **Gheorghe Achiței, Marcel Breazu, et. al.**, *Dicționar de estetică generală*, Editura Politică, București, 1972, pp. 30–31.

⁶ **Mircea Eliade**, *Sacrul și profanul*, traducere din franceză de Brîndușa Prelipceanu, Editura Humanitas, București, 2017, p. 37; 55.

⁷ *Art and religion*, Encyclopedia of Religion, Encyclopedia.com., <https://www.encyclopedia.com> (accessed on 17.10.2024).

⁸ **Prof. Ene Braniște**, Prof. Ecaterina Braniște, *Dicționar de cunoștințe religioase*, Editura Andreiana, Sibiu, 2010, p. 356.

The prophet's role as a herald places him between God and man, as an intermediary, a position very characteristic of the artist as well. '[Prophets], in various religions, are individuals who possess the gift of conveying the divine message. In a narrower sense, they are the authors of certain books of the Old Testament, called to instruct the Jewish people and guide them in various circumstances. The four major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel) appear frequently in sacred imagery. Prophet Elijah is also widely represented. Other prophets are depicted in groups, often in friezes or medallions on the walls of Orthodox churches, and less frequently on Gothic churches' western façades, around the portal (Fr. *prophète*, It. *profeta*, Ger. *Prophet*, Eng. *prophet*).⁹

The quality of being an artist, as 'one who professionally cultivates the arts [...] and demonstrates creative activity through which the artist proves their talent,¹⁰ cannot be attributed to the Old Testament prophet, if we refer to the intention of using personal attributes to convey the divine message. However, in a broader, more contemporary sense, the artist in general, and the performative artist in particular, transcend these boundaries, adopting an attitude where the protagonist of the action does not make themselves known, but rather uses their own body to convey a message.

Among the similarities between prophetic action and performative action is its 'live' dimension. *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance* distinguishes five meanings of the word 'performance': 'first, it is used to identify the live event of presenting a typically pre-prepared material in front of an audience. This can involve the presentation of any kind of performative art, including theatre, music, dance, circus, or martial arts, happenings, improvised performances, etc. Important characteristics of this definition are the live nature of the performance and, usually, the expectation that the performer will create a sense of presence. (...) Secondly, in a broader sense, the term performance describes all social behaviors, (...) namely everyday behavior. (...) Theorists in anthropology and sociology have identified elements of repetitive or restored behavior in social and ritual conduct, (...) which are essential for performance. (...) A third usage (...) refers to success and achievements (...). (...) This usage shifts the focus from the process of performance to its result and product. Fourth, the term is still often used as a synonym for performative art and body art, as a result of a history of fine art practices. These forms of performance gained prominence in the 1980s and often exploited the live nature, presence, and embodiment associated with the first meaning of the term (...)'.¹¹

Symbolic Acts of the Old Testament Prophets

The symbolic acts of the Old Testament prophets encompass both bodily manifestations, gestures, movements, or nonverbal communication, as well as the use of objects and materials, and role interpretation by the prophets, alongside interaction with the audience/public. At times, these acts are representational, while at others, they are figurative/symbolic¹².

Body Actions

Isaiah¹³, one of the major prophets of the Old Testament, at God's command, walked naked for three years: 'In the year that Tartan came to Ashdod, sent by Sargon, king of Assyria, and besieged Ashdod and took it, at that time the Lord spoke by the mouth of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saying: "Go and

⁹ **Mircea Popescu**, *Dicționar de artă, Forme, tehnici, stiluri artistice, N-Z*, vol. II, Editura Meridiane, București, 1998, p. 69.

¹⁰ **Gheorghe Achiței, Marcel Breazu**, *et. al., op. cit.*, p. 37.

¹¹ **Paul Allain, Jen Harvie**, *Ghidul Routledge de teatru și performance*, traducere din engleză de Cristina Modreanu și Ilinca Tamara Todoruț, Editura Nemira, București, 2012, pp. 386–388.

¹² **Mark J. Boda, J. Gordon McConville** (editors), *op. cit.*, pp. 709–710.

¹³ "Isaiah (Heb. *Yeshayahu* – 'salvation of Yahweh') is one of the four major prophets of the Old Testament (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel). He lived in the 8th century BC in Judea, advocating for the renewal and strengthening of the religious life of his people. He prophesied the coming of the Savior, providing accurate and detailed information about Him and the messianic kingdom, earning him the title of 'the Evangelist of the Old Testament.' In his prophecy, Isaiah gave the Messiah the name *Emmanuel* ('God is with us,' Isaiah 7:14):

remove the sackcloth from your hips and take your sandals off your feet.” And he did so, going naked and barefoot. And the Lord said: “Just as My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and portent against Egypt and Ethiopia, so shall the king of Assyria lead away captives from Egypt and exiles from Ethiopia, young and old, naked and barefoot, with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.”¹⁴ (Isaiah 20:1–4)

In the category of bodily prophetic acts, the prophet Jeremiah¹⁵ can also be included, as God commands him to wear a yoke: ‘Thus says the Lord: Make for yourself bonds and yokes and put them on your neck; [...] But the people who submit to the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will leave in their own land, and they shall till it and dwell in it, says the Lord.’¹⁶ (Jeremiah 27:2; 11)

One of the most serious and impactful bodily actions is performed by the prophet Ezekiel¹⁷, who lies on his left side for 390 days and then on his right side for 40 days, at God’s command: ‘And you, son of man, lie on your left side, and lay the iniquities of the house of Israel upon it; for the number of days that you lie on it, you shall bear their iniquities. For I have laid on you the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days—390 days; so you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. And when you have completed them, lie again on your right side, and you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah for 40 days, each day for a year I have appointed you. Therefore, you shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem, with your arm bared, and prophesy against it.’¹⁸

In the same bodily register, gesturality can also be included. Jeremiah wears a linen belt: ‘Thus says the Lord: “Go and buy yourself a linen belt and put it around your waist, but do not put it in water.” [...] “Take the belt that you have bought, which is around your waist, and arise, go to the Euphrates, and hide it there in a cleft of the rock!” [...] So I went to the Euphrates and dug, and I took the belt (...), but the belt had become ruined and was good for nothing. [...] “So will I break the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem.”’¹⁹ (Jeremiah 13:1–9)

In the category of gestures, we also include the clapping of hands and the exclamation ‘Alas!’ by Ezekiel: ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Strike your hand together and stamp your foot and say: Alas for

‘The Lord himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel.’”(Prof. Ene Braniște, Prof. Ecaterina Braniște, *op. cit.*, p. 206).

¹⁴ *Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2018, pp. 757–758.

¹⁵ “Jeremiah is one of the four major prophets of the Old Testament (...). He lived in the second half of the 7th century BC and was the son of the priest Hilkiyah from the town of Anathoth, in ‘the land of Benjamin’ (Jer. 1:1), near Jerusalem. Jeremiah was chosen for the prophetic mission even before his birth (Jer. 1:5). He began his prophetic ministry in the thirteenth year of King Josiah’s reign when he was about 20 years old (Jer. 25:3), and he carried out his work for over 40 years. From the books written by him, it is evident that he led a very tumultuous life, constantly in conflict with the political and religious leaders due to their immorality and unbelief, confronting them solely with his strong faith in God and his prophetic mission. Without moral living, he asserted, the sacrifices offered at the temple and the entire cult hold no value before God, who alone is the master of the universe and possesses all power. (...) The end of Jeremiah is believed to have been tragic.” (Prof. Ene Braniște, Prof. Ecaterina Braniște, *op. cit.*, p. 191).

¹⁶ *Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură*, *idem*, p. 828.

¹⁷ “Ezekiel (Heb. *Yehezkel* – ‘God will strengthen’) is the name of the third major prophet of the Old Testament and of the prophetic book he authored. He was taken into captivity during the Babylonian exile (under Nebuchadnezzar, in 597 BC). He married and lived among the Jewish exiles by the Chebar River, south of Babylon. He began his prophetic ministry at the age of 30, seven years before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, a ministry that would last for at least 22 years. Ezekiel addresses: – the exiles in Babylon, showing that the exile is not an injustice from God, but a consequence of their own sins; – the Jews who remained in Judah, warning them that unless they repent from the idolatry that has even tainted the Temple, it will be destroyed, and Jerusalem will be laid waste; – all the exiles, after the fall of Jerusalem, whom he comforts and strengthens with the optimism of his vision regarding their return from exile, the purification of the people, the restoration of the Temple, and the re-establishment of monotheistic worship.” (Prof. Ene Braniște, Prof. Ecaterina Braniște, *op. cit.*, p. 155).

¹⁸ *Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură*, *idem*, p. 871.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 813.

all the evil abominations of the house of Israel! For they shall fall by the sword, famine, and pestilence because of all their iniquities!”²⁰ (Ezekiel 6:11). Additionally, there is the action of eating and drinking trembling, performed by the same prophet: ‘Son of man, eat your bread with trembling, and drink your water with trembling and anxiety!’²¹ (Ezekiel 12:18). There is also the action of sighing: ‘You, son of man, sigh with a breaking heart...’²² (Ezekiel 21:6–7), the act of shouting and striking his thighs, and clapping his hands: ‘But you, son of man, prophesy and strike your hands together...’ (Ezekiel 21:8–17), and the action of refraining from weeping at the burial of his wife: ‘Son of man, behold, I will take away from you the desire of your eyes with a blow; yet you shall not mourn or weep, nor shall your tears run down. Sigh in silence and make no mourning for the dead...’²³ (Ezekiel 24:15–24)

Non-verbal communication as a gesture of warning regarding the disobedience of the Jews to God is manifested in Ezekiel when God leaves him mute for a time, symbolically (Ezekiel 3:24–27; 24:25–27).

The Prophet as Interpreter/Role Player

In the context of the prophetic biblical actions of the Old Testament, the figure of the prophet appears as one who assumes various roles, similar to that of an artist, at the request of God. He can embody both the people and God. ‘In the role of the people, the prophet portrayed the people’s past, present, or future behavior (“So the audience has done, is doing, or will do”). Ezekiel eats rationed portions of food (Ezekiel 4:9–11) to illustrate the people’s consumption of limited quantities during the siege of Jerusalem. [...] When in the role of God, the prophet depicted how God acted toward the people, who were often signified through artifacts. Jeremiah shattered the jar, demonstrating that God would destroy Jerusalem (Jeremiah 19:10–11). Jeremiah wore the linen waist sash to signify God binding the people close to Himself. Just as Jeremiah removed it and buried it, so God would remove His people into exile (Jeremiah 13:1–11).’²⁴

Use of Objects and Materials

In order to highlight, exemplify, compare, or substitute meanings related to the relationship of the Jewish people with the divinity, and always at the express command of God, the prophet employs materials and objects in the execution of his actions. For example, Jeremiah wears a sash around his waist and performs various actions with it until it deteriorates, symbolizing the destruction of the arrogant attitude of the Jews toward God (Jeremiah 13:1–11). The same prophet purchases a clay pot in the presence of the elders of the people and the leaders of the priests, delivers a speech, and then breaks the pot in a symbolic gesture with a strong visual impact (Jeremiah 19:1–13). He offers wine to the Rechabites in the temple, which they refuse, highlighting, in contrast to the attitude of the Jews, their obedience to the laws established by their ancestors (Jeremiah 35). Ezekiel makes incisions on a brick, representing Jerusalem, and creates a scene using objects and gestures (Ezekiel 4:1–3). He consumes portions of food and water: wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt, from which he makes bread, eating while lying on his side for 390 days. The quantities of water and food are precise and carry symbolic meaning, while the method of baking is shocking, even for the interpreter, as he uses human excrement, with the action taking place in the presence of the Jewish audience: ‘And you shall bake the bread as cakes of barley and you shall bake it in their sight with human dung’ (Ezekiel 4:12).’²⁵

Spectators / Audience

All prophetic actions are performed with a precise purpose and directed toward the audience, as suggested by verbs such as: say, shout, call, prophesy! If the concept of the action is of a divine nature,

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 872.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 877.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 888.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 893.

²⁴ **Mark, J. Boda, J. Gordon McConville** (editors), *op. cit.*, pp. 709–710.

²⁵ *Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură*, *idem*, p. 871.

and the prophet occupies the role of intermediary, then the spectators are the recipients of the prophetic messages. In this sense, the prophet is both subject and object, while the Jewish people are the recipients of the message and the observers of the action. The demand for interpretation of the message often comes from the spectators to the prophet, who has this role as well: ‘But the people said to me, “Will you not tell us what these things mean for us that you are doing?”’²⁶ (Ezekiel 24:19) or the exhortation ‘And you, son of man, take up a lamentation for the leaders of Israel and say...’²⁷ (Ezekiel 19:1) or ‘Say to the people of the land...’²⁸ (Ezekiel 12:19).

Considerations on the Performative Aspect of Prophetic Actions: A Comparative View

The aspects highlighted above regarding the symbolic prophetic actions could be related and translated into artistic language in an attempt to observe and demonstrate that they can be considered performative actions, perhaps not in the strict contemporary sense of the term, understanding that we are dealing with two completely opposite spatio-temporal coordinates. Nevertheless, certain specific features of contemporary performance are inevitably present in the symbolic prophetic actions.

The Use of the Body as a Medium for Conveying Information

Performative art, beginning with Viennese Actionism in the 1960s, focused on expression through the artist’s body²⁹, which becomes an instrument of manifestation and an intermediary in conveying a message to the audience. While the actionists created shocking performances with their own bodies³⁰, a similar phenomenon can be identified in the extreme manifestations of the prophet Ezekiel, who lays on one side of his body for 390 days and then on the other side for 40 days (Ezekiel 4). This is also evident in Isaiah’s act of walking naked for three years (Isaiah 20:1–4), Jeremiah wearing a yoke (Jeremiah 27), or Ezekiel shaving his head, symbolically dividing his hair into three parts, burning one part and throwing another (Ezekiel 5). The common element is the seriousness of conveying a message to spectators (who are present in both cases), which highlights the social dimension of the performance. “Performance puts the body in a state of extreme risk, with the body destabilizing its limits at the forefront. The body becomes the subject of all performative actions (from Viennese Actionism to the interventions of artists like Gina Pane or Ana Mendieta), permanently placed in relation to various political contexts reflected in its transformations and modulations. Permeated by social and political convulsions, the body assimilates them and transposes them into its own becoming. (...) Performance questions, in fact, the existence of the limits that keep the body captive within a known perimeter, and relies on liberation from the constraints imposed by these limits and on sensory overexposure.”³¹

Contemporary artists such as Orlan³², Hermann Nitsch³³, Ion Grigorescu³⁴, and Amalia Perjovschi³⁵ interrogate the body from physical, psychological, social, political, and even spiritual perspectives. The prophet performs bodily actions at the request of God, with similar meanings.

Gesturality

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 893.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 895.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 878.

²⁹ “Body art is a radical performative art that explicitly utilizes the artist’s own body to visually, sensorially, and often viscerally comment on their identity, while also bringing to life the social meanings of the body and its expressive possibilities.” (Paul Allain, Jen Harvie, *op. cit.*, p. 279).

³⁰ We refer, for example, to the Viennese actionists (Hermann Nitsch, Otto Muehl, Rudolf Schwarzkogler).

³¹ **Mihaela Michailov**, *Corpuri radicale în spectacole contemporane*, Editura Vellant, București, 2021, p. 89.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 116.

³³ **Mihaela-Florina Tănase**, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 279.

³⁵ **Mihaela Michailov**, *op. cit.*, pp. 146–147.

The use of symbolic gestures is a component of the performative act, just as it is in prophetic action. We can mention the actions of Joseph Beuys, in which certain gestures took on ritual dimensions, such as the repetition of a sound resembling that of a stag in *The Chief* (1964) or the performance of various gestures such as cleaning gelatin off the wall, spinning in the middle of the stage in *Celtic (Kinloch Rannoch) Scottish Symphony* (1970), washing feet³⁶, etc. Similarly, the biblical prophet remains mute for a period (Ezekiel 3), holds out his right hand (Ezekiel 4–5), points to Jerusalem, groans (Ezekiel 21:6–7), cries out, and claps his hands (Ezekiel 6:11–12).

The Use of Objects

In the context of action, artists use objects and materials to metamorphose personal concepts into tangible elements, just as Hermann Nitsch integrates animal carcasses, organs, blood, fruits, and scents to produce physical sensations in the participants, triggering *abreaction* or catharsis. Joseph Beuys imbues objects and materials such as felt, fat, copper, and personal items from his past with the idea of healing a trauma that, by extension, refers to social trauma, attempting to ignite the creativity of spectators through any artistic means, affirming his concept of *Social Sculpture*. Similarly, the prophets, at the divine request, utilize objects with symbolic significance to demonstrate God's action toward the people³⁷ (Jeremiah 19:10–11; Jeremiah 13:1–11; Ezekiel 4): “And you, son of man, take a brick and lay it before you, and engrave on it a city, Jerusalem. Then lay siege against it, build a siege wall against it, and cast up a mound against it; set camps against it also, and place battering rams against it all around. Moreover, take for yourself an iron plate and set it as an iron wall between you and the city; and set your face toward it, and it shall be besieged, and you shall lay siege against it. This will be a sign to the house of Israel.”³⁸ Thus, the prophet creates a true installation to visually express the divine concept.

The Audience / Spectators / Public

A component of the performative action is the audience, which highlights the very motivation for its realization. Generally, spectators are participants in a theatrical manifestation or a performance; however, in contemporary terms, the emphasis shifts from traditional stages to adjacent spaces (streets, art galleries, museums, etc.), with newer concepts of theater emerging where interaction between artist and audience becomes possible. Antonin Artaud, in *The Theater and Its Double* (1938), develops the concept of a “theater of cruelty,”³⁹ where movement and the inclusion of the audience within the stage space appear.

In the case of prophetic actions, the audience is an integrated element, being the very recipients of the message. The existence of eyewitnesses is documented in biblical texts (Jeremiah 19:1–10; Ezekiel 4:12; 12:3–7), as well as the responses of the audience (Ezekiel 12:9; 21:7; 24:19).

The dramatized⁴⁰ manner of conveying the divine message through the prophet holds major efficacy, with the act itself attempting to prevent the reality of its occurrence. On the other hand, unlike contemporary performance, the prophetic action is a concrete manifestation of divinity⁴¹ in biblical times, aimed at convincing the audience, changing their relationship with the divine, and restoring the public-divinity relationship in the terms that existed before the fall into sin.

Scenography

In contemporary performative acts, planning carries less weight than in theatrical representations, where *mimesis* is more pronounced. The actions allow for greater artistic expression through the integration of improvisation. While some artists prefer to create “scores” (Joseph Beuys), musical scores for

³⁶ Mihaela-Florina Tănase, *op. cit.*, 211.

³⁷ Mark J. Boda, J. Gordon McConville (editors), *op. cit.*, p. 710.

³⁸ *Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură*, *idem*, pp. 870–871.

³⁹ Paul Allain, Jen Harvie, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁴⁰ Mark J. Boda, J. Gordon McConville (editors), *op. cit.*, p. 711.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

the sound background (Hermann Nitsch), or preliminary drawings for the action, the organization of the space affected by the performance, and its delineation (Joseph Beuys), prophetic actions are “oral compositions presented, recited live in front of audiences,”⁴² whose script is the biblical text itself, created post-action. The divine script is precise (Ezekiel 21:6–7) and includes directives regarding the corporeality of the prophet, gestures, discourse, non-discourse, the use of objects, and various materials, to create and share a reality with the audience in a dynamic, credible, and transformative way.

The faithful execution of each stage of the action adds a new dimension to it, namely the ritual aspect, through the rendering of the divine discourse, as well as through the spiritual purpose.

Conclusions

In this sense, prophetic manifestations, although not considered artistic acts—with the actor not being the conceptual producer of the action, but God, thus lacking the characteristic of artistic intentionality, self-production in the artistic act, and the transmission of a personal message—can still possess the attributes of the performer, meaning the prophets can “entertain the audience by acting, singing, dancing, or performing on an instrument.”⁴³ The manner in which they manifest can be regarded as a performative act, by incorporating the characteristic elements of this form of artistic expression. This has been demonstrated above, providing a new interpretive framework for symbolic prophetic actions as actions with a performative character.

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⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 578.

⁴³ Performer, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/performer> (accessed on 17.10.2024).