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Writing performance : on relations between texts and performances

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Conclusions

First Conclusion

The first conclusion is that one can roughly differentiate relations between texts and performances of extrinsic and of intrinsic nature. Extrinsic relations are external relations in which text and performance stay besides each other and come together only in the reception, as in the case of most paratexts. Intrinsic relations are inner relations of texts and performances; as in the case of scores which reach far into the performances themselves. Intertextuality in general as well all the texts that are written before a performance with the aim of being performed belong to this category. In the case of intrinsic relations, we can speak of *interrelations* between text and performance.

Second Conclusion

The second conclusion, which I consider to be more important, is that texts have two functions in relation to performances: an interpretative function and a recording function.

The interpretative function explains the potential of a text to be read in different ways. This potential was emphasized by post-structuralist thinkers like Derrida.¹⁵⁸ It can be identified in a broad sense with the Derridean notions of dissemination, iterability, *différance*, force of law and game. These terms all stress the idea that text has a meaning which cannot be determined by the author and her or his intention. The interpretative function means the potential of being read, and this includes generating meaning beyond the intention of the author, that is, it is caused by the subjectivity of the performers and/or by the inner logic of a text. The meaning of a text to be performed lies in its potential performances and is made visible through them and amongst others in collaboration-based performance practices.

The recording function means the ability to store, fix, represent and maintain information about a performance. This function plays a role in communicating the

¹⁵⁸ It was emphasized not only by Derrida, but by other post-structuralist thinkers like Roland Barthes, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva as well.

concept, the intention, images and/or thoughts that an artist has of an upcoming performance, and potentially enables its reproduction; further, it enables one to “record” a received performance or aspects of it in the form of descriptions, reports or audio/visual recordings.

The specific concern of this dissertation has been to answer the question whether it is possible to conceive of the relation between text and performance as non-hierarchical or not. The general conclusion is that a non-hierarchical relation between text and performance is practically and theoretically possible. But this is only valid in regard to the interpretative function of texts related to performances. In order to answer this question it was necessary to distinguish between the recording function and the interpretative function.

Like literary texts, texts related to performances can have an autonomous status and be read as unconnected to the performance it is referring to. This counts for texts that have the interpretative function. The fact that a text can be read in itself, and be further developed through interpretation (or translation) makes something autonomous out of it.

Texts that have the function of recording (information about) a performance do not have an autonomous status. They refer to what they attempt to represent and fix it. The recording function makes something secondary out of a text. It cannot be read in the sense of being interpreted beyond the scope of the recorded performances.

For realizing performances, both the recording function, which maintains, and the interpretative function, which generates, are necessary, often at the same time. For example, the generative rule “Whenever someone looks at you, start to sing,” appeared in the performance,¹⁵⁹ together with the text to be sung. This text is written down in order to be maintained. Besides the fact that for the production of a performance texts from both categories are often needed, there are also some cases in which both functions appear in one text, and determined elements and open elements are combined with each other.

Moreover, these functions themselves cannot always be clearly separated; there are transitions, variations, combinations and gradual differences. Their purpose often lies

¹⁵⁹ “Self-Portrait,” Lilo Nein; shown within the exhibition *Self-Timer Stories* at Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León (MUSAC) in 2015. <https://vimeo.com/user68591043>

somewhere in between determining how a performance should look or sound, and making this act reproducible on the one hand, and on the other, producing a score or a text that is open to interpretation and improvisation, and thus triggering as many different performances as possible. However, usually it is possible to say which of the functions is more prevalent in a text.

Third Conclusion

The third and last conclusion is that a categorical division into texts before performances and texts after performances does not necessarily make sense. The aim of describing a past performance is akin to the aim of determining a future performance and/or making it reproducible. Although the purpose of maintaining an existing performance differs from generating something that is not imagined and/or has not happened yet, writing is neutral in regard to the material it captures. For writing it makes no difference whether the material is derived from the physical world (the sensible) or from thought or imagination (the intelligible). Therefore it does not matter whether or not a performance has already been performed, and likewise whether a score is written a priori or a posteriori. This neutrality is not dependent on the function; it applies to the recording function and likewise to the interpretative function.

In closing, I briefly want to recall the most important connections between these conclusions and the literature I have drawn upon. Concerning understanding the role of the recording and the interpretative function of texts, Plato and Derrida were the most important sources. In *Phaidros* Plato points out that one cannot rely on the recording function of writing, and that writing also has an interpretative function that we should be aware of. In “Plato’s Pharmacy,” Derrida deconstructs the recording function of writing. He emphatically points to the interpretative function, which he describes as being in the form of a “game,” and which he applies in his own text through his way of writing.

For determining the specific characteristics of texts related to performances such as scores, instructions and rules, Derrida’s notion of the force of law provided valuable insights. One key characteristic of text to be performed is the fact that they define

themselves via the praxis of their “applications,” that is to say through their performances. The force of law emphasizes the eventful aspect of the relation between texts and performances, which also applies to translation.

Translation was used as a term to designate a non-hierarchical relation between text and performance, which is possible, but only in relation to the sphere of what Benjamin calls “pure language,” and which I interpret as being an undeterminable place. The use of the term translation is possible, but not necessary after all. Rather, the places where the equality of texts and performances could be encountered is simply reading, understanding and interpreting that is enabled by the non-intentional aspect of writing – which is a future place to go from here.

The last conclusion I would like to draw concerns my artistic position. This research, including all the components of: 1. reading theory and engaging into a written dialogue with them from the perspective and experience of my artistic practice, as well as 2. to realize research-related projects, and to design and implement the final artistic project, as well as to give presentations during these processes in the PhDArts program and the feedback thereof, has brought me to the conclusion that I perform different roles in relation to the text I write.

Epilogue

TEXT: Yes, I admit that we first had to get to know each other. Or better still: to learn to love one another. After all, we could really use each other’s help! Side by side, each as the complement of the other. Isn’t that a nice thought?

PERFORMANCE: Well, if that is all our relationship is going to be about ... I, for one, certainly imagined love to be something completely different! What do I need a text tugging¹⁶⁰ at me for when I’m already a text myself?

TEXT: You’re right. Why should I love a performance when I myself am a performance? And if I’m so wrapped up in self-love, then who will love you?

¹⁶⁰ The text was originally written in German language. In German, *ziehen* means “to tug.” It is part of the word *Beziehung*, which means relation or love affair. *Beziehung* literally means to be related to one another (*aufeinander bezogen sein*).

PERFORMANCE: Admittedly, in the act of performance I am you; you appear in me. However, we are not united from the start. You should think about that.

TEXT: Are you talking about a separation?

PERFORMANCE: I just want to say that you were not already me before me. That's why we could only get to know each other before you saw me. Maybe we should go have a drink, and you can tell me about you and I can tell you about me.

TEXT: I don't understand. How am I supposed to recognize you before you exist? And don't tell me that that won't be a problem for me.

PERFORMANCE: That's just what I wanted to tell you, and one more thing as well: As long as you don't start thinking for yourself, I will always have existed in your imagination long before we met.

TEXT: I don't want to dream you up for myself. And I don't want you to appear for me. I wish we could agree on a place where you could reveal yourself. I just want to know where I can wait for you.

PERFORMANCE: I can tell you the place. It will be the place where you would still have been Performance and I would still have been Text.

TEXT: Okay. Then you'll wait for me there, and I will rediscover myself in you.