

Immaterial Performance: Knowledge, Everything, Frames, Change

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Knowledge

A Buddhist guru arrives in New York for the first time in his life to give yoga classes, and deliver some mysteries of life to the Western world. On his way to the studio he feels a slight hunger. He desires something genuinely local and decides for a hot dog. He walks up to a near-by sausage stand and announces, as he knows it from the movies: “Make we one with everything.”

Immaterial performance has nothing to do with gurus. Gurus *know* and nourish their existence on the basis that they would under no circumstances contaminate *the knowledge* with personal or other interests. Immaterial performance estimates a different notion of authorship departing from established concepts of autonomy, body of works and self-containment, rejecting the hotdog both due formal aspects - its sculptural quality (straight with mustard) – its ornamental expression – the manifestation of conventional skills (packed up with accessories and impossible to take in) – not to mention its intercultural variation – French hotdog.

Immaterial performance would most probably forget hunger and consider the entire structure’s potentiality, taking place inbetween the performance of the guru, the hotdog vendor, the architectural structure of his carriage and the environment. What particular relationships, what specific spaces can organizations like this create circumstances for? And most of all what kinds of knowledge can be produced, in relationship to what kinds of territories? Immaterial performance insistence on not knowing, its persistence of a spatio-temporal dynamism (its mobility), rather formulates a promise for production without, even the possibility of essence. Immaterial performance therefore is neither a theatre (the architectural structure), nor theatre (a performance) but a process, generated by an “architecture” and a “performance”, constituting a situation, a method of dramatization¹.

Immaterial performance suggests that performance consists of particular scripts that engage, involve, and empower individuals, groups or even objects to perform their existence as becoming. Performance is thus constituted by engagements in defined typologies of scripting and contexts, and not in any respect engaged in the action of performing. Immaterial performance appear through a precision in naming contexts, in accounting an environment or a frame, and through those processes manifest something as performance. Performance in this sense is manifested in relationship to intention rather than through conventions of recognition.

¹ See G. Deleuze: *The Method of Dramatisation*, 1967

Immaterial performance, following George Dickies, claims that the existence of the work as “performance” is due to its being appointed to the status as a “candidate for performance” by agents who are situated inside the “performance world.”

What performance is can therefore no longer be understood on the basis of traditional aesthetics, or through an idea of an experience of form, sense, etc. The question is not: *what* is performance, but: *when* is performance.

This shift implies a passage that can open the stage to capacities of performance emerging through performance intensive, however foreign discourses such as marketing, management, economics, post-colonialism, architecture, biopolitics etc. Immaterial performance proactively suggests that anything can be performance, but *is* not by definition, independent of its ontology and sustained by capacities of activation.

Immaterial performance proposes a shift towards performance as activity, shared through multiplicities of relations, rather than performance as representation. Immaterial performance engages through activation, not in performance, i.e. participation, but as an emancipated spectator *through* intensities of performance.

Immaterial performance expands the notion of the stage towards being able to frame situations where the performer and the audience can merge into one entity, not through conventions of participation, but through the opportunity to charge social interaction and thus politicize everyday behavior.

Immaterial performance performs the performance of the already there, through minimal reconfigurations of spatio-temporal coordination.

Immaterial performance implies a prolific expansive modality of the theatre’s framework, detached from deconstruction or *detournement*, as a plug-in of radical enthusiasm into existing frames of social production. Immaterial performance bypasses narrative, plot or dramatic consistency, in favor of an open heterogeneous production of narratives, and a complexification produced by user interaction and the canceling of drama towards production and (de)-actualization processes.

Immaterial performance expand the understanding of the stage which production is contractual, emphasizing multiplicity and identitarian regimes, into processes of individuation, and is productive of conventions set into motion.

Immaterial performance short-circuits illusion through an affirmative gesture where illusion is no longer an issue. Immaterial performance performs the illusions of everyday life, between individuals and individuals and spatial-temporal frames in a manner where the production of illusion becomes visible in a dynamic and heterogeneous manner. Illusion instead of being the unfaithful veiling of theatre, becomes a possibility of the production of event,

Immaterial performance is a salutation of theatre come situation, where the lights have been turned on, the doors opened and the actors work in the bar. What is there is a performance that cannot be seen or interpreted, but must be experienced, a performance in which performing and spectating are interchangeable. A performance that dissolves skill and perfection (generality), and emphasizes difference and precision (specificity), as a set of terms that are necessarily producing an emancipated spectator. This performance passes from concepts of action to time-image -in cinematic terms.

Everything

Immaterial performance never the less aspire to nothing other than everything, although considered through a reversed logic in relationship to the guru who through his gesture contains it, and aspire to an actualized, fathomable, "everything". The procedures employed by immaterial performance instead set in motion de-actualizing processes and accordingly suspends opportunities of distancing, both in respect of critique - the in situ unfolding of governmentality - and in the sense of Brechtian *Verfremdung*². Fundamental to immaterial performance is the use of overstated, or deliberately blunt representations that cannot be mistaken for content, but function as entry points to non-representational layers. These strata operate as agency for creative actions³ that does not simply break or obey to rules (simultaneously affirming them in the act of transgression), but are actions that changes the grammatical system itself, operating in, and on, a space or situation where the grammatical rules can not be distinguished from the event.

Immaterial performance is precisely and not (a/the) theatre, but unfolds as an expression of practices as it subsists in experience, and can hence not be reducible to a grammar, or the whole field of visibility⁴. Central to immaterial performance is to remain open, resist institutionalization and insist on being understood as an organization, i.e. as an ongoing cluster of processes never to be finalized but that emerge through the experience of movement.

The new guru isn't the one who *knows* but rather one that triggers the experience of movement, that instigates activational outlines and nourishes permissions for transformation. This guru – from time to time they are two - supports holoarchy and announces himself as propositional - acknowledging hierarchy -, but engages in the experience of movement through the same terms as other participants, clients, students or fellow travellers. Immaterial performance operates through such assymetric production while being firmly, if not categorically, faithful to the experience (thus being universal), that in this way functions as a generative principle of dissensus in the creation of differentiation (distinction and complementarity).

² French *la Distanciation*

³ See P. Virno, *Wit and Innovation*, 2005, <http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0207/virno/en>

⁴ See M. Foucault: *Society must be Defended*, 2003

Frames

The time of change always appears prior to its needs. The moment when a call for change is experienced implies that irreversible transformations are already set in motion. Change demands effort and is in flourishing contexts frequently ignored in favor of short-term gain, which, in combination with other consolidating forces such as security, identification, modes of decision making etc, is the reason why change tends to appear between generations, or in steps, rather than through gradual development.

Powerful frames for production, practice, discourse or display implement sustainability and rigor but appear to homogenize knowledge and methodological flexibility, often emptying a field, or an expression, of its aptitude to generate content, and more importantly cancelling its capacity for political production, i.e. change. Such processes result in academism that unavoidably produces fundamentalism, replacing convention with contract and thus installing a certain kind of masochistic subject, deliberately subordinating itself to the frame. Such processes strive towards actualization, and perfection through repetition, which renders it perverse.

Notions of change emerge through different trajectories depending on the dynamics between frame and expression, or display device and displayed. Weak frames stimulate change although commonly resulting in excessive demand of energy and high concentration of loss. The moment when a frame grows stronger the expression, or the product change inevitably fluctuate and is necessarily negotiated in relation to the safeguarding of the frame. Independently of a frame's ontology development of change conventionally comes into view on the basis of variations given a certain structure demarcating modes of production of discourse. Weak frames, given that their discourse, production and expression can be regarded successful, appear more prone to support the expansion of transformation to structural levels i.e. are benevolent to fundamental conditions of change.

Transformations in relationship to distribution, accountability and authorship have influenced corporate economies to reconsider relations between frame and expression, an equation gaining complexity taking into account e.g. post-Fordist management models, complex job descriptions and destabilization of labor in respect of location and time. Similarly capitalist economies have deserted its long-lived interest for the nuclear family as a means of control and market stability. Capital has without exception abandoned corporate identity production based on strong representations of reliability and power. The once so important headquarters erected as a demonstration of a corporation's excellence, emphasizing its support of fundamental values, today symbolize immobility and outmoded management models. The current prototype instead highlights maximum mobility, organizations that optimize dynamic resources and lives on performance. Business recalls the world of things and manufacturing as historical events, and has turned its interest to the world of

performance, described already in 1999 with Pine and Gilmore's catchphrase "work is theatre and every business a stage"⁵.

This is not a tendency but correlative to general transformations of society towards post-Fordist production. It is no longer products and their circulation that is key, it is organization and management that counts. It is no longer about selling many of the same, as the good old T-Ford, but selling a few of many, like Amazon or Google. This is sustainability today, small entities everywhere. Swarm intelligence in front of flagship cultural export.

The questions of *what*, even in business, has hence been replaced, because its pursuit towards essence and the execution of an (one) optimized task, by *how*, *where*, *by who*, *in which case*, that precisely, however ideologically different, acts as a method of dramatization, whose quest is multiplicity and plurality of performance⁶.

Frames in its classical form function as spatio-temporal dynamisms where the brand, the identity and the product tirelessly are brought to the foreground. This argument although doesn't hold true as the arguments are given across borders between corporations, organizations and institutions, but what interests us is not to cross borders but indeed to investigate them; their cracks, intervals and irregularities. Particular resistances ought to be articulated that do not opt for *another*, i.e. already established structure or strategy, but persevere, however impossible to sustain, within the border; in non-discursive, un-nameable, un-repeatable sets of entry-points, in order to construct political, economic and aesthetic devices through which existential transformation can be tested.

Change

Speculative and spectacular powers and intensities, the inherent oscillation between territorialization and deterritorialization of capitalism, force the corporate world to engage in continuous movement of change. Sectors related to cultural production appear subject to altogether different forces and modes of territorialization. Observing the formation of institutions in the cultural sector gives evidence to movements towards further consolidation of sustainable structures and static resources. The cultural sector nourishes an illusion of mobility and dynamic production that suspend necessary, and politically imperative changes of fundamental character. This adjournment is contingent with the elaboration and consolidation in particular of strong (institutional) fames, where the product, or expression, is assumed to reinforce the authorizing entity, thus operating through a paradoxical hierarchy as the frame is licensed by its own production. A model based on facilitating is inevitably static, immobile, operating through given rules (which unreserved permanence regularly is confused with, the equally embarrassing although more delicate formulation: excellence of rigor) calling off any opportunity for change or innovation, as both change and innovation involve a distributed decision that cannot be referred to by normative conditions or applications of

⁵ See Pine & Gilmore: *The Experience Economy*, (New York, 1999)

⁶ E.g. the difference between a turntable and your multi-purpose Iphone.

grammatical rules. Rules can never stipulate their application, yet enable action. It is only possible to articulate the meaning of situation in relation to an action undertaken to transform it. The setting in motion of spatio-temporal dynamism is hence neither self-evident nor straight forward, but always contested and always therefore political⁷.

To propose a different articulation of frames implies new modes of subjectification that are both political and existential. Frames that shift perspectives from defensive tendencies of structural allocation to benevolent heterogeneous allocation in dynamic resources, are ones that emphasize opportunities for a multiplicity of new modes of subjectification, that through equity apply to every engaged subject or community, independent of hierarchical positions.

Immaterial performance is a process, production and product, including discourse production, which intention, generated through methodologies of affirmation, generosity and pro-activity, is to dissolve, even change consolidating, defensive, gurusque formations of knowledge applied on present society by a significant part of the cultural sector, although not through examples but an actual and fully functioning organization or situation. Immaterial performance therefore does not, first of all, represent a certain politics but is producing a possibility for the emergence of the political.

The unconditional escape from *what*, existing as neither architecture or performance, corporate or cultural, facilitator or expression, frame or art, and yet each of these opportunities simultaneously, exclusively enables Immaterial performance to contest traits of distribution, accountability and authorization in general, to intentionally perform a creative action understood as an exodus from sovereign frames⁸.

Immaterial Performance

Directional performance defining a territory must inevitably reproduce consolidated knowledge, licensed as proprietary, whereas immaterial performance in and of itself, on an ontological level, is deterritorializing reproductive economies and modalities of distribution. It therefore unavoidably destabilizes conventional models of authorship, and performs an open protocol allowing for collaborative modes of production with references to open source.

Directional performance essentially homogenizes its territory in order to maintain validity in a given context, as well as its legacy due a particular technology, technique, style or strong author.

Immaterial performance's production on the contrary is heterogeneous as it favors means in front of ends, process in front of result. It is legitimized by its own continuous contextualization, its engagement in context as a plurality of strategies formed by its specific modalities of activation.

⁷ See Neilson & Rossiter: *Towards a Political Anthropology of New Institutional Forms*, 2006

⁸ See P. Virno: *Motto di spirito e l'azione innovative*, 2005

It is not based of what performance, with its different expressions, can be, but on specific potentialities' becoming performance, or in other words, not formed on conventions of presence, embodiment or e.g. narrative structures but on formations of immateriality.

Immaterial performance announces as a first instance in order to pass from "what is being said in what is being said" to what can be said here and now and only through the particular frame offered. It is theatre as ready made, however not in the sense of staging the everyday as peculiar but staging the peculiar as everyday, or better the everyday as *everyday*, and it is in this minimal addition, that withdraws from the position of "telling", i.e. canceling a conventional concept of outside, that immaterial performance produces criticality, and where its topography always is contemporaneity.

The ambition of immaterial performance, outrageously overstated, thus is to praise what forces us to escape good will, consensual thought, and insist on bad will, which fundamental concern is to examine the reliability of claim, in favour of an open speculative operability that empowers us to venture all the way along the question that gave power to oblige us to think: how to produce incoherence where coherence rules.