

The Incomparable – further differentiations of terms

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Over the last ten or so years, new sets of terminology have flourished within the circles of performing arts. Some of them picked up from visual art, others, from various horizons between entertainment and scientific discourses. Revisiting the period of time during which I myself have been active in the field, it seems that the terminology machine used tends to update more in respect to market strategies, including applications, public talks, reviews, presentation texts, etc., than through an explicit need to formulate different or alternative modes of production and representation. I should not try to escape the attraction of such strategies as I myself have sat on various seats in respect to our landscape and have been quick to adopt terms when I hardly knew, or know, what they actually implied. But I must confess that I have developed a certain desire to clean up the usage, not so much in respect to definitions and epistemology, although I have been a spokesperson for such, but in respect to a user's position. What I mean here is that I believe that the terms used and in use, as often as not, try to implement different and alternative strategies in ways that are oblique to the major strategies applied by the field and its markets. And if we in the field are not cautious of their use they might be recuperated, if not obliterated, by market forces.

A significant example is the term "research" that was issued by makers mostly with good intentions. As far as I can remember the term showed up in this shape around 1997, and after just less than ten years of use, the term seems to have lost its capacity as an alternative grounds for production, as well as

its etymology from scientific use, namely to research, as a matter of coming to terms with one or another site of difficulties, and with it is particular capacity of knowledge production.

Several of the terms addressed by this glossary are weak in respect to capitalist notions of production as well as due to representational strategies, which make it even more important that makers and curators use them in ways that are proper in order not to be inscribed in such modes of production and representation. It is also important that makers are conscious of what strategies lie behind the use of certain terminologies due curators and funding systems. For example, the term "research" was first issued by makers but was quickly picked up by curators and presenters. Why? I can see two main reasons: 1) when the market's economy and audience were failing in the mid-'90s, it was important to issue new arguments to gain public support. One of them was to address the importance of research in order not to have to have a large-scale audience, or said in a less direct way, it was a means of deviating away from a spectacularisation of the field's representations proper. 2) Continuing on the spectacularisation, it was also a way for market forces to localise and fasten productions that were either dangerous due their critical potentiality, or, in order to maintain a certain kind of productions within a particular size of economies. In short, by issuing a research framework, e.g., in a festival, it implied to announce certain productions as something that a regular public should not see, but that they were for a 'special' kind of audience made up by con-

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noisseurs. Hence to issue a research program as part of a festival was a means to maintain for the large scale audience an entertainment based program and at the same time satisfy the critical implementations of the makers and doers in the field.

On the other side, what kind of ambitions did the field's makers and doers need to satisfy when baptising their research proposals? Most of them were probably relevant but several were indeed addressed as research not only due the fashion but also through an ignorant use, because one was incapable of creat-

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ing works that were, so to say, finished, or in other cases, because makers and doers where incapable of producing a coherent method of work. However, at the end of the day, are we actually capable of addressing an artistic work without some sort of research procedure? Isn't it a contradiction in terms to think that one is not researching, or in some or other way experimenting when going to work, in the studio, in the study or in other places?

It is my belief that research economies are normally weaker than economies of production and it is therefore important to be cautious with how the small economies for research are being used. It would be a shame if they at some point would be considered as similar to economies of production due to a misuse of them, for example, in respect to a use which is understood as simple preparation for a conventional production. I will not here address the dangerous fields of what the terminologies in this glossary implies in respect to representation. Isn't it so, that research, for example, has also lately developed into more or less a style, with proposals for a light, style of performance, set and/or kind of dramaturgy (normally flat and fragmented)? If so, this can only be of negative value for the field in its entirety.

Laboratory

Even more peculiar is how performing arts have used the term, or label, "laboratory". It occurs that the field has mixed the term up, considering it something more than a site, or confinement, where certain systematic – or not – activities can be executed. It seems that

performing arts regard laboratory, or in the worst of cases 'lab', as being a per definition creative environment in which inventions take place. I don't want to be general about what laboratory can impose, but it is factual that its very condition is to be a neutral site that does not intervene in, or preferably alters specific and sensitive experimentations to a minimum extent. It is only in our fantasy that innovators spend day and night in the laboratory, and it is indeed naïve to assume a laboratory, in any discipline and any part of the world, to behold any innocence.

In fact, I believe that the notion of laboratory in performing arts most of all is influenced by popular culture: a research and laboratory concept derived from Jules Verne coupled with Mary Shelley, mixed with black and white movies where the genius changes the world, or engages in alchemic or life-giving success stories that of course, end up in hell.

This is certainly as good as any other image and construction of a laboratory, but what our field should keep in mind is what does the laboratory propose or do in respect to the field? What is the lack that needs to be fulfilled by laboratory, and what is this lack nourished by? Is it possibly so that such romantic notions of laboratory in fact obtain the opposite of its intention, which, I assume, to be a deterritorialisation of the field in order for a more progressive future? I believe that laboratory, as used in performing arts, to a large extent is a means of recreating an artist genius, but formulated external to artistic production which long ago shook the sticky clown "The Genius" off its back through modernism, as well as giving priority to intuitive processes in which the methodology favored is one which end up with the researchers' hair standing straight up, being completely black in the face, with a disorientated smile of methodological ignorance shining form within the soot.

The critical voices of certain groups within the performing arts environment that laboratory and research emphasise is, in other words, correct if the concept of research and laboratory used would coincide with proper definitions worthy of an academic or scientific agenda. But as this is not the situation, the same terminology promotes, in fact, intuitive processes which methodologies often have mediated as obscure or even as something which would lose its magic if articulated, when, in fact, any standard definition would emphasise that it is not a site with a priority for research and experimentation, but that the aim is to provide fast and reliable results.

Recapitulating the exhibition *Laboratorium* curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Barbara Vanderlinden, it is imperative to note that it was neither an attempt to forefront research and experimentation, nor to provide fast reli-

able and fast results, but to provide a specific framework within the field of visual art that negotiated the work of art as process, as knowledge production, conversation or dialogue. The exhibition was not a site for experimentation; it was a site of presentations of processes that rigorously applied laboratorial strategies.

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Collaboration/Collectivity

In this respect it is also important to properly negotiate, for example, the differentiation between more or less conventional management models and terms such as collaboration and/or collective/collectivity. It seems to me to be a bad omen when simple teamwork and collaboration is intermixed and confused. It is my belief that collaboration and collective/collectivity needs to be the topography of a work or works to qualify as relevant, in front of groups and constellations that announce their method as collaborative. As far as I know even the most demonic director or choreographer is in some way or another collaborating. A conductor in front of a symphonic orchestra is still inscribed in a collaboration, moreover one with very specific features.

If a group or constellation wishes to address collaboration as an important feature of its work or its being some kind of community, it is at least in its place to know and to be able to articulate what specific features a collaboration or collective want to emphasise. If what one wants to push is the importance of working together, to push that the result can become different or that it deviates from models of authorship, it is my belief that one should stop talking immediately, as I can hardly imagine any work situation that is not constructed along these or similar issues, understood as positive or negative.

There seems to be a political paradox inscribed in any collaboration or collective that does not pose its very existence and its socio-political nexus as the work. Isn't politics motored by these very operations between

equality and liberty, and thus become the only realm necessary in which to invest in respect to intra- and extra-structural notions of domination? It is further interesting to note that within the field of performing arts, the production of collaborations and collectives is generated in respect to processes and appearances through strong spatio-temporal coordinations, i.e., collaboration and collectivity are hardly ever addressed under any other circumstances than superficial deviations of authorship, through which the instigator, the delegating unit, receive an even stronger position, not far from the co-ownership raised by consultant companies in the '90s, for example, which without further difficulties could be reduced to a redistribution of loyalty from the community of workers to the community of owners.

From process to ownership

As much as collaboration doesn't start in the studio and end in the dressing room, neither does process have any particular relation to site or duration. Three decades later, performing arts have returned to process; quoting, doubling, honoring and deviating through a complete mismatching of heroes of the neo avant-garde, recycling aesthetics to make collaboration etc., recognisable, resurrecting ideology in an easy way in order to disguise the fact that we have nothing to voice, but it seems less in a manner of emphasising heterogeneity as a clumsy means of escaping malign capitalism à la the late '90s. Isn't it just magic that collaboration and process go rocket to the sky in the moment performing arts buys itself a mobile phone, or as soon as performance constellations get themselves an e-mail addresses starting with info@?

What artistic work is not issued through one or another process? Hardcore conceptual work, yes. But that is something that we haven't seen in performing arts since the late '60s, considering that a conceptual work, at least as inscribed in art history, is protocol-based and can therefore, on a display level, not involve any process, or collection of experience due the work's representation. Hence, it is not enough to speak about process but it necessarily has to be conceptualised, or preferably speak its conceptualisation in its representation. Never mind any interdisciplinary attempts, that often sound great on the level of application but seldom offer any further production of ideology or knowledge in its presentation. With both process and interdisciplinarity it is awkward to realise that its manifestation, as with collaboration, seems to have been formalised to include only a process just prior to a finished product, but is rarely considered to include any other frame of time or space.

What process-orientated work in performing arts needs to look further into are matters of ownership. To what extent, and in which respect mechanisms are, or are not, also processes owned by somebody, or some entity? An activity, whatever process is involved, will necessarily be represented by or through somebody, or some entity, and it is therefore important to address, not what process is implied, but what differentiation of ownership a given process provokes, according to which market or environment. It has become common that performers, for example, are inscribed in credit lists as co-creators but it is rarely common to consider what it would imply to issues of co-ownership. Even though I risk becoming tedious I still want to raise these questions on responsibility that necessarily occur in respect to process and production. It is not evident that co-authorship implies a wider range of transparency, nor into legacy of a work, not in respect to laterality of procedure. On the contrary it seems that co-authorship decreases opportunities of resistance, doubt or failure that each individual, or institution, involved runs the risk of losing its face. In fact, the process-orientated work that has flourished in performing arts over the last ten years has been an important factor in relation to the currently conservative climate. Is it perhaps so that an autonomous author instead could venture into a greater degree of radicality than a collaborator acts according to the responsibility he is pre-given and agrees with? Something that must, at least for the capacity for critique be true. The entire range of collaboration, process, co-production, co-authorship, etc., is performing arts' own opportunistic response to a society of control.

What, then, is the solution? I believe, to use an extensive amount of terminology and to change its meaning continuously, as a means of deterritorialisation and in order to create further recognition to any user that an assembly of terminology not only establishes markets, but also is an important instigator of history and historicity. A discourse indeed has, or issues, the terminology it deserves, and as seen in Gille Deleuze's two books on cinema, any assembly of terminology is also what produces paradigm and territory. But this is not enough. It is important to observe and inquire what terminology can be of use, which etymology cannot be derived from academic or scientific backgrounds. Can performing arts instead conceptualise terminology from pop culture, everyday language, sports, cooking or management in order to produce autonomy, something which certainly has produced resistance because an appropriated use naturally is a means of establishing dance as an art-form proper? This is the trap in which Doris Humphrey had to step into with her *The Art Of Making Dances*, and in its

form almost classical treatise, and is it not precisely here that Yvonne Rainer's *No-manifesto* is most valuable, and provocative, namely as a matter of defining dance, choreography, or performing arts, as radically different to any conventional aggregate of commodification?

It is today instead imperative to divert terminology and find ways around institutional frames and capitalist economies, and perhaps even to use terminology with such abundance that not only active creators and doers in the field have to invest and announce positions and opinions, but also other participants in order to create a shared criticality through which can be produced not multiplicity, but a multitude. Performing arts today need to create terminology, which differentiates its participants instead of bringing them together, in order to necessitate a livelier discussion on all levels. It is first through a shared interest in accuracy of the use of terminology that the field, for instance, can initiate discussion on curatorial practices and economical circumstances.

Flexibility and mobility must be conceptualised, precisely as a means to not be positioned by a given assumption. The performing arts have to understand what a critical position, and have to announce themselves as mobile, but not in respect to the market but in respect to other and different coherences.

Yet within this work, we participants of the field, are subject to a responsibility which is extremely complex to handle in its multiplicit directionality, which operability is to expand the conclusive concept of performing arts in order to give a multitude of processes, productions and products, discourses and intuitions, amateurs and professionals, collaboration and collectives the opportunity to create performing arts so far unthinkable.

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