

Catalog of Situations

Proposal for a research project
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Starting point

for this project – biographical as well as theoretical – is our fascination with a specific quality in art works. We have spend many long hours discussing our emotions of seizure by and obsession with certain art works, first trying to compare our experiences to reach a common ground for discussion, then trying to find words for what we felt was the common denominator. And parallel to as well as resulting from these exchanges, we tried to create art that would inherit this very quality.

In an article on DWKs piece "This Performance" (2004) JPP termed this quality "ambivalence", referring directly to the Romantic tradition of "the sublime" and to representations of the metaphysical.¹ This "ambivalence" is strongly connected to the subject of this project, yet the term is misleading in as far, as it commonly refers to the content of a narrative.

The first object: Permeable Form

What we are really looking for can be described as a quality of transgression or porousness of the representational towards the realm of the non-representational. We can call this quality permeable, meaning that the form allows for the interaction and permeation of representation and material reality. In order to illustrate this quality of permeability, we juxtapose two reproductions of famous paintings by Caspar- David Friedrich:



Works of this order often intentionally reach out across the frame of representation; CD Friedrich is an early master in this art of transgression, and one of our important inspirations. But we believe that the same effect can be created by artifacts that are "defectious" so to speak in their representational effort, of poor artistic quality as would be commonly judged.

¹ „Embracing Ambivalence – Situating art between the material and the metaphysical“. VOLUME, Magazine of Theater Gasthuis, January 2005, Amsterdam. <http://www.associationlisa.com/david/press/275/>

We therefore propose to include not only art but also advertisement, every day speech and many other products of human expression into our research. For this proposal we term all these objects "artifacts of human expression".

The second object: situations of encounter

For us personally these situations of transgression are the most valuable and intense experiences of encounter with artifacts of human expression – maybe with our surrounding in general even.² We understand, that in order to learn about transgression, to speak about it and to create permeable art, we have to understand these situations. As a quality, permeability is referring to the interaction between a viewer/listener/reader (audience) and the artifact.

We started to think more intensely in the direction of audience-work-interaction and to focus our theoretical and artistic efforts on understanding and creating intense situations of interaction. It is important for us to stress the role of the audience as participator and as activator of an artifact's representational potential. In this project we want to focus on this moment of interaction, not on ontology or on production processes behind the artifacts.³

This already establishes the two main objects of this project: 1) situations of encounter with artifacts and 2) permeable forms. The first refers to the subjective human experience and the second to qualities in material objects (declaring verbal or gestural manifestations of ideas as "material objects" as well).

Finding strategies of analysis and terminologies for these objects of research is the first challenge we want to take on with this project. The second challenge is to find forms of expression to communicate experiences of transgression that inherit this quality of permeability themselves.

Communicating Transgression

The encounter between an artifact and an individual we see as a social situation and therefore as loaded with ethical and political implications. When we speak of "seizure" or "obsession" we use terminology which implies the forcefulness of the act. Often, we have found, we are attracted most by those artifacts whose authority and suggestive power we fear or despise. The question is: How do we talk back? We believe that formal permeability opens ways for talking back, for positioning oneself towards the artifact as autonomous individual.⁴

That is why we do not want to stop at scientific terminology but strive to develop an alternative – permeable – form of communicating our findings. That way, we aim to connect object of research and form of presentation in order to follow our own ethical ideals of interaction.

2 These intense situations of being seized by an artifact are highly personal and subjective, the reaction is bound to individual propositions: prior experiences, expectations and fears. It is therefore very hard to communicate to others. However, only by putting the experience into context with our memories and those of other people can we arrange them into meaningful wholes and enhance our understanding of us as social beings and of the world around us. This is what we need to do, to unlock our experiences.

3 The above proposed view on art implies several things: A valuable experience can be made against or despite the intentions of the artist; in fact, the intentions of the artist are negligible to the understanding of the situation. Communicative situations are highly cursory and subjective; as an object of analysis, they can only be accurately accessed through an individual's expression of his memories. Artifacts are positioned in the context of the time they are encountered which is not necessarily the time of their production.

We are not uninterested in or opposed to artistic programs or historical analysis – quite to the contrary. In our discussion of art practice, we rely extensively on art theory, philosophy and background information about the artifact, which all can help us to better understand our reactions. But we feel that a re-shifting of attention away from academic discourse and authorship towards experience and the social realm can help to affirm art practice as a lively and socially valuable form of production.

4 Some artifacts might intentionally invite this practice, some might not. Possessing permeable form does not make an artistic expression ethically superior per se. It is also debatable if ethics are an aesthetic category or not.

Lecture-Performances

We have experimented successfully with the format of lecture-performance before⁵ and find this format to be ideal for creating permeable forms around intellectual discourse. The format also allows us to engage in a discourse with other people, their experiences and their understanding of our experiences. We therefore propose to lead this project simultaneously on two levels: as a theoretical research and a practice of lecture-performances.

With these lecture-performances we want to make use of transgression in two ways: 1) in combining the format of academic lecture with its – as we see them – authoritarian and elitist implications with the format of a theater situation. The theater situation allows for multi-formed manifestations of the verbally expressed or merely implied ideas, therefore allowing for contradictions and subtle shifts between the interpretations of the audience and our interpretations. Not giving one format or one manifestation tutelage over the other will allow us to invite the audience to actively question and interact with our text.

2) in seeking to take up a position between author (lecturer, artistic director), object (body, performer), and audience (audience of an artifact we discuss). By doing so, we question the authority of certain positions and create a flux between positions within the space of social interaction. We want to present our experience with an artifact as merely a case study and the description of which as a practice equally accessible to anyone in the audience.

The lecture-performances become permeable artifacts themselves, allowing again for analysis and discussion. The approach therefore aims at a cycle of reception, interpretation and manifestation. This of course implies, that we do not exclude ourselves from this cycle, making us researchers and creators at the same time.⁶

The steps of the project

To sum the objective of this project up in one sentence: This project aims to research systematically into the interactive nature of transgressive situations of encounter with artifacts of human expression.

We propose to do so in several steps over the course of two years. The three project phases can overlap chronologically or be altered according to the results of the research as the project continues.

First project phase:

- 1) We will collect our own experiences in the form of a catalog to be presented to each other. The goal is twofold: to collect material and to learn to distinguish the qualities of encounters and to develop terminologies to communicate them.
- 2) On invitation of theaters, festivals etc. we will develop and present lecture-performances dealing with selected artifacts, groups of artifacts, or communicative strategies. By doing so, we intend to advance our usage and knowledge of this format and to engage in an open discourse about this project and its objective.
- 3) We try to construct a theoretic framework for our approach, backing and comparing our position with other scientific and artistic texts, developing an archive of texts to support the ongoing research and creation.

Second project phase

- 1) We will fix a system and terminology for analyzing the communicative strategies at work in permeable artifacts in general. In this form of work analysis, the interaction between observer

5 „the consequence of infinite endings“ (2005) <http://www.associationlisa.com/david/works/the-consequence-of-infinite-endings/>

6 Whether this conflicts with scientific accuracy and plausibility is another object of this research. For the time being we insist on creating an alternative to the commonly accepted scientific position.

(interpreter) and work is central, as opposed to an ontological or production focused approach.⁷

2) We systematically invite other people to share their experiences using the methods and terminology we developed, in order to understand better the connection between our reactions and the reactions of our social surrounding. We will collect these experiences together with our own in a "catalog of situations".

Third project phase

1) We develop a manual for analysis and creation of lecture-performances that deal with these specific forms of situations. This manual shall be presented and made available to artists and academics alike to propose an alternative model of knowledge transfer.

2) We will lead workshops to teach our method and create lecture-performances, based on the participant's own experiences and created and performed by them. These are intended for artists, academics and non-professionals, enabling the audience members to understand and share his or her experiences in a more profound and productive way, and thereby becoming active observers instead of passive consumers.

<http://encyclopediaofworldart.wordpress.com/>

⁷ Our approach can be compared closest to "pragmatic analysis" in semiotic exegesis following Charles W. Morris and the Behaviorist School of George H. Mead.