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Rooms, Tables, Books

Ideas

Inspiration for this research comes from a situation of teaching whose parameters i devised through my work with students as a guest professor at the School for New Dance Development. In a period between 2005 and 2008 i have been repeatedly “coming together” with different groups of SNDO students, exploring, together with them, the problem of dramaturgy/concept development in the field of an embodied, movement based artistic practice.

These encounters with students were taking place under the changing spatial situations, inside shifting time frames and in a variety of working circumstances. They were also bringing together smaller or larger groups of people, arriving to the moment of encounter from a variety of specific cultural contexts and personal situations. Yet, despite the fact that the embodiment and movement were playing central role in our joint academic exploration, both students and myself were more or less ignoring the dynamic particularity of our encounter. Instead of starting our joint work from a recognition of the immediate concreteness in which we are placed to act, we would always first assume fixed positions inside the symbolical sphere of social relations. In this sphere the general notions like student, teacher, knowledge, academy, practice, theory, authority, would always take precedence over a concrete time/space of the encounter. Under such a conditions, consequences of the particular encounter would always end up depending on the functioning of the ideological apparatus which redefine a space and reorganize bodies in terms of abstract power relations.

This research is emerging from a desire to create a circumstances in which

conventional learning and sharing situation inside the academic context could be suspended and put on a different ground. For that purpose I would like to consider certain notions (community and knowledge) through the physical engagement with the concrete circumstances of the encounter and related entities (rooms, tables, books). My ambition is to re-wire relation of a group to material reality and temporarily reorganize attention concerning its meaning, beyond the prescriptions of the operating ideological framework.

In a world where things/situations are made for us we have a tendency to engage with them without considering their “coming into being”; to use them as pure indices of their own given function. But what if the physical action (of building a table, for example) inside a specific space/time (this room/today), become a content of a particular book (as a container of knowledge)? Can a book about people making a table become a new source of knowledge concerning parameters of community? Can a “real” people assume a roles, become a characters/agents in a book (on knowledge and community) by making a table together? To what degree physical action of making the world (table) can grow to become new kind of knowledge about the world? What kind of knowledge we can create by departing on a journey into the world as if it is not-yet-made? What kind of book we can write by becoming amateur carpenters of our own temporary community? Finally, if we, the makers, sit around the table that we created, will the food that we eat from it and words that we exchange across it taste differently?

Connecting encounter and knowledge, through a simple shared embodiment of problem solving (table making) and through the organization of the traces that this embodiment leaves in space/time (book making), will define the methodology of this research.

Work

In its simple mechanics the work will consist of formulating and realizing set of

procedures:

Appropriating particular space for a limited period of time.

Organizing the space according to the requirements of the carpenter's workshop.

Setting up the environment that can facilitate collection of the materials out of which "the book" can emerge (audio and video equipment).

Receiving small group of people and proposing simple rules that should govern working process.

Engaging in the work - making a table.

Spending time around the newly made table - eating, talking.

Generating documentation (for making the book) throughout the process.

Starting the cycle all over again - different space, different time, different people.

Organizing growing documentation into "the book"

Putting "the book" into the circulation.

Each encounter itself will be minimally structured by set of roles/rules of behavior:

People will be invited with a simple request to assist me in making a table.

As their entrance to the process they will be asked to bring their own chair that they are ready to donate to the project.

Encounter will start with negotiating distances between people sitting on the chairs.

While working on establishing distances everybody should become aware that apart from making a table, by their actions they will also contribute to the making of the book.

For that purpose they will need to agree and submit their presence/actions/words to the process of detailed documentation.

The size and shape of the space in between people will be marked as a shape of the table to make.

Table making will be negotiated in the act of making it.

Once made table will be used - we will eat from it and we will talk to each other over it.

Food will be cooked for everybody as an act of hospitality.

Conversation will be initiated and navigated by me, following certain game like procedure similar to the one of a fortune telling.

Vocabulary

Table - in its simplicity of form and function, table as an object is a carrier of a complex meaning. Paradoxically, by separating us, table makes a communion between us possible. Through the medium of the table, distance and closeness are put in an immediate relation. As such surface of the table on a micro level and in physical terms closely resemble notion of public space. According to Hanna Arendt, in its communal function public space is constituted by the distances between citizens. Public space do not belong to anybody in particular as it is constituted by the relation (of distance/closeness) between everybody present at the moment of encounter. Same apply to the table. We could say that a table is objectified, intimate articulation of a public space. Yet in its physical ability to "hold reality" on its surface (food, objects of exchange) table is also primordial theatrical stage available for presentation and interaction. In this sense table, apart from being metaphor of public space (and consequently metaphor of agora - ancient instrument of demokratia) is also metaphor of theatre. To climb on a top of a table is the most straightforward act of assuming performative position of power. On a deeper level, table is also a symbol of community in a more primordial sense - community of a tribe and of a family.

Chair - By assuming the shape of our body, chair is a singular object closely related to individual difference and identity. As such chair is the counterpoint to the table, it is an extension of the body rather than an extension of the relation between bodies. It is also the object that always "belong" to somebody. Each chair represent the person who could be sitting on it. The power of empty audience testify to this phenomena. Ghost of the one who did and who will sit in the chair is always present in the existence of the

chair as an object. To climb up on top a chair is existentially different act than to climb on the table.

Book - In a society based on reason, books are containers and guarantors of authority. As such they are always standing in a place of the persons who are signed as their authors. It is hard to brake this symbolical connotations of a book as an instance of knowledge and start perceiving it on a denotative level - as a concrete material object. On the other hand, this problematic materiality of a book opens a possibility for a free play with its fluidity. In its unfolding the event can assume a shape of a book. By assigning a label of a book to an encounter or a lived event, I can blur the boundaries between knowledge and existence, reality and fiction, object and subject. The same apply to the opposite procedure. If the book become in my perception a material item of a particular proportions and external properties to be used according to its physical characteristics, or if I access its content through the play with its materiality, i will be able to disrupt and dislocate the regime of knowledge by offering radically different, "blasphemous" readings of it.

Encounter - I consider a human encounter as a minimal measure of social interaction and in this sense the essential reality of communal life that takes place below and beyond a political regulation of it. The real meaning of notions like collaboration, confrontation, storytelling, solidarity, intimacy, engagement, care, protest, manipulation, honesty etc. are all, in my opinion sub-sets of the basic phenomena of an encounter. Encounter is not a result of the match-making and social engineering but it happen rather despite it, on its own accord, in an uncontrolled, spontaneous and unexpected manner which is always challenging circumstances that are set up to facilitate it (or prevent it). By taking into account emotional, obsessional, unreasonable nature of our affinities and motivations and by acknowledging accidental and temporal dynamics of human interaction, encounter is inverting the logic of political representation that aims to regulate it. Strategically, encounter should be considered as a basic measure of

human freedom. We are, as individuals, free from the political agendas of the social regulators to the extent to which we are ready to consciously breach given circumstances for a sake of meeting others. In this sense encounter is inherently subversive force.

Fortune telling - Every conversation is a ritual of fortune telling. Rather than telling us ultimate truths of who we are and where are we going, fortune telling is rather giving us a framework for relating to each other. Being formulated as a game with a clear rules, fortune telling is offering perfect excuse for engaging language on a more intimate, personal level.