Performativity as a differential process of ethico-aesthetic creation

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- Delmenhorst

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„How is it possible to come to massively produce a desire to create, a collective generosity, by means of the tenacity, the intelligence and the sensibility proper to arts and sciences ."
Félix Guattari

1.– What facet[s] of performance/performativity are of key interest in your own work and research?

My understanding of performativity is based onto the notion of individuation, as coined by the French Epistemologist Gilbert Simondon in his 1958 treatise „Du mode d'Existence des Object techniques". Until recently, Simondon has been a rather unknown position outside a circle of French specialists, but especially the fast developing issues of inter- and transdisciplinarity as well as the research for conceptual tools necessary for a new evaluation of our recently digitized world, have lead to a recent upsurge of interest in Simondon in France, as well as in the English-speaking world. The last few years have seen not only the publication of Simondon's university courses (Simondon, 2006, 2010), but as well a surge in secondary literature (i.e., Combes, Chabot, Barthélémy, and the journal Cahiers Simondon), and the establishing of the Atelier Simondon by Vincent Bontems to gather people together interested in pursuing research into his work. Similarly, interest in the English-speaking world has been gradually growing (see Toscano, Mackenzie, Massumi 2009), and is about to surge following the translation of Simondon's major works.

Simondon makes use of the concept of individuation in order to describe the active element in the emergence and becoming of an individual entity. This perspective demarcates an important philosophical shift: the individual is taken under consideration not from the point of view of its full constitution, but from its *genesis*. And even more important, the genesis is not inquired from a move a posteriori that is, moving from the perspective of an already constituted individual towards the inquiry of its genetic becoming. Rather, individuation describes the process of becoming individual *as such*. To set the focus onto a process, onto something that necessarily entails a level of indeterminacy, does not mean that the content becomes vague. Quite the contrary. Simondon's inquiry regards the determination of precise conditions which are both generative of the process and allow for its sustainability. Brian Massumi (2012) calls

them „enabling constraints". Enabling constraints can be seen as juncture knots in order to allow for the onset of processes of *metastable resonance.* Processes of resonance, Simondon explains, significantly involve an exchange between already constituted beings, but within a systematics which is not yet fully individuated. The yet individuated part accounts for the ability and the means to produce the exchange, the not yet individuated part, constitutes the „elbow room" which gives space for the occurrence of novelty, that is, allows for the emergence of information which has not yet come to constitution. The dimension of indetermination allowing both for the openness, but also for the potential of novelty, constitutes the dimension of *metastability*. Thinking in terms of resonant metastability within the specifics of this field allows to open a space for both science and arts to be grasped in the dimension of their *operative emergence*.

It is another thinker who intimately related the notion of individuation to that of performativity: Gilles Deleuze. The fifth chapter of his 1968 ontological treatise „Difference and Repetition", starts with the concept of disparity borrowed from Simondon. Simondon has used this term in order to indicate the tension between different energetic levels as the motor leading towards a process of individuation. In the reading proposed by Deleuze, disparation does not only connect to different energetic levels but also to the Leibnizian theory of differential calculus. Significantly, this move allows for the inclusion of the abstract <u>operative</u> dimension of variables.

Disparation in Deleuze's understanding stands for an *infinitesimal* difference of intensity. It is conceived as a „difference operator" enacting the occurrence of visible phenomena and the production of its complex surrounding relations. It is this operational shift, what allows individuation to become performative.

Deleuze understands this performative moment in terms of „dramatization". It is at the level of infinity, Deleuze explains, that the *intensity* of disparity becomes indistinguishable from its *extensity* i.e. from its more proper physical and sensuous qualities. It is in this way that heterogeneous elements are not only able to emerge, but also to acquire a *performative* character, as its very constitution accounts at the same time for the creation of new relations, of new channels of deep communication. In other terms: the metastable resonance between different entities, does not only open for new levels of communication, but lies at the very onset of their conditions of creation. Here is where performativity comes into play: it comes to account for the *actualization,* (the becoming real) of the relation between conditions of creation and modes of metastable communication.

„Dramatization", in Deleuze's meaning, does not only express an ontological condition, i.e. condition of how being and becoming is understood, but entails also a *pragmatic* aspect, as it can be seen as a „method" defining different modalities of production of sense. The privileged philosophical and scientific question: what is this? Is replaced by a series, a multiplicity of questions: „who? how? how much? where and when?" in which case? (Deleuze 2004, 94)

If we translate this mode of thought towards the question of the relation between the fields of science and art, we might understand how this perspective allows us to think the relation between the scientific and the aesthetic in terms of <u>performative emergence</u>.

Aesthetics, as Félix Guattari states in his last book *Chaosmosis*, is preceeded by a protoaesthetics, by a „dimension of creation in a nascent state" (102). This term is used in order to make clear that the topic is not the work as it gets manifested in institutionalized art, or in the social field, but that it refers to a series of intensities *leading towards* processes of aesthetic creation.

Significantly though, this abstract moment, which is disconnected from _the result_ of a visible work of art, is nevertheless conditioned by an existential pragmatics: protoaesthetics is brought forward by „the affect of territorialized subjectivity. Here, the existential territory becomes, at the same time, homeland, self-belonging, attachment to a clan and cosmic effusion."(Guattari, 102) It is only through an engagement into the specificity of a particular scientific and/or aesthetic question, that it is possible to create the intensity enacting a creative process, which in turn connects the microscopic to the macroscopic, the differential energetic level to a cosmic dimension. It is this moment in which the intensity meets the (scientific, aesthetic, affective, linguistic) territory enacting the possibility of its actualization, that performativity gets „dramatized", into both an unfolding of becoming and into a pragmatics of emergence of interepistemic relations.

It is this operative understanding of performativity, which shifts the „inter-disciplinary" problem towards a „trans-disciplinary" one. While interdisciplinarity is concerned with the transfer of methods from one discipline to another, allowing research to spill over disciplinary boundaries, nevertheless preserving the existing framework of disciplinary research, transdisciplinarity is grounded on the logic of the included middle, its major concern being to define and establish new epistemic dimensions in the emergent space space within and beyond established disciplines.

2. - How do notions of performance/performativity influence the way you formulate the relationship between scientific and artistic practice/inquiry/research?

The pathway towards the creation of transdisciplinary performance proposed above, has straightforward *practical* consequences.

1. It contributes to change the idea of how knowledge is understood and how it gets produced. „Knowledge" in its widest „scientific, artistic and philosophical" dimensions is understood here „as a comprehensive 'sensing'" (Brunner, 59) and not as being limited to human cognitive processes. This wide perspective changes its definitions and its generative conditions: knowledge is primarily not defined as an act of recognition, which would involve a cognitive act of recalling something which was already preconceived, neither as a the production of linguistic analogies or visual metaphors, but in terms of *problematization*. A problem is always bound to a field in which it can be stated, where the means to 'solve' it can be assessed, and where also its solutions can be found. Moreover, a problem derives from a compulsion to create. Parafrasing Isabelle Stengers, „You create (knowlegde) when you are forced or obliged to create. You do not create without a 'cause'"[1] (191).

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[1]   I changed the original quotation "You think when you are forced or obliged to think. You do not think without a ´cause`'", in order to enfasize the horizontality between different modes of scientific philosophical and artistic creation.

Here 'cause' is not understood in terms of a linear relation to an effect, but as an indeterminant connection to a broader dimension of sensibility, to an affective „territory". This territory is shaped by the occurrence of intensive encounters. Encounters can be of any kind: „what is encountered may be Socrates, a temple or a demon. It may be grasped in a range of affective tones: wonder, love, hatred, suffering. In whichever tone, its primary charachteristic is that it can be only *sensed* (Deleuze 139, my emphasis)". Sensation is primary inasmuch as it creates the *necessity* to engage.

Isabelle Stengers translates this idea into the pragmatic concept of „Technologies of belonging". These are specific constraints „which can and must address people from the point of view of what they may *become* able to do and think and feel because they belong" (190). The emphasis is set on becoming: technologies of belonging do not confine protagonists into the realm of already defined habits, but promote obligations which entangle protagonists into the path of a new, creative construction. From this point of view, transdisciplinarity is seen as a process of metastable junction between different modalities of creation, each linked to the specificity of its own space and time dynamics.

2) It accounts for the creation of *transversal relations* between different modes of creation scientific, artistic or philosophical. Transversal relations are expressive of the *pragmatic* unfoldings of the tension between intensities and extensities which Deleuze conceived to be the core of the movement of 'dramatization'. In this sense transversal relations are the conditions by which transdisciplinarity gets *performed* into the unfoldings of different practices. These conditions are generative of two important concrete aspects in relation to the understanding of the notion of practice:

I). Transversal relations account for horizontal relations between heterogeneous practices. Stengers idea of technologies of belonging means accounts for the condition that no discipline would transcend other ones, but that each one shapes a particular dimension of knowledge to which it contributes to. Therefore, the problem of transdisciplinarity can be stated more precisely as the individuating process of those specific transductive conditions allowing for the creation of new matrices of transepistemic resonance.

Translated into pragmatics: various forms of scientific and artistic production can be understood in terms of „practices" whose difference is determined by the engagement in distinct concerns. Hereby, i refer to Bruno Latour's definition: matters of concern, deal with the multilayered extensions around the objects, which are ignored by the the strict perspective onto the objects themselves (the strict perspective would result into the inquiry of 'matters of fact'). „Each object gathers around itself a different assembly of relevant parties. Each object triggers new occasions to passionately differ and dispute. Each object may also offer new ways of achieving closure without having to agree on much else" (Latour, 5).

II). Trasversal relations involve the ability to perceive, to engage into and to create *different temporal modalities*. It is the difference in timing conditions, which is constitutive of the conditions of intensity and duration contributing to demarcate the

specificity of each practice. Thinking in terms of temporalities, not only allows to better understand the specific methodologies, epistemologies or aesthetic conditions involved in each situation, but creates also means to find ruptures into consolidated patterns, and to allow for processes of epistemic transduction to happen.

3) How do notions of performativity provide insights into your systems of interest?

The inquiry of the notion of performativity from the perspective depicted above, has turned my interest towards different modes of experimentation in processual practices involving both collective and one to one collaborations:

A) One to one collaborations:

1) <u>Deleuzian ontology and aesthetics</u>: Collaboration with the philosopher and art theorist Dr. Stephen Zepke (Vienna). This collaboration aims to explore the conceptual conditions of trandisciplinarity especially from the point of view of a Deleuzian ontology and aesthetics. Stephen's project of retracing the conditions of a new geneaology of conceptual art resonates with mine inasmuch as both are interested into exploring the conditions by which forms of aesthetic expression are also charachterized by a moment of construction.

2) <u>Individuation and new Quantum Mechanics</u>: Collaboration with Prof. Reinhold Bertlmann (Particle Group and Quantum Information and Quantum Optics, University of Vienna). This collaboration aims to understand inasmuch quantum mechanical theories of second generation - especially the concept of quantum entanglement - could be of relevance towards both a more complex understanding of the process of individuation[2] and towards perspective of onto- epistemological creation (crf. Barad).

3) <u>Individuation and mechanisms of vision</u>: Collaboration with Dr. Alessandro Sarti (Mathematician, CAMS/EHESS Paris). Sarti's research deals with the mathematical exploration of neurophisiological patterns of activity relative to mechanisms of vision, by means of the idea of neurogeometry (Petitot and Tondut (1999)). His research follows the findings that the process of visual perception does not work in terms of `reduction` of external reality, but on the contrary visual perception is a process differentiating the entire field of view, recreating a cerebral image in a global way. Thus the morphogenesis of a visual image operates through a complex process of individuation between various levels of external and internal metastability.

4) <u>Pathologies of social sensibility</u>: Collaboration with the sociologist and political activist Franco Berardi (Bifo). The question of concern relates to how dimensions of emergence and individuation of artistic and scientific sensibility could relate to current patologies of social sensibility.

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2   In this regard it is to be noted that Simondon's elaaboration of the concept of individuation relied on quantum mechanican considerations of the first generation. The relevant question then, is if the scenario of teleported states could change and complexify the understanding of individuation as it was first conceived by Simondon.

Collective collaborations:

1) <u>Enabling constraints for collective processual research.</u>
   Collective Diagrammatic practices: This is an international and transdisciplinary network organised by Christoph Brunner (ITH Zürich), other participants are: Sher Doruff (Artist and Theoretician, Amsterdam), Thomas Jellis (geographer, University of Oxford), Diego Tizzoni (Dancer and theoretician, Amsterdam), and me. Between 2011 and 2012 the group has met three times. Departing from the theoretical notion of the diagram as developed by Deleuze in his book on Michel Foucault, the meetings aim to promote a process of interrelation between practices of thinking and practices of formation. Each of the workshops was determined by one or more constraints, in form of texts and/or working tools. The idea beyond this, is to create the means in order to support and to intensify a collective research process, in oder to enable transversal epistemic relations between different knowledge production by means of a complex process of mutual imaginative and affective resonances.

2) <u>Inquiry of specific transdisciplinary problems.</u> Scientific coordination of the project „Radikal Neues". The aim is to promote transdisciplinary collaborations between pairs each composed by a scientist and an artist. A four people team contributes to the formation of the pairs, and documentates the working process. My function is to supervise the transdisciplinary working groups as well a to analyse their different approaches and to promote their research process.

3) <u>Feminist concerns.</u> Collective Miss Baltazar: This is a feminist hacker group of digital media artists and theorists who meet in regular workshops at the interface between digital art, visual art and theory production. My role there is to create „theory spaces" in form of reading groups and discussions which provide the means to both reflect onto the art practice, as well as to enable new processes of aesthetic creation.

4.   – In relation to questions 1 through 3 above, where do you feel future research questions should lie, and why?

A key notion of performativity lies for me in the enactment of the necessary conditions in order to enable the epistemic transfer between diverse epistemic domains. As stated by the title, I conceive this problem in terms of an ethico-aesthetic processs of creation.

Aesthetic because the intersection between heterogeneous epistemic domains engenders new modalities of creative expression, outside of the specificity of the artistic realm.

Ethic because it concerns the question of the reconstitution of both subjects and objects, as new research questions lead towards the constitution of a whole *different* range of linguistic and nonlinguistic modalities of expression.

Guattari states that such an operation would lead towards a „detournement of

discoursivity"(26), i.e. a change into the conditions leading towards discoursive formation. The ethical question concerns then the analysis of the *potential* and the *specific modalities* of this interstitial mutation. The mutation of this configuration is performative in a twofold way: on one side leads it to changes in the configuration of the research objects, and on the other it promotes the constitution of different patterns of feeling and thought at the subjective level.

Thinking in terms of the coordinates determining an ethico-aesthetic process, goes along with an inquiry of the conditions of creation in the realm of a collective sensibility. This sensibility reflects the affective compositions between the all actors (subjects) and actants (objects) involved into the position of a specific problem, but can also never be isolated from the 'cosmic effusion' of a wider range of political, social, epistemological, philosophical etc... conditions.

It is the inquiry of both the operative and the performative conditions determining the *potential* for sensible mutations, which i regard as being crucial in future trasdisciplinary research between science and arts. An inquiry that, because of its very premises, cannot be other than the result of a collective re-composition of heterogeneous affective and epistemic partialities.

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