

Momentary gathering, performative moment and creative process. The documentation of realtime AV performance

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Text published in the catalogue of the festival SOUND:FRAME 2011- perFORMance, Vienna.

Introduction

In the year of its 5th anniversary, Sound:Frame is putting the emphasis on the process of making / developing live performance and how it relates to content and form through a wonderful program of performances, installations and talks. This emphasis is expressed and summarized in the word 'PerFORMance'. The concept of performance, in its original sense by Alan Kaprow, is a moment in everyday life transformed by its context into an artistic moment. Performance implies an absence of the object or document (considering a painting or sculpture as a document) as artistic expression. The use of capital letters in the word 'PerFORMance' places relevance on FORM, this way reinforcing the shape of an object. This only apparently transforms the word in a play of contradictions. Bearing in mind that the audience of a performance expects an aesthetic experience (just like the visitor of a museum), this interest in form (expressed by the organizers) extends and shifts from the object-oriented situation, with it at the centre of the experience, to the surrounding environment situation created through the multimedia experience of the space. In this last situation the audience replaces the object at the central position. The form in A/V is non-tactile, ethereal and ephemeral, features inherited in the course of the history of avant-garde movements and of technological devices applied to art contexts. FORM is therefore not intended to provoke a contradictory play with words but to expand on the definition of performance, providing new complex dimensions.

This text will focus on questions of form in the performative moment and on the creative process. It will also relate performance and process to its possibilities in expanding beyond the limits of its existence as part of the construction of memory of its related community.

As part of my research in the context of realtime audiovisual performance, my writing expresses a process of reflection and questioning. I attempt to address the reader in a mode of dialogue, bearing in mind that this requires in the other a similar curiosity in the theoretical reflection of the practice.

Momentary gathering, performative moment and creative process

The moment is a key element to the A/V performance that establishes a relational connection with other performative practices, and is the result of the organization of time and space. In order to understand the importance of these relationships I have established three variations of the moment. We will start by looking at the definition of moment in these three different variations to make the concept clear. The first is the festival, as for example Sound:Frame. It is a moment, or a momentary gathering, of an international community. Festivals (and other similar gatherings) are places for demonstration, exchange, where the community of practitioners are also audience and, in this double role, potentially transform the practice. Momentary gatherings have their own specific time and space which define their identity. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that most festivals in Europe happen during spring. In the present case,

this year's festival is defined by its duration and its program. It is also defined by the venues; the open space of a club allows different expression than a gallery or a cinema. The social and historical codes define each place. Lastly, the festival is also defined by the energy generated in the dynamics between performers, organizers and attendees. The moment of the festival is key to the affirmation of the fluid community around A/V practices.

The second variation is the performative moment. Realtime A/V performance presents this moment as artistic expression, resultant of a complex interweaving between knowledge, technology and concepts. In spite of the technological capacities for repetition, the performative moment, similar to momentary gatherings, has an emotional component that defines each one as unrepeatable. This emotion is directed at the audience but it also happens between performers. Collaborative environments allow skills to come together in endless possible combinations. Collaborative teams are nodes, points of intersection, which envisage a net of connections between audio and moving image artists, programmers, etc. This network of connections, reflected in collaborations, is the A/V community as a pluridisciplinary practice of flexible definitions.

The third variation of the moment has a different concept of time and space. It occurs before the performance. It is the period of its preparation, which can also be referred to as process and the creative process. The collaborative creative process provides new perspectives to process in art. A project is defined by a dialogical process of development and its presentations in the form of one or many performative moments. In a set of concept development, potentially, image doesn't illustrate sound (nor vice versa) but shares dynamics.

From moment to document

In the work of A. N. Whitehead, nature is a process in permanent movement. This is a dynamics of becoming common across process philosophy. Following Whitehead's concepts of time, constituted by events that extend along and over other events, we can envisage how the three variations on moment can develop, overlap and affect each other. They form interconnected relationships, where present experiences are influenced by prior experiences, and will influence all future experiences.

Issues related to the discussion on space become gradually complex if, to the physical space, we add the virtual space. The virtual has been key to community formation and to collaborations, beyond constraints of geographical distances for example. Looking into the future, there is a clear growing interest in the development of works that combine both virtual and physical spaces in the creation of a two-level experience - a *vireal* experience. Space has been also considered relevant by Sound:Frame organizers, who chose it as part of last year's festival theme.

Gatherings in physical space are key moments in the short history of the community development of the technological age. Previous to festivals, encounters between unknown people of similar interests took place online, through chat-rooms and forums, this way allowing exchange to develop between many from different and distant locations. Festivals have been encouraging stronger bounds between attendees and are motivators of exchange, allowing A/V community to exist and evolve.

Concerns and issues related to documentation are recent and affect artists, festivals and others. These concerns reflect the ephemeral dimension, which A/V practices borrow from the performance and club scene. They become evident if looked at from the point of view of the technology. Performers, on stage, although using technology

capable of endless repetitions and instantaneous document production, do not craft objects.

As a consequence of the ephemeral, non-document producing, a need for visibility arises. Documentation is therefore a way to take further the practice and investigations to proceed grounded on evidence. Ephemeral practices require particular methodologies to document appropriated to register moments. But documents related to A/V do exist. Promotional videos, for example, available through social networks, present a preview of the best moments of a specific A/V performance. They lack though the ability to demonstrate all the complexity of a performance throughout its process or its effects on the audience. It is suggested here a different kind of documentation, one that does not constitute a summary. As a clue towards the development of a methodology, the pluridisciplinarity of the practice should be observed, since other areas also feed in to shape it. This intersection of practices include references to theatre and music composition. When I note these two artistic forms as examples I have in mind that a theatre play is conceived for many representations and still each one is unique, as I also have in mind that music composition has a score as the basis for multiple reinterpretations. But both examples consider an interest in reinterpretation of an A/V performance, which is in itself a enormous argument. In many aspects, methodologies to document contemporary performance should observe many perspectives, to include the one of the performer as well as of the audience. The document should not be mistaken by a performance though.

Conclusion

At the very beginning of the process of writing this text, during an exchange of emails with Eva Fischer, our conversation went into documentation and she called my attention to several very concerning points. I will refer to a very particular one to which I have no answer for as yet. It regards technical feasibility in documentation. My intuition follows the practitioners skills and the tools of their practice as part of the answer. The way to documentation should be found, not only in terms of its technical feasibility but also in terms of its dissemination, within the community of practice and through creative ways. It is for the community to provide the means towards visibility, perhaps through an effort to open collaboration to new areas of knowledge.

Practice is bound to change: conceptual, theoretical abstract understanding of A/V have been done mostly from an inside perspective, one that looks at nuances and details. Theoretical reflection has been developing and diversifying, especially in the past five years. One (rather warm) summer night, discussing theory and practice during an online meeting with my friend Blanca Regina, we came to the conclusion that, although at the basis of theory lies practice, it is through theory, as a reflective process, that changes take place.

Documentation will eventually affect the practice. Perhaps will come to trace a clear line of separation between spontaneous improvisation and process-based practices. If this is the case, our understanding of "performance" and FORM, as expressed at the beginning of the text, will need to be redefined. Other conceptual possibilities in A/V may develop, provoked by the long lasting and memory constructing powers of documentation. For example, video documentation of performance that never happened or interviews that describe the experience of an auditorium that was never there. The examples may reveal unwanted fakeness but can also open the practice to more conceptualized works and even those impossible to achieve. The future, as

usual, is hidden somewhere, sneaking in voyeuristically at our actions to surprise us with its reactions.