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Research Plan 8.6.2018

audience function -- footnotes of a live corpus

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Who is the audience and why are they there? In other words, what makes an audience and what is its function? The research project aims to disclose these functions, generate artistic and/or para-artistic practices of audiencing, conjure polyphonic and temporary communities, and inquire into the political potential of attending events.

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According to dictionary.com, a footnote is

1) an explanatory or documenting note or comment at the bottom of a page, referring to a specific part of the text on the page. 2) a minor or tangential comment or event added or subordinated to a main statement or more important event.

Here *footnote* marks a reversal of the common reference structure, much like the whole research plan marks a reversal of artistic focus. As a default, in research of performance audiences *the body of research text* is text per se, in which live performances appear as references or footnotes. Here the reverse is the case. These sections of text are footnotes referring to the actual body of the text which has taken place in event-form, in multiple sites, at multiple times, among/in/through/as multiple art works made by multiple authors. These events are inaccessible to the reader of this text, except for the lucky coincidences where the reader has attended those events in the past. The footnotes are an attempt to compensate for the inaccessibility of these events through feedback loops, where fragments of some of those events are included in the text as descriptions and contemplations, and through theoretical thinking in textual form.

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According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a corpus is

1) the body of a human or animal especially when dead
2) a : the main part or body of a bodily structure or organ: "the corpus of the uterus". b : the main body or corporeal substance of a thing; specifically : the principal of a fund or estate as distinct from income or interest
3) a : all the writings or works of a particular kind or on a particular subject; especially : the complete works of an author. b : a collection or body of knowledge or evidence; especially : a collection of recorded utterances used as a basis for the descriptive analysis of a language

Here, the *live corpus* is composed of the artistic parts of the research plan.

In his text *What is an Author?* Michel Foucault wrote about what he calls the "author-function". Foucault defines an author (of a text) as a function in a discourse (rather than an actual person). I propose that another function that is related, or even opposed, to the author-function is the function of an audience. A text is written to an audience, and an audience is even more present in live events. In the context of events, we could outline that the audience-function

1. is tied to a set of conventions that organize and direct the ways of sensing, receiving, witnessing and taking part in events.
2. does not operate in a uniform manner in all contexts, at all times, and in any given culture.
3. is not defined by mere attendance of an event but through a series of aesthetic, relational and dialogical procedures.
4. implies plurality, and does not refer, purely and simply, to a mode of anonymous collectivity, but also to assemblages of subjective positions that are composed of actual individuals who form these collectivities facilitated by the spatial, temporal and relational organization of the event.
5. is secondary to the author-function (from which the organization of the event originates) – not in terms of value but in terms of procedure or assemblage. The audience-function requires following the lead of the authors, at least as a primary orientation, and listening to them.
6. requires a preparation to be unprepared, through its secondary or submissive nature: the inhabitants of the audience-function are subjected to the unknown, to circumstances and challenges, with which only the authors and other makers of the event have been familiarised.

"Further elaboration would, of course, disclose other characteristics of the 'author-function,' but I have limited myself to the four that seemed the most obvious and important. They can be summarized in the following manner: the 'author-function' is tied to the legal and institutional systems that circumscribe, determine, and articulate the realm of discourses; it does not operate in a uniform manner in all discourses, at all times, and in any given culture; it is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a text to its creator, but through a series of precise and complex procedures; it does not refer, purely and simply, to an actual individual insofar as it simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy." (Foucault. 1969, p. 309)

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A preliminary opening regarding the existence of a function such as this was made by Jacques Rancière in his much quoted *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009). Rancière refers to the audience as an entity with an agency of its own. This he contrasts with the need of theatremakers to transform their audience from passive observers to active participants of the society. He suggests that the audience is not passive nor are they in a need for transformation. When interpreting Rancière with a foucauldian filter, we might say that Rancière suggests that audience has a function of its own, as an audience.

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For example, in *Amor Fati* by Anna-Mari Karvonen and Anni Puolakka (Kiasma Theatre, Helsinki, September 2017), the audience is seated in a square shape, on all sides of a small elevated stage. The audience can see each other: when watching the actors on stage, the opposite rows form a live backdrop. The audience envelops the stage. They are addressed from the stage, but their space is not compromised, and they witness together the disclosure of the story of the main character, the actor Brad Pitt. They arguably have a function that is specific, yet easily applicable for the participants. The function of the audience could not be implemented by any other agent than an audience. The audience of *Amor Fati* embodies the functions audiences in general inhabit. These functions the research plan aims to study.

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Another example is *Voyer* by Joel Neves, performed in the Theatre Academy as well in September 2017. The structure of the performance itself supports the audience becoming conscious of its audienceness. When they step in, they encounter a wall-sized mirror in a space with a carpet-covered floor. Slowly the lighting changes and the mirror turns into a transparent window, revealing that the space is divided into two nearly identical halves. Ten performers, equalling ten audience members, become visible on the other side of the window. For the duration of the performance, this relationship between the stage and the auditorium, at the same time identical and different, is at play. The gaze of the spectators is directed both towards themselves and the performers.

Audiencing art – artistic part 1?

During the winter 2017-18 I tried to get a grip of how the audience or its members are positioned in research – specifically in artistic research and in research dealing with the position of the audience in performances. Based on a brief review of the material (the Acta Scenica -series published by the Theater Academy of Helsinki and texts by Fischer-Lichte (2008), Rancière (2009), Bishop (2012), Harvey (2013), Cvejic (2015), Alston (2016)), I had some conclusions. In artistic research (based on this narrow source material), artists write about their own art works, and refer to texts (mainly art theory and philosophy, to smaller extent other humanities). They rarely reference art works by other artists, i.e. art works that they audienced. In research by art scholars and theorists who address the audience, quite usual is to not disclose the audience member who was there. The references to art works are then made from a "non-subjective" perspective: it is not articulated, who attended the performance, instead the events that took place are described as if the perspective they are described from did not matter. Some recent theorists on the other hand do articulate their position as an audience member, and thus resonate with my project (Alston 2016, Bishop 2012, Cvejic 2015).

My main interest is in what happens in the event. By this I mean within the shared temporal and spatial form created by the authors; within the art of performance. Even the above-mentioned remarkable research (like Bishops *Artificial Hells* or Alston's *Beyond Immersive Theatre*) is formed as text in which the scholar theorizes based on their experience of the event after it has passed. I think artistic research could be a way to study the audience *in situ*, and as a collective body. This would be something quite different from a lone scholar attending performances and reflecting on their personal experience in their study, on their computer; or from an artist doing research of their own work on stage.

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My idea is to create a structure in which a collective or plural body attends performances as a research entity. This entity would expose agencies and qualities of being an audience, and possibly create para-artistic practices from that position. To realize this, the following questions need solving:

- 1) Who forms this body – who is the audience? How to invite its members? Should the members be permanent or change every time? How to tackle the contradiction of a single doctoral candidate whose project it is and the plurality that he is searching for – the fact that I am not a we?
- 2) How to choose the performances to be audienced? How to inform or not inform the authors or organizers?
- 3) How is the plural body oriented? What do they know of the research in advance?
- 4) What is the purpose; what do I or we want to create? And consequently, what is the material of the research? What is the medium of reflection?

My plan is to configure this entity and the parameters of its work during the autumn of 2018. It would start to function in the spring of 2019 and would possibly conclude after a period of one year.

Audiencing non-art – artistic part 2?

In March 2018, at a seminar organised at the Theatre Academy as a preparation for Palestine Performance Symposium, Ray Langenbach suggested that the greatest value of the symposium (or especially our participation in it) would not be performing, but *witnessing the event* of the commemoration of Nakba (arabic for *catastrophe*, referring to the ethnic cleansing that took place at the time of the founding of the state of Israel in 1948). In May, 5.-12.5.2018, I took part in symposium itself in Al-Arroub refugee camp, Bethlehem and Ramallah.

The experience reflected Langenbach's proposal. Witnessing the event had meaning in itself, at least both as a transformational process for us foreigners and as an experience of being listened to by the locals. The problematics of active-passive that are constant in participatory performances (and to which Rancière refers), were likewise present. Our presence and attention had a function. But what does it help to just witness? And on the other hand, what else can you do as an "outsider"?

Another event took place a week later. After I had returned to Finland, my grandmother got a stroke and was, at least to some extent, unconscious. I witnessed the last four days of her life, or her process of dying. The elements that I was familiar with from my work with the audience, were there. Attendance, listening, support, empathy, participation, entanglement, being secondary yet crucial. Is it possible to say that I was *audiencing* her death? It feels disrespectful, and yet in the way I consider audiencing, it might make sense.

Witnessing these events lead me thinking about the possibility of doing research not only within the realm of artistic performances and events, but also in the realm of non-artistic events. Audiencing artistic events and performances might be a field of experimentation that discloses something more general. If in the context of art audiencing is a para-artistic practice, reactive to the art of making, in non-artistic context it may become an artistic practice, as it transpositions the event into the context of art or artistic research (vrt. Kirkkopelto 2018). However, I am uncertain of the ethical implications of this idea. The tensions between voyeurism and empathy, activity and passivity, and respect and colonization are present.

Audiencing the audience – artistic part 3?

The structure of the seminar weeks, that is the recommended spine of the first two years of doctoral studies at Tutke, suggests and enables specific forms of artistic research, while omitting others. As I followed the suggested schedule to enter the discourse of academic artistic research, my research practices were moulded accordingly: I started to invent expositional forms that would function in the spaces provided by the Theatre Academy, at office hours between 9am and 6.30pm, in durations between 30-60 minutes and for an audience composed of doctoral candidates, post-doctoral researchers and professors.

The part of these practical experiments that is worth mentioning is the series of expositions called *the audience: drafts 1-x*. It takes form as program handouts that guide the participants to be or act in the situation in a certain way: to co-research the audience as a question posed by the framing of the situation. I have so far conducted three expositions that can be counted as worthwhile, one at the Practicum-seminar at the Theatre Academy (16th of February 2018), one at Dance Hallerne in Copenhagen (9th of April 2018) and one at Kahlil Sakakini Cultural Center in Ramallah (9th of May 2018). This series is available in the Research Catalogue (<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/445803/451564>).

As a background material for this series I would like to mention a series of books that I have created between 2014-17. These books work as scripts that the audience members follow through the performative event. They guide the process of audiencing and the dynamics between individual audience members and the audience as a collectivity. In all cases the books, unlike the handouts in *the audience: drafts 1-x*, where parts of larger collaborative performance pieces (*Portals* 2014, *Triologue* 2015, *Plato's Cave* 2016, *Plato's Republic* 2017).

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The *audience: drafts 1-x* -series has posited questions about the anonymity and collectivity of the audience, and appropriation of theoretical proposals of several scholars. In practice, I have for example addressed the participants personally, including their personal ideas into the work. Or, I have proposed audiencing through lenses borrowed from Rancière, Alston, Fischer-Lichte or Bishop.

This practice could be developed into an artistic part, into a more extensive event where audiencing would be proposed and realized in multiple forms, at least through the mediums of text and spatial arrangements. The event would take place either in a theatre space or in a gallery.

Possibly in the spring of 2021.

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As the question marks in previous titles suggest, the composition of the doctoral thesis is still strongly in progress. Above are the preliminary ideas about the possible artistic parts: the plural audience research body attending performances (2019), audiencing the audience (2021) and the vague idea of audiencing non-art. In addition to the artistic parts the doctoral thesis requires a commentary.

So far I can say two things about it. Firstly, this research plan and the research catalogue work-in-progress exposition of *audience: drafts 1-x* contribute to the process of creating a commentary as the first steps. As evident in them, the question of the relationship of the live event(s) and their reflection is crucial here.

Secondly, if I would go on to realize the artistic part called here *audiencing the audience*, the creation of the commentary would intertwine with the creation of that live exposition. Also here this research plan can serve as a preliminary example: the first part is crafted in the form of a handout used in performances as a tool of orientation, and the second part respectively as an application of the form of an article used in academic discourse.

The commentary would then be constructed using the relations between live events, printed materials and online materials.

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audience: drafts 2-20. 16.2.2018. Practicum, Theatre Academy. A course led by Esa Kirkkopelto, Mika Elo and Lea Kantonen.

audience: drafts 23-30. 9.4.2018. Choreography in Action, Danse Hallerne, Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen. Choreography in Action is a weekly event throughout the season. Every Monday from September 18th 2017 at 7-9 pm Dansehallerne presents meetings between affiliated artists and guests from other programs and performances presented by Dansehallerne.

audience: draft 31. 5.-12.5.2018. Palestine Performance Symposium, Al-Arroub, Bethlehem, Ramallah. The symposium was generated out of a partnership between the University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland, Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre, Nowat Theatre Ensemble in Al-Arroub Refugee Camp, and the Palestine Philharmonie, whose Director, Michele Cantoni has provided early and consistent support for the initiative.

Plato's Cave. 23.-28.2.2016. Reality Research Center, Copenhagen. Working group: Tuomas Laitinen, Maria Oiva, Jani-Petteri Olkkonen. A mystery play in five acts across six days. One of the four scenes is based on a script that the audience member reads and through which they communicate with a performer. Text and performance by Tuomas Laitinen.

Plato's Republic. 24.-29.8.2017. Reality Research Center, Helsinki. Working group: Tuomas Laitinen, Maria Oiva, Jani-Petteri Olkkonen. A mystery play in five acts across six days. The performance is based on a script that the audience reads and embodies. Text by Tuomas Laitinen & working group.

Portals. 13.-27.2.2014. Panoply Performance Laboratory, New York. Working group: Jesse Harold, Tuomas Laitinen, Samita Sinha. One element of the performance was a script, which audience reads and embodies. Text by Tuomas Laitinen.

Trialogue. 4.-20.8.2015. Reality Research Center, Gallery Oksasenkatu, Helsinki. Working group: Visa Knuuttila, Tuomas Laitinen, Jani-Petteri Olkkonen. A live exhibition, where one room is based on a script that the audience

member reads and through which they communicate with a performer. Text and performance by Tuomas Laitinen.

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