CHARLOTTA RUTH: Choreographic Clues

Inspired by score based choreography, treasure hunting, game-design and instruction based art; I have developed practices and theory under the umbrella Choreographic Clues. Choreographic Clues come in different media, but what they all have in common is that the facilitation is mediated. The facilitation is outsourced to the clues. The facilitator participates at the periphery or is not at all present.

I coined the name of this practice during my PhD in Arts where I looked at how to construct liveness (a heightened or shared here and now) in digital and hybrid spaces where communication and presence is often asynchronous. This text contribution is a rework of a text that originally stems from the part of my PhD reflexive work called APPROACHES, PRACTICES, EXERCISES.

The Practice Choreographic Clues was also further developed inside a research project that looked at the role of the facilitator of participatory performance, WITHDRAWING THE PERFORMER, that I conducted with Jasmin Schaitl 2021-2022.

Regardless if written on paper or coming up as a digital link, clues as well as their sometimes less enigmatic sibling; instructions, are performative utterances (J. Austin). They make us do something. Even when we cannot literally execute a conceptual instruction (think for instance about the conceptual instructions written by Yoko Ono), we are being activated beyond the realm of reading and grasping - we are to some extent performing the action in our mind. Peter Liversidge, famous for his "proposals", has described how the live component in his exhibitions often is that which is not visible in his exhibitions. That there is a tension between attending to a proposal that has not been realised when another proposal, like a cannonball that has been fired into the gallery wall, is next to it. In this way it is important to consider how the space the facilitator has prepared facilitates the way an instruction, a proposal or a Choreographic Clue will be attended to. From my perspective as a facilitator or game-designer, the thing that makes clues specially interesting, is not that people understand them straight away, it is that clues open a contingent poetic game space. The content of the clue resonates with each person's imagination and interpretation of the situation. The flow of for instance a game therefore isn't only establish through succeeding, but also through the game's capacity of becoming meaningful in relation to its surroundings.

If an instruction is related to a material or site-specific situation, we (human beings) are conditioned to expect that the instruction supports us assembling, finding, or achieving something. If the materiality creates this expectation, it is necessary that it's possible to resolve or complete the task - otherwise there is no participatory sense making. But important to note is that if the goal is not a shelf or an address of a pick-up point - the fastest route to finding this location is not always the most engaging. I'm originally trained as a dancer and as a dancer it's not at all a problem to stay inside of a space of contradicting information – this rather triggers creativity. The difference between performing an instruction or looking for what an instruction can do is enormous. It can, for instance, change which part of me engages, how long I engage and how I work with nuances. As Lilia Mestre says about scores in the book "Choreographic Figures. Deviations from the line" (p. 306 eds Gansterer, Cocker, Greil) 2017. "The eternal quest to understand and the eternal impossibility of achieving, leaves us with the wonderful possibility of experimenting." Depending on context, the clues I facilitate hence sometimes deliberately puzzling or impossible – they facilitate an ongoing process of looking for another relation to the given.