

[Helsinki. A group of reseachers are in a room. One has just opened an envelope.]

Dear Alex and everybody,

Happy to be here with you. Could you read this aloud? I would like to share these thoughts with everyone who are present.

[Silence. The reseachers are waiting.]

Reading aloud honors the memory of the first reading circle in November
and the genorosity of the Merleau-Ponty text
when shared through voice and listening.

Now that you have started, I would ask you to continue until an appropriate point in the text
and then hand the letter over to someone else, who can continue reading. And so on.

Take your time - one point of the reading-aloud is the level of performativity that it brings into this situation.
Thus it matters how we listen, and that we have enough time to experience
the phenomenon of **audiencing** this reading-aloud,
through receiving this voice,
through spectating the act of reading,
through being situated in relation to each other and the writing,
through becoming an audience and it's members.

So do not hurry through the text but allow us to enjoy the phenomenality of it's appearance.

What is the practice then?

Well, there are two.

The first one is the opening up of sort of a speculative stage, or a stage whose inhabitation is deferred

[pause. the reader resists the desire to continue.]

as a performative situation, where the attention is looped back towards audiencing itself

[a longer pause]

when opening the envelope, I suppose an audience already appeared
when voicing the text out, it became more familiar

Yet it's condition is unclear

and hopefully available
for a phenomenological gaze

[The audience is a condition]

[a dialogue surfaces.]

A:

"If we consider this letter as an example of practice, as such it aims to provide a position of audiencing while encouraging a suspension of the natural attitude that is normally linked to it (*Van Manen writes: "to open myself and try to bracket my presumptions, common understandings, and scientific explanations"*). This natural attitude would usually direct the focus on stage and disregard the phenomenality of audiencing itself (*Van Manen writes: "to regard the phenomenon that was given in my experience"*)."

B:

"For Levinas there is always something more important than my life: the life of the other. I am the hostage of the other. The audience is the hostage and the stage, as exposure of vulnerability, comes first."

A:

"I'm not sure if I would go that far, but it seems that alterity is there when we say "audience". It is an audience of something, for something, and this something has invoked the audience. The audience comes second."

B:

"Van Manen writes on Levinas: "We are cohabitant fellow human beings, who live in reciprocal relationships. In these relations, each of us cannot help but see others as objects of our personal perception and thinking. But this is not the only possibility. It also may happen that the other person bursts upon my world and makes a claim on me outside of my own intentional cognitive orientation. In other words, it is also possible to experience the other in the vocative: as an appeal, as someone who stirs and touches me. This is especially true of situations where we meet the other in his or her vulnerability.""

A:

"Ok, that's enough."

[Pause. Three men sit in the foyer after the show.]

A:

"I sit down in the first row, on the right side, next to one of the two men I have invited to participate in my research arrangement. The arrangement is set up so that we attend the performance as audience members and reflect the experience through writing afterwards. The performance begins and dancers start moving on stage. My mind is occupied with my car, which I backed into a concrete pig just before the performance. I am tracing back my actions before it: which choices led to the crash? How could I have avoided it? Will I get it to the repair shop still today? I regret the accident and anticipate the loss of money involved. I am also thinking about my research arrangement and the men whom I have invited to join me and whether I did and said everything as I should have with them. I am very conscious of the man sitting next to me, his reactions and feelings. Dancers move on stage. The movement enters my system more and more, slowly it hypnotizes me with its relentless energy. We as an audience are grouped against the stage and the performers. They are virtuosic, they have heaps of skill, which we do not have. Nothing questions this setting, this classical polarity, in which the artist with skill is on stage and the spectator with expectancy is in the auditorium, free to let their mind wander anywhere they like."

B:

"As it started, I had an uncomfortable feeling, an emotion, difficult to concentrate. I felt myself an outsider, which was enhanced by the choice of seating. Backrow, although in the middle. I felt the dancers at first machine-like individuals, in the end a community, a team. Peter Greenaway's films and Chaplin's Dictator crossed my mind. The music was good - possibly through that I joined the performance and experienced in the end being one with everybody, I experienced that the stage was the audience."

C:

"---"

A:

"I gather that this polarity of inside and outside appears in the audience experience time and time again. If you take the theatre of this story as an example, we were in the theatre, but outside of the stage. One desires to experience being inside, even if one does not really want to step on stage. The "inside" of the theater performance is the maker's position on stage. It is the first thing that has to emerge, only it can invoke the audience to appear. Audience's other, which is what takes place on stage, comes first."

[The last page is turned.]

That is the second practice: going somewhere where an audience already has been invoked and where someone already fills the stage.

The natural habitat of an audience.

Audience as a condition whose appearance is not questioned.

[pause]

Thank you for taking the time. I appreciate our attention.

Yours,
Tuomas

Sources:

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