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Listen to the Space, See the Sound: The City as a Motive for a Collaborative Performance

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ΔΙΑΒΑΣΤΕ ΤΟ ΑΡΘΡΟ ΠΑΡΑΚΑΤΩ

Το άρθρο μπορεί να χρησιμοποιηθεί για έρευνα, διδασκαλία και προσωπική μελέτη. Κάθε αναφορά στο άρθρο ή σε μέρος του άρθρου μπορεί να γίνει με παραπομπή στην παρούσα έκδοση.

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Abstract

The workshop combines methods of theatre and music education with aspects of urban geography. The facilitators invited the participants to engage into an embodied experience of the public space around the Moraitis School and to transform it creatively into a performance. The participants selected elements of the surrounding environment and transferred them on paper in the form of a graphic or verbal score. The scores got mixed and then performed by the group by the mean(s) that they chose to use (sound, movement, speech, image). The scores were performed in groups as a collective performance.

The workshop is based on the “open works” tradition, as formed by the experimental music and the Fluxus movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Nyman, 1999). The participants were invited to play, experiment and act via an educational process which overcomes the borders of formal educational tools and rather becomes the occasion for a didactic approach based on self-action and creativity (Kanellopoulos & Stefanou, 2015). Today, performing arts continue to justify their role in the school daily routine, by putting forward specific educational and learning objectives. By introducing contemporary artistic trends, such as performance, in the school framework, we aim to reflect on the structural roles of the student and the teacher, as well as on the learning and teaching process itself (Primavesi & Deck, 2014).

Key words: *performance, open score, embodiment, theatre and music education, urban space*

1. Introduction

To what extent is the school daily routine engaged with the physical, acoustic, expressive and creative art form, as a concept released from the burden of a “meaning”? What happens when performance becomes the trigger to transfer the educational process out of the classroom, outside the school and the yard, and to get out on the streets of the city?

These basic questions led us to design this workshop, which set the key objectives for the participants to come in contact, discuss and reflect on the following issues:

- The concepts of space and time. How do these concepts overlap in everyday life and how do they relate to each other in performing arts?
- The experiential approach of contemporary art forms; open score and performance as tools in theatre and music education; the role of playing, experimenting and improvising.
- The interplay between individuality and collectivity as a key element of the educational process; the redefinition of student - teacher roles in a pedagogy of performativity.
- An educational process out of the classroom; urban space as a motive for a collaborative performance learning platform.

2. Performing arts in school life

The educational policy in Europe and Greece related to arts education (music, theatre, visual arts) in school life has changed dramatically during the last years. Today, students' engagement in arts is considered as self-evident at most levels of education. From the 1970s until today, arts in education have been following two main directions; the first attributes "healing properties" to their teaching, while the second focuses on their specific characteristics as arts (Degenhardt as cited in Hilliger, 2009).

The first direction includes general aims that school, as an institution, has to achieve; from students' personality shaping (the so-called social skills, such as learning to improvise, to think critically, to find solutions, to adapt, to cooperate, to get to know oneself, etc.) to pure learning goals (teaching and learning history or a foreign language through theatre, learning mathematics through visual arts or music, etc.).

It has been widely admitted that, within this context, performing arts go through a process of instrumentation, with which music and theatre legitimise their presence in school life only as useful and necessary tools for acquiring skills that are not directly related to it (Kanellopoulos & Stefanou, 2018, pp. 47-49). Since the 1990s, an attempt has been made to integrate arts in the context of aesthetic education. In the field of theatre education, in particular, we should mention Ulrike Hentschel's contribution with her work *Theaterspielen als ästhetische Bildung*, which brings to the fore of theatre education the teaching and learning of theatre as an art, in order to acquire artistic skills in a context of an aesthetic education (Karamoutsiou, 2016, p. 40). After Hentschel's theoretical contribution, there have been many discussions in the scientific community that attempt to overcome this tension between these two directions (Sack, 2011, p. 80). Nevertheless, it is a fact that theatre and music education can no longer ignore the current trends of the arts they represent.

3. The concept of performativity in performing arts and pedagogy

The current trend in performing arts and pedagogy is now driven by the concept of performativity. This shift focuses the practice of performing arts on the concepts of event and present. Performative processes are perceived as self-referential and as processes that define a reality. So, based on the question of how reality is produced, several topics are being discussed again, such as the relations between directing and performing, between the role of actor and spectator, as well as between physicality (as act and presence) and materiality (Karamoutsiou, 2016, p. 41). All the aforementioned correlations are directly related to the production of meaning and describe the performance as a situation that is created during its process. Its existence is directly dependent on the physical presence of both performers and spectators and the levels of communication created between them. The members of this interaction, which we call performance, are equal within the concept of performativity, and even their physical presence and their sensory perceptive abilities are considered to be an action. For this reason, each performance is unique and cannot be repeated (Fischer-Lichte, 2001, pp. 233-234).

Arts education and pedagogy are also influenced by the concept of performativity and consider the teaching process as performative process with the aforementioned characteristics. A performative pedagogy adds importance to situation as a concept which, in the conditions of an educational process, depends on the physical and spatial conditions in which it takes place (Wulf & Zirfas, 2007, p. 16). The pedagogical process is approached as an a priori interactive space, directly related to the concept of performance, in which all members are equally capable, even with their sensory perception, of defining its outcome and turn. The design of a course is considered as a "course sheet" that has been prepared by the teacher, but can be changed by all members of the group. Under these circumstances, the roles of teacher and student are observed through another perspective. All participants of an educational process are perceived as individualities that are in the same space, at the same time and act collectively with a common purpose, which is to interact, experiment and discover. Therefore, for this workshop we chose performance as our didactic approach, because we believe it is a form of art that is inclusive and embraces different kinds of expression through which we perceive and converse with the environment, while respecting others' individuality.

4. Playing and experimenting as a framework of contemporary art in education

This new trend in arts education and pedagogy, as it has been described so far, presupposes a framework that allows an open-ended result via the interaction of its members and includes the factors of unpredictability and incomprehensibility. Playing as a communicative and interactive act can be the basis on which

the above theoretical concept will be practically developed. The communicative function of playing is succeeded when the players are able to perceive its context and rules through verbal or non-verbal actions, which can at the same time aim to change or even reject its rules and limits (Sack, 2011, p. 134).

Through this prism, an experimental character can be attributed to playing, where the factor of coincidence/chance not only plays an important role, but is also desirable. Experimenting is an action whose outcome cannot be foreseen (Cage, 1973, p. 69), an open procedure to which we can only set a frame or some kind of structure elements, but whose content can only be completed by its participants. Thus, in order to create a learning environment where art is not just another prefabricated knowledge (Kanellopoulos, Stefanou, 2018 p. 50), we used verbal scores¹ to organise our workshop and retain its performativity. The historical background of this score tradition (Dada, futurism, Neo Dada) made it possible to approach one of our basic goals. Like those art movements which wanted to redefine the limits between arts, art and life and art factors (creator, performer, audience) (Karamoutsiou, 2011, p. 57), we likewise created tools affected by their art tradition in an attempt to redefine student-teacher roles in a pedagogy of performativity, and to set the prerequisites for a collective creation through self-expression, by using our environment and everyday life as artistic inspirations.

5. The production of -urban- space as a stimulus for experimentation

The discourse around the open works and the art as a trigger for the transference of education outside the school building, into the actual living environment, be it rural or urban, has led us to the negotiation of introducing aspects of urban planning and geography into our framework and practical approach. The majority of the terms and approaches referred to in the previous paragraphs, such as “embodiment”, “production of reality” and “experience”, seem to be highly related to the disciplinary field of phenomenology (Seamon, 2011), which started from philosophy and was also transferred into the field of human geography in the early 1970s; a time when experimental music and the Fluxus movement also emerged (Nyman, 1999). We consider this not to be a matter of coincidence, and through our workshop practice we seek to dig into this interconnection more deeply.

Many philosophers, scholars and practitioners have approached and continue to approach the relation between the subject and the space through the prism of the conception, perception, experience and embodiment that the urban environment and daily life provoke to the person, and vice versa. Amongst many others, this dialectic relationship between a person and a space has been discussed by Henri Lefebvre in his work *The Production of Space*, created in 1991, by firstly introducing a spatial triad, a “conceptual triad”, which negotiates the representations and practices of the social space; through them he actually incorporates the societal and experiential aspects (the construction of space) in the production of space (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33). These three “elements”, which are closely related and in constant negotiation, are the perceived space, meaning the physical space, the networks and relations, the representation of space, which is the space as conceived by the “scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent”, and the spaces of representations, referring to the space as it is lived, including symbolisms, experiences and images (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 37-39). The stimuli that create a person’s everyday experience of space are related to one’s senses. Tuan (1977) supports that “it is impossible to discuss experiential space without introducing the objects and places that define space” (p. 136).

Except for the tangible and intangible elements of the realm which affect the experience of space, it seems that the body and all the senses play a critical role in the production process of perceptions and experiences (Merleau-Ponty as cited in Seamon, 2010, pp. 1-2). The cultural background, emotions, state of mind, sense of self, social relations and cultural predispositions are also attached to the physical embodiment (Tuan, 1977, p. 34; Low, 2003, p. 10). It could be argued that individuality is an element highly recognised in the phenomenological approach of the spatial production, and it seems to be also closely connected to the role of individuality in performative processes in arts and arts education. These are the elements that the participants of our approach are invited to recognise, reflect upon, record and then integrate into a score and perform openly.

The introduction of the artistic and performative perspective into the discourse of the phenomenological production of space is closely related, historically and thematically, to the Situationist Movement (1957-1972) and its initiator, Guy Debord (Young, 2012, p. 6). The Situationists viewed the urban environment and city life through a philosophical and artistic - avant-garde - prism, which allowed them to have a different focus on the experiences of urban life and symbolisms of the urban environment (Doumpa, 2012). In order that the Situationists translate their philosophical approaches to empirical results and works of art, they developed three practices – *Dérive*, *Psychogeography* and *Détournement* – which are linked to each other and based on urban walking (Young, 2012, p. 6).

6.3. Music Improvisation

Part A³

After warming up, we experimented with the available musical instruments and sound objects. During the first part of the experimentation we chose three or four sound objects and played with them for a couple of minutes, holding them very close to our ears and trying to discover different kinds of sounds.

Images 3 and 4. Experimenting with instruments and sound objects. Source: Authors' capture and edit



PART B

For our improvisation we used Fredric Rzewski's verbal score "Sound Pool" (1969) as our basis, focusing on the three roles that he indicates:

Silence: listening to and reflecting on the sounds around you; thinking about what you are going to do. Accompaniment: providing a background or support for a sound made by someone else; any sound over which someone could play a solo. Solo: a prominent or leading sound, a thematic statement. (Rzewski, 1969, p. 13)

We also focused on the "playing" options that he gives:

Play long sounds and short ones, soft ones as well as loud ones; discover new ways of playing, other than those you are used to, and influence other people to play in different ways. Sometimes imitate what another person is doing, and sometimes play in sharp contrast (for example, against a long sustained sound, make short, spaced, percussive attacks and vice versa). Sing. Use the hands and feet. Play the room. Make sounds by striking on floors, walls and furniture (taking care not to damage anything). (Rzewski, 1969, p. 14)

We found it very useful to create some graphic scores with the aforementioned options and put them on the wall. In this way, on the one hand, participants had an optical reminder of what they could do and, on the other hand, this was an opportunity for us to introduce participants to some kind of graphic scores. We chose this score as our basis because Rzewski had the idea of a socialised art. With "Sound Pool" he tried to include in music improvisatory procedures people who may have had no previous experience in playing music; "...doing things, giving everybody the opportunity to have experiences they would not otherwise have had" (Nyman, 1999, pp. 130-131).

The group interacted with the available objects, using them either in a common way or in original and creative ways. Following an exploration that lasted a couple of minutes, the facilitators invited the group to the improvisation session, by referring to the "Sound Pool" score and the graphic scores on the wall. We started performing by using the objects. The outcome was balanced, had an interesting flow of textures and volumes, and everyone seemed to have participated equally in the improvisation.

Images 5 and 6. Graphic scores on the wall based on Fredric Rzewski's Sound Pool



6.4. Sound Dérive: sound mapping I

During this part of the workshop we left the classroom and the building, and started “the drifting”, the Dérive, in the neighbourhood. We created a verbal score, Listen17_18⁴, in order to activate the senses and mobilise the recollecting and performative options. Before leaving the classroom, we were in a way familiarised with the neighbourhood through a brief introduction to the map of the area and some indicative information about the history of the place.

Specifically, the Palaio Psychiko district, where the workshop and the conference were held, was designed, developed and constructed according to the utopian ideal of the *Garden City*. The idea, and eventually the movement, of the Garden City was initiated at the end of the 19th century by Sir Ebenezer Howard in the United Kingdom, as a counterbalance urban planning model to the industrial city. This model promotes the need for open and green areas surrounding the city and integrating into the urban grid, while enhancing the sense of community and social bonds through the daily use of the open and public spaces. The relevant urban design models of that period present quite an interesting graphic result that we also showcased to the workshop participants for reflection and inspiration.

At that point, we made the connection between the place where we were, which was designed according to a utopian perspective, and the theme of the conference “Theatre/Drama and Performing Arts in Education: Utopia or Necessity?”, briefly highlighting the interconnectivity of the aspects of our daily life, and how these have political, social, financial, cultural as well as spatial dimensions. To complete the introduction to the spatial elements of the area, we highlighted some specific points in the history of the development of the Palaio Psychiko area before the construction of the neighbourhood, when it was only hills and greenery, and afterwards.

During the Sound Dérive (Debord, 1956) we were called to drift and follow the sounds of our interest. We could recollect them by recording them, taking pictures or notes (verbal or graphic ones) or touch them, we could “play” music or dance with them. The main goal of this score is to set a context in which someone could “sound drift” in a public space, collect and creatively respond to sound stimuli of his/her interest.

Image 7. Verbal score: Listen17_18

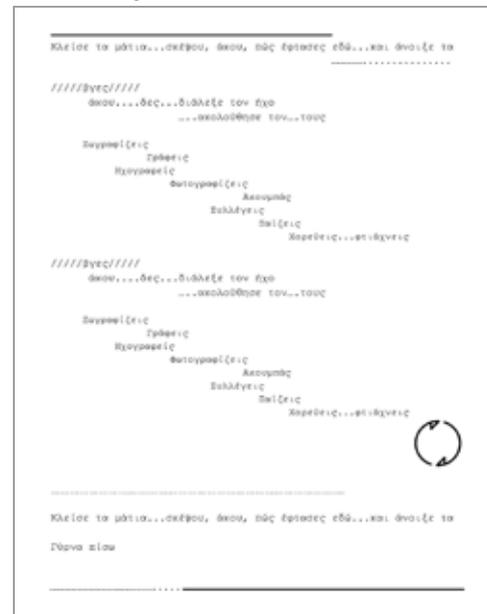
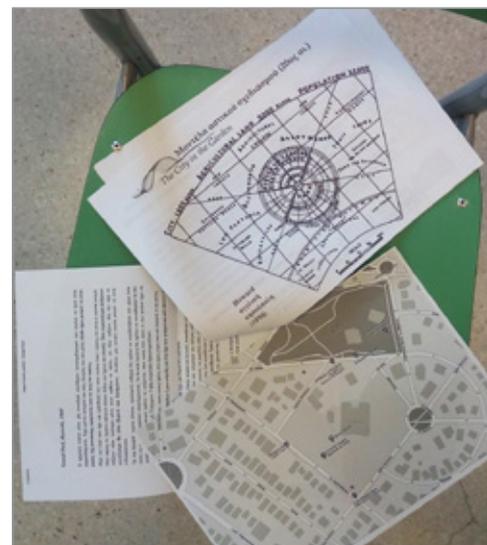


Image 8. Map of the area and indicative designs of the Garden City utopian model to use for navigation and inspiration to the Dérive and Psychogeography



6.5. Back to classroom: sound mapping II

The Sound Dérive lasted for about 20 minutes and the time was agreed before leaving the classroom. This is the minimum proposed duration. When we were back we noted our drifting space on an A0-size printed map, without specific guidelines on how to do it.

Images 9 and 10. One of the cartographical outputs of Psychogeography and Dérive: indicating the drifting route on the map



6.6. Sound performing

In order to organise our performance quickly and easily, we created a second verbal score inspired by Marcel Duchamp's first music composition "Erratum Musical". "Erratum Musical" was a vocal score made by Duchamp and his sisters in 1913, based on random procedures. The title of this score, translated as "musical misprint", implies the dialectic relation between seeing and hearing (Ya-Ling, 1999).

At first, our score, entitled "Everyday sounds people...", asked the participants to recollect and reflect on our Sound Dérive by imprinting our experience or specific parts of it with the use of words, drawings or a combination of the two. If we had already done this by using the Listen17_18 score, we could use this imprint too (photos, recordings, etc.). The imprints were then collected and mixed in a box.

Image 11. Collect and Mix Imprints



Image 12. Imprint from the sound Derive



Secondly, we created three groups of three or four people, and each of us took one or more imprints from the box, depending on how many imprints had been put in the box earlier. Then, every group had 10 minutes to rehearse in order to “interpret and play the papers or items you “chose” in any order you prefer, either successively or altogether. You have to decide beforehand the duration of your performance (3’-7’). When one group stops, the other starts immediately” (Karamoutsiou, 2018).

Finally, the performance consisted of three distinct performances, yet combined in an organic collective whole. The creativity and liberation of the participants and ourselves, as actively involved facilitators, was outstanding. Every team was really different from the other but harmonically connected with each other in the end, creating a performance that dialectically combined music and theatre performative tools.

7. Conclusions

After the performance, the participants spontaneously created a reflection circle. The enthusiasm after the completion of the workshop led to a great need for discussion and exchange of thoughts about this collective experience. The reflection circle brought to the fore many concepts which were related to the theoretical framework of the workshop.

Participants enjoyed the playing and experimenting process mostly because they don’t often have the opportunity to play and experiment in their classroom as teachers. The dialectic between the individuality of the participants (facilitators and “students”) and the collective action of the workshop was also highlighted as a liberating element.

Focusing on the body, the senses and the materiality of objects was mentioned as a unique experience because it is not something that they did in their everyday life. At this point, the importance of silence was also noted as a state of listening very carefully and comprehending reality, sometimes including its unpleasant aspects that we usually want to avoid. In other words, silence was considered as a process of realisation.

Performance is a form of art that is inclusive and embraces different kinds of expression through which we perceive and converse with the environment, and respect others’ individuality; it is a utopian frame in which anybody can artistically express him/herself and communicate with the others.

Notes

- 1 It is necessary to create an alternative way of notation to create the space needed for experimentation (Cage, 1973, p. 73).
- 2 The facilitators actively took part in the workshop. This is why, from now on, the first plural person is preferred for the description of the workshop. Facilitators and participants worked together and changed roles.
- 3 This part is inspired by Terry Riley’s verbal score “Ear Piece”. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/127535>
- 4 The first version of this score was created by Alexandra Karamoutsiou and Vivian Doumpa during the workshop “Music in between: Intermedia artistic experimentation workshop for adults” in 2016-2017, held by Danae Stefanou, Anastasia Peki and Alexandra Karamoutsiou at Thessaloniki Concert Hall. <http://www.tch.gr/default.aspx?lang=el-GR&page=3&tcheid=1787>

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