

Creating Performative Critique

A reflective attempt of a dramaturgical and methodological kind on

One Less Manifesto, by Gilles Deleuze

The complete critical operation consists of (1) deducting the stable elements, (2) placing everything in continuous variation, (3) then transposing everything in *minor*.¹

Gilles Deleuze

To reverse the sequence

We are going to move into the question of how a radical critique can be produced within artistic creations. This will be done mainly through a reading of the text *One Less Manifesto* by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995), that was written in 1978. In this text Deleuze develops an in-depth critique of the esthetics of the Italian theater director/actor Carmelo Bene (1937-2002), and he does so in close relation to some of the core concepts developed in his philosophical work elsewhere. To look more closely at this text is done with the intent to locate critical figurations that could possibly be activated in compositional thinking, as well as in artistic research methodology.² The phenomena of appropriation, or more precisely, the appropriation of critical discourses into different creative doings, is a sequence central to artistic research, and can certainly be considered a necessary methodological component. Appropriating and utilizing thought lines and concepts picked up

¹ Deleuze, Gilles, in *Mimesis, Masochism and Mime*, ed. Timothy Murray, University of Michigan Press, 1997, page 246. All quotes, unless otherwise noted, are from this edition and will be referenced as, in this case, [OLM 246].

² Possibly unnecessary, but important to clarify, is that this text does not in anyway try to reflect on the theater art of Carmelo Bene, most obviously so because that is what Deleuze is doing and the intention is to look at the specifics of *his* critical attempt. Other reasons for not connecting to that level of the text, where the intricate details of the directorial treatment that Bene's choices represent, is that we do not have a direct experience of the expression that he created, and this makes the tension between the expression and the critical gaze less vibrant. A second reason is that the creative approach that Bene represents as director and actor, from which Deleuze's reasoning feeds, from the viewpoint of contemporary theater/theater directing and dramaturgy and its development over the last thirty years, in many ways can be regarded as a quite common approach. Emphasizing a certain reading through deducting parts or elements in the material, or creating shifts through imagery or bodily expression are central in modern dramaturgy. This is *not* to say that Bene's art isn't strong or unique.

from various critical discourses is then most often done to illuminate and problematize different aspects like composition, interpretation, perception, cognition and so on. Obviously the phenomena of surrounding an art practice with theories – or incorporating them more explicitly – is not new. However, I don't think it would be an exaggeration to say that this dynamic has been radically intensified through the occurrence of artistic research as a separate field of research within academia. This intensification, *combined with* the specific thinking of Deleuze, generates a number of questions around how appropriations can be done, but there is one in particular that, in my eyes, moves to the forefront in regards to what consequences it can produce. That question is if it is possible to switch this around so that it's not about appropriating concepts and thought lines but instead *letting oneself be appropriated*. In other words, not “only” moving them from one reflective discourse into another, but instead looking at what possible concrete compositional outcomes they might generate. What happens then is of course dependent on the understanding that the artist apprehends from the theories put in relation to the specific premises of the artistic practice, but in the case of Deleuze I see that such a reversed sequence could pull the idea of appropriation into a quite radical light. Why is that? Well, I suggest that the in-depth, and extremely consistent criticism of a representative esthetics - woven around a cluster of different concepts like multiplicity, univocity, difference, repetition, variation, immanence, major/minor, rhizomatic (and more) – clearly shifts the philosophical focus towards perceptive qualities, building what could be seen as a theory of cognition. If one chooses to approach his critical apparatus in such a way (like what he is doing himself in the case of the art of Carmelo Bene) the question that arises is: What happens to the energy and the thoughts that the artist has regarding his or her perceptive intent with the creation, and with the organizing of expressive matter? This question finds its dynamic in relation to the observation that the philosophy of Deleuze, like all philosophical activity – though I tend to see the Deleuzian even more so – is in its core confirmative of the ongoing, never stopping processes of thinking and living. To integrate concepts that are part of this movement, i.e. in themselves to some extent in flux, into an analysis of artistic practices that strive toward creating artifacts with a certain degree of fixity, could be seen as disconfirmatory to the Deleuzian thinking. When everything is in a perpetual becoming, when difference and the singular are acknowledged, when multiplicity is let free, when acknowledging that “thinking” the art piece already is a subordination to representation, *and* the artist lets him or herself be appropriated by this understanding, then shifts *have* to happen. It changes how one relates to the creative act and how one views the construction of

the compositions one makes: What happens to the notion of borders in space, in time, in narration? Maybe the most burning question is what such an openness provokes: How is the idea of the creative subject holding up, what happens to its stability and creative energy when the philosophical-esthetic discourse in such a pronounced way shifts the focus towards perception? It is not really interesting to answer these questions in a way that stymies the creative energy. Instead, what's interesting is to look at the compositional consequences that arise when they are taken to the brink of dissolving the artistic activity as such, thus provoking conservative and commodified notions about art, about the artist and about expressive form, notions that have to be contested in order to turn the dissolving into possibilities. If we, as a crude starting point for uncovering those possibilities, claim that the most basic level of an art practice is a desire for building and making things that occupy a certain space, so to speak, this energy is most often subordinated, in a repressive sense, by the idea that the outcome of the practice should be recognized as an addition to what's out there in the world already. The formats that prevail for these additions are not only commodified but also sustained through what feminist theory would label the phallogocentric system. (Braidotti, 1994, 33) To counteract this notion of art as an addition, hence evade a reinforcement of such a system and *at the same time* acknowledge the inherent energy in the intuitive urge to create, is an equation that only can be approached through extended thinking around dramaturgy and composition.

The position of the artist implies a privilege that ought to be utilized: our practice is to create not to criticize. This obviously does not mean that we should refrain from – and especially not so in artistic research – allowing criticism to ensue within the creations, but the movement goes in the opposite direction: from the problematization into creation. The appropriation thus becomes repetition (of thought lines and concepts) in a pure sense, a repetition *prior to* what the concept represents, in other words, related to the intuitively sensed (in the art practice). This is what the art of Bene – and even more so the critical undertaking of Gilles Deleuze – points towards.

To critique

Deleuze's text goes straight into Carmelo Bene's method of approaching and treating plays, his way of staging existing material and it lays out what Deleuze sees as central in the esthetics of Bene's theater making: *the production of critique*. Hence, every critical insertion

that Deleuze makes in his text is aimed at chiseling out the specifics of this critique; how it is contrived and its target. Deleuze departs from the observation that Bene's conceptualization (of Shakespeare's Hamlet) has a constitutive power. It is done with the play; its components, its narrative dynamic and history of interpretation, as an absolute necessary reference, what Deleuze calls "a primary play". The radical directorial choices made by Bene are – in the eyes of Deleuze – constitutive and critique is a constitution. (OLM 239). If we define the constitutive as an energy of definite replacement, as an establishing of an alternative gaze, it is, in the case of Bene directing Shakespeare, the notion of power that Deleuze sees as Bene's main objective. But the critique of power moves, in the eyes of Deleuze, further down to a level that encompasses "...both the power of what is represented and the power of theater itself." (OLM 241)³ This is the foundation of the critique: Theater itself, as an institution, exerts a power even if the rendering is of a critical kind; in that institution a representative esthetic prevails and that has to be contested. All other critique grows from this substrate: the power of the institution, the power of representation. However, the understanding of these two phenomena, and of the constitution of their power, is complex and to counteract their forces operations "of surgical precision" are required. (OLM 239)

To operate

To activate the type of specific operations that Deleuze detects and acknowledges as crucial in Carmelo Bene's theater esthetics, within a larger context, comes as a quite evident prolongation, as his critique not only is of a structural type but also because it extensively treats the relations between the movement of the expressive matter and perception, in a broad and, at points, explicit political sense. Structural critique of such a type establishes an obvious

³ It is interesting to put this reasoning in relation to Walter Benjamin's text *The Author as Producer*, a text that to a large extent also revolves around theater (Brecht), dramaturgy and the question of power. To engage in a thorough critique of power is in Benjamin's analysis closely tied to questioning how the production means are allocated; a central value of art must be to oppose its means of production. Even if the context of his reasoning is highly political ("Brecht has coined the phrase 'functional transformation' to describe the transformation of forms and instruments of production by a progressive intelligentsia – an intelligentsia interested in liberating the means of production and hence active in the class struggle." (Benjamin, W, 1998, 93)) it should also be understood as a dramaturgical proclamation: Benjamin places his thoughts in the midst of creative activities (theater making, literary writing) and therefore it's unavoidable that it has an impact on the dramaturgical, structural specifics of the art. He says: "... to supply a production apparatus without trying, within the limits of the possible, to change it, is a highly disputable activity even when the material supplied appears to be of a revolutionary nature." (Benjamin, W, 1998, 94) This is almost mirrored by Deleuze saying: "The actual power of theater is inseparable from a representation of power in theater, even if it is a critical representation." (OLM 241) To acknowledge the kindred (I would almost say complementary) relationship between Benjamin's text and Deleuze's allows both for an enhanced political reading of Deleuze as well as a reaffirmation of Benjamin's strong engagement in trying to disentangle the relationship between structural specifics of art and its perceptive possibilities, a focus introduced already in his treatise on 17th century German baroque drama, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928).

contact with creative doings and reflective thinking, outside the framework of theater and can therefore be talked about as dramaturgical, in a general sense. We are going to look more closely at the workings of three operational tools that Deleuze makes use of in his critique: Subtraction – Amputation, Major – Minor and Stammering. These terms, or critical devices, are, in Deleuze’s text, thoroughly intertwined and intricately dependent on each other in different ways (they also generate adjunctive terms), but nevertheless possible to look at discretely.

The specific circumstances of Bene’s art making – using existing material (written plays) and creating performative presentations (theater) – is the prerequisite for Deleuze to insert the term “primary play” in his reasoning. It is on this body of existing material that the operations are done and from which the expression is set in motion. It is primary both because of this reason, as a starting point for the expression, but also, and maybe even more so, because it is material – in this case plays by Shakespeare – in which rich historical connotations are embedded, that have been processed through an enormous number of different treatments, hence seeped deep into “our” consciousness. We might refer to these connotations as being on a level of semantics, or on a level of history of interpretation, or on a level of history of ideas, or on a mythological level, but they are all energies inherent in the material and on which Bene’s treatment, as well as the perception of the performances, is dependent. But why then should we not regard what Bene is doing as “just” another interpretation? The reason for that, in the eyes of Deleuze, is because it signifies changes of a proportion that constitute radical reevaluations and rearrangements, thus compels replacing the notion of interpretation with operation: “The theater maker is no longer an author an actor or director. She/he is an operator” (OLM 239).

The main device(s) in Bene’s performative production of critique are deduction and replacement, operations for which Deleuze introduces the terms *subtraction* and *amputation*. The mechanics of these are not difficult to envision: something is taken away, more or less. However, crucial in the operation is of course what specific part of the material that is subtracted, and what kind of shift it is intended to generate, i.e. what it reciprocally will enhance. For Bene this process is guided by the intent to illuminate the mechanisms of power structures and for that reason “[...] you begin with subtracting, deducting everything that would constitute an element of power, in language and in gestures, in the representation and in the represented. You cannot even say that it is a negative operation because it already enlists and releases positive processes.” (OLM 245) These operations are done to shift the

balance, to enhance and illuminate alternative aspects, and to change the status of the components of the material. Levels in the material that otherwise seem unimportant (hidden, secondary, repressed) come forward. But if this can be seen as a somewhat obvious transformational sequence it is necessary to understand that what Deleuze is pointing out is that the mechanics of subtraction go beyond interpretation; it signifies a critical approach to the material as a whole as it changes the status not only of the specific components – that are either reduced or enhanced – but of its status as a free standing, self-reverberating statement. To change the status is not to reduce its meaning but to investigate how it critically reverberates in a present moment.

If subtraction is an operation that changes the weight of components, amputation is a more radical operation as it actually removes specific parts. That is the delineation, as we shall see later on, most useful when transposing the reasoning into other dramaturgical contexts, but in Deleuze's text the boundaries of the two operational devices are somewhat blurred, mainly so because he focuses on the dramaturgical effect that they both cause, which are closely related, and not on the specific measures. However, amputation seems to allow a critique not only of a structural type but also of a semiotic, as when "...he [Bene] decides *to amputate* the elements of power, he changes not only the theatrical matter but also the form of theater, which ceases to be a 'representation' as the actor ceases to be an actor. He gives free range to a different theatrical matter and to a different theatrical form, which would not have been possible without this subtraction." (OLM 241) Amputation liberates the presentation from the burden of representation (which again puts an emphasis on the present), but equally important is that it opens up a time-space for "different theatrical matter" to ensue: the amputated part is replaced with material of a counter-quality, a "prosthesis" that exerts an undermining and critical force.

The operational dynamic that's conjured up by activating the conceptual dyad of Major and Minor is maybe the one that comes across as having the sharpest critical edge in the apparatus.⁴ This is due to the distinct opposition that Deleuze delineates between two concepts and therefore they fuse two contradictory operations: "On the one hand, one ascends to 'the major': one makes a doctrine from thought, one makes a culture from a way of life, one makes History from an event. One thus pretends to discover and admire, but in fact one

⁴ The concept of Minor is thoroughly developed in the preceding book *Kafka: Toward a minor Literature* (1975, together with Felix Guattari) in which they instigate the concept of minor (a minor literature) in relation to the writings of Franz Kafka. The Major – Minor dynamic is also extrapolated in the book *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980, also with Felix Guattari, chapter 4). Interesting though, the opposition between the two concepts is rendered more crude and on a more concrete (compositional) level in OLM than in the other books.

normalizes.” (OLM 243) Deleuze talks about this “majorization” as something that is transplanted on our backs in order to normalize “us”, to make us become major. On the other hand there is the operation of minoration which is the arduous undertaking of removing the transplanted lump: “...operation for operation, surgery against surgery, one can conceive the opposite: how ‘to minorate’ (*minorer*) (a term employed by mathematicians), how to impose a minor treatment or a treatment of minoration to extract becomings against History, lives against culture, thoughts against doctrine, graces or disgraces against dogma.” (OLM 243) The concepts of Major and Minor are, much like the other terms, inserted in the reasoning to expose how Bene, through his minorations, illuminates the mechanics of power and specifically so the rule of doctrines. The repressive force of doctrines is generality and generality not only dismisses multiplicity but stymies difference. However, the formulation that encircles the critical workings of minoration in such a way that connects it to the critique of the institution and the power of representation, as mentioned earlier, can be found in the text on Kafka where Deleuze/Guattari says that “...minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature.” (Deleuze, Guattari 2012, 39) So, to minorate, as an operational pursuit, is to challenge the status of the material as Major (“...what is called great...”) and test its inherent revolutionary potentiality, though not through formulations of an examining nature, but through operations.

In *Kafka: Toward a minor Literature* the process of minoration is related to the deterritorialization of language, which is a process evoked by the pressure from the rule of the Major (languages). It is contrived by the artist (writer) through “...finding his own point of underdevelopment, his own *patois*, his own third world, his own desert.” (Deleuze, Guattari 2012, 39) Attaching the concept of minoration to the deterritorialization of language relates it to the concept of stammering, of which the desirable outcome is an expression in continuous variation: “Stammering, in general, is a speech problem. But to make language stammer is a different matter. It is to impose the work of continuous variation on language, on all interior elements of language, phonological, syntactical, and semantic.” (OLM 247) In Bene’s artistic practice Deleuze detects that the stammering emerges out of his way of writing as it is “...neither literary nor dramatic, but truly performative ...” (OLM 246) but still, it is through the enactment, on stage, in the performative moment, that the operation of stammering and the placing of language in continuous variation is played out. In this expressional movement it is not the text, and the semantic understanding of it that counts but rather its spatiotemporal continuity of variation. This variation presupposes the extraction of constants (from the

language) and, in the case of Bene, it is done through the performative treatment, a treatment that "...expand the variables: make language stammer, or make it 'wail', stretch tensors through all of language, even written language, and draw from it cries, shouts, pitches, durations, timbres, accents, intensities." (Deleuze, Guattari 2004, 115) The extraction of constants enables an expression of poverty (the desert) but also of an expression of overload (superimpositions of variations) to ensue. This overload is "...an extension of variations functioning to deploy a continuum sweeping up all components." (ibid) Neither the concept of poverty or the concept of an overload are rhetorical figures. They are not metaphors, rather expressions that bear witness of an unlocalized presence "...of an indirect discourse at the heart of every statement. From both sides we see a rejection of reference points, a dissolution of constant form in favor of differences in dynamic. The closer a language gets to this state, the closer it comes not only to a system of musical notation, but also to music itself." (Deleuze, Guattari 2004, 116) In order to locate the operation of stammering and continuous variation within the dynamics of an institutional critique, as detected by Deleuze as the main objective of Bene, it needs to be understood as a critique of *all* languages, hence contrived from questioning any one language as major. The stammering is not about moving into a different language, but rather referring to the usage and function of language: to stammer is to minorate the language in which one is confined by.

To politicize

Before moving into the question of how to activate these operational devices in different compositional experiments, it's useful to acknowledge that the intention of their operational effect is political, in the deepest sense. What that means is twofold. First comes the observation that all the operations are related to, and dependent on, a subtext that grows from a view of the world *outside* the performance, outside the premises of the primary material and outside the composition. Secondly, which is a current continuously present in the esthetic criticism of Deleuze, lies the fact that what he sees in Bene is an ambition to create performances where the ethical and political engagement is reflected as much in the structural and conceptual qualities as in the spoken language. (It's therefore possible to say that Deleuze's text is an exploration into how to delineate the occurrence of meaning and how to create an experience of understanding disconnected from, or rather beside, the hermeneutical

level).⁵ This observation is securely attached to the questioning of a representational esthetics and to the history of Western theater and its relation to politics and political issues. A history that puts conflicts at the center: conflicts of thoughts as well as conflicts between political systems. The overarching intent of such theater is to incite, to participate in and contribute to the public dialogue around conflicts by staging and “telling stories” that criticize the prevailing power and the repression that it stands for. (This is why western theater often regards itself as part of the backbone of democracy.) The formal structures of that type of theater are criticized by Deleuze as being stuck in an esthetics of representation that actually reproduces, consolidates – and commodifies – conflicts rather than dissolving them, or maybe one should say, offer alternative ways of approaching them. Though, such alternative approaches cannot be based on the idea of making representation infinite (an excessive, overflowing chain of re-shaping), as it “*nevertheless does not acquire the power to affirm either divergence or decentering*. It requires a convergent and monocentric world.” (Deleuze, 1994, 263). Deleuze offers a quite equivocal, hence expansive formulation for approaching this “dilemma”, a formulation that installs abandonment as the operational device: “When consciousness abandons solutions and interpretations, it thus acquires its light, its gestures and its sounds, its decisive transformation.” (OLM 256) Merged with the surrounding reasoning, the abandoning of solutions can be understood as the avoiding of arriving at a specific and conclusive point – it cannot be captured – and instead ensures a continuous movement. Further impetus for the (political-esthetical) activation of the Deleuzian observation can be gained if interpretation is replaced with experimentation, hence we arrive at an alternative formulation: When consciousness abandons the idea of arriving at a specific and conclusive point and stays in a continuous movement of experimentation, it thus acquires its light, its gestures and its sounds, its decisive transformation.

To experiment

We have been looking at the critical explorations in Deleuze’s text and at possible ways of understanding it, as well as briefly indicated, some dramaturgical extensions. So far this reasoning has been somewhat stabilized by the oscillating movement between the multilayered distinctness of the Deleuzian formulations and the structural and expressional

⁵ “...Bene sought the means for theater to surpass this domination of words and to arrive at a direct perception of the action.” (OLM 250)

qualities he detects in the art of Carmelo Bene (and those we gain nothing from questioning). However, when approaching the question of how the different operations can be done concretely, how they can be transferred into a compositional practice or as part of research methodology, in a wider sense, we have to attune to an even more evasive reasoning. How can that be understood? Well, all alternative operations are dependent on esthetic preferences (the borders/limitation of imagination) and therefore prisoners of the imagined. If we accept that as a precondition we would have to investigate how to develop a methodological (operational) grid that is independent of those preferences, which we might refer to as an esthetic. In that endeavor the concept of experimentation should be central. But, then again, experimentation will only have an impetus, i.e. generate critical outcomes beyond the known, if it is allowed to operate outside the borders of established esthetical frameworks, pushing all boundaries, both idiomatically/esthetically and personal. In such a dynamic the notion of control is central, a notion that conjures up a tension of a dichotomous nature. On the one hand each artistic/research activity is in need of an initial idea, a conceptual set up, a creative movement of sorts: an investigative question, an assumption of something to be found or unearthed, and/or an expressive intention. On the other hand, this “initial idea” inevitably represents a controlling instance and subsequently we’re faced with a Gordian knot. It might very well be that the aspect of control doesn’t constitute the main focus/issue of the artistic/research endeavor and therefore this is not seen as a significant problem.⁶ Even so, it is constructive – in the attempt to generate continuous variation, and refrain from conclusiveness – to look for how the dissolution of control can happen within limited areas, on certain levels, and apply to certain aspects. For such an approach to take on a status as a substrate for how the experiments are carried out – how the different operations are inserted – it’s important to abandon answers and stay in the questions. But a more concrete starting point is to let the operational grid be founded on reversal thinking: questioning the formal quality of the outcome, of its presentation, and of the nature of the meeting – if such is envisioned/desired – between the experiment and the world outside, *hence dissolve any preconception of the performative outcome*.

⁶ Deleuze’s point of focus and explicit opinion, is that the distribution and dissolving (to a certain degree) of power – as exerted from the theatrical expression as well as from its institutional status – can only happen when continuous variation is set in motion. If that is the priority, the question of what means are needed to attain this is subordinate, as indicated by Laura Cull in her observation that “If a dominant director is needed to construct such a theater, then so be it, Deleuze seems to imply; whatever way works.” (Cull, 2012, 54) Hence, the questioning of control, as phenomena, is subordinate to the outcome.

The whole idea of transposing Deleuze's critical observations, emerging out of one specific art practice and one specific art form, into dramaturgical/compositional generalizations must of course be met with a critical gaze. The level of abstractness inevitably becomes high as the reasoning isn't attached either to a specific type of form or a specific material, and therefore it's preferable to search for formulations that create as broad as possible contact, hence transferable to as many creative instances as possible. Though, just like esthetic alternatives are prisoners of the imagination, so are critical undertakings *and* the shaping of their operational devices. This is why the idea of complete applicability has to be abandoned: for some creative instances the questions, and suggestions – and how they are formulated – will be redundant, for others hopefully they will radiate some adequacy. Essential to keep in mind is that nothing in the following is relevant as some kind of an esthetics but intended exclusively as operational possibilities *for the process of producing critique*.

In order to investigate and activate the operational possibilities of subtraction it's useful to commence with the question of what is intended to enhance (actually making it an oxymoron), or to use Deleuze's word, what do we want the subtraction to "release", which obviously is a question reciprocal to what specific effect the experimentation is in search of.⁷ Can we have an idea about how to get there before it is done? If the answer is no, no alternative subtraction can be excluded on the basis that the effect is known. Developed technical skills combined with extended experience of an artistic practice could very likely – and to a certain extent rightly so – be the basis on which to purport that certain experimental alternatives are useless. But might not the subtraction of exactly this notion create the most expansive creative opening? Should not the first of all possible subtractions be the subtraction of a preconceived knowing? Would not such a stance create the most fertile ground for examining the inner nature of the components, their relations and the precise specifics of the present situation? However, to move further into the idea of subtraction as an experimental operation it is – and especially so because of the preconditions of the Deleuzian reasoning above – important to delineate the difference between subtraction happening in a creative situation that's about setting in motion existing material and one where the creative activity is about building something from newly invented material. In the first instance we have, guided by Deleuze, touched upon what's at stake when changing the weight of components, and that subtraction in such a situation is not a negative operation but one that "...enlists and releases positive processes." (OLM 242) These processes are, in their core, about relations and

⁷ This aspect cannot be approached, as it is embedded not only in the hypothetical material, but also in the artist's personal intention, which in turn is dependent on the material.

therefore it pulls the operational dynamic into a concrete realm: what are the relations between the components and how can they be changed? If we look at time-based art, like the theatrical presentations of Bene, the nature of the relations between the components carries structural specifics that in many ways differ from, let's say, literature, where the relations are not tied to the progression of time, but rather circumscribed by concepts like narration, themes, semantic juxtapositions and semiotic reoccurrences (which of course also can be present in time-based art). In order to locate a few concrete possible operational suggestions, in regards to subtraction and relations (as well as the other operations) we'll stay within the prerequisites of the creative situation as it is for Bene: art that moves through time, based on existing material.⁸

When a multitude of components are in play, making up the assemblage that constitutes the initial condition, the experiment has to start with recognizing and analyzing each component. Though, that observation does not really create any useful tension – as it must be considered the basis of all creative undertakings – if we don't concentrate on how the components relate to each other regarding enhancement, subordination and structural dependency. This is to say that such an analysis should be guided by the search for possible shifts in the relations (between components) that in a performative way can illuminate the intended critical stance/investigation. The time sequence of the performed material (score, text, choreographic sequence, etc.) moves along what will be referred to as the horizontal line, which consists of a more or less complex mass of components (simultaneously occurring on what instead will be referred to as the vertical line), and the most obvious type of subtractions would be to: change dynamic relations; omit certain (one or more) components; swap the different “voices”, i.e. designate one component to a different voice; exchanging the expressive source(of one or more). However, operations of this kind are not necessarily difficult seen from a purely technical perspective. And the fact that it is so actually constitutes a pitfall, meaning that quite easily made operations might *radiate* the illusion of a critical attempt, but are not.⁹ Therefore the awareness of the critical outcome has to be continuously kept in the forefront, suppressing all other inclinations: The operation is not set in motion to enhance what is experienced as clear already, but to uncover what's not.

⁸ Some brief comments on how to activate the operational devices in a creative situation where newly invented material is involved, is done in the conclusive remarks of this text.

⁹ Examples of musical juxtapositions, where musical expressions from different time periods and/or from different musical traditions are merged, are plenty and have become almost like a genre in itself. The esthetic ambition/stance in most of those, mainly because they're aimed at a commercial market (in a broad sense), is *not* to create critique of any kind but rather the opposite: to eliminate difference, friction and stammering.

As indicated by the questions above, operations of subtraction do not only have to apply to components. Can it not also mean/indicate refraining from applying gestures and interpretational choices that are seen as idiomatically/emotionally evident and “a must” within the conditions of the practice? This could for example be stylistically attached formats, as well as emotionally ingrown attitudes – emerging out of what is perceived as personal choices. Subtraction then becomes the process of illuminating the unreflected and subsequently constitutes an attempt to refrain from “doing” something that has its roots in preconceptions – stylistically, idiomatically, personal-emotional. Whether this dynamic is more present in an interpretational practice (like Bene) or in one where invention of new material is the main doing, should be left unsaid, but instead probably regarded as more or less present in both cases.

Subtraction can be thought of as something that happens on a vertical line: from the moving mass of components, one or more is removed, making the expression less dense but the duration stays the same.¹⁰ *Amputation*, on the other hand, can be thought of as happening on a horizontal line: something is cut off, taken away from the primary material and then the duration is changed, if what’s removed is not replaced by something else, with the same durational proportion.¹¹ This opens up for maybe the most interesting question to approach when looking at amputation as an operational device for producing performative critique: What is put in its place and what does that addition generate? Deleuze makes the observation that an amputation gives “... birth to and multiplies something unexpected, like a prosthesis.” (OLM 247) That is what he sees happening in the art of Bene, but it is not an evident outcome of amputation as one can refrain from putting something in its place, or something is put in its place but that something is not unexpected. The only thing we can say for sure is that it allows for something else to take its place and, in regards to the production of critique, this opportunity should not be overlooked but instead seen as an active compositional/research element. These are unfortunate abstract formulations as we neither have a primary material to relate to or the definition/formulation of the critical undertaking, but by extrapolating on the use of the word prosthesis it can be said that it indicates the importance of function, which in turn generates useful questions: What do we/the artist/researcher want the prosthesis to give

¹⁰ We are still conducting the reasoning within the framework of time-based art.

¹¹ A rather large number of artists have, since early modernism, worked with the technique of replacing certain parts in existing material, a technique, or style, greatly enhanced by the post modern esthetical paradigm as well as by technical developments. One easily accessible, illusive and quite recent example of subtraction/amputation/prosthesis is the work of Austrian composer Wolfgang Mitterer and his piece *Inwendig losgelöst*. Though, examples of that type cannot be considered related to the idea of producing performative critique in a thoroughly deconstructive mode that this reasoning is trying to promote.

birth to? How can the investigative questions, the critical stance, be illuminated by the qualitative tension between the primary material and the prosthesis? How should the prosthesis be created in order to generate the unexpected? What are the possibilities of evaluating the outcome of the insertion of the prosthesis?

In contrast to its sharp underlying intention the question of how to go about when inserting minoration as an operational device is much less clear than subtraction and amputation. This is due to its dependence on a political gaze, which as mentioned earlier, grows from a view of the world *outside* the performance, outside the premises of the primary material and outside the composition ("Everything in a minor literature is politics" ¹²). This political view is not just any, but one that acknowledges and creates an alliance with the minority. In the Deleuzian reasoning *minority* has two meanings, related but distinct. The first asserts that minority " ... denotes a state of rule, that is to say, the situation of a group that, whatever its size, is excluded from majority, or even included, but as a subordinate fraction in relation to the standard of measure that regulates the law and establishes the majority. In this context, we can say that women, children, the South, the third world, etc., are still minorities, as numerous as they are." (OLM 255) This first meaning does not imply any motion; it's an observation, an analysis. Though, it gives birth to the second meaning, which is a movement (towards reaching the "goal") and a call for a continuous reevaluation, and must in its essence be considered ethical. It asserts that "...minority no longer denotes a state of rule, but a becoming in which one enlists. To become-minority. This is a goal, a goal that concerns the entire world since the entire world is included in this goal and in this becoming inasmuch as everyone creates his or her variation of the unity of despotic measure and escapes, from one side or the other, from the system of power that is a part of the majority." (OLM 255) It can be argued that not all readers are in alliance with such a view, but that notion is not going to be taken into account in this reasoning as it would be an unconstructive deviation from the conditions on which the Deleuzian critique is based. Instead, it should be taken further to illustrate how the operation of minoration makes the question of why the artistic activity is being done, in the first place, acute, *and* that it (minoration) underlies the execution of all the other operations. The unavoidable challenge inherent in this observation is to approach the task of how to precisely construct the formal structure of the performative event – and the shaping of all its components – so that it not only mirrors but creates an experience of such an outlook on the world. What are the possible concrete measures that could/should be

¹² Deleuze, G, Guattari, F, 2012, 35

considered in such an undertaking? Are there any such measures that can be formulated in a more general way, without attaching them to a specific material, to a specific compositional/research intention? Initially, one could claim that no such undertaking is possible if the (artistic) activity does not involve a process of placing it within, and relating it to, a political analysis in conjunction to a pre-developed idea of the relation between this analysis and esthetic choices.¹³ Secondly, one could argue that minoration entails an increased awareness of which semiotic systems are being used (unconsciously/consciously) and how/if it is codified in such a way that pre-knowledge is needed, i.e. functioning as an excluding factor. Thirdly, and this should not be seen as a contradiction to the effort to place the artistic/research activity in relation to the world outside the “composition”, it’s essential to rely on the present moment (of the performance), i.e. not deviate from evaluating the event as it is.¹⁴ And fourthly, it’s probably important to develop a capacity to think (compositionally/dramaturgically) through the perceiver.

A representational coding cannot be easily avoided, when experimenting with rearranging expressive material that belongs to an established repertoire and that’s built on idiomatically familiar components. The inclination to perceive certain gestures, modes, expressive details and compositional progressions as signifiers with a specific expressive intent, is deep, and part of a “common” cultural/esthetic knowledge that through ongoing use has developed into esthetic norm. This (pre)condition, acknowledged and problematized by Deleuze throughout and central both to the workings of Bene as well as to an artistic/research practice where “known material” is activated, is what causes the useful friction. However, avoiding the rule of a representational esthetic is *not* about, neither for Bene or Deleuze, the creation of never-before-experienced material, but enabling the occurrence of continuous variation. And it is for this reason that stammering, as an operational device, is inserted. But how can the concept of continuous variation (as an outcome of stammering) be understood more precisely, within a compositional practice, i.e. separate from the perpetual production of difference happening in the world? ¹⁵ Deleuze guides us towards looking at the “geometry of

¹³ This observation generates, as most likely noticed by the reader, a meta-level to this whole reasoning as its intention is – through untangling Deleuze – exactly this; to propose ways of how such ideas can be extrapolated.

¹⁴ Possible inspiration for embracing such an equation is John Cage’s statement: “Though we are not now living in a society which we consider good, we could make a piece of music in which we would be willing to live. I don’t mean that literary, I mean it metaphorically. You can think of the piece of music as a representation of a society in which you would be willing to live.” (Retallack, 1996, xxx)

¹⁵ “Difference is behind everything but behind difference there is nothing.” (Deleuze, 1994, 57) All movements are movements of a perpetual production of difference and this is what we recognize as a continuous becoming. In OLM variation is tied to the notion of becoming and therefore in opposition to representation. But here variation needs to be given a different connotation, outside the perpetual movements of the world as the term is put in relation to an artistic expression.

speeds, intensities, and affects”, to find the answer. (OLM 250) These are terms that can be more finely divided hence thought of as rhythm (rhythmical structure), duration, phrasing, articulation, dynamics, timbre, tension, release, *and* the transformative relation between them all. In any compositional endeavor the consideration and handling of the relation between these qualitative aspects are central, almost unavoidable, so in order to figure out how to re-activate the stammering quality/operation that Deleuze detects in Bene’s performance we need to look more closely at his specific treatment – as Deleuze sees it. The one observation he makes regarding the occurrence of stammering, underlying all the others, is that “...two essential aims of the arts should be the subordination of form to speed, to the variation of speed, and the subordination of the subject to intensity or to affect, to the intense variation of affects.” (OLM 249) This conjures up a picture that stammering is about the shaping of the rhythmical structure of the expression. A structure that is more concerned with difference (variation of speeds) than clarity and not necessarily avoiding the unbalanced as long as it has an expressive intensity and is clear of its affective intention.¹⁶ Such a structure is sluggish, it is created through cuts and recuts, thus has a sharp and unexpected rhythmical quality. Within this structure there are two progressions of variations, simultaneously moving through time, that combined create the rhythmical complexity, thus enhance continuous variation: the variation of language and the variation of gesture. The stammering is therefore not necessarily caused by the specific quality of one of these two layers of variation but generated through their combined effect, “*forming one and the same continuum*”(OLM 250).¹⁷ What we get from this, in regards to how to ensure a stammering quality, can partly be found in the implicit proclamation that the communicative intention should be subordinate to variation, i.e. to the vitality of disjunctive shifts regarding all the above mentioned parameters, and partly in the rather elusive suggestion (open to a wide range of interpretations) that it can be found in a “sluggishness” as an effect of interruptions, cuts and recuts in the material. (OLM 250) This can of course be attained through detailed instruction/preparation of each expressive movement (thorough composition), or for example through creating time-pockets in which

¹⁶ An intricate and inspiring description of the dynamics of stammering and how it sets off a sense of non-direction, and a sense of petrification of time and of how it can cause a feeling of uncertainty (“where is this going to go?”), as well as it is closely related to art, is Thomas Mann’s winding and detailed rendering of Adrian Leverkühn’s first music teacher and his monthly lectures in the parish hall, in his book *Doctor Faustus*. An inspired and thoroughly knowledgeable man – Wendell Kretzschmar – is deeply engaged in his subject (Beethoven’s piano sonata opus 111), but his stammering causes the rhythm of the talk to swing between a fast flow of words and long moments of stuckness. Mann also describes how Kretzschmar’s voice, at the moment of coming to a halt, instead of formulating words utters strange and unimaginable sounds, which is a speech figure that directly mirrors Bene’s treatment of language: how he, at certain points, transforms it into purely onomatopoeic utterances.

¹⁷ This is most easily understood when imagining the relation between the rhythmical expression of an actor’s body movement and the structure of his/her vocal expression - a relation that can be formed more or less “contradictory”.

uncontrolled gestures of stammering (stops, cuts, sudden jumps, prolongations of different kinds) are performed in an improvisational mode (a condition open for continuous variation). Deleuze also points to the possibilities of repetition (which certainly is a figure that can be recognized in stammering as we know it in real life), and how variation can be obtained through shifts in duration and articulation in the same expressive figure, making the observation that “...the same gesture or word is never repeated without obtaining different characteristics of time. This is the musical formula of continuity, or of form as transformation.” (OLM 249) Variation through and in repetition can also be seen as a readiness to move beyond what already has been done, which is a stance closely related to – whatever compositional technique or conceptual setup we are referring to – the notion that the stammering needs to be instilled with an energy of urgency, i.e. not only as a pre-shaped form, that ensures that *the choice of how to direct the utterance/gesture continuously is made in the present moment.*

To conclude – To be operated on

The appropriation of the Deleuzian critical discourse and the insertion of the different operational devices comes more easily in a situation where the creative/research situation is about setting in motion existing material than in a situation where the creation of new material is the case. When pulling the thinking out of the relative confinements of pre-formulated material, the premises for theorizing become different and the notion of operational methodology changes. It immediately confronts us with a situation that demands a rethinking of how the different operational devices can be activated. But why should that be considered at all, aren't the thought lines and terms in Deleuze's text developed to function precisely under those circumstances and should we not make an effort to locate/create other terms, other devices when the situation is different? Surely, that can be, and is being done, but there is no reason for choosing one or the other. The critical turbulence that ensues from the Deleuzian gaze and gamut of terms is, as we have seen, highly intense and effective in producing critique, and that is where the interest lies; finding ways to produce performative critique. So, let's look, in a conclusive though hypothetical mode, at some possible extended applications.

If the primary material (the *primary play*) is given its function through the insertion of the different operational devices the question is how they can be inserted and activated in the

process of invention (inventing/creating a new piece)? Followed by the question of *how the notion of art as constitutive critique can be formed when there is no primary material at hand*? Initially we should understand that there is quite a clear shift in the creative investment when the incitement for the expressive doings, instead of emerging from existing material, is derivative of the more bare position: I am here, I want to say something, and I am searching for exactly what that is and for how it can be done. This open process is central to an artistic practice and the foundation for the invention, the invention on which the operations will be done: The artist then becomes an operator that operates on his/her own body – of invention. When placing the operational devices on to that, for the moment, bare slate, entails a reordering of which to look at first. Instead of starting out with subtraction, followed by amputation, it is minoration that initially needs to be approached, as the insertion of that operational device is not dependent on the materiality of the composition but rather the other way around: it provokes the question of why the artistic activity is being done, in the first place, and the answer to that question in turn underlies and effects the execution of all the other operations. It is already said, that minoration is fully dependent on a political gaze growing from a view of the world *outside* the creative doings. It lies there, cries out its urgency, prior to the creative act and can therefore, in its initial step, be activated under any type of creative circumstance.

To subtract or amputate something from nothing is hard. Some expression, of any kind – even just an idea of it – needs to be set in motion. Then the experimental investigation of subtraction can start: What is really necessary? What am I doing/creating that blurs what I want to investigate?¹⁸ What should be subtracted to illuminate my critical intention (better)? But there are two questions that stand out concerning subtractions on the newly invented body. First, is it possible to search for what there is to be released? and if so, how? Is that a question that entails creating an alternative methodology for composing, where control over the material is let loose, an energy that can function as a momentum for subtraction (and other operations)? The other question that stands out, and that connects to the reasoning above around the subtraction of a preconceived knowing (also a reoccurring thought figure in the history of experimental art) – is if the operation of subtraction can be thought of to subtract art from art (theater from theater, music from music, literature from literature, and so on), in

¹⁸ Creating compositional relations within an art practice are most certainly done to reach a specific expressive goal; adding component to component is the nature of a building activity. However, if the awareness that all relations are repressive this question is highly relevant. On that note it's rewarding, both from a technical/compositional perspective when creating new, non-interpretational expressions, and from a political perspective, to engage in the work of South African artist William Kentridge, who in many of his films concretely works with the relation between subtraction/reduction and repression

other words subtracting from the creation the expectations of what art should be? This is sharply commented on by Deleuze when saying, the primary material in Bene's work is literature, but the literature is not used for the reason to "make it a fashionable parody or to add literature to literature. On the contrary, it is to subtract literature, to subtract the text, for example a part of the text, and to observe the result." (OLM 239/240)

Further extension of how the operations can be inserted/activated on newly invented material can certainly be imagined but it would mean moving even deeper into an intricate and highly hypothetical reasoning, like for example reflecting on what specific rhythmical structures capture a stammering quality, or into reflections around a performer's way of working with the demand to continuously stay in the present moment. That would be in vain as such discussions are tied to the ineffable zone of personal esthetical choices, to tactile processes and to the precise performative situation. It can be said that this tension of speculation hovers over this reasoning already as it represents an attempt to formulate and contribute to knowledge around the unstable exchange happening in the encounter between an artistic expression and its audience, *at the same time* as it reveals its renunciation of that area of truth towards which language is directed. That observation should be taken as an encouragement to retune all the assertiveness in the formulations into transparent suggestiveness. With that said, it's possible to claim that the only conclusion of a more certain kind that can be drawn from this critical attempt, irrespectively of what primary material that's treated, is that a truly deep and continuous questioning – of the intention of the artistic/research activity as well as of all aspects of the material that is set in motion – needs to be nourished throughout. It is also possible to claim that the appropriation of the operational devices generate a need to make radical choices: To truly be allowed to flourish, the radicalism of Deleuzian critical thinking entails the courage to formulate the value of the artistic creation to the world, as a whole.

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