



Performing the Future The Future of Performance Research

Concluding Conference of the Collaborative Research Center “Performing Cultures”

July 8-10, 2010, at the House of World Cultures, Berlin

Under the aegis of the German Minister of Education and Research

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From July 8-10, 2010, the Collaborative Research Center “Performing Cultures” will be hosting its concluding conference in collaboration with the House of World Cultures, Berlin, after eleven and a half years of sponsorship by the German Research Foundation.

The goal of our conference with the motto “Performing the Future” is twofold: to examine the scope for expanding existing theories on performativity on the one hand and, on the other, to investigate the generation of future as a specific effectual dimension of performative processes.

In developing new theories, the Collaborative Research Center over time probed the most diverse of fields that constantly demanded new molds and perspectives. Thus, the different research areas – within philosophy, sociology, cultural anthropology, theatre studies, literary studies, media studies, even theology (to name just a few) – necessarily developed their own diverse concepts of the performative. The decision of our Collaborative Research Center not to aspire to a unifying theory was a conscious one. Instead, we wanted to give each research area the space to explore its specific manifestations that would capture the concept of the performative in all its peculiarities. In what ways can these diverse approaches be developed further? What is their potential? What are their limitations? Does the concept of the performative have a future at all? And how might this future manifest itself with regard to the different disciplines?

Over the course of our research on performativity, one aspect clearly emerged as pivotal to our work: Performative processes describe transformative processes that, in principal, cannot be fully planned or controlled. The interplay of intended action and emergence, of planning and contingency, gives rise to the unplanned and the unpredictable, which fundamentally co-determines the transformative process. Performative processes constitute reality, dissolve in the moment of their fleeting present, and yet, by aiming to induce change, they also generate future. These performative acts take effect only once they are (regularly) performed. Thus, we are not asking what kind of future emerges or even should emerge from performative processes, but *how* and in *what way* they generate future. What constitutes the transformative power, the particular *energeia* of the performative, and how can it be described and understood in more depth? What moments and factors are capable of giving performative processes a new orientation, of leading them in unplanned – perhaps unexpected – directions?

Given the close connection between representation and production, the dual formula in our title, “Performing the Future,” refers to these two questions raised by our conference.

With: Gottfried Boehm, Judith Butler, Johannes Fabian, Bruce Kapferer, George E. Marcus, Jon McKenzie, José Estéban Muñoz, Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, Irit Rogoff, Elaine Scarry et al.