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**PERFORMATIVE THINKING ACTS: THE WISH**

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Hello and good evening, My name is Zoe DeWitt, I am a performance artist and philosopher, which means in that special case that I am making art by trying to express my thinking and communicate it to others. As this thinking follows mainly a philosophical approach, I hope that I will not bore you too much, yet it is of an existential necessity to me to express my thought, and I found philosophy for me to be a way how this could be done ...

I will first talk about the situation, in which this lecture was written: I was living here in this room since Monday evening as a resident artist in Anna Khodorkovskayas project REALITY RAUM RESIDENZ, which meant for me that I could not leave this room except for the toilet and the bathroom, while 24 hours being watched by this webcam and streamed live to the internet. I started to write this lecture without any preparations except a few notes and what I had in my mind. Actually it turned out during the week that I didn't even look into my notes, but just let the writing flow. During daytime I was writing the lecture, and in the evening I invited guests for discussions who gave me feedback on my ideas. So the whole lecture was written within five days and therefore only can be something preliminary and uncompleted, but nevertheless it is an attempt to express my thoughts on a certain topic which has been keeping my mind occupied for the last three decades.

To give this topic a name I would say it is about desire and its fulfilment, and my thesis is that if you transform your desire into a wish, then it will necessarily result in an event of fulfilment, at least if certain conditions are fulfilled which are to be named later.

Just to explain my use of the terms reality, desire and wish: reality as I understand it here is individual experience, everything we perceive and all events that happen to us in our life. Desire I regard as the basic intentional force of any being, the force that is moving us but that likewise creates the splitting up between the subject and the object, that what we call ourselves and the world that is surrounding us. The wish is a particular desire, and as we will later see, it is a desire that is also reflected at least to some extent by the rational mind.

So the title of my lecture is “Performative Thinking Acts: The Wish”. What do I mean by this title? Well Performative Thinking Acts refers to the Speech Act Theory which was created by John Langshaw Austin in the middle of the twentieth century. Austins philosophy is a further development of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language games, and has been highly influential in both philosophy and performance art theory (of which by the way I’m proud not to know anything). John Austin can be regarded as a representative of analytical philosophy, which is usually not my field of interest, as I am more devoted to freestyle metaphysics or better to say quantum metaphysics – what that means I will explain later...

What is interesting for me in Austin’s Philosophy is the performative aspect of language. In short, John Austin has shown that our use of language does not only comprise statements by which we describe reality, but also statements by which we create reality. As an example he mentioned legally valid declarations such as the marriages, oaths, promises and the like. When a priest or officer says to a marriage couple “I now pronounce you husband and wife”, then certain realities are created (I don’t want to go into further details which kind of realities these are). The same is true for oaths, promises and other speech acts, which impose certain obligations and rights on the speaker or the addressed person. That such a speech act can produce the desired result, according to Austin, certain conditions have to be fulfilled. He gives us three such conditions: 1) there must be an accepted conventional procedure or rite with a certain conventional effect, and in this procedure certain words have to be spoken; 2) the procedure has to be performed correctly and completely by all participants; and 3) the involved persons must actually have the corresponding thoughts and feelings as well as intend so to conduct themselves.

So far in a few words the score of John Austin’s speech act theory.

My intention in this lecture is to extend Austin’s observations to the field of thinking. As both speaking and thinking are based on language, what is valid for speech acts must – to some extent – also be valid for thinking acts. In order to test this hypothesis I will examine the wish, as it can be regarded both as an act of thinking and is clearly related to a corresponding reality (the desired aim of the wish). So I want to consider the conditions which are necessary for the wish to become reality, as well as to show under which conditions the wish is determined to fail.

If we want to apply Austin’s first condition to thinking acts like the wish, we will have to find out whether the wish can be regarded as a conventional procedure or rite with certain conventional effects in which certain words have to be used. Well, all we have to change in Austin’s first

condition is the term conventional. We might leave this away for the wish, as there is only one person involved in the mental formulation of a wish (although even the individual wish can be addressed to an imaginary instance, as for example god, the universe, the unconscious etc.) Nevertheless there are some striking parallels as the act of wishing can also by one person be developed into a frequently used procedure at any time when a particular desire arises.

It is also quite interesting that Austin says that there has to be a certain procedure or rite. If we examine the term rite, we come very close to the idea of magical or religious ceremonies. But what is a rite or a ceremony? Has it not ever been the expression of a wish, performed by a person or group in the hope that this act will cause a certain desired effect in reality? If this is true, and I cannot see any reason why it should not be true, then the wish precedes the rite and can be regarded as its condition of possibility. So there is not only a correspondence between speech acts and the wish, but rather the wish is the very essence of any rite and already implied in Austin's first condition for the success of speech acts. So then, which are the words that have to be thought in the act of wishing? Well, I would say that the logical structure of any wish can be formalized as

Id C

wherein Id stands for "I desire" and "C" for Concept, by which I mean any content of a wish. One could likewise say X instead of C as for any possible object, but I will use C in order to make clear that we are talking here about a mental representation or idea, not a material object.

Then, according to Austin's second condition, the wish would have to be performed correctly and completely. My suggestion for a happy wishing procedure would be the following:

- 1) there must be an original desire.
- 2) the desire has to be reflected (before making any wish I have to ask myself: do I really want the desired result with all its consequences?).
- 3) if I really want it, then the desire has to be accepted (by which I mean that all inhibiting impulses have to be abandoned, so that the wish will not create conflicts in the psyche).
- 4) the wish has to be formulated emphatically (i.e. the content of the wish has to be imprinted with a strong emotion or libidinous energy).
- 5) the wish has to be dismissed, which means that the imprinted emotion has to be withdrawn from the object and any thought about it has to be avoided. So the wish can become unconscious,

which is to be achieved either by a deliberate suppression or – more appropriate – by simply forgetting it.

One could even, as Jacques Lacan did, compare the wish with a letter, that has to be written, signed, stamped and sent away. As he put it in his essay on “the purloined letter”, it will in any case reach the right addressee...

I had on Tuesday a highly interesting skype conversation with Yoel Regev from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who is working on the appropriation of synchronicity and magical effects within a materialistic philosophy. He said that it is perhaps not enough for the wish to become unconscious, but perhaps the wish must cease to be a wish at all. I regard this as a very interesting idea, as it suggests that by this way the imagined aim of desire is being separated from the subject and thus can manifest as a perceivable reality.

Finally, Austin’s third condition is that the involved persons must actually have the corresponding thoughts and feelings, which I think is obvious and self-evident also for thinking acts like any wish. Of course the wish can only result in an event of fulfilment, when we truly feel the desire, and it would never work when we mentally formulate a wish that is not the expression of our desire. It is an interesting point in Austin’s theory that all the examples he names for such speech acts refer to some extent to a law that is in effect behind these acts. The reality of marriage can only be created because the possibility of such a contractual agreement is laid down in common laws. The same is valid for oaths, promises etc. If they are broken, legal instances can be appealed by persons when they feel that someone has impinged upon their rights. So finally I had to ask myself: Is there also a law that is valid behind thinking acts as for example the wish? As an answer I will write down a formula, that can be regarded as such a law. It goes like this:

$$R = C (-a)$$

In this formula R stands for “reality”, C represents again the “concept” or content of any wish and –a is “negative awareness”. So in other words we could formulate this law as: the wish has necessarily to become reality when it disappears from conscious awareness.

We can see, that the C of the first formula which I gave as the logical structure of the wish, is also contained in this formula, so that we gain a very simple logical system: We can take any wish, insert the C (its object) to the second formula, and will transform the desired object into a real one by not being aware of it.

While I was preparing this lecture I asked myself whether there could be also other performative thinking acts beside the wish, and I came to the conclusion that there is at least one such act, which is to fear an object. In the same way as with the wish one could formulize the act of fearing like this:

If C

If I now insert this C in the above formula  $R = C (-a)$ , what will happen? Does anybody know? Well it happens exactly the same as with the wish, the feared object will become reality! I think this fact can be observed quite often - when people have persistent fears, these fears can become so attractive that a corresponding reality will follow and what they have feared will become true...

If you feel somehow uncomfortable with the disposal of this law, then it might be the case that you are asking yourself this highly interesting question which follows from my thesis, that the wish necessarily creates its own fulfilment in reality. This question is: How should the mind affect physical reality? How should an intentional act such as a mental wish create effects in outer reality that we would consider as a fulfilment of that wish?

I will here not give you a ready explanation, as I think this is not possible due to several reasons, of which the most grave is perhaps the fragmentation of our knowledge into a variety of disciplines, which do not share the same objects, methods and language, and another might be the fact, that the subtle level of such processes – like also quantum processes – are not accessible to a full empiric investigation (to some extent these two reasons can be regarded as one and the same). So instead of offering you a ready made theory, which surely is not possible to give, I will seek points of contact with existing disciplines of knowledge such as psychoanalysis and quantum physics, which to my mind show possibilities that are in accordance with my thesis or show interesting analogies.

The first comes from the field of psychoanalysis: In his essay “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” Sigmund Freud writes about of the phenomenon of the psychoanalytical transference, which is – like the neurotic symptom – a manifestation or projection of unconscious contents unto the plane of actual reality .... He then adds that the same phenomenon can also be observed in the life of not neurotic persons, who appear to experience repeatedly similar events in their life, as for example the course of personal relationships and other fateful events. Freud mentions for example a

woman who was married three times, and each time her husbands were taken ill shortly after the marriage so that she had to care for them until their death. Other examples are friendships that always end up in the same way, love relationships that always follow the same development and so on. I'm sure everybody will know similar cases from his or her own experience. The interesting point here is that such events seem not to be caused by an active intervention of that person, but rather happen to them in a passive way. Freud regarded this phenomenon as a special form of repetition compulsion and called it the "destiny compulsion". So what we can conclude from Freud's observation is that there must be an existing relation between our unconscious conception and the events we experience – even without active interference – in a passive way as accidental events in our life.

A very similar approach can be found in the analytical psychology of C. G. Jung: in his remarks on synchronicity Jung speaks of cases of coincidence between inner states of the psyche and events in outer reality, which have no causal connection and thus are to be regarded as happening by chance, but nevertheless obviously make sense to the observer. Jung concludes from the observation of such an acausal connection between the inner and the outer world, which both seem to be connected only by the "sense" of the coincidence, that either the psyche is non-local within space or otherwise space is relative in terms of the psyche. As with space, according to Jung, the same should be valid for time. So also here, in Jung's essay on synchronicity, we find the very clear observation of a relation between the inner and the outer world, and I think it's a very interesting point that Jung mentions, that the only bridge between both worlds is the "sense" or "meaning" of such events.

"Sense" or "meaning" are usually terms connected with language, and so this brings us to a third brick of my theory, which is the linguistic approach to psychoanalysis as formulated by Jacques Lacan. It is one of Lacan's most known sayings, that the unconscious is structured like a language. Yet if the unconscious is structured like a language, it appears quite reasonable that there might be the possibility to modify our unconscious conception of the world and the reality we are going to perceive by adding new concepts to that structure or modifying the existing ones. Actually this is what happens in many forms of psychotherapy, where – also by the means of spoken language - hidden conceptions are brought to conscious awareness, so that one gains the chance of modifying them. What I am saying about the wish, that it has the power to create reality, is based upon the same mechanism, but only made to function in the reverse direction: a

wish or conception of reality is being formulated, induced to disappear from conscious awareness and thus made to determine the reality we perceive or the events that happens to us.

The only thing that is disturbing for our western mind is this again this problem, how the inner world or what we consider as the mind, our thoughts and feelings should be able to affect the outer world, that what we consider as being the material or physical reality. I was thinking nearly three decades about this problem and I now came to consider it as a pseudo problem, for the simple reason that inside and outside are too merely conceptions of language and do not refer to realities that could bear up a strict empiric investigation. In fact we say that thoughts and feelings are inside ourselves, but what then is this conception of ourselves? If we look into our bodies, there are merely material structures, but no thoughts and feelings can be found. One could then argument that these structures, as for example our brain, produces such thoughts and feelings, and so one still could say that these are in some way within us. Yet I think we all have already experienced this effect, that you think simultaneously the same thing as another person with whom you have a close relationship. Between friends or lovers this happens quite often and it seems to me really not a very good idea to explain that as happening by chance, as the probability that two persons have the same thought exactly at the same time seem to be very low. Such observations, which most of us experience in certain situations, are for me a clear indication that thoughts are not only within us, but are working on a different level which is not constricted to an individual brain or what we have learned to consider as ourselves.

Actually we have to see that this conception of myself and a separate world, which is not me, is in the same way as the conception of an inner and outer world, a construction that we have learned to adopt in our very early childhood. For a baby there is not much difference between a toy and a part of its own body, both are likewise new, strange and interesting. As Lacan has shown with his notion of the mirror stage, this process of adopting the idea of a division between “I” and “not-I” does not happen before the age of six months and still implies a certain kind of alienation as it is never clear where the borders between this I and not-I should actually exist. We are neither our mirror image, nor are we our body nor something inside our body. We have learned to structure our reality by these conceptions, yet they are itself learned constructions, concepts of our language, which elude a further empirical investigation. I put these remarks forward only to show you that these notions of I and not-I, inside and outside, are not such solid or fundamental realities as it is usually believed, and therefore we should perhaps not torture our minds too much

with philosophical problems that arise from this division, which can not even be proven or dealt with on the plane of traditional science.

So both the Freudian observation of what he called destiny compulsion, Jungs remarks on synchronicity and Lacans linguistic approach suggest in some way, that the relationship between ourselves and the world that is surrounding us, the events that happen to us in our lives, is not that simple as one would believe when one sticks to the traditional notion of a singular subject and an objective reality that exists independently of its observer, as for example Einstein still believed throughout his lifetime.

It finally happened as a consequence of the experimental observations that were made throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the field of quantum mechanics that a different scientific approach seemed to become necessary, as it was shown by experimentation that subatomic and even atomic and molecular particles such as fullerenes behave differently as we would expect of material objects. There was at first the discovery of quantum indeterminacy which said that two complementary properties of a particle, as for example its position and momentum, cannot be measured exactly to the same extent. If you observe its position in space, you will not get exact measurements of its momentum and vice versa. This effect is not a matter of an inexactness of measurement, but fundamental and ineluctable, and thus suggests that there is no reality that exists independently of the observer. Another important discovery of quantum physics was the superposition of opposite states of a quantum system as illustrated in the example of “Schrödinger’s cat”. As long as we don’t observe a system, opposite realities can exist in a superposed state. And finally there is the epr-effect, which showed that particles that once had been parts of one system – so-called entangled particles – will react upon each other simultaneously if the properties of one of this particles are modified, and that this happens also when such particles are separated by long distances in space, so that there can be no causal relation or transference of information between them. This effect, which has been verified by several experiments, has led to the conclusion that quantum processes are happening on a non-local plane. To me this suggests that we live in a very sensible universe, in which the slightest changes in one part will result in corresponding changes in other parts of it, and that this is not a question of very particular events as for example quantum laboratory experiments, but rather must happen on certain levels everywhere and all the time. As the particles that are described by quantum mechanics are in fact nothing but the particles that we consist of, the assumption may



be allowed that even we and the reality we perceive are subject to quantum processes in some way. Quantum physicists currently are trying to find out more about the limits unto which quantum processes work. So far quantum effects can be observed only with very small particles and there are a lot of experiments going on all over the world to observe quantum processes also with larger objects. As quantum physicists are usually always investigating material objects, I thought that's perhaps not the only way how to search for quantum processes on a makro size level, and so I had the idea that quantum processes perhaps could manifest also as non-material events that happen to us in our life, as for example personal relationships, the accidental meeting of persons, decisions and so on.

On Tuesday my guest was Tanja Traxler, a young quantum physicist and philosopher from the University of Vienna, whom I know from the seminar of Prof. Reinhold Bertlmann, one of Austrias most important quantum physicists. And to talk with her was a highly interesting experience as it turned out that we were thinking in quite similar directions. We both agreed and both had the same feeling that possibly the most subtle processes in physical reality have in some way to do with that what we regard as our mental processes such as feelings or thoughts. In fact we cannot prove such relations, as there always remains a gap within our possibilities and disciplines of gaining knowledge, yet on the other hand this impossibility to get a full empirical knowledge is something very similar to the fact of quantum indeterminacy as a fundamental condition of reality.

By the way, and with this I will end my excursion to quantum physics, I realised some very striking parallels between Freud's psychoanalytical theory, Jung's remarks on synchronicity and quantum physics: Freud always mentioned two important properties of the unconscious, namely that the principle of contradiction (i.e. that not one thing and its opposite can be true) is not valid for the unconscious, and secondly that there is a fundamental non-temporality in the unconscious (which means that all unconscious contents are ever present to the same extent. What it makes so difficult for us to understand in quantum physics is nearly the same – the principle of contradiction is not valid (as can be seen in the superposition of two contradicting possibilities within a quantum system), and that there is also this principle of non-locality or non-contextuality (to cover both space and time). This again is nearly the same as Jung said in his essay on synchronicity, that either the psyche is non-local or space and time are relative to the psyche. So finally to say all these remarks based on observations from very different fields of knowledge all suggest a universe in which psychic or mental processes seem to be on a very fundamental and subtle level connected

with that what we call physical reality in space and time. I don't need to add that in such a universe wishes, desires or whatever tensions our psyche may produce in view of physical reality, can be thought as having the ability to affect that reality too. And by the way why should not the psyche have the ability to affect physical reality, when physical reality affects the psyche all the time? All I want to say with my explanations is just that this relation is not only working in one direction, but rather is - on a very fundamental level, that might escape our conscious attention, functioning bi-directional.

At the end of my lecture I would like to make one remark on what Gilles Deleuze said about the wish (*le desir*): In his *abecadaire*, an interview on terms following the letters of the alphabet, he said that we don't wish single objects, but aggregates. As an aggregate he understood a more complex structure, which involves certain places, certain ways of using language etc. Now I have to disagree here with Deleuze at least to some extent. I don't believe that we desire aggregates or complex combinations (and if we did it would not work), but that we still desire single objects, and still have to desire single objects (just as I suggested by the logical structure of the wish) yet that these desires for single objects have somehow to connect with aggregates to become reality. So the wish needs to be a singular and at it's best most simple, but to become reality it must find a place to manifest, a concrete situation, which always is a complex combination of different elements in space and time.

To summarize my lecture I would like to close with one good and one bad news: To start with the bad one, I will quote from Albert Einstein, who said that reality is an illusion, but a very persistent one. The good one is by myself and goes like this: If you are smart enough, you will be able to control it.

Thanks for your attention!