

HOW TO PLAY

Dominique Koch / Romy Rüegger / Tanja Koljonen
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The English word "play", in addition to its main meaning, playing games, also has associations with theatre plays. HOW TO PLAY presents three artists whose works question the relevance of linguistic and physical actions and mises-en-scene as well as their overlappings or incongruences.

The main links between language and body, text and mise-en-scene, intersect in the concept of performativity. Derived from the English verb "to perform", the term has various levels of meaning, referring both to the action-related "performance" (Ausführen) and to the dimension of "presenting" (Aufführen) which is coupled with the linguistic and physical staging. The linguistic-philosophical interpretation of these terms is based on the lectures by John L. Austin published in 1962 as *How to do things with words*. Austin describes linguistic statements as performative and assumes that they concur with actions and create facts. In her seven-part work *Emotional Diamonds*, Dominique Koch addresses the links between text, language and facts. With recourse to a computer program that analyses emotional differences in the human voice, the artist makes abstract diagrams. These computer-generated visualisations capture the measured states of mind of different speakers in terms like "somewhat energetic", "fairly passionate" and "a little less thoughtful", thereby creating identity types, such as the "intense thinker" or the "confident man". By suggesting analytical-scientific integrity, the computer program creates a congruence between the speakers' linguistic-performative performance and character traits that ultimately imply certain actions and behaviours.

As a complement to the linguistic aspects, the cultural philosopher Judith Butler, in her works on feminist theory, expands the idea of performativity to include a decidedly physical level. In her engagement with (gender-) identities, Butler demonstrates that the latter are not given but are produced through performative action. Physical acts or gestures produce social realities through constant re-enactment. It is also in these re-stagings that the potential for interpretation, even subversion, lies. The performative draft of an identity is thus comparable to the staging of a given text. Like an actor who can shape his or her role within the framework of the textual givens, the performance of an identity also allows shifts and breaks. These interpretational gaps, these questions about the kind of performance, the kind of play, are immanent in Tanja Koljonen's work *Eros & Psyche* (2014). On the basis of the stage dialogue of the same name by the Finnish author Eeva-Liisa Manner (1921-95), an influential figure in Finnish modernism in the 1950s, Koljonen conceives a book in which all that is visible is the punctuation. The famous story from Greek mythology, which is based on absolutely stereotypical (gender) rolls, thus hopes for a new interpretation, provides scope (Spielraum) for new performances.

Dominique Koch's video work *Interpretation* (2014) also deals with the potential of stagings and the processes of translating between written models, spoken language and physical expression. In this work, the software she already used for *Emotional Diamonds* analyses spoken language, with the speaker reading Jean-Paul Sartre's essay *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*. In the subsequent process of translating the states of mind ascertained, the explicit question arises of "how to play". Guided by a theory of theatre arising from Russian reform and Polish avant-garde theatre, the actor interprets emotions as physical gestures. The moment of physical performativity that permeates

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these stagings is also central to Tanja Koljonen's series *Plays and Players* (2014). In found photographs and text fragments from theatre magazines we see excerpts from plays, most of them close-ups, sometimes of actors reciting texts. Confronted with these reduced excerpts, however, we can only guess at the characters being played. Here too the fundamentally performative creative freedom and the resulting gaps are obvious, as in Koljonen's *Eros & Pshykhe*.

Romy Rügger's subtly compelling setting *Si tu vivais ici tu serais déjà chez toi*, activated on 16 April in the context of a performance, explores the tensions between language, body and the exhibition venue as a space with social and historic connotations. The artist plays with the presence and / or absence of a performer, whose fleeting physicality only becomes concrete in the moment of the performance. The performance also addresses the theme of the possibilities involved in subversive re-staging, in the circumvention of supposedly fixed forms for standardising and domesticating bodies. After all, the work's ambivalent title, referring both to an emotional state and a linguistic and physical place, points to those physical and psychological spaces that enable certain linguistic statements and physical actions in the first place. In this sense, *Si tu vivais ici tu serais déjà chez toi* refers to the level of the social context always inherent in the concept of performativity which always determines the dimensions of the play and the question of "how to play".

Goia Dal Molin

DOMINIQUE KOCH (*1983, CH, lives and work in Paris) studied at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst in Leipzig. Her works were recently shown in the solo exhibitions *Beyond Chattering and Noise* (Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris, 2015) and *Jetzt wird es wieder Zeit uns mit den Emotionen zu befassen* (Galerie Jochen Hempel Berlin, 2014). She also took part in various group exhibitions, including *Narrativ/Performativ* (Kunstraum Riehn, 2014), *Surfaces - Neue Fotografie aus der Schweiz* (Fotomuseum Winterthur, 2014) or *Correction Lines* (L102, Berlin, 2014).

TANJA KOLJONEN (*1981, FIN, lives and works in Helsinki) studied photography among others at the Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture (Helsinki) and the Moholo-Nagy University of Art and Design (Budapest). Recently she showed works in the solo exhibition *Repetitive gestures* (Galerie Taik, Berlin, 2012) and in the group exhibition *Between Flashes of the Lighthouse* (Galerie van Der Mieden, Brussels, 2015) or the Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin (2015).

ROMY RÜEGGER (*1983, CH, lives and works in Zürich) studied photography, film and fine art at the Zürcher Hochschule der Künste and the Universidad del Cine Buenos Aires. Her works and performances come about in different forms of collaboration in inviting and editing. She has had solo exhibitions, for example, in the context of *What she said before leaving society* (Lost Property Amsterdam, 2014) or *A Play for Recorded Voices* (Les Complices* Zürich, 2012). She was also represented in group exhibitions as recently for example in *Collecting the Future* (Corner College Zürich, 2015), *The Other Design* (Beton7, Athens, 2014) or *Clusters and Crystals. Observing at Point Zero* (Sinop Biennial Turkey, 2014).