WORD EVENTS: UNSPEAKABLE

by Ben Spatz
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MATERIALS

• Three participants

• Poster displaying the following list of words[2]:

DIVERSITY	SCIENCE-BASED
ENTITLEMENT	TRANSGENDER
EVIDENCE-BASED	VULNERABLE
FETUS	

• Stopwatch timer set for one minute

• Handheld video camera

ACTIVITY

Each participant is assigned one of the following roles: Performer, Conductor, Videographer.

Before the rotation structure begins:

1) The Performer prepares their body and any other instrument to perform.

1) The Videographer activates the camera in recording mode.

2) The Conductor announces the present date and location.

Rotation structure:

1) The Conductor starts the stopwatch countdown.

2) The Conductor chooses one word from the displayed list and tells it to the Performer. The Conductor can choose to repeat the word and/or give additional instructions (see Notes).

3) The Performer responds continuously through performance to the initial word given and to any further instructions. The Videographer records the event as they see fit.

4) After one minute, rotate roles until each participant has enacted each role (three rotations).

NOTES

• The camera remains on the whole time.

• The stopwatch can be set to loop automatically, operated by a fourth person, or by the Conductor. The important point is that there be an alert sound after each minute, marking the rotation of roles.

• The Conductor's primary task is to choose one word and tell it to the Performer, who responds to it through performance. The Conductor can choose to let the Performer explore freely or can deliver further verbal instructions. There is no specific limit on the type of instructions that can be given. On the other hand, the Performer should not *obey* in a hierarchical sense but rather *respond* to any instructions received. The dynamic between these two roles should be understood as a type of research: mutually respectful collaboration from which something emerges that could not have been produced by either participant alone. Both the Performer and the Conductor are searching for a performance that responds adequately to the utterance of the chosen word. This search happens live, through the collaborative dynamic between the roles, and is witnessed and documented.

• The Videographer can record the Performer, the Conductor, or both, from any angle, as close or distant as they choose. The actions of the Videographer are understood as a third element of the research rather than an external or objective perspective. The Videographer can choose to move far away from the Performer so as to capture the whole event unfolding in the space, but they can also choose to bring the camera very close to the bodies of the Conductor or Performer.

• The above score produces a video recording slightly longer than three minutes. This video should be posted online with the title of the composition and composer; date and location as stated in the video; names of all participants; and any other relevant information. *All participants must agree beforehand that the resulting video will be made public in this way.* This rule introduces another limitation for the Videographer role: *The Videographer should not record anyone who has not given permission for their recording to be made public.* If the event organizer wants to allow recordings of public guests (e.g., audience), then a clear announcement of public recording must be made.

• In the absence of a portable video camera, a smartphone can be used. However, a better camera will usually produce a more visually engaging video document. The production of the video document is an essential part of the score and not a secondary documentation of the event.

VARIATIONS

• Using a different set of words will focus the research on other topics and concepts.

• Longer durations (but each rotation must have the same duration as the others) deepen and intensify the score. To create conditions for substantial research outcomes, a useful starting point is 3 x 90 minutes with 30 minute breaks between each rotation, taking six hours to complete the cycle.

• More than three participants can perform the score by having multiple Performers and multiple Videographers (not multiple Conductors) at the same time. This requires agreement beforehand as to how the roles will rotate so that there are still exactly three rotations. A form of quasi-algebraic notation is being developed to notate these more complicated scenarios.

[1] This is a miniaturized version of the research method Dynamic Configurations with Transversal Video (DCTV) that has been rendered as a score according to the conventions of contemporary musical performance. Thanks to Mira Benjamin for help with this process. The title is a reference to *Word Events: Perspectives on Verbal Notation* by John Lely and James Saunders (Bloomsbury 2012). DCTV was developed during the project 'Judaica: An Embodied Laboratory for Songwork' (UK Arts and Humanities Research Council 2016-2018) at the University of Huddersfield. The core team was Ben Spatz, Nazlıhan Eda Erçin, and Agnieszka Mendel. This 'score' version was first performed by Aleksandra Miglowiec (flute), Jasper Davis (trombone), and Rose Xiu Yi Kow (violin), with projections by Robert Morton, at the Anathemas event organized by Ann Warren and Concrete Timbre at Olli Gallery Studio, New York City, 21 January 2018. For more information and related works, please visit <www.urbanresearchtheater.com>.

[2] The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was told by senior government officials to avoid these seven words in their reports. "Women's rights groups and LGBT activists said the report reflected the low regard in which issues of sexual orientation, gender identity and abortion rights are held in the Trump administration." — *The Guardian* (16 Dec 2017): *https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/dec/16/cdc-banned-words-fetus-transgender-diversity*