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„Can Knowledge be (a) Performative?
Performativity in the Studies of Science”

Summary

The recent surge in popularity of the notions of performance and performativity provides an incentive for examining their productivity for contemporary models of knowledge production. Drawing upon a host of conceptions from performance studies, philosophy of language, literary theory, gender studies as well as the postconstructivist science and technology studies, the Author proposes that we investigate knowledge in terms of its performativity.

The notion of knowledge as (a) performative is supposed to provide a certain supplement to the philosophical landscape of studying science and knowledge, largely shaped by a positivist approach, which models knowledge in terms of representation, and constructivism with its focus on 'knowledge as social practice'. In its greatest part, the concept of knowledge as (a) performative draws upon postconstructivist studies of science and technology; yet, it also shares some important tenets with poststructuralism and other conceptions that are widely identified under the so-called performative turn. Altogether, the notion proposed is not intended to overrule the other visions of how science and knowledge work, neither does it pursue empirical adequacy. As such, the concept of knowledge as (a) performative is supposed to mark a simple, but a productive conceptual shift in the way we envision knowledge processes today: their goals, outcomes, mode of operation, criteria of assessment, but also complex relation to the world, including entanglement in relations of power.

The structure of the thesis is tripartite. The first two parts provide an overview of the vital conceptions and issues pertaining to performance and performativity. The third part contains an outline of the notion proposed: knowledge as (a) performative.

The first part contains an overview of conceptions and authors that are considered as having largely influenced what we today call 'the performative turn'. Chapter one provides a sketch of the origins and developments of the so-called performative turn, touching upon fields such as theatre and performance studies, philosophy of language, literary studies, and gender studies.

Therefore, it pays some special attention to Erika Fischer-Lichte's framework of analysis, Richard Schechner's insights on the nature of performance and Jacek Wachowski's understanding of the relation between performance and performativity. Next, it turns the conceptions of John L. Austin and Jacques Derrida, especially their attempts to establish how performatives work, and with a focus on the notion of iterability. Another section of this part of the thesis is devoted to Butler's gender performativity, particularly her anti-essentialist reformulation of this notion and the possibility of resistance and transformation of the existing order. This landscape is yet complemented with a brief account of Jean-Francois Lyotard's seminal work – "The Postmodern Condition…", which marks a shift towards the understanding performativity in terms of economic effectiveness. The last passages of this chapter are devoted to a conception created by Jon McKenzie, who creates a framework for analysing various expressions of performance in diverse areas of contemporary culture, economy, technology and science, and eventually applies it to current changes in the field of science and knowledge.

Next, the second chapter in this part of the thesis is a brief recapitulation of some of the most substantial issues emerging across various disciplines and conceptions. These include, first of all, a tendency to shift the traditionally accepted boundaries and oppositions, especially when it comes to relations between language, action and meaning-making, secondly, an attempt to account for both repeatability and singularity, embeddedness and uniqueness, and thirdly, questions pertaining to performative productivity and exercising power. In the end there is also quick summary of the remarks towards contemporary science and knowledge production that reappear throughout the argument in this part of the thesis.

Therefore, the first part is an outline of the most important, from the point of view of the thesis, ideas and conceptions aiming to describe how performance and performativity work in a range of issues and conditions.

The second part of the thesis conveys a variety of approaches from the field of postconstructivist science and technology studies, including their import into social sciences and humanities. It begins with a summary of selected insights from the actor-network theory, with a special focus on showing how laboratories allow constructing objects of research, their seemingly objective results, and realities that are apt for their operation. Then it provides an overview of Andrew Pickering's discernment between representative and performative idiom of science, together with his conception of the mangle of practice. Next, "agential realism" by Karen Barad is presented, together with her posthumanist and radically anti-essentialist version of performativity. The subsequent chapter is devoted to ideas elaborated by Joseph Rouse, starting with his normative concept of practices, including the proposition of cultural studies of science, and concluding with the vision of scientific research as niche construction.

The ideas delineated in this part of the thesis, although departing from laboratory studies, are often employed to analyse social sciences, including some Latourian anti-dualist insights, the concept of social machines (by Łukasz Afeltowicz and Krzysztof Pietrowicz), performativity of social sciences methods (by John Law) and performativity of economics (here represented mainly by Michel Callon and Dwight McKenzie); conceptions which are brought forward in the final section of this part of the thesis.

Altogether, in light of the above ideas and conceptions it seems fair to say that an overall image of science and knowledge production shifts from one based in broadly understood representation, to another, founded upon performativity. This transition can be characterised as series of movements: from epistemological to ontological questions, from distance to engagement and accountability, from truth-false assessments to felicity conditions (workability, effectiveness), from objectivity to iterability, from individual geniuses to human-material collectives, from description and explanation to a change and intervention, from methodology to management, etc.

The third part of the thesis contains a delineation of the concept of knowledge as (a) performative. Building on the ideas expounded in both previous parts, its origins are explained together with some most substantial aspects of how it works. These include, above all: the mutual embeddedness and enactment of knowledge and the world, the nature of outcomes of knowledge as (a) performative and its profoundly processual character, diverse problems of knowledge contextualisation and portability together with the issues concerning the connection to academia and an ethical import that knowledge as (a) performative inevitably entails, and, finally, the liminal spaces of its production. As a result, introducing the concept of knowledge as (a) performative entails a number of shifts in both language of description and issues at stake, concerning, above all, questions of broadly understood effectiveness, a link to power and ethics, as well as a more general problem of delineating the role of science in today's world.

The concept of knowledge as (a) performative takes full account of the currently prevailing conditions in which everything is at stake and at issue, processes are forever ongoing, and not a thing is given. It is based upon anti-essentialism, trivialised realism, posthumanism, and a-representationism. Knowledge in the performative mode aims at enacting its outcomes – facts, objects, statements, together with properly accommodated realities by means incessant translations that bridge the gaps between the world, language and action, between the material, discursive and social, and between various forms of knowing. Its productivity is founded in iterability: it is portable and adapts to the context, but stays intelligible and identifiable as one; it responds to specific background, but also introduces some novelty; it remains comprehensible, intuitive, but influential; it translates big ideas and values into pragmatic steps. At the same time, knowledge as (a) performative stays embedded and responsive to the world: it always works against a current hinterland of practices that translate into what felicity conditions are posited at a time.

Furthermore, the concept of knowledge as (a) performative welcomes a specific understanding of effectiveness. It is no more an external, discontinuous measure determined from afterwards by comparing input with output, or the point of departure with the point of arrival. Contrarily, effectiveness of knowledge as (a) performative rests upon the constantly reformulated felicity conditions, which result from interaction between a recognised hinterland and the anticipations concerning the current workability and the long-standing ethical import. Then, effectiveness is both pragmatic and idealist, and both real and relational. At the same time, it requires that knowledge as (a) performative has its specific liminal spaces in which disciplinary borders, and the dominant norms are not completely renounced, but somewhat provisionally suspended.

In sum, knowledge as (a) performative works upon a specific mode of operation, in particular spaces, according to characteristic, constantly re-fitted measures of success. It draws attention to a specific, profoundly transformative, yet at the same time embedded character of knowledge, itself understood both as a product and a productive process. Such vision brings to focus its open-ended, non-linear, transient, and heterogeneous character, its active engagement with the world and within matrices of power, lack of clear-cut paths or easily measurable results. What is also important is that the notion of knowledge as (a) performative takes full notice of the inherent capability of all sciences', including social sciences and humanities, of engaging in and transforming the world. It accounts for the effectiveness of both experimental findings or technological devices, and the conceptual ideas or theories, that come from both laboratories and the 'basic research' settings.

The second chapter in this part of the thesis is an attempt to show that the shift towards understanding knowledge in terms of performativity is already taking place within humanities and social sciences. Namely, the selection includes some participatory qualitative methodologies adopting performance as a their certain *modus operandi*, the non-representational theory which focuses on profoundly practical, processual side of reality, and Ewa Domańska's conception of affirmative humanities as 'means' of reinforcing communities and opening possible futures.

The very ending summarises the whole thesis as well as provides some personal remarks on how the notion of knowledge as (a) performative could be of use in the context of undergoing debates on the role and the future of humanities and social sciences in the contemporary world.