



PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

LETTER TO LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

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ABSTRACT

Lynda Gaudreau's current artistic research on asynchrony emerged from her choreographic practice. Asynchrony is the modification or disturbance of perception caused by a slight change in space and/or time within a work, and which, like a pebble, slips inside a machinery. This tiny friction between space and time heightens the audience's attention. During her doctoral research (2018), she elaborated her conception of asynchrony through specific parameters, such as the hole/gap, short circuit and fake space. These were organized into three dynamic axes: desynchronization, destruction, and editing. Her project eventually took the form of twenty-five fictional letters to various individuals - artists, thinkers and characters. They include letters to Pier Paolo Pasolini, Cedric Price, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and a Sainte. The letter to Ludwig Wittgenstein is one of the unpublished letters of this project. Begun during the live screening of the American presidential election in 2016, the letter integrates various recollections and texts about space, movement and time. It carries the reader into a choreographic and asynchronous experience, from one place to another, and into different times (live stream, recorded...). The letter to Ludwig Wittgenstein is a reflective enquiry into the relation between space and language, and the mobile nature of both.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Lynda Gaudreau has been working internationally as a choreographer, researcher, curator, teacher and mentor for nearly twenty-five years. Detail and attention underlie her pieces. In parallel to her artwork, she has initiated several choreographic and interdisciplinary research activities for her peers. On June 7th, 2018, as a part of the doctoral program in art studies and practices at the Université du Québec à Montréal, she defended a thesis on the notion of asynchrony. She now occupies a position as staff and postdoctoral researcher at UniArts at The Theatre Academy in the Performing Arts Research Centre TUTKE in Helsinki, Finland.

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Montreal, November 9, 2016

Dear Ludwig Wittgenstein,

I spent the night yesterday glued to the TV in my kitchen, waiting patiently for the results of the American presidential election. It was an excruciatingly long evening. At one point, I decided to take a break to watch a conversation on YouTube that had been recorded in 1976 by the BBC on the subject of your philosophical work. Stretched out on my bed with my laptop on top of me, I found myself in the company of two philosophers: the host of the program, Bryan Magee, and his prodigious guest, Anthony Quinton, with whose help I succeeded in untangling complex ideas presented in your two works—*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* published in 1922 and *Philosophical Investigations* in 1953. The episode was appropriately entitled *The Two Philosophies of Wittgenstein*.

What I enjoyed most about that conversation was being able to put my finger on the concept that has constantly drawn me back to your thinking: the mobile nature of language. As dry as your philosophy can sometimes seem with its literary economy, it suddenly became congenial. When, at around 35 minutes and 23 seconds, Anthony Quinton began to speak about the adaptable and public nature of language we all agree on, it was like listening to the architect Cedric Price talking about space. Something clicked: both language and space exist only to the extent that they are self-destructive. Like language with its constantly changing rules, space is a living process that transforms and renews itself in response to the activity of living beings, constantly reinventing itself. A table has no more “destiny” in language than it does in spatial reality: a table is a piece of wood we eat on, two hours later an ironing board, and so on. The use(s) and the infinite number of possibilities a space can offer are the guarantee of its vitality.

You and Cedric Price agree on the idea that space and language rely on a similar process of transformation. I go back to Price’s works precisely for that reason. Space is always in process; people transform it, appropriate it, and recreate it. His philosophy of repurposing reached its peak in the conceptualization of his project, never realized, of the *Fun Palace* (1961). The space was not specialized, not limited to one function only. What was a library during the day could become a dance club at night. This implied that a space was many spaces and was designed to be as mobile as possible, depending on the time of day and what visitors wanted.

9:00 pm: Clinton takes New York.

On the subway this morning, I read an article by Meaghan Morris (1992), “Great Moments in Social Climbing: King Kong and the Human Fly,” in which she quotes Michel de Certeau (1984):

Again I draw on de Certeau to assume that space is not a prior condition or something else (‘place’), but rather an outcome, the product of an activity, and so it necessarily has a temporal dimension. Reversing the customary assumption

that 'place' is a structured space, 'space,' says de Certeau, 'is a practiced place.'
(Morris, 1992, p. 3)

— TRACTATUS LOGICO-PHILOSOPHICUS — 1. The world is everything that is the case. — 1.1 The world is the totality of facts, not of things. — 1.11 The world is determined by the facts, and by these being all the facts. — 1.12 For the totality of facts determines both what is the case, and also all that is not the case. — 1.13 The facts in logical space are the world. — 1.2 The world divides into facts. 1.21 — 10:29 pm: Clinton takes Virginia. 10:31 pm: Trump wins in Ohio. 10:42 pm: Clinton takes Colorado.

1:00 am: Trump moves slightly ahead of Clinton in Pennsylvania.

Through their activities, human beings use up, disorganize, cancel and recreate space. The idea of language games in your first philosophy in the *Tractatus* finds its equivalent in the multiple "situation-games" of objects and living organisms in space. Cedric Price (The Telegraph, 15 August 2003), an ardent defender of this concept, liked to emphasize the limited lifetime of a space: "The building must adapt or be disposed of like a worn-out pair of Hush Puppies." As far as he was concerned, spaces had a life span of ten years, at which point they should be destroyed. An anecdote comes to mind that would probably have made you smile: when the City of London decided to demolish one of Price's architectural projects, the *InterAction Centre* (1976), a group of citizens decided to circulate a petition to protect the project. What they didn't know, however, was that Cedric Price had already signed another petition calling for its destruction...

In the BBC's interview with Bryan Magee, Anthony Quinton (Magee, 1976) refers to the conventions and rules that are constantly transforming language, stressing the importance of "considering language in its natural settings, to see all the circumstances in which people say things, the behaviour that characteristically accompanies their saying certain things."

Citing your *Philosophical Investigations*, Quinton (Magee, 1976) insists during the interview on the importance of the perpetual reappropriation and rearrangement of language by individuals.

Unperturbed by human presence, space becomes obsolete. The exhibition *Beat Generation* (2016) that I visited last September at the Centre Pompidou in Paris led me to reflect on my relationship with the exhibit space. There were virtually no artistic *works*, only archival posters on display, surrounded by constantly changing video projections and the movement of visitors bustling about in all directions. The atmosphere resembled that of a fair: there was none of the careful physical restraint normally felt in museums and galleries. In a sense it was perfect - visitors seemed uninhibited, spontaneous, and probably it was the archival character of the exhibition that allowed them to move more freely through the space. So how might it be possible to generate this same freedom in visitors to an exhibition with works of art?

▸ I didn't intend to talk to you about my fear, Ludwig, about the thing I'm most afraid of. It's not mice, or the dark, or death: it's enslavement to space and language.

— TRACTATUS LOGICO-PHILOSOPHICUS — 2.0212 It would then be impossible to form a picture of the world (true or false). — 2.022 It is clear that, however different from the real world an imagined one may be, it must have something - a form - in common with the real world. — 2:49 am: Trump wins in Wisconsin. — 2:52 am: Trump carries Pennsylvania. 3:04 am: Trump declares victory.

I had lost my election, and I was not alone.

And I'm scared, Ludwig.

Lynda

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