

Connections between
a Performance directed by Jens Reulecke and Daojia Philosophy

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Performances directed by Jens Reulecke in some universities in China have aroused many interests among the students and teachers and are explained by various ways. This essay intends to explore connections between one of such performances in Sichuan Polytechnic College (hereafter the Performance) and daojia Philosophy. Because the Performance is not based on daojia philosophy and what Reulecke expects in it is not something built on world view of daojia, it is hard to say the two are connected by nature. Therefore this article only focuses on the outward connections between the two. Such kind of connection is that the form of the Performance happens to fit in with five views of daojia philosophy.

One, daojia philosophy upholds that dao is nothingness, which produces being, which then gives birth to all beings. As such, all beings derive from nothingness namely dao.

Two, qi is one of things from dao. One of the meanings of qi is a sort of gas. It is fundamental in making up the world. Hence, all things are essentially in one with qi. Therefore, daojia philosophers tend not to differentiate essentially subjects from objects, beautifulness from ugliness, and so on.

Three, the way of dao is doing nothing, because dao itself is nothingness. Naturally, dao cannot do like the things other beings are able to do. However, all beings are actually from dao. In this sense, there is nothing that is not done from dao. This feature of dao inspires daojia philosophers that if one person lives according to way of dao without any artificial intentions, s/he will be close to a true inner life, namely a natural state of life. Such a person is seemingly ignorant, yet s/he is no longer limited by knowledge and should not be evaluated against knowledge.

Four, because dao is nothing and yet there is nothing that is not done, it is the simplest of all. One comes to understand the universe essentially through comprehending dao and thus her/his mind and emotion are not affected by the phenomenological world. Also, her/his inner energy is not the kind based on rational cognition. Since one approves dao, s/he will approve all beings from dao, respect their own ways of existence and never interfere with their existence. Besides, s/he will live a life observing the laws of nature and become a part of it. Such a person is closest to dao.

Five, among people who are consistent with dao and between such people and nature, the best communication should be via spiritual contact, rather than languages or any other possible means. As a result, this communication will not be framed by space and time.

The discussion on the connections between the five aspects and the Performance will be based on my perception from being a participant in it.

The Performance is not about presenting something to the audience, but about inspiring them in gaining experiences from it. This unique feature separates its art form from other art forms, from which we can clearly discern audience and artists. In the Performance, however, communication itself becomes a special form of art. Consequently, the Performance is not visual or hearing art for the audience, but directly points to spirit. Since communication itself is now a form of art, roles of art works (as objects of appreciation) and audience (as subjects of appreciation) lose their traditional significance. In this new relationship between artists and audience, both are involved in the art works. In this way, they are no longer limited to their subjects' roles, and pick up roles of objects. This does not mean they can never go back to their original roles, but artists, audience and works are integrated in an entirety.

This transposed position between subjects and objects in art appreciation is quite similar to philosophy of qi of Taojia school, which is featured in breaking the dividing line

between subject and object, cancelling their opposite relationship and bringing them into a whole. According to Daojia philosophy, qi is the noumenon of the world and the most fundamental element in making up the universe. It is a sort of gas in when it interperated as substance. Qi also means life force and an energy owned by objective spirit in Daojia philosophy. It forms various kinds of things when it is congregated,; while it is dispersed, forms of things disappear.

ChuangTzu, a master of Daojia philosophy, wrote in his Zhibeiyou [knowing's travel to north]: “人之生， 气之聚也；聚则为生， 散则为死。若死生之徒， 吾又何患！故万物一也， 是其所美者为神奇， 其所恶者为腐臭；腐臭复化为神奇， 神奇复化为腐臭。故曰：‘通天下 一气耳’。圣人故贵一。” [literally, life of man is congregation of qi; congregation of qi

means life, while dispersion of qi death. If death and life are of the same kind, what else shall I worry about! Therefore, all things are unified into one thing. Why view the beautiful things as good and see the ugly as bad, for the ugly can become beautiful while the good may get bad. That is why we say the whole universe is “qi” by nature and “qi” makes no difference between all things in this world. Therefore sages hold high this point that all things are one]. If everything is qi by nature, the essential distinction between things will have no reason to exist. There is no subject and object but only a big one that we call qi. In the other words, the seemingly primary and secondary things actually derive from one source; likewise, the subject and the object are unified into one thing, namely qi.

Communication in the Performance, as an art form, achieves its significance of daojia philosophy in this sense.

This form of art is not what is designed in space, nor what is consisted of the movement of everybody, but is a communication Reulecke explained in his own way. Not only the Performance itself but also all the contact between the artist and the students can be called art. As such, Reulecke's art performance then will not be limited by prescribed space and time just as other forms of art.

Based on the above-mentioned reasons, I would like to deem the actions—presented in the end and called art—as a part of his work. What makes art true is life from artists' inner world and coherence between an artist and her/his works. Actions in the performance are actually expressions of an inner life which flows from the artist to everybody involved in his work. Communication here just plays the very role to carry this flow. To invite people who do not know each other at all to come into the Performance voluntarily is not easy; this only becomes possible when they are attracted by the flow of inner life. Such an outcome depends on both artistic accomplishment of an artist and his inner life. The flow is silent and reflects the artist's aesthetical experiences of many years. In such a condition, to appreciate art therefore does not rely on shape, space or sounds.

The flow carried by communication is like a living state of some sages of Daojia school. According to Daojia, a perfect person is not dragged by anything. He does things naturally and never does for doing itself. One doing a thing intentionally is constrained by the thing done. S/he will care about the outcome of her/his conducts or the process of the thing and will be affected by what s/he is doing anyway. For example, putting on clothes is a thing we do everyday. If we care too much about which clothes we shall put on, we will be constrained by this clothing ourselves. But if a cloth designer chooses unconsciously her/his clothes via trained aesthetic tastes, then s/he is actually presenting us her/his fine appreciation in a natural way.

This is Dao's way: to let everything be natural without any artificial intentions. One who achieves this is not really ignorant. He always acquires much knowledge, throw the knowledge away and become ignorant. But such an ignorant person is different from people who never receive any knowledge. The two kinds of person can be compared to an illiterate and a poet. The former have no idea of poem-writing at all. The latter does not

write any poems intentionally, but each of his seemingly common sentences can give people poetic enjoyment. Unfortunately, most of us are those who are writing poem intentionally.

This type of doing-not-for-doing-itself philosophy is a key characteristic of communication in the Performance art. It is felt in the artist-audience contact during his stay in Sichuan Polytechnic College, which may not be seen as art work or part of it. Specifically, the contact occurred when the artist delivered lectures to the students, rehearsed the performance with them, and dined with them. However, it is this kind of contact, without any artistic intentions, that gives the students artistic enjoyment. This is the truth of art in terms of oriental aesthetics. I cannot find any evidence implying that this kind of communication was done artificially or done for making itself art, for it just flew naturally. As a participant and a spectator, I should not view such communication as not a part of the work.

If we compare the contact part of the Performance to a creek, then the final performance part can be seen as a river. While the river is forming, energy accumulates. In the last part of his performance, language disappeared and even images were turn off for a time. Instead of resorting his work to concrete forms such as shape, plot and sound, Reulecke employed methods closer to the students' comprehension, such as standing in silence, creating two circles of people by connecting each others' hands, and moving as a whole. These methods invited the students to move from an outside world into their own inner world.

The Performance aims to let students experience something. So if there is anything (other than language) that could serve better to realize the aim, language will become redundant. This situation is just like what ChuangTzu said in his book *Waiwu*[outside things]: “荃者所以在鱼类，得鱼而忘荃。蹄者所以在兔，得兔而忘蹄。言者所以在意，得意而忘言。吾安得呼忘言之人而与之言哉！ [a basket-trap is for catching fish, but when one has got the fish, one need think no more about the basket. A foot-trap is for catching hares; but when one has got the hare, one need think on more about the trap. Words are for holding ideas, but when one has got the idea, one need on longer think about the words. If only I could find someone who had stopped thinking about words and could have him with me to talk to!] [translated by Youlan Feng]. When the movement of bodies gradually becomes tactic, the breath coherent, the voice harmonious and the time of silence deep and transparent; communication in the Performance then transcends language and enters a realm of spirit.

If there is a kind of communication without the use of language, then communication of meanings do not necessarily entail concepts. Therefore, communication is not constrained by rationality. The world is understood with order of rationality by humankind. It seems that for us to master the world with rationality is reliable, although irrational ability in us is not weak. This makes us spend most of our time on a world built upon order of rationality. However, the more masterful we live with rationality, the further we are from irrationality. Rationality is finite while irrationality is infinite. Disappearance of language in the last stage of the Performance just serves to make the students be devoid of interruption from rationality and to let them withdraw from their outside selves and turn instead to their inner world.

Not only does rationality in the performance cease to work, but also some sensations, like seeing, cease to function to some extent. Communication then largely relies on spirit, which is unrestricted by time and space and thus a new world could possibly open to the students. Such a new world seems nothing, as it does not build on any elements from nor adds something to the actual world. Spirit, not sensation or abilities of soul, goes first in the performance. On the one hand, this new world means nothingness for me rationally living in the actual world; on the other hand, it is true existence for me who touch nothingness

with spirit. The nothingness here is said, in relation to reality and to a way through which things exist in the actual world. It is not really nothing if I change my way of thinking about existence.

Simplicity of such nothingness is similar to dao. Laozi contends that dao as nothingness is the simplest. Nothing can be simpler than dao. In other words, dao itself is simplicity. Such a state is actually the real state of natural life, which does not rely on or is not affected by the external world. To be harmonious with dao, rather than achieving this via the external world, one must instead understand the essence and origin of the world masked by phenomena and focus her/his attention on the inner world. In the Performance, I detect a similar seeking for simplicity. Reulecke's work intends not to do anything to the external and phenomenal world, but is concerned with various experiences of nothingness in human-space interaction, interpersonal contact, and a simplicity of one's inner life.

From the students' feedback on the performance, I find that their experience in nothingness is a process from nothing to something. This is similar to Daojia's theory of origin of the universe: from non-being to being and then from being to all beings of the world. Moreover, during the time of experiencing nothingness, energy gradually emerging and pervading to the whole group of students and even further is like qi of Daojia philosophy. That is, such energy from nothingness is like qi from non-being. Both the two kinds of process focus on nothingness and experiences in it. Although they are not absolutely the same (e.g., the outcomes of the two kinds of nothingness are not identical), their ways of perceiving a world beyond the actual one is very close to each other.

Via similar perspectives of seeing a new world, both Daojia and Reulecke's performance find their own ways of communication, which aims to pursue something from a spiritual world, such as true state of life, freedom above the reality, endless possibilities, potential energy from one's inner life and a group of people connecting with their special way of communication and so on. In this sense, the Performance is not only art but also a thing directly pointing to belief. However, I think it is the wish based on belief that actually makes the art form of the Performance unique.

Now, the discussion has to stop. If it goes further, it may find that the roots of the Performance and daojia philosophy are actually different. It is very interesting to realize that different "roots" sometimes will produce similar "branches". To identify similarity in branches may provide us a special perspective, from which we can discern dissimilarity in roots or find a way to harmonize different roots. I only wish this essay can provide more perspectives in interpreting performances directed by Jens Reulecke's in universities in China.