

Praxis

Generous Attentiveness *

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A video article that investigates how the interactive performance installation *Your Past Belongs to Them Now* by Inga Gerner Nielsen applies qualitative interviews as an artistic method.

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This video article is about the methods used in the interactive performance called *Your Past Belongs to Them Now* by performance artist Inga Gerner Nielsen.

The fictitious setting of the performance is a future Europe in 2039, after an electrical shock has deleted nearly all digital memory. The performers play activists who are using the digital disaster to focus on somatic characteristics of memories. They want people not only to recall important factual events but specifically to regain the bodily feelings of these memories.

In this performance, the audience members are participants who are taken through exercises of remembrance using phenomenology-based interview methods. The performers are local students, newly trained over two weeks in these specific performance methods.

Using interviews as an artistic method is not new. It is often used to collect artistic materials prior to the performance or as a means of gaining insight into audience experiences and opinions post-performance. However, the use of interviews in the interactive performance installation *Your Past Belongs to Them Now* is novel in that the interviews are part of the performance proper. They are not only a generator of performance content but also yield a specific aesthetic and very personal experiences for the participants.

The interview technique applied in this performance is, in its basic form, not much different from the instrumental interview of the human and social sciences. What makes it different, however, is the keying of the interview as a performance, requiring the performers to keep

at least two perspectives in mind when interviewing the participants: the immediate somatic and psychological experience of the interview and the collection of memories that make up the performance. Through the participants' engagement in this very personal and intimate experience, they are producing collective memory in the form of a decisive aesthetic atmosphere as well as concrete objects and texts that can be looked at, read and interpreted by other participants, who, in turn, yield other recollections and imaginations.

Contrary to qualitative academic interviews, the objective of the interviews used in this specific interactive performance installation is not generalizable knowledge about a certain topic but personal experiences and the creation of a performance installation.

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