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Introduction

In John G. Blair's article "An Intellectual History of *Performance* in Our Time," which functions itself as a highly useful introduction to the present collection of essays, we read that performance studies "have become so multifarious as to defy enumeration" and that "to begin to catalogue [their] ramifications would be self-defeating" (21).[1] Proceeding selectively by necessity, Blair then singles out four important fields, namely

(1) anthropological studies, such as those of Victor Turner, with their concern for liminal states, and in their wake Richard Schechner's theorizing of performance in the widest possible form;
(2) the conceptualization of performance by postmodernist critics and philosophers after the 1960s, in the context of their questioning the fundamental premises at the heart of "Western civilization";
(3) postmodernist criticism with a theoretical and *political* agenda promoting new perspectives in areas like identity or gender;
(4) historians of science using the concept of performance to demystify the notion of an "inbuilt logic" in the progress(ion) of science.

Looking at the range of the fourteen essays collected in this volume in the light of Blair's categories, one can say that they directly or indirectly reflect the concerns of at least three of the four outlined fields. The only absent field is that of anthropologically oriented studies. On the other hand, a discipline not mentioned by Blair but represented here with four essays is that of linguistics. All of the essays collected in this volume are based on talks given at the biennial conference of the Swiss Association of University Teachers of English at the University of Lausanne in May 1997. The diversity of topics or texts studied in the light of performativity is considerable, ranging from the "performances" of medieval mystics through the production of plays by the RSC to the language of newspaper ads and the developing of a dialogue program and a machine translation program in computational linguistics.

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[1] Page numbers in brackets refer to essays printed in this volume.

In his overview, Blair also places the recent flourishing of performance studies in the arts and the humanities in a larger cultural context, relating it in particular to the changing *zeitgeist* between the 1960s and the 1980s. These decades saw the erosion and finally the collapse of the hegemonial division of the world into East and West with its concomitant Cold War mentality and the "Us-Them binaries that ruled conceptions of the 'Western World' during the recent half century" (Blair 21). In politics, culture and science, this period was indeed characterized by a ruling tendency to perceive and categorize phenomena in terms of dichotomies or binary oppositions. In literary criticism, for instance, New Criticism under various appellations ruled triumphant, with the formal properties of the work of art as central object of study, and with a radical split between literary and non-literary language, between the (pure, ordered) work of art and the (impure, disorderly) world at large.

"The notion," writes Blair, "that in retrospect proved central to that enterprise and those that later rebelled against its constraints was that of *boundary*" (24). This is fully borne out when one turns to performance as commonly understood before the 1960s. Performance was usually defined as the staging of a play, the playing of a musical score, the reading of poetry, etc., in ways implying a neat separation or boundary between the work of art itself and its individual performance. The latter, given with the intention of coming as close to the "original" as possible and doing justice to it by actualizing its full potential, was seen as fraught with the risks of the individual moment, the concrete occasion. In terms of this opposition, the work of art was timeless, whereas the performance was bound to time and circumstance; the play, the score, the choreographed dance piece was the "object" or mas*terpiece* containing the meaning, the essence which the performance was meant to bring out.

The surging interest in performance in and after the 1960s coincided with the radical questioning of this division. The new way of thinking of performance focused on the "potentially disruptive forces of the 'outside'" which "are encouraged to assert themselves," as Henry Sayre wrote. What one finds "outside" the text is "the physical space in which it is presented, the other media it might engage or find itself among, the various frames of mind the diverse members of a given audience might bring to it, and, over time, the changing forces of history itself."[2] Of course this different concept of the relationship between text/object and performance was not completely new; it

[2] Henry Sayre, "Performance," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 94.

had informed the theory and practice of the avant-garde for a long time (Duchamp and Dada come to mind, for instance) but reached a new importance in the 1960s and after. It is of course not accidental that this different concept of performance coincides with the advent of the many poststructuralist and postmodernist theories questioning not only the text-performance binary but many other dichotomies used widely and uncritically up to that point (essential vs. accidental, central vs. marginal, surface structure vs. deep structure, *langue* vs. *parole*, literary vs. non-literary language, etc.) One now became aware to what extent the world had been read in terms of binary oppositions, and one also began to see that the binaries, ostensibly used in neutral ways, often turned out to be value-loaded terms. In the case of gendered binaries (reason vs. intuition, active vs. passive, etc.), not only feminists noted that the masculine side was favoured over the feminine; in the more "abstract" categories of so-called scientific thought the preferences (and the ideologies or myths informing them) were more difficult to spot but no less present. Thus in linguistics, for instance, many argued with Bloomfield that the proper object of study was *spoken* language, and one should turn to written language only when no spoken language was available. In his famous chapter "Plato's Pharmacy" in *Disseminations,* Derrida relates such convictions to the myth prevalent in Western civilization that speech was closer to a lost origin, and that favouring speech over writing was part of a system of binary oppositions in which one term was judged intrinsically superior to the other (cf. Martine Hennard Dutheil 118).

Not that the authors of the essays collected in this volume can stay away from a reasoning that makes constant use of binary oppositions – as Derrida tried to show, this is not a viable option anyway since it is not possible for us to step outside the frame of Western metaphysics. But from the eminently productive way in which the concept of performance is used it becomes evident that much is to be gained from using binary oppositions more cautiously, above all from not using them as dichotomies. Many of the essays are also informed by a high awareness of the value judgements adhering to binary oppositions, or by the insight that to work with binaries may be useful up to a certain point but that beyond this point the oppositions tend to collapse and to reveal themselves for what they essentially are – mental constructs. Thus even the briefest of summaries of the articles collected here should make evident how many of the rigid distinctions and oppositions of the past have given way to a more cautious kind of thinking, aware of the problems of reification when separating the act of performance from the work or "object" being performed.

In Peter Holland's "Measuring Performance," for instance, the conviction that the text of a play compared to its performance is not much more than a musical score in relation to the music itself is all but taken for granted. Holland goes a decisive step further in undermining the old distinction between the essential and the accidental by showing that many of the seemingly marginal aspects of a theatrical performance are in fact more crucial than some of those habitually regarded as essential. Thus Holland convinces us that too narrow a notion of "performance" is as detrimental to a genuine awareness of what is at stake in theatre as was in the past the scholar's exclusive preoccupation with the drama as text.

If Holland considerably extends the notion of performance, then Boris Vejdovsky shows that performance begins long before a play is put on stage. Reading a play, he argues, is in itself a kind of performance. The reader, occupying a middle ground between the page and the stage, is "the person who stands between the live performance and . . . the dead and inanimate marks on the page" (56-57). When reading a play (any narrative, in fact), we give the characters a voice, project them into a space, endow them with a life without which they do not exist and cannot make sense. Thus no play can be staged without this preceding performance by a reader, a performance which, as Vejdovsky notes, is always a first interpretation or "translation." Such a reading of a play is a precondition for its performance; hence ultimately the question whether a performance is faithful to the "original" text cannot be answered since the latter only exists when at least read/performed by a reader. Strictly speaking, it turns out, "the text itself" cannot be kept apart from its performance.

As one would expect, drama still occupies a central place in the current flowering of performance studies, and one of the reasons may well be that extended notions of performance have coincided with the current preoccupation with the problematic of self and identity, which for a long time has been so close to the heart of drama. *Hamlet* in particular, whose interpretation in *Ulysses* is the topic of David Spurr's essay, has been a crucial text in this respect. Turning to Stephen Dedalus's interpretation of *Hamlet* allows Spurr to relate performance to the problem of self in a number of ways. Stephen's theory is inspired by the first performance of *Hamlet* at the Globe Theatre in June, 1602, in which Shakespeare played the role of the ghost. Based on this fact, Stephen concludes that Shakespeare is both ghost and prince, father and son, and thus marked internally by the same division that sets Hamlet and the ghost at cross purposes. Spurr argues that Shakespeare represents for Joyce "the divided condition of the subject per se, whether he

be Shakespeare, Hamlet, or Stephen Dedalus" (65). He shows that behind Stephen's reading of Hamlet as double we find that of Stéphane Mallarmé, to whose interpretation of *Hamlet* Joyce alludes repeatedly. For Mallarmé, *Hamlet* is the prototype of the "théâtre de notre esprit," that is the drama of the subject. Spurr sees Mallarmé as part of a modern critical tradition preoccupied with the "fading of the subject," which later ranges from Freud and Jones to Lacan, Barthes and Derrida. "The Platonic idea of the subject made wholly present to himself and others . . . through performance . . . has faded, and is gradually being replaced by the notion of voice and performance as, not the outward expression or the mask of a presence, but rather the concealment of something missing" (67).

Redefining the self along these lines has been a central concern of some of the most influential (and debated) movements in (post)modern criticism. Pursuing the notion that the self may not so much manifest as *constitute* itself in performance has in particular inspired a rethinking of gendered or sexual identity. It has also led to new studies in drama, particularly of the Elizabethan, Jacobean and Restoration theatre in which the problematizing of (sexual) identity appears in a different light as soon as one gives up the notion that there is a stable self behind the performing self and that the two can be neatly kept apart. Thus Christa Knellwolf in her essay on Aphra Behn maintains that Behn used her plays as "experimental ground for defining the self" which appears largely as "an effect of presentation . . . perceived at several removes from the idea of natural essence" (74). To leave it there would, however, be too simple, since the new notion of self does not replace the old conception so much as rival with it. If irrationality and excess in Behn's work provide the viewer with images "for an identity that is independent from the constrictive definitions of contemporary authority," then other, more conventional images and notions ground the self in more orthodox conceptions. The representation of gender is typical in this respect: Behn in her plays particularly attacks the stereotypes of the passive woman and the active man, to the point of turning them upside down. At the same time, her plays remain grounded in "an idealized vision of monarchical and paternalistic order" which she supported because it "paradoxically free[d] women, in particular, from the demands of the patrilineal ideology" (Markley in Knellwolf 86).

Traditional notions of the relationship of self and performance (as well as text and performance) are also questioned in the one essay on a medieval topic: In "Mystical Texts or Mystical Bodies," Denis Renevey points out that late Medieval England abounded in performances other than those of the

many medieval plays. Medieval liturgy and para-liturgical anchoritic practices in particular were full of ritualized, controlled forms of performance. Particularly fascinating instances are those of mystics using texts that were designed for (or even the result of) performances in which the body, completely oblivious of itself, could become the site of an otherworldly sacred reality. Renevey maintains that one has not been sufficiently aware to what extent the writings of late medieval mystics are full of signposts for the performance of some parts of their writings. In fact, mystics like Richard Rolle and Margery Kempe offered their writings not as literary pieces but as support to a performance which alone could bring about the state of mind necessary for the mystical experience. Margery Kempe is a particularly interesting case here, not only because her performances verged on the sensational and wildly ecstatic. Deprived of the authority of the male textual Latinate culture, Kempe used her body as site for the manifestations of her discourse with God. The fact that Margery usually performed without a text was one of the reasons why she was fiercely attacked by the orthodox church. However, her very inability to write may have been an important reason why "her performing body [became] her text," as Renevey puts it: "the book itself is only an afterproduct, the outcome of a negotiation between Margery and her scribes" (96, note 21).

In terms of performativity, the transition from orality to literacy, whether in late medieval England or any other culture, is usually seen as a loss. A case in point is Native American literature, which which Hartwig Isernhagen deals in his paper. Isernhagen, however, finds it problematic to approach Native American literature from the perspective of "how much of the performance dimension is lost in translation" but finds it much more adequate for an appreciation of its specific achievement to see how much of orality "may in what shape be preserved or recreated" (108). He is thus able to move away from writing the history of the transition from orality to literacy as a story of sheer loss and to acknowledge that cultural change, even in as destructive a form as that imposed on Native Americans, is not only disabling. Isernhagen analyzes the way in which writers like Leslie Silko and N. Scott Momaday reinscribe the performative, which is so central to their heritage, into their narratives. Salvaging the performative leads to the invention of new (and often highly successful) narrative strategies.

If in Silko and Momaday sections of storytelling both frame and interrupt the more "Westernized" discourse, then Salman Rushdie both thematizes and enacts the essentially performative character of *all* discourse, as Martine Hennard Dutheil shows in her essay on *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie thus

challenges the Islamic myth of the Qur'an, the "uncreated word of God," as an "intrinsic part of the Divine Essence" (119). Like all novels, *The Satanic Verses* reflects the author's attempt at creating alternative worlds. Intrinsically dialogical, it challenges the monological and monolithic Islamic world view, but it does so *not* by simply presenting itself as the antithesis to the monologic discourse of God's law but as its uncanny double. Like Ruthven, Hennard Dutheil sees *The Satanic Verses* as "a kind of 'anti-Qur'an' which challenges the original by substituting for the latter's absolutist certainties a theology of doubt" (Ruthven in Hennard 121). At its heart, Rushdie's novel therefore contrasts two rival views of reading: one endows the Qur'an's classical Arabic with the capacity to convey God's message whole and pure, the other stresses the performative nature (and the transformative power) of all writing and reading, and thus guarantees the endless openness of *all* stories (including those that are sacred) to change, reinvention and reinterpretation.

In Beverly Maeder's essay on Stevens' "The Man With the Blue Guitar," the tension between the artist and the audience about the function and meaning of art/writing takes a different but no less constitutive form. Even in Stevens' secularized world, the artist is still expected to take a stance and act – if not as a prophet, then at least as a representative figure whose work reflects the central concerns of the time. In his famous poem, Stevens directly responds to this pressure by presenting the man with the blue guitar as the artist figure responding to the audience's simplistic demands. Exploring the distinction between "singing" and "playing," Beverly Maeder shows that Stevens' poem deals with this challenge on two levels simultaneously. On the level of the song, the singer/poet, responding to the audience's demands that he present "things as they are," deals with art's social, political and epistemological implications; as a player/artist on the other hand, the man uses his instrument for creating a work of art that takes us beyond any concrete message or meaning in the narrow sense, embodying in his text/score, in Maeder's phrase, the "temporal experience of ongoingness, an experience we usually associate with a performance of music or dance" (2).

Of the four essays by linguists, the one by Henry Widdowson attempts to transcend oppositions of a different kind, namely that between the disciplines of linguistics and literary criticism. Widdowson maintains that the traditional divide between them may to a good extent have been caused by the fact that formalist linguistics, which dominated the discipline for a long time, was exclusively engaged "with the analysis of language into abstract grammatical categories." Linguistics, in other words, was engaged with the description of *langue*, whereas literary criticism treated literature as a kind

of *parole*, or indeed, performance, dealing with individual literary works as "communicative acts, individual applications of the code" (Hough in Widdowson 145). Over recent years, however, linguistics has extended its scope beyond *langue* into *parole*, to investigate the way in which the formal properties of language have been "variously actualized in contexts of use for the expression of social identity and pragmatic meaning." Many linguists are now concerned with "language as performance, with discourse, spoken and written, and the interpretation of texts" (146). Widdowson deals with one of these approaches in particular, namely critical discourse analysis, to show that its approach is indeed closely related to some of the basic assumptions and procedures in literary criticism. Widdowson maintains that to bring out the points of comparison could lead not only to a better mutual understanding of the two disciplines but to help reveal the strengths and weaknesses of their respective procedures.

In the second linguistic paper, Didier Maillat also demonstrates that the divide between linguistics and literary criticism is not unbridgeable. He analyzes the language of newspaper ads with the help of Austin's speech act theory, which has been equally influential in the analysis of literature, Maillat studies in particular the use of such pervasive linguistic devices as indirectness and implicitness. He relates their frequency in advertising to "the extremely convoluted nature of this form of communication." Ads, he says, "play hide-and-seek with consumers, pretending not to be what they are, using complex linguistic devices to conceal plain facts" (162). Indirectness and implicitness often also function as protective devices, i.e. they reflect the advertiser's attempt to avoid the legal consequences of failing to live up to *explicit* promises. But even in the case of directives (illocutionary acts urging the reader/viewer to buy the advertised product) the directive force is almost always couched in a language of indirectness. Performance – to use the term for once as it has become popular in business – seems to be higher when the advertiser uses indirect, that is "nobler" or less obtrusive forms of persuasion. In any case, what seems to be essential is that *all* forms of directives are addressee-oriented speech acts, turning a passive reader of ads into an active addressee who is expected to make the world fit to the utterance – by buying the product.

The two other linguistic articles deal with the changing perspectives and the new research possibilities introduced by the computer. Ernst Rudin and Willy Elmer argue in their paper that in their field, dialectology, a branch of linguistics "thoroughly permeated by the notion of performance," the possibility of working with the computer may revolutionize the discipline. Tradi-

tionally, establishing and organizing the data, i.e. the dialect material, preoccupies the dialectologist to the point where "the description is the explanation" (171). What is even worse is that a comprehensive processing of the data collected in the past by manual methods has proved to be downright impossible. Rudin and Elmer therefore started in 1992 the Phonetic Database Project (PDP) with the aim of making the 12 volumes of the *Survey of English Dialects* accessible in digitalized form. In their article they delineate three basic aspects of their project, namely 1. scanning and encoding of phonetic script, 2. search procedures, and 3. map-making. The two linguists are convinced that once the data of the SED are available in computerized form, its hidden treasures can be unearthed much more easily: moreover, in the area of general phonetics and phonology one will be able for the first time to investigate an entire series of context-dependent processes, to name only one of a number of new possibilities.

Pius ten Hacken in turn shows how the development of computational linguistics leads to a reassessment of the competence-performance distinction familiar from linguistic theory. Computational Linguistics (CL) is the branch of linguistics concerned with performing certain tasks on a computer, such as dialogue systems and machine translation systems. Pius ten Hacken shows that in order to develop programs for these tasks one has to clarify the definition of the terms *competence* and *performance*, originally introduced by Chomsky in 1962 and since then often defined in ways that no longer have much to do with Chomsky's original usage. Moreover, a range of additional problems have to be dealt with, such as the relationship of these terms to text and speech. If linguistic theory, following Bloomfield and others, often still favours speech over writing, then CL tends to find it more useful to collapse the distinction. Another important task is to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the two basic approaches to CL, which have been labelled competence-based CL and performance-based CL. Proceeding along the lines of usefulness and applicability ten Hacken proposes to combine the two rather than to take a decision for one or the other, since each can do what the other cannot.

The final essay in this collection deals with the notion of performance in the history of science. Beat Affentranger shows that in the past scientists or philosophers of science in their attempts to define the nature of science frequently operated with metaphors and images derived from both theatre and theology. Thus Alfred N. Whitehead, for instance, perceived an "inevitableness of destiny" in science, comparing it to the "remorseless working of things" in Greek tragedy. Affentranger shows, however, that Whitehead's

view of science is not tragic because its deterministic bias is essentially derived from medieval theology with its insistence on an entirely rational and benevolent God. Affentranger convincingly argues that part of this theological foundation is the all-important notion of nature as "the book of God's work," the equivalent to the Bible as "the book of God's word." "In one way or another," Affentranger argues, "the idea of nature as a text with a coherent rationale inscribed into it is behind all claims about the unity of science, irrespective of the . . . kind of unity that is postulated: metaphysical, logical, methodological, etc." (206). The opposite view of science is one that acknowledges fragmentation and diversification, as well as – even worse – contingency. "The really knotty problems start," writes Affentranger, "when we give up the notion of nature as a given text altogether. For then we give up the assumption of the predetermined order of nature and with it the notion of a reality that is fixed" (209).

This takes us back to the basic tension underlying all modern discussions of performance, discussions that turn out to have much wider implications than are first apparent. The old order of things (in science, philosophy, art) is indeed one in which the "object" of performance (what we have) and performance itself (what we do with it) can be kept apart. At its centre there is the belief in "a reality that is fixed," be it outward or inward, and to which one can go back as the touchstone of truth when evaluating the performance – that is, the scientific experiment, the hermeneutic act, the artistic interpretation. It has become increasingly difficult not to question this clear-cut opposition. But the conflict between those who believe in a reality that is fixed and those who point out what one would call today the problems of reification is very old, going back at least to the time of the Presocratics. So, inevitably, human beings will continue by means of language to keep apart and give a separate identity to what is an intrinsic part of a multi-dimensional and multi-directional field of action. And so the old notion of performance, too, we may suspect, will stay around for a while – although for some of us with a difference.

Lausanne, August 1998 Peter Halter