

TOWARDS ANOTHER ONTOLOGY OF PERFORMANCE

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TOWARDS ANOTHER ONTOLOGY OF PERFORMANCE

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Thesis Abstract

Eylül Fidan Akıncı, “Towards Another Ontology of Performance”

This thesis focuses on the concept of performance, specifically in its artistic modality, as a reflexive event through which an ontological examination of being can be actualized. Starting from a critique of current positioning of contemporary performance theory against mimetic structures, the thesis tries to negotiate the event-being of performance with its foundation on repetition and representation. French philosopher Jacques Derrida’s critique of Western metaphysics on the basis of the philosophy’s attack on writing and literature deeply informs and structures the thesis’ critique of performance theory and its claims to presence, liveness and truth of the unmediated. In the final analysis, the thesis tries to read how performance is also co-opted by the media culture and art system it has initially criticized.

Tez Özeti

Eylül Fidan Akıncı, “Towards Another Ontology of Performance”

Bu tez performans kavramına, özellikle de sanat formu olarak performansa odaklanmakta, performansı varlığın ontolojik bir sorgusunun gerçekleştirilebileceği düşünömsel bir olay olarak ele almaktadır. Tezde çağdaş performans teorisinin kendini mimetik olanın karşısında konumlandırışının eleştirisi yapılmakta, performansın olay-oluşu ile tekrara ve temsile dayalı temelleri müzakere edilmektedir. Fransız filozof Jacques Derrida’nın, batıdaki metafizik düşöncenin felsefeyi yazı ve edebiyatla çatıştırması üzerine yaptığı eleştiriler, tezin performans teorisi ve bu teorinin mevcudiyet, canlılık, dolayımıız olanın hakikati gibi iddialarına yönelik eleştirilerine ciddi anlamda yön vermekte ve biçimlendirmektedir. Nihai analiz olarak, tezde performansın, kendini kurarken eleştirdiğı medya költürü ve sanat sistemi tarafından neden ve hangi yollarla kapsandığının örnekler üzerinden bir okuması yapılmıştır.

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PREFACE

The main motivation of this thesis was to read Martin Heidegger's seminal work *Being and Time* both on the basis of thinking performance anew, and as a performative text of thinking. Due to time and energy constraints this motivation could not be actualized. This idea, however, is still inherent in the composition of the current text. Therefore it is strongly advised to consider performance as a momentary opening for *Dasein* to alterity and understanding (*Verstadenis*), rather than as the field of emergence of presence or subjectivity.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to ground the theories about contemporary performance with the philosophical concerns regarding reality, presence and Being in view. Jacques Derrida's "deconstructive" thinking has revealed the paradoxes nested within the metaphysics of subjectivity and presence, along with the impossibility of thinking life by shunning one side of the paradox. The opening, the trace underneath this double structure has been partially suppressed by Western philosophy, and Derrida's rigorous reading of it perfectly lays bare this suppression for the name of truth and precision.

The theory of performance –as an art form- dates the emergence of performance (or at least draws its oldest examples) back to the beginning of the twentieth century. The avant-garde quests of the late modernist artists of literature, theatre and visual art run parallel with the new kind of thinking trying to dismantle the hegemony of rationality along with the capitalism it buttressed. The aftermath of colonialism and holocaust increased the sense of disintegration, at every level of life as much as in artistic circles, which called forth a new articulation beyond a modernist sensibility. Performance, as a complex form, has been a unique site hosting not only the disintegration of values, desires and anticipations, but also the subversion of mediums and materials of making art. The theories of and around performance have been much indebted to post-structuralism as well. While other art and thought forms were undergoing similar changes, performance has been a new hybridity of forms and a new experimental ground with a quite recent history.

Nevertheless in the theories of performance I detect a renewed metaphysical approach to liveness, reality, presence and subjectivity. Posited as a critique of

representation, mimesis, drama and authorship, these theories nevertheless employ their opposing terms rather in an unchallenged and unquestioned way. Although the avant-gardes that brought about and established performance as an art form were very much aware of their opposition to the Western philosophy's determinations over being and meaning, the theoretical energy of 1990s and 2000s somehow reproduced the metaphysical binaries by overtly refusing the former hierarchy and putting another one in its place. Today, performance is living its golden age in terms of its relationship with the prevalent art institution and cultural establishment. I relate this period to the critics' and theoreticians' unintentional alignment with the neo-liberal production modalities in their definitions of and demarcations around performance. Thus, I assert, they have provided a conceptual framework in which performance falls into its ideological contraries and loses its oppositional tenor.

I will first try to explain what I mean by performance and which forms I include under this banner, and present a very brief history of performance. Necessarily both steps involve comparisons with and parallel readings from theatre, dance and visual arts, an obligation which is inherently imposed by performance's own discourse regarding its contrariness against representation.

Second chapter will be a critique of several points in these accounts, those which I believe return them to a metaphysical binarism they supposedly overcome and challenge. I believe performance works indeed shake them from the core, but the theories that conceptualize them fall short of such vigor and foresight most of the time. I will bring together Derrida's texts from *Dissemination* in order to establish what performance theories oversee. I must repeat this critique is not directed towards the form itself, but rather the ways of conceptualizing it. In other words, what I will

do is to point to certain mistakes and lacks within a thinking system by getting help from a thinking that thinks the systemacity of thinking.

As a commentary I aim to pose a critique of performance's relationship with the current art system and global economy, which is an inescapable result of the caesuras within performance's self-conception (revealed throughout the second chapter). Nevertheless I am still very much impressed, excited and hopeful about the potentialities specific to performance. My overall contribution in this thesis to its theorization aims to provide a new energy in thinking and evaluating performance's promises in the post-industrial age.

CHAPTER II: AN ATTEMPT TO MAP OUT THE STAKES

The History of Performance

According to art historian Thomas McEvilley, performance emerges from three directions: from theatre, painting, and ritual. It was a counterpoint to the realist theatre, an opposition to object-based and atemporal visual arts, and an investigation of the body, energy and vitality inspired by oriental healing arts and spiritual practices. I will follow at least the first two paths here.

RoseLee Goldberg, in her seminal book *Performance Art from Futurism to Present*, presents the European Futurist manifestos of 1900s as the basis of performance art. Surrealism, Constructivism, Dadaism and Bauhaus movements to follow also have common significant aesthetic qualities, such as the organic idea of art forms integrated with each other to create a wider plane and scale of experience; the fascination with technology and machines; puppetry, variety and cabaret styles; the desire to challenge the bourgeois tastes and notions of art; the experimentations with formerly ignored objects and themes in hybrid forms; the sensitivity towards the revolutionary ideas and communication among people.

Then she directs our attention to post-WWII America. The influence of fleeing European artists met with the governmental tactics of supporting arts in a propagandist controversy to USSR. Bauhaus members continued their work in Black Mountain College in USA. From this assembly emerged influential artists such as John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Allan Kaprow. The former two introduced ideas of the Zen Buddhism and chance operations to the artistic method, and lifted

the emphasis on artist's power and deliberation in the creation. Allan Kaprow, on the other hand, strived for a "life-like art" as opposed to the prevalent "art-like art". To the happenings he designed, he privately invited his audience to be part of the proceedings of the night, by giving them certain objects and scores. Strictly formulated and rehearsed, the happenings nevertheless allowed for the emergence of a variety of works. For, the simultaneity of actions allowed as much as limited each spectator's own frame of observation. Furthermore, there was no all-encompassing meaning to which the parts could be related.

Cunningham and Cage continued their work in Judson Church Theatre with other joining dancers from California such as Yvonne Rainer, Simone Forti, and Steve Paxton. Yvonne Rainer, especially, researched the kinetic qualities of everyday movements, and constructed pieces based on the repetition of movements, which emphasized, manipulated, transformed, and migrated them to different spatial and temporal planes. Her *No Manifesto* (1965) is still an important statement of resistance to the conventions of dance as a spectacle, representation and virtuosity.

At the same time, the visual art scene of America and Europe witnessed a growing interest in art that overcomes the object. Seeing the live performance as a way to transcend the rules and burdens of object and material, visual artists joined the dancers and musicians in their experiments. Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni and Joseph Beuys are the precursors of later movements such as Fluxus and Situationism. Yves Klein's questions were more related to the form and color, and he used human body as a brush to paint the canvasses with his famous blue tint. He "directs the performers of his 'anthropometries' as art spectacles with music in front of an audience" (Lehmann 53). He insisted in the immateriality of art object, pushed

to the limits of burning the check he received for the transaction of his work *Immaterial Pictorial Sensitivity Zone 5* (1962), which consists of throwing 20 grams of gold leaf into the river Seine.

Manzoni's performance-like works were more of institutional critiques in action. He questioned the authority of the art object along with the value added to it by the artist's signature. In his performances he literally emphasized "the everyday reality of his own body" (147), as in his work *Artist's Shit* (1961), the packaged production of feces preserved and sold at the "current price of gold (149). According to Goldberg "[b]oth artists believed that it was essential to reveal the process of art, to demystify pictorial sensitivity, and to prevent their art from becoming relics in galleries of museums" (147). In a sense, the performance for them was as much work as it was an operation of struggle.

Joseph Beuys was also critical of the art institution, but his work did not employ the sarcasm Manzoni's famous for. Also a pedagogue, he was seeking ways to unleash the creative energy, of which he believes everyone possesses. He sees art as a "social sculpture", by which he means "art beyond specialist activity" (151). He designed mythic structure with certain objects and ritual-like performances as a model for the release of this collective creativity. *Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974) is very famous for the artist's self-imprisonment in a gallery with a living coyote for seven days. His signature material felt was also present in the performance as a layer dividing him from America, represented by the coyote. The self-restraint of the artist marked the later performance works as a site to test the limits of the body and endurance.

There was a strict opposition against the art institutions and museums, as they were representing the “highbrow art” that this generation of performance artists wanted to dismantle. In other words, artist’s initiative, position, artwork’s object being, materiality and rigidity; the passivity of the spectator, the lack of communication and interaction between the work and the spectator, they all interrogated by these performance works which try to open up the production as well as reception process of the art work to the effects of chance, time, space and individuals; to review the everyday objects and situations under a new light; to introduce new aesthetics by coming to terms with death, pain, desire, dreg and excess; to challenge the hierarchies around and within the art world by revealing the fragility of creation and creator.

Hans-Thies Lehmann, in his conceptualization of post-dramatic theatre, draws the trajectory of theatre that transformed into what I address in contemporary performance. He differentiates post-dramatic theatre on the basis of removing the textual domination of drama over the theatrical machine. He employs a general view of dramatic theatre throughout the book, which is more or less isomorphic to theatrical realism. In his designation of “old theatre”, he takes Aristotle’s *Poetics* as representative of these dramatic theatre practices. In this sense, what post-dramatic theatre accomplishes is the complete refusal of the unity of time, space and action; the disregard for the principle of surveyability, regarding the totality, consistency and closure of the drama; emphasis on *tableau vivant*, the visual presentation of states and moments, instead of *coup de théâtre*, a term used in mid eighteenth century for the representation of a sensational or dramatically sudden action or turn

of events (similar to Aristotle's *peripeteia*, that is, dramatic reversal), as the main locus of theatrical energy.

The tendencies Lehmann attributes to post-dramatic theatre had been present in the most realistic kind of theatre (presented in the ideas, for example, of Diderot), they have become the main effort within the theatre theory and practice since the beginning of the twentieth century (as Goldberg also marks). "Towards the end of the nineteenth century, dramatic theatre had reached the end of a long blooming as a fully perfected discursive formation. Shakespeare, Racine, Schiller, Lenz, Büchner, Hebbel, Ibsen and Strindberg could thus be experienced as variants of one and the same discursive form – despite all their differences" (Lehmann 48). The main characteristic that brings these names together was the "*self-reflection, decomposition and separation of the elements of dramatic theatre*" (48, italics original). The first object of this divisionary movement was the play text; these "[n]ew forms of texts develop that contain narration and references to reality only in distorted and rudimentary shape: Gertrude Stein's 'Landscape Play', Antonin Artaud's texts for his 'Theatre of Cruelty', Witkiewicz's theatre of 'pure form'. These 'deconstructed' kinds of *texts* anticipate literary elements of post-dramatic *theatre* aesthetics" (49, italics original). A striking feature of these texts was their resistance to the material conditions of their staging. Lehmann dubs this resistance as the crisis of drama, and relates this to "the autonomy of theatre as an independent artistic practice" (50), meaning the former categorization of theatre as a literary form:

This orientation had meant not just a certain limitation but at the same time a certain security for the criteria of theatre crafts, a logic and system of rules for the use of theatrical means that serve the drama. Hence, a loss occurred along with the newly acquired freedom, which, from a productive point of

view, has to be described as the *entry of theatre into the age of experimentation*. (50, italics original)

Lehmann points towards another dynamic in the emergence of “new theatre”, namely the change from valorization of theatre in the frame of entertainment into its establishment as an art form with “ambitious” (52) inquiries about the human nature, society and reality. He lists figures such as Chekhov, Stanislavsky, Claudel and Copeau on the side of the alignment. Theatre achieved the responsibility of social critique and a site of reflection for the freedom, thus it overtly attached with a political function, the exemplary of which is Brecht’s epic theatre. Its near contemporary Theatre of the Absurd, on the other hand “renounces the visible meaningfulness of the dramatic action but in the midst of the decomposition of sense sticks surprisingly strictly to the classical unities of drama” (53). Epic theatre, theatre of the absurd, or poetic theatre is still on the line of literary theatre, according to Lehmann, although they radically play with the frame of “dramatic and narrative logic” (55). The full emergence of post-dramatic theatre happens only by way of positing language on equal footing with other theatrical elements, which can be “systematically thinkable without [the text]” (55). This is accomplished by Heiner Müller, Jean Genet, Tadeusz Kantor, Jerzy Grotowski, Polish Laboratory Theatre, The Living Theatre, The Wooster Group, The Forced Entertainment, Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman to name but a few, through the retreat of synthesis between the concept and the form, by creating dream landscapes and images, by encouraging synaesthesia on the perceptual plane, by emphasizing the performance text –that is, the score of the work-, by underlining non-hierarchy between the elements employed, by employing simultaneity and non-linearity of action, by playing with the density of signs, by using plethora or scarcity of stimulus, musicalization,

choreography and physicality of acting, visual dramaturgy, conscious manipulation and reduction of affects, by the irruption of the real on stage, and by bringing the event quality of the performance to the theatre work.

What is Performance I: Ontological Endeavors

Artistic performance, in its most crude definition, uses the event and behavior as medium. Action is in its core, so the action painters such as Jackson Pollock are regarded as the predecessors of performance art. But it differentiates itself from another art form based on action, namely, theatre. The paradigm of differentiation is on the grounds that in performance the action does not serve within a fictive structure but rather shows itself as pure action. Performance removes the narrative from the classical definition of theatre as “narrating through people in action”. Moreover, the action of performance is not executed for an objective; it is itself the end of the work. In this way performance, as an art form, does not conform to the meaning “to accomplish”, or rather, it is the accomplishment and realization of itself. This is also how performance differentiates itself from visual arts or other object based arts, which presents the artwork in its “accomplished” form, rather than the duration of its coming into being.

So we can assume that the foundational gesture of performance art is an extraction from visual and theatrical arts. The histories of performance also confirm this approach. But it is also possible to read this as a blending of visual arts with theatre; taking the minimalist existence and solitude of the visual art work and leaving its material solidity, and taking the medium of bodily and behavioral expression of theatre and leaving its narrative fiction and textual composition.

Of course this approach seems quite reductionist, and throughout its history performance resisted the confinements of art institutions (museum, gallery, theatre alike) as well as representation of any kind. However, the recent trending of

performance in the gallery and museum context and the way works are presented and promoted raises suspect toward the premises on which performance conceptualizes itself. The experimental and interrogative nature of performance seems diminished and favoring repression of indecision. Even while the performance discourse aligns itself with ambiguity, it nevertheless fetishizes a latent certainty and directness.

It is this transformations in the performance field (both in works and in their criticism) which triggered me to read its theories more closely and ask whether they reproduce a kind of metaphysics in their foundation.

The performance works mostly operate on a set limit -be it on body, time, space, energy, identity, reality- and what is actually called the performance does not consist of the breaking of this limit, but rather of the process of testing and hopefully flexing it. Again, at the core is not accomplishment as the word suggests, but the possible failure. It is this possibility that originally makes performance liminal and transgressive.

Some performance makers and artists who worked between 1960 and 1990 complied with their artistic statement and respected the transience and temporality of their work, the opposition to produce objects, the survival of the work merely in memory. But some of them entered into the currency of contemporary art market, paradoxically still holding the same statements about the form, and they even “represent” the expansive performance field. These paradigmatic examples are telling in how performance discourse can turn into its other, or worse, create a relativism in which every principle and statement can pass. An episteme that excludes and negates the object and the fiction is at some point caught and presented within the most objectifying and fictive regulation.

Performance (and not action nor acting) insinuates a certain reality, playful but untouched by fiction and representation. But this understanding uses only one meaning of reality, one meaning of fiction and one meaning of representation, the ones that are decided on by Western metaphysics. The critique of this metaphysics, I think, should not be by claiming the terms hegemonic and creating a different layer without them. Rather, the critique comes from revealing the fact that this metaphysics, the terms that it employs, carry their others, contraries within them. Establishing their paradoxical nature frees them in new matrixes.

Performance theory is aware of its double structure, but it still makes a critique of representation and theatricality on surface layers. This devalues performance's claims and promises for a new understanding of truth and ontology. Again, the ontology of performance is first and foremost founded on presence and metaphysics of subjectivity. Even more so than any theatrical structure. For, as opposed to theatre's emphasis on "seeing", that is to say on the structure that allows a group of people see another group of people, performance emphasizes the showing doing, which is both done by the one and the same agent quite consciously. This is nothing other than defining a subject, mastering its own being and behavior, and powerfully exposing the other to this mastery, though it is aimed towards inviting the other to making and unmaking the mastered territory.

Let us return to the more modest and innocent statements of performance on its specificity. Performance has dispersed cognates and usages (performatives, performativity, rituals, everyday performances), even within the art context there are differentiating layers in relation to performance (performance art, performing arts, contemporary performance). The most meta-feature among them is the exposition or

showing off of a doing, duration, behavior, state, process. As the founding figure of performance studies Richard Schechner defines it, “ ‘showing doing’ is performing: pointing to, underlining, and displaying doing” (Schechner 2002: 28). This showing doing necessitates communication, however, therefore there must be an influence between the participants, interactivity and relation through the action. Therefore “performance isn’t ‘in’ anything, but ‘between’” (30).

Schechner’s definition of performance constitutes to the most general category of performance that includes sports, games, rituals, play, theatre in diverse variations of each, and it is also valid for the contemporary performance category I am investigating. I delimit this category, on the other hand, as an expanded field of including performance art (or live art, time art, body art), post-dramatic theatre (or more generally any theatre practice without drama and representation) and contemporary dance (or dance beyond movement, virtuosity and spectacle). The category indeed hosts diverse possibilities of forms and genres, but it has entered the currency of art system as a singular division and department. It is not an accident, for these differing practices have similar foundations in philosophy (although it seems inappropriate to divide performance –a post-modern invention- into practice and philosophy, there is still a binary of conceptualization and application at work. Most often than not, the work is the result of a philosophical and conceptual investigation, more so than it is the case other art disciplines).

The philosophical deliberations on performance frequently revisit the post-structural critiques regarding the arbitrariness signification structures, totalized meanings and suppression of becoming, and performance responds to these criticisms through its ideological and methodological opposition to theatre and

culture's prevalent logocentrism. This theoretical ground implies that the power of performance as performative action, that is to say action that makes things rather than causing them (if we take Austin's linguistic performatives as a model), is "a site for the emergence of novelty in representation" (Reinelt 205).

The idea that artistic forms and mediums transform the experience of an event into expression implies that in artwork "we do not experience the event itself but its representation" (Schechner 2002: 48). The performance artists try to overcome this by creating the events and situations for everyone attending. They carry out the actions, undergo them, and let everyone witness it. However, the consciousness of its demonstration, for the artist and spectator alike, nevertheless inserts a frame around the event as "event" (which is no different than a Facebook event now). Once framed, the event happens, but it happens *to* no one. It is expected and anticipated; the consciousness in the attention prepares the participants from before, hence it is already retrospective. Furthermore, doing something with its foreknowledge of being-seen turns the performer into spectator, for, reversing Merleau-Ponty's statement, the ontological condition of being-seen is to see. To see is to foresee and to comprehend. In order to see and at the same time be there, the performer needs to allow for the hetero-affection, which is no more authentic, true or immediate than the role the actor puts on. The performer is neither in full possession nor in full release of her self.

In order to oppose the logocentrism and hierarchies of culture and art, performance turns towards the hitherto "unmarked" (as Peggy Phelan uses the term) sites of life. The first gesture is to denounce the difference between life and art, and this is how the basic bit of human existence, behavior, constitutes the main

vocabulary of the form. While the anthropology of mid twentieth century came to see everyday life in a theatrical trope, art world tried to look at the everydayness through their respective mediums. Performance was seen as a site in which the medium and content comes quite close to blur the boundaries of perception differentiating the realms. This also contributed to the demystification of artwork, and joined the tradition of institution critique. Though not in the specific context of artistic performance, Schechner states that “something “is” a performance when historical and social context, convention, usage, and tradition say it is [...and t]here is nothing inherent in an action in itself that makes it a performance or disqualifies it from being one (38). He gives examples from Allan Kaprow’s idea of “lifelike art” and performances based on repetition or deceleration of everyday activities in order to portray performance’s capacity for “developing a Zen consciousness in relation to the daily, honoring the ordinary, noticing how ritual-like daily life is, and how much daily life consists of repetitions” (29).

Performance theorists, from anthropology and art theory alike, “argue that everyday life is performance” (40). Schechner asserts that every piece and bits of behavior is already repeated, twice-behaved, restored. This brings in a fabricated quality to everyday life. Not always we are conscious of this fabric we donate ourselves with, but we make use of it constantly in order to operate. Performance as an art form highlights this behavioral pattern, makes an issue of it, and allows a spacing for its contemplation. The process of highlighting can vary from exhausting repetition to shocking amplification, from year-long durational works to physical endurance tests. This is the closest any art can get at everyday being of humans; the artist uses what everyone as well as she uses, she announces something about what is

deemed mundane and therefore invisible. It makes use of the familiar in an emphasized and serious way. It looks at the ontical and asks questions about it by daring not to escape in another plane. But why is this obsession with presence and reality, when especially the question is to articulate the writtenness of the mutest part of our being? And more importantly, what about the aesthetization of everyday life? Does the first assertion (that everyday life is performance) bring along that performance (art) is everyday life? Though this question is beyond my scope, it is nevertheless plain that on the artist's part, "performance is a public way to show private stuff" and it has a therapeutic function (Schechner 2004: 265). An analogy with psychoanalysis can be found, as it heavily relies on the consultant's self-exposition.

The artists of 1970s (just like turn of the century avant-gardes) tried to remove this distinction; after all it was a modern and bourgeois hierarchy. It was the classic aesthetics based on the representation of experience and phenomena, lifted, sublimed, synthetized, "cooked", and therefore tamed. It is untrue to life and it lies in general: "Drama, as an exemplary form of discussion, stakes everything on tempo, dialectic, debate and solution (*dénouement*). But for a long time now drama has lied" (Lehmann 75). Two responses issue out of this critical position; one is total abstract expressionism and experimentation with form and materiality, the other is aesthetization of everyday life, or "lifelike art" (which were the same in the beginning, subject to change in the age of reality TV and then Facebook; one only need to think about the transformations pop art underwent). Lifelike art at first aimed at direct political action and psychotherapy as a reaction to post-WWII erosion of the

sense of community, rather than the ironic glorification of the banal. It had a deep critical engagement to valorize what had been formerly overseen or suppressed.

According to Schechner's approach the shared qualities of performance family are:

1) a special ordering of time; 2) a special value attached to objects; 3) non-productivity in terms of goods; 4) rules. Often special places – non-ordinary places – are set aside or constructed to perform these activities in. (Schechner 2004: 8)

What unifies the forms of performance, according to him, is their distinctive non-productivity, at least in the explicit understanding of work and material production.

Coupled with this, the free arrangement of time-space-activity creates a virtual field of play in which “the player is absorbed intensely and utterly” (Huizinga 1955: 13, quoting from Schechner 2004: 11). Schechner combines ritualized behavior with the condition of play to assert another definition of performance (99). If play is in opposition to “real”, ritualized behavior (which includes performances) is the test site of this opposition (105). The special arrangements of time and space demarcates the behavior from “real life”, though the ritual within this frame is part of what is deemed “real life” itself. It is this frame structure that allows the possibility for the self-reflexivity of performance, creating (or sometimes hiding) the consciousness of the performer and of the audience (302).

Herbert Blau also emphasizes that the sly difference between “just living” and performing is the deliberation and consciousness of the act, which is similar to “the economic motive, the yield of pleasure in the anxiety”. Differences between performances, on the other hand are “the inflections (or economic indices)” of consciousness to the degree to fully present the reflexive frame or to “seem to occur without it” (Blau 140). Blau, too, points towards the ambiguous attitude of the

current discourse on performance as to validating or invalidating the “ontological gap between the actuality of everyday life and the actuality of a performance”, and implies this obscurity to the acceptance or refusal of the dramatic time in relation to the expenditure of energy, an expenditure without any material gain or effect in view. This discourse goes hand in hand with performance practices that seriously scrutinize the activities of everyday life, but it is also cognizant of the artistic attempts to utterly remove the traces of daily and mundane. The first group of works can be understood as living theory, or philosophy in action, while the other group tries to transcend the banality of omnipresent “reality” by opening the ontological gap between life and art. These two contradictory motives somehow meet under this ambiguous discourse on performance, Blau states. But in any case what is universal is that performance is a conceptual bracket to think about the varying degrees of transformativity, immediacy, participatoriness, transcendence, and irreversibility within the framed of behaviors “where doings are ados”. In order to make use or get rid of the everyday processes, a deep understanding of them is necessary, and performance ventures to “decondition” or “denaturalize” the habits and body functions “down to the most rudimentary basis of our actual living” (141). In a sense, the fundamental ontology of performance, whether as “lifelike art” or strict ritual, is the process of comprehending the fundamental ontology of human beings.

Still, in spite of this assessment, performance seeks to overcome its framed nature, both in theory and practice. A weighty part of discourse asserts performance’s proximity or identity with unmediated experience, truth and authenticity. Yet as Blau states “there is nothing more illusory in performance than the illusion of the unmediated” (143) but only the varying degrees of the illusion’s

recognition and consciousness. By positioning the theatre as the site of strong illusions, performance is haunted by the assignment to get away from machinery of illusions and to claim its territory for the emergence of truth. However, it is possible to see, as Heidegger does in his *Origin of the Work of Art*, all forms of art as serving for this emergence by way of spacing, and as much as performance achieves it, so does dramatic, illusionary theatre.

Schechner proposes “actualization” as the site for the restoration of community’s truths and authenticity. Quite similar to how he defines performance (for he later claims that performance is actualization), it is the conscious manipulation of the frame drawn around the bits of behavior, and “it is the idea of art as an event, as opposed to imitating reality or expressing states of mind” (Schechner 2004: 28). It operates by “the making present of a past time or event” (37), and its aims are “wholeness, process and organic growth, concreteness and religious, transcendental experience”. Schechner claims that these are prevalent and fundamental to the rituals and traditions of “oral-based tribal cultures”. Actualizing is how they regulate the transformations within the social group, overcome crisis, contemplate and celebrate their varying states. But actualizing exists in avant-garde art and new theatre as well, according to him (32).

An actual has five basic qualities, and each is found both in our own actuals and those of tribal people: 1) *process*, something happens *here and now*; 2) *consequential, irremediable, and irrevocable* acts, exchanges, or situations; 3) *contest*, something is at stake for the performers and often for the spectators; 4) *initiation, a change in status* for participants; 5) space is used *concretely and organically*. (46, italics original)

I will investigate whether these basic qualities are indeed inherent in contemporary performance, as it is part of the larger system of performance. For now, I should point out that the demarcation of “oral-based tribal cultures” is too generalized and

not unproblematic, and Schechner is also aware of the anthropological romanticisms and esoterism in the art world. His aim is to show that on a higher level these patterns are shared and universal. At least, the experimental ways of reacting to the more fragmentary and alienating conditions of life are coming close to the tribal rituals of oral cultures, he says. The “effectiveness” of these actualizations in these tribal cultures aside, I wonder if being part of a similar experience in Western culture necessitates being part of an oral culture as well. And this wonder entails the question, what is an oral culture? Rousseau is still speaking. This is exactly what I problematize about the performance theory, the assumption that writing is a supplementary system which based on imitation and replacement, and that separates us from those tribal, oral cultures, whose experiences form a continuous and progressive whole, which is the authentic (and truly aesthetic) state of being. If actualizing is the core of performance at large, and if it finds its Western echoes in avant-garde artists’ quests in reaction to modern experience, then contemporary performance is also within the system of original and double, which is based on one interpretation of mimesis banished by Plato two thousand years ago.

On the surface level, describing performance as “making present of a past event” is not quite different from “restoration of behavior”, yet Schechner focuses on the unmediated here and now in the former description (as actualization), while he leaves this effort in the second description which emphasizes the doubling over, repetition and supplementation. The former definition leans on an “uninterrupted present” (Blau 143), yet the “restoration” of the past experience necessarily inserts what is the memorial and excessive about the experience. This change in the understanding of performance sounds pessimistic, but it is no less “therapeutic” or

cleansing. On the contrary, it is homeopathic; it recognizes the disseminative force and enlarges the freedom of play exponentially. It is already in “Plato’s pharmacy”.

In reaction to the technological reproduction offered by camera, Peggy Phelan states that documentation of performance betrays the performance, for the economy of representation inherent in the recording and repeating is totally contrary to performance’s ontology, which is disappearance:

For only rarely in this culture is the “now” to which performance addresses its deepest questions valued. (This is why the now is supplemented and buttressed by the documenting camera, the video archive.) Performance occurs over a time which will not be repeated. It can be performed again, but this repetition itself marks it as “different.” The document of a performance then is only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present. (Phelan 1996: 146)

Phelan’s assertions are more on the plane of criticizing the object-based art, which excludes disappearance and death. She attributes the quality of incident and uniqueness to each run of a performance work, and only the actual witnesses can be the partakers of its memory, and it is their memory only that the document encourages to be present. This implies that those who are not witnesses to the performance are seeing in the videos only the secondary, mediated, and infidel copies of the original performance. Whatever can be seen, therefore, it is not at all true. This is why “[p]erformance’s only life is in the present” (146). Performance has a primacy over representation, for performance

“[o]ffers a rediscovery of the now [...] rediscovery that all knowledge exists on the threshold of and in the interaction between subject and object; a rediscovery of ambiguity, of contradiction, of difference... (George 1996: 25)” (Kershaw 14).

What is Performance II: Against-Literature as the Utmost Ontology

‘To present a tragedy is nothing else than to prepare an evening, and the most accurate title ought to be the date of the performance’ (Vigny, *Oeuvres Completes*, 1914: 3:xii-xiii). [The work is] a unique combination of the dramatist’s goals, the actor’s interpretation, and the public’s response... (Carlson 208)

The nineteenth century playwright Alfred de Vigny announces the event quality of theatre work with these words, which is quite similar to Richard Schechner’s description of performance as the totality of events surrounding and including theatre, script and drama (Schechner 2004: 87). According to Schechner’s axis, drama is the most fixed element of performance as what the writer’s write; its textual nature is permeable but less welcome to total arbitrariness. Its dependence and belatedness to its writer (hence the precedence to the performer) is implied in Schechner’s definition (he actually gives an example from his own productions which resulted in the disapproval from the playwright upon the production’s interventions on the play text). Then comes the script, the “general map of production” (87), which is a dynamic score and more open to revision through repetitions. It is the system of “theatrical” elements the play text does not directly interfere with, such as mise-en-scène, scenography, light and costume design. Theatre, on the other hand, is “specific set of gestures performed by the performers in any given performance”. Performance is each specific repetition of the totality of these, defined by the actual time, space and auditing participants. In allusion to Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, the observation changes the observed; therefore the work performed by the production group as much as the meanings co-produced by the spectators are different each time a work is staged (Schechner 2002: 44). In

other words, the idea of performance as a unique action is nested within classical theatre (if we can unify it) as well.

Contemporary performance has many common features with theatre and ritual; Schechner's "taxonomy" uses the top category of performance as a general modality rather than a specific genus. In this matrix, post-dramatic theatre, contemporary dance and performance art are grouped under contemporary performance, which is under artistic performance, which in its turn is under performance as the category of twice-behaved or consciously framed behavior. Theatre at large is also amongst the artistic performance (and not literature, for text is only one component of theatre rather than its core, the absence of which only brings about a direct treatment of action). Schechner's approach does not conflate these categories, but he does compare them, as much as he compares artistic performances with social performances and rituals. Therefore he is always careful to present them within a spectrum, and advises against "searching vertically for unprovable origins" (Schechner 2004: 19). Yet still, the cultural obsession with live and real creates a discourse in which narrative is equated with unreal, hence it is the enemy of performance. Performance's dependence on action and behavior, on the other hand, and its proximity to everyday life gain it the claim to reality and actuality. Schechner's unifies the realm of performance including ritual, theater, dance, music, sports, play, social drama, and various popular entertainments; and points out that each individual performance and genre has a certain immediacy, ephemerality, peculiarity, and ever-changingness (296).

However, "performance art", which gives the word "performance" its currency in the scholarship, positions itself as the other of theatre and object-based

arts. The theatre within this comparison is boldly marked as the realm of fiction, representation, mimesis, and illusion; the experimental and avant-garde theatre is still theatre by virtue of their conditions of presentation and relationship with the spectators, according to the performance artists defending this opposition. Yet as we will see, theatre artists also differentiate themselves from “classical”, “dramatic”, “bourgeois” theatre, and most of the time for the same reasons and on the same premises. How does this come about?

The category has been a negative field from the beginning, though it has always been quite inclusive, welcoming experimentations that do not fit any former categorization. I think this is because “performance”, more than being a specific form or medium, is a technique and effect, applicable and transformable in different layers and materials. It is a parameter consolidating behavior, time, and consciousness. As a frame, it is liminal and works on/as the threshold. Yet this cutting-edge quality of performance art is impeded by its constant-contrariness against theatre, fiction, text, mimesis. In this opposition it necessarily takes side with the realm of everyday life, reality, immediacy, authenticity. Both sides of this binary are always already a trace, an effect. This obsession with presence leads to performance artists’ frequently banishment of art and artistry, just in order to return to it. I wonder whether this is a struggle for legitimacy on the face of the disintegration and violence the world undergoes.

Whether dramatic theatre can be included within the general category of performance (as Schechner does) or not is a question that centralizes the indecision about the value of writing. Rather than saving dramatic theatre as a performance genre, I would like to understand this indecision prevalent in the contemporary

performance world. Derrida shows the historical alignment of writing with copy, supplement, death, and relates this as a result of a certain way of thinking life, art, truth, idea and reality entrenched in the Western culture at large. I believe the determinations on writing and the desire to suppress its disseminative and delaying effect inform performance's anxiety against theatre.

However, there is indeed a change concerning theatre; this change is not a result of the banishment of signification structures and textuality, but rather the self-reflection of forms and mediums, a process that almost all forms of art underwent from the beginning of the twentieth century. The units, paradigms and principles that define any form of expression are dissociated and scrutinized discretely, to be assembled again in new approaches and blends:

[T]he individual elements, thus thrown back upon themselves, could gain acceleration and new forms could come about. From the *decomposition* of the whole of a genre into its individual elements develop new languages of form. Once the formerly 'glued together' aspects of language and body separate in theatre, character representation and audience address are each treated as autonomous realities; once the sound space separates from the playing space, new representational chances come about through the autonomization of the individual layers (Lehmann 51, italic original).

Not that formerly this kind of artistic self-reflexivity was nonexistent; however, the possibilities of technological reproduction and manipulation dismantled what Walter Benjamin calls the "auratic quality" of art. Theatre's self-reflexivity, for example, was a result of the advent of moving pictures and later of television. It was in an endeavor to assert the uniqueness of the form that theatre underwent critical decompositions, whose overall result was aversion from one kind of theatre, the one that is easily reproduced on screen with minimum loss. That is, the dramatic theatre.

The reflexivity has been used as a method of performance, on the other hand. The composition process of a work has come to be the issue of the work (Schechner 2004: 131); the performance is based on showing its seams and holes. “This self-referencing, reflexive mode of performing is an example of what Gregory Bateson called “metacommunication” – signals whose “subject of discourse is the relationship between the speakers” (Bateson 1972: 178)” (Schechner 2004: 131). In other words, the syntax of performance (for example, stage elements of theatre, or its operations of “putting on a character”) emerges out of its invisibility and announces itself as (sometimes the one and only) semantic quality. Theatre began to operate on this meta level, which is still prevalent in contemporary performance. It reaches to the point that the “delight of reading” is crossed out thoroughly where the artist aims to cancel any hermeneutic attempt by at once exposing the logic (or lack thereof) that brings the work into existence. I think it is still related to the aversion from textuality. The desire to show the arbitrary and manufactured nature of signs and meanings can find its breathing space in approaching the way they assemble “literally” and “concretely”.

Hans-Thies Lehmann examines the post-dramatic qualities in the new theatre, which, according to him, radically differs from old theatre based on Aristotelian unities. In order to make these distinctions, however, he carries on a totalizing approach towards “old theatre”, sometimes equating it with the bourgeois theatre of eighteenth and nineteenth century, sometimes with the whole theatre history between ancient Greeks and symbolists. But overall he attacks the Aristotelian theory of theatre, which I feel the necessity to underline again. For he is not criticizing the criticism of theatre; he is constantly comparing old way (the Aristotelian way) of

making theatre with the new one, as if Aristotle's *Poetics* had never been broached and breached. It is true that the treatise was the main criteria of criticism for centuries, but the critiques were always pointing out the transgressions of laws they found in the plays, and a good deal of plays were indeed not conforming to them. On the other hand, not only *Poetics* also harbors different understandings of mimesis, but also each critique and playwright had interpreted the unities differently.

But it is an obvious quality of new theatre to "take on a fragmentary and partial character". Unity and synthesis have ceased to be positive criteria, leaving their (assumed) supremacy to allow chance operations, non-linearity, and episodic dynamism. It is on the grounds of allowing impulses beyond drama that "[theatre] discovers a new continent of performance" (Lehmann 57). Moreover, the avant-garde intolerance towards any coherence of meaning or structure informs the post-dramatic tendencies in new theatre; "giving up theatre as a 'work' and meaningful concept in favor of an aggressive impulse, an event that implicated the audience in its actions, or sacrificed the narrative causal nexus in favor of other representational rhythms" (61) were the novel methodologies of Futurists, Surrealists and Dada, which are among contemporary performance's precursors.

Adrian Heathfield is more clear in stating the ambiguities that performance and live art play with. He locates the cultural valorization of "the immediate, the immersive and the interactive", and denotes this as "*a shift to the live*" (Heathfield 7a, emphasis original), just like Thies-Lehmann names it as "*shift from work to event*" in terms of theatre aesthetics (Lehmann 61, italics original). The overmediatized and digital society of spectacle, in a sense, now feeds an "obsession with liveness". This obsession, he concedes, is a reaction grown out of the individualistic

society of the West as much as it is a desire to master the temporal and spatial difference:

The drive to bring close all that is now distant to us can be an acknowledgement of our connectedness and interdependency, and a means to encounter new realities, but it can also be the manner through which the 'threat' of such realities may be held off, controlled and contained. Visual art's shift towards immediacy and interactivity offers a reflective space through which to interrogate these cultural dynamics, to stage an acute enquiry into what we think of as near, dear and happening now. (Heathfield, 7b)

This definition of live art and performance, as a site of questioning the mediation along with immediacy, pretense along with reality, detachment along with proximity pays due respect to the experimental spirit of the form and potentially liberates it from the above-mentioned obsession; an obsession, I would say, is not independent from centuries-long desire to defy gravity, death, noise, absence, delay, obsolescence and fatigue. As long as the possibility of failure (of the work and of the live) is put into the context of these interrogations about near-dear-now, performance can operate along the edges of culture and of theatre and visual arts (as past and current discourses of performance always underline this radical and oppositional quality of performance as its foundational gesture).

But I rarely come across this "unfortunate" possibility in the writings on performance. The reflective space of performance and live art is most of the time employed as a mirror for the cultural longings, rather than a playground for distorting the unquestioned desires of authenticity and uniqueness. If this mirroring effect were not shunned by the performance theory, I would not problematize this passing over of indecision. Heathfield presents performance as a site of uncertainties and doubt about our common drives and tendencies, yet the rest of his discourse on performance is still based on the appropriated of "another kind" of experience of

live, which I argue that it is a symptom of many performance scholars, which show their uncritical alignment with metaphysical understanding of live, reality and presence.

CHAPTER III: CRITIQUE OF PERFORMANCE'S ONTOLOGICAL CLAIMS

Let us summarize. According to the contemporary performance discourse, dramatic theatre asserts a single and surveyable meaning to the work, and its enaction is bound by the play text's solitary signification. It dominates the rest of the elements in the work. It is a pretense, a false representation, and still based on the narrative system. It imposes the domination of the author on the overall theatre work. It is not living, but just a dead copy of a dead text. It uses stock images, gestures and emotions; it approves the prevailing ideologies and re-enact them on stage. It does not interfere with the authority, or at best rids the audience of its anger and energy against power. It suspends the rational thinking just as it deadens the vital energies of the spectator. For, it necessitates artificial environments for performance, one that separates one group of people from another. The audience is locked up immobile in a house, darkened, watching appearances of reality. It tries to seem real and make the audience forget its unreality. The performance has no actual connection with the audience. The players have no actual communication with each other. They memorize their lines and more or less stick to it in a similar fashion each night. The first partaker of the creation is audience, then maybe the director. It is based on their vision and nothing else. The impulses, creative energies of the actors are dulled for the sake of performance's predictability and repeatability. It does not answer to the differences. Nothing happens for the first time or for real. The entrance of the real is always an accident. The procession of the work is stabilized; improvisation is still bound to the text. Nothing left to the authentic moment or chance. As such, the

dramatic theatre is dead, fixed, unitary, dull, shallow, deceptive, and something of past.

That is why performance tries to bring the action to the now, susceptible to change and chance, open to accident and the spectator's contribution. It removes the wall separating the performer from the spectator; it invites the audience to make and unmake its own significations, or sometimes asks them to relieve any initiative to seek for meaning. It emphasizes the active and scenic qualities of theatre; the progress of narration leaves its supremacy to the tableaux and states. The form-content relationship is shunned altogether; the content of the performance is itself, and also the totality of life. Nothing is faked; everything done in front of the audience is for real; the performer actually undergoes and endures physical situations and transformations. The time and space is used concretely. No thematization or metaphoricity is allowed; the performance represents nothing outside itself. The performers communicate with each other, sustain the awareness of the moment, and receive and explicitly confirm the effects of audience's co-existence with them. They do not look beyond the seats, they have eye contact with the audience; even more than that, they allow the physical proximity. The performance cannot be repeated, recorded. It lives in the present, and later in the memories of its witnesses. It is an event. If ever, each run of the performance is different from before; it answers to the actual conditions and situations. Therefore the performers are equally creators, and they control the work. If there is text, it is nothing more than poetry within the scene, on equal footing with the light, music, and objects. The performance does not tell stories, neither it creates them. It rather deals with human condition, experiments with each particle of existence and life. It is in reifying ethics rather than rectifying

it; what it reifies is the challenges and subversions of common perceptions and values. It hides nothing, shows everything that can be shown.

With all these in mind, I would like to read Derrida.

On How Performance Reads Texts

Throughout *Dissemination*, from its “preface” to its end, Derrida writes. It is hard to say that he writes “about”, nevertheless for the convenience now I will say he writes about the insurmountable difference of the intention-to-say from the text, the rift between the syntax and semantics, and “the impossibility of reducing a text [...] to its effects of meaning, content, thesis, or theme” (Derrida 7). Here I will try to read what he has to say about writing in the frame of dramatic text. The situation of writing, of the preface, of the dangerous supplement, I think, is the feedback loop behind performance’s criticism against theatre.

“[O]nce having read [the preface], you will already have anticipated everything that follows and thus you might just as well dispense with reading the rest” (7). At least this is the prevalent logic of understanding the anterior writing, which assumes it to consolidate the main points, explain the structure of the rest, give out the interior map; hence extraneous and unnecessary. The production and presentation of the content should be at the one and the same moment:

‘Logic, on the contrary, cannot presuppose any of these forms of reflection and laws of thinking, for these constitute part of its Own content and have first to be established within the science. But not only the account of scientific method, but even the concept itself of the science as such belongs to its content, and in fact constitutes its final result’. (Hegel, cited in Derrida 18)

The writing should be standing on its own and in this standing provide its logic and meaning simultaneously, affected by nothing else. Derrida states that this is never the case, that there is always a textual displacement at work in writing, brought by the occasion of writing and also reading. “The question of the here and now is explicitly enacted in dissemination” (7). So far it is quite an appropriate sentence for describing performance. Nevertheless what I grasp from Derrida’s words is that writing, as much as dead and static it is seen, nests the movement of dissemination by the virtue of its being written, being a signification of signs, representation of representation, caught in a chain of technical supplement. As such, it is the condition of dissemination.

“The liminal space is thus opened up by an inadequation between the form and the content of discourse or by an incommensurability between the signifier and signified” (18). Performance’s main critique of theatre is nothing less than this inadequation. The dramatic theatre has been accused of being totally bound to the text, but what is constantly implied is the inadequation of the character to the actor, of the stage to the real life, of the representing world to the represented one. On the one hand this critique conceives the writing the way Hegel prescribes it to be, as a closed totality thinking and knowing itself, as a “meaning *teleologically* equated with its *conceptual tenor*” (20, italics original), imposing its vision on the physical enactment of the play. On the other hand it criticizes the dramatic theatre as a breach of signifier/signified in two ways; in terms of its desire to erase its difference from reality, or in terms of its machinery of representation referring to an exteriority in low fidelity. Equating the act of expression with the expressed erases the “absolute dehiscence between writing and wanting-to-say [*vouloir-dire*]” (20, brackets and

italics original). This is how performance passes over this dehiscence; by taking the admitted illusion of reality, the interiority of drama seriously, and by deeming the enaction on stage unnecessary, without any “haphazard productivity” (48) (the idea of which was a trope for artistic competence of the text, of its liveliness and enactability)¹. Had such idealism be the sole understanding and practice of theatre, it would have economically closed on itself. But this is not the case.

Performance’s rejection of form/content distinction is fruitful, for it starts by investigating the possibilities of form and making them the issue of the work, that is to say the doubling of form and content is allegedly cancelled out. The form is no longer considered as the empty cluster of the work, nor the meaning is what is inside or carried out. The fragmenting movement is accepted, just in order to return to the idea of an organic and living work, the non-separation of the performer from the performed, of form to the theme; they are one and the same. However, the break between form and content cannot be mastered (but at best be played with), for “dissemination [which is potentially within every form of inscription, or rather *the* potentiality of inscription] interrupts the circulation that transforms into an origin what is actually an after-effect of meaning” (21, brackets and italic mine).

Although performance assumes and appropriates the disintegration of meaning or structures of representation, “[no] *form of presence* can pin/pen down the trace” (26, italics original). The performance’s temporality in the present tense is only a desire to capture this fragmentation, the tense play between the meaning and the intention-to-say. As such, it wants to become the trace itself. Yet trace does not

¹ The nineteenth century critic George Henry Lewes, for example, contends that stage production could create “an infinitely grander effect than could have been reached by any closet reading” (Lewes, “Shakespeare’s Critics: English and Foreign”, *Edinburgh Review*, 90, 1849: 68; Quoting from Carlson 231).

have the quality of being or being had. Performance is a conscious strife for having the virtuosity of the movement of trace. Its discourse states that theatre ties down its play, does not allow any digress from the plot and its meaning, dominates the perfect illusion of a semantic totality, “thus producing (a) history” (26). It is interesting to remember that throughout its “history”, theatre had to defend it against philosophy by the only solace that it is superior to history as it reflect things as they “should be and not the way they are”. As Marvin Carlson relates, the sixteenth century playwright Sir Philip Sidney follows Aristotle in his understanding of theatrical imitation beyond the replication of natural phenomena and stresses that the “virtuous action is the end of all earthly learning, and poetry –more specific, more focused, more moving than its closest rivals philosophy and history- is best suited to this” (Carlson 82).

Theatre’s claim to reality is almost always a stylistic one; it is on the level of the audience’s onsite credit, and a question of whether it can more or less conform to what the mind perceives as reality (rather than to what exactly happens out of the stage). It has been debated in the entirety of theatre criticism and never defined the form totally. The ethical duties attributed to theatre invite a metaphorical, reference relationship with everyday life, but the latter is not re-fabricated on stage for the sake of documenting. Then, reality for theatre is operative on different layers, say, the reality of the feelings the actor arouse for herself for better acting. Even that was a debate during the eighteenth century, that whether the immersion of the actor in actual feelings creates better performance or not. Diderot’s famous paradox is a playful discussion of this question, which does not arrive at a certain answer, nor specifies what it means by reality (or more correctly, “naturalness”). From the very

beginning of the discussion, written as a dialogue between two anonymous persons, it is stated that “nature bestows the actor with the gifts of appearance, voice, judgment and tact” and “it is the study of the great models, the knowledge of the human heart, the habit of society, earnest work, experience, close acquaintance with the boards, which perfects Nature’s gifts” (Diderot 4). In other words, actor’s art lies in his molding of this given; this base can be seen as a separate object on which the artist works. Within a short paragraph he immediately determines the dramatic work’s difference from everyday life, the difference between the actors, and the difference of the act from the lines assigned to the actor.

Performance makes a *literal* claim reality. It wants to get rid of any fictive and illusionary element, or it allows that on the sole condition of explicit parody of fiction. The production of the work is the performance, the exposition; performance is the presentation of itself. It does not re-present anything prior to it. It speaks in its own voice, its own logos, rather than the words of an absent author:

The end of the preface, if such an end is possible, is the moment at which the order of exposition (*Darstellung*) and the sequential unfolding of the concept, in its self-movement, begin to overlap according to a sort of a priori synthesis: there would then be no more discrepancy between production and exposition, only a *presentation* of the concept by itself, in its own words, in its own voice, in its logos. (Derrida 30-1, italics original)

How performance conceives of itself is terrifyingly similar to how Hegel conceives logic. Performance is the end of the preface, of the pretense that is theatre (“the preface is a fiction” 36), the sole moment in which it can start to speak for its own. And Derrida says, this is “the point where the relation between the ‘text’ –in the narrow, classical sense of the term- and the ‘real’ is being played out” 32-3). I think the performance’s criticism of theatre is based on the historical criticism of text, art, representation. Performance follows the paths that distinguish the real from the

fictional in order to ground its legitimacy against its older rival. Although performance theory is sufficiently cognizant of post-structuralist theory, it falls into a relativist misunderstanding of the critique of signification structure, which understands that “there is nothing outside the text” (35-6), but omits the possibility “that the text is no longer the snug airtight inside of an interiority or an identity-to-itself” (36). What I understand from Derrida is that this is the condition of any text, indeed the condition of their very composition, and not just those written under the concrete consciousness of that. Not only that, but also he shows that any reading, any interpretation of the text trespasses the assumed interiority of it. In other words, there is another way to conceive the text, or the possibility that underlies any text, as the play of between, between inside and outside, between “dramatically textual” and “really real”, which are the very effects of text’s inscription. This between, I would say, is nothing other than the stage.

There is more than one interpretation of fiction, the multiplicity of which is frequently used but not explicitly addressed by critics of fiction. There is one fiction that is loyal to what it presents, submits to the original meaning and employs itself for its delivery by effacing itself. The affirmation and assertion of fiction as simulacrum, on the other hand, “disorganizes all the oppositions to which the teleology of the book ought violently to have subordinated it” (36). At the first sight, it is hard for us to discern to which theatre belongs. Theatre is criticized sometimes by being totally subservient to the meaning of the text and not at all theatrical (which means without any formal specificity), and sometimes by creating a pure illusion by replicating the impression of reality and therefore deceiving the spectator. Which form of fiction is intrinsic to the mechanism of theatre, then? What defines the

overall decision about the mimetic in theatre, the execution of the play (Schechner's theatre) or the anterior existence of the drama (as "what the writer writes")? If the text is "beyond of the whole" (57) ("whole" is either theatre or real life according to each interpretation), if "it resists all ontology (in whatever manner the latter might determine that which is [*l'étant*] in its being [*être*] and presence)" (57, brackets and italics original), how to state and get rid of the mimesis?

Dramatic Theatre as Speech-Writing

Derrida follows the Socratic dialogue *Phaedrus* in order to reveal the ambiguity surrounding the decision on writing and memory. On his way to read more closely, we come across with theatre in its most generalized and averred form. The writing discussed in the dialogue is writing *for* speech, written by a ghostwriter for respectable citizens. “In writing what he does not speak, what he would never say and, in truth, would probably never even think, the author of the written speech is already [...] the man of non-presence and of non-truth. Writing is thus already on the scene” (68). Let me paraphrase: in writing what he does not perform, would never utter, would probably never even think of doing on his own, the playwright composes plays “which he does not attend [...] in person, and which produce their effects in his absence” (68). Such is the playwright’s relation to the play. At the outset and in its crudest designation, the writing is indeed on the scene in the absence of its writer.

Socrates’ discussion of the problem of writing first turns around memorizing. Lysias’ speechwriting is an aid for memorizing words, but it does not help the active memory of logos. It is “external to memory, productive not of science but of belief, not of truth but of appearances” (103). It is only good for “repeating without knowing” (74), only good for telling myths, which is always a trope for telling lies. “The *pharmakon* [that is the text] produces a play of appearances which enable it to pass for truth” (103, bracket mine, italic original). Theatre is understood on the basis of this, “a play of appearances which pass for truth”; the equation of the text with the theatre is deeply historical.

The reasoning, the *dianoia* (read *diegesis*: narrative) of the text, on the other hand, is not equal to text, “the actual discourse” (Plato 228d; quoting from Derrida 72) either. If there is a text in question, it can truly be recountable only by the complete repetition. Memorizing and not owning, repeating and not reconstituting, the actor is the mouthpiece of the text; his breath is stolen. Writing, which Socrates defines as *pharmakon*, poisons the presence of the actor and deprives him of his *logos*.

As Derrida also says, the question of writing shows itself as a question of morality (74). The ethical value of the assertion aside, according to Socrates, having the property of one’s words is having the propriety of them. *Logos*, living memory, belongs to the speaking subject, “the *father* of his speech” (77, italic original). Without the present attendance of the owner of speech, the speech is vulnerable and not answerable for itself, “nothing but, in fact, writing” (77). The moment the speech breaks its organic (read: live) bonds with its owner, it becomes writing and turns into an orphan. And the actor, in repeating somebody else’s speech from its trace, that is writing, fathers somebody else’s orphan, and creates absolute travesty in the lineage. Because in writing the *logos* no longer recognizes its origins, but the actor takes it up and let it be re-present “under the false appearance of presence”, having lost its conformity with “the necessities of the situation at hand, to the expectations and demands of the interlocutors present”, in other words, having lost its “persuasiveness and control” (79).

Graphics of Supplement

At this moment I find it useful to remember what André Lepecki has to say about the notation of dance. By taking into account the Renaissance dance manuals, Lepecki asserts that neither presence nor body is central to Western dance, for the dance – which is isomorphic to movement- has always been notated and graphed by a male figure in recluse, in order for other reclusive figures to repeat and learn later. The notation necessitates an economical explanation of the kinetic process in order to suit every kind of bodily and spatial situation. Graphed to supplement the absence of the instructor, choreography is a relic of movements representing only the visual plane of dance, a representation of it rather than an invocation of its presence. It is this idea of explicitly visual movement, absence of the body and representation of the choreographer's vision –always anterior and extraneous to dance- on to the stage that the contemporary dance protests and tries to dismantle. The choreography preserves the dance in its notation, the play text lock the theatre inside of itself. Contemporary performance proposes that the inscription, if any, is within the body of the performer and the memory of the co-present audience, alive and susceptible to change. The performer “cannot rely on the writing at his disposal and forget all about it” (104). Conversely, the absence of the performer and the audience is the absence of the performance; at least this is what performance aims for. “The *pharmakon* and writing are thus always involved in questions of life and death” (105, italic original), and performance strives for life by excluding death in every possible way. Extracting the knowledge from the living memory, writing hypnotizes it, “fascinating it, taking it out of itself by putting it to sleep in a monument” (105) or mausoleum, museum,

theatre. The solidification of living idea in the material, the translation of speech into writing: one signifies the general understanding of plastic arts whereas the other, theatre. Performance desires to surmount both in its immanent relation with live and living memory, “of memory as psychic life in its self-presentation to itself” (105). Therefore it apparently² runs the risk of being forgotten, indeed cherishes it, in its refusal to turn into signs distinguished from its truth. But Derrida states that the memory is again divided in itself; “[a] limitless memory would in any event be not memory but infinite self-presence. Memory always therefore already needs signs in order to call the nonpresent, with which it is necessarily in relation” (109). What performance performs in the “now” always already calls forth the non-present memory both of the audience and the performer. It is the condition of simple perception, to which unreadability is also included. The choices and consciousness dividing the performer from the witness eludes the claim to the infinite self-presence of all (which Rousseau insists is a quality of festival, and which, performance tries to achieve by apparently removing the division).

A Matter of Life and Death

As the art of “live”, performance shuns the non-being of sign; it protests its artificial existence. The supplementary nature is dangerous exactly for the fact that its value cannot be determined; it slides “out of the simple alternative presence/absence”

² I underline, apparently, for the marriage of the performance with the institution implies the contrary. Yet performance enters into institution by virtue of its claim to “here-now-live”.

(109). Performance's the attempt is to create a communication without signs but affects; an energy field sterilized of its delays and surrogates that is language. This is what Rousseau dreamt of as the natural state of human kind. Even when language is used, it is not a substitute but a subservient accessory, a hieroglyph not for the ration but for sensual perception. The discourse and history of performance always point towards Artaud, whose theatre is a theatre of hieroglyphs exactly for these reasons. Yet performance, just like theatre, is a play within this indeterminacy of absence/presence dyad. The problematics of mimesis is no different than this indeterminacy; if there is perfect resemblance, if there is perfect repetition, that is imitation, the mimesis can replace the original therefore it *is no longer* mimesis; therefore mimesis becomes practically and apparently absent. If there is not perfect resemblance and repetition, the smallest difference would turn the imitator into another being no longer referring to the imitated. The *bad* imitation is unsuccessful in imitating and therefore rudimentary; it is practically present yet its presence is not of being but of non-being:

[B]etween *mneme* and *hypomnesis*, between memory and its supplement, the line is more than subtle; it is hardly perceptible. On both sides of that line, it is a question of repetition. Live memory repeats the presence of the *eidōs*, and truth is also the possibility of repetition through recall. Truth unveils the *eidōs* or the *ontos on*, in other words, that which can be imitated, reproduced, repeated in its identity. But in the anamnestic movement of truth, what is repeated must present itself as such, as what it is, in repetition. The true is repeated; it is what is repeated in the repetition, what is represented and present in the representation. It is not the repeater in the repetition, nor the signifier in the signification. The true is the presence of the *eidōs* signified. (111, italics original)

The demarcations blur once again when the mimesis is carried out by performer, whose identity-to-itself is also implied throughout the performance. The performance is the play of this identity, the sense of realism by virtue of the identity

of the performer. As Gómez-Peña himself states, the performer performs his self along with his other selves (Gómez-Peña 78-9). It is still a theatre but with assumedly more rightful claims to reality.

In Platonic thought, the speech is also a substitution. It is the substitution of the self-contained and auto-affected logos, which in turn is a substitution of eidos. The chain is inescapable and reproducing itself ad nauseam. The metaphor of this substitution of logos and of speech is always based on the metaphor of writing. As such, writing opens up the metaphoricity of metaphor. The hierarchy between substitutions is already determined by a detour through writing. In its relationship with reality, performance does not have a superior position than theatre. It is the other way around; the reality effect of performance is by virtue of theatre's foundational spacing that enables one to "obviously" separate the mimicry from genuine:

What is repeated is the repeater, the imitator, the signifier, the representative, in the absence, as it happens, of *the thing itself*, which these appear to reedit, and without psychic or mnesic animation, without the living tension of dialectics. Writing would indeed be the signifier's capacity to repeat itself by itself, mechanically, without a living soul to sustain or attend it in its repetition, that is to say, without truth's *presenting itself* anywhere. (Derrida 111, italics original)

The question is, therefore, the subjectivity and identity of the performer to himself, the extension by which he releases the desire to be and surrender to the control of the role by which he is ready ["the Mime does not read his role; he is also ready *by* it". (224, italic original)]. The actor speaks "without knowing, recites without judgment, without regard for truth", without regard for his identity-to-himself, without being present on stage as himself, "in order to give signs" (112). Performance promises a stage for the actor to know himself, transform himself, assert himself, give some

piece of himself, be himself in the testimony of others, and “is better able to conduct his signs”:

he is there to accentuate them, inflect them, retain them, or set them loose according to the demands of the moment, the nature of the desired effect, the hold he has on the listener. In attending his signs in their operation, he who acts by vocal means penetrates more easily into the soul of his disciple, producing effects that are always unique, leading the disciple, as though lodged within him, to the intended goal. (114-5)

The goal of performance is to achieve a shared time with its audience. The whole problematic of theatre is its distance to its “outside” by strictly demarcating the seating place from the stage. This physical distance hinders the truly gathering; what reaches to the spectator from the stage is only a visual story, and its effects are limited to the efficiency of the story the play text encompasses, of the mores and emotions communicated within it. The play text, therefore, is only seemingly different from diegesis. What performance wants to achieve is to create and release energies and comprehensions far beyond the limits of represented narrative.

Performance artists try to expose their transformation and create a “gut feeling” in the spectator, not through by identification with the characters, but by directing the audience into an awareness of time and space. I think another kind of katharsis underlines the performance; the performer wants the audience to ask the questions the performer asks, and to challenge their common sense (and sensibility). Still a pedagogical relationship is intact with the audience even though the distance between the stage and the seats are diminished. The performance is always a performance in the face of the audience, and preferably in spite of them. The main principle behind the controversial and daring use of physical strains, the “real” enaction of violence on the body is this desire to impress and penetrate into the audience’s way of thinking and feeling. Again, it is another sort of persuasion, a non-

linear, non-rhetorical, non-dialogic one. Aristotle uses the word *katharsis* in order to defend the efficiency of theatre, but he might as well have said *pharmakon*, which means remedy at once it stands for the poison.

The nakedness of the *pharmakon*, the blunt bare voice (*psilos logos*), carries with it a certain mastery in the dialogue, on the condition that Socrates overtly renounce its benefits: knowledge as power, passion, pleasure. On the condition, in a word, that he consent to die. The death of the body, at least: that is the price that must be paid for *aletheia* and the episteme, which are also powers. The fear of death is what gives all witchcraft, all occult medicine, a hold. The *pharmakeus* is banking on that fear. Hence the Socratic pharmacy, in working to free us from it, corresponds to an operation of *exorcism*, in a form that could be envisaged and conducted from the side and viewpoint of God. (120, italics original)

Performance's obsession with the body and its limits is an unsettling relationship with death. Whatever the performer does in the sight of the audience, even the most mortal act no longer brings the dread of death. Death performed, death presented is no longer dreadful; each performance is a rehearsal of death in order for performer to defy his mortality, therefore it is also a rehearsal of life. "Live art" is the stage in which death is played with, and the fear of death is tamed. Theatre, on the other hand, is the plane of ghosts, appearances without bodies, risks that are only acts, invisible strings, fake blood. Performance tries to be bold and gallant in being live as much as in being dead. It is only this way it achieves its autonomous position within other art forms that also uses body, also uses time, also uses space, also communicates (is there any art from which do not communicate?). The truth it puts its claim on is only on "the condition that the performer consents to die". The consent to die is at the same time the utmost control over the mortality, and it cannot be possible without "self-knowledge and self-mastery" (122). This is why Chris Burden's piece *Shoot* (1971) (in which the artist asks a friend to shoot him in the arm) or Marina Abramović's *Rhythm 0* (1974) (in which the artists asks the audience

to do anything with her with a set of 72 objects) is epitomes of performance. The artist surrenders its mortal body to the audience, apparently victimizes himself. But the legitimacy, the copyright of the work is this death that is always the performer's potential death and not others' (namely, the author's). It is by this surrender the artist achieves the truth of his work, which brings to mind the poison hemlock, the staged execution of Socrates, and its re-execution in the text that is *Socrates' Apology*:

[P]harmakon is presented to Socrates as a poison; yet it is transformed, through the effects of the Socratic *logos* and of the philosophical demonstration in the *Phaedo*, into a means of deliverance, a way toward salvation, a cathartic power. The hemlock has an *ontological* effect: it initiates one into the contemplation of the *eidos* and the immortality of the soul. *That is how Socrates takes it.* (126-7, italics original)

The make-up, costumes, prescribed gestures and stolen breath of the actor do not allow him to be-as-himself, to live on the stage. "The magic of writing and painting is like a cosmetic concealing the dead under the appearance of the living" (142). Life is outside of the stage, whereas "[d]eath, masks, makeup, all are part of the festival that subverts the order of the city" (142). Yet the actor is not dead either, there in repetition he is animate, re-presenting something that *is not* present. The ambivalence of life opens the stage as the locus of play; eluding the assignment of a place in the oppositions; it is the very site of difference that determines the differences between alive/dead, "inside/outside, memory/forgetfulness, speech/writing" (127). Theatre is neither speech nor writing, not inside the reality yet not outside it, it is not memory of something but works on the layer of remembrance. Performance, on the other hand, takes sides in these oppositions (alive, here, present); yet in its challenge to art-life distinction, it perplexes the outsideness of the outside, it brings the outside inside and vice versa. It plays with "me/not me" (Schechner 2002: 29). Performance and theatre works on the same line of difference

and not in opposition. Yet the literal approach of performance insistent in seeing theatre as strictly outside, and it “keeps the outside out” (Derrida 128) in order for its therapeutic be effective on the audience. It apparently does not allow any kind of make-believe, any accessory technic, but only performs and establishes itself in its self-identity. It wants to cure the illusions that theatre has been spreading for centuries, and therefore “the pharmaceutical operation must therefore *exclude itself from itself*” (128, italics original).

It is no accident that performance theory focuses on the communal ritual as its model. It aims for the transformation of the community through the self-transformation of the artist, who is also a shaman, who knowingly becomes the scapegoat, the *pharmakos*. Performance is the katharsis of the social body through the expelling of pharmakos, yet the expelling is a voluntary. It does not even ask for the consent of the community. It rather asserts itself in the artist’s will. As such, it is a solitary action as much as it aims for a communal gathering.

André Lepecki calls the act of choreography an idiocy, in the sense that the idiot does not have any connection or responsibility with the society, solitary and self-contained. As long as the dance is a spectacle, that is a representation by the vocabulary of movements, its “choreography [is] a peculiar invention of early modernity, as a technology that creates a body disciplined to move according to the commands of writing” (Lepecki 6), “a solipsistic technology for socializing with the spectral” (27). It is on the basis of this Lepecki claims the choreography of representational, movement-based dance idiotic: allowing one to practice it in the absence of the (choreo)grapher, isolated from its origin, repeating the movements without transforming them into the uniqueness of the body, without creating the

movement from out of a living memory. Choreography is “a repetition of death and oblivion (*lethe*) which veils and skews because it does not present the [body] but re-presents a presentation, repeats a repetition [of movement]” Derrida 135, brackets mine, italics original). Choreo-graphy “is not the living repetition of the living” (136).

Choreography, as technology and expression of modernity’s being-toward-movement, participates fully of this exhausting psychological, affective, and energetic project of modern subjectivation as the creation of a socially severed, energetically self-contained, emotionally self-propelled idiot experiencing the appearance of the other as unbearable crisis that initiates the symptom (Lepecki 33).

It is not a coincidence that performance discourse accentuates modernity’s fragmenting, isolating, alienating powers on the subject, and offers a way out of this melancholia by demolishing the theatrical, spectacular, representative. For it is the epitome of modernity’s ideology (which modernity, one would like to ask).

Contemporary dance’s “slower ontology”, its turn to micro-movements as opposed to “dance dance” (that is, energetic, kinesthetic and rigidly choreographed dance) brings it surprisingly closer to the theatrical, if by theatrical we are not only understanding the dramatic theatre (and even then, most of these works indeed have “play” texts and scores). It is mostly because of this ambiguity that recent choreographers prefer to use “performance” for their works. I believe my categorization is now clearer. To return to the idiot, the way Lepecki criticizes the choreography is very similar to the classical indictment against writing: “The truth of what is: writing literally hasn’t a damn sight to do with it. It has rather a blindness to do with it. Whoever might think he has produced truth through a grapheme would only give proof of the greatest foolishness (*euitheia*)” (Derrida 134-5, italic original). A text that is written in defense of writing as *pharmakon* is thus used by Lepecki to

back up his argument as to show how “dangerous”, haunting, delaying and subduing graphism is.

Endless Divisions within Performance

Derrida states that the writing is further differentiated into good and bad writing, just like good and bad mimesis. While the good writing is the metaphor of living memory, of “truth inscribed on the soul” (Derrida 149), the bad writing is physical, external, mute and artificial. “And the good one can be best designated only through the metaphor of the bad one. Metaphoricity is the logic of contamination and the contamination of logic” (149). Metaphoricity is exactly the chain of supplements which endlessly loops the substitutions one after another, this is also why representation does not represent the original but yet another representation. Metaphoricity is therefore the utmost removal from the source. Peggy Phelan, on the other hand, sees the metaphor as the “vertical hierarchy of value and therefore reproductive; it works by erasing dissimilarity and negating difference; it turns two into one” (Phelan 1996: 150). In other words, metaphor is the bad mimesis in the sense of perfect imitation. She opposes “the realm of metaphor with the realm of metonymy”, by “moving from the grammar of words to the grammar of the body”:

Metonymy is additive and associative; it works to secure a horizontal axis of contiguity and displacement. In performance, the body is metonymic of self, of character, of voice, of “presence.” But in the plenitude of its apparent visibility and availability, the performer actually disappears and represents something else—dance, movement, sound, character, “art.” (150)

Phelan consciously associates metaphor with the realm of writing in order to clear the field of performance of the movement of substitution; for there is no substitution in performance, but displacement, attribution and association. Metonymy as a simile is based on a much more fixed, commonly agreed relations, whereas metaphor can be freely constructed and communicated in spite of its apparent novelty. It is exactly

this familiarity that is being employed in performance, the familiarity of the artist on the basis of which the performance does not turn into fiction, a theatre. The performer announces her association with a certain form of visibility. The infinite and free substitution that is metaphor, on the other hand, annuls the specificity of the actor; anyone can fulfill the cluster of similarity, the metaphor is independent its partakers. As Phelan rightly asserts, it erases the dissimilarity, dissimilarity of the actor to the character she tries to enact. The actor, therefore, must be open to erasure and re-mark (which never *completely* eclipses the identity of the actor anyway). Phelan tries to explain the *me/not me* tension intrinsic to performance. But in the way she asserts the “vertical hierarchy” of metaphor, which is a metaphor of theatre. Metaphoricity, on the other hand, is the common ground of metaphor and metonymy. My point is, both performance and theatre works on the same operation on different levels, but what founds performance is still the basic theatrical machine based on the difference of identity, the contamination of the auto-insemination by the insertion of frame, of specific consciousness, of attention, of testimony.

I am emphasizing insemination, for Derrida states that between good writing and bad one, there is a difference *similar* to that of “fertile trace over the sterile trace” (Derrida 149). The sterile trace is the bad writing, which is the site of mimicry, theatre and festival; it is an “unreserved spending” (150), writing without the living knowledge of the thing that reproduces its non-truth. Good writing is serious; it carefully sows the seeds of knowledge onto the soul in order for them later defend themselves and him who planted them, “whence new words grow up in new characters” (155). Good writing, in a word, is procreation. Phelan associates the femininity with performative writing; therefore I cannot help but think that the auto-

insemination in good writing is a figure for Phelan to relate the performance with metonymy, with reserved spending, with fertile trace.

From one kind of simile to another, from one kind of insemination to another: this is the tension that binds performance and “old theatre” together. One is manifestly closer to truth, to reality, to presence than the other, whereas it still occurs within the machinery offered by the latter. Between two kinds of play Plato inserts “ethics and politics” (156); the good play is governed not by amusement but seriousness. The amusement play “can give place to no activity, to no discourse worthy of the name –that is, one charged with truth or at least with meaning” (156), it is Broadway, it is entertainment, a pastime activity for bourgeoisie. In order for theatre to produce meaning and carry some truth within it, it has to sever its ties with “old theatre”. It becomes serious, “play begins to *be* something and its very presence lays it open to some sort of dialectical confiscation. It takes on meaning and works in the service of seriousness, truth, and ontology” (156, *italic original*,). It asks serious questions directed to the heart of life and being, it takes itself seriously in asking the full attention and participation of the audience, it risks the life of the performer and puts the comfort of the community at stake. Theatre is no longer, but performance. As soon as it presents itself in its seriousness, “play erases itself as such”:

The point is that there is no *as such* where writing or play are concerned. Having no essence, introducing difference as the condition for the presence of essence, opening up the possibility of the double, the copy, the imitation, the simulacrum –the game and the *graphe* are constantly disappearing as they go along. They cannot, in classical affirmation, be affirmed without being negated. (156-7, *italics original*)

This is exactly why performance needs to negate the theatre and theatrical. Though on the level of discourse it acknowledges “difference” between presence and present, between identity and subjectivity, between origin and authenticity, it nevertheless

hopes to arrive from one to the other by the itinerary of performance. Theatre is the non-essential play, the make-believe, the simplistic mechanism that sides only with the copy, that plays with props and appearances; it does not have any hold on the life of the spectator nor on the actor. It is, in a sense, *nothing* to be cared about.

Performance, on the other hand, has something to say about the human being and life, it is fiercely experiments with the heart of reality; it is on the level of philosophical discourse. That is why it refuses the art-life distinction (art here denoting artifice, the second-level reality, pretense), it may be artistic but is still on par with reality. It indeed challenges the authority of philosophy by its self-assertion to the scene of truth and reality, but it presents this challenge to theatre, by suppressing the theatrical within it, which is the system of understanding things in the as-structure, (understanding reality as a scene, for example). That is why performance unwittingly comes quite close to the ages old discourse on ideality of truth, on Being as presence. That is why it presents “old theatre” exactly the way the cave allegory is presented and negated. But the Platonic dialectic, the inscription of eidos in the form of logos always already necessitates the dramatic scene of theatre in the most general, hence most suppressed, sense of the word. Every Socratic dialogue is staged dramatically in alignment with the development of the arguments; it draws on metaphors and similes, and proves its point by way of these associations. The argument is carried on in dialogues. Theatre is the system of dialogue; indeed historically it starts the moment Thespis answers the chorus. But it is potentially there before the dialogue begins, it is the site of “vision” (which etymologically binds it with *theorein*, “to see”), a site of gathering, an accumulator of attention. As the space, or the system, it has no essential value in itself, but it is by which the truth

gains its manifestation. It works as the threshold of the vision, of appearance.

Theatre has been criticized on the basis of the “content” of what it shows, of bourgeois life, the limited representation of reality on stage. It is with the criticism of theatre’s structure of showing, representing that performance emerges distinctly.

The disappearance of truth as presence, the withdrawal of the present origin of presence, is the condition of all (manifestation of) truth. Nontruth is the truth. Nonpresence is presence. Différance, the disappearance of any originary presence, is *at once* the condition of possibility *and* the condition of impossibility of truth. At once. “At once” means that the being-present (*on*) in its truth, in the presence of its identity and in the identity of its presence, *is doubled* as soon as it appears, as soon as it presents itself. *It appears, in its essence*, as the possibility of its own most proper non-truth, of its pseudo-truth reflected in the icon, the phantasm, or the simulacrum. What is is not what it is, identical and identical to itself, unique, unless it *adds to itself* the possibility of being *repeated* as such. And its identity is hollowed out by that addition, withdraws itself in the supplement that presents it. (168, italics original)

Yet performance also operates on the condition of addition and of heightened gaze.

[I]n the plenitude of its apparent visibility and availability, the performer actually disappears and represents something else—dance, movement, sound, character, “art.” As we discovered in relation to Cindy Sherman’s self-portraits, the very effort to make the female body appear involves the addition of something other than “the body.” That “addition” becomes the object of the spectator’s gaze, in much the way the supplement functions to secure and displace the fixed meaning of the (floating) signifier. Just as her body remains unseen as “in itself it really is,” so too does the sign fail to reproduce the referent. Performance uses the performer’s body to pose a question about the inability to secure the relation between subjectivity and the body *per se*; performance uses the body to frame the lack of Being promised by and through the body— that which cannot appear without a supplement. (Phelan 1996: 150-1, italic original)

Theatre is the site of supplement, im-personation, substitution. What performance tries to pose, the theatre expose “literally”, by making its mechanics explicit and announced beforehand, yet it does not venture into reminding “the lack of Being” constantly throughout its process. The fundamental power of contemporary performance is its announcement of this lack by making it the quite pronounced

issue of performance, by closing representation up on itself, maybe much more strikingly than any theatrical “play within the play” in which the illusion is explicitly marked and reminded. But the condition of marking it out, of gathering the attention and inviting the testimony, is still no different than the “old, illusionary, theatre”.

The disappearance of the Face or the structure of repetition can thus no longer be dominated by the value of truth. On the contrary, the opposition between the true and the untrue is entirely comprehended, *inscribed*, within this structure or this generalized writing. The true and the untrue are both species of repetition. And there is no repetition possible without the *graphics of supplementarity*, which supplies, for the lack of a full unity, another unit that comes to relieve it, being enough the same and enough other so that it can replace by addition. Thus, on the one hand, repetition is that without which there would be no truth: the truth of being in the intelligible form of ideality discovers in the *eidos* that which can be repeated, being the same, the clear, the stable, the identifiable in its equality with itself. And only the *eidos* can give rise to repetition as anamnesis or maieutics, dialectics or didactics. Here repetition gives itself out to be a repetition of life. Tautology is life only going out of itself to come home to itself. Keeping close to itself through *mneme*, *logos*, and *phone*. But on the other hand, repetition is the very movement of non-truth: the presence of what is gets lost, disperses itself, multiplies itself through mimemes, icons, phantasms, simulacra, etc. Through phenomena, already. And this type of repetition is the possibility of becoming-perceptible-to-the-senses: nonideality. This is on the side of non-philosophy, bad memory, hypomnesia, writing. Here, tautology is life going out of itself beyond return. Death rehearsal. Unreserved spending. The irreducible excess, through the play of the supplement, of any self-intimacy of the living, the good, the true. (Derrida 168-9, italics original)

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

In Hans-Thies Lehmann's definition of old theatre, or in other criticisms against the unities and representation of theatre, the address is theatre itself, but it should actually have been the historical criticism, primarily revolving around the text. Indeed, the actual conditions of staging were discussed quite lately in theatre theory, and by the moment it began with Artaud, Brecht, Meyerhold, Kantor or Grotowsky, it was no longer theatre but "new theatre". The fact that a theory of staging comes "after" the theory of theatre text does not imply the total domination of the text over the staging before the emergence of new theatre, but that this thinking comes through as a result of historical turn that at the same time allowed the "emergence" of performance. The conditions of appearing, the play of trace, dissemination, has always already been at work, but only named in the crisis of modernity and metaphysics, articulated by Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Derrida. Just like the "literature coming out of the book", or just like theatre coming out of the play text, performance issues out of theatre "by affirmed simulacrum and theatrical staging, by the break-in of the re-mark, [...] it escapes it beyond return, no longer sends it back its image, no longer constitutes an object finished and *posed*, reposing in the bookcase of a *bibliothèque*" (54, italics original) or as Peggy Phelan would say, of a *mediathèque*.

It is of capital importance to read this crisis of truth not in line with the reign of simulacrum or perfect relativism as most post-modern theories of art inclines to do. This crisis is an occasion, a breach to think about the tensions still prevalent within the sense of reality and truth. Phelan states that although performance is generalized to encapsulate every fabric of real life, "[t]his is not to say that 'the real'

has disappeared, but it is to acknowledge that it is impossible to recognize ‘the real’ without a concept of performance in view.” (Phelan 2003: 292). I would only state that replacing “performance” with “theatre” creates no loss in the truth of argument. If performance differentiates itself from theatre on the basis of the fact that performance uses the elements from real life, involves “real” persons, actualizes space and time, happens in the here and now, this results in taking one side in the poles of the tension, the crisis of which is announced by deconstruction. There is no esoteric “another” way of reality and presence meant in the performance, it still borrows these terms from the historical demarcations of metaphysics. Performance plays with the sense of reality and presence, it is exposition as much as it is illusion. It is intersubjective as much as it is solipsistic. It the performer still needs to accentuate the difference from her spectators, just in order for performance to accomplish itself to the end.

An example would be enlightening, I believe. Jérôme Bel’s piece *The Show Must Go On* (2001) is based on the literal inquiry of how metaphors work on stage. He uses several pop songs, and the performers on stage accord with the lyrics of the songs. The whole performance is based on this. At one point, the performers vanish from the stage with the Beatles classic *Yellow Submarine*, and from then on the songs address the spectator directly. In *La Vie En Rose* the seats are colored with pink light, whereas in *Imagine* lights totally turn out. Then comes *The Sound of Silence*, and only its line “sound of silence” is heard. Bel removes performer, story, light and sound in order to explicitly show the constitution of theatre, namely, the spectator and the time it lends (and borrows). It is a very ontological question about the nature of theatre, and the latent answer comes very close to the ontological

constitution of Being, that is, time. Bel wants to remind the spectator its existence in the theatre space by making them feel the time in explicit ways. It is an act to remove representation and the infamous fourth wall. The spectator is allowed to do anything, as much as nothing, in this gap within the performance. It is the spectator's site of liberation, so to speak.

But in its Istanbul edition (2010), the space between *La Vie En Rose* and *The Sound of Silence* is "violently" filled by the spectator, as one of the assistant directors Dina Ed Dick states. Everybody in the salon accompanied the songs, applauded each other, danced in their seats. A group of young dancers from the audience bounced on the stage and performed a tiny choreography full of pirouettes and jumps. Had this craze gone on, the performance would not have accomplished itself. The assistant director was completely disturbed by this violent audience. The total presence of the audience, the total intersubjectivity in other words, is the end of performance. It is the dream festival of Rousseau in which everyone is equally seeing and being seen.

Another point, which does not live up to performance's claims, is the question of document and immediacy. If performance's ontology is the now of performance, it cannot be repeatable, as Phelan says. But today the performance enters into the frame of museum and gallery, as a legitimate art form it wants to preserve and sustain itself by leaving its legacy. The document of performance might not be seen as the performance itself, true. Yet we are now face to face with the phenomena of "re-performance" and performance retrospectives. The prefix "re-" denotes more or less exact repetition of the performance, hence erasing its claim to total authenticity. Although such is the fact, the re-performances are organized in

order to enable new audiences experience “the real thing”, rather than seeing its video record. This is nothing less than the capitalization of experience and fetishism over “reality”. As I have stated, this still depends on the basic opposition between original and double, real and imitation. The aim of re-performance in the frame of museum is not to open it new possibilities and deviations, but rather to preserve it in a certain form, with a certain set of affects accumulated around it. This is what motivates Marina Abramović’s retrospective exhibition “Artist is Present” (2010), which literally presents the artist during the exhibition. But this literality not at all glimpses towards parody; Abramović takes her presence seriously –this is the condition of self-mastery of her performance. The namesake of the exhibition, the performance *Artist is Present* (2010), is Abramović, sitting on a chair in an illuminated square. There is another chair facing hers, to be filled by the gallery visitors. The artist is at once the subject and object of the performance (which is mostly the main standing of all performances); her attenuated presence is the work of art. The visitor –the looker/looked- is possessed by the power of Abramović’s gaze and heightened presence. According to Abramović, they see themselves in the face of the artist, for she is merely a mirror. Up to that point, there is nothing problematic with this work. It even accepts the system screen, of mirror, which Derrida discusses throughout the rest of *Dissemination*. Yet the artist does not denounce her presence, she does not totally vanish. On the contrary, it is her cultic image in the cultural memory that creates the elevated feeling of suspension. The work is not based on an awareness of time, it is based on its forgetting by getting carried out in the experience of finally getting to sit in front of Marina, for which people wait in queues for days. The exact translation of monotheistic adoration into the apparently

secular plane of art is what defines *Artist is Present*. The moment the performance is officially institutionalized in the most authoritative museum, MoMA, it re-gains the hierarchical quality of artwork performance has been opposing against.

I believe contemporary performance indeed liberates the material, temporal and spatial potentialities within expressivity. My main objection is against the exclusion of *différance*, which marks and permeates any expression, as a gesture of performance's establishment. Its alleged event quality and ephemerality does not liberate performance from the capitalist circulation and objectification of meta; for the hallmark post-industrial mode of production is exactly this temporariness of signification and experience. Pascal Gielen even goes on to assert that post-Fordism comes from the art scene; the physical mobility, mental mobility, actuality of communication, and chronical instability experimented by the artists from 1960s and 1970s, he implies, inspires the system of immaterial labor. Alongside the statement that we are always performing, it should be discerned that we are always working. It is on this basis I am suspicious of performance's claim to liberate the subject. It is on the same basis that immateriality of performance by no means the circulation of capital: the performance artist Tino Sehgal has gained the attention of the art world by virtue of the transactional rules of his works. He sells his works ("situations") in the presence of notary and passes the work only orally. Any kind of documentation is not allowed in the exhibitions; therefore the works cannot be reproduced materially. Only the author, Tino Sehgal, knows the work completely and authorizes the buyer by transferring the general frame of the performance/situation, to be re-performed under one of his assistances' direction. After the transaction, however, Sehgal does not burn his cheque.

Our continuous everyday performance is also based on our assigning things to perform for us: words, images, posts, instant messages, Facebook profiles. If that is the case, if we are living in a representation in the strict sense of the word, the dramatic theatre's exemplary existence can help us be aware of this (I am saying this because Hans-Thies Lehmann also emphasizes the importance of its exhibiting the signification structures and creating awareness). If we accept the definition of Aristotle or Lehmann, dramatic theatre in itself is still a model of the system of representation that we employ in everyday life. Not merely performance, but old theatre also has the potentiality for self-reflection. Moreover, if everything is performance and if everyone is a performer, the only way for the artist to specify her position as artist is to frame her practice, underlining it, repeating it, being sarcastic about it, doing and undoing it while accepting that this undoing is also another doing, and in the end being totally miserable about it.

The performance works mostly operate on a set limit -be it on body, time, space, energy, pain, identity, reality, correctness- and what is actually called the performance does not consist of the breaking of this limit, but rather of the process of testing and hopefully flexing it. Taking it quite seriously, performance insinuates a certain reality, playful but untouched by fiction and representation. But this operation still uses one meaning of reality, one meaning of fiction and one meaning of representation, the ones that are decided on by Western metaphysics. The critique of this metaphysics, I think, should not be by claiming the terms utterly hegemonic and totally excluding them from the plane of thinking. Rather, the critique comes from revealing the fact that this metaphysics, the terms that it employs, carry their

others, contraries within them. Establishing their paradoxical nature frees them in new matrixes.

Performance theory is aware of its double structure, but it still makes a critique of representation and theatricality on surface layers. This devalues performance's claims and promises for a new understanding of truth and ontology. Again, the ontology of performance is first and foremost founded on metaphysics of presence and subjectivity. Even more so than any theatrical structure, for as opposed to theatre's emphasis on "seeing", that is to say on the structure that allows a group of people see another group of people, performance emphasizes the showing doing, which is both done by the one and the same agent quite consciously. This is nothing other than defining a subject, mastering its own being and behavior, and powerfully exposing the other to this mastery, though it is aimed towards inviting the other to making and hopefully unmaking the mastered territory. Performance discourse heavily deals with our conceptualization of existence and modalities of being. Yet for the final time: the trace structure, the movement of *différance* also reflects and is reflected in performance. Its power does not lay in its claim to presence as Being, but rather making this presence an issue, a question throughout its execution.

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