

Performance/Transformance: Editorial

Barbara Godard

To perform – a transitive verb. To make or mould, by means of/all over, this is also to *transact*. By repetition to fix as form, as model? Or in repetition to carry across into a different state, to *transform*? The work of performing in the here and now is a turning, a making strange through a recontextualization that opens new networks or fields in which to situate a gesture, a body, a word. Performance has no past – only a present and (possibly) a future. Introducing a breach in regular social relations, performance works through a crisis, moving into the liminal, into the betwixt and between to furnish a critique of the crisis. Social dramas such as initiation rites and political ceremonies effect a transformation in the status and bodies of the participants in the action whereas aesthetic drama works its transformations on the audience of the performance (Schechner 171). What unfolds in such twice told tales, where behavioural strips are reworked, is a gathering, performing and dispersing of energy. Between repetition and rehearsal – a place of transformation.

This focus on process and action is carried over into language where a “performative” is an illocutionary act whose work is carried out in its very utterance (Austin). Such speech acts refer not to something beyond themselves but establish a frame within which a process unfolds. Promising, swearing, seducing – the performative is crucial to the love story in which the feminine is constructed as the object of an ever delayed masculine desire (Felman). But promising, this is a game women too can play, as *poseures*, masquerading to be the phallus (Lacan 84). As Luce Irigaray rewrites Lacan, to “play with mimesis” is for a woman to expose her exploitation by discourse without being caught in it. Through “playful repetition” she makes visible the possible operation of the feminine in language that has been covered up and demonstrates that women are “such good mimics” because the

are not wholly absorbed in this function but remain elsewhere, within and without representation (Irigaray 1985b, 76).

Such staged mimetism or mimicry, a foregrounding of "bad" or materially contaminated mimesis, works to undermine and critique the purity of Plato's "good" mimesis of logic and mathematics and to give away the game of Plato's philosophers in the cave caught up in the illusion or simulacra with a pro-ject in symmetry and closure of representation, "the contemplation of the Idea. Eternally fixed" (Irigaray 1895a, 249). Such fixity is unsettled by the scrupulously fake of the performance of femininity, for it unsettles the boundaries between inside and outside, displaces the relations of subject/object of the gaze. This unmasking the mimetic function organizing the cave, unmasks the fiction of being that covers up its reproduction/production, by attending scrupulously to processes of repetition. Irigaray has challenged the metaphysics of presence that valorizes the proper (identity, analogy, symmetry) – representation as *mimesis* – in the name of a heterogeneous logic of becoming – re-representation as *mimicry*, as production – a ludic repetition or supplement that exposes the operation of representation as the production of exchange value within a specific economy of meaning. She both valorizes the adaptation, the performance, with its foregrounding of the instance of enunciation (the moment of discourse in the here and now) as she opens up the polysemy of meaning, a movement of repetition from copying the old to producing the new. Re-representation as the construction of fictions of provisional identity. Performance, beyond the logic of lack, of non-identity.

It is just this question of subjectivity that Josette Feral sees as crucial to performance. Performance is concerned above all with the manipulation of the fragmented body perceived as a site of desire, of displacement and fluctuation, that it seeks to liberate, and with the manipulation of space so that it becomes fluid, continuous present, transformed into event from which the subject emerges transformed. This work with the scenic space makes tangible the play of the imaginary that positions subjects (in the plural) in the scene. Through a play of doubling and repetition are constructed spaces for the projection of different postures of desire. These subjects in process construct themselves through projection into different objects, so many "objets 'a'" (Feral 135) necessitated by their libidinal economies, emerging from this "event" transformed. It is this incessant play and displacement of

positions of desire that constitutes theatricality. Though present to a lesser degree in the theatre which through a character limits it, the play of desire in performance is not constrained to an assumed subject position, but moves in a destabilized, infra-symbolic zone (Feral 136). The performer as subject is catalyst for the passage of desire, "a primary process without teleology" (Feral 136). What is exposed here is the frame of performance, usually hidden, a process that demystifies the subject. Seeking not to say something, but to set in place a series of relations among subjects through the play with a variety of transitional objects, the performance poses a deterritorialized gesture, forcing an opening that reorients relations of centre and frame (Feral 138).

The question of gender and performance is a complex one, engaging not only an oscillation between "true" and "fake" identity, subjectivity as process and a positing of gender as performance, but also involving a wide variety of performance situations. In recent years, there has been a great interest in performance. Sociologists and anthropologists have analyzed the rituals of everyday social interchange and of larger cultural dramas, linking the concept of theatricality to human behaviour within social structures. Performance *art* has become of central importance in the visual arts and dance where the conventions of high art forms in these domains have been challenged by a new attention to a process that fails to move to a single paroxysm, point of closure. Instead of representations, performance stages social roles as models for demonstration and critique of social technologies (Monk 122). Semiotic analysis of the theatre has introduced ways of understanding the imbrication of behavioural script, dramatic script and performance text. Performance destabilizes the fixed subjectivity of scripted text through setting in play the "fictive body" manipulated by the actor rehearsing her own staging of the imaginary as a subject in process. What these approaches share, is a theory of enunciation that considers a textual event as process, rather than finished product, within the constitution of social subjects.

Performance is approached from a variety of angles in these texts in *Tessera*. In her "Courtes notes," Patricia Lamontagne engages the central issues at stake in performance, its escape from the regime of mimesis and representation through language that is taken in charge by the libidinal energies of the body to shake the foundations of logocentrism by modifications in the distribution of discursive instances.

She goes on to argue that the work of women poets engages in this type of exchange, of a space in-between, where transformation is produced through interaction between performer and spectators.

A number of texts outline the way in which performance as process of transformation of bodies and languages has been used to construct femininity. Ritual performances (institutional and social) work through repetition and redundancy to construct the norms for feminine subjectivity. These are located in the very founding practices of psychoanalysis as it produced the hysteric – as pure representation. This is what Nicole Jolicoeur exposes. Her photographs stage performance at a third degree, for they frame, hence dis/place, the display of Charcot's photographs of the hysterics at La Salpêtrière, who in turn were acting out in a convulsive language not yet at the point of verbal expression but restrained within the body, available to the look, the camera, that recuperated their somatic mimicries into medical and photographic discourses. As Jolicoeur's drawing on the photographs exposes, Charcot's amphitheatre was a stage for *tableaux vivants* that represented the poses of the demonically possessed in Renaissance paintings. Here femininity was produced as hysteria through image and stage business. Though hysteria may under some conditions be the only form of resistance possible to some women, it limits women to marginal circulation. Nonetheless, psychoanalysis appropriated the hysteric as the model of female subjectivity as lack, as masquerade of what it is not, as the phallus, "that is to say, the signifier of the desire of the Other" (Lacan 84). Femininity functions as a mask for non-identity: Jolicoeur's exploration of its performance, through work on (im)posture, stresses the constructed, the invented, femininity as a possibility to be put on (or off) with a vengeance. Marion McMahan's text, "Nursing History," part of the script from a film of the same name, continues this restaging of the construction of femininity in performance or social rituals such as marriage and graduation from nursing school, images of which are superimposed here, two rites through which one becomes a woman devoted to meeting the needs of others. McMahan's strategy is a deconstructive one: through memory and repetition, more selective and less mechanical than that of the hysteric or her nurse, she stages these scenes so as to refocus attention on image and object to break up the flow of narrative that would position these images as the natural ending of the story of women's lives. The repetition of performance turns the image to focus

on it critically. Claudine Potvin's "Le Show d'Angèle" stages another mode of performance that (re)produces femininity, the pornographic show in which woman is coerced into the position of object of a masculine gaze, and so denied the possibility of subject/object differentiation that would construct her as subject in the Symbolic. With its title "Original Sin" and exchange of apple, Heather McLeod's poem invokes another scenario of oppressive femininity from which familial romance, however, the persona is taking her leave. Dôre Michelut's use of the directed unsettling repetition of memory focuses on the grammatical use of "The Third Person Polite" as it constructs hierarchies of class as well as of gender in the ritualized performance of conversational exchange.

Another group of texts explores the intersection of performance and theatricality as they demonstrate how women's engagement with the theatrical institution involves a privileging of performance over text, and inserts the body into the space of the maternal scene to res(c)ite female desire. Natalie Rewa describes how Banuta Rubess emphasizes the body and its rhythms in a veritable choreographic work using jazz as model of performance to break out of the limits of scripts with their focus on product over process and their traditional mimetic representation of the female body. Roz Currier outlines the ways in which Maria Fornes' text poses a feminine "gestus" that reworks the Oedipal contract of the Symbolic order which has required a female victim for the birth of tragedy, for the separation that constitutes subjectivity. In this play, a woman kills another woman in what is a gesture of elimination of traditional representations of femininity. So, Fefu leaves the mirror stage and abjection to constitute herself as subject in the Symbolic. Penn Kemp's "Masks Again" describes the process of performance work with some women friends who have all been involved in traditional theatre but have turned to the production of their own rituals and masks to work through issues of subjectivity. The making of masks is a crucial gesture in breaking the force of socially approved and imposed masks leading away from the ritualized social contexts, in which such performances of femininity are reproduced, to improvisational techniques for unleashing and refocusing the libidinal energies of the body – "we whirl in a perfect kind of freedom." Not objects for the masculine gaze, but subject(s) in process.

A number of texts are the trace of performances. Sylvie Laliberté's

manifesto proclaims the pleasure and play of performance. The collaborative work of Leila Sujir and Sarah Murphy is a performance of a ritual of academia, the lecture, which deconstructs the frames of its own presentation at the Calgary conference on blurring genres. What happens when you squash the text between the margins? In this case, excessive footnotes that overwhelm the textual economy to irrupt in the blanks, a “para”-sitical text which, through its insistent repetition on the question of torture and language, inserts the body into the scene and reworks the relations of margin to centre in a metonymy of occupied space, both textual and political. Dena Davida blurs the borders between dance and performance art in her exploration of the work of the body in the performance spaces of both low and high culture, of weight lifting and ballet. Gender distinctions too are blurred when the femininity of the dancer’s body is shown to be comparable in strength to that of the body builder. Like a number of other dancers turned performers, Davida refuses the conventional representations of femininity. Rather than rejecting the female body altogether, as some artists have done (Goldberg 19), she explores the contradictions in the representation of the female body, locating a source of pleasure in female strength and motion, a pleasure in breathing, carrying, improvising, that refuses to make a spectacle of itself.

While performance engages with the play of margins, realigning configurations, some of these texts explicitly engage in a play on the margins, not just the border blurring of genres, but the configuration of certain types of performance modes beyond those presently institutionalized. Karen Stanworth’s “Re-placing Performance in ‘Art’: the Case of Françoise Sullivan,” reminds us that performance is not only in/of the moment, but that it has a history, in Canada as elsewhere. In this essay, she traces Françoise Sullivan’s work as it breaks from the improvisational poetics of Quebec’s Automatiste movement and situates it as a disruption of “high art” practices in the visual arts through its merging of dance, poetry, visual forms, that make it figure as “craft” to art critics. Paola Bono’s “The Passion for Sexual Difference: On (Re)Reading Angela Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve*,” extends the implications of Lamontagne’s pronouncement that poetry is performance by examining the way in which reading is performance. Here she understands the text within a theory of enunciation, discourse as event. In the repetition of reading, an interchange is established between text and interpreter in the realization of the

potentialities of the text so that the corporal presence, the libidinal energies, are brought into play. This concretization or reception of the text is productive, producing a pleasure (or displeasure) akin to catharsis which is transformative (Zumthor 57). Bono here engages in a double performance of the signs, situating herself in a position of opposition to accepted figurations of femininity and in one of positioning herself as an engaged feminist reading otherwise. From this second position, Carter's texts with their repetition of the pornographic show are disturbing in their fetishizing women as objects of masculine desire. However, reread in the light of Irigaray's theory of mimesis as a game of repetition that unmasks the codes of performance constructing femininity, Carter's work may be seen as a staged re-presentation aiming to unsettle existing relations of subject/object in a hybridization or "bricolage" blurring textual boundaries.

With the selections from Susan Hawthorne's poetic sequence, "The Language in My Tongue" written after reading *Tessera* No. 8 "Autobiograph(e)," we encounter the limits of performance. A sequence intended to challenge the mythical perceptions of epilepsy, these poems explore a way in which the body invests language with its rhythms in acts that are repetitions but not performance, for they are not framed or keyed as a space of interaction with spectators, but are uncontrollable gestures in which the body forces itself to centre stage, undermining the possibility of critical distance of keyed performance repetition. Nonetheless, through their repetition of the seizure, the poems engage in such a critical reframing, questioning our perception of "disability."

Close up focus on object/image, memory transforming temporal configurations, exploration of space as in-between – so many strategies for restaging the production of feminine subjectivity as/in performance, so many technologies of gender to be investigated in the future of female becoming. Transformances for other occasions.

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