The Body and the Text.
Performance in Cultural and Literary Studies

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ABSTRACT

The essay explores the incidence and fertility of 'performance' as a means to examine and critique culture also in the field of cultural and literary studies, on whose ground it has landed, together with performativity, as a 'travelling concept'. Continuously traversing the porous borders of performance studies, both concepts are in fact aiding an understanding of identity and culture not only as discoursively and normatively 'constructed' but also as 'performed' through embodied practices whose 'efficacy' (transgression, resistance, agency) against those very terms of discoursive constructedness and normativity may be tested. Post-subcultural studies, for example, focusing on contemporary youth subcultures' creative life-style, body language and spectacular appropriation of the city spaces, analyse their tactics of resistance to the organizational 'efficiency' and technological 'effectiveness' that dominate today's cultural scenario. The texts of literature are likewise increasingly approached as 'events' or performances, on whose contested terrain the embodied practices of writers and readers have become crucial while, especially in the so-called 'performative writing', the split speech/writing is being pushed to the background.

1. Introduction: the in-betweenness of performance

As is often stated, the pervasiveness of the performance trope[1] and the explosion of performance discourse in the cultural and epistemological domain in recent decades has

brought about what is usually described as the 'performative turn'. The concepts of 'performance' and 'performativity' have crossed the borders of theatre studies to emerge, with a dramatic impact, in linguistics and the philosophy of language and in literary and cultural studies. As Ute Berns points out:

> Today the terms circulate on two levels. On the one hand, they have become mere 'jargon', that is, ubiquitous labels without any particular specificity or explanatory power. On the other hand, they have turned into 'travelling concepts' that function as 'miniature' or 'short-hand theories' […] whose theoretical content and precise relation to each other tends to be inflected by the field in which they are used. (Berns, 2010: 94)

Evidently, it is as 'travelling concepts' that performance and performativity have largely contributed to the interdisciplinary approach to literature and culture as performative, traversing back and forth the porous boundaries of performance studies, which is in fact, in Dwight Conquergood's words, "a border discipline, an interdiscipline, that cultivates the capacity to move between structures, to forge connections, to see together, to speak with instead of simply speaking about or for others" (1995: 137-138). So that, if one had to answer the uneasy question "What is performance studies?", it would be wise to follow Jon McKenzie's suggestion when he affirms that 'liminality' "is perhaps the most concise and accurate response" (2001: 50).

Richard Schechner openly praises the constitutive liminality of this "intergeneric, interdisciplinary and intercultural" discipline. He says that it "transgresses boundaries, it goes where it is not expected to be. It is inherently 'in between' and therefore cannot be pinned down or located exactly" (1998: 360), and he significantly adds that accepting the prefix 'inter' "means opposing the establishment of any single system of knowledge, values, or subject matter. Performance studies is unfinished, open, multivocal and self-contradictory. Thus any call for a work toward a 'unified field' is, in my view, a misunderstanding of the very fluidity and playfulness fundamental to performance studies" (361). This fluidity which makes the discipline also "inherently unstable" (360) can of course cause, especially in the newcomer, a certain disorientation, which, in Henry Bial's opinion, is the "flipside of finding oneself at the center of such an intellectual vortex" (2004: 2). Openly emphasizing the link with cultural studies, the scholar expresses the legitimate uncertainties connected to an almost impossible definition of the field with another travelling metaphor:

> Where do academic disciplines overlap? Is performance studies properly a discipline at all, or is it a kind of way station, an academic version of Grand Central Terminal, where ideas and idea-makers brush up against each other on the way from one place to another? 'Your attention, please, this is the final boarding call for Cultural Studies, making all local stops including Women's Studies, African Studies, Asian Studies, Queer Theory, and Cultural Studies. If you're not going to Cultural Studies, you're on the wrong train!" (2)

Voicing similar perplexities about the discipline's heterogeneous field of interests and the cross-fertilizing contamination with other studies, Peggy Phelan adds: "One could argue that performance studies was a narrow, even smaller-minded version of cultural studies. One could say that performance studies had so broad a focus precisely because it had nothing original to say" (Phelan, 1998: 5). But, she opposes:

> […] each of these (conditional) claims misses what I believe are the most compelling possibilities realized by performance studies. While theatre and anthropology certainly played a central role in the generative disciplines of performance studies, other 'points of contact' have also had exceptional force in the field. […] If indeed we are entering a new intercultural 'global village', then we must begin to imagine a post-theatrical, post-anthropological age. Such a post-age, like all postage, is reinscribed, written over. (5)

And if this statement contributes to a palimpsestic idea of the field, Schechner likewise suggests that, as "we are living in a postcolonial world where cultures are colliding, interfering with each other, and energetically hybridizing" (Schechner, 1998: 360), performance studies cannot but be reflexively hybrid in its approach and scope if it wants to keep being an adequate, productive means for cultural analysis. "Our radical move is to turn, and return, insistently to the crossroads", states Conquergood (2002: 154), once more underlining the fruitful intersections of performance studies with other areas of inquiry and once more adopting travelling metaphors, as powerfully as when, in another essay, he talks about the future of the field: "Instead of a stable, monolithic paradigm of performance studies, I prefer to think in terms of a caravan: a heterogeneous ensemble of ideas and methods on the move" (1995: 140). The scholar appreciates the intellectual and institutional solidarity with other disciplines such as literary studies, cultural studies, diaspora studies, gender studies or queer studies, among others, but he also underlines that performance studies have brought to the table a distinctive contribution: "the heuristic potential of performance as concept, practice, and epistemology" (139).

Given the specificity of the contribution, maybe it would be worth clarifying once more what 'performance' is according to this wide and shifting theoretical (and pragmatic) framework. Marvin Carlson provides the following definition: "[Performance] is a specific event with its liminoid nature foregrounded […] presented by performers and attended by audiences both of whom regard the experience as made up of material to be interpreted, to be reflected upon, to be engaged with in – emotionally, mentally, and perhaps even physically" (1996: 198-9). The field of these 'events', that McKenzie expressly categorizes as 'cultural' performances in order to distinguish them from the organizational and technological performances, includes a wide variety of activities:

> […] traditional and experimental theatre; rituals and ceremonies; popular entertainments, such as parades and festivals; popular, classical, and experimental dance; avant-garde performance art; oral interpretations of literature, such as public speeches and readings; traditions of folklore and storytelling; aesthetic practices found in everyday life, such as

play and social interactions; political demonstrations and social movements. This list is open to additions, subtractions, and debate, but from it one can see that cultural performance is cultural in the widest sense of the term, stretching from 'high' to 'low' culture, though its most ardent proponents stress its *counter*cultural aspects. (McKenzie, 2001: 29)

As is clear from the list, together with the events that tradition and convention declare to 'be' performances (theatre, dance and music: the so-called performing arts), "[a]ny event, action, item, or behavior may be examined 'as' performance" (Schechner 1998: 361). And as Schechner points out, approaching phenomena 'as' performance has advantages: "One can consider things as provisional, in-process, existing and changing over time, in rehearsal, as it were" (361). However, this cultural domain which includes such a wide range of roles/events/acts always temporarily and relationally enacted by an incredible variety of actors/performers/individuals, basically features events played out by "threshold-crossing, shape-shifting, and boundary-violating figures, such as shamans, tricksters, and jokers, who value the carnivalesque over the canonical, the transformative over the normative, the mobile over the monumental" (Conquergood, 1995: 138). So that, if one had to answer the question "What is performance?", 'liminality' would again be the best response available.

This emphasis on the liminal aspects of aesthetic performance basically derives from Victor Turner's positioning of liminality at the centre of the ritual processes or passages through which people and reality are transformed, as they are transitioned from one status to another as through an anti-structural *limen*. And though theatre, dance and related disciplines already encompassed notions of contingency, betwixt-and-between and the 'as if' of the subjunctive condition contemplated in rituals, this emphasis on the liminal as the site of a potentially disruptive condition, before the recovery of a new status and order, reinforced the idea that the performance's liminal potential, or rather 'liminoid' – because not strictly pertaining to rituals – was to actively transform, transgress or resist the dominant hegemonic structures. Particularly interesting is the hybridizing and potentially subversive role of any cultural activity in this regard:

> Just as when tribesmen make masks, disguise themselves as monsters, heap up disparate ritual symbols, invert or parody profane reality in myths and folk-tales, so do the genres of industrial leisure, the theater, poetry, novel, ballet, film, sport, rock music, classical music, art, pop art, and so on, play with the factors of culture, sometimes assembling them in random, grotesque, improbable, surprising, shocking, usually experimental combinations. […] to generate not only weird forms, but also, and not infrequently, models, direct and parabolic or aesopian, that are highly critical of the status quo as a whole or in part. (Turner, 1982: 40)

Victor Turner's work has been fundamental because it has helped define humankind as *homo performans*, shifting thinking about performance from an idea of representation (*mimesis*) to one of practice (*poiesis*). However, as Conquergood notices,

in what Phelan calls our 'post-theatrical and 'post-anthropological' age there has been a new shift of performance thinking from *poiesis* to *kinesis*. The current thinking is bent toward a "more post-structuralist and political emphasis on performance as kinesis, as movement, motion, fluidity, fluctuation, all those restless energies that transgress boundaries and trouble closure" (Conquergood, 1995: 138). The scholar also recalls Homi Bhabha's view of performance as shifting from 'making' to 'breaking and remaking', as referred to "action that incessantly insinuates, interrupts, interrogates, antagonizes, and decenters powerful master discourses" (138). "Cutting-edge practices, fringe groups and marginalized peoples, border crossings, transgressions of boundaries and limits" (McKenzie, 2001: 50) are even more theorized and analysed in terms of 'liminality', and, paradoxically, McKenzie points out, the unrelenting use of this concept has made it into something of a norm by which the efficacy of performance and of performance research is attested: "This liminality is a mode of activity whose spatial, temporal, and symbolic 'in-betweenness' allows for social norms to be suspended, challenged, played with, and perhaps even transformed" (50).

Identity *as* performance

In this light, performance is also the enactment of a practice which is capable of disclosing a different, in-between perspective and of influencing one's own and the others' view of the world. So, to perform comes to mean not only 'to act' in the sense of playing an actual or metaphorical role, but also 'to act upon', in the sense of producing an effect on oneself, on the others and on reality: to make a step forward, to change views and things, to produce performances that are "a catalyst to personal and social transformation" (30). 'Performing' culture in this perspective would actually come to mean 'questioning' culture.

As we have seen, and as McKenzie brings to the fore, the concepts of transgression and resistance may be said to have always played a key role in performance studies, together with the idea of a potential power inherent in all cultural performances to enact a social and cultural critique. Yet, as Phelan remarks, the 'points of contact' with cultural and gender studies, and more generally with 'theory' in the 1980s and 1990s, have really had an 'exceptional force' in the field, helping performance studies to adopt a different perspective. According to McKenzie, the explosion of 'theory' has actually caused a shift of paradigm 'from theatre to theory'. In a first moment, coinciding with the social unrest of the sixties and seventies – especially the struggles over civil rights, the Vietnam War and women's liberation in the US – theatre helped see performance as embodied practices: "cultural performance opposed the physicality and passion of the body to the rationalized alienation of modern society. From the Living Theater to Woodstock, from Birmingham to the streets of Chicago, bodies performed and transgressed the power of the Establishment, the System, the Machine" (2001: 38-39). But with the new approaches that have emerged in the last decades, including Cultural Studies, Semiotics and Deconstruction, and Feminism(s), together with a critique of

'presence' (the uncompromised efficacy of the body) the topics of 'discourse' and 'text' which had been left behind have been reintegrated – some say like a Trojan horse – into an idea of performance which is more strongly articulated in terms of politics, or 'body politic' (ideology, hegemony, resistance).

Drawing on cultural critique's assumptions, and so implying that all identities are non-essential and non-metaphysical, but rather the material and historical product of discursive practices and norms that underlie their 'construction' as social subjects, Jill Dolan asserts that these social subjects, to gain agency or a certain, if limited, autonomy, "have to always perform themselves in negotiation with the delimiting cultural conventions of the geography in which they move" (1993: 419) and with the norms that construct them. One is immediately reminded of what Stuart Hall wrote about identity: "Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps, instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact […] we should think of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation" (1990: 222). This is also the core of the theories of performativity, which basically see identity as constantly refashioning itself in different contexts and configurations of reception. Performative behaviour is, also according to Schechner, how people heighten "their constructed identity, performing slightly or radically different selves in different situations" (1998: 361-2). The emphasis is of course on the question of how much one is endowed with the power to act instead of being acted upon and merely responding to pre-scripted discursive roles; a question that has been widely discussed by performance studies theorists – for example Schechner with his formulation of 'restored behaviour', meaning that one always performs strips of behaviour already behaved, so that performance in everyday life is actually a reiteration of twice or 'n' times behaved behaviours – and by poststructuralists such as Judith Butler, who has used the term 'performatives' to indicate the repetition, through citational processes, of these often concealed or dissimulated scripts – in her case 'gender' scripts – in society.

However, identities are not tied to fixed or unalterable oppositions: just as any script in theatre can never be repeated and received in exactly the same way, performative behaviours can always contain potentially deviating or disrupting differences when they are en-acted in the always different and temporally shifting contexts of any single performance. McKenzie sums up this distinction by saying that performativity refers to a discursive compulsion to repeat conventions of gender, sexuality, and race, while performance is an 'instance' of identity's performativity, a live embodiment and enactment of an identity in a particular space and time (an event) (2001: 227). So that, as Elin Diamond puts it – drawing on Butler – performance is the site "in which concealed or dissimulated conventions might be investigated. When performativity materializes as performance in that risky and dangerous negotiation between a doing (a reiteration of norms) and a thing done (discursive conventions that frame our interpretations), between someone's body and the conventions of embodiment, we have access to cultural meanings and critique" (1996: 5).

Notwithstanding the fact that, as Philip Auslander reminds us, 'everyone' "can speak of performing a self in daily life just as readily as one speaks of performing a text in a theatre or concert hall" (2006: 101), Dolan is right to clarify that performativity as metaphor has been used in particular "to describe the nonessentialized constructions of 'marginalized' identities, like white and ethnic women, gays and lesbians, men and women of colour and various conflicting combinations and intersections of these categories and positionalities" (1993: 419), and to investigate the practices of resistance enacted by these liminal figures through the performance of a parodic or transgressive role capable of disrupting the discursive repetition with the production of a variation, a slippage, a mutation. That is, of repeating "with a vengeance" (Pollock, 1998: 93). For Butler it is 'drag' that allows for this possibility of resistance through a parodic gesture or pantomimic signification. By performing the social codes and conventions that both regulate femininity through dressing-up, comportment, gesticulation and vocality and allow it to re-signify itself as female, drag mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a 'true' gender identity. It reveals the mechanisms by which gender, like any kind of identity, is not an essential or original category of being but something socially and culturally produced that needs the iteration of its conventions and norms to retain its 'authority'. The question is likewise treated by Bhabha when, talking about the subjugation of colonial (black) subjects wearing white masks (Fanon, 1986 [1952]), he inflects the concept of 'mimicry' in the terms of a difference that is "almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha 1994: 86): "When colonial discourse encourages the colonial subject to 'mimic' the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a 'blurred copy' of the colonizer that can be quite threatening" (Bill Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998: 139). Mimicry, like camouflage, reveals the colonized subject's consciousness of cultural, political, and social 'inauthenticity', that is, of being ideologically constructed and fixed in representation. "Its threat", says Bhabha, "comes from the prodigious and strategic production of conflictual, fantastic, discriminatory 'identity effects' in the play of a power that is elusive because it hides no essence, no 'itself'" (1994: 90).

The concept of inauthenticity, together with the implied awareness of playing a role and/or wearing a mask, finds a privileged place, and a quite utopic understanding, in the novel *Londonstani*, by the Anglo-Indian novelist and journalist Gautam Malkami (2006). It describes the shifting and hybridized identity of a London-based youth subculture, whose language, dress, behaviour and gesticulation are performed by the British 'white' main character of the novel in order to be accepted by the black group's components. The writer uses this reversed, and even more parodic version of mimicry to transcend, question and resist the assumption of essentialized ethnic identities (cf. Esposito, 2009). In an interview he said:

> I really like the idea of performed identity. […] The whole point of the book was to look at the construction and performance of inauthentic identities among young people today regardless of race. The Myspace, Facebook generation, whatever you want to call it, it's the first generation where […] [i]t doesn't matter what race you are, what class you are,

what gender you are even, it's all changeable. […] you have a cut and paste identity ... we're talking about kids who have no connection with their roots whatsoever. And 'roots', that's a meaningless term when you're a third generation British Asian, isn't it? […] I don't mean we don't have them, I just mean roots don't necessarily have to take precedence over another form of identity. […] Some people choose, third generation, to be more Indian than their parents. But it's a choice – it's not coming from within your blood vessels... (Graham, 2008)

All the characters in the story perform their identities through protean and spectacular practices to "assert their own brands of Britishness", says the quarter page of the novel. In fact, Britishness itself, like any other cultural identity, can only be the product of performative acts, as any national identity is the product and expression of an invented, 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1982). As John Storey points out using the specific vocabulary of performance studies:

> […] the performance of nationality creates the illusion of a prior substantiality — a core national self — and suggests that the performative ritual of nationness is merely an expression of an already existing nationality. However, our nationality is not the expression of the location in which we are born, it is performatively constructed in processes of repetition and citation, which gradually produce and reinforce our sense of national belonging. […] National performativity is not a voluntary practice, it is a continual process of almost disciplinary reiteration. National identity is created through repeated and sustained social performances and involves citations of previous performances of nationality. (2010: 20)

However, as Malkani shows in his novel, a performer's autonomy is not negated by the framework of performativity; indeed, she or he can decide when, where, and how to enact (perform) certain identities, but the cultural and social histories of those identities (their performativity) must be taken into account. So, as we have seen, it is the negotiation of a performer's free will with the history of an identity which actually influences the efficacy of the performance as a mutational or resistant force.

Auslander (1994) reformulates the question by identifying this kind of efficacy in postmodern performance. Echoing the post-structural critique of 'presence' related to the autonomy of the body, he thinks that in our information-saturated time a shift has occurred from a strategy of 'transgressive efficacy' – as a 'presence' outside and in open opposition to the alienating power of dominant social structures, which it seeks to overthrow – to a strategy of 'resistant efficacy' – arising from within the very forces of normative power which it challenges, so that, rather than oppose them, it 'infiltrates' them through subtle critiques and/or parodies. This reminds us of the difference between the anti-establishment *counter*culture of the sixties, with its protest marches and its disaffiliation from the social and institutional order, and the less transgressive but no less spectacular youth *sub*cultures, which grow and keep themselves inside the system, but resist its norms by elaborating alternative dress, gestural and linguistic codes (cf. Hebdige, 1979).

Agency and the postmodern 'resistant efficacy'

Cultural studies had actually already detected this kind of resistant strategies in the British subcultures of the sixties and seventies, analysing their signifying material practices and 'rituals' as subversive forms through which to negotiate social identity and exhibit the hegemonic power of dominant culture. Suffice it to mention the seminal works of Stuart Hall and Toni Jefferson, entitled *Resistance through Rituals* (1976) and dedicated to post-war youth behaviour, and of Dick Hebdige (1979). Hebdige, in particular, emphasised the spectacular excesses by which such subcultures as the mods or punks articulated their subject positions by resorting to a *bricolage* or cut'n'mix style, in other words, by recombining and re-signifying items belonging to dominant culture in quite a carnivalesque way – in Bachtinian terms. Auslander is right, however, in his interpretation of the 'more subtle' model of resistant efficacy as more typically postmodern if we take into account both the more elusive and dissimulated forms of power disseminated in what today it would be difficult to comprehend as a homogeneous block of power or dominant culture – fragmented as the latter is "into a plurality of life-style sensibilities" (Chaney, 2004: 47) – and the obsolete idea of a class-based resistance perpetuated by groups which were identified as authentic and authentically anti-hegemonic. In more recent times post-subcultural studies have stressed the ideas of 'life-style' and 'pleasure' as linked both to subcultural practices – that, on the contested terrain of culture, are in a perennial dialectics between resistance and containment and thus can also "buttress, reinforce, and justify the prevailing social and cultural mores and political orders" (Turner, 1974: 72) – and to subcultural identities – understood, as by Malkani, as more fluid, playful and interchangeable. Post-subcultural studies have also more forcefully stressed the idea of 'performance' as something more multidimensional, to be preferred to material 'practice'.

The idea of performance necessarily implies the body. Notwithstanding the post-structuralist critique of 'presence', as McKenzie clarifies, "the body has in no way disappeared from performance studies. Indeed, bodies have multiplied and diversified as more and more people have taken up cultural performance as a means to challenge social norms" (2001: 42). Actually, given the strong affinities with cultural studies' praxis and areas of inquiry, what mostly differentiates performance studies from the latter, as Tracy C. Davis brings to the fore, is that "emphatically in performance studies bodies are corporeal, not merely textual, and speech emanates from people with corporeality as well as identities" (2008: 6). Indeed, according to Julia Walker (2003), the repeated trope of performance, with its emphasis upon actors acting upon the world, is dictated by the perception of a loss of individual agency within late capitalist culture and by the need to rearticulate human presence and experience (which constitutes a kind of 'visceral' knowledge, with its emphasis on speech, voice, gesture) in relation to the objectifying textuality of contemporary cultural relations. Against a modernist split text/body she seems to advocate a greater emphasis on that "mediated play of embodied practices and discursive statements" argued by McKenzie (2001: 42). As Walker says: "subject positions are *lived in the body*. Though our conceptual knowledge of that body

may be restricted to epistemological categories that are created in and through verbal language, there are other modes of knowledge that may be able to disrupt those epistemological categories. […] [M]eanings shape and are shaped by a fully embodied experience of the world" (2003: 169).

As McKenzie puts it, the body and its performances still seem to be a powerful resource in not becoming 'servomechanisms' of the ultra-rational environment we live in; an environment in which all knowledge, evaluated in terms of operational efficiency or commensurability, is objectified and commodified (2001: 14). In fact, as Walker points out, in such a system, governed by the late-capitalist service economy, "the primary commodity of exchange is labor power itself", so that "the very act of serving, doing, making – in short, the act of acting – not only becomes a thing, but in its newly intensified form of alienation threatens to erase the actor whose labor it is" (2003: 170). However, "[w]hile capitalism's ever-expanding logic of rationalization seeks to colonize the mind, the actual material body remains largely outside that logic, offering itself as a kinetic force of political resistance" (171). Postmodern (sub)cultural performances such as those enacted in more recent times by skateboarders or by *parkour* practitioners are in fact understandable as embodied tactics and strategies of resistance aimed at anthropomorphizing and appropriating the growingly alienating spaces of the city – a place now existing mainly for the benefit of globalized flows of information and capital.

In his study on skateboarding, which draws extensively on Henry Lefebvre's work, Iain Borden underlines the "body-centric and multi-sensory performative activity" of these postmodern performers who, "indifferent to function, price and regulation", create new patterns of space and time through their moves and creative, rhythmic actions. In doing so they challenge "the notion that space is there to be obeyed, and that we exist solely as efficient automata within the processes of exchange and accumulation. […] [S]kateboarding suggests the move from things to works, from design to experiential creativity" (2004: 257). Evidently this has little to do with the former subcultural – and even less countercultural – attitude. As Borden points out, "skateboarders as a group of young people are not about to take over the revolutionary mission of the proletariat; […] they in no way seek to fundamentally alter anything. […] They offer only an 'infra-politics' of resistance, a 'hidden transcript' intelligible only to other skaters" (266). Being basically "a pleasure-driven activity", a "productive-of-nothing labour", skateboarders' performance is mainly "disruptive of the optimal management of urban space. Where business invades not only economics and politics but also social experience, […] skateboarding rejects the 'efficiency' and economic logic of urban space, undertaking an activity which, by business standards, has an entirely different rationale" (257). Traversing city spaces dedicated to business 'exchange' activities, they give them a different, embodied, 'use' value and thus re-signify them. The relationship of the performer's body and self to the spaces of the city is fundamental as skateboarders use their particular appropriation of the city to construct themselves and their relations with others. As Border underlines, this "is a true dialectic of the social and the spatial, each produced through the other" (266).

The tight relationship of youth subcultures with the city space is likewise detected by Conquergood's focus on gang communication. He emphasizes gangs nonverbal channels of communication – "hand signs, color of clothing, tilt of a baseball cap, brand of tennis shoes and style of lacing, whistles, visual icons […], mode of crossing arms, and earrings" (1994: 27) – in their overall repertoire of communication practices (whose defining term is *repping*, short for 'representing'), but, most of all, he notices that the "communicative task of the gang group is to transform marginal, somewhat forbidding urban space into a hood – to make a world of meaning, familiarity, adventures, and affective intensity through rituals, symbol and dramaturgy" (39). Pushed to the margins by the powerful, indifferent forces of production and consumption logics, they literally re-inscribe these marginal spaces with their meanings; they build a hood, which represents "a space for the nurturance of agency, intimacy, and meaning" (52) and express their 'love' for it by writing on its walls. The hood so becomes "an *embodied* space, a living space of sensuous communication" (49), to such an extent that "the tattooed and signifying bodies of gang members become mirrors and mobile extensions of the graffiti-inscribed walls" (50).

As Susan Bennett notices, cities have increasingly "become a subject of performance studies so as to elaborate the relationship between a particular iteration of urban space and those who use it. […] The lens of performance studies is useful precisely because of its attentiveness to this sense of 'hereness', or what Alan Blum would call the 'scenes' of a city" (2008: 77). David Chaney echoes this vision of the city as "a stage for public drama" (1994: 148) and complements it with an understanding of the modern urban experience's resistant efficacy as something that, "rather than complying with a commonly acknowledged and 'objective' social narrative, comprises a series of competing fictive interpretations" (148). Emblematic in this regard is the project of the English performance group Blast Theory, as it posits itself somewhere in-between theatre and computer games, stressing the playful dimension implied in the very idea of performance. In its projects the urban map of London is re-constructed through GPS technology as a huge platform game. Responding to cryptic instructions and uncertain rules that are provided to them through the Internet, the players (audience members turned into improvised actors) move and interact with other performers in the interconnected space of the city under the slogan "City as Theatre". Participation is often figured as a potent method of empowerment or agency, and Blast Theory's work certainly illustrates this effect. However, as Helen Freshwater points out, it also positions the participant

> […] in a world where she is watched over by forces she cannot control, influence or comprehend. […] The model of interaction presented is one in which freedom to choose is profoundly compromised by the limitations of the system in which choices are made. These shows' exploration of the limitations of interaction provokes in me a profound unease about the connections between participation and agency […] within the broader cultural and political sphere. (2009: 70-71)

This concern with the efficacy of "the voice of the public within culture" (71) – that is, of the 'embodied' performance within the restrictions of 'discursive' conventions – seems to be, however, as noted by Freshwater, precisely the kind of reaction that Blast Theory are hoping to provoke. The company's artistic director, Matt Adams, has acknowledged that there are productions that simply require participants to fit into roles that are already scripted for them and he has also observed on the company's website: "These projects have posed important questions about the meaning of interaction and especially, its limitation. Who is invited to speak, under what conditions and what that is truly meaningful can be said?" (www.blasttheory.co.uk). Yet Adams also asserts that it is worth taking the risk of exploring the anxieties and tensions roused by this kind of experiment. Participation, fostered by interactivity and user-generated content, is actually designed to be disturbing and unsettling, and even though Adams cannot guarantee the pieces have transformative potential, they allow the performers to physically create and emotionally respond to imaginative spaces in which they can explore their freedom of movement and speech.

Of course, the technological environment foregrounded by these projects is something towards which attention is highly alerted today. As the world appears to be growingly dominated by technology, whose performative measure is 'effectiveness', the 'efficacy' of resistant performances is more and more being tested in the digital environment, not only through the openly subversive practice of hacking but also through embodied tactics aimed at making a creative and unconventional use of the internet and info-mobility in the public space. For example, the so-called *wireless internet performance* of a group of London students who some time ago had the idea of marking the city spots where it was possible to exploit the non-protected Wi-Fi connections of offices, houses or public institutions, so as to 'steal' the connection, as it were. This gave rise to the related phenomenon of *war-walking* (*wonder and walking*) in the city in search of an exploitable connection, with the term 'war' alluding to both the cyber-guerrilla that the young *bricoleurs* were engaged in, and the 'wonder' provoked by a conflict essentially based on an alternative, displacing use of the city space (Infante, 2006: 126).

If this can be considered a direct progeny of the sixties Situationists and of their affective, experiential wanderings in the city through psycho-geographical maps, it must be noted that today's hyper-technologised and mediatised environment exponentially complicates the scenario. As McKenzie puts it: "the citationality of discourses and practices is passing across an electronic threshold, a digital *limen*. Words and gestures, statements and behaviours, symbolic systems and living bodies are being recorded, archived, and recombined through multimedia communication networks. Liminal and liminoid genres are becoming cyberspatial, flighty, liminautic" (2001: 94). The metaphor of the Cyborg, envisioned by Donna Haraway (1991) as a euphemism for cybernetic organism, or a hybrid of machine and body, is the perfect emblem of this novel configuration. But the cyborg is also a metaphor by which 'posthuman' performance artists such as the well known Stelarc, Orlan or Guillermo Gómez-Peña, by using their bodies as both affected by and affecting digital technologies, challenge

the idea that identity is merely inscribed by them. They create strategies of resistance that enable us to rethink the construction of identity and technology as implicated in a perennial dialectics of inscription *and* resistance. As Charles R. Garoian and Yvonne M. Gaudelius remind us, since the years of the Living Theatre "performance art has emerged as a site of contestation, an aesthetic space wherein artists have exposed, examined and critiqued the impact of emerging technologies on the body in order to gain political and creative agency within contemporary culture" (2001: 334). They have also 'exposed, examined and critiqued' what Butler (1990) defines as the 'culturally intelligible body': a body "mediated through discourse from a variety of texts, producing a legible body that is separate from the physical body to which it is attached" (Garoian and Gaudelius, 2001: 337). Digital culture undeniably inscribes the body with its 'texts', but as Katherine Hayles notices, "culture not only flows from the [cultural] environment into the body but also emanates from the body into the [cultural] environment. The body produces culture at the same time that culture produces the body" (1999: 200). With body and culture so interconnected, the cyborg signifies embodiment that, in its "continual state of liminality, contingency, and ephemerality", can also "determine its own fate, to produce its own cultural identity" (Garoian and Gaudelius, 2001: 338).

The 'embodiment' of writing

Both performing art and performance studies have actually worked hard to dismantle the long lasting, and prejudicial, idea of culture as uniquely made out of texts, emblematized by the metaphor employed by Clifford Geertz (1973) of culture-as-text and of the ethnographic field as a 'manuscript'. Diana Taylor (2003), for example, challenges the preponderance of writing/textuality as objects and metaphors of analysis in humanities and social sciences and calls for a greater consideration of the 'repertoire' (including 'processual' cultural forms such as ritual, gesture, music, dance, vernacular speech, and the body itself) as a means of storing and transmitting knowledge alongside the 'archive' (including written texts such as documents, letters, maps). She reminds us that when culture was primarily oral, history, memory, and knowledge were usually transmitted in the repertoire, and that these continue to be transmitted as such in non-Western and marginalized ethnic groups, many of whom have been accused of having no history just because of the absence of a preponderance of written materials.

No wonder that, in reaction to a long lasting scriptocentric bias, texts have been conversely regarded with suspicion by many because considered to be implicated in the reproduction of authority. But Conquergood basically agrees with Taylor when he advices to take into account the fundamental role of performances as forms of cultural production without pitting the Performance Paradigm 'against' the Textual Paradigm and instead to use the Performance Paradigm to "decentre" the hegemony of texts, rather than discard them (1991: 191). W. B. Worthen quotes Joseph Roach's advocated suspension of a "schematized opposition of literacy and orality as transcendent

categories" because "these modes of communication have produced one another interactively over time" (1998: 1100).

Talking about the specific field of literature Worthen points out that, just as performance should be seen as a contested concept, "[t]exts – with their boundaries in flux, their authors appearing and disappearing, even their typography dissolving on the computer screen – might as well be seen as similarly contested fields, fields in which notions of authority are constantly under negotiation, redefinition, change" (1100). The concept of text, indeed, has dramatically changed over time: from a substantial and enclosed work or 'object' to one of an intertextual (and palimpsestic) field of "play, activity, production, practice" (Barthes, 1977: 162); something much more similar to a 'performance' in fact. Jerome McGann has likewise suggested that "a 'text' is not a material 'thing' but a material event or set of events, a point in time (or a moment in space) where certain communicative interchanges are being practiced" (1991: 21). McGann in turn is echoed by Derek Attridge when he says that "the artwork is not an object but an event, […] it comes into existence, again and again, always differently, each time a reader, listener or viewer experiences the arrangement of sounds or images as a work of art" (2011: 332). The idea, he recognizes, is not completely new, as reader-response theories have long emphasised the role of the active reader as a 'performer' who negotiates and actualizes the text at each reading. But other critics too have rather 'symptomatically' employed theatrical metaphors. John Glavin, for example, has explicitly declared his intention to 'update' reading as performance, or rather, we would say, as 'restored behaviour'. As the theatrical performer always knows that his/her work is belated, in the sense of coming after a script, the reader must know that reading too is belated: "Those who read for themselves – rather than merely repeat others' readings – are in fact always 'after' and always 'aftering', always restoring, adapting, supplying, making texts and promulgating meanings" (Glavin, 1999: 4). Not to mention, finally, the contemporary discussion about digital hypertexts, whose open and rhyzhomatic configuration so strongly encourages interactivity and 're-writing' on the part of the reader that specialists such as Stuart Moulthorp (1995) have been led to expressly define them as 'performance spaces' in which inter-actors are given the possibility to experience agency.

The novelty in Attridge's treatment of the subject actually lies in its overview of the phenomenon inside the theoretical framework of Affect Theory. Echoing Stanley Fish when he points at both "the action of the text *on* a reader and the actions performed *by* a reader" (Fish, 1980: 4), Attridge emphasizes the overall 'affective', 'experiential' dimension of the literary text 'as' performance: "[literature] *performs* hurting, teaching, obscure and so on, relying on the effectiveness of the *as if* to provide an experience that replicates modes of thinking and feeling in the non-literary domain" (2011: 333). The reader experiences the text affectively, non only cognitively, and his affects are 'performed emotions' because they are "coloured by an awareness that they are being prompted by art" (340). In addition – Attridge concludes – "this is an enjoyment we can experience over and over again, precisely because it's not a response to an object but to

an event, or rather the response *is* the event, an event that changes with us as we change. We can always read it once more, with feeling" (340).

The need to rearticulate the human body, its experience and feelings is even more evident in the project of performative writing, for example in the works by performance theorists Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Peggy Phelan, who have also experimented this kind of writing to try to convey the 'feel' (the colours, smell, rhythm, emotions) of the spectacle when describing and analysing performance events. Even though it lacks the 'live' dimension of a true oral and/or gestural performance, this highly evocative writing seeks to blur the boundaries between speech and written language, so that writing itself may become a performance, a sensory event capable of recreating in the mind and body of the reader the experience 'lived in the body' by the writer. But performative writing is also a site of conflicting desires, between an irrepressible will for 'meaning' and a specific resistance to it; a conflict that straightens out, as Della Pollock explains, only because "writing as *doing* displaces writing as meaning" (1998: 75). In doing so, it challenges not only a too easy distinction between performance and text, but also an equally easy "absorption of performance into textuality as 'performativity'" (74). So, the answer to the claims of textuality, Pollock concludes, is "not to write less but to write more: to write in excess of norms of scholarly presentation, to write beyond textuality, […] to make writing/textuality speak, to, of, and through pleasure, possibility, disappearance, and even pain. In other words, to make writing *perform*" (79, my italics).

Notes

1. The provenance of the term from Theatre Studies allows for an understanding of performance in all other fields and disciplines as a metaphor or, more generally, as a trope, and the majority of the works quoted in this article use it as such. However, as Schechner (2013) basically seems to mean and Fabrizio Deriu (2012) to argue with conviction, performance is something reality doesn't refer to in terms of similarity but something which it is 'constituted' by in terms of dynamism, processuality, provisionality, and last but not least, 'showing doing'.

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