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## **All Performance Is Electronic: Feedback Requested**

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### **Thought entertainment**

How to entertain this thought: all performance is electronic? I ask this with other spirits in mind, in the spirit of Albert Einstein's thought experiments, Ludwig Wittgenstein's language games, and Avital Ronell's hallucinogenes. Guided by these spirited thinkers, I wish to generate feedback from you on some strange loops connecting performance and technology, loops so striking that they have made me think all performance is electronic. The circuitry installed through these loops perhaps constitutes a fictive event, one whose reverb is nonetheless all too real. (Just ask the ghosts of Einstein about the fallout from other thought experiments.)

To put things in yet another theoretical frame, one whose most articulate construction dates from 1955: this entertainment will be an experiment in performative rather than constative theory. That is, instead of proposing the statement "all performance is electronic" as a report or description of some reality, I ask that it be entertained as a discursive event, one which, in the words of J.L. Austin, "does something." Channeling Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, I ask you to evaluate not the truth or falsity of "all performance is electronic," but rather its success or failure, its felicity or infelicity, its happiness or unhappiness as a speech act. And as I seek to produce an entertaining experiment, one which gives an other thought, your own felicity is also at stake. Will "all performance is electronic" make you happy or unhappy?

I ask this last question because, though this text stages rather some abstract formulations, its method is concretely guided by immanent forces, personal and impersonal, autobiographical and sociotechnical. As I hope to show, this thought entertainment has actually been in spirited rehearsal for decades. I have merely been reading its script for a few years now and remain unsure whether its performative future will be felicitous or not.

### **Performance: the timing and placement of its make-up**

To initiate the thought entertainment, let us imagine that the strange loops between performance and technology were first installed during the formation of what has become known as the field

of performance studies. Before getting to these loops in a rather graphic manner, let's take a quick pass through three texts whose survey of this formation can help us place and date it.

First, in the introduction to his 1984 anthology *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*, John J. MacAloon describes the foundational moment of the study of performance in these terms:

Dell Hymes has coined the phrase "breakthrough into performance" to describe the passage of human agents into a distinctive mode of existence and realization. "Breakthrough into performance" equally well configures certain initially independent intellectual developments in the 1950s that have served as a foundation for the now rapidly expanding and coalescing interests in the study of cultural forms exemplified by this volume. No historian of ideas has yet attended to the complicated history of the performative approach. (2)

While not explicitly attending to such a complicated history himself, MacAloon nonetheless summarizes the key theoretical contributions made by four writers in the 1940s and 1950s: Victor Turner's concept of "social drama," Milton Singer's "cultural performance," Kenneth Burke's "dramatistic pentad," and Erving Goffman's "social psychology of everyday life."

A more recent survey of the performance studies field reiterates most of the components of MacAloon's foundational moment. Carol Simpson Stern and Bruce Henderson's 1993 *Performance: Texts and Contexts*, one of the first textbooks of the field, offers this definition of performance:

The term performance incorporates a whole field of human activity. It embraces a verbal act in everyday life or a staged play, a rite of invective played in urban streets, a performance in the Western traditions of high art, or a work of performance art. It includes cultural performances, such as personal narratives of folk and fairy tales, or more communal forms of ceremony—the National Democratic Convention, an evening vigil march for people with AIDS, Mardi Gras, or a bullfight. It also includes literary performance, the celebration of individual genius, and conformity to Western definitions of art. In all cases a performance act, interactional in nature and involving symbolic forms and live bodies, provides a way to constitute meaning and affirm individual and cultural values. (3)

Simpson Stern and Henderson do not attempt an intellectual history of performance studies; nonetheless, as was the case with MacAloon's introduction, their first chapter's longest section, "Scholarly Definitions of Performance," can be read as rehearsing such a history. Indeed, it too discusses four authors—three of whom were also cited by MacAloon (Turner, Burke and Goffman)—as among a "number of scholars of performance who have attempted to define performance and performers." Instead of Singer, these authors discuss Richard Schechner and his concept of "restored behavior." This citation of Schechner leads us to the third text, for it was written by him.

In a 1989 editorial of *The Drama Review*, Schechner provides his own historical outline of what he calls "the performance studies paradigm."

The performance studies paradigm came to the fore in the mid-1950s. Gregory Bateson's "A Theory of Play and Fantasy" was published in 1955, the same year as J.L. Austin's Harvard lectures on the *performatives* (*How to Do Things with Words*). Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* was published in 1959; Albert B. Lord's *The Singer of Tales* in 1960; and Roger Callois' *Man, Play, and Games* in 1961. My "Approaches to Theory/Criticism" was published in 1966; Dell Hymes' "Model of the Interaction of Language and Social Setting" in 1967. Victor Turner's *The Ritual Process* came out in 1969, his *Drama, Fields and Metaphors* in 1974. Milton Singer's *When a Great Tradition Modernizes* appeared in 1972. *Folklore: Performance and Communication* (editors, Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth Goldstein) was published in 1974 as was Barbara Myerhoff's *The Peyote Hunt. Secular Ritual* (edited by Myerhoff and Sally Moore) appeared in 1977, the same year as Richard Bauman's *Verbal Art as Performance*. ("PAJ Distorts the Broad Spectrum" 7)

Schechner stresses that the formation of performance studies is on-going and, in a footnote, that his outline focuses only on its development in the United States. With the exception of Burke, he lists all the authors cited by MacAloon, Simpson Stern and Henderson—plus many others. There is thus a certain consistency to the three surveys of performance studies.

Our quick pass through these three texts suggests several things. First, the listings and discussions of authors and concepts indicate that the field of research called performance studies was invented, even "made-up." As Schechner points out, "All modern disciplines with the exception of classical languages, philosophy and theology, were *made-up* since the Renaissance. What constitutes an academic discipline is not an event *out there* in the world — but the felt need

among a community of scholars to gather people who are concerned with a particular set of questions, data, and methods." (6). With the institutionalization of this discipline, not just anyone can research and teach performance; to produce and disseminate this knowledge, scholars are now trained, examined, and authorized to do so. In short, they are institutionally empowered as subjects of performative knowledge. This involves the reading of canonical texts and the writing of articles and books on performance, as well as the participation in courses, seminars, workshops, and conferences devoted to its study. Thus the objects we call "performance" are not events simply "out there," but are themselves invented. Performance scholars do not find or discover already existing performances; rather, through a combination of statements and practices, they construct performance as an object of conceptual knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

I'm stressing the made-up nature of performance because it grounds our thought entertainment, our experiment in performative rather than constative theory. No doubt much, indeed most, performance research implicitly poses itself as constative by describing, analyzing, and interpreting objects "external" to their study: however, such research does so only by taking for granted the cultural and historical make-up of its invention, in other words, the performativity of its own discourses and practices. Significantly, Schechner himself raises a related issue in the same footnote mentioned above when he asks: "is performance studies a Western invention?" I'll pose this response: yes, and this invention can be inventoried by reading how the concept of performance has been theorized in terms of such concepts as "presence," "live bodies," and "human agents." To keep to cites at hand: recall that MacAloon cites cultural performance as involving the "passage of human agents into a distinctive mode of existence and realization," while Simpson Stern and Henderson state that the "term performance incorporates a whole field of human activity." In all cases a performance act, interactional in nature and involving symbolic forms and live bodies.

If we had the time and space, we could place these passages within the Western epoch which Jacques Derrida has called logocentrism. For now, let's situate the invention of performance more precisely than in the "West" by noting two things: first, both MacAloon and Schechner cite the 1950s as the time when the field that would become performance studies began to emerge. Second, Schechner's qualification that his outline focuses only on its development in the United States is not arbitrary: in many ways, performance was made in the U.S. of A. Not only were most of its early theoreticians either American or working in the United States; not only were the first academic departments of performance studies located here; but perhaps more telling is this bit of linguistic lore: the use of the term "performance" as outlined above occurs predominantly in American English rather than British and rarely, if ever, in French, the language which the OED cites in its etymology of "perform" (from the Old French *par* (thoroughly) + *fournir* (to furnish)).

Performance studies and its objects of study thus are a Western invention, one whose formation can be placed and dated within our thought entertainment as initiating in the United States during the 1950s. With these spatiotemporal coordinates in place, let's turn to the strange loops connecting performance and technology.

### **Reengineering from ritual to theatre**

I have requested your feedback in order to collectively entertain the thought "all performance is electronic." So far, however, the definitions surveyed here have, if anything, made our experiment infelicitous: they stress not a technological but a human essence of performance. Yet this emphasis on the exclusively human aspect of performance has recently come into question, along with the closely connected aspects of presence and live bodies.

Philip Auslander argues in *Presence and Resistance* that the theories and practices which came to define the transgressive performances of the 1960s are no longer politically or aesthetically adequate. Analyzing the work of several performers from the 1980s, he offers a critique of the performance concept defined in terms of human agents, live bodies and, most importantly, presence. In its place, he develops a theory of performance which foregrounds the role of media and mediation in performances by Laurie Anderson, Sandra Bernhard, Spalding Gray, Andy Kaufman, and The Wooster Group. Auslander contends that through the use of technological media and an active engagement with mediated culture, these performers resist social institutions from within rather transgress them from without. This passage from presence to mediation, from transgression to resistance, and more generally, from modernism to postmodernism, is emblemized theoretically in a section entitled "From the Politics of Ecstasy to the Ecstasy of Communication," in which Auslander contrasts an early Schechner text to a more recent one by Jean Baudrillard.

Auslander's theorization of mediated performance art of the 1980s is important to the field of performance studies for it helps open the way for consideration of technological as well as human aspects of performance. As I have suggested, some strange loops between performance and technology were installed very early on in the formation of the field, loops which can be traced to the first theorist Schechner lists in his outline of performance studies' intellectual history: Gregory Bateson. In a very concrete sense, Bateson installed the elemental circuit for our thought entertainment.

Bateson's research is best encapsulated in his 1972 *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, a collection of essays ranging across a wide variety of disciplines, including anthropology, psychology, ecology, arms control, biology, and logic. What connected all his thinking was an ongoing fascination with patterns of governance--cybernetics--within and between different systems: environmental, animal, human, and technological. Our script focuses on the elemental system: the feedback loop.

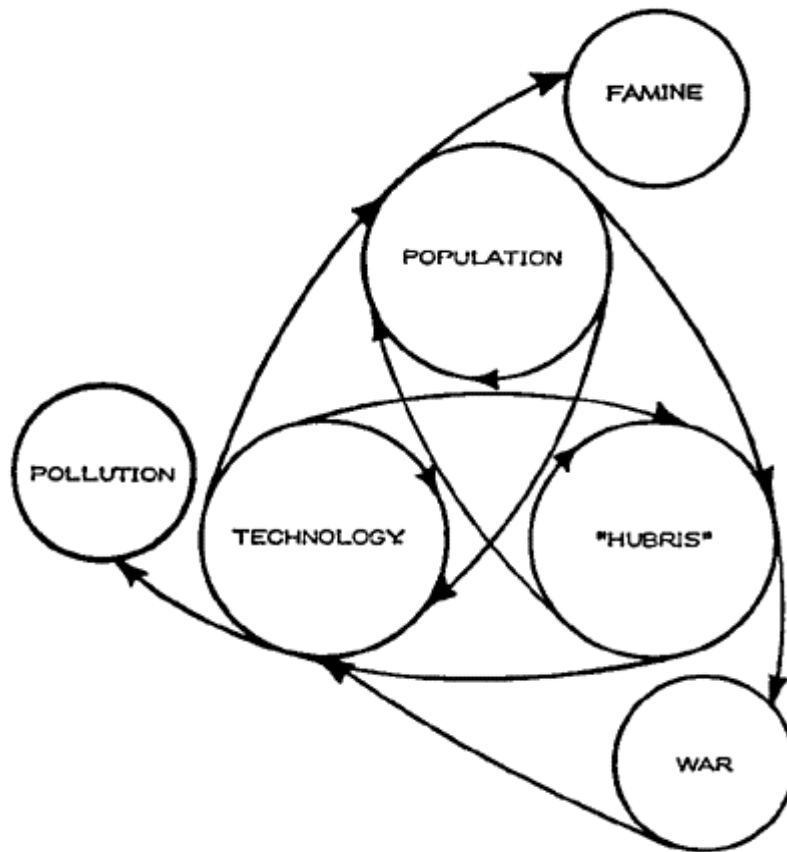


Figure 3. The Dynamics of Ecological Crisis

Bateson's own development of this feedback concept stretches from his 1935 essay "Culture Contact and Schismogenesis" onward. In his 1949 essay, "Bali: The Value System of a Steady State," he refined his theory of schismogenic and nonschismogenic social systems (i.e., those leading, respectively, to schism and to steady state) in terms of "regenerative" and "degenerative" circles, terms defined in this footnote.

The terms "regenerative" and "degenerative" are borrowed from communications engineering. A regenerative or "vicious" circle is a chain of variable of the general type: increase in A causes increase in B; increase in B causes increase in C; ... increase in N causes increase in A. Such a system, if provided with the necessary energy sources and if external factors permit, will clearly operate at a greater and

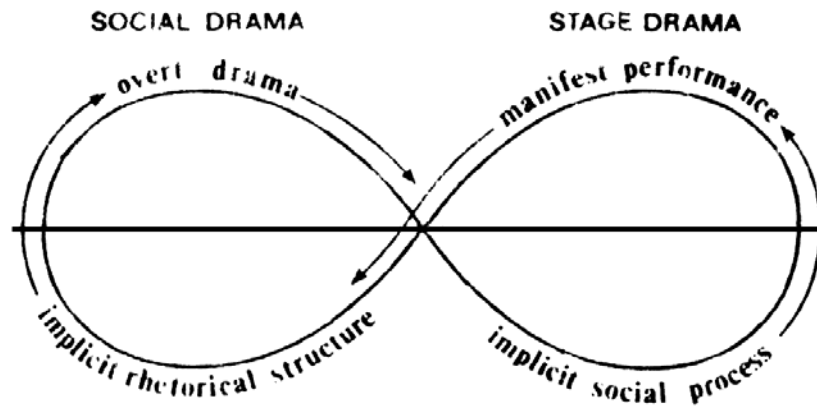
greater rate of intensity. A "degenerative" or "self-corrective" circle differs from a regenerative circle in containing at least one link of the type: "increase in N causes decrease in M." The house thermostat or the steam engine governor are examples of such self-correcting systems. (109n3)

The thermostat and governor become commonplaces, sets or props if you like, within Bateson's script. Regenerative and degenerative circles are also known as positive and negative feedback loops, and Bateson installed them in all sorts of places, from the Cold War arms race to the art and dance of the Balinese. For us, feedback is the elemental circuit, the strange loop between performance and technology. To trace the way Bateson's circles turn up in the performance studies paradigm, we follow its twisting motion between two foundational theorists cited above.

The first theorist is anthropologist Victor Turner, whose concept of social drama has been staged all across the performance field. Along with liminality, the social drama is one of Turner's most important theoretical inventions. Social dramas involve the use of rituals to redress breaches and restore structural balance within traditional (i.e., agrarian, oral) cultures. Turner was also a reader of Bateson, whose theory of framing he elsewhere cites in relation to liminality. Bateson's cybernetics can be sensed in the "Social Dramas and Stories About Them."

Social dramas are in large measure political processes, that is, they involve competition for scarce ends--power, dignity, prestige, honor, purity?by means and by the utilization of resources that are also scarce?goods, territory, money, men and women. Ends, means, and resources are caught up in an interdependent feedback process. (From *Ritual to Theater* 71-72)

This feedback occurs in the social drama's phase of redressive ritual, which can be thought of here as a thermostat governing the balance of social structure and anti-structure. Turner's use of feedback concepts extends beyond his concept of social drama,<sup>2</sup> and he not only utilized feedback concepts discursively; he also made use of a strange feedback diagram. This is the feedback from ritual to theatre:



The left loop represents the social drama; above the line is the overt drama, below it, the implicit rhetorical structure; the right loop represents stage drama; above the line is the manifest performance, below it, the implicit social process, with its structural contradictions. Arrows pointing from left to right represent the course of action. They follow the phases of the social drama above the line in the left loop, descending to cross into the lower half of the right loop where they represent the hidden social infrastructures. The arrows then ascend and, moving now from right to left, pass through the successive phases of a generalized stage drama. At the point of intersection between the two loops, they descend once more to form the hidden aesthetic model underpinning, so to speak, the overt social drama. (73-74)

The "output" of social drama becomes an "input" of stage drama, whose own "output" then becomes an "input" of social drama. Feedback is not used here simply as a metaphor; its extensive use forms a matrix in Turner's thought and his life. In his Introduction, Turner discusses how his parents' careers contributed to his own lifework, specifically, his theory of social dramas. His mother was an actress, a fact also addressing itself to our own fictive event. "My father, though, was an electrical (in American terms, "electronic") engineer" (8). This feedback between life and theory is what makes thought entertaining and efficacious and thus worth undertaking.

Perhaps we are beginning to make some felicitous progress in our experiment: if Turner's concept of social drama is indeed foundational to performance studies, and feedback is crucial to his invention of social drama, then technological feedback haunts the foundations of performance research. But let's read from the scripts of another theorist of performance, someone who not only theorized performance, but who also put it into practice, both theatrically and academically: Richard Schechner.

Like Turner's concept of social dramas, Schechner's concept of restored behavior is cited in Simpson Stern and Henderson's "Scholarly Definitions of Performance." In *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, Schechner defines restored behavior as "the main characteristic of performance" (36), for it works upon and with other behavior, whether historical or fictional. It is a citational process of citing, playing back, and transforming past behavior under the guidance of a future performance. "Performance means: never for the first time. It means: for the second to the nth time. Performance is 'twice-behaved behavior'" (36). Schechner states that the "work of restoration" occurs in rehearsals, workshops, and master-novice training. Significantly, he draws up a loop diagram of the workshop-rehearsal and staged performance relation.

Figure 2.10 shows how the deep structure of workshop-rehearsal inverts the deep structure of performance. In workshop-rehearsal real work is being done, work that is serious and problematical: indicative, "is." But the daily experience of workshop-rehearsal? what a casual observer might feel? is an "as if," something tentative, subjunctive. Workshops are liminoid, creating an "as if" scalpel used to cut into the actual lives of those making the performance.

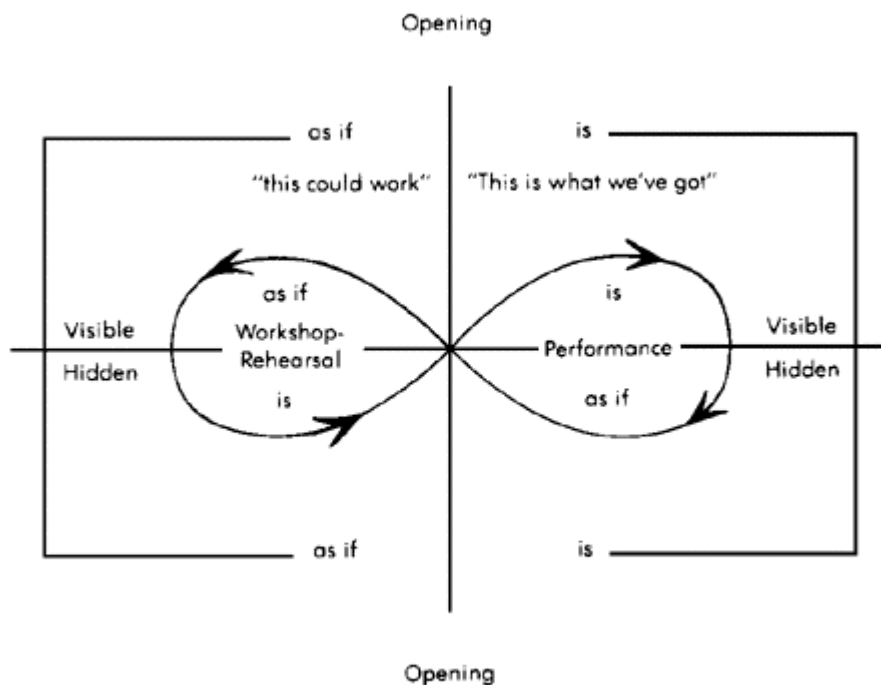


Figure 2.10

The finished performance text is the inverse of the workshop-rehearsal. The performance text displayed before an audience, or requiring their participation, is "indicative". (102-103)

Schechner, another reader of Bateson, uses feedback concepts not only to theorize restored behavior, but many other inventions as well. In fact, restored behavior can be thought of as the "micro" loop within an immense feedback system whose "macro" loops Schechner began inventing earlier in his career: the relations of entertainment and efficacy, of aesthetic and social drama, and of theatre and ritual were all theorized using feedback concepts. And if the above diagram looks oddly similar to the one used by a certain anthropologist, that's because it is itself a "restored diagram," one caught up in the citational feedback between Turner and Schechner. The diagram used by Turner was cited from Schechner's own "Selective Inattention," where Schechner drew the "infinity loop" to diagram Turner's theory of social dramas. In a later revision of "Selective Inattention," Schechner cites Turner's citation of his diagram: "Victor Turner very much liked the infinity-loop model of the interaction between social and aesthetic drama. He used the loop in two essays elaborating his theories of social drama" (Performance Theory 191).

In our experiment, the infinity-loop also diagrams the feedback of feedback of feedback between Schechner, Turner, Bateson and many other players. This citational circuit, in which proper names and intellectual property rights pass into a liminality without assured return, installed a strange loop between performance and technology, and did so at the initiation of performance studies. Strangely enough, the feedback devices have performed largely undetected for four decades. Perhaps this was one effect of certain power stations of knowledge. Then again, Schechner spent years working in a place called The Performing Garage.

### **That obscure power**

Happily or not, our thought entertainment has made some progress, though it's been a bit circular or?why not?even loopy. The sites and cites we've entertained so far: First, both performance studies and its field of objects are inventions whose formation began in the United States during the 1950s. The social and historical aspects of this invention of performance are part of its foundational event, its own self-legitimizing performativity, a performativity which must be taken into account when one seeks to describe, analyze, or interpret any cultural activity as "performance." Second, an important component of this performative invention was and remains feedback?feedback concepts, feedback diagrams, and even feedback mechanisms themselves. To differing degrees, Bateson, Turner, and Schechner each worked with feedback to theorize a wide range of activities, and their efforts continue to produce effects on both the study and practice of cultural performance. Third (and here we loop back toward our initial thought), these two points suggest that, in addition to the social and historical factors conditioning its invention, the study of performance also has technical dimensions which condition its formation and which likewise deserve entertainment, if not demand attention.

Let's gather these social, historical, and technical factors together and call them performance's "postmodern conditioning." This term alludes, of course, to Jean-François Lyotard's text, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Though not (yet) a canonical text in performance studies, Lyotard's "report" has everything to do with performance and study. We've seen that the 1950s were crucial to the formation of performance studies paradigm; this decade is likewise important to Lyotard: for him, passage into "the postmodern age [Ö] has been under way since at least the end of the 1950s" (3). He reports on how postmodern knowledge legitimates itself and how this legitimation relates to the broader question of social bonds. "Knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question: who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?" (8-9).

In terms of our thought experiment, my interest lies in Lyotard's answers to these questions, for these answers explicitly involve performance. Significantly, throughout his entire report, Lyotard employs Wittgenstein's theory of language games as his guiding methodology.

There are many language games—a heterogeneity of language particles. They only give rise to institutions in patches. The decision makers, however, attempt to manage these clouds of sociality according to input/output matrices, following a logic which implies that their matrices are commensurable and that the whole is determinable. They allocate our lives for the growth of power. In matters of social justice and of scientific truth alike, the legitimation of that power is based on its optimizing the system's performance—efficiency. (xxiv, my emphasis)

Lyotard gives the language game which has come to dominate both knowledge and social bonds since the 1950s a one-word name: "performativity." Displacing the "grand narratives" of modern legitimation (Emancipation, Progress, Revolution), performative legitimation is now causing the generation and dissemination of knowledge to be increasingly evaluated in terms of optimizing input and output ratios. Its motto: perform—or else!

Lyotard's reference to input/output matrices connects performativity's optimization to a figure we've sighted before—the loop of cybernetics—and thus to the technical aspects of the postmodern condition, as well as certain lessons of the future. Performativity unfolds through powerful circuits, through what he calls the "hegemony of computers," whose electronic memory and processors allow the rapid calculation of inputs and outputs from increasingly diverse language games. In a section entitled "Education and Its Legitimation through Performativity," Lyotard writes: "To the extent that learning is translatable into computer language and the traditional teacher is replaceable by memory banks, didactics can be entrusted to machines linking traditional memory banks (libraries, etc.) and computer data banks to intelligent terminals placed at the student's disposal" (50). Socially, these databanks could become a "dreamy instrument for regulating the market system" but could also "provide social groups with information needed to challenge it" (67).

Where are we in our thought experiment "all performance is electronic"? Our passage through Lyotard's text suggests that all study, not just that of performance studies, becomes performative as it becomes immersed in electronic matrices. How so? All power/knowledge circuits are becoming legitimated?made up, installed, and evaluated?in terms of the efficiency (read productivity and profitability) of their performance. Indeed, the widespread restructurings and downsizings that have occurred in American universities over the past fifteen years have explicitly been designed to make knowledge production and transmission more efficient. This is the same period in which the Cold War inventions of digital computers and networks became widely accessible to all fields of research, not just those of the hard sciences where they were initially installed, but also to those of the social sciences, the arts and the humanities. More importantly, computers have come to dominate the administration of all these fields, of the entire institution of learning, and of all other social institutions as well.

All performance is electronic. How to read this "all"? Up to now, I've implied that performance studies and its objects made up "all performance." But what is the relationship between the performance invented within the performance studies canon and that set forth in Lyotard's Postmodern Condition? Are they the same? If not, how do they differ? And why are such questions only of late being posed? As Peggy Phelan writes in her introduction to *Acting Out: Feminist Performances*, published in 1993: "To date Ö there has been little attempt to bring together the specific epistemological and political possibilities of performance as it is enacted in what are still known, for better or worse, as theater events and the epistemological and political openings enabled by the performative invoked by contemporary theory" (15). Since then, several works have brought together certain openings of performance and performativity to theorize the social construction of gender, sexuality, and race, most notably *Bodies That Matter* by Judith Butler and the anthology *Performativity and Performance*, edited by Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. The primary focus of this research has been the relation between embodied (i.e., theatrical) performances and discursive (i.e., Austinian) performatives. We should note that the reading of Austin in performance studies was forestalled for decades: it took the feminist and queer theorists of the 1990s to show us again *How to Do Things with Words*, a text published in 1962 but based on his 1955 Harvard lectures. The connection between Lyotard's technical "performativity" and performance, however, has likewise been forestalled, as has that between Lyotard's and Austin's performatives.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps all these stalled readings are themselves connected.

The strange obscurity of Lyotard's performativity within the paradigm of performance studies can best be demonstrated by returning to an earlier site, Philip Auslander's *Presence and Resistance*. As suggested above, this text is one of the most provocative studies into the relation between cultural performance and technological media. Its subtitle, *Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in Contemporary American Performance*, articulates the theoretical framework through which Auslander analyzes the resistant performances of Anderson, Gray and the other artists he

discusses. Now the obscurity of Lyotardian performativity arises here not from a failure to cite *The Postmodern Condition*; on the contrary, Auslander repeatedly utilizes this text in his discussions of postmodern performance. Rather, what's strange is that Auslander, while citing Lyotard on modernism's loss of grand narratives and on postmodern art, never mentions that Lyotard theorizes postmodernism itself in terms of performativity. As we've seen, this theorization is so strategic to Lyotard's text that one might recite a few lines and say that performativity is the postmodern condition. How is it then that a leading performance scholar, in a text explicitly theorizing the relations of performance, politics, and postmodernism, not to mention electronic media, how is it a fine reader can repeatedly cite *The Postmodern Condition* and not cite its most powerful conceptual invention, that of performative power? What forces could govern such a strange, if not foreign, pattern of citation?

Let's entertain this response: We are dealing with a reading system, a lecture machine. Auslander's pattern is not so foreign; rather, it may be a constitutive gesture of cultural performance research. The pattern is governed by institutional forces of normativity and mutation, by sociotechnic forces which not only lead to an obfuscation of Lyotardian performativity in *Presence and Resistance*, but to similar patterns of citations involving entire generations of readers. Nick Kaye, another fine cultural theorist, generates a similar reading of *The Postmodern Condition* in his book *Postmodernism and Performance*. These citational patterns reiterate themselves into a vast network. Lyotard's report, published in the U.S. in 1979, ranks among the most widely cited of postmodernist scripts. If his theory of performativity was not connected to "theatrical" performance by an entire generation of cultural theorists, it is less a question of shoddy reading by particular individuals but of institutional reading machines slightly out of tune?or too in tune?with the power of performance. If Lyotard's performance theory has been cited strangely or not at all, it's in part because he invents performativity as a normative process, while those researchers in performance studies most interested in cultural politics have, until recently, invented performance as transgressive, resistant, mutational. This obfuscation of normative performance extends beyond readings of *The Postmodern Condition*, for a similar citational pattern marks an earlier generation of researchers, those involved with politicizing performance in the 1960s. Here the object of obfuscation is the concept of "performance principle," theorized by Herbert Marcuse as the repressive reality principle of industrialized, post-World War II societies. Marcuse was something of a philosopher-guru to many 60s' activists, but he had defined performance as alienated labor and connected it to technological media as early as 1955 in *Eros and Civilization*. However, like Lyotard's performativity, Marcuse's performance principle has yet to be brought together with the performance invented by performance studies scholars.

Thus not one, but two generations of performance studies researchers have been, as it were, out of the loop when it comes to normative performance. Perhaps this decades-long separation of normative and mutational performance was necessary for the invention of performance studies.

This lecture machine no doubt yielded a certain discursive coherency, one that insured a relatively stable field of study while at the same time allowing for the radicalization of liminal performances analyzed in stark contrast to the power of the Establishment, Big Brother, the System or, more recently, to logocentricism, patriarchy, and postcolonial discourse?all normative regimes which might well be recast in terms of electronic performativity. Yet the theoretical separation thereby forestalled thought of how the infinity-loops of liminal performance might feedback with the input/output loops of performativity, how the two sets of loops might already be looped together, and thus how the liminal turns normative and the normative liminal.

### **The geology of performance**

In the course of our experiment, we have become caught up in all sorts of loops, those of performance and technology, theatre and ritual, performance and performativity. The forestalled theorization of the feedback within and between all these loops has unplugged performance studies from the power of electronic knowledge?or rather, it has let this power run on obscurely in the background of its own institutional sites. It is time to loop the loops, and stage performance on a grand scale. To feign a conclusion while going for a big finale, I will entertain "all performance is electronic" by reciting and recombining some of the theoretical inventions discussed above in order to make up a few more. In doing so, I will sketch what I have elsewhere called an outline for a general theory of performance. The finale entails a remake, then, of performance, a rewiring of its electronic infrastructure into something like a geological strata of history.

As we have seen, performance and performativity have gradually been brought together in a number of ways in performance studies. During the past several years especially, the concept of performance as the live, present, and human embodiment of culture has been supplemented by J.L. Austin's concept of discursive performatives. Here Judith Butler's work has had perhaps the greatest impact. She comments on the relation of these two inventions of performance in *Bodies That Matter*. "It may seem Ö that there is a difference between the embodying or performing of gender norms and the performative use of discourse. Are these two different senses of eperformativity,í or do they converge as modes of citationality in which the compulsory character of certain social imperatives becomes subject to a more promising deregulation?" (231).

Butler's question regarding compulsory social imperatives becoming subject to more promising deregulation points to a second way of bringing together performance and performativity. As our reading of Lyotard suggests, he invents "performativity" as a highly normative process while performance studies scholars invented "performance" as the liminal challenging of social norms. The latter's intense focus on liminal performance may explain why Lyotard's performativity and Marcuse's performance principle went uncited for so long in performance studies, and also why Butler's own emphasis on performative normativity was initially glossed over.<sup>4</sup> Combining these

two ways of gathering performance and performativity, the embodied and discursive, the liminal and the normative, we can say that for decades performance studies scholars focused primarily on embodied forms and mutational forces, while theorists of performativity have recently introduced the questions of discursive forms and normative forces. To better entertain the relations of these forces and forms, as well as their connection to electronic technologies, let us now rehearse another performance, what I call the performance stratum.

Theorizing the performance stratum requires yet another way of bringing together performance and performativity, this time by distinguishing research paradigms and historical formations. We've cited MacAloon, Simpson Stern and Henderson, and Schechner to situate performance's intimate connection to performance studies, a paradigm of research institutionalized at several universities. Lyotard and Marcuse, however, situate their respective theories of performance in even wider historical, cultural, and technological terms: performativity and/or the performance principle comes to power throughout technologically advanced cultures shortly after World War II. I would like to suggest that with Lyotard and Marcuse, we are not dealing merely with paradigms of research, but also with what Michel Foucault called a historical formation or stratum. In his study Foucault, Gilles Deleuze explains what makes up such strata: "Strata are historical formations, positivities or empiricities. As sedimentary beds, they are made from things and words, from seeing and speaking, from the visible and the sayable" (47). Discourses and practices become sedimented through their citation over time, and it is the arrangement or patterning of sedimentation which defines a particular historical stratum. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argued that the arrangement of discourses and practices which grew out of the French Enlightenment came to form what he called the formation of discipline. In this respect, I contend that performance is to late-20th century America (and, very likely, to the entire 21st century world) what discipline was to 19th century Europe: a historical stratum composed of forms of knowledge and forces of power.

In broad terms, here are some important distinctions between the strata of discipline and performance: First, while Foucault connects discipline to the sciences of Man, to Western humanism, the performance stratum is producing a series of critiques of these discourses, among them those undertaken by researchers in race, gender, and sexuality studies. Closely associated with this first distinction is a second: while discipline institutionalized the colonialism of European nationalism, the performance stratum is producing a postcolonialist world ambiguously inhabited by multinational corporations and multicultural corporealities. A third and related distinction: disciplinary forms governed the institutions of early, manufacturing capitalism as well as those of the "classic" capitalism of Taylorism, while performance regulates those of advanced, service-oriented capitalism. To these three distinctions, which can be roughly designated as the epistemological, the cultural, and the economic, we can add a fourth: the technological. While the disciplinary stratum relied on alphabetic discourses to produce such industrial architectures as factories, prisons and schools, the performance stratum supplements

these with such electronic architectures as robots and computers. These distinctions are not oppositional. Performance does not contradict discipline but rather breaks apart and redistributes the normative forms of its stratum, its particular arrangement of statements and practices; it simultaneously opens up new possibilities of transgression, resistance, and mutation. Between the two strata there is both a continuity and a break: performance thus transforms and displaces the disciplinary regime of power/knowledge.

The performance stratum: emerging in the Cold War climate of the United States, its make up consists of the knowledge-forms of the sayable and the visible, or rather, of a particular sedimentation of discourses and practices. The pattern of this sedimentation is both given and invented: though conditioned by a particular arrangement of power-forces, it is given as an invention of the other and invented as its own given. Significantly, via citation, we can already specify the strata's knowledge-forms of discourses and practices as performatives and performances and its arrangement of normative and mutational forces as performativity.

But how does the performance stratum differ from the research paradigm of performance studies? To put it much too simply: the paradigm sits upon the stratum whose knowledge-forms and power-forces it has helped to articulate. Not that performance studies has single-handedly invented its own ground, for performance studies is but one of several paradigms of performance research grounded on and in the stratum. Two other paradigmatic examples can be downloaded from the World Wide Web. First, at <http://www.npr.gov/>, we find the website of the National Performance Review, Vice-President Gore's report on the performative efficiency of government agencies. This report is the effect of a second paradigm of performance research, what in business management theory is called "high performance." High performance management is often posed as a paradigm shift away from the centralized, authoritarian management associated with Taylorism. A chart from Robert T. Golembiewski and Alan Kiepper's High Performance and Human Costs: A Public Sector Model of Organizational Development (1988) can help us understand the structural shift from Taylorism to high performance management, in their terms, from bureaucratic to purpose-oriented structure:

**Bureaucratic Structure**

- ï Authoritarian supervision
- ï Monitoring details of performance
- ï Limitation of employee to a single or few operations in a total sequence of related operations
- ï Separating worker from control of work
- ï Centralizing decision-making

**Purpose-Oriented Structure**

- ï Supportive supervision
- ï Monitoring of overall performance
- ï Control by an employee of a total sequence
- ï Integrating worker and control of work
- ï Decentralizing decision-making [regarding] operations [regarding] operations (23)

Performance rating has a long history in 20th-century American corporations and public institutions where management has used performance evaluations to rate individual merit, defined as how well s/he performs certain expected tasks or positions. The Performance Rating Act of 1950 aimed at measuring employee merit in order to facilitate retention policy decisions, but it was not the first such government rating system; it superseded the Uniform Efficiency Act of 1935. But as was the case with performance studies scholars, those of high performance cite the origins of their paradigm as the 1950s, for it was in this period that the application of the managerial performance concept began to extend from blue- to white-collar workers, then to entire departments, institutions, and even economies.

A third paradigm of performance research can be sighted on the web at <http://product.info.apple.com/productinfo/datasheets/dt/performa6400-180.html>. We have seen that feedback played an important role in the invention of Turner and Schechner's concepts of performance: what we glimpse here is how important a role a certain performance concept has played in technological research. With qualifications, I call the paradigm of research which has developed the concept of performance embodied in technology "techno-performance." This concept of performance has yet to receive the kind of critical reflection which performance studies and high performance scholars have given to their inventions of performance: that is, its researchers from disparate fields have yet to generalize their invention across disciplinary lines. Nonetheless, in a wide variety of fields, performance concepts function to evaluate existing technologies, to guide the design of new technologies, and even to market technologies to consumers. In the fields of engineering and computer science, especially, performance has emerged as a concept used to evaluate and design machinery, communication networks, and computer systems. Further, a highly specialized branch of technological performance research has been institutionalized in industrial, military, scientific, and commercial sites, as can be seen in this partial list of "high performance computing centers" found on the web:

Army High Performance Computing Research Center

High Performance Computing at NReD (Naval Research and Development)

Maui High Performance Computing Center

Mississippi State Distributed and High Performance Scientific Computing

NASA High Performance Computing and Communications Program

National Consortium for High Performance Computing

NOAA High Performance Computing and Communications

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Center for Reliable and High Performance Computing

University of Texas at San Antonio High Performance Computing and Software Lab

These centers indicate that even if the concept of technological performance has not yet received critical reflection, the research which invented and continues to deploy it has become institutionalized across the United States. Although additional investigation would have to test this hypothesis, a comprehensive study would, I suspect, show that the emergence of techno-performance has, like the other performance paradigms cited here, occurred in the U.S. since the 1950s.<sup>5</sup>

These three performance paradigms invent their own discourses and practices and thus contribute in different ways to the knowledge-forms of the performance stratum. However, as our reading of feedback loops indicates, these discourse and practices can be cited across paradigmatic borders. For instance, both high performance and performance studies are hardwired to techno-performance through their own electronic archiving of discourses and embodied practices. Knowledge in the performance stratum is by no means archived exclusively in electronic technologies; discourses and practices circulate through utterances and gestures, books and photos, text files and video. Yet the computer, the most decisive installation of techno-performance research, has radically transformed the citational sedimentation of statements and visibilities: on the performance stratum, discourses and practices circulate at speeds and distances unimaginable within the disciplinary stratum. Similarly, each performance paradigm installs its own arrangement of normative and mutational forces and so contributes to the strata's performative power-forces. Again, however, the borders are permeable: though one might, indeed should, contrast the mutational forces of performance studies with the highly normative forces of both high performance and techno-performance, one must also study the flow of forces across paradigms. Indeed, high performance and techno-performance institutions compose the most powerfully normative alliance upon the performance stratum, but this alliance entails mutant forces as well, forces which performance studies researchers must tap in order to better resist the normative forces stretching across the paradigms, including our own, and thus across the entire formation.

I will close this thought entertainment "all performance is electronic" by further delimiting the performance stratum, re-siting it again through the feedback loops between Turner and Schechner. These loops, formative to the performance studies paradigm, situate the embodied, transformational practices of performance somewhere between those of ritual and theatre, in a liminal space of historic proportions. Elsewhere, Gregory Ulmer, in his attempts "to find forms

appropriate for conducting cultural studies in relation to the electronic media," sets out by situating electronic discursivity or "literacy" between those of oral and print cultures. "Logically, the electronic apparatus does not come after print but between print and oral literacy, making technically possible a greater ease of circulation of knowledge through the different institutions of culture" (Heuretics: The Logic of Invention xi). Overlaying Ulmer's invention with that of performance studies, we get three great couplings of discourses and practices: oral-ritual, literate-theatre, and electronic-performance. In short, performance is the embodiment of electronic discursivity. Further, the performance stratum which has emerged since the 1950s is the tip of a massive, futural stratum, one that "follows" those of orality and literacy historically, but which also creates non-linear paths when entertained "geo-logically."

In linear terms, some cultures have passed from oral to print to electronic strata in roughly two and a half millennia; some have taken centuries. However, other cultures have made this passage in just decades and, sometimes, even in a single generation. In effect, such cultures have short-circuited history and are transposing their rituals directly into performances. Their orality is feeding back with electronic interfaces as they simultaneously take in theater and other literate forms from televisions, satellites, and, increasingly, computers and the internet. Geo-logically, the electronic-performance stratum initiates itself between the oral-ritual and literary-theatre because it is itself a world wide folding and twisting of their strata, a desedimentation and recombination of past discourses and practices as well as an anticipatory citation of others to come. These futural knowledge-forms are glimpsed in hypertextual multimedia, but also in more mundane and "low tech" gestures of everyday life. And the power-forces of this massive electronic-performance stratum, these too are already on-line, though we can not fully do them justice here and now. Félix Guattari, discussing the emergence of information technologies, writes: "It's impossible to judge such a machinic evolution either positively or negatively: everything depends on its articulation with collective assemblages of enunciation. At best there is the creation, or invention, of new Universes of reference; at the worst there is the deadening influence of the mass media to which millions of individuals are currently condemned" (Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm 5).

Deadening influence of mass media or the invention of new Universes of reference, compulsory social imperatives or a more promising deregulation: how do these obscure citations connect up with the failure or success of our thought entertainment "all performance is electronic"? And to you, to your own infelicity or felicity in giving thought to it? I leave these last questions open for future feedback and close with one last loop, the multi-sited invention of a new Universe of reference: computers as performance. In *Computers as Theatre*, Brenda Laurel argues against the monopolization of human-computer design by scientists and engineers and offers another thought: computer interfaces as Aristotelian theatre. Ulmer takes an adjacent path, using Stanislavskian Method acting as a heuristic to invent a poststructuralist interface, what he calls "chorography." Significantly, his take on Method acting focuses not on its realism, but on what

Schechner would call its "rehearsal process," i.e., the feedback loop between life and performance. Between theory and practice, Ulmer writes: "The part of the Method appropriated in choreography as the analogy for the purpose of electronic rhetoric is not the public performance but the rehearsal, not the realistic effects of a finished performance but the work around the margins of the play, parallel to the play and different from it, in which an autobiography and a work of art are brought into a fragmented correspondence. A choreographer reads disciplinary texts the way a Method actor reads a (screen) play" (118). This is the way I have read others' scripts and desire in turn to be read. That's the thought, entertainment.<sup>6</sup>

## Notes

1 At this point, I entertain a possible, even probable, objection: "But there were performances going on long before scholars started studying them! Dances and plays, rites of passage and feasts, parades and festivals, exorcisms and healings: all of these have been happening for centuries without any need, thank you, for subjects of performative knowledge and certainly without the advanced degrees bestowed by Departments of Performance Studies." I agree to some extent with this second sentence: plays and rites and so forth have been going down for centuries. However, it wasn't until scholars and practitioners began to generalize, to conceptualize, to gather these disparate activities together under the rubric of "performance" that they became "performances." (And to entertain another objection which might arise at this point: Yes, people have long spoken of performances in theatre, but that's not the same as conceptualizing theatre itself as a genre of performance and establishing departments devoted to such genres.)

2 A close reading of *From Ritual to Theater* would find feedback loops, circles, and even a well-placed Catherine's wheel installed amidst his theories of liminality, drama, and play, as well as his thoughts on the relation of performance and theory.

3 An enticing footnote in *The Postmodern Condition* reads "The two meanings are not far apart. Austin's performative realizes the optimal performance" (88n).

4 Butler explicitly offers "Critically Queer" as a corrective to the those who only read *Gender Trouble* as theorizing the transgressive potential of performativity. See page 21 especially.

5 Among the interrelated factors which have contributed to its emergence are 1) the extension of the American military-industrial complex beyond World War II and into the academy, giving rise to what Stuart Leslie has called the military-industrial-academic complex. The effects of this "MIA" complex reach beyond far beyond departments of engineering and physics and incorporate themselves in psychology and sociology; 2) the political climate of Sputnik and the Space Race, the Viet Nam War, Star Wars—in short, the Cold War atmospherics which socially

legitimated the MIA complex in the United States; 3) the increasing application of concepts drawn from cybernetics or general systems theory to develop and evaluate all sorts of technologies, not just those developed by the military; and 4) the emergence of a veritable "meta-technology," the electronic computer, which is not only designed and evaluated in terms of performance, but also widely used in the design and evaluation of other technological performances.

6 Additional experiments in thinking "computers as performance" can be found at the StudioLab site, <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/mckenzie>.

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