

## From Imitation to Quotation

Karl Toepfer

Postmodern performance, which tends to appropriate other media beside theatre, has captured public attention by introducing a "new physics" of temporal-spatial relations governed by a collage, rather than linear, organization of perception. Jean-Francois Lyotard contends that postmodernism entails the collapse of "master narrative" constructions of consciousness in which signifying practices validate the concepts of "evolution" and "progress." These concepts, which of course operate in "reality" as well as representation (performance), establish their credibility through a logic of signification (narrative) in which the spectator sees a distinct, transformative relation between the origin (motive) for an action and the consequence of the action. The linear logic entails signifying practices which move perception *from* moment *to* moment, *from* one time *to* the next, *from* one space *to* another, *from* mood A *to* mood B, *from* a first point of view *to* a second. Preservation of this logic depends on achieving "unity" or consistency of signification according to *categories* of signification, a network of categories, that, in the theatre, include character, plot, scene, style, genre, period, and author.

Narratives acquire master status when their production and consumption motivate a monolithic scheduling of time, resources, labor, and perceptions. Production entails specialized divisions of labor (author, director, actors, designers, technicians, managers, etc.). Both the production and "reading" of narratives, in one medium or another (print, live performance, film, electronic media) occurs at "appropriate" clock and calendar times imposed by the social order in relation to its own need to see itself moving "on time" according to a grand narrative strategy of evolution. The value ascribed to a narrative emerges out of an institutionalized context, an educational apparatus (such as

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*departments* of theatre arts and *publishing ventures* devoted to disseminating information about theatre) with its own scheduling agenda. "Making theatre" means inculcating *habits* of work, perception, economic exchange, and technology deployment in which both producers and consumers of narratives play out roles scripted for them by supertextual constraints ("structurations") on cognition which bear such names as History, Culture, Art, Entertainment, all of which urge us to identify the signs of life itself with the making (inscription) of a story, with movement *from* one condition *to* another.

While not repudiating narrative altogether, postmodern performance questions the authority of narrative consciousness to assume master control over constructions of "reality" as well as representation, and this questioning involves dissolving the transparency of narrative mechanisms, so that perception focuses, not on the narrative, but on the signs and signifiers of narrative. Instead of a story, we see a "story," a collage of quotations, a network of references, not to "reality," but to other texts. And this exposure of "reality" as intertextuality also exposes narrative as a problem of communication in a world saturated with ambivalence toward the conditions, costs, and liberating effects of being "modern," of being free *of* the past and freed *by* the present or the future.

However, much postmodern performance deconstructs narrative controls over perception by depressing the value of language, especially speech, to signify "new" temporal-spatial relations, possibly because narrative has become synonymous with the (mysterious) processes by which language itself is encoded and decoded, one word at a time, one line at a time, one speech at a time. It is by no means clear how language and speech in performance operate in a collage fashion. Postmodern literary imagination (people who consider themselves authors rather than performers) has yet to exert much influence in the theatre. Consequently, postmodern ideas about temporal-spatial relations in performance have come largely from directors, visual artists, composers, choreographers, and performance artists, people inclined to interpret postmodern skepticism toward the power of language to unify perception as reason enough not to rely on language and the spoken word as a central or driving component of performance. Postmodern efforts to make the body a sign of crisis in representation often entail the assumption that speech belongs to something other than the performing body or that, in any case, the body constitutes a territory of conflict between logocentric and graphocentric formations of meaning.

But these assumptions, despite Derrida's defense of them (232-250), are merely re-formulations of the modernism Artaud sought to introduce into the theatre, a modernism which pursues the idea of recovering an "authentic" body (identity) in (Benjamin's phrase) an "age of mechanical reproduction." This detachment of speech from the body undermines the notion of performance as a reproducible (and therefore reinterpretable) "text." We then have the current situation in which postmodern performance increasingly refers to

temporal-spatial relations which belong exclusively to those bodies which originally perform them. A piece by Pina Bausch, George Coates, or Robert Wilson is not something that anyone else wants to do in the same sense that moves people to propose yet another production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The body's authenticity apparently depends on its exclusivity, its resistance to repetition and reproducibility, its release from textualization (or inscription, a term which sometimes becomes confused with textualization). But as Josef Svoboda has observed, "new" temporal-spatial relations in performance escape becoming textualized, not so much because the authentic body resists being reduced to a text, but because literary imagination fails to release itself from pre-modernist and modernist notions of text, in which attitudes toward the body remain trapped within questionable values ascribed to narrative and the transparency of *conventions* defining narratives (Burian 36). This article seeks to identify strategies by which language and speech may introduce "new" temporal-spatial relations in performance and to account for some of the difficulties involved when speech or literary imagination appropriates control over these relations and thereby complicates the issue of textualizing the body.

At least three categories of time intersect during live performance: 1) *historical* time (T1), the time to which the performance refers by *representing* action within a specific "period"; 2) *narrative* time (T2) refers to the clock and calendar time *represented* by non-historical signs, such as "night" or "Spring"; 3) *performance* time (T3) refers to the clock and calendar time consumed by the performance, including the duration of the performance or actions within it, the time(s) of the day or year(s) when the performance occurs, the number of times the performance recurs, the time needed to prepare for the performance, and even the time(s) consumed, not by the performance itself, but by subsidiary actions which the performance motivates, such as commentary on the performance by spectators or historians, activities associated with promotion or economic viability of the performance, and the ability of the performance to function as a "sign of its (or our) 'time'." Obviously each category of time entails subcategories of time. For example, with T1, visual signs in performance may refer to one time, such as 1990 (T1a), while speech signs refer to another time, such as 1600 (T1b). This congruence (rather than interaction) between T1a and T1b occurs when people do a Shakespeare play in a "contemporary" setting. T2 achieves subcategories when the performance represents "morning" (T2a) in relation to "evening" (T2b), or when "1913" (T2aa) appears in tension with "1931" (T2bb) or when "Christmas" (T2aaa) is juxtaposed with "Easter" (T2bbb). Conventional theatre practice provokes no great strain upon perception by representing T2a, T2aa, and T2aaa at "the same time," and then moving *from* that time *to* "another" time, composed of the simultaneous representations of T2b, T2bb, and T2bbb. Difficulties emerge when theatre attempts to represent, say, T2aa ("1913") at "the same time" as T2bb ("1931"), so that feelings, values, ideas associated with different times *interact* with each other at the same time.

Collage organizations of time and space in postmodern performance work to represent different times at the same time to show how the *identity of the body* projects a complex of moments which echo, explain, or contest each other. The use of visual devices and music to produce temporal collages is by now commonplace in performance. It does not alarm audiences familiar with, say, the work of Robert Wilson (or MTV), to hear electronic music or a Bartok string quartet accompany performance imagery which includes, simultaneously, projection of dinosaurs, a Greek temple colonnade, Bauhaus furniture, nineteenth century costumes, and a row of television sets on the edge of the stage where footlights used to glow. But collages of similar complexity involving speech are very rare and much more disturbing.

The chief problem in creating speech collages is to establish a *dynamic* (rather than unified) relation between speech and the speaking body. It's a matter of acknowledging that the body contains other modes of speaking or voices than the one it speaks at any given moment. In Michel de Ghelderode's *The Death of Doctor Faustus* (1925), to take a relatively old example, Faustus begins the play with a long monologue in which, as we might expect, he confesses grave doubts about his quest for total knowledge; he speaks in a musty, medieval environment, a study or chamber which signifies the archaic nature of his identity and sentiments. However, in subsequent scenes, he appears in Antwerp of the mid-1920s and encounters such characters as An Actor Playing Faustus and An Actress Playing Marguerite, who re-enact the Faust legend in the play and in a play-within-the-play. Faust encounters the modern version of himself. Several scenes require dialogue to occur in one part of the stage, while the spectator sees, "at the same time," actions occurring elsewhere in the city, such as spectators in a movie house watching a sensational cinematic debasement of Faustian hunger and Mephistophelian modernity. The silent film screen "explains" its imagery with lurid, tabloid language.

*The Death of Doctor Faustus* is interesting for anticipating (but not incorporating) the complexity of postmodern performance aesthetics. When he moves *from* the medieval world *to* the modern, Faustus' language does not change; de Ghelderode ascribes to him a syntax, a vocabulary, metaphors which apparently transcend any particular historical time and allow him to appear as a profoundly lonely figure who does not belong to any context. By contrast, the Actor Playing Faustus shifts voices: when he plays Faustus, his language is "medieval" in its childish vulgarity, toward which he feels superior; but when he plays himself, as a "modern" young man, his language lacks seriousness in the sense that it has none of the transcendent poetic features ascribed to Faustian speech. At "the same time," the silent film inter-titles seems to constitute a highly democratized language of the unconscious, which does not speak through any body, but through modern technology, through demonic electronic machines. The theatre world tends to regard de Ghelderode as a modernist because of the complexity of formal devices such as I have

described, even though he himself felt he did not belong in the twentieth century and disclosed a rather mystical nostalgia for the golden age of medieval Flemish culture. One might even suggest that, for de Ghelderode, whatever is modernism lacks "seriousness," and a major sign of this lack is formal complexity, an observation which critics of postmodernism continually level against it. But perhaps de Ghelderode's satiric critique of modern identity as a Faustian imposture indicates, instead, that movement toward a collage performance aesthetic, while it may project a disillusioned attitude toward modernism, does not necessarily imply a postmodern release from (medieval) master narrative controls over perception.

De Ghelderode's play is symptomatic of the confused perception regarding the relation between past and present which results when speech operates as a dynamic sign of historical time (T1). Consequently, many history plays invent a language to represent the past which is neither historically "authentic" nor modern, but which develops words, a syntactic structure, and metaphors that signify "history" because they signify a difference between the way people spoke "then" and the way they speak "now." Speech signifies the difference, not the historical reality; it functions in relation to assumptions about the spectator's knowledge of history and pleasure in distance from "then." In the first act of his *Laughter!* (1978), for example, set in the sixteenth century reign of Ivan the Terrible, Peter Barnes devises an "archaic" language comprised, among many other devices, of idiomatic contractions ("I can't wear these traps t'hide my covering o'worms"), neologisms ("ruled f'me in their turn and turned wolsome in a day, whemmed and broke in a night"), bizarre respellings/pronunciations ("frekes" for "freaks"; "luif" for "love"), strange conversions of nouns into verbs ("F'two years I've monk'd 't humble, you've throned 't mightily"), nonmodern (melodramatic, lurid) metaphors ("I move little, else my body shatter into pieces and the lightning spill out"), obscure words, names, and titles from "the past" ("The Swedes've taken Narva, Ivanograd, Koporie, and Yam"; "crown o'Monomach"; the use of "they," "Sire," words like "muscadin," "haltane," and "authority's staff"). Moreover, Barnes stitches into this "historical" rhetoric patches of Latin, eighteenth century Italian opera, and twentieth century managerial jargon. Obviously, for Barnes, history does not speak (as it does in so many "history" plays) through a language which is transparent at the same time that it is different from the way we speak. More significantly, Barnes dramatizes the perception that history speaks through the deployment, even exposure, of bizarre rhetorical devices, which, by their overt (theatrical) *literariness*, signify old ways of speaking: historical (rather than historicized) speech actually results from *inventing* a new, idiosyncratic language, not from *recovering* an "old" or "authentic" one.

Like so many postmodernists, Barnes builds a text out of self-conscious quotations from the past, but what he quotes is not the language which people in history "really" spoke, but the devices by which language itself speaks its oldness. Barnes quotes signifiers of "old speaking" rather than old statements

or even devices for impersonating, say, Old Slavic. But postmodern performance pursues other quotation strategies for making history speak with an *immediacy* which visual signs alone cannot achieve. In *Bluebeard* (1970), for example, Charles Ludlam quotes old statements. He litters his text with lines lifted from horror and sci-fi films of the 1930s and 40s. These he juxtaposes with statements lifted from romantic literature, comic books, and soap operas (the play, however, concludes with the last line of Moliere's *The Misanthrope*). It is language which people in the past "really" spoke; Ludlam does not invent an old language of the past, he *recovers* one. But because Ludlam plunders lines from such a wide variety of sources, the characters jump around in historical time as they speak. Yet the story (of a mad doctor trying to create a third sex) is absurdly coherent, indicating the power of particular cliched statements to bestow (comic) credibility on otherwise hackneyed actions. Ludlam was preoccupied with showing how narrative conventions of popular culture control perceptions of sexual difference, but while his collage technique succeeds in preventing audiences from taking seriously the cliched statements or the narrative contexts associated with them, it tends to reduce deconstructive practice to parody and the glorification of silliness.

A problem with this compulsion to travesty the past is that in diminishing the seriousness with which the conventions of popular narrative have "inscribed" the sexual body, it also underestimates the latent *power* of the sexual body to disrupt its narrativization by popular culture. Perhaps sensing this limitation, some performance art pieces take Ludlum's collage technique a step further: the performers mouth or pantomime lines which are actually spoken, through tape recordings, by the original performers of film, radio, or television shows of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. Just as interesting is the use of new synthesizer and mixing technology which enables performers to distort or quote their own voices during performance in often very mysterious ways. But in these cases, it is really technology, rather than the exposure of narrative inscription, which discloses other voices within the body, and the failure to acknowledge or at least clarify this difference probably accounts for the failure of these experiments to make a significant, transformative impact on live performance. Technology can work on behalf of postmodernism, not to the extent that it frees the artistic body from either narrative or science, but to the extent that it allows the body to signify a blurring of distinction between art and science. This occurs when scientific experiment becomes public performance.

In *Cloud Nine* (1980), Caryl Churchill adopted a technique that was just as radical, but simpler. The first act, set in nineteenth century Africa, shows how efforts of "civilized" males to colonize "the dark continent" intersect with a need to colonize the sexual body, especially the "feminine" body (which includes homosexual and black bodies). In the second act, some characters from the first act re-appear as themselves in the "liberated" London of the 1970s, and because for the most part they do not seem any happier than they

were in the previous century, the play wittily dramatizes the perception that modern bodies contain values and sentiments from a past which has been repudiated. We are not free of the past because we are not free of the notion that our bodies belong to an old force external to them, namely language, the abstract apparatus by which ideology and desire encode difference with the most enduring consequences.

Churchill does not invent a historical language, nor does she recover one; instead, she develops a language of the Historical Unconscious which people in the past did not realize they were speaking when they said what they "really" spoke and which people in the present, because they speak so "openly," mistakenly assume they do not need to speak anymore. It is a *transhistorical* language of power and desire which enables the same body to continue *from* one century *to* the next. It is a language of things people do not know they are saying or are afraid to say which allows other bodies from other times to live in *the* body. Churchill pushes this strategy even further when, in *Top Girls* (1981), she has several women from different historical periods gather around a banquet table and discuss their identities as historical figures, as if they see themselves from the perspective of the present, in which historical consciousness urges us to believe in a difference between then and now. But again, the scene shows how the past is not all that "other" than the present as we might suppose. Churchill collages history by having different bodies from "other" times speak to each other, rather than have "the same body" speak from one time to another. But Churchill's strategy, in spite of its apparent simplicity, has had little, if any, transformative impact on dramatic writing, which, in dealing with relations between one historical time and another, continues to rely with stagnant predictability on the flashback technique. Churchill herself has not explored the strategy any further, perhaps because it cannot go any further without bringing historical time (T1) into a more dynamic relation to narrative time (T2) and performance time (T3).

These postmodern strategies for collaging historical time through speech are author-driven, embedded in literary texts. They reinforce de Ghelderode's perception that disillusionment with modernism, with its attendant pleasure in self-conscious modes of signification, entails a comic perspective on the nature of historical difference. But this distrust of seriousness, so pervasive within postmodern aesthetics, has severe limitations in achieving *power* to liberate people from master narrative habits of perception and feeling. Indeed, signification is comic precisely because it fits so well into the heavily institutionalized, narrated contexts it mocks. Comic writing can no more escape these contexts than Bluebeard can invent a third sex. Part of the problem is that the author-driven strategies for speech collages focus almost entirely on tensions between different historical times. T1 does not interact with T2 or T3 to produce much more complex collages whose impact on perception is far more uncertain and ambiguous than a comic sensibility can tolerate. Author-driven strategies persist in linking the speaking/performing body to the concept

of character, a distinct set of signs which differentiate a body from all others. The same actor may play different characters in a narrative, and different actors may play the same character. But the concept of character nevertheless ties speech to the construction of an *imaginary* body, because, for the literary mind, language's power to define consciousness depends wholly on its success in establishing the believability of actions which did not "really" happen.

However, postmodernism questions this distinction between the real and the imaginary, and in doing so questions the nature of authorship itself. The manifestation of character loses its authority to unify perception when speech constructs collages of T1, T2, and T3. The motive for such a collage arises from the assumption that the body, with the voice as its dominant sign, is interesting, not as a unifying, stabilizing focus of perception, but as a source of fragmented, contradictory perceptions, which master narrative organizations of time and space can no longer contain. Theoretically, as the notion of character disintegrates, so, too, does the mystifying idea that, because the body contains dark, disturbing pressures which we can only imagine (such as the unconscious), it is necessary, "for everyone's sake," that ideology contain the body through narrative inscriptions of it (characters and characterizations). But it is performers rather than authors who seem attracted to the collage strategies defining this attitude.

The impetus for T2 (narrative-centered) collages probably emerged in the late 1960s, when directors, seeking to liberate performance from its subordination to literary texts, began setting old texts in new contexts, with the result that it became a convention by the mid-1970s to perform a play by Shakespeare or Ibsen in an environment which made *visual* allusion to different historical times at once (projections of dinosaurs, Bauhaus furniture, video monitors, etc.). But this strategy always protected the *speech* prescribed by the "classic" text from disintegrating into a collage or a quotation of itself. Moreover, the strategy never reversed its direction from old text-new context to new text-old context: thus, it never occurs to anyone to set *A Streetcar Named Desire* (if one can call it a new play) or *Cloud Nine* in the visual realm of the eighteenth century or the Middle Ages. Copyright law is not entirely to blame. For some reason which we do not yet understand well, people associate context with spatial-visual, rather than linguistic, signs: a context "contains" a text, just as the body "contains" a self. Furthermore, people tend to think of their context as bigger than past contexts because texts produced by "their" contexts use more complexly evolved signifiers capable of encoding a larger set of referents, which, in turn, make the space of reality seem larger than it was in the past. Thus, new texts do not fit well into old, constricted contexts. But these assumptions really deserve to be tested by performance. For when we assume that a new text is too "big" for an old context, we obviously do not mean that *Cloud Nine* requires a larger *performance space* than the *Oresteia* or *Phèdre*. We mean, rather, that a new text requires signifiers of its newness (modernity), and we trust spatial-visual signifiers of



newness more readily than we trust linguistic signifiers. Newness signifies a larger *emotional* space than an old context. Visual signifiers of oldness trap linguistic signifiers of newness and thus depress the *feeling of freedom*, of expanded emotional space, which we expect of something new, as any text written within our time claims to be. But when the spatial physics of context become so deeply entangled in the textualization of feeling, it's no longer clear that a context is something which contains the text and to which the text directly or indirectly refers. On the contrary, it is a text which contains the context in the sense that "master narratives" control the space and time of human experience. For this reason, postmodern performance moves toward using speech-collages which disturb various conventions of T2 and T3 as well as T1.

An interesting example of a T1-T2 collage strategy is a 1988 production by the Dutch theatre group Maatschappi Discordia, under the direction of Jan Joris Lamers: *Sardou/Wilde/Shaw*. The performance was a collage of three separate texts: Sardou's *Let's Get a Divorce* (1880), Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), and Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1893). For this bizarre experiment in "intertextual" performance, Lamers divided a large stage (of the Shaffy Theatre in Amsterdam) into three zones with three separate decors. The same actors appeared in all three plays (or zones) and none of them left the stage. When they weren't "acting," they stood visibly against a wall at the back of the stage; or if they were already in one text, they could enter another by stepping into another zone. This technique assumes that the three texts are not that different from each other unless each has its own space, an assumption that the performance did not entirely justify. But the main interest of the technique is that it effectively dramatizes the idea of acting as a condition of intertextuality (rather than characterization), wherein the body (including, of course, the voice) is a highly dynamic sign of textuality without, however, "belonging" to any one text. Different actors could play the same character in any given text, but they did not stress their ability to be different in other texts, for the idea, apparently, was to expose those signifying practices unique to the actor rather than to the character(s).

Lamers further complicated the performance by his use of a large forestage which gave the entire playing space a kind of fan-shaped configuration. With the passing of performance time, action moved by degrees from deep upstage center, in the middle zone (Wilde), to points closer to the edge of the forestage, with the result that the space between actors in the different zones became greater and greater. Lamers claims that the rigorous *linearity* of movement compelled by the zoned configuration of space was a jest at the obsession with circularity of blocking invariably found in conventional theatre (Klinkenberg 48). But the significance of the strategy is that it exposes intertextuality as a phenomenon which expands space between bodies and at "the same time" is what allows a body to become fragmented into other bodies. For Lamers, signifying practices peculiar to the *actor* are so stable that they are

*transtextual*, and textual differences are above all spatial differences: different texts require or produce different spaces, through which the body passes without being contained.

But how accurate is this perception? I remain unconvinced until the experiment goes further in the direction of textual collage and clarifies the extent to which the body's power to appropriate other bodies is indeed independent of a text's power to appropriate other texts. We need to see the texts penetrate each other's space to such an extent that we cannot tell them apart before we can believe in the necessity of separate zones for each. As it was, the movement *from* one text *to* the other did not sufficiently instill the perception of each text speaking to the other. But of course, for Lamers, what the texts are "about" was not so important as establishing that both performance and textuality are "about" theatre, "about" the unmasking of theatrical master narratives: he asserts that theatrical productions should not mask (as Stanislavskian technique does) autobiographical elements ("vanzelfsprekende dingen") that are peculiar to the particular persons, objects, and moments with which the director works (48). Lamers, for example, did not decorate the set with stuff that was "appropriate" for the texts, but with objects, materials, colors, textures, and light which interested him (or his actors) in their own right. The unmasking of this autobiographical element in performance turns T1 visual signification into a bizarre collage, not of "times," but of obscure and private selves imposed upon History, upon the public Text. As action progresses from the rear of the stage to the edge of the stage, the spectator senses the power of this "private" appropriation of the text to leave the stage altogether and spill over into the "public" realm of the audience.

These T1-T2 collage strategies, which put perception of what the text is "about" in sharp tension with what the performance is "about," provoke emotional responses of much greater intensity than the postmodern comic impulse, with its disinclination to take anything (including itself) seriously, tends to encourage. The text of *Sardou/Wilde/Shaw* is a pastiche of three comedies, but although the actors did not attempt to suppress the comic pleasure of their lines, the effect of the performance was a mood of gathering and even ominous *seriousness*. The sense of experiment, daring, and risk involved in the project seemed to overpower any need to feel amused. (Texts and their performances are amusing to the extent that audiences feel utterly "safe" at the theatre.) Performance collage exposes *passions* which narrative masks. We encounter the sobering assertion that our emotions do not attach themselves to people, to characters, or to stories, but to *conventions*, to abstractions, to institutions, to "appropriate" but nevertheless transparent narrative controls over perception of how the body should "act" in relation to language, theatre, and the public.

Critics of postmodernism often complain about the excessive cerebrality and "game-playing" of postmodern aesthetic strategies, the lack of emotional highs. But Lamers' production suggests that, for postmodern sensibilities at

least, narrative, the whole business of believing a story, can no longer provide an emotional high. Rather, the emotional high is a response, not to what representation tells us about the world, but to the exposure of the (secret) conditions which empower signs to tell us anything at all. What's implied by the refusal to take *narrative* seriously is a failure to take the world seriously, some context to which narrative refers. And this loss of faith in signs is really a greater source of controversy and passion, of emotional highs *and* lows, than most people everywhere seem willing to acknowledge yet.

But perhaps I can reinforce this point by discussing some modest efforts to achieve postmodern performance which I've supervised at San Jose State University. These attempt to blur distinctions between art and science by turning "experiments," in a more rigorous sense of the word, into performances. For example, in 1986, we staged stichomythic passages from Euripides' *Hippolytus*, Seneca's *Thyestes*, and Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken*. No passage lasted more than three minutes, but we repeated each passage several times, changing a performance variable each time. These variables included: 1) changes in the interpretation of a passage by a single performer; 2) changes in the performers interpreting the passages; 3) changes in the translation of the passage; 4) changes in the scenic and musical accompaniment to the action. The original intent of the experiment was to expose the extent to which different translations from different times (e.g., for Seneca, 1894, 1917, 1940, 1983) changed the meaning of the action. (Only one passage from Seneca was performed in the "original" [Latin] language.) Indeed, as it turned out, different translations did produce substantially different responses, and it was clear that translators were as much authors of the text as the "original" author. It was, however, really not possible to separate this variable from the other variables. But more significantly, the performance as a whole achieved an intensifying, somber emotional atmosphere as a result of pursuing this strategy of "repetition with a difference." Strong emotional responses depended on situating speech and action, not within a literary narrative context, but within a "scientific" narrative context.

In 1989, we performed a variation of this "experiment" by focusing on a single, larger passage from Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (1893), this time with the help of slightly higher production values. New variables included the use of masks, more lights, dance movement with speech. One version, requiring very minor re-writing, had Salome played by a man as a man and Jokanaan played by a woman as a woman, with an eerily melancholic effect. In another version, dolls played the bodies of Salome and Jokanaan, while two two-person (male and female) choirs spoke their lines as they manipulated the small dolls (and their large shadows). On the same program, a graduate student, Jenny Boris, alone on the thrust stage, improvised a performance piece in which 1) she permitted pre-selected persons in the audience (and in the performance company) to direct her, to tell her what actions to perform, what to say in public; 2) she invited anyone in the audience, including complete strangers, to

direct her; 3) she called upon (ordered) specific persons in the audience, strangers as well as friends, to direct her; 4) she directed the audience. The fourteen minute performance created tremendous tension, which could have been protracted indefinitely. More importantly, it constructed a complex web of emotions from the theme of "direction," the authority to make the vulnerability of the body a sign of power.

But I briefly mention these little adventures to indicate the impact of performance collages on the master narrative of "theatre." Modest as they were, these pieces created considerable emotional turbulence among performers. It was clear to me that new forms of theatre require new methods of production, and these new methods entail transgressions of the master narrative for "doing" theatre. Actors, especially undergraduates, expressed much anxiety over the pressure on them to "make another choice and show it." It troubled them that the emotional power derived from abstractions of their bodies rather than from something "human." Just as disturbing (and exciting) was the mood of competition that resulted from having different actors play the same passages differently. They were expected to memorize their lines thoroughly without doing much rehearsing, without stabilizing any particular choice of signification. Light board operators had to *interact with the moment* rather than work from plots which predetermined the moment. Set and costume designers were by no means invisible bodies: they appeared on stage to supervise another choice and to comment on their choices. All actors were technicians and all technicians were actors; each member of the company was expected to appropriate some other role in theatrical production. One could not reduce "acting" to the signs produced by a spectacularized body, for actors are not competitive unless they assume control over the technology which supports the visible body and largely defines its value as an image.

Such experimentation awakens powerful, latent emotions because it raises great *doubt*, internal conflict, regarding the temporal-spatial organization of theatre knowledge itself. These experiments are not harmless: they question the institutionalization of theatre into a set of master narratives. If, indeed, "new" theatre is necessarily postmodern, if "new" theatre depends on exposing signifying practices rather than concealing them within "stories" and "characters," then perhaps the whole theatre curriculum needs to be overhauled, and with it the scheduling of time, resources, and personal energies required to change it. Perhaps the classification of theatre knowledge into discrete specializations should be abandoned in favor of a more complex and integrated understanding of performance. But if you do that, then you also abandon an entire industrial apparatus which schedules theatre culture according to assumptions about its economic value derived from heavily institutionalized semantic values.

"Serious" change does not occur without a profound investment of emotion. Postmodernism pressures people to view their lives as performances, and in doing so, it further pressures them to achieve optimum control over the

times and space by which they perform their lives. You *desire* to do *everything* as if someone were watching, even if it's only yourself watching yourself. If you feel you *have* to do this, then of course you'll feel quite ambivalent about postmodernism and its appropriation of your time rather than other's. You'll fret over rather than contribute to the fading power of master narratives to assign special times and places to theatre. Obviously I'm over-dramatizing the point, but these marginal experiments did demonstrate to me that T1-T2 collage strategies inevitably appropriate the T3 (performance time) categories and all the time (and language) that goes into theatre.

Performance art has made even more self-conscious attempts to appropriate time from T3 master narratives. The strategies are manifold.<sup>1</sup> Performances can occur in several places at once, or continue in different places at different times, so that no one grasps the performance as a "totality." Or performance occurs "suddenly" when one enters a classroom or bank, determined to make the act of teaching or withdrawing money an aesthetic-dramatic event. But what is of special interest to me here is the way in which some postmodern performers, largely from the visual arts, have extended the time(s) and space(s) of performance into the documentation of the performance. By taking a great interest in documentation, these artists do more than suggest that performance is not complete without its documentation; they assert that performance *is* a documentation of something which is not "now." Women performers have been especially active in exploring this mode of T1-T2-T3 collage: Manon, Hannah Wilke, Valie Export, Cleo Uebelmann, Barbara Heinisch. But men are by no means absent from this scene: Sylvano Bussotti, Wolf Vostell, Luciano Castelli, Hermann Nitsch.

A typical manifestation of this phenomenon is the work of Dutch performance artist Lydia Schouten. An accomplished painter and graphic artist, she has moved from live performance to "video installations" which feature herself as a performer. It's no simple matter to separate her performances from exhibitions of her artworks. She appropriates all media: painting, projections, theatre, video, choreography, sculpture, photography, architecture, music, and most of her imagery consists of startling, lurid, and witty (but not humorous) "quotations" of imagery from popular culture. An interesting feature of her performance is her use of her (naked) body to interact, physically, with the images both she and popular culture have created. In *Romeo Is Bleeding* (1982), for example, she made love to large, cardboard paintings of male movie stars, which, instead of making her look ridiculous, actually glamourized her. In a video installation, *Beauty Becomes the Beast* (1985), she attempted a sort of story about a woman who grows a tail and is therefore "no longer at home in the existing world. She looks for other life forms, other creatures," which live only in myths. Schouten, however, told the story using a collage of media: comic strips, video, paintings, photography, and her own body.

The idea behind this strategy is that the "real" body cannot transcend a *desire* to achieve the mythic, "immortal" identity projected by popular and mass media iconography of the body. This desire for immortality, objectified through multimedia collage, is what the "real" body constantly betrays (by its failure to stay "the same") and what makes the mythic, mediated body "real." One does not objectify this dominant desire of postmodern society through a collage of different times, but through a collage which negates time, for the "desire to be desired" is never new nor old. As Schouten herself remarks, quite perceptively:

The media shows desires in more and more subtle ways, while our own desires are getting more and more aggressive and frustrated. [. . .] That these images are artificial does not lessen our desire for them. Artificial beauty is now the object of our desire [. . .] Stars who have been dead for many years remain young forever and create the impression that they are immortal. The most important task of the media seems to be the destruction of chronological time [. . .] Our lives are filled with these fantastic images from the media, which makes it difficult for us to accept death. Instead, we turn in our dreams to science fiction films of other planets, inhabited by creatures who become hundreds of years old or are immortal, in which we too become a part of the universe and can live on forever. (Schouten 22)

In its need to fill time, the mass media constantly recycle the past without ever really "quoting" it. Quotation exposes the presence of death in the image. If, in the realm of conventional theatrical performance, the signification of life depends heavily upon complex processes of imitation, then postmodern performance is largely a process of moving *from imitation to quotation*. But then, quotation achieves maximum authority, not in the performance itself, but in the documentation of the performance. I haven't seen any of Lydia Schouten's work in person; my interest in her stems entirely from a luxurious book which documents her achievements in pretty spectacular fashion. The book performs what the performances themselves cannot do: it quotes them, it quotes Schouten, it quotes people who have commented on Schouten, and it includes a lengthy bibliography in which you can find many other quotations of and concerning Schouten. Her performances do not end; they continue, transformed as quotations, in the collage of her career performed by this quite serious book.

Perhaps the inclination of performance artists (rather than hardcore theatre artists) to "publish" their performances in this appealing, glitzy manner indicates that performance itself is no longer as interesting as discourse on performance--or rather, performance is interesting only to the extent that it is a discourse on signification. A book, of course, is a powerful sign of "dis-

course." Schouten captions many of her images with language which articulates a feeling concealed by the image. In her video imagery, she uses subtitles and occasionally songs, but otherwise she does not make *speech* a significant component of her discourse. But this absence of speech from performance (and discourse) reinforces the idea of language as monumentally autonomous, utterly external to the body, something "real" only insofar as it is other, an image, writing, *a text*.

Yet this compulsion to detach language from the body, commemorated by blurring distinctions between books and performances, shows us how much postmodernism itself remains subordinate to a master narrative which tells us that the language contained within the body is so capable of disrupting the story of our lives, of dissolving our sense of belonging to a time and place, that we do not trust it until we have quoted it, written it, turned it into a text which can belong to someone else, as a thing (an image, a book, a character, even a myth), in a way that speech never can. Thus, a "new" physics of temporal-spatial relations in performance still depends on freeing ourselves from the notion that the body contains something unspeakable, and that the vulnerability of the body is such that narratives must in turn contain the body by telling us when and where it belongs *from* one time and place *to* the next.

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## Note

1. I have discussed some of these strategies in Toepfer 1989.

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